

From SDS to LSD: Politics, Viewers, and Minimal Art  
in Late 1960s America

by

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## ABSTRACT

When the artist Mel Bochner described the reductive geometric forms on view in the “Primary Structures” exhibition in 1966, a show that announced the arrival of minimalism on the New York art scene, he claimed: “there is nothing behind these surfaces, no inside, no secret, no hidden motive.”<sup>1</sup> Yet after a careful examination of minimal art, and the ways in which it challenged a modernist trajectory set into place in the postwar period, I am arguing Bochner couldn’t have been more wrong. With minimalism as its primary focus, my thesis considers how the political turmoil of the late 1960s— manifest in widespread social upheaval, the polemics of a contested war, and questions regarding the nature of the modern subject— disrupted the perceived self-referentiality of abstract art, particularly that adhering to a tradition of Greenbergian modernism. That is, when complicated by contemporaneous social relations and artistic debates, the formal language of minimalism, with its simple forms, precise lines, and industrial manufacture, becomes full of potential meaning, leaving the minimal box less hollow than Bochner would have us believe.

To get at some of the complexities of the minimal project, both mainstream artists, such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, and those more marginally related to the movement, like Barnett Newman, Jo Baer, and Eva Hesse, are considered. Setting the work of these artists into tension with one another and with the critical writings of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, the unique strategies used to mediate between individual artistic interests and larger social tensions are brought into focus. One primary

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<sup>1</sup> Mel Bochner, “Primary Structures,” *Arts* (June 1966), 32. Reprinted in Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1998), 220.

area in which this was accomplished was in relation to the issue of viewership. Whether rethinking Morris' notion of "experience," Newman's conceptualization of "participation," or Baer's prioritization of "perception," these distinct modes of engagement signal what was at the time a shifting understanding of how politics is formulated in relation to the body of the viewer and how the art object is implicated in this process. Considering how this broke with previous formalist models, what these chapters show in different ways and from varying perspectives is that the authority of modernism was fracturing in the late 1960s, and that minimal art was central to this process.

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## Introduction: Flirting with Hilton, or Debating the Relation Between Politics and Art

Survey any of the recent texts on the 1960s and one thing is immediately apparent: the legacy of the sixties is just as allusive today as it was over thirty years ago at the close of the decade. In fact, the ways in which the sixties have been framed and how its successes and failures are perceived by different factions, past and present, demonstrates the decade's malleability. In other words, the sixties can, to a large degree, be custom tailored to fit a variety of pressing social needs. For example, for many conservative politicians in the United States from Newt Gingrich to George W. Bush, the 1960s have become something of a scapegoat, at blame for the loss of traditional values in contemporary society to which are attributed an increase in poverty and crime, rampant drug use, and even AIDS.<sup>1</sup> From perspectives such as these Bill Clinton's presidency in the 1990s embodied both what had been wrong with the decade and the threat the 1960s continued to hold for the present. As the argument goes, if a marijuana-smoking, draft-dodging, sexual degenerate could become president of the US, then the legacy of the sixties continues to put the nation's moral health at risk. The left, however, constructs a very different image of this period providing a portrait that tends to romanticize the radical potential of the decade and its capacity for political reform. For many liberal groups, the sixties serve as a lynchpin between the conventional and the progressive, a

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<sup>1</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Renew America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995). In his best-selling book, Gingrich blamed the supposed breakup of the American family on a contemporary moral degradation with roots in the permissiveness of the 1960s. See also Fred Barnes, "Revenge of the Squares," *The New Republic* 23 (March 13, 1995), 23-9. In this article, Gingrich is quoted as describing the 1960s as a time of "decay," of "extraordinarily destructive" values, and of "irresponsibility and self indulgences." As for George W. Bush, when asked by *The Wall Street Journal* on January 5, 2000 to name the book (excepting the Bible) that has been most important to him, he replied: "*The Dream and the Nightmare* by Myron Magnet crystallized for me the impact the failure of the '60s had on our values and society." Magnet argued, among other things, that part of the legacy of the 1960s has been the development of the "underclass," a new class of poor formed from the "ideals" of the period; that is, from a contempt for both work and the middle-class, and a

harbinger of a new sensibility of opposition that challenged basic assumptions about power and questioned the status quo. Think antiwar movement, the fight for women's liberation and black power. The foregoing— albeit a polarized schema for the many competing representations of the 1960s— foregrounds the problems inherent in forging a contemporary purchase on the decade and its implications for the present. As well, as questions are raised regarding the viability of today's left to effectively intervene in governmental policies, think of the recent war in Iraq, a re-evaluation of the potential gains of the 1960s, and the ways in which these have been codified through discourse, seems even more urgent. My thesis considers these issues in relation to the ways in which the discipline of art history has approached art practice of this era.

At the broadest level, what I argue in the following pages is that the history of late 1960s art production has been structured, whether consciously or not, in terms of implicit biases that have pushed critical analysis to avoid any consideration of the dynamic social conflicts of this period. That is, during a highly charged moment in the history of the United States, when a vast array of aesthetic practices— pop, minimalism, post-painterly abstraction and conceptualism— vied for dominance on the New York art scene, certain framing devices were set in place which still influence the parameters of art historical writing. To consider the implications of this allegiance to a priori models of investigation, the chapters of my thesis will focus on specific case studies of 1960s art practice which sit uncomfortably in relation to established discourse. By examining fissures, points of rupture, or the interstices between conventional readings of the art of this era and the lived experiences of social relations, a more complicated sense of how historical analysis

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lifestyle of sexual permissiveness and rampant self-indulgence. See Myron Magnet, *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties Legacy to the Underclass* (New York: William Morrow, 1993).

has skewed our understanding of the aesthetic debates and crises of the 1960s is revealed.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly, this investigation is concerned with the production and reception of a group of artists loosely organized around, or responding to, minimalism, a non-representational, geometric art movement based on elemental forms, schematic compositions, and modular seriality. Considered by many to be the most advanced sculptural production of its day, minimal art has long been explained as distanced from everyday realities, ensconced in formalist discourse, as if its sleek, metallic surfaces and abstract form were somehow outside of the social relations of this period. The art historian Anna Chave alluded to this polemic:

Now, as in the 1960s, the dominant accounts of Minimalism do not portray it as an instrument of social change but, on the contrary, as art that somehow generated and occupied a special sphere, aloof from politics and commerce and above personal feeling. The language typically used to describe Minimalism employs a rhetoric of purity, primacy, and immediacy in focusing on the artists' means and on the objects' relations to the constitutive terms of their media.<sup>3</sup>

In the 13 years since Chave wrote her article, not much has changed. Minimal practice and criticism is still primarily discussed in relation to its formal and material attributes. As the critic and art historian James Meyer recently reaffirmed, "Minimal work does not allude to anything beyond its literal presence, or its existence in the physical world. Materials appear as materials; colour (if used at all) is non-referential."<sup>4</sup> Conversely, my

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<sup>2</sup> The postcolonialist thinker Homi K. Bhabha has used the term "interstices" to consider the ways in which identity is formed through "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference." See Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2. I am similarly interested in the discontinuities of historical scholarship. Such points of rupture, in which established belief systems are questioned, help to illuminate that which has been ignored or marginalized through the production of discourse.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990), 44.

<sup>4</sup> James Meyer, ed., *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 15.

analysis begins with an alternative premise, specifically that the social relations that gave rise to minimalism can be read in its material form. To think this through, minimalism will be resituated within what was at the time rapidly changing paradigms of art production, processes of viewership, and terms of political engagement. Poised at the cusp between modernism and postmodernism, minimal art, read against the grain of contemporary historical scholarship, can reveal what was at stake both aesthetically and socially in the late 1960s in the violent confrontation between codified forms of practice and new artistic media and techniques. In short, the point of this analysis is to trouble what Chave described as the “rhetoric of purity” attached to minimalism’s critical discourse, opening up new readings of the austerity and simplicity seemingly invested in its reductive form.

The recent opening of the Dia Foundation’s satellite museum, the Dia:Beacon, in May 2003 adds a further impetus for interrogating the terms of 1960s art historical scholarship (fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Situated in a converted paper and printing factory, the Dia:Beacon in Beacon, New York, is now the largest museum of contemporary art in the world, complete with football field-sized rooms for the display of minimal, conceptual and earth art; that is, work whose overlarge scale previously limited possibilities of long-term display. Considering the impact the opening would have on the art establishment, Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of *The New York Times*, explained, “The history of American art is going to need a little rewriting.” He continued:

They are men mostly, with big egos and big ideas. They were the first Americans to influence Europeans. The work these artists made changed, or at least questioned, the

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<sup>5</sup> The Dia:Beacon, which was funded by Heiner Friedrich and Philippa de Menil, opened to the public on May 18, 2003. See Michael Kimmelman, “The Dia Generation,” *The New York Times Magazine* (April 6, 2003), 30-7, 58, 61, 72, and 76-7.

nature of art: what it looked like, its size, its materials, its attitude to the places where it was shown, its relation to architecture, light and space and to the land. The artists even questioned whether art needed to be a tangible object.<sup>6</sup>

Kimmelman implied in this self-stated, revisionist narrative that the most significant U.S. art of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not that of the Abstract Expressionists, but instead the work of the minimal, conceptual, and earth artists, again “men mostly, with big egos and big ideas.” His celebratory tone, one of patriarchal aggrandizement, attributes an almost heroicizing quality to these artists, as if they single-handedly and presumably self-consciously reworked the parameters of late 1960s aesthetic and theoretical debates. And while I concur that the history of modern art was significantly changed through the contributions of these artists, this process was not so straightforward as Kimmelman claimed. Rather, minimal art, when exposed as contested and conflictual in nature, actually disrupts the sort of cohesive narrative that is herein being constructed. As such, it provides an appropriate starting point from which to re-evaluate the larger critical implications of this period and the possibilities this engendered for art viewership.

Of unmeasurable importance to the development of a discourse around modern art in the decades following World War II, and to the 1960s in particular, was the critic Clement Greenberg. As numerous scholars have shown, beginning in the late 1930s, Greenberg developed criteria that refocused the measure of art’s value around issues of aesthetic quality. Intended as a semi-objective system of analysis or measure against which forms of modern art could be weighed, Greenbergian formalism displaced considerations of artistic intentionality or social function to focus on the tangible,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 32.

material characteristics of a work of art. As a result, contextual analysis and subjective interpretations were ostensibly downplayed in favor of what were claimed to be problems intrinsic to art itself.<sup>7</sup> The merit of a painting, its aesthetic worth, was for Greenberg contingent on its ability to be self-critical.<sup>8</sup> Or at least this was the definition of formalism that was generally accepted by a large part of the American art establishment in the sixties, by which time Greenberg's voice had been almost singularly controlling the meaning of modernism for over twenty years. His tenure, however, was soon to be disrupted as critics and historians by the end of the decade began considering other markers of meaning including social relations.<sup>9</sup>

Taking up Greenberg's mantle in 1964, Michael Fried, in an article in *The American Scholar*, also underlined the critical agenda of the new formalism while implicitly emphasizing the need for eschewing the social and political. Fried argued that: "contextual criticism has shown itself to be unable to make convincing discriminations of value among the works of a particular artist... it often happens that those paintings that

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<sup>7</sup> Despite Greenberg's claims about the depoliticized nature of modern art, his theories did ironically operate within the very political arena he was trying to avoid. As Serge Guilbaut has demonstrated in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), Greenberg's modernism was contingent upon the international promotion of US art production during the cold war as the democratic and free alternative to the propagandistic impulses of socialist realism.

<sup>8</sup> For Greenberg, in the best of modernist painting, flatness, shape and color were of primary importance; while representational imagery or literary or historical narrative was deemed superfluous as it deflected attention from pictorial effects. Greenberg attempted to underscore the critical nature of formalism, and its grounding in a Kantian enlightenment model in his article "Modernist Painting" first published in 1961: "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself— not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85. Modernist Painting was originally delivered as a *Voice of America* broadcast in 1960. It was first published unrevised in *Arts Yearbook* 4 in 1961.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Barbara Rose, "Problems of Criticism IV: The Politics of Art, Part I," *Artforum* 6, no. 6 (February 1968), 31-32, "Problems of Criticism V: The Politics of Art, Part II," *Artforum* 7, no. 5 (January 1969), 44-9, and "Problems of Criticism VI: The Politics of Art, Part III," *Artforum* 7, no. 9 (May 1969), 46-51; Max Kozloff, "Letter to the Editor: After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International* 7, no. 6 (June 25, 1963), 88-92; Barbara Reise, "Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View," Part I, *Studio International* 175, no. 901 (May 1968), 254-7, and Part II, *Studio International* 175, no. 902 (June 1968), 314-6; and Leo Steinberg, "Contemporary Art and the Plight of Its Public," *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 3-16.



are most full of explicit human content can be faulted on formal grounds.”<sup>10</sup> Fried, as part of a second generation of formalist scholars, was greatly influenced by Greenberg’s theories, made more readily available through the re-publication of many of his essays in *Art and Culture* in 1961.<sup>11</sup> Along with Rosalind Krauss, Sidney Tillim and Barbara Rose among others, Fried began in the late sixties writing for the magazine *Artforum*, which under the direction of Philip Leider became, for all intents and purposes, a Greenbergian mouthpiece.<sup>12</sup> This emphasis on formalist criticism in what was, at the time, the leading art journal in America is not surprising given the tumultuous social upheaval of the Vietnam-era. While initially formalism had claimed to resist the commodification and banality of modern life,<sup>13</sup> as Amy Newman has noted in *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74*, in the sixties formalism provided a “logical, learnable, demonstrable, and, perhaps most appealingly, contained” method of analysis, which allowed modern art to remain protectively isolated from intrusive social concerns.<sup>14</sup> As the tensions around the Vietnam war and the violence associated with dissent and its suppression increasingly infiltrated

<sup>10</sup> Michael Fried, “Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism,” *The American Scholar* 33 (Autumn 1964), 642-8.

<sup>11</sup> Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1961). For a contemporary analysis of the legacy of Greenbergian formalism in the late 1960s, and the specific positions of those critics involved (such as Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, etc.), see Reise, “Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View,” Parts I and II.

<sup>12</sup> As Donald Judd explained in his 1969 article “Complaints, Part I”: “I didn’t think about Greenberg much in the early sixties and he didn’t write much. I suppose Fried and Philip Leider, the editor of *Artforum*, kept him going. When *Artforum* moved to New York it revived the roster of New York hacks.” Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 198.

<sup>13</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5-22.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 9. Newman’s book, which chronicles the early years of *Artforum* magazine, is comprised of interviews Newman conducted during the 1990s with those editors and contributors active during the magazine’s formative period. The interviews are arranged in a “dialogue” format both to highlight the importance of discussion and debate to the constitution of the journal and to demonstrate that the history of *Artforum* is still a contested domain even among what were its principle participants.

all areas of everyday life, it was comforting to think high culture, specifically modern art, could provide a space of refuge.<sup>15</sup>

Consider, for example, a recent quote by Hilton Kramer, a critic who started his career in the 1960s writing for *Arts Magazine* and who went on to become editor and publisher of the conservative journal *The New Criterion* as well as chief art critic for *The New York Times*:

“one of the most remarkable things about the art world in the '60s, (is) that *the art itself was so little effected by the war in Vietnam and the antiwar movement and everything that went with it.* (emphasis mine) It certainly had no influence on the Pop Art movement, it had absolutely no influence on the Minimalist movement, it had absolutely no influence on the Color-field painting movement. The first association I have with anything having to do with the war or the politics would be with some of the conceptual art stuff. But not at the beginning of that either. This was to me a more '70s phenomenon than a '60s phenomenon...”<sup>16</sup>

It seems Kramer would have us believe that as debates in the U.S. raged over the draft, the effectiveness of the protest movement and the appropriateness of the war itself, politics “had absolutely no influence” on the production of “advanced” art. In other words, art, specifically pop, and post-painterly abstraction, somehow managed, either through play or intellectual rigor, to avoid the quagmire of politics and maintain the borders Greenberg established to insulate fine art. Yet, it is exactly this distancing from

<sup>15</sup> While Greenberg became less interested in the political implications of his theories by the end of World War II, his initial position vis-à-vis the separation of art and politics had roots in the writings of Leon Trotsky. See, for example, Trotsky’s “Art and Politics,” *Partisan Review* V, no. 3 (August-September, 1938), 3-10. In this essay, he maintained that “Art, like science, not only does not seek orders, but at its very essence, cannot tolerate them. Artistic creation has its own laws— even when it consciously serves a social movement. Truly intellectual creation is incompatible with lies, hypocrisy and the spirit of conformity. Art can become a strong ally of the revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself.” The theoretical connection between Greenberg and Trotsky in the late 1930s is carefully considered in Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock’s “Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed,” *Art History* 4, no. 3 (September 1981), 305-27.

<sup>16</sup> Hilton Kramer as quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974*, 299-300.

the social, this depoliticization of art, particularly minimalism, that I find so problematic and which my own reading of this material is intended to work against.

Here, the term “political” needs to be understood as contested, its multiple uses and meanings actively debated both then and now. In fact, in the late 1960s the word itself was reworked in popular parlance to incorporate more than just the ideologies of state politics, competing parties or governmental affiliations. Under the rubric of activism, the political became, after the consensus of the 1950s, a means of opposition for resisting the dominant ideology and its institutionalization through overt means of protest and dissent. But there is another definition of the political that is crucial to my analysis and that emerged at this time not just because of the Vietnam War. Connected with the women’s movement in particular, but arising from a larger inquiry into issues of subjectivity, this involves a politics of the everyday that functions on a more micro-level than the institutional or oppositional politics Kramer was addressing. Specifically, I am referring to the everyday practices, behaviors, and transactions through which the individual, consciously or not, intersects with and makes meaning in the larger social world.<sup>17</sup> This is a politics of social relations which because of the crisis of Vietnam and

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<sup>17</sup> Everyday life, as a site of critical inquiry, has been theorized by a wide array of scholars and historians. My own understanding has been formed in part through the writings of the French philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau. For Lefebvre, as a Marxist theoretician, the everyday is the mundane or ordinary other of modernity, something produced through social relations and practices. As such, he argued, it should not be overlooked in philosophical inquiry, but instead recognized as a potential site of resistance against commodity culture and inauthentic experience. Using the work of Lefebvre, among others, as a point of departure, De Certeau invested everyday practices with a transgressive and potentially subversive purchase. His writing foregrounds the experiences of the consumers/users of a system to evaluate how their intervention can potentially rework established institutions and dominant ideologies. See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), trans. John Moore (London and New York: Verso, 1991), and *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. S. Rabinowitch, Allen Lane (London: The Penguin Press, 1971); and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For a discussion of competing notions of the everyday, see Leora Auslander, “Representation, Style and Taste: The Politics of Everyday Life,” *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 1-28; Alice Kaplan and Kristin Ross, “Introduction,” *Yale French Studies: Everyday Life* 73 (1987), 1-4; and Alf Lüdtke, “The Historiography of Everyday Life: The Personal and Political,” *Culture, Ideology and Politics: Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones, eds. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1982), 38-54.

an increased awareness that the “personal is political”— that politics is enacted through the social coding inherent in the performance of the everyday— became during this period more broadly recognized. Thus, one of the primary goals of this thesis is to explore the ways in which representation in the 1960s negotiated these often overlapping and intersected definitions of the political, a project that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the implications of social conflict on elite aesthetic and cultural debates.

In some ways, Kramer is an easy target, repeating what is by now a tired, cold war argument, that overtly political art (such as socialist realism) is manipulative and propagandistic, the communist other of a more open and free (read democratic), abstract, American art. Yet, what is both compelling and potentially dangerous about Kramer’s words is their contemporary currency, as many art historians are today equally-unwilling to challenge the accepted autonomy and social detachment of modern art. James Meyer’s provocative and important writings on minimalism are one such case in point.<sup>18</sup> While philosophically and theoretically rigorous, analyzing the influence of Immanuel Kant, Stanley Cavell, and Maurice Merleau Ponty among others on specific minimal practitioners, Meyer, in the hundreds of pages he has written on the subject, makes almost no mention of the social practice in which minimal art participated. Instead, he perpetuates a detached historical model that erases the tensions and conflicts circulating around objects by segregating art production from larger social concerns. While at one point, Meyer does admit that minimal art by 1968 “elicited wildly different social readings, depending on one’s nationality and ideological posture,” he stops short of

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<sup>18</sup> James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), and “Non, Nothing, Everything: Hesse’s Abstraction,” *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 57-77.

interrogating the potential that any of these alternative positions might hold.<sup>19</sup> The connection between the rigid, geometric language of minimal art and processes of US cultural imperialism, for example, an issue debated in the late sixties and more recently taken up by the historian Anna Chave, is barely acknowledged by Meyer, and then quickly dismissed. Like Greenberg and Fried before him, albeit each in their distinct ways, Meyer can be seen as insulating aesthetics from everyday practices, a condition that narrows the potential meaning invested by both artists and viewers in minimal art.<sup>20</sup>

The art historian Francis Frascina in his recently published *Art Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* has articulated a very different position. This study takes up the most overt instances of political engagement among artists working during the late 1960s, specifically artists involved in collective activities such as the Collage of Indignation, the Los Angeles Artists' Tower of Protest and the protest performances of the AWC. Frascina adopts a very traditional definition of politics by focusing exclusively on artists grouped according to shared ideological commitments and belief in radical political activism.<sup>21</sup> His stated aim: "to consider some of the collective projects marginalised in dominant histories by institutionalised processes of legitimization."<sup>22</sup> That is, to give voice to the underrepresented in existing histories particularly to those engaged in organized group action with overt political intent. Yet, this methodology which focuses on only the most blatant examples of artist-organized activism can be problematic. At its best, Frascina's project illuminates much that has been excluded from the canon of modernism, which has tended to omit collaborative and

<sup>19</sup> James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 262.

<sup>20</sup> See Anna Chave "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990), 44-63, and "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March 2000), 149-63.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Frascina, *Art Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

socially conscious art. At its worst, it reinforces a narrowly defined notion of the political concerned with a macro politics and the opposition this engenders, which is a formula that erases all but the most obvious manifestations of socially engaged art.

As is apparent from this brief introduction to the scholarship of Meyer and Frascina, the conception of the political remains contested, as both historians define and apply the term to their own historical analysis in radically divergent ways. My own work is concerned with broadening the boundaries that such fixed positions set in place; that is, between the insularity of Meyer and the political activism of Frascina. The 1960s provide the appropriate ground for such analysis as culture itself was at this time radically effected by a foreign war abroad and violent domestic upheaval on numerous fronts at home. As artists were forced to articulate and address the implications of their social situation, the terms of the aesthetic experience, such as the relationship between object and viewer, were largely reconsidered. Further, by taking up artists and critics whose work is largely considered to be non-political, and clustered, however loosely, around the minimal project, this study bucks against much contemporary scholarship which has tended to isolate work based in formal abstraction from broader social concerns. The contributions offered by artists as diverse as Barnett Newman (picked up as a stylistic precursor by many of the minimalists), Jo Baer, Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Robert Morris will be examined in light of the discourse that developed to support and critique their production. The case studies chosen, therefore, are intended to re-examine specific examples of non-representational art of this period as participating in a politics of representation that operates through the material object and through the relationship it establishes with the audience.

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<sup>22</sup> Frascina, 7.

The issue of viewership is, I am arguing, one place where it is possible to isolate both what was at stake for artists working during this period, and the particular pressures the context of the late 1960s brought to bear on their art. This focus on the subject is not surprising, as new technologies of war (injected into the private spaces of the home via the nightly news), in conjunction with the enforcement of the draft served to politicize the body in ways unthinkable for a generation coming of age in the 1950s. From the violent self-immolation of the Quaker Norman Morrison on the steps of the Pentagon in 1965 to Timothy Leary's call to the disenfranchised to "turn on, tune in, and drop out," social and political conflict was increasingly centered on the body of the subject. Thus, it is in part through a reconsideration of viewership that artists developed a range of strategies to interrogate the position of the subject and contemporary possibilities for both physical and intellectual engagement. Moreover, as part and parcel of a search for authentic experience in what appeared as a desensitized modern world, this emphasis on the "beholder's share," allowed interested artists one way to directly connect with contemporary problems, specifically through the re-evaluation of the experience of art.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Writing in the 1960s on issues of perception and the relativity of vision, the Renaissance scholar Ernst Gombrich considered what the viewer brings to the viewing of art, naming it the "beholder's share." Influenced by Gestalt psychology, Gombrich argued: "The image, it might be said, has no firm anchorage left on the canvas— it is only 'conjured up' in our minds. The willing beholder responds to the artist's suggestions because he enjoys the transformations that occur in front of his eyes. It was in this enjoyment that a new function of art emerged... the artist gives the beholder increasingly 'more to do,' he draws him in to the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of 'making' which had once been the privilege of the artist." Ernst Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 202. Gombrich further defined the "beholder's share" in *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 145. He wrote: "The 'beholder's share' (is) the contribution we make to any representation from the stock of images store in our mind." Art historians, such as Norman Bryson and Mieke Bal, have more recently considered art not as a record or trace of perception, but as site for the production of a sign. Utilizing an understanding of semiotics gained by such writers as Ferdinand De Saussure, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Lacan, Bryson and Bal argued in their co-authored work "Semiotics and Art History" that art is actively engaged in the production of meaning. In other words, art is a signifying system that intersects with other signifying systems existent in the social world and through which the viewer produces meaning. See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotics and Art History," *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (June 1991), 174-208.

Taken further, as the parameters of the art establishment were forcibly redrawn many artists experimented with the position of the viewer, exploring both how representation engages its public and what the beholder might bring to the experience of art. In this way, some 1960s artists initiated an inquiry in to the ways in which the art object operates on and through the individual subject.

Debates about viewership and its implications for the future development of modern art, such as Michael Fried's infamous critique of minimal art on the basis of its theatricality, will be taken up in depth later in my thesis. But in short, Fried deviated (however slightly) from Greenberg's established belief in the complete self-referentiality of the image by reasserting the presence of the artist. While still continuing a tradition of Greenbergian formalism, Fried considered the ways in which artists were conscious of viewers and how works of art were constructed with particular viewing positions in mind. For modern art, those viewing positions were meant to be above all contemplative and critical. This conception of viewership, however, must be distinguished from my own, as I am not arguing for a unidirectional or monolithic method of viewing in which 1960s artists were thinking about viewers in order to directly connect to the social world (though this is happening). Rather, I am conceiving of viewership as a more complicated situation that pits Fried's observer as an entity constructed by the critic and by artists against a real-life audience making of the work of art what they will. During this period many artists were concerned with creating other possibilities that give more agency to the viewer, specifically through such strategies as embodiment and a reworking of spatial relations, both in terms of the space in which the work is sited and social space. The viewer, therefore, is being reconsidered as an agent or author able to take advantage of



new viewing possibilities in a myriad of ways, in part because of the stimulus of the surrounding social environment.

On the macro-level, this emphasis on the relationship between artwork and viewer dovetailed with a much larger social inquiry into power relations, or how the individual intersects with and is subjected to institutional and ideological power. The writings of the French cultural theorist Louis Althusser, which first appeared in the US in the late sixties, addressed this problematic.<sup>24</sup> Influenced by the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Althusser argued against a humanist interpretation of Marxism, maintaining that the real subjects of history were situated in terms of the structural relations between productive and ideological forces. Lévi-Strauss had argued that: "Whatever meaning and movement history displays is imparted and endowed not by historical actors, but by the totality of rule systems within which they are located and enmeshed."<sup>25</sup> Working from this vantage-point, Althusser's theories focused on the effects of power and authority on the production of modern subjectivities. For many political activists associated with the emergent New Left, this focus on the subject was fundamental to re-conceptualizing the connection between self and state. One arena in which this link was actively debated was through contemporary media, particularly the alternative or non-conformist press of the day. Inexpensively produced papers, such as the *East Village Other*, *Los Angeles Free Press*, *Berkeley Barb* and *Seed*, analyzed and mediated the position of the subject vis-à-vis larger social and political relations. For example, the cover of a 1970 issue of *Seed* published in Chicago portrays two figures dancing in wild abandon (fig. 2). The caption

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," *The New Left Reader*, Ed. Carl Oglesby (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1969), 57-83; *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Books, 1971); *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Allen Lane, 1969).

<sup>25</sup> Ted Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structuralist Marxism: Althusser and His Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 13.

above reads: "We shall celebrate with such fierce dancing the Death of your Institutions." In other words, only with such destruction can the embodied individual shake off the constraints of societal repression and be truly 'free.' Questions regarding the liberation of the body, or a lack thereof, and the culpability of the state, were also addressed in an August 1968 issue of the *Berkeley Barb* (fig. 3). Published in immediate response to the rioting at the Democratic National Convention, the headline identifies the issue as a "Yippie Report on Czechago, U.S.A." Here, a parallel is drawn between the streets of Chicago, where the convention was taking place, and those of Czechoslovakia, where the Prague Spring which started as a reformist movement within the Czechoslovak Communist Party, was brutally crushed by Soviet troops. This connection between the U.S. and a totalitarian regime is reinforced by the comic-like images that pit armed protesters against government forces. The caption in the first cell describes the narrative: "Destroy the Machinery of the State."

Althusser further theorized this relationship between the subject and institutions in an essay entitled "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," translated into English in 1971.<sup>26</sup> Here, heavily influenced by Maoism and the events of May '68 in France, Althusser turned increasingly towards ideology not just as the site of class struggle, but as a phenomenon embedded in institutions ranging from the family, the church the school and the state, and as a means through which a society perpetuates itself. In effect, Althusser rewriting Marxism, shifted emphasis from a purely economic reading of the conditions of society to an analysis that took culture, and the ways in which it perpetuates ideological structures through processes of reproduction, into account. Fundamental to

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<sup>26</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Books, 1971), 123-73.

Althusser's project was the reciprocal relationship between the subject and ideology.

Addressing this issue, he wrote:

the category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but at the same time and immediately I add that *the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects.*<sup>27</sup>

While, subjectivity according to psychoanalysis was unstable, composed of multiple subject-positions formed through encounters with both the unconscious and material world, Althusser offered a means through which its terms could be integrated.<sup>28</sup> And for many political activists in the late sixties, this was a further step, after the direct call for social action instigated by Marx, towards a critical intervention against established institutional politics. The point for Althusser (as well as for many members of the Frankfurt School) was to underscore some of the less overt methods through which the subject is interpellated, beginning with an inquiry into why and how we think and do what we do. This is not to say that an interest in the constitution of subjectivity was exclusive to this period. To cite but one example, the work of André Breton and the surrealists in 1920s and 30s France was preoccupied with similar issues using the writings of Sigmund Freud as a vehicle to explore both the unconscious and the possibility of revolutionary change. What is unique to the late 1960s, however, is the grounding of experience in the physical body of the subject. While there has been much written generally about the performative body at this moment, (for example Amelia Jones' work on Vito Acconci),<sup>29</sup> in my analysis issues I work to avoid include a notion of

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>28</sup> For an examination of subjectivity and its political grounding see Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>29</sup> Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). See also, Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993);

a generalized or universalized body and viewer or beholder by grounding both within the specifics of historical context and place.

The widespread dissent generated in the US during the Vietnam era, and the ways in which this politicized the body, had its roots in the much more marginalized political rumblings of the Beat generation, the bohemian lifestyle and anti-consumerist agenda of which troubled the cultural consensus of the 1950s.<sup>30</sup> Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1956) and Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955-6) are both emblematic of beat sensibility, rallying against the stultifying effects of capitalism, the wholesale embrace of scientific positivism, and the perceived straitjacket of middle-class mores. Ginsberg's poem begins, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness," a madness seemingly brought on by the rise of suburbia and the rapid proliferation of consumer goods during the post-World War II period. Disenfranchised by the cultural conformism of the McCarthy-era, the Beats rejected the perceived moral clarity of middle-class America. Living in unconventional urban environments often communally-based, they dropped out of mainstream society and embraced alternative value systems, looking to eastern religions and indigenous cultures, among other sources, for inspiration. Searching for some sort of deeper existential meaning in a world with which they are at odds, the Beats refused to participate in the establishment lodging a pointed critique of contemporary social and cultural life.

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and the collected essays in Colin Counsell and Laurie Wolf, eds., *Performance Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>30</sup>Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32-33. Marwick notes that the term 'beat' was apparently first used by a drug dealer in Times Square, New York, to describe the drifters and addicts he supplied, as well as their drug induced states of exaltation and exhaustion.

Despite such overt hostility to traditional values, the Beats, described in *Life* magazine on November 30, 1959 as “a few fruit flies... who refuse the seeping juices of American plenty and social advance,” remained throughout the fifties and early sixties largely peripheral to the US mainstream. It was not until the late 1960s, when the war in Vietnam had effectively polarized the nation into pro and antiwar factions, that their critique, exemplified in part by experimentation with drugs, sex and mystical spirituality, was picked up by disenfranchised middle-class youth. As beat epigones, students in the sixties embraced the nonconformist sensibility and bohemian lifestyle of Ginsberg, among others, who was, by this time, participating in the antiwar and gay rights movement. Advocating flower power as an alternative to the increased militarism on college and university campuses, Ginsberg became a spokesman of sorts for the counterculture, a term defined by the cultural historian and 1960s scholar Theodore Roszak as:

the embryonic cultural base of Politics, the effort to discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics, the bourgeois home, and the Protestant work ethic.<sup>31</sup>

While by no means a cohesive entity, the counterculture, a collective label applied to largely middle-class hippie and student radical sub-cultures, was, like the Beats, opposed to the values associated with the preceding generation. Generally, they were calling for a new kind of social experience in which feelings of commitment and authenticity were the norm. Posters bearing slogans such as “Hell No We Won’t Go” and “Make Love Not War,” which hung on bedroom walls as visible signs of this rejection of conservative

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<sup>31</sup> Published in *The Nation*, March 25, 1968.

society, measured the extent to which rebellion had infected a broad social base. Consequently, while early beat critiques in the fifties could be dismissed as the dissension of a few, the widespread upheaval that exploded at the end of the sixties was more palpable and unsettling, ostensibly with more radical potential.

For example, by 1967 an antiwar demonstration at the Pentagon was able to attract over 100,000 supporters, with the number of committed protesters steadily increasing over the next few years. The popular writer and cultural historian Norman Mailer's best-selling novel *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* described the events of this March on the Pentagon bringing the issues it raised regarding dissension and protest to an even wider audience.<sup>32</sup> Composed of two parts, the book shifts from a first hand account of the march in which Mailer participated, though written in the third person, and a description of events as recorded by the contemporary news media. What is stressed is the slippage between fiction and historical accuracy and the implications this has for the individual subject. As Mailer explained:

The mass media which surrounded the March on the Pentagon created a forest of inaccuracy which would blind the efforts of an historian; our novel has provided us with the possibility, no, even the instrument to view facts and conceivably study them in that field of light a labor of lensgrinding has produced. Let us prepare then (metaphors soon to be mixed—for the Novelist is slowing to a jog, and the Historian is all grip on the rein) let us prepare then to see what history might disclose.<sup>33</sup>

For many in the late 1960s, an increasing impetus to action was the realization that what was presented through the government and media as the social and political "facts" of the moment was only part of the story. Debates about the nature of political action and

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<sup>32</sup> Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* (New York: Signet Books, 1968).

personal responsibility in a climate of uncertainty and unrest had an immediate contemporary purchase which, regardless of one's position on these matters, had to be addressed.

Artists practicing in the late sixties were also highly influenced by this push towards increased political activism and the resulting questioning of systems of authority and institutions of power, a critique that eventually affected the art establishment. When Vassilakis Takis forcibly removed his sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art in January of 1969, a catalyst for the formation of the Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), his action was one of many which signaled what was effectively a re-politicization of the art scene for the first time since the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> As Annette Cox has argued in *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society*, activism among artists in the 1930s, much of which centered around the communist affiliated Artists Union, became increasingly difficult by the end of the decade.<sup>35</sup> The revelations of Stalinist policies through the Moscow trials of 1936-8 and the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact in 1939 disintegrated the artistic left in the US leading to what was after World War II a strident anti-Communist fervor. Within this climate, there was no room for criticism of the American political system much less for a discussion of the relationship between politics and art. Ad Reinhardt was one of the only abstract expressionists who during this time

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 219-20.

<sup>34</sup> The kinetic artist Takis removed his work from the "The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age" show at the Museum of Modern Art because of a disagreement with the guest curator of the exhibition, Dr. Poltus Hultén of the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Originally, Hultén chose a recent large-scale work by Takis for inclusion in the show. A few months before the show was to open Hultén decided to substitute a smaller work by Takis already in the museum's collection. A lengthy period of correspondence ensued between Takis and Hultén, but when the show opened the smaller work was displayed. This led to Takis' symbolic removal of his *Tele-Sculpture* (1960) from the gallery to the museum's courtyard and to a larger debate regarding the rights of an artist over work previously sold. See Therese Schwartz, "The Politicization of the Avant-Garde, Part II," *Art in America* 60, no.2 (March-April, 1972), 70-9.

<sup>35</sup> Annette Cox, *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982).

remained a committed socialist, providing (as will be discussed later in my thesis) a younger generation of artists with one model of political engagement from which to draw. While promoting the social responsibility of the artist, Reinhardt rejected the politicization of the art object maintaining in 1962 that: "Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else," a position that became difficult to maintain by the late 1960s.<sup>36</sup> In 1966, Reinhardt even contributed a painting to the Los Angeles Tower of Protest, a collective antiwar, artist-organized project, though he later renounced his participation.

The ostensible schism between the overt political activism of many artists working in the 1930s and their apparent retreat from direct engagement during the height of the Cold War was mirrored in the ideological rupture between the Old and New Left.<sup>37</sup> Again, this shift is grounded in a contemporaneous re-conceptualization of the political, from an understanding of macro state politics, to a more personal understanding in which the body of the subject is fundamentally implicated. Important here, is that it was to various factions of the Left that many sixties artists were looking both for political inspiration and for debates over the nature of social commitment and authentic experience. Proponents of the Old Left, Marxist in orientation, were specifically concerned with capitalism and the rights of labor, envisioning the working class as the agent of revolutionary change. Critical of Soviet Communism but with their roots in the 1930s, they attempted to keep socialism alive in the postwar years by marrying it with liberalism, believing individual liberty, freedom and equality of opportunity were

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<sup>36</sup> Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art," *Art International* VI (December 1962), reprinted in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 806-9.



attainable through a socialist reformation of democratic ideals.<sup>38</sup> But by the late 1960s, this trust in ultimate political reform was for many stretched to the breaking point. As African-Americans were disproportionately fighting the war in Vietnam while affluent white students were procuring draft deferments, the faith in the likelihood of equality put forth by the Old Left seemed to many youth more like fantasy, a simple case of too little too late. Growing up during the fifties under the omnipresent threat of nuclear war, members of the New Left were nihilistic identifying more with the sociological rather than the economic aspects of Marxian philosophy.<sup>39</sup> Looking to the ghetto, uprisings in the Third World, and intellectuals for models of change, the New Left, as a diffuse collection of social organizations that challenged the legitimacy of US political institutions, was more aggressive in its call for political activism.<sup>40</sup>

The search for authenticity and personal fulfillment discussed by intellectuals as diverse as Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills led many in the New Left to ideas of participatory democracy, though its meaning was heavily contested.<sup>41</sup> As a politicized concept, participatory democracy first gained currency in 1962 through the release of the *Port Huron Statement* by the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko and Arshile Gorky, among other abstract expressionists were associated with the Artists Union in the 1930s. The critic Harold Rosenberg was one of the editors for its magazine *Art Front*.

<sup>38</sup> Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1987), 1-34. Pragmatic in nature, and to a large degree critically silenced during the Cold War, the Old Left coalesced around journals such as *Partisan Review* (in which many of Greenberg's early essays were published), *Dissent*, and *Commentary* waiting under the weight of McCarthyism and the red scare for conditions more favorable to widespread social change." See Garfinckle, 121-2.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

<sup>40</sup> Employing strategies of civil disobedience, anti-militarism, and participatory democracy, New Left organizations, such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), promoted an anti-racism and antiwar agenda. Their popularity among student groups during the last few years of the decade spoke to a contemporary need for new political options, particularly as the Old Left appeared bereft of any radical potential.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), and *Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969); C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956; reprint, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), and

authoritarian manifesto that called for a radical overhaul of the American political system based on the rejection of poverty, racism, Cold War culture and war.<sup>42</sup> In this context, participatory democracy was a primary means through which to critique and rebuild the establishment through individual political involvement. As a call to action, towards personal directedness and social responsibility, it offered a program of engagement to counteract the apathy that had plagued US politics since the end of the Second World War. Moreover, using C. Wright Mills and his notion of face-to-face democracy as a point of departure, participatory democracy, as conceptualized by Tom Hayden and Al Haber of the SDS, could provide a citizenry with a sense of an authentic experience.<sup>43</sup> The idea was to encourage inwardly gratifying and outwardly productive forms of experience through which politicized individuals could work together to promote radical social change. It was this thoroughly rebuilt conception of democracy, with its wholesale incrimination of traditional systems of belief that fit uncomfortably with the Old Left, which was on the whole more moderate in their critique of institutionalized authority.<sup>44</sup>

While the Old Left perceived of itself as intellectually rigorous, versed in the complexities of a history of European critical thought including Marxism; the New Left

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*Power, Politics & People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (1963; reprint, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1987), particularly the chapter "Participatory Democracy," 141-154.

<sup>43</sup> For the influence of Mills on the New Left, particularly the SDS, see Miller, 78-91.

<sup>44</sup> Isserman, 118. As Isserman points out, this reading of the New Left by the Old was in some ways too hasty and resulted in the loss, for the Old Left, of the political opportunity it had been waiting for. Similarly, the New Left, on the whole, was very vocal in their repudiation of the lessons and strategies learned by the previous generation, a tactic that increased the estrangement between the two groups. As Richard Flacks, one of the early SDS organizers noted retrospectively: "we felt we knew things better than they did. We not only had the belief we could correct all their wrongs, but the further arrogance that despite the fact they didn't agree or understand us, they would sponsor us nonetheless. It seemed perfectly natural at the time that we'd know better than these old people. After all, they'd failed. See Miller, 162. It was this sense that the Old Left was bankrupt, no longer able to effectively intervene in political affairs that sealed this sort of reasoning in the sixties and, in part, contributed to the distance at times consciously maintained between these two groups.

developed a particular brand of knowledge based on eclectic appropriation.<sup>45</sup> Strands of thought from various theorists, such as Marx, Sartre, Althusser, and Mao, were recombined in what were sometimes incompatible and contradictory ways.<sup>46</sup> As a strategy, this selective borrowing reinforced the movement's anti-intellectual tone, its attempt to chart a new course distinct from any established and institutionalized forms of knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Though largely supportive of socialist ideals, the New Left was less patient, looking to Third World revolutionaries and their coup d'état methods as a more immediate model for the realization of political change. Anti-patriotic and adamantly opposed to America's war in Vietnam, they considered democracy in its existing form an illusion, a condition masked by the affluence of consumer society and its promotion by the middle-classes. But armed with both Mao's *Little Red Book* and Timothy Leary's drug-induced call to 'drop out', the New Left was unable to put forth a cohesive plan towards total rebellion. Radically decentralized, the most it could offer was a renewed belief in a committed, albeit individualized, authentic experience and a variety of suggestions, ranging from draft dodging to more direct forms of political activism, on how this experience might be achieved. Thus, the different lefts in hindsight had much to

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<sup>45</sup> For a fundamental discussion of the differences between the Old Left and the New, see Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), 117-125; Wini Breines, "'Of This Generation': The New Left and the Student Movement," *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, ed. Alexander Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-46.

<sup>46</sup> In fact *The New Left Reader*, edited by Carl Oglesby and published in 1969, testifies to the diverse theorists contributing to New Left thought. For example, Louis Althusser, Fidel Castro, Frantz Fanon, Herbert Marcuse and Malcolm X are included among the contributors.

<sup>47</sup> This lack of historical grounding also functioned to alienate much of the Old Left from its progeny. Irving Howe, in particular, was convinced this lack of historical awareness would condemn the New Left to repeating the mistakes of the past, a condition he believed would result in ultimate failure. Co-founder of the democratic-socialist vehicle *Dissent* magazine in the mid-fifties, Howe was one of the most outspoken critics of the New Left, implying it instigated a politics of vagueness, with no theoretical underpinnings or unifying doctrines. Without a tradition of philosophical thinking and through its refusal of liberalism and anti-American rhetoric, the New Left was for Howe a threat to the continuation of democracy. See, for example, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, "New Styles in Fellow-Travelling," *Dissent* 8 (Autumn 1961), 496-498; and, Irving Howe, "Introduction" and "New Styles in Leftism," *Beyond the New Left* (New York: The McCall Publishing House, 1970), 3-15 and 19-32. See also Michael Harrington, "The Mystical Militants," *Beyond the New Left* (New York: The McCall Publishing Co., 1970), 33-39.

offer each other, a motivated citizenry on the part of the New Left and a plan for collective political action on the part of the Old. Despite this, the two were unable, because of generational and ideological differences, to come together, the New Left having the more dramatic influence on contemporary social and cultural life.

The root of the ideological differences between the New Left and the Old was a differing conception of politics, a word as previously mentioned transformed in the 1960s, to respond to new ideas of individual agency developing out of the protest movement. Whereas for the Old Left, politics consisted of concrete ideological associations and institutional allegiances through which the individual could lobby for change,<sup>48</sup> during the Cold War the terms of political engagement dramatically shifted foreclosing this sort of dissent or critique.<sup>49</sup> Trying to develop a voice after this period of conformism, the New Left, by the late 1960s, viewed the American political system as suspect, condemning it for "confusing the individual citizen, paralyzing policy discussions, and consolidating the irresponsible power of military and business interests."<sup>50</sup> Arguing against the dogmatic politics of the 1950s, the New Left conceived of a more active subject able to change society through committed or authentic action. Centering on real, lived experience, or again what had been theorized in France during the 1950s and 60s as the social interrelations of everyday life, the New Left looked to emergent post-structuralist theory for direction, as well as to writers as diverse as Herbert Marcuse, Henri Lefebvre and Timothy Leary. Concerned with understanding how power

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<sup>48</sup> See Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Student Movement, 1929-1941* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Lary May, ed. *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>50</sup> "Politics Without Publics," *The Port Huron Statement*, reprinted in Miller, 336.

operates both on and through the individual through processes of language and discourse, they recognized the body as a site of possibility. In this way, politics became more intimately linked to individual identity, a postmodern conception of identity politics still viable today. Thus, for the New Left, politics was implicit in the individual's actions, as apparent in one's militant behavior or political associations as in modes of hairstyle and dress. Authenticity, which combined a belief in personal autonomy, free self-expression and meaningful and committed social action, became a catchall of sorts, a word meant to signal the end of alienation and the birth of a new interactive political realm.<sup>51</sup>

This renovated conception of politics as indicative of how power operates and what it produces, is a central concern of my thesis. When considering art of the late 1960s, it is not my intention to arbitrate between what is and is not political, between an art with overt propagandistic content and a non-representational, autonomous art. This is an Old Left strategy already adopted, as mentioned above, by the art historian Francis Frascina and which positions an explicitly Marxist art history against the social history of art.<sup>52</sup> Rather, I am interested in re-evaluating minimal art and the ways in which it interacts with its public to uncover a politics of representation that operates as much through the material art object as through the debates in which it is situated. That is, I am interested in how the disciplinary boundaries of art re-constitute under volatile societal

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<sup>51</sup> Howard Brick, "Authenticity and Artifice," *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 66-97.

<sup>52</sup> See Hollis Clayson, et al., "Art History: A Range of Critical Perspectives," *Art Bulletin* 77 (September 1995), 367-391. While there is a variety of perspectives offered on the state of the discipline of art history in this article, all of which are of interest, Clayson's contribution defines the differences between Marxist and social art history. Both are concerned with how images operate within a larger social world, but a Marxist methodology implies a critique of ideology and a grounding of art within the material conditions (social, political, and economic) in which it is produced and received. Conversely, social art history considers a more nebulous field of social relations and practice in which images can not be so easily located. For social art historians, art is less deterministic and often functions in multiple and contradictory ways.

pressures and the implications this has on artists and viewers, and on both the production and reception of art.

One marker of this shift was a symposium in print organized by *Artforum* during the summer of 1970 on the issue of the artist and politics.<sup>53</sup> As the last bastion in the fight to maintain Greenberg's particular definition of modern art, *Artforum's* capitulation to politics measured the extent to which contemporary social pressures had infiltrated the art establishment. While artists had been banding together since the mid-1960s to protest the war in Vietnam, for example in 1965 the Artists Protest Committee organized over five hundred artists in the "End Your Silence" advertisement campaign, the *Artforum* symposium revealed the gravity of the situation (fig. 4).<sup>54</sup> Artists from a wide range of ideological perspectives, regardless of their political beliefs, were asked to assess the social situation and to address the impact this potentially had on the making of art. For formalist scholars like Michael Fried it must have appeared that culture was taken hostage by a vulgar form of politics, the future of modernism, which he defined as a radical, self-critical project, for all intents and purposes, up for grabs. The twelve different artists asked to respond to *Artforum's* survey, which I address more fully in Chapter 1, expressed a wide range of often conflicting opinions on the relationship between politics and art, yet taken together they reveal how the tensions of the Vietnam-

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<sup>53</sup> "The Artists and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* (September 1970), 35-9.

<sup>54</sup> "End Your Silence," *The New York Times*, June 27, 1965. After likening US involvement in Vietnam to French colonialist practices, the signatories affirmed: "American artists wish once more to have faith in the United States of America. We will not remain silent in the face of our country's shame." This statement was signed by over 500 writers and artists, including Norman Mailer, Elaine de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt, Harold Rosenberg, and Mark Rothko. Here, the critique of war put forth fit within a growing disillusionment among U.S. intellectuals over American involvement in Vietnam. See, for example, Joseph M. Kraft, "Politics in Vietnam," *The New York Review of Books* 6, no.11 (June 23, 1966), 11-21; John Kenneth Galbraith, *How to Get Out of Vietnam* (New York: Signet Broadside, 1967); and for a more popular account of this process, David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Random House, 1965).

era challenged what had been, since the 1940s, a rather stable understanding of advanced modern art.

Moreover, the *Artforum* symposium demonstrated that it was not just the activities of groups like the Art Workers Coalition or the Guerilla Art Action Group, art collectives with a specific political agenda, which rendered the cultural field a battleground during the late sixties (fig. 5).<sup>55</sup> There were other less visible signs of rupture. For example, in the earth artist Robert Smithson's response to *Artforum*, he argued that: "sooner or later the artist is implicated or devoured by politics."<sup>56</sup> While the abstract painter Jo Baer maintained: "the time for political action by artists is now... political action need not inhibit art-making; the two activities are dissimilar, not incompatible."<sup>57</sup> For both Baer and Smithson, as for many other artists practicing in the late sixties, to be politically engaged did not necessarily mean to be crass or figuratively propagandistic. In this way, the work of Barnett Newman, an outspoken political advocate and role model to many minimal artists, stood as exemplary. From the late 1940s onwards, he produced abstract, zip paintings, which despite their pared down visual language were highly charged with symbolic and socially imbued content. As a committed anarchist, Newman's particular brand of modernism argued for the power of individualism, but through a sophisticated modernist vocabulary.

These were not the only political rumblings within the art establishment. The critique of institutions put forth by artists such as Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren was

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<sup>55</sup> Though their violent and often bloody antiwar demonstrations set in museums were among the more obvious manifestations of what was beginning to be seen as an implicit connection between US cultural institutions and the war in Vietnam. As Gregory Battcock asked at a "Speak Out" in 1969 organized to discuss the museum's relationship to artists and society: "Do you realize that it is those art loving, culturally-committed museum trustees of the Metropolitan and Modern museums who are waging the war in Vietnam?" As quoted in Lucy Lippard, *A Different War* (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1990), 20.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Smithson, "The Artists and Politics: A Symposium," 38.

<sup>57</sup> Jo Baer, "The Artists and Politics: A Symposium," 36.

another site in which the political burst forth. As Haacke, a photo-conceptualist interested in unmasking the power base of cultural agencies, explained, "There are no 'artists,' however, who are immune to being affected and influenced by the socio-political value system of the society in which they live."<sup>58</sup> By the late 1960s, this was an idea to which more and more artists subscribed. For instance, in his *Shapolsky, et al., Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971*, Haacke was invested in enacting a deconstruction of relationships that cut to the economic and political underbelly of cultural power (fig. 6). Originally planned for the Guggenheim and combining photographs of tenements with information about ownership, acquisition and property values, Haacke named those individuals and institutions responsible for slum housing in New York, many with longstanding ties to the Guggenheim itself.<sup>59</sup> The French artist Buren produced a different sort of commentary on institutional power through his first series of prefabricated stripe paintings that he began in 1967. Abstract in nature, yet with a readymade content, these paintings were intended to direct attention to their contextual setting. Displayed on walls, fences, billboards and countless other supports, Buren's striped canvases focused attention away from the formal elements of his paintings to focus on the siting of the work instead.

Thus, when considering the politicization of art during the late 1960s, I am not concerned with work overtly didactic in terms of its representational content. After all, Claes Oldenburg's *Lipstick Ascending on Caterpillar Tracks* (1968), a sculpture which directly links a lipstick tube (symbolic of consumer culture) with the war machine, is rather straightforward, its meaning largely contingent on the position of the viewer

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<sup>58</sup> Hans Haacke, "Statement," *Art into Society, Society into Art* (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1974), 63.



(fig.7). James Rosenquist's *F-III* (1965), a multi-paneled painting which superimposes imagery from popular culture over a continuous likeness of the latest U.S. fighter jet, similarly engages with obvious ideological issues (fig. 8). Instead, what I am interested in is work less direct in its representational language, and which has largely been assumed to be non-political in nature, but which breaks faith with Greenbergian modernism and the detached model of viewership on which that version of modernism depended. By re-evaluating specific examples of late sixties art production, I want to show that it is possible to unearth the ways in which the relationship between the artist, object and viewer was being renegotiated at that time, in order to make the viewer more aware of her or his subject position and, in turn, how that position might influence an experience of the work.

Some of the issues delineated in my thesis, such as the changing definition of politics, the issue of viewership, and the fracturing of modernism, are not new to the examination of art practices in the late sixties. Yet, the ways in which these issues converge at a particular historical moment to fundamentally rupture and then reconstitute the existing aesthetic topography, I would argue, have been ignored in most historical accounts. Much current art historical research tends to erase the specificity and political intent of sixties art by downplaying its social relevancy.<sup>60</sup> In this way, art is locked in a tautology, its meaning contingent on insular and exclusionary philosophical and aesthetic

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<sup>59</sup> As many of those named had ties to the museum's board of trustees, the Guggenheim, not surprisingly, pulled out of sponsoring Haacke's exhibition.

<sup>60</sup> Major exceptions to this are Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) which situates the work of Robert Morris from the early sixties onwards within the larger spectrum of his political beliefs; and Tom Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996) which charts a very general survey of this period.

debates. What is often presented as cutting edge scholarship is upon closer consideration the same old story, but in a different packaging: a safe, albeit interesting, interpretation of history that erases social conflict in order to support what has previously been established as the canon of modern art. In the end, our understanding of minimalism, through the work of artists such as Barnett Newman, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Jo Baer and Eva Hesse, remains, to a large degree, unchallenged, a historical pablum that in no way troubles conventional interpretations of this work.

It is here that my own work attempts to intervene. By resituating the roots of certain artistic debates, particularly those circulating around minimal art within an everyday fraught with social upheaval, public riots, and an overseas war, it becomes possible to reconsider what was at stake in these seemingly distant cultural battles and to reconnect them to the complexities and contradictions of their social moment. Methodologically, I am not arguing for a crude social history that directly applies or even equates politics to art. Rather, I am interested in the possibilities opened up by paradigmatic shifts in the late sixties art establishment, and more particularly, how these were fore-grounded in contemporary art production. By re-attributing an efficacy to sixties art, by assessing how an understanding of politics changed at this time to incorporate altered notions of identity, personal agency and authenticity, the new sorts of spaces artists and audiences constructed (for viewership, possible activism, and engagement), can more easily be assessed. This said, I do not intend to write a comprehensive survey of late sixties art, minimal art, or of the work of the individual artists that my thesis discusses. Such an attempt would result, at best, in a series of generalizations and historical omissions. Nor is my project to organize a set of disparate

artistic practices around a cohesive political narrative. From our modern perspective, such teleological models erase points of contention and disjuncture, exactly what I want to avoid. Conversely, I intend to examine the very sites where difference is made manifest, as it is in these moments of fracture that power relations which function in and through the cultural establishment are reconstituted and it is at these places where boundaries redrawn. With this in mind, I have chosen to organize my thesis around a series of case studies, each one a site of rupture in which the anxieties and uncertainties of the Vietnam-era can be recognized as bursting forth on the 1960s art scene. My intention is to foreground the gaps or lacunae evident in any coherent reading of minimalist production and to reinsert issues of contestation and social practice to art historical debates. Moreover, each individual chapter is meant to highlight a different set of viewing possibilities set in place at this time by both the producers and audiences of art to address the stimulus of the late 1960s social environment.

Chapter 1, for example, examines the “Richard J. Daley” show, an exhibition organized by Richard Feigen in Chicago to protest against police repression at the Democratic National Convention in 1968. The work of Barnett Newman in general and particularly a piece he produced for the show, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, provides a foil for the discussion of the political options available to both artists and viewers in the late 1960s. At this time, I argue, culture was fundamentally affected by the contemporary political situation, as the seemingly strict separation of politics and art (supported under the rubric of the modernism sustained by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried) began to break down. Of central importance are the ways in which viewership became, at this

time, a politicized activity, an issue I argue, that Newman overtly confronts through the materiality of his sculpture and the allusions and references it evokes.

In the second chapter, the polemics of minimalism, as exemplified through the tension fraught relationship between Donald Judd, Robert Morris and Michael Fried, will be used to access concerns about the future of modernism within the context of the highly politicized social climate of the Vietnam-era. Fried's well-known riposte to minimalism, the essay "Art and Objecthood" published in 1967, which centers on the issue of theatricality will be used as a point of departure. Arguing that minimal, or what he termed literalist art, is the "other" of modernism, Fried discussed the ways in which he believed minimalism played to its audience, by encouraging an interactive viewer whose very presence was required to complete the work of art. At stake in my reassessment of the debates Fried's reading encompassed is the phenomenological framing of the relationship between the audience and art object.

In the third chapter, I consider the work of Robert Morris, Jo Baer, and Eva Hesse. Particularly, I analyze the distinct mediations offered by Baer and Hesse in response to what had become by the late 1960s a rather standardized, and for some ineffectual, minimal cube (for which, like Fried in his "Art and Objecthood" I will use the work of Morris as a stand-in). Of interest are the ways in which both Baer and Hesse respond, through the construction of distinct viewing possibilities, to the modernist tradition upheld by Greenberg and Fried. For example, while Baer, in her work seems to accept the basic tenets of this modernism, as her white canvases with painted borders deal with the problems specific to painting, at the same time she foregrounds processes of perception. While Hesse, following up on minimal artist's preoccupation with the cube

and working with the same notions of forms, appropriated and punctured the “masculine” rhetoric historically attached to this work adding another layer to the complexity of the debates concerning the minimal viewer, specifically those incorporating issues of gender.

“From SDS to LSD: Politics, Viewers, and Minimal Art in Late 1960s America,” the title of my thesis, underscores what I perceive to be a fundamental link between the rapidly shifting social relations of the late 1960s and an understanding of the new aesthetic possibilities opened up during this period. Whether considering the engaged activism of the New Left or the liberation of the individual through hallucinatory drugs such as LSD, the experience of the subject was prioritized, a condition that had a profound effect on the production and reception of art. This obsession with authentic personal experience is not surprising given the feelings of alienation plaguing contemporary youth at this time. For many, drastic change was necessary, as it was becoming more and more obvious that the social system inherited from the fifties generation no longer worked for large sections of the populace. Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground connected with this need for something more when he sang about the power of heroin. The song begins:

I don't know just where I'm going; But I'm gonna try for  
the kingdom, if I can; 'Cause it makes me feel like I'm a  
man; When I put a spike into my vein; And I'll tell ya,  
things aren't quite the same; When I'm rushing on my run;  
And I feel just like Jesus' Son; And I guess that I just don't  
know; And I guess that I just don't know... Heroin, be the  
death of me; Heroin, it's my wife and it's my life.<sup>61</sup>

Shooting up was one way to feel a physical rush, a sense of excitement found by others through social commitment or lifestyle changes. Regardless of the means— drugs, activism, communal living, new modes of dress— what mattered was being connected,

finding a way to override the malaise and despondency so pervasive among students during this period. As the Vietnam War cleaved US society into pro and anti war factions, it was important to find a means through which to form new notions of community to which disenfranchised youth, and those opposed to the politics of mainstream America, could belong.

My project, however, is about bringing this context and its implications back to the realm of modern art. The time period I am investigating, bracketed by the deaths of Ad Reinhardt in 1967 and Eva Hesse in 1970, explores the degree to which ideas about modernism shifted under the pressures brought to bear by larger social forces. Reinhardt's demand that art be about nothing but art gave way to Hesse's formal investigations into an early feminist politics, troubling what was for critics like Greenberg and Fried the de-politicized legacy of modern art. What was clear by the end of the decade was that art and how we view it was a direct result of the challenge posed to modernism by the Vietnam War, the protest movement and the questioning of authority this engendered. The dramatic change between viewer and art object possible at this time a consequence of how social and political factors impinged on the making of art. This is what makes the late 1960s so rich for re-interpretation, it is a historical moment when the connection between art, which for many historians is still seen as insular and in some ways separate from society-at-large, and politics is abundantly clear.

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<sup>61</sup> Lou Reed, "Heroin," *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, 1967.

Chapter One: When Push Comes to Shove—Positioning Newman's Zip in Late 1960s America

*Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, a six-foot by four-foot barbed wire sculpture framed in steel and splattered with red paint, is not seemingly representative of the work of artist cum philosopher Barnett Newman (fig. 9). Known for his more esoteric and metaphysically engaged zip paintings, widely considered as mediations on the tragic, if not sublime, condition of modern man, Newman here is more candid. He temporarily traded in a thoroughly abstract language of pictorial representation for raw physicality, broaching a literalism not apparent in any of his other work. Produced for a protest exhibition organized by Richard Feigen's Chicago gallery in the fall of 1968, Newman's sculpture was to satirize the figure of Chicago's Mayor Richard J. Daley and his repressive and autocratic political regime.<sup>1</sup> At the Democratic National Convention in August of that same year, Daley had turned his institutional power against the thousands of anti-Vietnam War protesters who had come to Chicago to protest their government's involvement in Southeast Asia and who were in turn viciously beaten by police. Television crews captured the chaos as the streets erupted in violence, a simulacrum of which was broadcast into the living rooms of middle-class America via the increasingly pervasive medium of the nightly news (figs. 10 and 11). For many witnessing the brutality, the Cold War rhetoric of freedom and democracy put forth by the United States since the Second World War was irrevocably shattered. The State as personified by Daley was now envisioned as the aggressor, and it was this shift in political consciousness that

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<sup>1</sup> This was one of two works Newman designed for the "Richard J. Daley" exhibition at the Feigen Gallery in Chicago from October 23 to November 23, 1968. The other sculpture, entitled *Mayor Daley's Outhouse*, was never executed due to time constraints. Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 123.

Newman, as an established anarchist with an unwavering belief in the power of individualism, specifically addressed.

Thus, considered in relation to such political turmoil, Newman's sculpture, and its difference within his oeuvre, can be read as a pressure point of sorts measuring the extent to which social tensions, exacerbated by the fighting both at home and abroad, had by 1968 infiltrated the cultural front. As the US moved from cold war to hot, what had started in the 1950s as a beat critique of consumer capitalism gained momentum and instigated an atmosphere of widespread upheaval that effected all areas of social life. When the beat poet Allen Ginsberg, addressing the complacency and conformism of his generation, asked in 1956 to a marginalized audience: "What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" His answer—the demonic super-force "Moloch!"—could be widely recognized just a decade later as a pseudonym for society itself. Ginsberg wrote:

Moloch! ... Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone!  
Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! Moloch whose  
poverty is the specter of genius! .../ Moloch in whom I sit  
lonely! Moloch in whom I dream angels! Crazy in Moloch!  
Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!/  
Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am  
a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened  
me out of my natural ecstasy!<sup>2</sup>

This conception of society as limiting individual freedom and personal rights was explored by various factions of the counterculture on all sorts of levels during the late 1960s as a means to combat what were widespread feelings of disenfranchisement and alienation. What was craved for, particularly among youth, was some form of an authentic experience (authenticity a buzzword of sorts in the late 1960s) as an antidote to

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<sup>2</sup> Allen Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956).



a growing cultural malaise. Drug culture, political activism, and alternative lifestyles and modes of dress became signs of this estrangement, which for many marked a complete disavowal of middle-class society and ways of life. As with the beats, dissent took on many forms. For some the point was reform, for others the total destruction of authoritative systems and traditional thought. As Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman as the leaders of the Youth International Party (Yippies) advised shortly after the Democratic Convention in Chicago: "Nobody goes to work. Nobody goes to school. Nobody votes. Everyone becomes a life actor of the street doing his thing, making the revolution by freeing himself and fucking up the system."<sup>3</sup>

As part of this volatile climate, Newman's *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* provides, I am arguing, a means of entry into some of the issues at stake for visual artists producing at this moment, specifically regarding the relationship between art and politics. For Newman this was well-marked terrain, as the search for authenticity in the 1960s connected with earlier debates from the forties and fifties regarding the nature of the human condition and the possibilities it offered for individual freedom.<sup>4</sup> As the major preoccupation of his abstract colorfield work, this was a theme with which he was well familiar. But what I am interested in investigating is what forced Newman in 1968 to deviate from this model to produce a work more obviously figurative in meaning. Here,

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<sup>3</sup> Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, "Yippie Manifesto" (1968), *"Takin' it to the Streets" A Sixties Reader*, eds. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 323. Referencing the riots in Chicago during the Democratic National Convention, Rubin and Hoffman advised, also in their manifesto, "let's make 2-300 Chicago's on election day." With the presidential election coming up in November of the same year, many counterculture groups, such as the Yippies, felt there was no real choice between the two candidates, Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon specifically as neither one seemed able or willing to spearhead widespread change.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre viewed authentic experience as the primary means through which the individual could counteract alienation and engage more fully in social practice. An authentic person is one who abandons all pretense, accepts the inevitability of death (and the terror of the unknowable) and assumes the responsibility of free choice. While Sartre's existentialism was part of a larger body of discourse on the predicament of modern man in the postwar period, his focus on authenticity as a means to counteract alienation was fundamental to the modernist project. See Jean Paul Sartre, *Being*

the political must be understood as not just representative of the sort of activism that Ginsberg, in his shift from beat bohemia to countercultural icon in the sixties, and the Yippies promoted. Rather, the term “politics” was being redefined in the 1960s through everyday social relations and practices, which included an exploration of subjectivity, the recuperation of the body, and an interrogation of individualism as both a theoretical and material concept. It is to such complex and multifarious notions of the political that, I am arguing, Newman’s work is addressed.

To complicate matters, and despite its obvious historical relevance, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* has rarely been set within the social circumstances that have contributed to and, to some degree, determine its meaning.<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps not surprising as the depoliticized legacy of modern art put into place in the post-World War II period by Greenbergian formalism discouraged such readings, as if the art object itself inhabited a separate and isolated aesthetic sphere removed from social circumstances. In fact, it was only in the last few years that Newman’s curtain was even included in retrospective exhibitions, its undeniable referential content uncomfortable for many that prefer an exclusively formal reading of his work.<sup>6</sup> A recent book by Francis Francina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties*,<sup>7</sup> however, does begin to look at art that has been historically left out of surveys of the 1960s due to its overtly political content. But

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and *Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1957); and Mary Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965).

<sup>5</sup> While Harold Rosenberg does mention *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* in a 1971 exhibition catalogue for Newman’s sculpture, which is in itself unusual, it is not discussed in any depth or in relation to the specific circumstances of its production. Thomas Hess also references this work, but most of the details of its political intent were relegated to a footnote. See Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman: Broken Obelisk and Other Sculptures* (Seattle: Henry Art Gallery, 1971); and Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971).

<sup>6</sup> More recent exceptions include Armin Zweite, “Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley,” *Barnett Newman: Paintings, Sculptures, Works on Paper* (Germany: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1999); and Ann Temkin, ed. *Barnett Newman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Francis Francina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999).

only that work which is concerned with macro-politics and artist-organized activism is included in his analysis. Frascina described the goal of his study as one designed:

to consider some of the collective projects marginalized in dominant histories, by institutionalised (sic) processes of legitimization. These projects involve artists, critics and intellectuals in the period defined by the major escalations of military intervention by the United States in Vietnam. In this sense, I am concerned with the underrepresented in existing histories, but the 'underrepresented' is not specifically focused on, say, gender or multiculturalism but on instances of the relationship between collective action and critiques of institutional processes and power.<sup>8</sup>

As Frascina indicates he is preoccupied with the recuperation of a particular notion of art practice from the late 1960s, predominantly that which involves artist-sponsored, antiwar activism, and the production of ephemeral aesthetic objects. That is, he considers both the external and material conditions affecting the production of activist art and the subsequent exclusion of this art from contemporary historical narratives.<sup>9</sup> Projects he focuses on include the Los Angeles Tower of Protest (1966), Angry Arts Week in New York (January 29 to February 5, 1967), and the various activities of the Art Workers' Coalition (formed in 1969). While Frascina does much to resuscitate an understanding of the political avant-garde, his primary aim is to expand the boundaries of the canon of art history in order to include work, which because of its collective or political intent, had previously been ignored.

My interest in the relationship between politics and art of this period incorporates a different set of problems. Namely, I am concerned with how individual artists,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>9</sup> In this way, Frascina fits within Hollis Clayson's definition of a materialist art historian, as one "informed by the Marxist tradition" and who "tends accordingly to operate on the assumption that the real is prior to culture." In other words, she claims that for a materialist, external social conditions exist outside of or a priori to the object. See Hollis Clayson, "Materialist Art History and Its Points of Difficulty," *Art Bulletin* 77, No. 3 (September 1995), 368.

particularly those like Newman who worked with non-representational languages, navigated an increasingly politicized environment and how this environment might possibly have effected both the art object and its potential viewers. Again, a more malleable conception of politics must be employed here, one that recognizes the political dynamic invested and produced through discourse and social relations. When considering this sort of politics, the late 1960s art scene transforms into a battlefield a contested terrain of competing interests and ideologies through which a politics of representation was brought to the fore. Juxtaposing the claims of Philip Leider, the editor of *Artforum*, that “there was an absolute division drawn between our politics and art thinking and art criticism,”<sup>10</sup> with those of the modernist painter Jo Baer during the period itself, “all art is eventually political,”<sup>11</sup> the extent of this conflict becomes visible. Moreover, as the ascendancy of post-painterly abstraction, promoted by both Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, was fundamentally challenged by the playfulness and humor of pop art, and the reductive formalism and theatricality of minimalism, the continuation of modern art as a serious intellectual practice was for many fundamentally questioned.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Fried, in the fight for the further development of formalist modernism, “I thought that nothing less than the future of Western civilization was at stake.”<sup>13</sup> It is these sorts of statements and the positions they evoke that lend urgency to the aesthetic debates of the 1960s in which Newman’s *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* resides. Using this sculpture as a case study, the competing cultural interests that attempted to redefine

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<sup>10</sup> Philip Leider as quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74*, (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 300.

<sup>11</sup> Jo Baer, “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” *Artforum* (September 1970): 35.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1960), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93, which appeared in revised form in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965), 193-201. In this essay, Greenberg outlined the self-critical tendencies of modernist painting as a practice predicated on the interrogation of its specific essence— flatness.

notions of political and artistic commitment during this period can be investigated and some of the difficulties faced by individual artists and critics as they navigated a rapidly changing field of aesthetic practice rethought.

Despite what now could be read as the almost legendary status of *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, as the only quasi-representational work in Newman's oeuvre, the piece was almost never completed. Prior to the planning of Feigen's protest show, a large segment of the arts community, over five hundred artists and writers, had planned to boycott the galleries and museums in Chicago as an act of solidarity with the protesters injured and brutalized by Daley's police.<sup>14</sup> The writer Norman Mailer, in his description of the events at the convention, provides insight into the sorts of atrocities the proposed boycott was intended to respond: "police attacked with tear gas, with Mace, and with clubs, they attacked like a chain saw cutting into wood... their clubs beating, demonstrators fleeing. Seen from overhead, from the nineteenth floor, it was like a wind blowing dust."<sup>15</sup> As Paul Potter, then president of the Students for a Democratic Society recalled, "Chicago was an armed camp... we just couldn't quite get it through our heads that all of that force was being lined up against us. It was too abstract; it was too absurd."<sup>16</sup> The sort of disbelief to which Potter referred soon transformed into what was

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<sup>13</sup> Amy Newman, 435.

<sup>14</sup> Originally planned by the artists Hedda Sterne and Jesse Reichek, the boycott was announced in *The New York Times* on September 5, 1968 with the support of over 500 artists and writers, including Barnett Newman. The statement read: "The recent actions by Chicago police, directed and supported by Mayor Daley and not repudiated by the people of Chicago, have marked that city as being unfit for membership in a civilized society. As painters and sculptors we know that art cannot exist where repression and brutality are tolerated." See Dan Sullivan, "Artists Agree on Boycott of Chicago Showings," *The New York Times* (September 5, 1968); and for a summary of the boycott effort, Therese Schwartz, "The Politicization of the Avant-Garde, II," *Art in America* 60 (March/April 1972), 70-79.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago: An Informal History of the Republican and Democratic Conventions of 1968* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1968), 169.

<sup>16</sup> Terry Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 217.

for many a total distrust of the federal government. It was as if the entire Enlightenment project, manifest in republican values and hinged on a belief in the individual's potential, was displaced in Chicago by militant tactics and corrupt political regimes. The question for many was if this could happen in a liberal and democratic city, what was next?

This is not to say that everyone sympathized with the protesters. In fact, the use of yippie scare tactics based in farce—threatening to taint the water supply in Chicago with LSD, to kidnap delegates to the convention, and to flood sewers with gasoline—had left some unsympathetic to the demonstrators actions.<sup>17</sup> But for others the idea that such repression of free speech and the right to protest could be condoned seemed to warrant immediate action. Barnett Newman, for example, on September 3 sent a letter to C.C. Cunningham, the Director of the Art Institute of Chicago, asking Cunningham to remove one of his pieces from an upcoming exhibition on dada and surrealist art. Newman wrote: “I do not want to be represented in this exhibition in protest against the uncalled-for police brutality of Mayor Daley, which fills me with disgust. I cannot in good conscience do otherwise.”<sup>18</sup> After Claes Oldenburg, who was injured during the convention riots, canceled an upcoming show at Richard Feigen's downtown gallery, arguing, “a gentle one-man show about pleasure seems a bit obscene in the present context,”<sup>19</sup> Feigen

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<sup>17</sup> Because of their outrageous antics, their use of parody and humor as strategies to undermine and critique the establishment, it was to a large degree against the Yippies that Chicago police reacted so forcibly. For weeks prior to the convention the Yippies, while not the largest group in attendance, had been planning what they called “an invasion of Chicago,” complete with demonstrations, street fairs, free public performances and rock concerts. Disillusioned with national politics, the Yippies intended to counteract the apparent futility of the convention with their own celebration, a ‘festival of death.’ What the mayor and his constituents found so dangerous about the Yippies was their complete disavowal of middle-class values, as evident in the apparent insouciance with which they greeted the solemnity of the convention proceedings—nominating a pig for president. See David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Anderson, 217-19.

<sup>18</sup> Reprinted in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 43. Other artists who supported the boycott include Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, James Rosenquist, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Elsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Kenneth Nolan, Larry Poons, Saul Steinberg, and Tony Smith.

<sup>19</sup> Claes Oldenburg in a letter to Richard Feigen dated September 5, 1968. Reprinted in “Artists vs. Mayor Daley,” *Newsweek* (November 4, 1968): 117. Also reprinted in part in Schwartz, page 70. Oldenburg was

organized the Daley protest exhibition, which for many replaced the proposed boycott (figs. 12 and 13).<sup>20</sup> The idea was that this exhibition could provide a forum for artists to both engage in a form of activism and negotiate the role of art in relation to social crisis.

But there was much discussion over how this might best be achieved. Some artists, such as Newman, took this as an opportunity to be incredibly forthright about their politics making it a readable part of their work. Others, such as Helen Frankenthaler, Donald Judd, Kenneth Noland and Robert Motherwell, chose to present in their traditional styles, supporting the aims of the exhibition, but eschewing direct social commentary. Motherwell, though socially committed with a long history of activism in liberal causes, was adamant about figuratively separating his politics from his art. Speaking about his contribution to the protest exhibition, an abstract expressionist painting, he explained: "There is a certain kind of art which I belong to. It can no more make a direct political comment than chamber music can. But by exhibiting with these artists who can, and with the theme of the exhibit, we are showing our support."<sup>21</sup> Conversely, *Tattered Image*, by the pop artist James Rosenquist took the likeness of the mayor himself as a starting point (fig. 14). Composed from a silkscreen reproduction of Daley's head in pink and white plastic, the work was intended to be physically interactive. Cut into ribbon-like strips, a representation of Daley's floating head could be punched by the viewer, the physical force of which would pierce the ribbons and

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responding to his personal experience of convention week violence at which time he was tossed to the ground and assaulted by six police troopers.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Morris still refused to exhibit. Though he did send Feigen a telegram the night of the opening that simply stated: "redo the fire of 1871." A partial list of artists who did exhibit includes: Lee Bontecou, Hans Breder, Christo, George Cohen, William Copley, Edward Flood, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Leon Golub, Adolph Gottlieb, Red Grooms, Henry Hanson, Charles Hinman, Donald Judd, Donald Kaufman, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Motherwell, Lowell Nesbitt, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Claes Oldenburg, Hans Richter, James Rosenquist, Seymour Rosofsky, Alfons Schilling, Richard Smith, Tony Smith, Theodoros Stamos, Frank Stella, Chuck Thomas, Jean Tinguely, Jack Tworokov, Jack Willenbach, and Derrick Woodham. See Donald Janson, "Anti-Daley Art Put in Show in Chicago," *The New York Times* (October 24, 1968).

violently rupture Daley's effigy. For an audience frustrated by the bureaucratic repression embodied in Chicago's political machine, Rosenquist's work offered fulfillment through an explicit, even sexualized, form of penetration which would, at least in theory, violate the violator, symbolically disempowering Mayor Daley and redressing the inequity that characterized his abuse of governmental office.

This brings us back to Newman's *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, and its uniqueness in his production, a condition related in part to the work's reliance on figurative elements and its title, which like Rosenquist's work directly references the mayor, if only on a symbolic level. Originally displayed supported on cinder blocks and of a height slightly taller than the average viewer, the sculpture was meant to block, even threaten its audience, at the same time sending a palpable warning about the dangers of getting too close.<sup>22</sup> The spiked protrusions of barbed wire which dot the surface of Newman's sculpture, are indicative of a potential for violence reinforced by the splattering of blood-like, red paint over the central portion of the sculpture's surface. While compositionally dependent on the grid, and therefore bearing some resemblance to minimal practice, such as the structural arrangements of a Sol LeWitt sculpture or a Tony Smith cube, the wire also calls forth the barriers attached to the front of government vehicles during convention week violence (fig. 15).<sup>23</sup> Used to disperse demonstrators from congregating in public spaces, these crowd pushers served a dual purpose, to protect the police from objects thrown by the protesters and as a very visceral and potentially

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<sup>21</sup> "Artists vs. Mayor Daley," *Newsweek* (November 4, 1968), 117.

<sup>22</sup> Temkin, 298. As the eyebolts on the top suggest, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* may originally have been intended as a hanging piece, and in fact Don Lippincott, whose company fabricated the work, remembers the artist suspended the piece at the plant. This, of course, fits with the curtain reference of the title. However, when the piece was shown at the Feigen Gallery, it was supported on cinder blocks, possible because of concerns over its weight. Since then, the work has always been displayed standing.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Schulman in a letter to Armin Zweite, dated November 22, 1996. Barnett Newman, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, Object File 1989.4333, Art Institute of Chicago.



harmful means of crowd control. Seen in this way, the red paint, which is centralized in the sculpture (though unfortunately not visible in reproduction), reads only ironically as a painterly or abstract expressionist gesture. Rather, the red splatterings evoke a tangible trace of a physical body that has been caught up against the jagged sharpness of the wire. By confronting his viewer with a possibility of bodily danger, Newman compresses the distance between the gallery space and the streets of Chicago. He conflates the body of the viewer with protesting bodies, and positions both as internal (rather than foreign) enemies of a repressive and controlling state.

Newman's naming of the piece further complicates this narrative, creating a disjuncture between the expectations called forth by the title and the physical rigidity and weight of the sculpture itself. With tongue-in-cheek, he parodied Daley's virile, authoritative power by linking it to the handcrafted softness and perceived femininity of lace (fig. 16). Moreover, using the specificity of Daley's own ethnicity as leverage, in part a response to the mayor's anti-Semitic heckling of Connecticut Senator Abraham Ribicoff on the convention floor,<sup>24</sup> Newman pejoratively associated the mayor with the 'lace curtain Irish,' a well-recognized term in 20<sup>th</sup> century American parlance and in the working class neighborhoods of Chicago from which the mayor hailed.<sup>25</sup> In slang of the time, to be 'lace curtain Irish' was to use material goods to convey social aspirations from the "shanty Irish" that referenced the working class ghettos associated with Irish immigrants in North American cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Hanging in the

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<sup>24</sup> What Newman was responding to was how Daley addressed Ribicoff in a commentary that was broadcast to eight-nine million television viewers. While the sound was cut by the broadcasting networks, the words were easily discernable by lip reading techniques: "Fuck you, you Jew son of a bitch. You lousy motherfucker, go home." See David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 213. To this blatant display of anti-Semitism by Mayor Daley, Newman responded, "Well if that's the level he wants to fight at, I'll fight dirty too; there're other words besides 'kike.'" Hess, 123.

windows of the middle-class Irish, lace curtains served as a sign of respectability shrouding the poverty-associated origins which a predominantly anglicized culture continued to associate with the Irish in America. Thus, in Newman's work, the 'lace curtain' activated a complex range of potential meanings all designed to indict the volatile behavior and corruption of Daley's particular brand of democracy. A 'lace curtain for Mayor Daley' implies his need as mayor of Chicago to mask an unrefined nature under a veneer of propriety and decorum; that is, to hide what happened on the streets of Chicago behind the more delicate trappings of lace. While associating Daley with the power politics of the Chicago-Irish political machine, the lace curtain, bespeaking domestic middle class values and the sanctity of the bourgeois private home, is here made one with the bloody public confrontations of the public sphere on the streets of modern Chicago. Indeed, seen in this way, the domestic lace curtain transformed into barbed wire can be read as a stand-in for the most famous of curtains in American political rhetoric— an iron one. The lace curtain is more gentrified perhaps, but conflated with Newman's modern steel it asserts that equally repressive tendencies are now firmly in place.

It is through such blatant pictorial and conceptual strategies that *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* sits uncomfortably, at least at first glance, within a survey of Newman's non-representational production. But, upon closer examination, one must ask if *Lace Curtain's* political purchase was that dissimilar to what Newman invested in his colorfield work, such as in *The Moment I* from 1962 (fig. 17), though here any of his paintings from the "breakthrough" work *Onement I* (1948) onwards could serve as stand-

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<sup>25</sup> Daley grew up in the ethnically white neighborhood of Bridgeport, a historically Irish American neighborhood that was birthplace to a half-dozen of Chicago's most prominent mayors.

in. In *The Moment I* a large white plane, with only the slightest traces of modulation completely fills the viewer's field of vision. Eight and one-half feet high by ten feet wide, its only disruptions are the thin vertical lines that puncture the right-hand side of the canvas. Golden-yellow in tone, and spaced in even increments from the edge, these two lines, which Newman was soon to call "zips,"<sup>26</sup> bind with the white field to create a total environment in which neither figure or ground dominates. At the same time, these stripes articulate an almost physical or human presence, asserting their independence from the surrounding space. In describing the experience of viewing his paintings, Newman often made an analogy to the encountering of another person: "When you see a person for the first time, you have an immediate impact. You don't really have to start looking at details (of appearance). It's a total reaction in which the entire personality of a person and your own personality make contact. To my mind that's almost a metaphysical event."<sup>27</sup>

Newman's emphasis on the immaterial and abstract nature of art fit within a larger inquiry into the human condition which preoccupied many New York School painters in the years immediately following World War II and which often involved an exploration of the tragic and the sublime.<sup>28</sup> Of central importance here is the idea that art could somehow function as a mediator or potential remedy to the chaos of a society

<sup>26</sup> As Sarah Rich has noted in a recent paper on Newman's "zip," he only began using the name in 1966 in relation to the *Who's Afraid* series. Prior to that time he had used the descriptors "stripe" or "line." Despite this, historians have used the term zip to describe the vertical elements in all of his post 1948 paintings. See Rich, "The Proper Name of Newman's Zip" (paper presented at a symposium on Barnett Newman, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Fall 2002), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Barnett Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio" (1970), *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 306. For an analysis of the implications of this "human-like" For more on the implications of the "immediate impact" of Newman's work, see Richard Schiff, "Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect," in Temkin, 96-7.

<sup>28</sup> See Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, "Statement" (1943), *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas 1900-1990*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 561-3. This statement, which appeared in *The New York Times* on June 13, 1943, was only signed by Gottlieb and Rothko, though Newman assisted in its composition. The statement set out in a manifesto-like tone to "explain" the work of these artists in answer to the critic Edward Alden Jewell's prompting. In so doing, it prioritized their interest in mystery, metaphysics, and myth.

fundamentally altered by the horrors of modern experience, such as that witnessed by the holocaust and the atomic bomb.

The same year that *The Moment I* was produced Newman was asked in an interview to explain the meaning of his work in relation to society. Arguing that meaning comes “from the seeing, not the talking,” Newman explained the political nature of his abstract painting and sculpture, calling it an “assertion of freedom,” a “denial of dogmatic principles,” and most importantly, a “repudiation of all dogmatic life.” With typical bravado, he continued by asserting, in what has become a legendary statement on Newman’s part, that “almost fifteen years ago, Harold Rosenberg challenged me to explain what one of my paintings could possibly mean to the world. My answer was that if he and others could read it properly it would mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism. That answer still goes.”<sup>29</sup> Concerned with the tragic and timeless as subject matter, Newman, through his zip paintings and sculptures, developed a vocabulary of abstract vertical elements meant to signal the primacy of intellectual and internal exploration as a way to clarify the individual’s place in a largely hostile and unpredictable modern world. Relying on certain precedents which borrow from a Judeo-Christian tradition as well as from Nietzsche’s work on the birth of tragedy in Greek literature and the metaphysical significance of Northwest Coast First Nations art, Newman forged a direct connection between so-called ‘primitive’ and modern experience, using this association to explain the spiritual and transcendental power of abstract art.<sup>30</sup> For the viewer who “could read his work properly,” through both an

<sup>29</sup> Barnett Newman, “Frontiers of Space: Interview with Dorothy Gees Seckler” (1962), in O’Neill, 247-51.

<sup>30</sup> Central to the development of Newman’s iconography was the influence of Northwest Coast First Nations culture, particularly Indian ritual art which, while based within an abstract representational language, was infused through social ritual and myth with metaphysical significance. As well, from the mid-1940s onwards, through his writings and curatorial practice, Newman highlighted what he viewed as a

intellectual and creative engagement, this could prompt a transformative experience, in which the subject became more aware of her or his place in society. In this way, Newman's aesthetic production connected with what was a life-long commitment to anarchism and an investigation into the possibilities open to the individual for personal and philosophical development in a repressive social environment.<sup>31</sup> Working within this framework, Newman rejected all organized governments and programmatic ideologies, including socialism, communism, and capitalism.

Consider this in relation to another example of Newman's production, *Here II*, a sculpture completed by Newman in 1965 (fig. 18). In this piece, three steel zips, or vertical bars, of an alternating thickness ascend from separate, pyramid-shaped bases to an approximate height of nine and one-half feet.<sup>32</sup> The central and most weighty upright is set slightly in front of the others, articulating a tangible material presence confirmed by the title – here – a word signaling the sculpture's existence in the present time and place. The central zip flanked by thinner vertical elements has been likened (specifically by the historian Thomas Hess) to the three crosses of Golgotha, each a surrogate for the suffering (if ultimately saved) human form. Each zip, therefore, was not just a vertical

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direct connection between 'primitive' and modern experience, in a sense using this association to explain the spiritual and transcendent value of modern art. Particularly interested in the art of the Kwakiutl, he believed the use of ideographs in native art was a primary method for communicating intellectual and emotional content, a strategy mirrored in modern painting's preoccupation with abstract forms. For an in-depth analysis of Newman's preoccupation with Northwest Coast art, see W. Jackson Rushing, *Native American Art and the New York Avant-Garde: A History of Cultural Primitivism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 126-37; and Barnett Newman, "The Ideographic Picture" (1947), in O'Neill, 107-8, and "The First Man Was an Artist," O'Neill 156-60.

<sup>31</sup> For more on Newman's particular brand of anarchism, see Temkin, 23-4. Temkin connects Newman's interest in anarchism, which after the deportation of the movement's chief spokesperson Emma Goldman in 1919 all but disappeared in the U.S., with American Transcendentalism, particularly its emphasis on individual responsibility. In 1936, Newman spent his honeymoon with his wife Annalee in Concord, Massachusetts visiting the places described by such writers as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. As Temkin notes: "Transcendentalism greatly affected Newman's perception of himself as a man and as an artist. It inspired his conviction that the life of an artist meant a life of personal liberty."

<sup>32</sup> *Here II* is one of a series of three sculptures produced by Newman under this title. *Here I*, first realized in 1950, was composed of two upright elements, one hard-edged and the other modulated. *Here III* from 1965-6 is reduced to only one vertical zip.

structure of varying materials and thickness, but rather an alternate for the individual, or taken more broadly a way in which to address the metaphysical, meditative significance of a Western philosophical tradition and the possibilities of redemption this calls forth.<sup>33</sup> Given this, the difference between the abstract representational language of *Here II* and the more figurative directness of *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, is primarily, I am arguing, one of a mode of engagement. That is, Newman is addressing not the contemplative viewer of the post-World War II period, but a politically mobilized viewer enticed by media representations of victories, losses, and body bags associated with the Vietnam War, and pushed, even smashed up against the wall if opposition or protest were voiced in the public realm. Thus, Newman's deviation from his firmly ensconced, esoterically grounded signature style needs to be read in relation to the social and political exigencies of the late 1960s, when literal physical bodies were entangled in the chaos of a nation at war. By creating a complex dialogue between the circumstances of the Chicago convention (as represented by its jeeps with barbed wire attachments) and what for Newman were the metaphysical concerns of modern art, he was able to articulate not only his own understanding of political engagement, but a critique, as well, of what modern sculpture—serial, industrial in reference, but human in scale—might leave out. At the same time, and as will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, it allowed him to reinvigorate the meaning already inherent in his more abstract work.

The difficulties of Newman's position—the significance of aesthetics formulated in the postwar period and now challenged by volatile politics of the late 1960s—were

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<sup>33</sup> See Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker, 1969); and John Golding, "Newman, Rothko, Still and the Abstract Sublime," *Paths to the Absolute, Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman*,

indicative of a larger issue being re-evaluated by the art establishment at this time; namely, the relationship between politics and art.<sup>34</sup> While in 1967, it was still possible for Philip Leider, as editor of *Artforum*, the pre-eminent art journal of the time, to argue: “I prefer to live as if there were no connection between the two enterprises, art and politics.”<sup>35</sup> By 1970, even Leider had to admit the necessity of addressing the problem of the power relations at play around the art object. Speaking about the ways in which *Artforum* began to deal with this issue, he wrote:

It's the way it happens every time politics comes punching its way into your life, everything you do becomes meaningless next to this immense thing that has to be done... In November '70 we started running the “Politics” column. I was dragged by the times, kicking and screaming, but I just felt it had to happen. ... I didn't want anything to do with politics, I didn't want it in the magazine. But I knew that I had to make an opening for it.<sup>36</sup>

What made this process so difficult for Leider was his commitment to Greenbergian formalism.<sup>37</sup> Like many of the critics writing for *Artforum* at this time, like Michael Fried

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*Rothko, and Still* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 195-232.

<sup>34</sup> For example, “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” *Artforum* (September 1970), 35-9; Dore Ashton, “Response to Crisis In American Art,” *Art in America* 57 (January 1969), 24-35; Barbara Rose, “Problems of Criticism IV: The Politics of Art, Part I,” *Artforum* 6, no. 6 (February 1968), 31-32; and Therese Schwartz, “The Politicization of the Avant-Garde,” *Art in America* 59, no. 6 (November-December, 1971), 97-105, Part II, *Art in America* 60, no. 2 (March-April, 1972), 70-9, Part III, *Art in America* 61, no. 2 (March-April, 1973), 67-71; Part IV, *Art in America* 62, no. 1 (January-February, 1974), 80-4.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Leider in a letter to Sidney Tillum dated September 30, 1967, Amy Newman, 14. Leider continued: “I know very well what it is like, however, to live as if there were not, and there the edge of discrimination turns not against the politics, but against the art.”

<sup>36</sup> Leider, as quoted in Newman, pages 264-5. The politics issue Leider references was from September 1970 and included “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” in which a small group of artists responded to the growing awareness in the arts community of the “deepening political crisis in America.” The “Politics” column which ran five times beginning in November 1970 was designated for: “political communications from various segments of the art community.”

<sup>37</sup> While Greenberg only wrote three articles for the magazine, his influence on *Artforum* during the 1960s was widely recognized. As Donald Judd acknowledged, “I didn't think about Greenberg much in the early sixties and he didn't write much,” but “(Michael) Fried and Phil Leider, the editor of *Artforum*, kept him going.” See Judd, “Complaints: part I,” *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 197-9. Francis Frascina considered the relationship between Greenberg and Leider in *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America*, 143-4. Considering Leider's correspondence with the critic between 1966-70, Frascina demonstrates the editor's ideological commitment to Greenberg's version of modernism; for example, Leider often referred to Greenberg as ‘master’ and encouraged him to publish with *Artforum* on a more regular basis.

and Rosalind Krauss,<sup>38</sup> Leider endorsed an understanding of advanced modernism that was predicated in part on art's self-conscious detachment, at least in theory, from its social milieu.<sup>39</sup> Following the guidelines that Greenberg articulated in his essay "Modernist Painting," Leider supported art that promoted self-criticality and the re-examination of materiality, logic and form.<sup>40</sup> The idea was that by focusing on a specificity of media, and avoiding overtly ideological content, the value of the arts could be safeguarded within a consumerist society, and aesthetic experience appreciated as worthwhile in and of itself.<sup>41</sup> Thus, what Greenbergian formalism offered Leider was a criteria for how to look at and talk about painting that was seemingly objective and depoliticized in nature. As the art critic and art historian Robert Rosenblum explained the appeal:

"It'd be hard for anybody to imagine the papal authority Greenberg had in the '50s and '60s— he really was the looming power who dominated our way of thinking about art... he wrote with a sense of evolution, drama, clarity—a sense of the central versus the peripheral, the good versus

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Fried acknowledged the importance of Clement Greenberg to his own understanding of modernism, particularly the articles "Louis and Noland" (1960) and "After Abstract Expressionism" (1962). See Amy Newman, 41-2. Also, a collection of Greenberg's essays was published in the early 1960s making the development of Greenberg's theories regarding aesthetic experience more readily accessible. See Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

<sup>39</sup> As Greenberg located aesthetic value not in subject matter but as manifest through form he constructed a historical determinism for modern art based on formal innovation. His belief, however, that this would protect modern art from co-optation was ultimately proven wrong, specifically in the ways in which abstract expressionist painting was promoted by the U.S. government in the 1950s as the democratic alternative to socialist realism. See Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War" (1973) and Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War" (1974), *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 107-23 and 125-33; and Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>40</sup> In "Modernist Painting," Greenberg constructed an aesthetic rationale for and historical justification of post-painterly abstraction, particularly as practiced by artists such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. The crux of his argument was to demonstrate a logical development in what he perceived as the most successful painting of the last century which prioritized an articulation of flatness and those qualities specific to the medium of painting itself.

<sup>41</sup> Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 86. Greenberg, influenced by the belief in the autonomy of art put forth by Leon Trotsky, pitted an artistic avant-garde against the forces of mass culture in order to preserve the quality of culture, as an elitist, intellectualized preoccupation, against the proliferation of kitsch. For an analysis of Greenberg's political position vis-a-vis Trotskyism see Francis Francina, "Greenberg and the Politics of Modernism," *Art Monthly* 111 (November 1987), 6-11; Serge Guilbaut, "The New Adventures of the Avant-Garde in America," *October* 15 (Winter 1980), 61-78; and Annette Cox, "The Art Criticism of Clement Greenberg," *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), 141-157.



the bad, the major versus the minor. And it was a voice of such intellectual clarity, and he talked about things you could *see* as well, as opposed to a marsh of ideas, that it was very tempting to sit up and say: *This is the voice of truth. I am following this leader.*"<sup>42</sup>

For three years after Artforum's move to New York in 1967, Leider was able to maintain the journal's formalist orientation. But this position became increasingly complicated as the widespread acceptance of authoritative theories and previously established metanarratives was fundamentally decentered in the late 1960s by a larger inquiry into power relations instigated in some part by the protest movement. As art historian David Howard has argued the shift in Greenberg's status resulted to a large degree from the pressures of the changing political climate in the US, marked most notably by a move towards pragmatic liberalism, and away from New York as the exclusive center of advanced art production.<sup>43</sup> Looking to Los Angeles and Washington, DC, where pop art triumphed and the hierarchies between high art and mass culture could no longer be so stridently maintained, "Greenberg's modernism failed to renegotiate its relationship to North American culture. Rather than dominating the US art scene in the early 1960s, Greenberg, while still influential, was increasingly displaced from his previous role as the arbiter of taste in modern art."<sup>44</sup> For example, when Greenberg's "Post-Painterly Abstraction" exhibition opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964, an exhibition meant to chart the next advance in modernist painting, it was greeted with a lukewarm reception. The dominant position that formalism held in the 1950s, and which Greenberg was still trying to maintain through his curatorial work with

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<sup>42</sup> Amy Newman, 163.

<sup>43</sup> David Howard, *Bordering on the New Frontier: Modernism and the Military Industrial Complex in the US and Canada 1957-65* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1993). Howard, *passim*, provides an analysis of Greenberg's fall from grace in the early 1960s.

French & Company and as a cultural representative for the United States Information Agency (USIA) was no longer secure.

Moreover, the idea that modernism, specifically as exemplified through the writings of Greenberg, was ever completely cohesive was in itself misleading. Over a twenty-year period, Greenberg had been reworking formalist criticism to arrive at the position Leider and *Artforum* inherited.<sup>45</sup> Greenberg's views had been consistently challenged since the 1940s by the other critic of postwar painting, Harold Rosenberg.<sup>46</sup> As Max Kozloff remembers it: "Though their important work was mostly behind them, the two patriarchs, Harold Rosenberg and Clem Greenberg, did not hesitate to exist in the '60s. At the beginning of the decade, if you stepped into art criticism, you stepped one way or the other into their gravitational field."<sup>47</sup> Unlike Greenberg, who by the 1960s was prioritizing formal innovation, materiality, and flatness, Rosenberg was primarily concerned with the act of painting and the political viability of art and art criticism.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Howard, 324.

<sup>45</sup> Between his essays "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939) and "Modernist Painting" (1960), Greenberg unhinged his theory of modernism from what he had earlier defined as its political project; to preserve a space for an avant-garde practice safe from the commodifying tendencies of capitalism. In his earlier essays, Greenberg struggled to account in political terms for what he perceived as a move towards a sense of "purity" in the visual arts evident in abstract expressionism in which the medium and materiality became the artist's predominant concern. Intrinsic to Greenberg's early criticism was an anti-capitalist agenda, which in 1941 caused him to issue a statement with Dwight MacDonald naming the overthrow of capitalism as the primary goal of the era. By the mid-forties, however, during the Cold War, Greenberg, like many U.S. intellectuals, was much more tolerant of American liberalism. At this time, Greenberg retired political ambitions for exclusively aesthetic ones. See, Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" (1939), and "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5-23 and 23-28, "The Plight of Our Culture" (1953), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 122-152, and "Modernist Painting" (1960), *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93; and Clement Greenberg and Dwight MacDonald, "10 Propositions on the War," *Partisan Review* 8 (July-August 1941), 271-8.

<sup>46</sup> For an evaluation of Rosenberg's political positioning, see J. Hoberman, "Harold Rosenberg's Radical Cheek," *Village Voice Literary Supplement* (May 1986), 10-13; and Casey Blake, "The Defense of Good Ideas," *The Nation* 242 (12 April 1986), 526-529.

<sup>47</sup> Amy Newman, 162.

<sup>48</sup> This position is first explored in Rosenberg's "The American Action Painters" (1952): "At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act... What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event... The big moment came when it was decided just to paint... just to PAINT. The gesture on the canvas was a gesture of liberation, from Value- political,

While committed to non-representational work, he was interested in how art production allowed for a sense of creative engagement on the part of the artist with all the larger implications this could have. For example, describing the work of Barnett Newman in 1969, Rosenberg explained: "For him, painting is not (a formal) organization of shapes, color, and line... the chief characteristic of a Newman is that *it is there*, an entity that keeps nature at bay."<sup>49</sup> In other words, the importance of Newman's painting was not its objectness, but rather the way in which it asserted a palpable, physical presence, be it that of artist or viewer. Rosenberg continues: "Newman is confident his metaphysical matter will prevail against his means. For this to happen, the expressiveness of the means must be reduced to a minimum. His handling of his surfaces, edges and joinings of forms is meticulously simplified."<sup>50</sup> Here, Rosenberg adds a socio-political imperative to the formal precedents as outlined by Greenberg, demonstrating that modern art criticism could also be cognizant of social issues and practices.

The hardcore issue of politics arrived in the pages of *Artforum* in September of 1970 in a feature article, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium."<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, at this same time the magazine began to move away from formalism as an overarching aesthetic program, resulting in the increasingly contentious relations between many of the

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esthetic, moral." See Harold Rosenberg, "Three American Action Painters," *Art News* (December 1952), 22-3, 48-50. See also Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1960), *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (New York: Horizon Press, 1964), *The De-definition of Art: Action Art to Pop to Earthworks* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), and *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

<sup>49</sup> Harold Rosenberg, "The Art World: Icon Maker," *The New Yorker* 65, no. 9 (April 19, 1969), 140, emphasis added. Reprinted in Shiff, 84.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>51</sup> The question artists were asked: "A growing number of artists have begun to feel the need to respond to the deepening political crisis in America. Among these artists, however, there are serious differences concerning their relations to direct political actions. Many feel that the political implications of their work constitute the most profound political action they can take. Others, not denying this, continue to feel the need for an immediate, direct political commitment. Still others feel that their work is devoid of political

contributing editors and eventually Leider's own withdrawal from the magazine.<sup>52</sup> After his departure, *Artforum*, under the direction of John Coplans turned towards more alternative forms of art practice, such as film, performance, conceptual art, and even early video and dance. As a sign of this impending methodological and ideological shift, the symposium outlined a broad range of opinions regarding the relationship between the heightening political crisis in America, as witnessed by the recent killing of four Kent States students by National Guardsmen in January of that same year, and contemporary aesthetic production. The beliefs expressed by the twelve contributors were ideologically diverse and offered differing conceptions of the meaning of the political,<sup>53</sup> ranging from the complete disavowal of the mixing of art and politics by the painter Walter Darby Bannard, to Irving Petlin's call for increased political activism among artists in the form of strikes, demands, and non-cooperation.<sup>54</sup> But what becomes clear through a survey of the answers, is that in spite of Bannard's assertion that the relationship between politics and art does not merit much attention, most by the end of the 1960s felt the issue had to

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meaning and that their political lives are unrelated to their art. What is your position regarding the kinds of political action that should be taken by artists?"

<sup>52</sup> While Leider did not step down as editor until 1971, his article "How I Spent My Summer Vacation or Art and Politics in Nevada, Berkeley, San Francisco and Utah," published in the same issue as the artists and politics symposium, was considered by many as an official announcement of his departure. Here, Leider attempted to reconcile his growing social concerns with his beliefs about the power and cultural importance of art. Describing a conversation with the sculptor Richard Serra, he wrote: "Serra was wondering whether the times were not forcing us to a completely new set of ideas about what an artist was and what an artist did. I argued for Michael Fried's idea that the conventional nature of art was its very essence, that the great danger was the delusion that one was making art when in fact you were doing something else." See Philip Leider, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation or Art and Politics in Nevada, Berkeley, San Francisco and Utah," *Artforum* (September 1970), 40-9. To complicate matters, by late 1970 Greenberg and Leider had a falling out regarding a quote by Ad Reinhardt published in *Artforum* in which Reinhardt called Greenberg "a dealer." Greenberg wanted Leider to retract the statement and Leider refused. This furthered the division between Greenberg and the magazine. See Amy Newman, 315-9.

<sup>53</sup> The twelve artists *Artforum* chose for publication were Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Walter Darby Bannard, Billy Al Bengston, Rosemarie Castoro, Rafael Ferrer, Donald Judd, Irving Petlin, Edward Ruscha, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner all of who, to varying degrees, were invested in non-representational production.

<sup>54</sup> Petlin stated: "I will join with people into any direct political action that strikes back at this layered and spaced brutality called the 'administration.' The hierarchical make-up of the art world is simply a network of community and interest, filled with art men and women, no more, no less. If it strikes at the war and racism, I will be there, if it doesn't, I'll be elsewhere." Irving Petlin, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 38.

be addressed.<sup>55</sup> Even by abstract artists who comprised the majority of the *Artforum* panel. It is in this context of competing conceptions of political engagement, particularly by non-representational artists, that Barnett Newman's *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* must be situated.

The minimal sculptor Donald Judd, whose sleek, metallic boxes and theoretical writings were by 1970 paradigmatic of minimal production, wrote the most protracted response to the *Artforum* symposium (fig. 19). Caught between a belief in activism by artists and in an art for art's sake, Judd argued both for wholesale political involvement and the complete segregation of the art object from the realm of politics.<sup>56</sup> For Judd, artists should act first and foremost as citizens, on a regional and local level, and use artworks for overt political purposes in extremely important circumstances and only "when nothing else can be done."<sup>57</sup> His insistence that in relation to social issues: "art may change things a little but not much," was indicative of his belief that politics, like art, exists in its own sphere of activity, governed by its own rules and systems. The only way to intervene in political problems, therefore, was to address them head on and in their own terms.<sup>58</sup> Concluding: "I suspect one reason for the popularity of American art

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<sup>55</sup> Bannard argued: "Political things should not affect the *making* of art because political activity and art-making have never mixed to art's advantage, and my guess is most artists are better off out of politics... As a subject it really does not merit the attention you are giving it." See Walter Darby Bannard, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 36.

<sup>56</sup> Considering the issue of artist-organized activism, Judd specifically critiqued the Art Workers Coalitions and targeting of the institutional policies of the Museum of Modern Art. Believing there was nothing intrinsically corrupt about institutions, especially one as "indifferent" as an art museum, Judd asked: "Why is the Modern so interesting? Why be so eager to demonstrate (against it), to use a tactic that was originally used for a much more serious purpose?" While not against artists' organizations per se, which he agreed could further specific political aims, Judd was opposed to many of the Art Workers Coalition's ideas, particularly their demands that a permanent section of the Museum of Modern Art be reserved for artists of color and that artists without gallery representation be given temporary exhibition space. Adamant that not all artists are equal, he insisted on the use of strict qualitative criteria when making judgements about art. In this way, Judd stringently marked out the terms of his position, emulating Greenberg's insistence on quality, as well as his belief that only an initiate in intellectual and philosophical matters can make lasting claims about the value of art. See Donald Judd, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> On Judd's political activism, particularly his affiliation with the War Resister's League and the Lower Manhattan Township, see Raskin, 687-96.

is that museums and collectors didn't understand it enough to realize it was against much in the society,"<sup>59</sup> Judd reinforced his point. As Francis Frascina has noted, for Judd: "politics has an 'autonomy' and an immanent critical process of change not dissimilar to the claims made by Greenberg for the autonomy of art in 'Modernist Painting.'" <sup>60</sup> Here, Judd's position aligns with that put forth by Theodor Adorno in his essay "Commitment" (1962), where he insisted that an art true to its own logic, an art for art's sake, was in itself sociopolitical in nature.<sup>61</sup> Adorno, paralleling claims made by Greenberg in his early essays, insisted that the intellectual rigor of modern art must be maintained in order to reserve a place for critical contemplation. As overtly political art can, within both totalitarian and capitalist societies, too easily be reduced to propaganda, manipulating its viewer towards certain ideological aims, the autonomy of art provides the only assured means of resistance. Speaking to this issue, and in relation to the circumstances of the early 1960s, Adorno wrote, "This is not a time for political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead."<sup>62</sup>

The painter Jo Baer, whose work on a formal level appears to align itself with Judd's, both reinforces and troubles the sort of autonomy that Adorno was advocating (fig. 20). Baer began her *Artforum* response with the claim: "I think the time for political action by artists is now and I believe action should be taken in the art world and in the world at large. Political action need not inhibit art-making; the two activities are dissimilar, not incompatible. In fact, all art is eventually political."<sup>63</sup> With these last

<sup>59</sup> Judd, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 37.

<sup>60</sup> Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America*, 138-9.

<sup>61</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Commitment," *Notes on Literature, II*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 76-94. For an analysis of the relationship between Judd and Adorno's ideas, see Frascina, 139.

<sup>62</sup> Adorno, 318.

<sup>63</sup> Jo Baer, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 35.

words Baer acknowledged the external social forces of the art establishment in particular that the art object participates in, as well as the multiple discourses through which aesthetic meaning is produced. For Baer, the problem with much contemporary art, from pop to colorfield painting, to protest art, was its commodity status. Reduced to a consumer product, contemporary art was stagnating, it lacked a certain progressive development that prohibited its engagement with the problems of representation, and consequently, and in connection with Adorno, devalued its political implications. Speaking of the artists who produced such work, Baer explained: "They posit no radical changes and deal with conundrums, not problems. Their net political effect is a tacit support of the present system."<sup>64</sup> In opposition to this, Baer proposed a "radical painting" which investigated visibility and modes of perception. In a series of large white canvases, bordered by black and colored lines, she highlighted a tension between surface and edge by painting on the sides of the canvas. In this way, she encouraged an ambulatory model of viewership distinct from the fixed, optical experience of painting prioritized by Greenberg, as to see one of Baer's paintings the audience must move from front to side.

Coming from a background in psychology, Baer referenced in her work scientific studies that considered the abnormal optical effects produced by specific processes of vision and the constructed nature of reality that these can promote, such as her interest in "mach bands" that I will discuss in greater length in Chapter 3.<sup>65</sup> Arguing for vision as part of lived experience— one where the relationship between the object, its environment, and an embodied viewer, are brought into tension, Baer played with such issues as the thickness of the canvas, its placement on the wall, and the shadows it casts. Often

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

hanging her paintings just a few inches off the ground, the canvases rupture conventional viewing positions and the traditional arrangement of the gallery space. By stimulating the intellect and challenging what were by this time very standardized, formalist notions of representation, Baer produced an abstract form of painting in which a politics of vision is established. Trying to reinvigorate a modernist project, her work secures first and foremost the viewer's critical engagement, a condition that avoids what Baer described as the bourgeois construction of aesthetic pleasure, which she believed was catered to in contemporary art production.<sup>66</sup> As she explained:

In prior works a figure/ground or hierarchical arrangement is imposed from outside the structure arbitrarily. In the new work, forms arise internally and the materials function to prescribe their own arrangements... These new ways have political implications that bear on the sovereignty of the subject and the nature and ramifications of self-determination.<sup>67</sup>

In a manner akin to Adorno's insistence on the autonomy of art, her response in *Artforum* similarly called for the rigorous exploration of the internal logic and structural arrangement of modern art. But Baer attached to it a more explicit and contemporary political agenda by asserting, as the quote above indicates, that the "sovereignty of the subject" and the right of "self-determination" were at stake. While for Adorno, autonomy provided a means of resistance, a strategy of isolation in which to preserve the criticality of high art, a position supported by Judd and his separation of art and politics, for Baer it allowed for political engagement. The beholder, made more aware of how visual perception functions, could examine their own subjective position and the nature of

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<sup>65</sup> For an interview with Baer that explains some of the political implications of her paintings, see Serge Guilbaut and Michael Sgan-Cohen, "Jo Baer: peintre traditionnel <<radical>>," *Art Press* 11 (May, 1974), 16-18.

<sup>66</sup> Guilbaut and Sgan-Cohen, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Baer, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 35.



embodied experience, thus extending the self-criticality of the modernist project to the viewing subject.

The *Artforum* symposium, and the extreme diversity of opinion it represented, hints at the complex aesthetic terrain navigated by artists as the pressures of the Vietnam-era expanded, forcing the question of art's function and role into the art establishment. Despite the periodical's earlier reliance on Greenbergian formalism, even *Artforum* was caught up in this process. The issue was not just about artist-organized activism, though for some like the minimal sculptor Carl Andre who maintained: "life is the link between politics and art," this sort of lived political engagement was crucial.<sup>68</sup> As an early member of the Art Workers Coalition, Andre was involved in a critique of the institutional practices of the art establishment and the connection between culture, as represented by museum trustees, and the war. But for other artists, like Baer, it was about a politics of representation in which the art object was re-situated within the larger debates and controversies, both aesthetic and social, that make meaning. Distinguishing her practice from someone like Judd who was involved in an exclusively formalist preoccupation, albeit connected to the politics of an autonomous art, Baer re-examined the parameters of modern painting as an intellectually-engaged practice. Her aim was to both reinvigorate, through science and modes of vision, the self-criticality of the modernist project as defined by the Enlightenment and to offer her audience a viewing experience in which the individualized and politicized body was centrally placed. Thus, as with Newman and his *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, the *Artforum* symposium brought to the forefront both a politics related to larger social events and practices and a politics inherent in the art establishment itself. As artists articulated what were conflicting

strategies for mediating contemporary social relations, their alternative aesthetic visions rubbed up against one another causing a friction rarely alluded to in historical scholarship of today. In order to understand the complexity of this moment, therefore, a sense of this dynamic must be re-established, which in turn further complicates a reading of the relationship between political practice and abstract art.

But there is another, what some might term more personal notion of politics invested in *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* that allowed Newman to speak to pressing issues concerning art and aesthetics, particularly those affecting his own critical reception. By the mid-1960s, Newman, who was still riding the success of his 1959 French & Company show, was recognized as the one member of the New York School whose visual repertoire could be aligned with a younger generation of artists. Though this status, along with the wider critical acceptance of his work, was only recently achieved. While he had received much recognition for his writings and curatorial work throughout the fifties, his first two solo shows at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1950 and 1951 had met with such negative criticism that Newman withdrew from exhibiting for many years.<sup>69</sup> As the Newman scholar Ann Temkin has recently noted in reference to the 1950 show, "the exhibition was largely perceived as a show of paintings devoid of content, let alone skill or expression."<sup>70</sup> But it was not just the public-at-large that took issue with Newman's work. As Thomas Hess remarked, writing a review of the 1950 show in *Art News*: "Barnett Newman... one of Greenwich Village's best known home spun aestheticians,

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<sup>68</sup> Carl Andre, "The Artists and Politics: A Symposium," 35.

<sup>69</sup> Florence Rubenfeld, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (New York: Scribner, 1998), 141-2.

<sup>70</sup> Temkin, 28. In her essay "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," Temkin provides a thorough analysis of the critical reception of most of Newman's major exhibitions with particular attention paid to the Betty Parsons shows.

recently presented the products of some of his meditations... Newman is out to shock, but he is not out to shock the bourgeoisie— that has already been done. He likes to shock other artists.”<sup>71</sup> It was not until 1959, when Greenberg as a consultant to French & Co. organized a show of Newman’s paintings that his art, not just his aesthetic theories, became more widely accepted on the New York scene.<sup>72</sup> As well, in his 1962 essay “After Abstract Expressionism,” Greenberg further strengthened his support of Newman by answering charges regarding the compositional and aesthetic rigor of his work. Greenberg argued:

Newman’s pictures look easy to copy, and maybe they really are. But they are far from easy to conceive... The onlooker who says his child could paint a Newman may be right, but Newman would have to be there to tell the child *exactly* what to do. The exact choices of color, medium, size, shape, proportion— including the size and shape of the support— are alone what determines the quality of the result, and these choices depend solely on inspiration and conception. Like Rothko and Still, Newman happens to be a conventionally skilled artist— need I say it? But if he uses his skill, it is to suppress the evidence of it. And the suppression is part of the triumph of his art, next to which most other contemporary painting begins to look fussy.<sup>73</sup>

Greenberg is here linking the success of Newman’s work with both a conceptual rigor and a methodologically planned and executed compositional arrangement, which involves “exact choices.” The formal structure of the painting, based in such elements as

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas Hess, “Barnett Newman,” *Art News* 49, no. 1 (March 1950), 48. Other reviews of the 1950 exhibition at Betty Parsons include: Stuart Preston, “Chiefly Modern,” *New York Times* (January 4, 1950); and Judith Kaye Reed, “Newman’s Flat Areas,” *Art Digest*, 24, no. 9 (February 1, 1950), 16.

<sup>72</sup> See Temkin, 52-7. Here, Temkin charts out the professional relationship between Greenberg and Newman that began with Greenberg’s essay “Feeling is All.” Greenberg praised Newman as “a very important and original artist,” further arguing that “these paintings have an effect that makes one know immediately that he is in the presence of art.” Clement Greenberg, “Feeling is All” (1952), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 103. While Greenberg was sympathetic to Newman’s production earlier in the 1950s, it was not until the French & Company show in 1959 that Newman began to be taken more seriously, both critically and in an economic sense. That same year, the Museum of Modern Art acquired one of his paintings, he received his first invitation to show in a Whitney Annual, and major collectors began showing interest in his work.

color, size, and shape, are what determines its quality, nothing else. Greenberg's interpretation of Newman's production made the latter fit with Greenberg's own criteria for modernist painting. However, as noted earlier, by the early 1960s Greenberg's authority was beginning to be questioned.

But Greenberg was not the only one appropriating Newman's colorfield painting. By the mid-sixties, its abstract, geometric language seemed to dovetail with the issues preoccupying conceptual and minimalist artists. In fact, by 1964 he was recognized both formally and technically as a forefather to minimalism, cited by the art critic and minimal sculptor Donald Judd as "the greatest painter in the country," and included in early exhibitions prioritizing minimal art (such as in the "Black, White and Gray" exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum that same year).<sup>74</sup> Despite such accolades by Judd and others, and the fact he was finally enjoying the success that for most of the 1950s had been withheld, such praise as art historian Richard Schiff has recently pointed out placed Newman (and his specific brand of individualism) in exactly the position he least desired. As a leader or as part of an organized or even codified artistic group.<sup>75</sup> Schiff has argued that through the course of his career Newman, true to his anarchistic beliefs, had successfully "cordoned off his art from any specific social or political conflict: he avoided influencing others, in order to avoid becoming a model or exemplum, to avoid being exploited by a faction or some entity grander and still worse."<sup>76</sup> Thus, while he

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<sup>73</sup> Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 132-3.

<sup>74</sup> While Judd described Newman in these terms in November 1964 in an article entitled "Barnett Newman," it was not published until February 1970 in *Studio International*. Reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975*, 200-2. Also in 1964, Newman was included in the "Black, White and Gray exhibition" at the Wadsworth Atheneum. As well, Kynaston McShine mentioned the importance of Newman's work to minimal sculpture in the catalogue to *Primary Structures* show at the Jewish Museum in 1966. Thus, by the mid-sixties, Newman was associated stylistically with the younger generation of minimal artists, an association that, I am arguing, colored the critical reception of Newman's work.

<sup>75</sup> See Richard Schiff, "Whiteout: The Not Influence Newman Effect," Temkin, 77-111.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

appreciated the support of younger artists in the 1960s, Newman resented the fact that they so easily “allowed themselves to be organized, almost, into groups.”<sup>77</sup> He advocated instead a complete reliance on independent thought and personal feeling as it was only in this way that he believed individual creative freedom might be achieved.<sup>78</sup>

Adding insult to injury, while many artists and critics of the sixties concurred that Newman’s paintings, particularly in regards to his use of color, line and form, were of historical and contemporary importance, his preoccupation with a metaphoric and philosophic subject matter was repeatedly evacuated from contemporaneous critical evaluations. In other words, while widely celebrated, Newman’s work was mostly considered in terms of its formal concerns. Thus speaking in 1972, shortly after Newman’s death, Robert Morris claimed it was “the least allusive painting, the least metaphysical painting for me, the most direct.”<sup>79</sup> This was the sort of reception Newman received from the minimal artists in general, as Judd’s description of Newman’s *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (fig. 21) written in 1964 and, at the time read by Newman, but not published until 1970, makes clear:

*Vir Heroicus Sublimis* was done in 1950 and the colour of one stripe was changed in 1951. It’s eight feet high and eighteen feet long. Except for five stripes it’s a red near cadmium red medium. From the left, a few feet in, there is

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Barnett Newman, “Interview by Allene Talmey,” 1967, audiotape, Barnett Newman Foundation Archives.

<sup>78</sup> In 1968, Newman wrote “The True Revolution Is Anarchist!” an introduction to a reissue of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin’s *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, originally published in the US in 1899. Kropotkin, and his theory on the nature of individual freedom, was a fundamental influence on Newman’s intellectual development, as well as his understanding of political activism. In his introduction, Newman establishes a propitious link between Kropotkin’s message, that the individual is equally restricted under radical dogmatic systems as by the established state, and late sixties political upheaval. Further, he uses this to issue a warning to political activists about the dangers inherent in New Left politics, which Newman argues “has already begun to build a new prison with its Marcusian, Maoist and Guevara walls.” As an alternative to such dogmatism, Newman offers anarchism: “the only criticism of society which is not a technique for the seizure and transfer of power by one group against another, which is what all such doctrines amount to—the substitution of one authority for another.” See Barnett Newman, “The True Revolution Is Anarchist!”, *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 45.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Morris, as quoted in David Sylvester, “Concerning Barnett Newman,” *The Listener* 88, no. 2263 (August 10, 1972), 172. Reprinted in Shiff, 85.

an inch stripe of a red close in color but different in tone; a few feet further there is an inch of white; across the widest area there is an inch and a half of a dark, slightly maroon brown that looks black in the red; a few feet further there is a stripe like the first one on the left; a foot or so before the right edge there is a dark yellow, almost raw sienna stripe, the colour that was changed. These stripes are described in one sequence but of course are seen at once, and with the areas.<sup>80</sup>

Breaking the image into discrete parts— color, shape, line, and form— Judd examined the intricacies of Newman's painting, rearranging its distinct elements into a coherently integrated image, available to the viewer in a single glance. This sense of wholeness had a particular resonance with Judd as it figured prominently in his own developing account of what should be the preoccupations of minimal sculpture, and such analysis could also resonate with Robert Morris' theory of the gestalt which will be addressed more fully in the following chapter. For Judd, clinging to a cold war conception of advanced modernism, one that was predicated on art's detachment from, and at least in theory resistance to, its social milieu, it was imperative to cleave Newman's art from his politics. Only in this way could the work of Newman be kept as a model of intellectual and formal commitment and in relation to which minimal art could be placed.

Thus, Newman's sculpture, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, packed with regional and local specificities, functioned as a lot more than a gut-jerk reaction to the social and political urgency of the late 1960s and the repressive and intolerant government

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<sup>80</sup> Donald Judd, "Barnett Newman," *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975*, page 200. Annette Cox also considers Judd's response to Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* in *Art-as-Politics: The Abstract Expressionist Avant-Garde and Society*, page 67-8. Cox, however, does not consider the implications of this depoliticization of Newman's work within the context of the 1960s, or in relation to the specific aesthetic and political objectives of Judd.

embodied and personified by the Chicago's mayor Irish political machine. On one level, Newman's sculpture can be read as a pop-like or readymade gesture, through which the artist appropriated and inverted in the language of the modern street the State's militaristic tactics by bringing the barbed wire used by Chicago police into the supposed sanctuary of the gallery space. Making such a direct reference to the contemporary art scene was not unusual for Newman. As Sarah Rich has observed, even his public adoption of the term 'zip' in 1964 to describe the vertical bands in his paintings can be interpreted as a strategy through which to connect and push against what was at the time the primacy of pop art (fig. 22). She explained:

The explosive word 'zip' served as a linguistic complement to Newman's stripes, giving them an electric snap, the crackling power (and even shape, in the use of the letter 'z') of a lightening bolt. The term begged for an exclamation point, and thus likened Newman's work to the crashing artillery sounds of Wham! and Blam! featured in Roy Lichtenstein's paintings of 1962.<sup>81</sup>

Newman obliquely addressed this issue in a 1965 interview in *Art News*. Discussing the opening of "New York School, First Generation: Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s," at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, he claimed labels such as abstract expressionism, action painting, and color painting were not able to adequately represent the diversity of art presented in the exhibition. Newman argued no labels "can stick the way 'pop' and 'op' have" particularly as the work of the New York School is so "powerfully personal that stylistic slogans at best can only apply to individuals."<sup>82</sup> Both parodying and utilizing the gimmicky strategies of consumerism for his own gain, Newman adoption's of the term zip, therefore, can be seen as a way to mark out his own

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<sup>81</sup> Rich, 5.

individual production, which due to its highly specific metaphysical content needed to be distinguished from that of his peers.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* can be read as a flirtation with pop and its more direct and sometimes readymade representational language. The sculpture allowed Newman to address these developments within the artworld and the crisis on the streets through the crass materiality of barbed wire and blood-like, red paint.

At the same time, however, this sculpture provided Newman with the opportunity to address the problematics of his own critical reception, particularly how supporters of the modernist project, as defined by Greenberg, read his work exclusively in terms of formal criteria and without reference to its obvious political concerns. In response to minimalists like Judd who 'used' his work as a formal precedent, Newman adopted a conspicuously engaged social content that in light of the violent conflict between antiwar protesters and government officials in Chicago and across the nation, could not be so easily ignored. Adopting the grid, a fundamental part of a minimal aesthetic language, Newman satirized the seemingly depoliticized production of a younger generation of artists, who despite all their posturing were reticent to open the private world of an insular and self-focused art establishment to larger public debates. While Newman was supportive of emerging artists, maintaining friendships with Donald Judd and Dan Flavin among others and as the op artist Bridget Riley remembered "encouraging them (younger artists) to take risks,"<sup>84</sup> he was concerned with maintaining sovereignty over his own

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<sup>82</sup> Barnett Newman, "The New York School Question: Interview with Neil A. Levine" (1965), *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 263.

<sup>83</sup> See Rich, 12. Rich argued that Newman's use of the zip was also a way to mark out his production from that of the hard edge abstractionists which was devoid of the subject matter inherent in much of the New York School work. She explained: "Newman's choice of the work *Zip*, which Poppish, was the sound effect of Barnett Newman coming to the rescue of metaphysical content in painting."

<sup>84</sup> Shiff, 80.



individual practice. And in turn, in keeping with his beliefs regarding individualism, he had no desire to project his own ideas or values on to other artist's work. In fact, when Walter Hopps, the curator of the U.S. pavilion at the eighth San Paulo Bienial included him as the senior figure with six younger artists (fig. 23), Newman insisted that the following statement be added to the catalogue: "It is important to realize that Newman has neither undertaken the teaching of his art, nor has he developed an alliance of pupil-like followers."<sup>85</sup> Seen within this context, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* can be read as a complicated response to how Newman saw his work being positioned in the late 1960s, and an attempt on his part to redirect the terms of his reception.

The lace curtain, traditionally serving as a liminal boundary between the public realm and that of private/interiority, suggests the transformation of Newman's earlier and well-known mediations on the ironies of a Judeo-Christian heritage when confronted with Auschwitz, Hiroshima and their tragic aftermath.<sup>86</sup> Allusions to elite biblical and mythological trappings are transformed in his lace curtain into the local and immediate, into a specifics of national politics through which concerns regarding the Vietnam war, new media incursions, and the erosion of concepts like freedom and liberty could be worked through. Seen in this way, Newman's *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* can be read as a strategy through which to re-invigorate and draw attention to the political positioning of his earlier zip paintings and sculpture, the content of which (according to much critical interpretation of the day) had been largely expunged. Thus, this sculpture afforded Newman the opportunity to put forth again a particular mode of engagement, which since 1947 he had been arguing needed to "turn perception into an act of communion, of

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> See footnote 33.

*participation with* rather than *reaction to* a work.”<sup>87</sup> “Participation” had been a goal of Newman’s earlier abstract works. However, when push came to shove, and one thinks of both bodies shoved against barbed wire, and the invasive shove of consumer media into the last remnants of a cerebrally constructed 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘man,’ Newman reconsiders participation as the goal of his late 1940s and 50s production and promotes here an activated and embodied conception of engagement. His audience, in front of *Lace Curtain* for Mayor Daley, had to directly address the politics of representation, and is asked to link the sanctuary of the gallery space to the public confrontations taking place in the streets.

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<sup>87</sup> From Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 191, from an introduction Newman wrote for Theodoros Stamos exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York City, February 10- March 1, 1947, n.p.

## Chapter Two: Cold Metal in a Hot Climate—Minimalism and Boxing the Political

Fabricated of galvanized iron, four freestanding cubes, each forty inches squared, occupy a central place in the gallery, forcing a direct and immediate confrontation with a peripatetic audience (figs. 24 and 25). Approachable from all directions, the rigid geometric shape of the structures is uncompromising. The viewer is immediately compelled to establish a tangible, physical relationship with the boxes, a connection reinforced both by their material presence and the optical experience initiated through their reflective forms. Linearly arranged across the floor, these four cubes are capped and joined together by a thin sheet of aluminum, painted with blue lacquer. On one side, the cap extends slightly onto the vertical face of the sculpture, the high-gloss of the lacquer sharply contrasting with unpolished iron. The overlap thus creates a solid, continuous band of color that connects the top of the four identical structures, uniting each of the individual boxes into one coherent whole. Further, this painted, lid-like element also reinforces the box-like nature of the sculpture, as if the top might lift up to reveal what is the inside. In this way, the work raises the question of content. Through the visual seduction of the viewer, as well as the physicality of the box-like form, Donald Judd's *Untitled* (1966) suggests the possibility of something more.<sup>1</sup>

The intimation that there was more than meets the eye was not just limited to Judd's *Untitled* but was a phenomenon associated with minimal sculpture in general. Judd's reliance on the cube was endemic of a much larger preoccupation, as witnessed by the geometrically-based art that marked minimalism's arrival at the "Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture" show at the Jewish Museum in 1966, in which

Judd's piece was displayed. An incident described by the proto-minimalist Tony Smith, whose own work was prominently positioned in this exhibition, underscores the aura of mystery surrounding minimalism's absorption with the cubic form. When the artist asked his young daughters what might be in his *Black Box*, a 25-inch tall painted steel sculpture from 1962, they just laughed and walked away.<sup>2</sup> Here, Smith's daughters seem prescient, and aware of the discord at play both within and around the minimal object. After all, at this time in the early sixties tensions regarding the future direction of modern art, the terms of sculptural production, and, most importantly, the role of the viewer vis-à-vis the art object were palpable issues opened up for re-examination and debate. As minimal art staked out a place for itself on the terrain of the New York art scene, anxieties were bubbling just under minimalism's seemingly smooth and pristine surface. And while some, like Smith's daughters, were amused by minimalism's form, others, such as the art historian and critic Michael Fried, found nothing to laugh about. Recognizing by the mid-1960s that the hegemony of modernism was slipping, Fried engaged in an all out battle against what he considered a perversion of the modern, a critique in which the minimal cube was centrally placed.

The contemptuous relations between Fried and the minimal project, as exemplified by the work of the artists Donald Judd and Robert Morris, have been well rehearsed in the historical scholarship that addresses the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Subsequent art historical theorists whose arguments will be addressed at a later point in this chapter have pored

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<sup>1</sup> *Untitled* (1966) is one of two nearly identical pieces that Judd produced simultaneously. One is freestanding, while the other is designed to be mounted on the wall.

<sup>2</sup> This incident is referenced in Joan Pachter, "Sculpture," in Robert Storr, ed., *Tony Smith: Architect, Painter, Sculptor* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 128-9.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, James Meyer, "The Writing of Art and Objecthood," *Refracting Vision: Essays on the Writing of Michael Fried*, Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, Toni Ross, eds. (Sydney: Power Publications, 2000), 61-96; and Alexander Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 178-206.

over the critical writings of all three of these figures to demonstrate the differences between what were at the time competing visions of art's role and philosophical influences. At the root of the conflict were differing conceptions of modernism. Judd and Morris, in different ways called for a reconsideration of sculpture predicated on the belief that it was now the more advanced form of art. Fried in contrast adhered to a legacy of Greenbergian formalism in which painting was considered dominant.<sup>4</sup> This particular version of modernism was based on a self-critical model in which each branch of the arts was understood to be within its own specific areas of competence. For abstract painting, flatness and opticality were its primary qualities.<sup>5</sup> Non-temporal in nature, abstract painting was meant to communicate in terms of "eyesight alone."<sup>6</sup> Describing the implications of this experience in relation to Jackson Pollock's *Number 1, 1948* (fig. 26), Fried argued for a compositional arrangement so homogeneous and devoid of recognizable content:

that I want to call it *optical*, to distinguish it from the structured, essentially tactile pictorial field of previous modernist painting from Cubism to de Kooning and even Hans Hoffman. Pollock's field is optical because it addresses itself to eyesight alone, The materiality of his pigment is rendered sheerly visual, and the result is a new kind of space— if it still makes sense to call it a space— in which conditions of seeing prevail rather than one in which objects exist, flat shapes are juxtaposed, or physical events transpire.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Greenberg's specific brand of formalism can be understood as taking root in the writings of the British critics Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Aesthetic judgements were held to be involuntary and disinterested in nature. Moreover, only those conditions specific to art could be used in its evaluation. See, Charles Harrison and Fred Orton, "Introduction," *Modernism, Criticism, Realism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85-93.

<sup>6</sup> For Fried's understanding of opticality, see his "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" (1965), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213-65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

Thus, for Fried this emphasis on opticality attributed to modernist painting the possibility of a timeless, transcendent viewing experience far removed from material, everyday relations; that is, from the sorts of experiences, which I will argue, were established by minimal sculpture.

Despite the emphasis that has been placed on the Fried, Judd, and Morris dynamic in the late 1960s, what is missing from such scholarly re-evaluations is what can be called a grounding of the differences between these figures within contemporaneous social relations and practice. In other words, how can minimalism, and the challenges it posed to the primacy of modernist painting, be situated in relation to other sorts of struggles and divisions that were at this time disrupting society as a whole? Here it is important to stress that I am not looking for a direct equation between political events and the emergence of minimal sculpture. Rather, in a period when activists of all kinds (militant political groups, hippies, feminists, gay rights advocates, etc.) contested established systems of authority—whether the government, academia, and organized religion—the effects of this increased criticality on contemporaneous modern art, bears examination. As one example, the novelist and cultural historian Susan Sontag argued in her collection of essays *Against Interpretation* published in 1964, one arena in which this distrust of convention and accepted power relations was questioned regarded the role of the critic. In other words, the very act of interpreting could be read as ideologically suspect: “interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> For Sontag, faith in the critic as the

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (1964; reprint, New York: Vintage, 1994), 7.

“true judge” of visual production, literature, and film resulted in a tyranny of sorts, an intellectualization and ossification of art that denied individual experience and agency.

An immediate consequence of this sort of skepticism can be read in what was the contemporaneous reconsideration of formalism. As a seemingly dogmatic standard of evaluation locked in place since the beginning of the Cold War, formalism seemed to many in the mid-1960s to be too exclusionary and elitist, particularly Greenberg’s insistence on the centrality of the critic as the arbiter of aesthetic judgement and notions of taste.<sup>9</sup> As the critic and art historian Barbara Rose explained retrospectively concerning her own disillusionment with formalism at this time and what she viewed as Greenberg’s ultimate co-optation by the market:

I think you can put Greenberg and Duchamp in a kind of pairing because both of them gave messages to the market that were easily assimilable. Duchamp with his *épater le bourgeois*— you can get them by shocking them— and Greenberg by reducing all issues to formal issues, which essentially the public can’t judge itself. So this gave him, the expert, a great power, which he abused. I believe Greenberg was funded by the USIA to travel around the world to spread his gospel. He had a kind of apostolic, evangelistic style and it was, you know, “You’ll believe in me, my revealed truth, or you’re not a true believer.”<sup>10</sup>

As Rose’s words reveal, the strident assertions of Greenbergian modernism, which left little room for deviation, was ultimately troubled by a growing skepticism throughout the 1960s. The place of authority from which Greenberg spoke led many to question

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Max Kozloff, “Letter to the Editor: After Abstract Expressionism,” *Art International* 7, no. 6 (June 25, 1963), 88-92; Barbara Reise, “Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View,” Part I, *Studio International* 175, no. 901 (May 1968), 254-7, and Part II, *Studio International* 175, no. 902 (June 1968), 314-6; and Barbara Rose, “Problems of Criticism IV: The Politics of Art, Part I,” *Artforum* 6, no. 6 (February 1968), 31-32.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 2000), 169. Rose was referring to Greenberg’s involvement with the United States Information Agency in 1966. In a letter to Philip Leider dated October 1, 1966, Greenberg explained: “the State Department is sending me to Japan to explain the show, ‘Two Decades of American Painting,’ that the Museum of Modern Art is sending over... (I’m letting the State Dept. manage me as I’ve never let anyone do before, in a sense, simply for the sake of a free & somewhat luxurious trip to Japan).” See Newman, 495, fn. 35.

formalist modernism as an aesthetic construct. This initial fracturing of a formalist position and the implications this held for a potential reworking of modern art must be seen as both complicating a standardized minimalist narrative and illuminating the stakes inherent in its ascendancy. It is this sort of tension, between what were by the mid 1960s competing notions of modernism, that my own reading of minimalism foregrounds.

In what has been a highly interpreted field, many historians have produced significant accounts of minimalism, analyzing the work of individual artists, minimalism's exhibition history, and the philosophical antecedents on which many of the minimal artists relied.<sup>11</sup> Art historian Alex Potts provides one model in his recent book, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, which re-evaluates the place of sculpture, typically out-shined in the history of modern art by the emphasis placed on painting.<sup>12</sup> Minimal art figures heavily in Pott's study, particularly for its disruption of accepted conventions of beholding, although Potts also considers the production of earlier modernist sculptors of a varied and somewhat dissimilar past. Antonio Canova, Auguste Rodin, Constantin Brancusi, David Smith, and Barbara Hepworth, among others, all play an important part in his analysis. Overall, Potts' objective appears to be a historically expansive view of the place of sculpture within a modernist trajectory, and the issues of viewership this calls forth. In fact, the "sculptural imagination" which provides the fuel for this study, seems predicated on the relationship between object and viewer, and the three-dimensional and material presence of sculpture

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968); and Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility," *Artforum* 13, no. 3 (November 1973), 43-53.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000).



itself.<sup>13</sup> But while the importance of Potts' reading of minimal art to my own project is consequential, he leaves largely unexplored the possible motivation that a reworking of the experience of beholding might have at specific historical moments. In contrast, I am particularly interested in what was driving such points of rupture from traditional models and established modes of perception. For my own purposes, and specifically in relation to the 1960s, it is the implications of such shifts that need to be contextualized and understood.

Another point of issue is the ways in which art history has largely divorced minimal art from contemporary social practice by concentrating almost exclusively on its formal concerns. The work of the art historian and minimalist scholar James Meyer is a case in point. In *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, a comprehensive examination of the relationship between minimal art, its exhibition history, and early critical texts, Meyer's project was to ground minimalism within the emergence and development of its own specific field of discourse.<sup>14</sup> Concentrating on the years 1963 to 1968, the analysis is organized around two specific objectives: first, the unpacking of difference between various minimal practitioners (Carle Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and Anne Truitt); and second, the charting out of the relationship between art work and text. As most of the artists that Meyer considers (all except Truitt) were also writing about their own individual practice, text is here considered as a primary strategy utilized by minimal artists to maintain the specificities

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<sup>13</sup> Potts clarified his position: "I am making a case for a critical rethinking sculptural norms that engages seriously with the more vividly embodied physical and perceptual responses activated by viewing three-dimensional work. Not only are such levels of response integral to any apprehension of an art object, however anti-aestheticising it might be bringing into play issues that cannot be dealt with adequately at a purely conceptual or ideological level; the more phenomenological dimensions of a viewer's interaction with a work of sculpture particularly need to be addressed in the present context because they have not been accorded anything like the same critical attention as the viewing of painting." Ibid., 5.

of their own individual work. As Meyer explained: “We come closer to the *truth* (my emphasis) in viewing minimalism not as a movement with a coherent platform, but as a field of contiguity and conflict, of proximity and difference.” He continues:

To look at minimalism as a field of difference, as a strategic game with potential positions to be occupied, is to assume a structuralist understanding of an artist’s work as an embodiment of a logic or systematicity, an author-system, as Roland Barthes would say. In playing the ‘minimal’ game each of these artists took a different tack. Each of these approaches made sense diacritically.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in Meyer’s reading, the philosophical positions and conceptual constructs utilized by different minimalist artists are distinguished and reorganized as a web of interrelations and practices. He analyzes each artist’s intellectual and aesthetic production, evident for example in the differences between Judd and Morris’ conception of modernism, and the impact these had on exhibitions and on the more generalized reception of minimal art.

But, despite such interest in individualizing the production of the various minimal artists and critics, Meyer also seems committed to tying them back together into an undoubtedly more complicated but still cohesive whole. While reminding his reader of the varieties of “minimalisms”, the only one he is concerned with is that codified through philosophical debate and which takes place within a formalized and insular realm. In other words, while Meyer categorizes the issues and debates that raged around minimal art, the actual lived circumstances in which the artists and critics associated with this movement were producing is excluded from the terms of his analysis. The result is a detached form of art history that isolates the making of art from its context of urgent social concerns. For instance, in April and June of 1967, at the same time that Clement

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<sup>14</sup> James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001). See also his edited sourcebook, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000).

Greenberg and Michael Fried wrote their critical responses to minimalism,<sup>16</sup> the domestic clash over US involvement in Vietnam was intensifying, the battles replayed each day on the front page of *The New York Times*. Events such as Muhammad Ali's trial and subsequent imprisonment for draft evasion, and the controversy over the mutilation and burning of the US flag, mingled in the popular press with more direct accounts of military strategies and the ever-increasing list of American and enemy dead.<sup>17</sup> And this was only the most macro politics of the moment. On an increasingly local level, social relations became politicized. From a growing awareness of the processes by which the subject is interpellated to an emergence of identity politics (recognized in the adage that "the personal is political"), the ways in which the individual was part and parcel of larger power relations was investigated by various social and cultural theorists.<sup>18</sup> Yet, in Meyer's rewriting of this period this climate in which the minimal artists and critics were working is glossed over, reduced to a few footnotes near the end of his book.<sup>19</sup> My concern is that in reinforcing this divide between seemingly external social relations and

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture" (1967), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, volume 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 250-6; and Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148-72.

<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Ali was convicted June 20, 1967. On the same day the House of Representatives voted to make mutilation of a US flag as well as any picture or representation of a flag a federal crime. See *The New York Times*, Wednesday June 21, 1967.

<sup>18</sup> While the writings of this period which consider the interpellation and politicization of the subject on a more immediate and personal level are too numerous to cite, a few examples include; Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), and Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytic Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1959) both of which reconsider Freud in terms of repression and alienation of the modern individual; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), and Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970), on an emergent feminist discourse; Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968) which examines the decoding of signs within social relations; Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) on the relationship between power and knowledge; Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (New York: Putnam Books, 1968) which considers the drug culture and its liberating potential; Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967) on racism and black power.

<sup>19</sup> While Meyer does briefly consider the ways in which European audiences read minimal art by 1968 in relation to a "perceived US military and cultural imperialism," he uses this as a means to introduce the challenge posed to minimalist seriality and industrial production by anti-form and process art. See Meyer, 262-5.

the practice of minimalism, the ways in which the two troubled and rubbed against one another is lost and the minimal cube is left to float, disconnected from social practice, in a removed philosophical or aesthetic realm.

Some historians have attempted to reintegrate minimalism within social practice, particularly Maurice Berger and Anna Chave, who have considered minimal practice in relation to a more ideological conception of politics, albeit a politics distinctly defined in each case.<sup>20</sup> Berger, in his book *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism and the 1960s*, has situated the artist's production from the early sixties onwards within the larger spectrum of Morris' political beliefs, particularly in reaction to the Vietnam War. In this way, Berger constructs an almost heroic vision of Morris as an art worker,<sup>21</sup> an artist engaged in both aesthetic innovation and real, everyday relations and socio-political issues through participation in multiple practices including sculpture, printmaking, and performance art. Integral to Berger's analysis is the link between a discourse around minimalism and a very specific notion of the political that involves activism, the protest movement, and the New Left. As Berger explains:

Art historians today, by continuing to rely on institutionally validated readings of "Minimalism," consistently overlook the alternative resources that might reclaim the radical side of 1960s art. Yet this side of the 1960s is recuperable in the activist journals of the period, in the writings of more socially aware critics (e.g., Ursula Meyer, Lucy Lippard, Gregory Battcock, and Barbara Reise), in the social theory of writers associated with the New Left (such as Herbert Marcuse, R.D. Laing, Paul Goodman, and Noam Chomsky), in the tracts and petitions of artists' protests against the museum and the Vietnam War, in the art worker

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) and Anna Chave "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990), 44-63. Also, Chave "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* 82 (March 2000), 149-63.

<sup>21</sup> By this I mean that Berger's isolation of Morris from the larger constellation of artists associated with minimalism, coupled with his highly celebratory reading of Morris' work, leads to a certain heroicizing of the artist's project, a condition that I would argue is not wholly productive.

concept, and, finally, in the archives and work of the artists themselves.<sup>22</sup>

While there is much to be gained from this type of analysis, which is grounded in a Marxist interpretive model and concerned with how art functions in terms of value exchange within a capitalist culture, there are also consequences to Berger's position. Namely, by aligning art produced in the late 1960s with an understanding of politics based in party affiliations and artist-organized collectives, Berger runs the risk of allowing social and external factors to "explain" or "validate" the form or content of the work of art. Such one-to-one equations between art and a macro-politics risks oversimplifying the often contradictory and unstable modes through which visual representation functions. What is needed instead is an approach that, while still grounded in social practice, permits a more nuanced consideration of how power is both produced and reaffirmed through discursive processes. As art historian Hollis Clayson has noted in an article considering materialist approaches to historical analysis, "works of art are constituted by different viewers in different ways at different times and places."<sup>23</sup> Thus, to be receptive to such subtleties a more inclusive social historical methodology, which considers representation as much less stable than what is apparent in Berger's reading of Morris, needs to be set in place.

While also interested in the functionings of power and its effect on the individual subject, Anna Chave has approached her critique of minimal art from a specifically feminist methodological position. In "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,"<sup>24</sup> Chave linked minimalism with the aims of advanced consumer capitalism, its large-scale,

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<sup>22</sup> Berger, 12.

<sup>23</sup> See Hollis Clayson, et al., "Art History: A Range of Critical Perspectives," *Art Bulletin* 77 (September 1995), 369.

<sup>24</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of Chave's article see Chapter 3.

geometric, industrial structures seemingly reaffirming big business and patriarchal power. She maintained: "By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, Judd and the other Minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology."<sup>25</sup> That is, by working within the formal language of the international style in their pursuit of "elegant, precise, and antiseptic-looking glass boxes," minimal artists participate in the same strategies for subjugating the individual as those utilized by the institutions of late capitalism.<sup>26</sup> The size, materiality, and abstract language of minimalism contributes to what Chave defined as an overwhelming viewing experience in which the beholder, left with few traditional aesthetic markers to hold on to, feels the authority of the sculpture itself. Chave explained the potentially dire consequences of this in relation to Tony Smith's *Die* (1962), a six-foot black cube (fig. 27):

*Die*(!) is also a verb form, constituting a command— the cruelest command that the empowered can issue to the powerless... The Blackness, the sealed state, and the human scale of Smith's cube help reinforce this reading of the title, which— considering the command is directed at the viewer— renders the work a gruesome gesture: a black crypt presented to the viewer with succinct instructions to perish.<sup>27</sup>

This sort of viewing experience makes sense when considering the palpable physical presence of the sculpture and its human scale that establishes an immediate relationship with the body of the viewer. In Chave's reading of Smith's work, *Die* confronts the beholder with its literal, material weight, setting up an experience that is at best oppressive and at worst deadly. But is this really the only way that Smith's work can be

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<sup>25</sup> Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 54.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 53. This same condition, Chave argued, was in part responsible for the economic success of minimal art as wealthy collectors saw their own values reflected in its formal characteristics and highly finished surfaces.

understood? To build her larger argument that involves the main stable of minimal artists, Chave utilizes a narrow range of possible interpretations in a sense leveling the playing field so that major distinctions between different practitioners or variable aesthetic strategies are erased. Thus, while Chave's interpretation of Smith's *Die* can provide insight into some of the subject positions established by minimalism, it can not be applied to all of Smith's production or all of minimal sculpture across the board. Otherwise, her model is as authoritative as that which she critiques.

In this chapter, I am concerned with a more dynamic interplay between art object, viewer and social practices in which the potential of beholding is greatly increased. I begin from the premise that the minimalist cube has much more to offer than has been acknowledged in recent art history and can in fact once opened up be used to reveal the tensions and anxieties that ruptured the late 1960s art establishment. Given the political upheaval of this period and its impact on cultural institutions through, for example, figurations of pop art and the critique of institutions initiated by conceptualism, this should not be surprising. In 1967, over 100,000 antiwar activists 'sieged' the Pentagon marking the first major protest of the war (figs. 28 and 29), and in 1968, student uprisings closed down major US universities, including Columbia and Berkeley. By the following year, the burgeoning women's liberation movement, part of the call for equality inherent in Black Power and gay rights, was deemed so subversive that it was under investigation by the FBI.<sup>28</sup> And these were only the most noticeable manifestation of politics as on a more local level the individual became increasingly aware of the web of discursive practices which constituted the 'body politic,' what Foucault defined as "a set of material

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 52.

elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> As individuals became increasingly aware of how they were implicated in this process, the political as both a conceptual apparatus and a lived practice became an urgent site of exploration. By re-considering this in relation to the context of the late 1960s, the fantasy of a putatively empty metal cube shaped and constructed within an exclusively philosophical frame dissipates quickly and a more complex understanding of minimal art production, in terms of its variability and contradictions, begins to take shape.

No one contributed more to the emergent discourse that developed around minimalism than Donald Judd, despite the fact that he adamantly rejected the minimal label. In 1965, significantly one year after turning from painting to sculpture, he published the seminal essay “Specific Objects,” which charted a new course for modernism through the production of an art that privileged three-dimensional form.<sup>30</sup> Judd opened his essay with a direct challenge to Greenbergian formalism by declaring that: “Half or more of the best work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.”<sup>31</sup> With these words, he broke with a fundamental tenet of late modernism rooted in the enlightenment; namely the self-critical model that advocated that distinct disciplines of art production should interrogate their individual means. As Clement

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<sup>28</sup> See Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Cointelpro Papers: Documents from the FBI's Secret War Against Domestic Dissent* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 28.

<sup>30</sup> Donald Judd, “Specific Objects” (1965), *Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1975), 181-9. Originally published in *Arts Yearbook* 8 in 1965.

<sup>31</sup> Judd, 181.



Greenberg reaffirmed in “Modernist Painting” reprinted that same year, “Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself. By doing this each art would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of this area all the more secure.”<sup>32</sup> Here Greenberg’s insistence on the specificity of media, which had been a hallmark of advanced modern art since the 1940s, was intended to safeguard the fine arts from a populist culture or kitsch. Judd, by rejecting this, in works such as his *Untitled* (1962), a rectangular wall relief with edges that curl towards the space of the gallery, challenged the dominance of Greenbergian formalism (fig. 30). Moreover, he acknowledged that modernism was no longer a coherent practice defined by fixed aesthetic criteria, rather its terms were highly contested and its meaning no longer entirely assured. For Judd, in his *Untitled* with its raised hard lines on metallic ground, there was a formal exploration enacted which could be compared in terms of its intellectual and compositional rigor to that involved in, for example, Barnett Newman’s hard-edged abstract paintings which Greenberg was concurrently promoting. But for Greenberg, Judd’s piece, which he described as “neither painting nor sculpture,” more fully approached the negation of art. Speaking in 1967 about minimal sculpture in general, Greenberg explained of minimalism that: “a kind of art, nearer the condition of non-art could not be envisioned or ideated at this moment.”<sup>33</sup>

Judd’s reworking of modernist imperatives was not the only challenge facing Greenbergian formalism in the mid-1960s, particularly as the commercial and critical success of neo-dada, pop and early performance art, or what Greenberg referred to

<sup>32</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 194. Reprinted in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965).

<sup>33</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 253-4.

collectively as “novelty art,” had recently announced the end of abstract expressionism’s almost twenty-year ascendancy. Modern art’s negotiation with mass culture at this time exemplified in Jasper Johns’ flag series or Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s soup cans, broke with the self-critical formal criteria of Greenberg’s position. Though consumerism was not new, modern painting since Jackson Pollock had provided a respite from its homogenizing tendencies, a seemingly safe haven for serious intellectual and theoretical pursuit. As this was now threatened, Greenberg was put on the defensive, forced to both fortify what he believed to be the boundaries of modern art and determine its future direction. His 1962 article “After Abstract Expressionism” and the “Post-Painterly Abstraction” exhibition he organized at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1964 must be seen in this context.<sup>34</sup> Through such venues, Greenberg attempted to work out a transition from the first generation of colorfield painters, to that of a younger generation of artists, most notably Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. And while Greenberg plainly stated in relation to the “Post Painterly Abstraction” show that it was “not intended as a pantheon, as a critic’s choice of the best new painters,”<sup>35</sup> many believe this was exactly the point.

Art historian David Howard, for one, has considered the obstacles Greenberg encountered in the early 1960s looking for some way to stay the tide of the increasing notoriety of pop art.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Howard has argued that geographic journeys from New

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<sup>34</sup> Clement Greenberg, “After Abstract Expressionism” (1962), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 121-34. The exhibition “Post Painterly Abstraction” was held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art April through June 1964. Greenberg both organized the show and wrote the catalogue essay which was reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 192-7.

<sup>35</sup> Greenberg, “Post Painterly Abstraction,” 196. In this exhibition composed of 31 artists from the east and west coasts of the U.S., and Canada, Greenberg announced what he viewed as the next advance in modern painting, a progression from painterly to linear modes of representation.

<sup>36</sup> David Howard, “Bordering on the New Frontier: Modernism and the Military Industrial Complex in the US and Canada” (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1993).

York City like Greenberg's trip to Emma Lake, Saskatchewan in 1962 to lead a workshop in modern painting, and his 1964 show in LA, were acts of cultural colonialism. In other words, Greenberg was moving from center to margin in the hopes of finding the next great painter and through this re-invigorating his specific vision of modern art: "The question now asked... is no longer what constitutes art, or the art of painting, as such, but what irreducibly constitutes good art as such. Or rather, what is the ultimate source of value or quality in art?"<sup>37</sup> Quality was now for Greenberg the primary determinant for distinguishing between different versions of modern art. But despite such maneuvering, his project met with little critical or practical success. In fact, by the time Greenberg reached LA, pop art was already well established. A case in point: the first exhibition of Warhol's Campbell's soup cans was held at the Ferus Gallery in LA in 1962 (fig. 31). Thus what had been read during the postwar period by the art establishment as Greenberg's infallible aesthetic judgement, a fact which secured him a lucrative position as a consultant to French and Company in the late 1950s, was now considered *retardaire*. By the sixties, questions were being raised about the clarity of Greenberg's vision and the power that underscored his position as an arbiter of artistic worth. Judd, seeing a window of opportunity for the promotion of alternative forms of advanced cultural production and aware that pop was making fun of *and* usurping the aesthetic predominance previously held by formalist art, put forth his own definition of aesthetic value and quality. Through "Specific Objects," as well as his other critical writings, Judd argued for the primacy of an art of three-dimensions which embraced industrial materials, an increased scale, and most importantly, reductive, geometric forms.

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<sup>37</sup> Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," 132.

Judd justified the new art by arguing that traditional mediums were exhausted, “The disinterest in painting and sculpture is a disinterest in doing it all again...”<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, painting always exists apriori, already defined, or confined, by the determinant of the frame. This condition, coupled with painting’s adherence to the perceptual relation between figure and ground, led Judd to embrace three-dimensionality by creating work based not in a transcendent, modernist ideal but in “real” space. As tangible, physical objects with a distinct materiality, the new art posed the possibility of escaping the naturalistic or anthropomorphic references of composed sculpture, a problem plaguing even the most advanced versions of modernist work. For Judd, minimal art, comprised of the most elemental units, was freed from the burden of representation concerned only with such formal issues as density, weight, texture and color. Therefore despite appearances to the contrary, “Specific Objects” did not instigate a complete break with Greenberg’s modernism (irregardless of what Greenberg maintained), but rather represented what was for Judd a step towards its logical progression. After all, on the surface at least, Judd’s rejection of illusionism and interrogation of the material limits of sculpture echoed Greenberg’s call for an art to be self-critical, specifically by focusing on “the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself.”

Moreover, notwithstanding Judd’s critique of modern art, he was careful to make clear minimalist production’s relation to formalist painting, rather than what he described as a regressive modernist sculpture. He claimed, “The new work obviously resembles sculpture more than it does painting, but it is nearer to painting.”<sup>39</sup> This “nearness” is important as Judd argues the most advanced artistic practice of the 1950s was the work of

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<sup>38</sup> Judd, 181.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 183.

Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still and Barnett Newman. Marked out as precursors to the minimalists, these artists established the rectangle, the shape of a painting, as a definitive form, albeit a form with a limited range of potential. As Judd explained:

The elements inside the rectangle are broad and simple and correspond closely to the rectangle. The shapes and surfaces are only those which can occur plausibly within and on a rectangular plane. The parts are few and so subordinate to the unity as not to be parts in an ordinary sense. A painting is nearly an entity, one thing, and not the indefinable sum of a group of entities and references.<sup>40</sup>

This idea of a cohesive work of art, a work that stresses unity and wholeness through an essentially optical experience, was for Judd primary. As painting began to exhaust its potential, minimalist art, again neither painting nor sculpture, was strategically poised to follow its lead. Through his essay “Specific Objects,” Judd worked out a complex relation to late modernist ideals. He announced the exhaustion of painting, while simultaneously affirming the importance of minimal art to the continuation of modernism. As the historians Charles Harrison and James Meyer have observed, Judd’s essay was not a complete break with the conceptual underpinnings of late modernism, a condition which distinguishes him from other minimal artists particularly Morris.<sup>41</sup>

Unlike the phenomenological and embodied viewing experience that Morris initiates, which will be discussed at a later point, Judd prioritized an optical model. That is, often

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>41</sup> See Charles Harrison, *Essays on Art and Language*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 42. Meyer explained Judd’s displacement of modernism: “‘Specific Objects’ obliterated the Enlightenment underpinnings of late modernism with a sweep of the hand. It replaced Greenberg’s Kantian, disinterested taste with ‘interest;’ it supplanted the integrity of medium of Lessing’s Laocoon and Greenberg’s historicist model of reflexivity, adapted from Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, and instead attributed formal interest to alternative traditions and practices, especially the dadaist narrative of Duchamp, Rauschenberg, and Johns. In the end, Judd’s ‘Modernist apostasy’—his simultaneous proximity to and distance from Greenberg—was a formidable challenge to modernism itself, opening up, perhaps more than he himself would have liked, the field of theory and practice of postmodernism.” See James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 141.

mounting his works on the wall and polishing his objects to highly reflective finishes, Judd's sculpture evokes an immediately visual viewing experience. In his *Untitled* (1968), with its six aluminum boxes capped with amber plexiglass on each end, the highly reflective quality of the work is what initially gathers the attention of the beholder (fig. 32). Light plays off the surface of the sculpture both beckoning and thwarting the viewer's gaze. In this way, Judd established a viewing experience more akin to the inherent physical properties of painting which seemed, at least to so degree, to fulfill Greenberg's mandate of modern sculpture: that it be as "almost as exclusively visual in its essence as painting itself."<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, Judd's choice of artistic forefathers also links him to Greenbergian modernism. For example, three out of the four painters he cites in "Specific Objects," particularly Rothko, Still and Newman, were celebrated just a few years earlier in "After Abstract Expressionism." While the work of Pollock, the fourth artist marked out by Judd, was used by Greenberg as a practical base for his understanding of modernist painting. In other words, those artists who Judd picks out as exemplary were all previously sanctioned by Greenberg, who completely depoliticized their work, at times even ignoring written manifestos and political affiliations, in order to prioritize exclusively formal and pictorial innovations.<sup>43</sup> By focusing on these artists, instead of someone like the abstract expressionist painter Robert Motherwell who was overtly politically engaged and whose work, such as his *Spanish Elegies* series, was less readily separated from its politicized content, Judd aligned himself with Greenberg's vision regarding the separation of art and politics. Though he was increasingly drawn to

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<sup>42</sup> Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 2*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 313-19.

activism by the social turmoil of the Vietnam era, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Judd believed this sort of activity should remain separate from aesthetic concerns.<sup>44</sup> Thus, while he promoted minimalism as the next serious contender for superstar cultural status, displacing modernist painting from its principal position, he kept one foot firmly planted, even if somewhat uncomfortably, in Greenberg's camp.<sup>45</sup> In fact, in a later interview Judd acknowledged this dependence on Greenberg by noting, "I thought we wanted the same thing."<sup>46</sup> Seen in this way, the claim Judd makes in "Specific Objects" that "a work needs only to be interesting" may be aligned with Greenberg's insistence on quality.<sup>47</sup> Both argue for an optical, aesthetic model that suggests some form of transcendent viewing experience, as well as a content liberated from everyday political and social concerns.

But not all minimal production was removed from the here and now, nor were all minimal artists so self-consciously following a modernist trajectory. By the mid-sixties, the work of Robert Morris was less object-based than Judd's and often incorporated performative or interdisciplinary elements—in other words, elements concerned with

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the statement published by Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman in the *New York Times* on June 13, 1943 regarding the content of their work.

<sup>44</sup> For a reading of Judd's work that complicates the relationship between his political affiliations and the terms of his sculptural production, see David Raskin, "Specific Opposition: Judd's Art and Politics," *Art History* 24, no. 5 (November 2001), 682-706.

<sup>45</sup> In "Recentness of Sculpture," Greenberg rebuked any such connection by situating minimalism in a non-art space; that is, in real space or in three-dimensions as opposed to in some sort of transcendent or philosophically distanced aesthetic realm. This connection with the here and now was strengthened by Greenberg through his connection between minimal art and everydayness: "Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper." See Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," 253.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with James Meyer, Marfa, Texas, October 27, 1991. See Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, page 140.

<sup>47</sup> This connection between "interest" and "quality" has been made by James Meyer, though its implications for Judd's positioning of minimal production have not been explored. See Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, page 140-1.

everyday experience rather than a high modernist ideal.<sup>48</sup> Even Morris' minimal sculpture, based in the same reduced, geometric forms as Judd's, belies his difference, a difference continually negotiated through the writings and public statements of each artist. In *Untitled (2 L Beams)* from 1965-67 (fig. 33), a work displayed in close proximity to Judd's *Untitled* (1966) at the Primary Structures show, two identical L-shaped structures of equal length and height confront the viewer, one upright, the other inverted and balanced on its ends. The upright 'L' is logically configured, with its weight rationally dispersed along its bottom section. Its partner, the inverted 'L' is in comparison unstable, its weight precariously distributed on its internal edges. Despite an obvious stylistic connection to the work of Judd, Morris' sculpture establishes a more direct, phenomenological connection with its viewer. The scale of the piece, slightly taller than human height, and its compositional arrangement invites the viewer's physical interaction, to experience the sculpture by moving within and around the shapes. Within this new participatory model of viewership, sculpture was no longer what Ad Reinhardt had ironically described in the early 1960s (though the phrase is frequently attributed to Barnett Newman), as "something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting."<sup>49</sup> Nor was it conceived exclusively in terms of the optical sensibilities prioritized by Greenberg's formulation of modernism.<sup>50</sup> Rather, minimal sculpture was

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<sup>48</sup> For a discussion of the eclectic nature of Morris' production, see Berger's *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism and the 1960s*.

<sup>49</sup> Potts, 1. The author of this phrase, however, is in some ways questioned. Though Potts referenced Lucy Lippard as a source for attributing this quote to Reinhardt, Rosalind Krauss connected the phrase to Barnett Newman. See Lippard's "As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio," in Maurice Tuchman, ed. *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles, 1967), 3; and Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 280-2. I chose to credit Reinhardt as the originator after corresponding with Krauss, who is not positive about the Newman attribution, and John P. O'Neil at the Barnett Newman Foundation in New York City, who knew of no connection between this saying and Newman.

<sup>50</sup> Near the beginning of "Notes on Sculpture, Part I," Morris writes: "Clearer distinctions between sculpture's essentially tactile nature and the optical sensibilities involved in painting need to be made." Here Morris was reasserting Greenberg's call for the specificity of media by arguing for the separation of



re-conceptualized by Morris to establish an interactive relationship with its audience based on what Michael Fried later termed the theatrical. The body of the viewer was meant to directly engage with the sculptural objects, in the process initiating a corporal experience within a real, lived time and space. The directness of this encounter, its physicality, and most importantly the ways in which it activated the perceiving subject, set, according to Morris, the new sculpture apart from a formalist understanding of modern art.

"Notes on Sculpture," the first two parts published in February and October of 1966 in *Artforum*, was the primary vehicle through which Morris articulated his understanding of the perceptual possibilities of minimal sculpture.<sup>51</sup> The article afforded an opportunity to distinguish his own production and theoretical grounding from that of other minimalists and critics, most notably Judd. Stating at the beginning that "there has been little definitive writing on present day sculpture," Morris leveled all previous critical interpretations, including Judd's "Specific Objects," to prepare the ground for his own analysis, which was based at least initially on a particular understanding of Gestalt psychology, and on phenomenology. Gestalt psychology holds that the human mind only ever perceives psychological, physiological and behavioral phenomenon as integrated elements or meaningful and irreducible wholes. It is this same sense of wholeness that is,

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the sculptural from the concerns of painting. While painting is all about opticality, Morris was arguing that sculpture needed to interrogate its own boundaries and uniqueness, beginning most notably with its physical presence, its tactile nature and its three-dimensionality. See Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part I" (1966), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 224.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part I" (1966), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 222-8, and "Notes on Sculpture, Part II" (1966), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 228-35. As minimal discourse became increasingly codified by the art establishment through writings such as Judd's "Specific Objects" and Barbara Rose's "ABC Art," published in *Art in America* in October-November 1965, Morris was careful to distinguish his own understanding of minimal sculpture. Uncomfortable with Greenberg's tradition of opticality, Morris linked the new art to a materialist modernism, most particularly by associating it with the Russian constructivists. Furthermore, he differentiated his work from that of Judd by purging it of a relief format, applied color and

according to Morris, specific to minimal sculpture. Writing about the gestalt, he explained:

In the simpler regular polyhedrons, such as cubes and pyramids, one need not move around the object for the sense of the whole, the gestalt, to occur. One sees and immediately 'believes' that the pattern within one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object. Belief in this sense is both a kind of faith in spatial extension and a visualization of that extension. In other words, it is those aspects of apprehension that are not coexistent with the visual field but rather the result of the *experience* of the visual field (my emphasis).<sup>52</sup>

What matters most to Morris is "experience", a term that was almost cliché in popular parlance of the 1960s and associated with the counterculture modes such as those of the diverse groups that "hippies" designates. For this group, physically or psychologically engaged experience provided an alternative to what was increasingly perceived as a culture based in simulacrum or deferred emotional or spiritual gratification. For example, describing the Haight-Ashbury scene in 1970, William Hedgepath in his study of communal living noted that in the Haight: "Something wildly radical was being awakened: the senses— feeling, seeing, hearing, smelling... people rediscovering here the perfect wholeness of their own bodies; in the doing of which, it dawned on them for the first time, too, just how ungodly fragmented and sealed off from themselves they had always lived before."<sup>53</sup> Bringing popular interest in so called authentic experience as an alternative to an alienating social world to the realm of high art, Morris' use of "experience" reconsidered the terms through which the viewer encounters both the sculptural object and the space it occupies. In a manner very different to that explored by

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seriality, all elements at the time associated with Judd's production. James Meyer considers some of the tensions between Morris and Judd in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 156-60.

<sup>52</sup> Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part I," 226.

the abstract expressionists in the 1940s, Morris utilized the gestalt to highlight a search for an authentic aesthetic experience, but one particular to the moment. Relying on the subject's a priori apprehension of form to trigger in the mind some sort of pattern so unified that its parts are indivisible, Morris plays with the adage that "seeing is believing" by forcing the viewer to physically (and conceptually) move around the work.

For example, in his *Mirrored Cubes* (1965), a work comprised of four plywood cubes covered with mirrors and arranged in a grid-like manner on the gallery floor, the viewer's experience of the sculpture and the exhibition space is accentuated and distorted by its reflective properties (fig. 34). The cubes appear to dissolve into their surroundings, as wooden floors, white walls, and the presence of the viewer are reflected on its surfaces, in part, dematerializing the individual forms. In this way, Morris prevents his audience from immediately perceiving the pattern produced by the compositional arrangement of the sculpture; in other words, the clarity of the gestalt is undermined by the exploitation of perceptual effects. At the same time, he calls upon an ambulatory viewer to make sense of this spectacle, to physically and temporally circulate around the work in order to understand its properties. Through the exploration of such altered gestalts, Morris began to redefine the relationship between the art object and its audience, an issue, as discussed in Chapter 1, also taken up by the modernist painter Jo Baer. With an interest in psychological and perceptual processes, Baer, by painting on the edge of the canvas, encouraged her viewer in a very anti-Greenbergian gesture to move from one viewing position to another in order to perceive the complexity of the entire work. The static, disinterested viewer advocated by formalism was here decentered and replaced by

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<sup>53</sup> William Hedgepath, "The Alternative" (1970), reprinted in *"Takin' it to the Streets" A Sixties Reader*, eds. Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 330.

a potentially new sort of beholder, one encouraged to establish a connection with the work in a more immediately physical way. Thus, as with Judd and Morris, Baer was engaged in what came to be understood in the late 1960s as a politics of vision, an increased awareness that seeing is not neutral but rather historically and specifically located. Though, for each of these artists testing the possibilities this could hold for a redefinition of an aesthetic experience, the implications of visuality were distinctly defined in each case.

Crucial to Morris' emergent theories regarding the nature of minimal sculpture and the terms of the aesthetic experience, were the writings of the French existentialist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who considered sight as a primary method through which the self mediates a relationship with the social world. Many of his texts, which were translated into English in the 1960s, most notably *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) which appeared in 1962, were influential at this time in conceptualizing human perception, specifically an understanding of sight as an embodied experience.<sup>54</sup>

Considering consciousness as always incarnate, Merleau-Ponty argued: "Every external perception is immediately synonymous with a certain perception of my body, just as every perception of my body is made explicit in the language of external perception."<sup>55</sup>

Within Merleau-Ponty's formulation, viewing was not the activity of a detached eye, but rather a body grounded in a unique material and social environment.<sup>56</sup> Seen in this way, the body is the vehicle through which the individual makes meaning of the world, and

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<sup>54</sup> The *Phenomenology of Perception* (1942) was translated into English in 1962; the essay "Eye and Mind" (1960), which considers the ways in which "authentic art" fundamentally influences how we see and experience the world, appeared in 1964; and *Humanism and Terror* (1947), a treatise on Marxism, in 1969.

<sup>55</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 205.

<sup>56</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the impact of Merleau-Ponty's theories on minimal sculpture, see Potts, 207-34.

conversely, the site through which the world responds, a conceptualization that in turn could open up many possibilities for sculptural experience. This sort of two-way communication which Merleau-Ponty references constituted an intersubjective self, a subject always in flux and situated in relation to the social practice.<sup>57</sup> The modern individual, based within her or his own body, was thus theorized not as a passive subject but an active participant, positioned within a specific historical and social reality.

Merleau-Ponty's theories broke with others like those of Jean Paul Sartre, which were attempting to work through the potential of the phenomenological experience. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty's colleague at *Les Temps Modernes*, had prioritized through his writings an existential conception of freedom based on the personal responsibility of the individual isolated within an indifferent universe.<sup>58</sup> For Sartre, it was possible to overcome feelings of alienation by accepting that existence precedes essence, in other words the individual *is* and then *becomes* what s/he is through processes of confrontation and conflict. Within this model of human action, the ultimate responsibility for one's life, and for bestowing meaning on the world, rests exclusively with the individual who must struggle to accept the consequences of his or her own freedom. But this conception of freedom unhinged the subject from its historical situation, a position that put Sartre directly at odds with the French Communist Party (CPF), a chasm he attempted to bridge in the 1950s.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, Merleau-Ponty was interested in establishing a middle ground

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<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the theoretical work of Merleau-Ponty see Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1975), 144-160.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophic Library, 1956).

<sup>59</sup> Here, I am referring to Sartre's position pre-1948. During the 1950s, Sartre searches for ways to reconcile his understanding of existentialism with Marxian ideology. Ironically, it is at this same time, by 1955, that Merleau-Ponty, an adamant supporter of the CPF, becomes irrevocably disillusioned with the Party. For an analysis of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's divergent positions, see Anna Boschetti, *The Intellectual Enterprise: Sartre and Les Temps Modernes*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 184-223.

between existentialism and the CPF, by considering the social basis of the subject. Still prioritizing ideas of free action and personal responsibility, he considered the ways in which the individual was integrally dependent on social interaction for the formation (and continual reformation) of identity.<sup>60</sup> This understanding of the subject was particularly interesting to Morris.

Morris' interest in the body and how social relations are experienced is not surprising given the wider preoccupation with this topic during the 1960s. The antiwar movement and various liberation movements—black power, women's liberation, and gay rights—were all concerned with the rights of individual subjects, and as these continued to gain visibility, the body took on a central position. For many, a conception of somatically grounded engagement was one way to reassert the importance of individual expression, especially when confronted with what appeared as the monolithic power of the government and established institutions. Julian Beck and Judith Malina addressed this very issue in their experimental dramatic company, The Living Theatre. Prioritizing unstructured and interactive performance methods, and with a very clear political agenda, The Living Theatre provided opportunities for the feeling body, whether actor or audience member, to participate in loosely scripted performances which in turn allowed for a greater freedom and creative potential. As the French critic Pierre Biner explained in analysis of the play *Paradise Now*:

It is said that the Living Theatre actor merely plays himself on stage. Instead of saying, as a traditional actor: "I am the embodiment of Richard III"... the actor in the living theatre says: "I am Julian Beck and I play Julian Beck." Even presenting oneself as an individual, however, requires maintaining oneself continually in the process of becoming... What the Living Theatre wants to accomplish

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<sup>60</sup> Poster, 148-9.

in *Paradise Now* is a realization in each spectator that a transformation in his whole being is both possible and urgent.”<sup>61</sup>

To signal this transformative potential, *Paradise Now* ends with the actors and audience moving together out into the street, presumably to continue what they learned in the performance regarding the possibilities of embodied experience.

This understanding of engagement as something lived through the body dovetails with the sculptural possibilities put in to place by Morris. Writing about the implications that minimal work, particularly his own, has on the viewer, Morris argued that:

One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships and he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context. Every internal relationship, whether it be set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists.<sup>62</sup>

With these words, Morris diverged from a high modernist notion of aesthetic engagement predicated on an optical experience, such as that prioritized by Judd, to one that binds the body of the viewer and the minimal object in a contingent relationship.<sup>63</sup> For Morris, ‘viewing’ a minimalist work creates a situation based in action through which the spectator can ‘feel’ and connect with the materiality of the sculpture and the surrounding architectural space. This emphasis on sensory perception, on feeling, can be loosely aligned with the desensitized environment of the late 1960s affected by, among other

<sup>61</sup> Bloom and Breines, 289.

<sup>62</sup> Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” 232.

<sup>63</sup> Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 246. While Potts agrees Morris’ theories about viewership are more somatically-based than Judd’s and as such anti-formalist, he argues that Morris’ definition of the viewer’s experience of an art work as an interplay between a given structure and its variable appearances is actually a formalist preoccupation.

things, what was known as the credibility gap. As the writer Nora Sayles described this in 1973, the antiwar songs and plays of popular culture of this era, “kept reminding us that our government was lying to us: about body counts, about the successes of American troops, about the waning strength of the North Vietnamese.”<sup>64</sup> This disparity between what you were told to believe and what you could see operating around you even effected television viewers. Numerous studies executed during the 1960s were intended to chart what was perceived as a growing impatience among the viewing public and lack of interest in news events.<sup>65</sup> Within this context, I am arguing, the possibility of authentic personal experience took on new meaning. By placing experience at the center of his work, Morris attempted to activate his viewer both viscerally and intellectually; and most importantly to ground one’s experience of an art object within lived, everyday relations and concerns.

Yet, while Morris depended on a phenomenological framework for his reconsideration of aesthetic experience, he ignored some of the political implications of Merleau-Ponty’s social philosophy, namely his desire to integrate existentialism and Marxism.<sup>66</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, the social and historical conditions in which the subject is grounded were of principal importance as he subscribed to the belief that individual freedom could only be achieved through the overall movement of society towards revolutionary aims. But he also insisted on the primacy of subjective decisions and experiences, issues he tried to reconcile with Marxism in *Humanism and Terror* (1947)

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<sup>64</sup> Nora Sayre, *Sixties Going on Seventies* (1973, reprint. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 2.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, “Problem of Sanitation: Questioning the Little Reaction to Ghastly Scenes of Vietnam Dead,” *The Nation* 206 (January 1, 1968), 5; W. Markfield, “Oh, mass man! Oh, lumpen lug! Why do you watch TV?,” *Saturday Evening Post* 241 (November 30, 1968), 28-9+; and “Haggerty Criticizes Viewers,” *The New York Times* (November 7, 1961), 66:7.

<sup>66</sup> Poster, 145-6.



published in English in 1969.<sup>67</sup> Even after the Moscow Show Trials and a pervasive disillusionment with Stalinist communism, Merleau-Ponty looked for ways to hold onto the hope of social liberation through direct political means. When taken up in the US, however, the theories of Merleau-Ponty were often divorced from their overt political connotations, not surprising given the lingering Cold War climate that pitted Marxism against liberal, democratic ideals. While a rather watered-down form of socialism was entertained by various factions of the Old and New Left, Marxist ideology was still considered by many as the enemy, specifically as a belief in communist containment was a major factor in justifying the expansion of the Vietnam War. Therefore, just as Judd had done with the painter Barnett Newman, holding certain aspects of his work up as exemplary while depoliticizing the overall content, so Morris achieved the same with his highly selective borrowing from Merleau-Ponty's theories. Predicated on a reconsideration of viewing practices, Morris' use of phenomenology allowed him to distinguish his own sculpture from Judd's production, specifically by injecting it with sensory manipulation and feeling. At the same time, by prioritizing certain formal issues such as shape and gestalt and removing himself from any direct social referent, Morris acknowledged a connection to the avant-garde strategies put in place by the New York School painters, yet reworked for an audience temporally and psychologically displaced.<sup>68</sup> For Morris, the spectacularization of culture allowed for a host of new visual

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 152-3.

<sup>68</sup> Potts, 244-5. Potts closely considers Morris' reading of Merleau-Ponty and suggests his interest in phenomenology must be contextualized with a formalist twist. He argues that as the minimalists were working in self-conscious dialogue with Greenbergian paradigms, Morris' understanding of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories must be grounded in what were then generally accepted formalist preoccupations, such as those regarding shape. Potts speculates that Morris later rejects such conventional formalist assumptions in his anti-form work.

and perceptual possibilities regarding how the audience interacts with and makes sense of the work of art.

Morris' preoccupation with the physical presence of a work was exactly what Michael Fried in his article "Art and Objecthood," published in *Artforum* in June of 1967, found so unsettling.<sup>69</sup> Here, Fried made his famed case against minimalist, or what he termed literalist art, partially on the grounds of this new model of perception and the alliance it established between the art object and its spectator. It was the interactive nature of this new relationship that he labeled the theatrical, a condition he attributed to all minimal sculpture without distinction. In this way, Fried was almost single-handedly responsible for consolidating the various forms of minimal sculpture into what has historically been considered, however erroneously, a coherent movement. Centering his analysis almost exclusively on the work of Morris and Judd, he leveled all distinctions between their respective practices, portraying minimalism as monolithic, a united aesthetic front waging a wholesale attack against the values and aspirations of modernism. This allusion to battle was re-inscribed in the very language of "Art and Objecthood." He wrote: "there is a war going on between theater and modernist painting, between the theatrical and the pictorial— a war that, despite the literalists' explicit rejection of modernist painting and sculpture, is not basically a matter of program and ideology but of experience, conviction, sensibility."<sup>70</sup> Fried's use of the word 'war,' a term repeated in his essay,<sup>71</sup> and his insistence on metaphors of conflict, such as the

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" (1967), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1998), 148-72.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> See also Fried, 163. "At this point I want to make a claim that I can not hope to prove or substantiate but that I believe nonetheless to be true: theater and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist

meaning of theater as an arena in which military operations are coordinated, was especially resonant. It evoked both the precarious position of modern art in the late sixties, its cultural hegemony attacked by neo-dada and minimalism, and the more overt trauma induced by the Vietnam War. Envisioning the abstract, representational language of minimalism as a more immediate threat to formalist modernism than the readymade, consumer-oriented imagery of pop, particularly as it looked like the work Fried was supporting (for example, the sculpture of Anthony Caro), he mounted an offensive to protect the quality and aesthetic value of modern art.

Speaking retrospectively about the writing of "Art and Objecthood," he demonstrated an awareness of his historical lineage and the tradition of art criticism he was maintaining:

Starting as a critic when I did, I became one of two critical advocates (the other being Clem of course) for the last full generation of high modernist artists... And I was perfectly conscious of the kind of role I was playing, of its historical precedents... I was sure that what I was doing mattered— in fact, I thought that nothing less than the future of Western civilization was at stake in "Art and Objecthood"... I'm being ironic, but only up to a point.<sup>72</sup>

Though these words resonate with melodrama, they actually reveal a certain level of self-consciousness on the part of Fried regarding the seriousness of his project. While interestingly, after "Art and Objecthood" Fried wrote little art criticism moving instead into historical scholarship of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> C,<sup>73</sup> his objective in the 1960s was to align himself with Greenberg, specifically in his ambitions for the future of modern art. In a

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painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such— and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such."

<sup>72</sup> Newman, 435.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago

sense, both were entrenched by the mid-1960s, trying to safeguard the continuation of a self-critical, dialectical modernism from both the influx of consumerism, as exemplified by pop, and the gimmicky viewing experience offered through minimal art. In response to what could have been perceived as an infiltration of the popular, Fried re-articulated a formalist position, and consequently was deemed by many as the heir apparent.<sup>74</sup> As he struggled to both continue a modernist tradition and work out his own identity in relation to Greenberg, which James Meyer has argued was the real objective inherent in "Art and Objecthood,"<sup>75</sup> Fried articulated the importance of maintaining standards of aesthetic quality, something he believed was being eroded by the manipulative effects of minimalism.

Both Alex Potts and James Meyer have been careful in their analyses of Fried to distinguish his objectives from those of Greenberg.<sup>76</sup> Both writers consider the ways in which Fried complicated Greenberg's insistence that each medium interrogate its own limits by considering such issues as color and shape in sculpture. Taken to an extreme, what Fried was fearful of was that Greenberg's reductivist view which called for a formal stripping down of each medium could be read as a justification for minimal art.<sup>77</sup> He was specifically responding to the claim Greenberg made in "After Abstract Expressionism, that "a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture— though not necessarily a

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Press, 1990), and *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), the first chapter of which was based on "Manet's Sources: Aspects of his Art, 1859-1865," *Artforum* 7 (March 1969), 28-82.

<sup>74</sup> See Newman, 188-91, on the 1966 symposium "Art Criticism in the Sixties," at The Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Brandeis University. It was in part based on his contribution to this symposium that Fried was so closely associated with Greenberg.

<sup>75</sup> James Meyer, "The Writing of Art and Objecthood," *Refracting Vision: Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*, eds. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, Toni Ross (Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sydney, 2000), 61-96; and *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 231.

<sup>76</sup> See Potts, 178-87; and Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 230-3. For Fried's own view on this matter, see "An Introduction to my Art Criticism," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, 33-40.

<sup>77</sup> See Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1996), 36-69. In this essay, Foster argues that minimalism presented both the ultimate realization of and break with Greenbergian formalism.

successful one,”<sup>78</sup> a phrase Fried quoted in “Art and Objecthood.”<sup>79</sup> Aware of the implications this held for modern art, and the *carte blanche* it offered minimalism, Fried would later comment:

What fascinated me about the minimalists was that they read Greenberg, valued the same recent art, but saw in it a development that projected literalness... It was as if (they) were the ones who really believed the Greenbergian reduction— that there was a timeless essence to art that was progressively revealed. And in their reading the timeless essence turned out to be not just the delimited flat surface of painting but the literal properties of their support.<sup>80</sup>

At stake in the exchange between Fried, Greenberg, and the minimalists was the issue of shape. Both Judd and Morris had isolated shape as a primary attribute of the new sculpture. For Judd, it had to do with the “wholeness” of a work: “the thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting.”<sup>81</sup> For Morris, the shape, “as the single most important sculptural value,”<sup>82</sup> was fundamentally tied in to an experience of the gestalt. In order to distance modern art from the literal shape that Judd and Morris were referencing, as well as the shape alluded to in Greenberg’s “tacked-up canvas,” Fried distinguished between literal and pictorial shape. That is, he reconsidered formal concerns, such as shape and color, as a means of complicating the formal objectives inherited from Greenberg. As Fried explained: “what is at stake in this conflict is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects,”<sup>83</sup> and to transcend the objectness of the literal frame of the canvas, Fried looked back to the internal elements of a painting, such as its compositional forms and relations. This

<sup>78</sup> Greenberg, “After Abstract Expressionism,” 131-2.

<sup>79</sup> Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 152.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Fried, “Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop,” *DIA Art Foundation: Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Vol. 1, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1987), 73.

<sup>81</sup> Judd, “Specific Objects,” 187.

<sup>82</sup> Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part I,” 228.

distance from Greenberg was confirmed through his claim that: "The essence of painting is not something irreducible. Rather, the task of the modernist painter is to discover those conventions that, at a given moment, *alone* are capable of establishing his work's identity as a painting."<sup>84</sup>

Another issue that Fried re-conceptualized, at least to some degree, was Greenberg's insistence on the opticality of sculpture, instead focusing on the ways in which the destabilizing effects set up in the physical interaction between viewer and art object could be reconciled. Like Morris, Fried was also interested in the phenomenological theories of Merleau-Ponty, moving away from a more Greenbergian version of a detached opticality which he endorsed in *Three American Painters*, as appealing to "eyesight alone,"<sup>85</sup> to a reworked notion of spectatorship. As Fried argued in "Art and Objecthood" using the work of Anthony Caro as a model, it was now possible for modern sculpture to "defeat, or allay, objecthood by imitating not gesture exactly, but the efficacy of gesture" through the compositional relations it establishes (fig. 35). He continued, Caro's sculptures, "are possessed by the knowledge of the human body and how, in innumerable ways and moods, it makes meaning."<sup>86</sup> For Fried this was a complicated issue, specifically as his entire critique of minimalism was based on its manipulation of the body of the viewer. But in setting modern sculpture off from minimal, he explained sculpture could acknowledge the body as long as this relation did not overpower the other aspects of the work.<sup>87</sup> In other words, sculpture could allude to

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<sup>83</sup> Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 151.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 169, fn. 6.

<sup>85</sup> Meyer makes a similar point in *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 234.

<sup>86</sup> Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 162.

<sup>87</sup> Fried explained: That Merleau-Ponty should be important to the minimalists makes perfect sense to me, and my reading of their art was certainly open to Merleau-Ponty. There are references to him in what I wrote. What bothered me about their art was not that it was keyed in some sense to the body but that its

without depicting the syntax of bodily gesture.<sup>88</sup> Thus, modern sculpture, according to Fried, could combine a viewing experience comprised of both an instantaneous visual effect, a condition he termed presentness, and a bodily identification. This was the crux of the difference between Greenberg and Fried— the latter’s recognition and prioritization of the viewer’s experience. Fried was looking for transcendence that would allow the viewer to both recognize their own humanness and inspire them to some form of critical engagement, but a form of engagement distinct from that envisioned by either Morris or Judd.

In his critique of minimal art, Fried maintained that the literalist sensibility was overly concerned with the physical body of the spectator, as the materiality of the work – its size, shape and even surrounding environment – relied on corporeal manipulation. In this he likened the difference between minimalism and modern art to the divide between genre and history painting in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As with modern art, history painting appealed to the intellect and integrity of the viewer, while genre painting spoke to its viewer through base emotion and deceptive effects. Thinking this through in relation to how the minimal object functions, Fried wrote:

Someone merely has to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one... And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone— which is to say it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.<sup>89</sup>

This grabbing of the viewer’s attention, as a sort of theatrical staging, was aligned by Fried with ‘presence’ or what he described as the anthropomorphic quality of large-scale,

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relation to the body was surefire. Those things were machines for producing surefire effect. And my aesthetic to this day is against surefire effect.” Foster, 74.

<sup>88</sup> Meyer, 233.

<sup>89</sup> Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 163-4.

minimal sculpture.<sup>90</sup> This insinuation of physical presence, as if the sculpture was a living body sharing the viewer's space, undermined the transcendent capabilities of sculpture binding it to a temporal encounter, or an everyday experience, based in real time and space. As an alternative, Fried called for 'presentness,' what he defined as a moment of perceptual clarity or revelation in which the art work itself is wholly manifest or made available to its audience. Writing about this high modernist ideal of viewership, he clarified:

It is this continuous and entire *presentness*, amounting, as it were, to the perceptual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.<sup>91</sup>

This notion of conviction as a belief in the quality and seriousness of the work is of primary importance. As something that is in no way guaranteed and must be secured again and again, conviction saves modern art from the purely subjective by setting it apart from the objectness of minimalism. Moreover, its potential instantaneousness, depending on the abilities of the viewer, further separated modern art from minimal, which was contingent on a temporal viewing experience grounded in the particular time and space. Concluding his essay, Fried argued for the uniqueness of this modernist experience:

I want to call attention to the utter pervasiveness— the virtual universality— of the sensibility or mode of being that I have characterized as corrupted or perverted by theater.

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<sup>90</sup> Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 232-3. Here, Meyer considers the epistemology of the word 'presence' in the 1960s. While contemporary parlance conceptualized presence positively as the bodily impact of a work, Greenberg and Fried considered it negatively as an indicator of a lack of aesthetic quality. For Greenberg this was aligned with the manipulative effects of commodity culture, while Fried associated presence with a human-scaled quality that troubled its viewer.

<sup>91</sup> Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 167.



We are all literalists most of our lives. Presentness is grace.<sup>92</sup>

In other words, presentness is something to strive for, something out of the ordinary and which is set apart from everyday experiences, or what Fried argued is the “utter pervasiveness” and “virtual universality” of the theatrical. As it is in the world of the theatrical that the possible audiences for modern art reside most of the time, the aesthetic should offer something unique and fulfilling and which allows for a temporary escape from the here and now. Ending with the promise that “presentness is grace,” Fried implied that the rigor and intellectual engagement of modern art were well worth the effort, sanctifying the beholder with a temporary immunity or reprieve from contemporary social pressures.

This understanding of the autonomy of art as providing a transcendent experience unhinged from everyday concerns, positioned Fried in relation to the Frankfurt School theorist Theodor Adorno, specifically his writings on cultural criticism.<sup>93</sup> In his essay “Commitment” from 1962 which continued a Marxist critique of capitalism, Adorno dismissed the traditional division between committed and autonomous culture by arguing that an art for art’s sake was the most effective means for confronting and resisting reification or the commodification of visual production.<sup>94</sup> As such, autonomous art was, through this very act of opposition, sociopolitical in nature. He wrote:

Today, every phenomenon of culture, even if it is a model of integrity, is liable to be suffocated in the cultivation of kitsch. Yet paradoxically in the same epoch it is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Commitment,” *Notes on Literature, II*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 76-94, and *Aesthetic Theory*, Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>94</sup> See Alex Potts discussion of Adorno’s aesthetic theory in *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist*, pages 199-206.

barred to politics. Sartre himself has expressed this truth in a passage which does credit to his honesty. This is not a time for a political art, but politics has migrated into autonomous art, and nowhere more so than where it seems to be politically dead.<sup>95</sup>

By reasserting the value of autonomous art, an art based in an intellectual rigorousness and complexity, Adorno, like Fried, tried to preserve a space for modernism to continue its self-critical tendencies, particularly as defined in the postwar era. Political viability, as functioning through a committed act, was not to be found in an overtly propagandistic art that (like the theatrical impulses of minimalism) capitulates to the purely subjective, but in an art concerned with its own internal logic examining the problems and issues intrinsic to itself. Though Adorno was coming from an overtly Marxist tradition, and as such was more interested in a capitalist critique, he shared with Fried a faith in the enlightenment underpinnings of late modernism and its purported revolutionary potential. Both believed that an art concerned with its own disciplinary boundaries would be more incisive, as it was through a dialectical process of internal exploration that progress, both in art and society-at-large, could be potentially achieved.

This was what Fried was fighting for in his battle against minimalism, the continued criticality and oppositional nature of the avant-garde. For Fried, minimal art had already capitulated to the forces of industrialism through its sleek metallic fabrication and physically seductive gestures. It was left to modern art, with its intrinsic difficulty, to maintain a space for something more serious and historically self-aware. In his 1964 article "Modernist Painting and Formalist Criticism," Fried came closest to defining exactly what the potential of modernism in the visual arts could be. Citing Hegel's

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<sup>95</sup> Adorno, "Commitment," 94.

conception of historical progression as based in dialectical movement, specifically as taken up by Georg Lukacs and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Fried wrote:

More than anything else, the dialectic in the hands of these men is an *ideal of action as radical criticism* founded upon as its objective an understanding of one's present situation as one is able to achieve. There is nothing in the least teleological about such an ideal: it does not aim towards a predetermined end, unless its complete incarnation in action can be called an end. But such an incarnation would mean the establishing of a condition of perpetual revolution, perpetual radical criticism of the existing state of affairs.<sup>96</sup> (my emphasis)

For Fried, it is this radical criticism as action, articulated by the individual who has objectified his/her intuitions about art through intellectual rigor and formalist evaluations, that attributes to modern painting a particular kind of political agency. His understanding of critical culture, which is fundamentally linked to an idea of avant-gardism, is dependent upon a dialectic of modernism in the visual arts, the principle by which painting can transform and renew itself both in relation to its past and the present historical epoch. This "condition of perpetual revolution" has allowed modern art which has become increasingly self-reflexive and divorced from larger societal concerns to take on, according to Fried: "more and more of the denseness, structure and complexity of moral experience, that is, of life itself, but life lived as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness."<sup>97</sup> To let go of this alacrity is to regress from enlightenment ideals regarding the future progress of Western civilization, to dangerously embrace a "couture society," a world of high-fashioned spectacle in which the individual comforted by the quick fix of popular culture has no hope of moving

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<sup>96</sup> Michael Fried, "Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism," *The American Scholar* (Autumn 1964), 646.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 648.

beyond. In this way, Fried's understanding of modernism is nothing short of revolutionary, a defense against the barbaric, but one arguable mounted a bit too late.

By the late sixties, as Fried was fortifying his position through "Art and Objecthood," the elitist and exclusionary aspects of modernist criticism were, as previously mentioned, seriously challenged, even by many of the writers clustered around *Artforum*, a magazine that since its founding in 1962 had prioritized formalist ideals.<sup>98</sup> Greenberg had, in a sense, left Fried to defend what was quickly becoming, under an emergent postmodernism that questioned authoritative structures and modes of thinking, a difficult position. As Barbara Reise argued in 1968, Greenberg's thinking had by the 1960s:

become more didactic, concerned with philosophy and history, removed from concrete aesthetic encounters, and seemingly unsure of its own objectivity. His early penchants for discussing art in terms of form rather than content, cubist and late cubist form, purist media categories, and an evolving linear progression abstracted from artist's lives and historic events were noted by some critics after reading his book. In the 'sixties these penchants rigidified into dogma: allowing only art which conformed to Greenberg's philosophy of art history to be considered as 'authentic,' 'serious,' 'high' art in his discussions.<sup>99</sup>

Thus, as Fried was writing "Art and Objecthood," he was battling against this loss of position vis-à-vis formalist criticism, the idea that it had been "rigidified into dogma," as well as more theatrical methods of viewership, that prioritized everyday physical relations and practices. His reassertion of the autonomy of art and a transcendent ideal of viewership, therefore, allowed him to distance the aesthetic from what were at this

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<sup>98</sup> As previously stated, Barbara Rose and Max Kozloff were among the first *Artforum* writers to question this allegiance to Greenberg. For an analysis of the love/hate affair between *Artforum* and Greenberg in the late 1960s see Amy Newman's *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-74*.

<sup>99</sup> Barbara Reise, "Greenberg and the Group," 255.

moment immediately pressing social concerns. As Fried was sitting at his desk working in the spring of 1967, outside on the streets violence erupted as antiwar activists staged wide-scale public protests, the March on the Pentagon in October of that same year, being one of the most prominent.<sup>100</sup> The resulting atmosphere of dissent contributed to a pervasive questioning of authority structures throughout the late sixties, a questioning that would also affect cultural institutions. While it would be a few years before Takis 'removed' his sculpture from the Museum of Modern Art, an act signaling a far-reaching critique of the art establishment, Fried was already aware of the surrounding discord and its implications for advanced culture. In February of 1967 as hundreds of artists took part in Angry Arts Weeks, an eclectic range of activities that included performances by Peter Schumann's Bread and Puppet Theatre (fig. 36), organized poetry and film presentations and multi-paneled art collages, art was being used as a form of direct political activism.<sup>101</sup> Faced with this polemic, the issue for Fried was how to preserve the advancement of modernism, with all of its radical potential, when confronted with an overwhelming populist wave. While prior to the 1960s, "the risk, even the possibility, of seeing works of art as nothing more than objects did not exist,"<sup>102</sup> by the time of "Art and Objecthood," this was the primary issue. Against the street politics of the moment as well as the objectness of minimalism, Fried's reaffirmed his own notion of politics which operated on a much more intellectualized and cerebral level, and which were echoed in the final words of his essay, "presentness is grace."

<sup>100</sup> For a popular account of this protest march, see Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* (New York: Signet Books, 1968).

<sup>101</sup> For a consideration of some of the activities which encompassed Angry Arts Week see Francis Frascina, *Art Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 115-20.

<sup>102</sup> Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 160.

At the same time and like most of their contemporaries, both Judd and Morris were forced to articulate their own respective responses to the urgency of social relations, though not surprisingly they were at odds over how this might best be achieved. Judd was himself involved in a variety of political organizations that lobbied for all sort of social issues, against the war and the conglomerates of big business, and for economic and social relief in inner city neighborhoods and ghettos.<sup>103</sup> Yet, his conception of action was directed towards the individual citizen not the artist, as his call for commitment stopped short of the art object itself. As David Raskin noted, "Judd was an artist first, activist second."<sup>104</sup> In fact, writing in *Artforum*, Judd argued for political responsibility by stating "I think everyone has to be involved in politics, in organizations that will defend their rights." But, he continued, "An activity shouldn't be used for a foreign purpose except when the purpose is extremely important and nothing else can be done."<sup>105</sup> In other words, artists should be politically involved without referencing this within the context of their artwork.<sup>106</sup> Here Judd, following Greenberg's lead, continued the call for an autonomous art that was completely self-referential, exclusively concerned with its own logic and form. Judd's most overt involvement, an advertisement placed for the War Resister's League in the *Aspen Times* (August 29, 1968), was followed by the disclaimer: "The War Resisters League wrote these ads and suggest they be run as often

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<sup>103</sup> For writings which reference these political connections, see Donald Judd, "Complaints: Part I," 197-9, "General Statement, WOHO and Greater Westbeth for *Newspaper-Lower Manhattan Township*," 202-5, "Quotes for War Resisters League," 205-7, and "Imperialism, Nationalism and Regionalism," 220-4, all in *Complete Writings 1959-1975*.

<sup>104</sup> Raskin, 697.

<sup>105</sup> Judd, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," 38.

<sup>106</sup> That said, David Raskin has argued, somewhat conversely, that while "Judd considered art to be a weak tool for enacting social change, at best having the ability to shake up social malaise," he did believe the anti-traditional nature of his art, which rejected pre-existing values, was political in nature. See Raskin, 683.

as possible. It's about all anyone can do."<sup>107</sup> (fig. 37) Positioning minimal art in relation to Greenbergian formalism, Judd, like Fried, wanted to distance advanced art from the surrounding social turmoil.

Morris, on the other hand, recognized a more immediate connection between his art and political action maintaining that, "art is always suffused with political meanings."<sup>108</sup> Through its production, its sale, and the varying ways in which it is historically received, art for Morris was wrapped up in larger social and ideological interests, which it both directly and indirectly promotes. While Morris did not come to anti-Vietnam activism until early 1970, when he organized the "Art Strike Against Racism War Repression" an artist protest at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in May of that year, his art was intertwined with his political beliefs throughout the sixties.<sup>109</sup> As Maurice Berger has argued, works such as Morris' *Crisis*, a series of drawings which referenced the Cuban Missile crisis in 1962, and *War*, a dance duet choreographed around the problem of urban violence and performed at the Judson Memorial Church in 1963, demonstrated a concern with larger social issues.<sup>110</sup> This is even more evident in a series of lithographs produced in 1970 in direct response to the U.S. bombing of Cambodia, which depicted proposed war memorials, such as *Trench with Chlorine Gas*, *One Half Mile Concrete Star with Names* and *Scattered Atomic Waste*.<sup>111</sup> But despite the overtness of these examples, on a more subtle level, and in his less representational work, even Morris' redefinition of the relationship between viewer and sculpture can be read

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<sup>107</sup> Interestingly for my purposes, in a particular version of this advertisement that ran in the *Aspen Times* on August 29, 1968, Judd included the following text at the bottom which references the rioting at the Democratic National Convention which I discuss in Chapter 1: "Obviously the Republican and Democratic parties aren't interested in either situation. They and the two foolish candidates disenfranchise a third of the people in the country. The two conventions were despicable. Mayor Daley and his police are horrible."

<sup>108</sup> Morris, unpublished essay on art and politics, reprinted in Berger, 110.

<sup>109</sup> For a description of this event, see Berger, 107-9.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-5.

for its political implications. By making the experience of his audience an integral part of the work, he opens up new sorts of viewing possibilities that can be used to think critically about the ways in which the embodied subject is positioned in relation to social practice. Through the phenomenological strategies he sets up, Morris sidesteps the issue of direct political activism and the modernist aversion to obvious propagandistic content, by instigating a politics of the body, in which the individualized viewer is encouraged to both think and feel.

Considering this conflict between Morris, Judd, and Fried regarding minimalist discourse and the terms through which the new sculpture was defined, the minimal cube with which I started this analysis no longer seems so straightforward. Appearing on the surface to be careful contained and hermetically sealed, upon closer examination it turns into a Pandora's box, which once opened exposes all the fragmentation and conflict of the late-modernism condition. While writing "Art and Objecthood," Fried must have been prescient of what was a waning faith in modernism, a growing disbelief in its canonical force. In the wake of modern art's destabilization, or the loss of its cultural hegemony, minimalism and its emphasis on the theatrical signaled for Fried a larger battle over the very survival of Western culture in a postmodern-era. Both the future of abstraction and the cultural dominance of the U.S. (as represented by New York City) were at stake. Minimalism and the relationship it established between object and audience prioritized, through the physical engagement of embodied viewers, a lived, participatory experience over the transcendental by rejecting the qualities that the modernist trajectory had unequivocally assigned to 'good' art, such as presentness. Thus, Fried's attack on minimalism, his lumping together of the somewhat contradictory

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.



practices of Judd and Morris (and other practitioners) under the banner of theatricality, functioned strategically to reentrench a faith in modernism in response to what he hopefully defined as a temporary minimalist siege. Thus, my search for something more in minimalist sculpture, for a content that gives meaning to the sleek, industrial materials and the highly polished forms, leads us back to a consideration of competing conceptions of the political. Minimalism marked out, through its changing relationship with its audience, the promise of an immediate, physical experience and for a viewer craving a space in which individual subjectivity could be expressed this was really something more.

### Chapter Three: Morris, Baer, and Hesse... Cubed

Art alters experience by reconstructing the objects of experience—reconstructing them in word, tone, image. Why? Evidently, the “language” of art must communicate a truth, an objectivity which is not accessible to ordinary language and ordinary experience. This exigency explodes in the situation of modern art.<sup>1</sup>

Release, violent transformation, eruption, these are some of the qualities Herbert Marcuse likened, as referenced in the quote cited above, to the “situation of modern art.”<sup>2</sup> In *An Essay on Liberation*, a text written in direct response to the increasingly urgent political contingencies of the late 1960s, Marcuse considered the relationship between the aesthetic and the social. More pointedly, at a historical moment consumed by a crisis of consciousness initiated by the Vietnam War, he argued that art has the potential to offer its contemporary viewers something out of the ordinary, an experience of truth presumably foreclosed in everyday life.<sup>3</sup> As a neo-Marxist and disciple of Freud, Marcuse used his inquiry into the aesthetic and the imaginative as a way to investigate possibilities of liberation from repressive social systems, most notably capitalism.<sup>4</sup> But in his work of the 1950s and 60s, he deferred the standard Marxian notion of a proletariat-led uprising, set to seize the means of production and topple the bourgeoisie, in favor of a different sort of revolution. Owing a debt of sorts to an Enlightenment notion of the

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 40.

<sup>2</sup> For a more expanded view of Marcuse's investment in culture as a site through which to envision possibilities for social and political change, see *The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> For a contemporaneous response to Marcuse's claims regarding the possibilities of the aesthetic and their implications for the art establishment, see Gregory Battcock, “Marcuse and Anti-Art,” *Arts Magazine* 43, no. 8 (Summer 1969): 17-9. While I am situating Marcuse and his call for an anti-art, or an art which best conforms to the possibilities of total revolutionary change, in relation to particular artists interested in formal and non-representational issues, Battcock looked to alternative forms of productions. Specifically, he considered the anti-art potential of practices staged or produced outside of traditional museum venues by celebrating the spontaneity of graffiti and the new narrative and technological developments evident in experimental film.

aesthetic,<sup>5</sup> he called for intellectual and corporeal insurgency, a rebellion of the mind and body, and considered culture as a potent starting point for this liberating process.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Marcuse argued, “the disorderly, uncivil, farcical, artistic desublimation of culture constitutes an essential element of radical politics: of the subverting forces in transition.”<sup>7</sup> Looking to modern art as a paradigm of self-reflexivity, which continually tests and reworks its boundaries, Marcuse attempted to transfer this same sort of criticality to the individual so that the limits placed on human freedom by social and political institutions might be recognized and thrown off.

Contextualized within its historical moment of the late 1960s, Marcuse’s examination of the potential for human freedom opened up by aesthetic experience connected with various factions of the 1960’s counterculture. Particularly, his insistence on a “new sensibility,” or non-repressed state of being, served for some as a *raison d’être* for pervasive feelings of social and political malaise, and for others as a *carte blanche* for the celebration of self-indulgence and hedonistic pleasure.<sup>8</sup> By advocating sensuality, a

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout his writings, Marcuse argued against what he believed to be the inherently exploitative nature of capitalist culture and the implications this held for the individual subject disenfranchised through a loss of freedom from contemporary social life.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, translated by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961). This essay sets forth Kant’s aesthetic theory, in which he disputes that objects possess an inherent quality of beauty. Instead, for Kant, the beautiful is that which gives the viewer a disinterested sense of pleasure. An object becomes an artwork when it can be judged disinterestedly. Thus an artwork cannot have a purpose in the world. By extension, the aesthetic represents a separate realm from everyday experience. It is this tradition that Marcuse operates within by arguing there is something available in the aesthetic realm not accessible in any other sphere.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Marcuse’s version of Marxian theory see David Burner, *Making Peace With The 60s* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 161-2. According to Burner, Marx functioned for Marcuse “as a visionary not merely of economic and social revolution narrowly conceived but of a transformed human mind and sensibility.” He argues that by bringing together Marx and Freud, Marcuse was able to apply the dialectic of history to consciousness, a shift that allowed the individual to imagine a remaking of any given condition. Revolution, therefore, is in part the product of a mind that is continually rethinking the surrounding world, a condition that further allows for the liberation of that consciousness. Seen in this way, the problem with capitalism is that it dilutes one’s ability to think dialectically.

<sup>7</sup> Marcuse, 48.

<sup>8</sup> Marcuse, 25. “The new sensibility... emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle is waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: negation of the entire Establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of a right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the *Form* of the society itself.”

preoccupation with the body and the satisfaction of its desires, as antidotes to increasingly repressive societal practices, Marcuse addressed growing anxieties during the Vietnam-era over the subjugation of the individual made all the more pressing by the draft and the ever-increasing number of war-related deaths (tallied nightly on the evening news).<sup>9</sup> Liberating the corporeal through performative strategies including long hair, what many took to mean a hippie lifestyle and free love, the subject, according to Marcuse, could use imagination and embodied experience to begin exploring the possibilities for liberation.<sup>10</sup> Free the body and the mind will follow, instigating a revolution in consciousness that would begin with the individual and move into society-at-large from there.<sup>11</sup> But despite this call for liberation, certain limitations were imposed. In fact, one point of tension between Marcuse and some members of the counterculture regarded the use of hallucinatory substances, particularly a growing interest at this time in LSD.<sup>12</sup>

While Marcuse allowed for experimentation with drugs as a stopgap measure, a way for the individual to find temporary relief from the pressures of a repressive society, he did not advocate drug use as an end in and of itself and in fact worried about where this

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<sup>9</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

<sup>10</sup> Irwin Unger and Debi Unger, Eds., *The Times Were a Changin': The Sixties Reader* (New York: Three Rivers, 1998), 69.

<sup>11</sup> This strategy for liberation, working through both the mind and the body of the individual, was not necessarily new or specific to U.S. society at this time. Rather, it has been a recurrent preoccupation throughout Western civilization and a condition particularly endemic to capitalist systems. For example, in the 1920s and 30s, the Surrealists advocated a somewhat similar program of liberation, but rooted in the exploration of the unconscious mind. This call to 'free the mind' reappears in the States in the years after McCarthyism when many contemporary thinkers were reconsidering the possibilities for freedom that moved away from strictly communist or socialist models. See for example, C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics & People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> During the 1960s, two of the main proponents of experimentation with hallucinatory substances were Ken Kesey and Timothy Leary, both beginning their exploration of these drugs when LSD was still legally available. Kesey, a graduate student at Stanford University, took part in a government drug research program to test a variety of psychoactive drugs in 1959. He later wrote about this experience for government researchers and began his own experiments with psychedelic drugs as a means to break through conformist culture of American society. After writing the novel, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1963), Kesey financed the Merry Pranksters, a group in part responsible for spreading a Hippie aesthetic, open experimentation with psychedelic drugs, and an anti-establishment sentiment. Leary, as another early advocate of LSD, taught psychology at Harvard until 1963. After his dismissal, he founded the Castalia Institute in Millbrook, New York, to continue his studies and to provide a controlled environment for experimentation. Leary coined the phrase "Turn On, Tune In, and Drop Out."

would lead vis-à-vis the lasting impact of the counterculture. Envisioning youth as the new revolutionary agent, Marcuse backed a more critically engaged student movement, interested in instigating lasting political and social change, as opposed to those exploring a decentered and personalized project.

This insistence on an engaged, emancipated body, central to Marcuse's writing of this period, can also be recognized in the work of many artists producing during the late 1960s, including the sculptors Robert Morris and Eva Hesse, as well as the painter Jo Baer.<sup>13</sup> In the post-McCarthy era of the 1960's, these artists all explored, albeit in specific ways, the possibilities for individual freedom as an antidote to the straightjacket of conformity which was even affecting the development of modern art. At this time, all three artists were loosely associated with a minimal project. Both Morris and Baer participated in '10' at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in 1966,<sup>14</sup> a show highlighting artists central to minimalism (fig. 38), while Baer and Hesse were featured in another seminal exhibition, "Art in Series" at the Finch College Museum of Art in 1967.<sup>15</sup> From this point onwards, Morris, Baer and Hesse were considered by the art establishment to share an aesthetic style based on geometric form, modularity and repetition, a condition supported by any cursory comparison of their work. While recent scholarship has begun to flush out the unique formal criteria and philosophical precedents of individual minimal artists, a

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<sup>13</sup> Historian Maurice Berger has noted that Robert Morris was well read in Marcuse's theories, his library housing well-annotated copies of the philosopher's work. See Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989), 77. In footnote 27, Berger notes Morris owned apparently well used copies of *Eros and Civilization* (1955), *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), *Negations* (1968) and *An Essay on Liberation* (1969), as well as Alasdair Mac Intyre's *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (1970).

<sup>14</sup> In '10,' an exhibition held at the Virginia Dwan Gallery in Autumn 1966, Dwan exhibited works by the ten painters and sculptors most often associated with minimal art. The ten included Carl Andre, Jo Baer, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, Robert Morris, Ad Reinhardt, Robert Smithson and Michael Steiner.

<sup>15</sup> A partial list of some of the fundamental minimal shows these artists were represented in includes: for Morris, "Primary Structures," Jewish Museum (1966), New York, and "The Art of the Real: USA, 1948-

practice that will no doubt continue, similarity can likewise provide a fruitful point of departure.<sup>16</sup> By briefly concentrating on issues of sameness, a base can be established from which to think about difference, and the distinct possibilities open to and initiated by art viewers in the late 1960s to engage with their immediate social and cultural realm.

Consider Robert Morris' *Untitled (Battered Cubes)* from 1965, Eva Hesse's *Accession II* from 1967, and Jo Baer's *Untitled (Wraparound Triptych – Blue, Green, Lavender)* from 1969-74. All three artists start with a rigid geometric formal arrangement, a cubic or rectangular beginning, which is then subtly undermined to reframe the terms of engagement through which the beholder comes to experience the work.<sup>17</sup> For example in Morris' sculpture (fig. 39), the four identical forms, which are arranged symmetrically with one another, appear at first glance to be cubic in structure, but upon closer examination it becomes apparent that each distinct shape slants on two sides. This abstruse change in the physical properties of the object draws attention to the perceptual experience of the audience, particularly as each of the sloping sides face outwards towards the viewer and away from the internal relationships set up between the discrete forms. As the art historian Maurice Berger noted, *Untitled (Battered Cubes)* can only be understood by moving around it, a process that continually changes the physical

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1968," Museum of Modern Art, New York (1968); for Baer, "Systemic Painting," Guggenheim Museum, New York (1966); and for Hesse, "Eccentric Abstraction," Fischbach Gallery, New York (1966).

<sup>16</sup> Scholars which have begun to think through some of the differences between these artists include James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), which specifically considers the artists Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and Anne Truitt; Maurice Berger in his aforementioned work on Robert Morris; David Batchelor, *Minimalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Anne Wagner, "Introduction," *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (1968), Ed. Gregory Battcock, (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> For an examination of the beholder as the primary audience for the work of art see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). In short, Fried's argument centers on the ways in which an art object (specifically French painting of the 1750s and 60s) either ignores or recognizes the beholder's presence, a tension between absorption (where the figures in a painting appear self-contained and unaware of the viewer's presence) and theatricality (an image which quite literally plays to an audience, either actual or imaginary). For Fried, theatricality is pejorative and to be avoided in the visual arts as it renders the art object too dependent on the response/interpretation of individual viewers.

and temporal position of the spectator, thus challenging any immediate recognition of a gestalt, that is the whole shape of the structure or its totality.<sup>18</sup> In this way, Morris' 'battered cubes' enact a tension between the expected cubic form and its alteration, creating an accentuated perceptual experience in which an immediate cognizance of the shape of the sculpture is both thwarted and simultaneously reinforced. In other words, Morris's altered cubes heighten the spectator's experience of the gestalt by holding the audience in a sort of theatrical tension, to borrow a phrase from Michael Fried, unsure of what the viewing experience contains. Additionally, through its very name—battered cubes—Morris ironically played with the multiple meanings of the term 'battered'—in an architectural sense (the sloping of a wall or column), a place or people under siege, or to be beaten. He pushed the envelope of a minimal aesthetic by roughing up the standard, Judd-like cube.

Jo Baer, in her work of the 1960s, shared Morris' interest in the act of perception as an embodied experience. Yet, while also contingent on an ambulatory audience, Baer's paintings establish a viewing position more fully grounded in optical phenomena. She is primarily concerned with visuality, the mechanics of which she foregrounds to make the viewer more aware of his or her own process of vision through an experience of the work. In her 'wraparound paintings,' a series of images composed of white or gray rectangles framed by black and colored lines, pigment is applied to both the front edges and the sides of the painting (fig. 40). The movement of the viewer from one vantage-point to another, a full one-hundred-and-eighty-degrees around the image, is encouraged as a physiological and intellectual confrontation between the art object and its beholder. How the individual perceives and conceptually makes sense of the painted form is at

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<sup>18</sup> Berger, 53.

stake. But here, and this is an important distinction, Baer is not offering the sort of visual experience contemporaneously available in op art, such as in Bridget Riley's *Blaze I* from 1964 (fig. 41). In this black and white painting, the geometric pattern, which appears to swirl towards a central vanishing point, is ludic in nature, based in a sort of fun and games (in some ways similar to the play of psychedelic posters popular at this time). When exhibited in New York for the "Responsive Eye" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1965, a show organized by William Seitz to consider how painting activates vision through optical and perceptual strategies,<sup>19</sup> Riley's brand of opticality was seen by formalist critics as too gimmicky. In other words, its illusionistic tendencies were considered too common, or similar to a graphic design exercise, especially when compared to the theoretical seriousness of modern art.<sup>20</sup>

In Baer's *Untitled (Wraparound Triptych – Blue, Green, Lavender)* from 1969-74 (fig. 42), three gray canvases of identical shape are linearly arranged each with a black rectangular border on each of the vertical sides. This border stops short of both the top and bottom of the canvas, but wraps slightly around to the front surface of the painting, dissolving the rigidity of the edge between the side and front perpendicular planes. Further, an outline of another color (blue, green and lavender respectively) just inside the confines of the black form, both accents and masks the turn from one side to the other.

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<sup>19</sup> William Seitz, *The Responsive Eye* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965). The "Responsive Eye" show brought together artists from over 15 countries many of whom were not yet known in New York. Seitz's catalogue essay considers perceptual abstraction in relation to a trajectory of modern painting concerned with processes of vision, a lineage beginning with the impressionists. As well, he makes connections to contemporary cultural phenomenon of the mid-1960s. For example, discussing the visual energy inherent in Riley's work *Current*, Seitz notes that the effects are increased under the influence of drugs such as mescaline and LSD.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Rosalind Krauss, "Afterthoughts on 'Op,'" *Art International* (June 1965), 75-6. As David Hopkins noted, Krauss, and other modernist critics, were incensed that in the "Responsive Eye" show, works by Riley were hanging next to paintings by 'superior' artists such as Morris Louis. From David Hopkins', *After Modern Art 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 147. Interestingly enough, in some ways Riley proved Krauss wrong by winning the international prize for painting at the Venice Biennial in 1968.



These visual strategies repeated three times through the triptych form enabled Baer to complicate any sort of disembodied optical experience.<sup>21</sup> The viewer is encouraged to both visually and physically interact with the work's materiality by moving around the piece. For Baer, as she made clear in a statement published in *Artforum* in 1970, a journal rife with debates and issues pertaining to formalist discourse, this intervention in processes of viewership bears directly on "the sovereignty of the subject and the nature and ramifications of self-determination."<sup>22</sup> That is, unlike with the experience of op art, the viewer is not allowed to escape the particulars of her or his situation through games of fantasy or optical and technological play. Instead, the subject must intellectually and corporeally engage with the mechanics of vision and its effects on perception. The viewer is encouraged to be critical of how vision operates, and then apply this criticality to other areas of thought.

Similarly preoccupied with formal geometry and the possibilities of beholding, the work of Eva Hesse troubles any straightforward reading of minimal sculpture by re-introducing hand crafted production into an otherwise depersonalized, and at times industrial, art. Like Morris in his *Untitled*, Hesse's *Accession II* (1967) takes on the integrity of the hexahedron by subverting the strict formal arrangement expected of the minimal cube (figs. 43 and 44). Comprised of perforated steel that appears on the outside to display a certain metallic rigidity, Hesse's sculpture is in fact stressed on the inside by thousands of rubber tubes that puncture the facade. In this way, the regular geometric pattern exposed on the exterior wall of the sculpture is displaced by soft, malleable

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<sup>21</sup> In a statement written in August of 1998, Baer described the importance of the diptych (and presumably triptych) form of many of her works from the late 1960s. For Baer, the diptych was an iterating device, as she argued "saying something twice or more can reinforce what is meant (or for the viewer practice makes perfect)." Jo Baer, "The Diptych," printed in *Jo Baer: Paintings 1960-1998*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1999), 26.

plastic. Working with standardized tropes of gender relations, the object's virile, machine manufacture is transformed by an effeminizing intervention, marked by the individual threading and knotting of each flaccid tube.<sup>23</sup> As with Morris and Baer, Hesse's sculpture also seems to beckon its viewer, but this time with the promise of a haptic experience. In fact, the seductive appearance of those thousands of suggestive tubes proved for many initial viewers incredibly alluring. When in 1968 the first version of *Accession II* was exhibited at the Milwaukee Art Center and the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art in an exhibition interestingly entitled "Options," so many viewers wanted to feel the interior of the sculpture that the piece was severely damaged by gallery visitors climbing inside.<sup>24</sup> While perhaps not the beholding that Hesse had in mind, the intimacy of this response reveals the powerful emotive qualities put forth by the sculpture, the tactile palpability of which moved many viewers to physically engage with the work. Hesse's insistence on sensual, organic form and 'soft' industrial materials, and indeed the permeability of the cube, offered a minimalistic alternative to steel's rigidity and altered the parameters of the perceptual experience to explore other sensory phenomena including touch.

Ultimately, Morris, Baer and Hesse shared an insistence on foregrounding the processes of beholding, mainly by making their viewer aware of the possibilities, both physical and perceptual, established during the encounter with the work of art. Yet, while they can be grouped together based on their common use of a simplified, geometric

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<sup>22</sup> Jo Baer, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum* 9 (September 1970), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Scott Rothkopf, "Accession," *Eva Hesse*, Ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 213-4. As Rothkopf pointed out, the idea that Hesse's *Accession* challenged the minimal object from within first took shape in the early writings on Hesse by Lucy Lippard. Since this time, Hesse's work has been grounded in a feminist discourse, often associated with female genitalia, a notion subsequently taken up by other art historians, such as Anne Wagner and Anna Chave.

<sup>24</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976) 103; and James Meyer, Ed. *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 114. While this narrative of viewers climbing inside the box is recounted by Meyer, he does not attach any significance to this event. From my perspective, however, this incident is telling. The organic and sensuousness of Hesse's box beckoned the viewer in a more immediate way than a rigid, impersonal minimal box.

language and an interest in renegotiating traditional processes of viewership, the specificities of each artist's highly personal approach to their production merits further study. As the art historian David Batchelor has noted, from the mid-1960s onwards:

almost any approximately geometric, vaguely austere, more-or-less monochromatic, and generally abstract-looking work has been or is likely to get labeled Minimal at one time or another. And, conversely, almost anything labeled Minimal will automatically be seen by some as starkly austere, monochromatic, abstract, and so forth, irrespective of its actual appearance.<sup>25</sup>

That is, the particularities of the work of individual artists associated with minimalism have been largely erased in historical scholarship. To counteract such leveling, I want to reattach to the production of Morris, Baer, and Hesse a sense of inimitability in order to show where minimal art, understood differently, could lead.

For Morris, as I have emphasized in Chapter 2, minimalism provided a mechanism for evaluating the relationship between the art object and its viewer and the phenomenological implications of an experience of art. As the artist among the three most firmly established within the mainstream minimal movement, his examination of the power relations invested in the sculptural experience provides a base from which to begin this analysis. Baer, while also concerned with the embodied subject, examined opticality and processes of perception in relation to the viewing experience. Investigating the problems inherent to painting, she used visuality and science as a means to reinvigorate what she perceived as the critical imperatives of modernist art. Lastly, Hesse, working with the same formal language, worked to appropriate and parody the stereotypical masculine rhetoric historically attached to minimalism. Using humor and play to eroticize minimal form, her sculpture allows for the possibilities of sexualized

viewing positions, something not previously prioritized in modernist art. Thus, taken together Morris, Baer, and Hesse all focused on the problems of the art object, the viewing subject, and competing definitions of the function of art, but each investigated these in distinct ways. Set into relief against one another, their work foregrounds the diversity of the minimal project. In turn, some of the primary concerns they were working with regarding issues of phenomenology, politics, and an emergent feminism, can be distinguished and critically situated. And only then does the cool minimal language of simplicity, repetition, and detachment emerge as anything but that.

By the mid-1960s, Robert Morris was considered by many to be the quintessential minimal artist. His *Untitled* (1966), a single, rectangular painted solid, was heralded as the simplest and most reductive minimal work (fig. 45). In part, Michael Fried can be held responsible for putting him in this position<sup>26</sup> as has been noted in Chapter 2. In his well-known article “Art and Objecthood,” which examined the intended phenomenological aspects of Morris’ production, Fried reduced all minimal art to theatricality, the non-art other of autonomous, contained and purely self-referential modern art.<sup>27</sup> Contrasting the ‘presentness’ of pictorial art and the ‘presence’ of minimalism, Fried dismissed minimal sculpture as too dependent on external relations. Conversely, modern art, he argued, does not rely on environmental conditions to make meaning and establishes an aesthetic experience always completely available and contained within the work of art itself. Morris’ ideas regarding the experiential value of

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<sup>25</sup> David Batchelor, *Minimalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Batchelor, 67. Batchelor wrote, “It seems likely that Fried took the already and intentionally theatrical work of Morris to represent the threat to modernist pictoriality, and subsumed all adjacent work under the same heading in his narrative of war and survival.”

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 2 for more in-depth analysis of the significance of Fried’s article in its late 1960s context.

minimal art, such as his claim that the best of the “new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light and the viewer’s field of vision,” provided Fried with a tangible, verifiable enemy.<sup>28</sup> He rejected all minimal art, regardless of its specificity, on theatrical grounds, on the basis that it played to an audience and, for Fried, this dependence on the viewer represented a condition of non-art. Utilizing the term literalist art as a stand-in for minimalism, ‘literal’ in this case being simple or obvious, Fried argued that the: “Literalist sensibility is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work.”<sup>29</sup> Whereas the meaning of modern art is contained within it, minimal art is only meaningful in relation to the external factors surrounding it and in relation to which the beholder is centrally placed. This dependence on the masses, for Fried, was highly problematic and indeed frightening. The Hegelian nature of modernism in the visual arts, to which Fried subscribes, is meant to “provide a principle by which painting can change, transform and renew itself, and by which it is enabled to perpetrate virtually intact, and sometimes even enriched, through each epoch to self-renewal....”<sup>30</sup> For Fried, as a contained discipline, modern art should not be contingent in any way on its audience, as this prohibits its intellectual rigor, a condition that would in turn signal the ultimate demise of modern art.

Works that pushed the limits of theatricality to the extreme ends of the spectrum in terms of scale and viewing experience were not treated differently by Fried, but rather were conflated into the generic model of minimalism he established in relation to

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2” (1966), in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 232.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood (1967),” *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153.

Morris's work. In fact, in "Art and Objecthood" Fried described very little minimal work at all. The implications of this omission become apparent when considering the different viewing experiences offered by Dan Flavin's *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Robert Rosenblum)*, originally produced in 1963 but exhibited under this title in 1964 (fig. 46), and Ronald Bladen's *The X* from 1967 (fig. 47).<sup>31</sup> In Flavin's piece, the objectness of the fluorescent tubing, rather small in scale and mounted on the wall, dematerializes by a play of light and shadow leaving a trace of a sort of ethereal presence. While in Bladen's sculpture, an enormous two-storied 'X,' barely contained within the architecture, dwarfs both the viewer and the gallery, making the work's overwhelming physical presence fundamental to the piece. Though both works are theatrical in a certain kind of way, if we read them in terms of Fried's argument a subtlety vis-à-vis the process of beholding is missing. His overwhelming desire to, "call attention to the utter pervasiveness— the virtual universality— of the sensibility or mode of being which I have characterized as corrupted or perverted by theater" forces him to paint all minimal art, and the experience it engenders, with the same broad brush.<sup>32</sup> This same normalizing strategy is picked up in

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Fried, "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" (1965), *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago, 1998), 213-65.

<sup>31</sup> Flavin's piece was originally produced in 1963 under the title *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Constantin Brancusi)* as a homage of sorts to Brancusi's *Endless Column*, a ninety-eight foot metal-coated, cast iron column originally conceived as a tribute to Romanians killed during World War I. It was installed as part of a sculptural ensemble in Târgu-Jiu, Romania in 1937-8. In 1964, however, Flavin made a second version of the piece in which he changed the name to *the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Robert Rosenblum)*, exhibited that same year at Kaymar Gallery in New York and the "Black, White, and Gray," exhibition at The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. While previously acquainted with the art historian Robert Rosenblum, it was in 1963 that Flavin audited a course he taught at Columbia University and which cemented a close relationship between the two. Rosenblum hypothesized this new dedication might have been Flavin's response to a statement he had made: "Perhaps he was impressed by my youthfully rash remark that his work had destroyed painting for me, a comment he quoted in Bruce Glaser's radio interview of 15 February 1964, with him, Stella and Donald Judd (though he subsequently withdrew his own remarks from the publication of this early document of Minimalism." See Robert Rosenblum, "Name in Lights," *Artforum* 36 (March 1997), 11-2.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (Summer 1967), 23. This position was not so unusual in the late 1960s, as the only minimal theorists really attempting to unpack the differences between distinct artists were the minimal practitioners themselves. See, for example, Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Part 2;" or Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Art News* (September 1966), reprinted in Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 148-64.

the early 1990s by the art historian Anna Chave who, as I will soon discuss, genders Fried's notion of theatricality by linking minimal art with issues of patriarchy and power.

Both the lasting significance of "Art and Objecthood" and of Morris' work of the 1960s, prove Fried chose the right fall guy when he used Morris to define his fears regarding a literal art, a choice made all the more salient when considering the artist's writing of the period. Morris' "Notes on Sculpture," a series of articles published in *Artforum* (between 1966-9), along with Donald Judd's "Specific Objects," a conceptual base for minimal art production in the mid-1960s, established the initial terms in which this new sculpture was discussed. While there was no love lost between these two artists, who often put forth contradictory views of the function and value of minimalism and its consequences for the continued development of modern art, even Judd recognized that: "Morris' pieces are minimal visually, but they're powerful spatially."<sup>33</sup> He affirmed a different sort of three-dimensional force contained within the shape of Morris' sculptures, part of what Rosalind Krauss argued in 1977 was "a new syntax for sculpture," an altogether new set of rules or patterns governing the structural possibilities of sculpture.<sup>34</sup> In relation to Morris' production, the result was a phenomenological repositioning of the audience and a temporal grounding, producing a viewing experience unlike anything offered through previous modernist works. Despite such acknowledgement, however, questions remain regarding Morris' particular vision of minimalism and its confrontational nature, some of which becomes apparent when considering his *Untitled (Slab)*.

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<sup>33</sup> Donald Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* (February 1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 165. Judd's comments are from a review of Morris' 1964 Green Gallery installation. See Chapter 2 for a summary of the antagonism between Judd and Morris.

Produced in 1962, *Untitled (Slab)* is an eight-foot-square shape that appears to hover a few inches off the gallery floor, uncomfortably poised between differing spatial configurations (fig. 48). Lit from above, a shadow cast below the sculpture prohibits it from sitting on the ground in a stable fashion, while its negligible height and only one-foot of depth, denies any sort of monumentality. Exhibited at Green Gallery in a one-man show in 1963, *Untitled (Slab)* figured Morris' conception of "wholeness," a quality he defined as a fundamental aim of minimal sculpture and which he later articulated in his "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1." Wholeness allowed for a work to convey with immediacy the totality of its material existence and to verify its grounding in a particular time and place.

... certain forms do exist that, if they do not negate the numerous relative sensations of color to texture, scale to mass, etc., they do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shape. Such are the simpler forms that create strong gestalt sensations. Their parts are bound together in such a way that they offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation.<sup>35</sup>

For Morris, this "resistance to perceptual separation," which speaks to a certain anxiety regarding the viewing experience, leads to conviction. As he further articulated, "one sees and immediately 'believes' that the pattern within one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object."<sup>36</sup> Or to borrow a phrase from Frank Stella, "what you see is what you see."<sup>37</sup> Thus, minimal sculpture offered independence from compositional relations, or the piece-by piece-construction on which sculpture has historically been

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<sup>34</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture," *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1981, c1977), 243-87.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1," in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 225-6. Originally published in *Artforum* 5 (February 1966), 42-4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.



based. Drawing from theories of gestalt psychology, particularly the idea that human beings perceive wholes rather than pieces, and that the incidence of the whole is greater than (or different from) the sum of its discrete parts, Morris opened sculpture up to distinct perceptual possibilities. He strengthened the intensity of the viewing experience, particularly noticeable in works such as his *Untitled (Battered Cubes)*, by playing with the tension between the expected and actual gestalt of the sculpture, thereby allowing the spectator to 'feel' its presence in a more immediate way. Through such tactics, Morris made the physical process of beholding, albeit specifically conceived and highly structured, an integral part of the work.

Along with the category of wholeness, "scale" was for Morris another primary quality of minimal sculpture and a condition, I am arguing, which was, due to its prioritization of the body of the viewer, at the crux of later critiques of his work. Moreover, his investigation of scale was particularly timely as it allowed him to distinguish his own understanding of minimalism from that put forth by the monumentalist impulse of artists such as Bladen, Robert Grosvenor and Tony Smith. Represented in both the Jewish Museum's "Primary Structures" show in 1966 and the Corcoran Gallery of Art's "Scale as Content" in 1967, the works of these artists as reviewed in the critical press, was typically considered more dramatic and physically overwhelming than that of Morris or his immediate peers. In fact, critics, such as Lucy Lippard and Irving Sandler, wrote articles distinguishing between the two main bodies of

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<sup>37</sup> Frank Stella, "Questions to Stella and Judd," interview by Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy Lippard in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 158.

minimal practices, with Sandler arguing for the superiority of the overly large-scale work.<sup>38</sup>

Significantly, at the opening of his essay "Notes on Sculpture Part 2," Morris cited Tony Smith's answers to questions regarding his work *Die*, a six foot steel cube, as a way to argue for a scale keyed to that of the human body:

Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?

A: I was not making a monument.

Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?

A: I was not making an object.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, Morris located the optimum size range for the new sculpture, as somewhere "between the monument and the ornament."<sup>40</sup> That is, a scale that can establish a viable relationship with the relative size of the human body, avoiding an overwhelming material presence that overtly objectifies the body or, conversely, allows the body to similarly objectify the work. Within this model, human-scaled objects are best suited to engage in a dialogue with the space around them, a situation reinforced by the distance required for the beholder to apprehend the entire piece. Morris wrote, "it is just this distance between object and subject that creates a more extended situation, for physical participation becomes necessary," presumably to fully understand the work.<sup>41</sup> But it is also about the environmental conditions of the three-dimensional space in which the work is situated. The viewer, art object, and physical installation space combine to construct a unique and unstable aesthetic experience with multiple conditions at play.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 163. See Lucy Lippard, "Escalation in Washington" (1968), reprinted in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971); and Irving Sandler, "Gesture and Non-Gesture in Recent Sculpture" (1967), in Battcock's *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, 308-16.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," 229-30.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

Framed in this way, the sculpture appears at once more sensitive to the presence of the spectator and forcefully dynamic. Essentially, by shifting the viewing experience from private to public, or from an internalized viewing experience to requiring an external physical engagement, Morris troubled established parameters of sculptural production and reception. As modernist art critic Rosalind Krauss argued in 1977, "Insofar as sculpture is constantly forming an analogy with the human body, Morris' work addresses itself to the meaning projected by our own bodies, questioning the relationship of that meaning to the idea of psychological privacy."<sup>42</sup> The scale and siting of Morris' work, therefore, figures in what Krauss calls "the externality of meaning," and in so doing, challenges the well-established ideal of autonomous art, an art predicated on a self-contained and transcendent object, and in supportive of which Fried was writing.

Despite the performative nature of the viewing experience as redefined by Morris, the art object remained central to his production of this period, reworked perhaps, but still articulating the terms of the aesthetic experience.<sup>43</sup> He clarified this issue: "That many considerations must be taken into account in order that the work keep its place as a term in the expanded situation hardly indicates a lack of interest in the object itself. But the concerns now are for more control of and/or cooperation of the entire situation."<sup>44</sup> This ability to control the 'entire situation' is exactly what, I am arguing, Morris was looking

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>42</sup> Krauss, 267.

<sup>43</sup> Here, the term performative, which is used in reference to Morris' physically interactive model of viewership, must be distinguished from performativity, which has recently gained currency through the writings of Judith Butler, among others. The radical potential of the performative, the process through which some sort of utterance is acted out, was exploited in the 1960s by such groups as *The Living Theatre* who were subverting traditional theatrical methods for avant-garde aims. A central concern was to explore social environments and to make connections between theatrical production and what happens in the streets. Performativity is a process whereby gender is constructed. Individuals try on and 'wear' socially inscribed notions of gender that are then reproduced and fixed through mimicry and repetition. For Butler, performativity, therefore, can also be a site of liberatory action, in which static notions of gendered identity can potentially be continually reworked. See, for example, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

for, from the production of the object, to the terms of the viewing experience, to the critical discourse at play around the work. In other words, Morris intended to assume full responsibility for how his objects operate. He confronted the audience with a somewhat manipulative corporeal experience in order to make the beholder think critically about how they are positioned and the possibilities and limitations that their position calls forth. Moreover, on another level, Morris' strategy foreclosed manipulation by the critics—the way in which Jackson Pollock had been manipulated by Clement Greenberg for example—a central reason for Morris' own writings on minimal art. Seen in this way, Morris' aim was to wrest more agency not only for the viewer, through a physically engaged experience, but also for the artist. In light of this, he concluded his discussion of the importance of the object with the claim that “The object itself has not become less important. It has merely become less self-important.”<sup>45</sup>

Though in this issue of a reduced self-importance, Anna Chave might disagree. Chave's analysis of minimal art in some ways extended Fried's theoretical model, yet its gendered implications have led many historians to all but dismiss her work.<sup>46</sup> Written in 1990, at the height of feminist art criticism, Chave put forth a radical argument predicated not on an avant-garde reading of minimalism, the norm at the time, but on what she viewed as its reactionary nature or its reaffirmation of the authority and power of

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Dutton, 1968), 234.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Chave's tone, and its implications for a re-reading of minimal art, has led many historians to all but dismiss her analysis of this work. For example, in James Meyer's *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, the only discussion of the implications of Chave's argument are reduced to a footnote (page 300, footnote 118). Here, he takes issue with one small aspect of her analysis regarding Stella's black paintings, particularly her likening them to a pinstripe suit. Meyer concluded his evaluation of Chave with, “This reasoning is hard to follow.” Here, he obviously means her reasoning about the power relations of minimal art in general, not the connection between Stella's stripes and socially elite fabric. See also Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 193. In his only reference to Chave's argument in his book, Potts notes that when it was published in 1990, her article “struck a strong cord in the psychoanalytic and viewer-response oriented art

corporate capitalism. Taking up, among other claims, Morris' imperative to control "the entire situation," she critiqued minimal art as manipulative and oppressive, building in her essay "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," on the dangers of theatricality which Fried established.<sup>47</sup> But for Chave, the implications of this theatricality extend well beyond the art world or the continued autonomy of art. Deconstructing the strategies minimal art exploited to connect with its viewer—sleek, metallic surfaces, simplistic and repetitive forms, an overly large scale—Chave reads these as signs of aggressive or violent behavior. She argued that minimal art controls its audience through a "kind of cultural terrorism, forcing viewer's into the role of victim, a role that may or may not bring with it a moment of revelation depending on the victim's prior experience with victimization."<sup>48</sup> In relation to the scale and placement of some of Morris' sculptures, Chave has an interesting point— they are big and macho, their presence exerting on the viewer a sort of authoritative, physical force. Yet, what Chave's analysis leaves out is a consideration of what Morris was trying to achieve, in others words a critically engaged, situated viewer made more aware of their grounding in a specific time and place. By thinking through the implications of this, it is possible to explore the viewing positions set up through his production, and his reworking of the conventional modes of viewership attached to modern art, while still taking into consideration his desire to control.

Chave lodged heavy charges, both literally and metaphorically, against what appears at first glance (and especially from a distance) a bland, inoffensive geometric form. By linking technology and industry with both the materiality and manufacture of

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world of the time." Here, he reduces Chave's article to a product of its time with little lasting influence on interpretations of minimal art.

<sup>47</sup> Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990), 44-63.

<sup>48</sup> Chave, 49. Here, Chave was specifically speaking about Frank Stella's black paintings. But she offered these as a stand-in for minimal art in general.

minimal art, she aligned minimalism with corporate capitalism and the military-industrial complex, an inflammatory association when considered within its socio-political context of production. During the Vietnam War, the view of many New Left organizations was that big business, such as Brown and Root or Dow Chemical, was in collusion with the Pentagon, ensuring profits by pushing for the continuation of the war.<sup>49</sup> As one of the first art historians to be so blatant about this political context, reminding her reader not just of Vietnam but also the Watts riots and the assassination of Malcolm X, Chave likened the inherent social and political violence of the day with the aggressive confrontations that minimal art established; namely, the altercations set up against both traditional pictorial conventions and art audiences.<sup>50</sup> For Chave, real, physical bodies are stage-managed by minimal art's theatricality, a condition eerily similar in the late sixties to the governmental control exerted on the individual through practices like the draft. Thus, the power inscribed in the form and scale of minimalism rests, for Chave, on its familiarity. She reasoned, "what disturbs viewers most about Minimalist art may be what disturbs them about their own lives and time, as the face it projects is the society's blankest, steeliest face; the impersonal face of technology, industry, and commerce; the unyielding face of the father: a face that is usually far more attractively masked."<sup>51</sup> In other words, minimal art, rather than being subversive or keeping with an avant-garde imperative to bother the status quo, actually reinforces patriarchal power relations. Its alliance with corporate capitalism by inference, for Chave, attaches to minimalism the same depersonalized and ruthless qualities associated with authoritative structures.

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<sup>49</sup> Dow Chemical, for example, as the manufacturer of napalm was frequently a target of antiwar protest and critique. In October 1967, protest against Dow on the University of Wisconsin's Madison campus led to a full-scale riot between protesters and police. This was just one of numerous actions against Dow across the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

<sup>50</sup> Chave, 53-4.

While Chave's arguments vis-à-vis male power have been dismissed by many art historians, something rings true in her argument.<sup>52</sup> One needs only to envision what it would be like for a viewer to enter Robert Morris' 1964 show at Green Gallery to recognize the power relations at play (fig. 49). His *Untitled (Cloud)*, for example, hangs precariously suspended from the ceiling (fig. 50), while other sculptures jut out from all directions constricting the ambulatory space around each separate work. Walking through the show, one would continually be forced to move close to, under, or around the different pieces, thus feeling the spatial limitations established through the installation as a whole. But there is an inherent irony to this reading that plays with boundaries between power and empowerment that seems lost in Chave's analysis. Here, the viewing experience initiated through Morris' particular brand of minimal sculpture needs to be reconsidered, especially the difference between intentionality and agency, and the implications this has for the audience of art.

Intentionality, in relation to aesthetic production, implies that the art object is a record of the artist's ideals or visions, a rather unmediated conduit through which the beholder can understand the author's aims. Conversely, the concept of agency places more emphasis on the viewing subject who is allowed greater freedom to assume, at least in part, the role of creator, using the materials and relationships presented to ultimately construct the meaning of the work. As Paul Smith in *Discerning the Subject* explains:

a person is not simply determined and dominated by the ideological pressures of any overarching discourse or ideology but is also the agent of a certain *discernment*. A person is not simply the *actor* who follows ideological

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<sup>51</sup> Chave, 55.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 46.

scripts, but is also an *agent* who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them— or not.<sup>53</sup>

Aligning the notion of agent with that of Morris' beholder, the spatial experiences prompted by the artist can be read as working to free the individual from a stable and exclusively optical viewing experience. As I have pointed out in Chapter 2, Morris was interested in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty which grounded the embodied subject in the concrete and locatable position of the here and now. In this way, the physical body of the viewer—and not just the eye or the intellect— becomes the means through which to “look” at and comprehend the work of art.<sup>54</sup> By comparing the viewing experience of *Untitled (Cloud)* to a Jackson Pollock painting, where the *artist* is the actor performing for a viewer who can only witness the trace of spectacle that the artist provides, the uniqueness of Morris' work becomes apparent. It was meant, to some degree, to change the terms of high art, and to turn the viewer into an actor, a strategy that both empowers the beholder's body and keeps that body from being reduced to a sign of corporate power. But at the same time, and as Chave has pointed out, Morris' orchestration of the viewing experience has strings attached, as the experience of the spectator is still framed by the structure of the installation and with the viewer's ambulatory movement controlled by the physical placement of each work. Thus, the agency Morris gives to his viewer is limited through the siting of the work in a museum or gallery, a situation addressed only a few years later by many conceptual artists.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxxiv-xxxv.

<sup>54</sup> This reading counters Chave's view of both Morris' writing and his sculptural production. She argued, “To judge by Morris' writings, his success at realizing such authoritative and oppressive images owed more to his infatuation with power than to his interest in finding strategies to counter the abuses of power rife and visible at the time.” She continued, “The relation between art and spectator that interested Morris became clearer over the course of the 1960s and early '70s as he made manifest an attitude toward the (embodied) viewer that was ambivalent at best, belligerent and malevolent at worst.” See Chave, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Realizing the problematic ideological affiliations set up through the display of art objects within a museum, many conceptual artists began in the late 1960s to take their work outside of this institutional



This in fact is the ironic paradox of minimalism and made apparent in Morris' case: minimalism was taken up as 'the style' of corporate capitalism despite the critique it originally contained. Donald Judd spoke to this issue in 1970 when he wrote, "I suspect one reason for the popularity of American art is that the museums and collectors didn't understand it enough to realize that it was against much in the society."<sup>56</sup> Judd's words take on even more purchase, I am arguing, when directly applied to the unstable reception of minimal art. In a sense, this explains the dilemma evident in the discourse surrounding the production of minimal art. Indeed, Judd's idea that "museums and collectors" misunderstood this work can, by inference, be applied to critics as well. What is important to consider is the oppositional nature of minimalism to which Judd's statement alludes. The case of Morris and the particular 1960s audience he addressed, permits a re-reading of minimalism as a kind of social practice that until now has largely been ignored in favor of philosophical and formalist emphases. Rosalind Krauss spoke to this issue in general terms in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* written in 1977, one of the first texts to analyze and redefine sculpture within a modern paradigm. Considering the minimalists, she wrote:

Contemporary sculpture is indeed obsessed with this idea of passage... And with these images of passage, the transformation of sculpture—from a static, idealized medium to a temporal and material one—that had begun with Rodin is fully achieved. In every case the image of passage serves to place both viewer and artist before the work, and the world, in an attitude of primary humility in order to encounter the deep reciprocity between himself and it.<sup>57</sup>

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framework, such as the earth art of Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer. Conversely, other conceptual artists attempted to highlight social and political affiliations within the gallery context, such as in the work of Hans Haacke.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Judd, "The Artist and Politics: A Symposium," *Artforum*, 38.

<sup>57</sup> Krauss, 282-3.

By fundamentally hinging the viewer to a corporeal exploration of the work, Morris addressed this desire for passage from a staid notion of sculpture, celebrated by critics like Michael Fried, to a more dynamic model in which the beholder's body is centrally placed. In a sense, he was trying to revive sculpture as a political experience by forging relations between the art audience and the world outside of the museum or gallery. So while Chave's critique of how the body is managed through Morris' production might in some instances be valid, it is also important to remember what else Morris might have been trying to achieve. His viewer was given the opportunity to physically feel, among other things, the pressures of the surrounding world, and to develop a sense of individual agency when confronted with the work of art. Seen in this light, Morris' sculpture intersects and reverberates with Marcuse's adage to explore both the aesthetic and embodiment as sites of possibilities by redefining the experience of sculpture as a politicized realm.

But as hindsight proves, particularly through contemporary re-evaluations of Morris' sculpture, this new definition is difficult to fix. And, in fact, a similar problem regarding political viability plagues the reception of Jo Baer's paintings of the late 1960s. Though working within a strictly pictorial medium, Baer, like Morris, shifted the traditional terms of the object/viewer relationship, which in modernist painting had depended on a stationary and centrally-placed observer. Instead, Baer encouraged a more physically active and perceptually acute method of viewing unhampered by painting's flatness or the limitations of the edge. However, the far-reaching implications of this move, which grounds Baer's abstraction within the here and now, have been largely

anaesthetized in current historical interpretations, a condition reinforced in a review of a recent retrospective of Baer's paintings at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York.

Written for *Artforum* by Sarah Rich, the review was intended to critically reposition Baer's work within a modernist canon, concluding:

It's been several years since Baer's early work received such careful attention in the United States. Indeed, given the dearth of scholarship on Baer, her work has been in danger of becoming as marginal as her signature motifs. The skillfully installed show at Dia, however, should help place Baer's work (and keep it) front and center.<sup>58</sup>

I am arguing, however, that Baer's work should not be placed "front and center" by art historical discourse, as such a straight-on viewing position, such as that established by modernist painting, was something Baer consciously tried to subvert. By hanging her canvases close to the ground and literally painting on the edge of the frame, Baer encouraged her audience to perambulate, to see her paintings from a multitude of positions, above or oblique angles, as well as from straight on. Through such maneuvering, Baer aggravated what were, at the time, well-established formalist paradigms that insisted on the strict separation of media and the rigorous interrogation of disciplinary boundaries.<sup>59</sup> Within this model, established and maintained through a Greenbergian rhetoric, painting was perceived as a flat, two-dimensional surface distinct from any other branch of the visual arts.

Yet, by constructing an alternative-viewing situation more akin to sculpture, Baer troubled such clearly defined differences between media. Offering her audience a

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<sup>58</sup> Sarah K. Rich, "Jo Baer: Dia Center for the Arts, New York," *Artforum* 41 (February 2003), 133. Review of *Jo Baer, The Minimalist Years, 1960–1975*, Dia Center for the Arts, September 12, 2002–June 15, 2003.

<sup>59</sup> See Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon" (1940), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23–38; on the differentiation of the arts and Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Clement Greenberg: The*

perceptual experience still visually based, but spatially and temporally unhinged from the stable 'opticality' of formalist conventions, her work can be understood as referencing back to an earlier model of modernist painting, particularly to cubism. In the 1960s, new scholarship emerged which reconsidered the terms of the viewing experience offered by cubist painting in light of changing conceptions regarding the nature of reality and the complicated psychological and physiological processes of visual perception itself.<sup>60</sup> For example, writing in 1966, Edward Fry argued for a reading of the work of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in light of the theories of Henri Bergson and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl.<sup>61</sup> At stake, for the cubists in their alliance with science and technology were pictorial strategies for investigating and describing the essence of objects and the experiential aspects of time and space. Based on her own theoretical positioning, Baer was seemingly aligning herself with a similar sort of project. As with the cubists before her, she wanted to blow up the frozen aspects of the canvas, to free modern painting from static illusionism, once again using science as the means to reinvigorate painting from a contemporary malaise. Thus, while I agree with Rich that it is crucial to re-examine the marginalization of Baer's work from mainstream modernism, the point is not just to reconcile her paintings within a formalist tradition. Rather, the uniqueness of Baer's production is what should remain "front and center" in order that a re-envisioning of the modernist project in the 1960s as a competitive and contentious discursive field might be achieved.

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*Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 85-93.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966); John Golding, *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907-14* (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1959).

<sup>61</sup> Fry, 38-9. Fry actually described a shift in the work of Picasso and Braque in 1913-4 from a reliance on the theories of Henri Bergson, which stressed the temporal aspects of experience, to an interest in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, which attempted to explain experience as independent of psychological understanding.

Further, the sort of intervention needed to open up Baer's production is alluded to, however unintentionally, in another passage from Rich's text, specifically concerning the wraparound paintings such as *Untitled (Wraparound Triptych – Blue, Green, Lavender)* previously discussed (recall fig. 42). Considering the pictorial qualities elicited by painting from front to side, Rich claimed, "It was in this context that Baer's work confronted the instability of the frame. Her black bars (even as they helped to "picture" the whiteness of the canvas) called attention to the frame's dual function as a pure cut between work and world..."<sup>62</sup> This cut, between the space of the painting and an external and distanced social and political world, is nevertheless problematic. It relies on a formalist modernist model that considers the frame a hard and fast boundary impervious to non-aesthetic concerns. This formal appreciation of Baer's work is not entirely unexpected as the artist herself was heavily invested in the theoretical advancement of modernist painting, taking on both Donald Judd and Robert Morris in its defense, Rich, however, omitted any reference to other potential readings of Baer's production. Without this, the implications of the processes of vision that Baer established, her unique brand of modernism, and its relation to larger social anxieties, cannot be completely understood. Thus, the friction Rich witnessed in Baer's work between surface (the contained realm of painting) and edge (the surrounding social world) metaphorically suggests a much larger conflict, which pits a transcendent vision of art against one that is more socially imbued. By foregrounding this clash, Baer's pictorial innovations offered an alternative modernist vision steeped in social responsibility and intellectual engagement, albeit one that has been effaced through contemporary discourse by formalist narratives.

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<sup>62</sup> Rich, 133.

The quandary of Baer's reception and the ways it has been shaped (or misshaped) by her critics, is more than just a current problem. Even in the late 1960s, her work was difficult to classify according to conventional paradigms, leaving Baer between a rock and a hard place. On one hand, by relaxing the divide between painting and sculpture, she fit uneasily within a tradition of Greenbergian modernism, her marginalia undermining its imperative towards flatness. On the other, Baer's allegiance to the problems intrinsic to painting itself segregated her work from that of minimal sculptors and put her on the defensive to rescue painting from the implications of their attack. In short, Baer could not be embraced by either the modernists or the minimalists, though her work responded to many of the imperatives set up by each group. Further, beginning in the late 1960s, Baer became increasingly disillusioned with both modernism and minimalism, claiming in an article in 1983 that "modern avant-garde art died in the seventh decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." She explained that the aesthetic optimism possible for a moment in the 1960s, and which was aligned with the "radical ambitions of minimalist sculpture" was by the end of the decade bankrupt, devoid of any critical potential.<sup>63</sup> She explained, albeit 20 years after this crucial period:

To put 64 bricks in a line on the floor or arrange four light tubes into a square is to attack significance and the world it inhabits. The shock effect of such reduced meaning, however, has a handsome pedigree. The prototype comes from Russian Futurist poets and continues, *ad nauseum*, through the French, so that by 1960, say, 64 sounds in a line was cliché. The difference is one of violence: 64 bricks in a line is brutal, as brutal as the time bespoken. What appalls in the '60s was the pervasive feel of normality. The '60s attempt at 'business as usual' subsumed conflicts and contradictions, which deserved 64 bricks through a window, which in part it got. When, toward the end of the decade the Minimalist sculptors became coopted, their

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<sup>63</sup> Jo Baer, "I am no longer an abstract artist," *Art in America* 71 (October 1983), 136.

‘reduced’ works chic and fancy bought for enormous sums, the tactics of confrontational avant-gardism were over. From this point on, to act as though innocent showdowns could be staged against the ideological weight of the market was tantamount to the belief that a fish can ride a bicycle.<sup>64</sup>

While it may have spoken to people in the mid-1960s, minimalism, through a process of institutionalization, was reduced by the end of the decade to a set of organizing principles and systemic rules. In a charge reminiscent of Chave’s critique of minimalism, Baer argued that its style was co-opted by capitalist culture implying that the intellectual debates and experiences that contributed to its meaning were largely forgotten. Therefore, thinking through the difficulties of Baer’s position in the 1960s, the ways in which the reception of her work was squeezed between a Greenbergian modernism and a somewhat chauvinistic and authoritative minimalism, the promise of minimal art and what it offered the modernist project can be more fully evaluated. Specifically in the case of Baer, this positioning helps to make sense of the rigorous course of psychological and perceptual exploration that her work instigated. At stake was the re-invigoration of modernism, the objective a politics of vision meant to challenge and provoke the viewer through a highly articulated and theorized aesthetic practice.

One of the primary venues for debates over the future course of modern art was in the realm of art criticism. As both a theorist of minimal art and a painter, Baer was well positioned to respond to the appraisals of painting put forth by Donald Judd and Robert Morris whose constructed narratives for minimal sculpture were predicated on painting’s

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 137. In another part of the article, which was written in part to explain her return to figurative painting, Baer notes: “Twenty years on, to a new generation lacking the relevant media propaganda, these carefully engineered works have reverted to hollow boxes, playground equipment, end tables, lighting schemes and peculiar dance floors, while questions of set theory, prime number or serial proportions are replaced by wonder at their presence in museums.”

demise.<sup>65</sup> For example, in his essay “Specific Objects” (1965) Judd points to the spatial and material limits of painting as one of its core problems. He claimed:

The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall. A rectangle is a shape itself, it is obviously the whole shape, it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside it... a form can be used only in so many ways. The rectangular plane is given a life span. The simplicity required to emphasize the rectangle limits the arrangement possible within it.<sup>66</sup>

From Judd’s perspective painting was exhausted, its radical potential played out over the course of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leaving it invalid for further aesthetic exploration. Determined and limited by the rectangularity of its frame, painting could not compete with the three-dimensional possibilities of sculpture, particularly as sculpture was not bound by a fixed shape or necessarily constructed to hang on a wall. Baer answered Judd and what she argued was “a specious objective to assign to painting of the mid-sixties” in an editorial in *Artforum* in September of 1967. Publishing in the primary forum for major aesthetic debates, Baer significantly was writing from a position of authority. She began by reminding her reader that throughout the history of modernism it was painting, not sculpture, which had demonstrated the most radical ideas in the visual arts. She affirmed, “painting is best suited for this pursuit, and the best painters are still about it,” to make clear her intention to further explore pictorial and optical sensibilities.<sup>67</sup> For Baer, modern painting has been, and would continue to be, on the

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<sup>65</sup> See Donald Judd, “Specific Objects” (1965), *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 181-9; and Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part 3: Notes and Nonsequiturs,” *Artforum* 5 (Summer 1967), 24-9.

<sup>66</sup> Judd, 182.

<sup>67</sup> Jo Baer, “Letters [Bob Morris writes (...)],” *Artforum* VI (September 1967), 6.



cutting edge of artistic innovation, a condition that “an academic, sculptural sensibility,” or minimal art, “is not able to anticipate.”<sup>68</sup>

The other major indictment that Baer takes issue with is the problem of illusionism as addressed by both Judd and Morris as the ultimate failure of painting, rendering it what Morris described as “an antique mode.”<sup>69</sup> Always comprised of marks on a two-dimensional surface, painting is caught, according to Morris, between its literalness (the thing) and an inherent illusionism: “For a long while the duality of thing and allusion sustained itself under the force of profuse organizational innovations within the work itself. But it has worn thin and its premises cease to convince.”<sup>70</sup> To prove its threadbare stature, Morris relied on a definition of painting indebted, at least in part, to the formalist criteria of Greenberg and his essentialization of modern art. Consistent with Greenberg’s strict separation of media, painting, as a two-dimensional surface, should be primarily concerned with flatness as this is the fundamental condition exclusive to painting itself.<sup>71</sup> By focusing on this particular area of Greenberg’s criticism, Morris used the a priori tension between the flatness of the support and the illusionism implied by marking the canvas to blanketly dismiss painting as a retrograde form of art. Making no distinction between the different kinds of illusionism discussed by Greenberg such as representational illusion that implies a three-dimensional referent and optical illusion, a pictorial convention more akin to optical effects initiated by modernist painting, Morris

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Morris, “Notes on Sculpture Part 3,” 25.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>71</sup> Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 86-7.

obscured the subtlety of Greenberg's argument.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately, he questioned the continued viability of modern painting as an avant-garde form of art.

Baer responded to this attack on painting in a letter to Robert Morris in July of 1967, which was not published until 1999. Here, she explains how her own work, particularly her series of large white or gray rectangles framed by black and colored lines, combat this issue of illusionism and challenges Morris' prognosis regarding the future of modern painting. Baer argued:

A painting is an object which has an emphatic frontal surface. On such a surface, I paint a black band which does not recede, a colour band which does not obtrude, a white square or rectangle which does not move back and forth, to and fro, or up and down; there is also a painted, white, exterior frame band which is edged around the edge to the black. Every part is painted and contiguous to its neighbour; no part is above or below any other part. There is no hierarchy. There is no ambiguity. There is no illusion. There is no space or interval (time).<sup>73</sup>

Of central importance to Baer was the creation of a compositional arrangement in which the black and colored bands surrounding the margins of her paintings are equally as prominent as the unobstructed areas of white or gray.<sup>74</sup> By carefully constructing and balancing a set of formal relations, based in shape, color, and line, Baer both acknowledged and neutralized the representational illusionism which Greenberg found so problematic and which Morris saw as foreshadowing painting's demise.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 90. Greenberg writes: "The first mark made on a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness, and the result of the marks made on it by an artist like Mondrian is still a kind of illusion that suggests a kind of third dimension. Only now it is a strictly pictorial, strictly optical third dimension. The Old Masters created an illusion of space in depth that one could imagine oneself walking into, but the analogous illusion created by the Modernist painter can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, with the eye."

<sup>73</sup> Jo Baer, personal letter to Robert Morris, July 29, 1967. The letter was written in response to Morris' critique of painting in "Notes on Sculpture Part 3." Excerpts are reprinted in *Jo Baer: Paintings 1960-1998*, (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1999), 40.

<sup>74</sup> Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 39-40.

Additionally, in her more public response to Morris, articulated in an *Artforum* editorial in September of that same year, Baer challenged sculpture's imperviousness to charges of illusionism by reworking the distinction Morris sets up between literalness (painting) and allusion (picture), and then turning it back on minimalism itself. She countered Morris' claim that a painting is always a picture of something, or a representational illusion, by pointing out that all art, even sculpture, references external phenomena. Thus, illusionism is a circumstance not so easily escaped. As Baer explained:

Some recent paintings exist which are not pictures. To despecify, and in regard to ubiquitous allusion: all art always alludes to something else. Here are some allusions which "advanced sculptors" may be said to illustrate: a molecular code in the brain which enjoys esthetic principles of symmetry, unity, good gestalt; geometry, a fabricated schema which surveys and measures solids, surfaces, lines and angles, space and figures in space; logic, a catalog of canons and criteria of validity; other art forms: painting, the theatre; other objects: boxes, tables, benches, statues; and the psychological projections of the artists themselves; objects as "surrogate." If not all sculptures are statues, and not all cubical specific-objects boxes, then not all paintings are pictures.<sup>75</sup>

In her theoretical writings and in her paintings, Baer acknowledged pictorial illusionism as a major aesthetic issue. In short, it was painting's inheritance that her own work attempted to overtly address. But, she contended, this did not negate illusionistic tendencies in other mediums, which specifically in the case of sculpture triggers associations to organizing principles, geometric patterns, household objects, and even the psychological makeup of the artists themselves. Thus, Baer both acknowledged illusionism as an inescapable condition of painting and lodged it as an accusation against

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<sup>75</sup> Baer, 5.

minimal sculpture. As illusionism exists in all pictorial mediums, the crux of the matter for Baer was “to face illusion boldly” as this in itself is “an ideological act.”<sup>76</sup> Convinced that illusion “exists in reality as much as in art,” Baer argued there was no escape from its tendencies, despite the minimal fantasy. By meeting it head on, it was possible to compel a critical audience to similarly face and question the somewhat symbiotic nature of illusion and reality. For Baer, the art object served as catalyst for such analytical and aesthetic engagement, “art is a powerful effector of choice and action,” the possibilities of which the spectator could transfer to his or her own life.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, for Baer working in the 1960s, painting was about a politics of vision, and as such distinct from the quick fix offered by the three-dimensionality of minimal sculpture. The viewing experience she established, prioritizing the mechanics of perception and its effect on painting, encouraged an ambulatory viewership, which required the spectator to move around the painting to understand the entire work. While alluding to the temporal experience of Morris’s embodied subject, Baer’s method was more engaged in issues of opticality and visuality. That is, she focused exclusively on the problems and issues inherent in modern painting (i.e. flatness, illusionism) through such strategies as marking on the edges of the canvas, adding two inches of depth to the stretcher or hanging her work very close to the floor. Using her background in psychology as a way to explore processes of vision, Baer pushed the staid parameters of a formalist rhetoric to ensure her paintings did not fade in to the background. Through

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<sup>76</sup> Jo Baer, “I am no longer an abstract artist,” 16. Baer continues: “When in 1966 Judd attacked illusionism in painting he neglected to explore or even question its presence in sculpture— their aim was an ‘objectivity’ to be derived from the ‘making of non-illusionary specific objects’ (via numerical concept and a mundane restraint against philosophy’s ‘secondary properties’ – i.e., they used prefabrication, metals, geometric forms, bricks, mirrors, lamps, car paints, uniform colours, etc.). Sculpture’s basic, scandalous fiction went unregarded. All sculptures pretend to contain the real.”

<sup>77</sup> Jo Baer, “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” 35.

minimal sculpture. As illusionism exists in all pictorial mediums, the crux of the matter for Baer was “to face illusion boldly” as this in itself is “an ideological act.”<sup>76</sup> Convinced that illusion “exists in reality as much as in art,” Baer argued there was no escape from its tendencies, despite the minimal fantasy. By meeting it head on, it was possible to compel a critical audience to similarly face and question the somewhat symbiotic nature of illusion and reality. For Baer, the art object served as catalyst for such analytical and aesthetic engagement, “art is a powerful effector of choice and action,” the possibilities of which the spectator could transfer to his or her own life.<sup>77</sup>

Consequently, for Baer working in the 1960s, painting was about a politics of vision, and as such distinct from the quick fix offered by the three-dimensionality of minimal sculpture. The viewing experience she established, prioritizing the mechanics of perception and its effect on painting, encouraged an ambulatory viewership, which required the spectator to move around the painting to understand the entire work. While alluding to the temporal experience of Morris’s embodied subject, Baer’s method was more engaged in issues of opticality and visuality. That is, she focused exclusively on the problems and issues inherent in modern painting (i.e. flatness, illusionism) through such strategies as marking on the edges of the canvas, adding two inches of depth to the stretcher or hanging her work very close to the floor. Using her background in psychology as a way to explore processes of vision, Baer pushed the staid parameters of a formalist rhetoric to ensure her paintings did not fade in to the background. Through

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<sup>76</sup> Jo Baer, “I am no longer an abstract artist,” 16. Baer continues: “When in 1966 Judd attacked illusionism in painting he neglected to explore or even question its presence in sculpture— their aim was an ‘objectivity’ to be derived from the ‘making of non-illusionary specific objects’ (via numerical concept and a mundane restraint against philosophy’s ‘secondary properties’ – i.e., they used prefabrication, metals, geometric forms, bricks, mirrors, lamps, car paints, uniform colours, etc.). Sculpture’s basic, scandalous fiction went unregarded. All sculptures pretend to contain the real.”

<sup>77</sup> Jo Baer, “The Artist and Politics: A Symposium,” 35.

placement, lighting, and painterly technique, she destabilized conventional modes of perception, again Rich's "front and center" viewing position, in order to prove to painting's detractors that it was far from dead.

Consider this, for example, in relation to *Untitled (White Square Lavender)* from 1964-74 (recall fig. 20), in which a continuous black band placed at the outermost edges of the picture plane frames a large white square. While a second band of color, a thin line of lavender, is set between border and field. Baer explained the relation between this compositional arrangement and the perceptual theories of the Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach in "Art & Vision: Mach Bands," an article published in the experimental journal *Aspen Magazine* in 1970.<sup>78</sup> Her self-stated objective in this essay was to interrogate "the color lights of science and painting," in order to ponder how optical theories and perceptual models could be used in painting to foreground the ways in which vision works in relation to established modernist aims (like the imperative towards flatness). Specifically, Baer was interested in Mach's 1865 discovery of Mach Bands, a physiological neural phenomenon based in the subjective tendency to see bright or dark bands at the edges between sharply contrasting areas of luminance.<sup>79</sup> Believing knowledge to be the organization of sensory experience, Mach was interested in how perception was influenced by environmental conditions which often fundamentally altered the terms of an optical experience, changing material reality in to what we think

<sup>78</sup> Jo Baer, "Art & Vision: Mach Bands," *Aspen*, Section 9, No. 8, 1970, n.p. Conceived by Phyllis Johnson, *Aspen Magazine* was an experimental multimedia journal of the arts published between 1965 to 1971. In its original form, it was delivered to subscribers in a box that contained a variety of media, from printed material to photographs, phonograph recordings and even Super-8 film. Baer's article appeared in issue number 8 known as the Fluxus issue, designed by George Maciunas and edited by Dan Graham.

<sup>79</sup> Ernst Mach, an Austrian physicist, philosopher, and psychologist, established important principles of optics in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century based on the belief that all knowledge is a conceptual organization of sensorial and observed data. The implications of this on vision, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of Mach Bands, were taken up in the 1960s by Floyd Ratliff in *Mach Bands: Quantitative Studies on Neural Networks in the Retina* (San Francisco: Holden-Day, 1965), which Baer used in formulating her own theories on perception.

we see. Relating this back to *Untitled (White Square Lavender)*, the lavender band, squeezed between the high contrast of white and black, gains in brightness, through what Baer explained and manipulated in her painting as two distinct edge effects. At the white-to-color edge, the white rectangle seems to swell past its boundary through the process of retinal glare and scattering that adds an extra degree of illumination to the color band. At the black-to-color edge, the lavender band is pushed to an even higher degree of luminosity through Mach bands.<sup>80</sup> The end result: the retinal reflex triggered by the contrasting intensities of light and dark prevents the black band from overpowering the lighter hue. No one element of the composition is allowed to dominate as all parts bind together, a condition through which the flatness of the painting, again a formalist necessity, is reinforced.

But Baer's interest in the physiological effects of Mach Bands goes further. She clarified the perceptual implications of such optical phenomena:

Most sensation is at the edge of things. Visual systems schematize; they look to physical boundaries, edges and contours to select from the immense detail in the retinal-image data which are most significant to the organism. What the receptors of the retina see is not what the organism sees. Changes and transitions from one intensity of light to another or, less importantly, from one colour to another are more important for seeing than the absolute light intensities and colours themselves so that boundaries, edges and contours – the change points – are physiologically preferred. The price of this change or edge preference is a loss of absolute visual accuracy while the gain is towards salient information. What is fundamental for organisms is essential for art.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, for Baer, art is not just about abstract theory, but about everyday experiences; to reiterate, "what is fundamental for organisms is essential for art." As

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<sup>80</sup> Jo Baer, "Art & Vision: Mach Bands," Part I.

vision functions according to biological and sensorial processes, these processes should, according to Baer, be taken into consideration when conceptualizing pictorial opticality. External phenomenon always influences the viewing experience, in this case through the effects of reflected light. Thus, by applying science to painting, Baer continued an exploration of the pictorial attributes— color, shape, plane, form, materials and space— which had been codified by Greenberg and the formalists in the 1940s. Focusing on color, both in terms of its luminosity and the ways in which it is affected by boundaries and gradients, Baer plotted a significant step in reinvesting modern art with a critical imperative. Science, particularly the optical theories of Mach, became the means through which to both further her aesthetic aims and to ‘prove’ the theoretical value of her project. Additionally, her use of Mach, whose name is associated with the Mach number, or the ratio of the speed of an object to the speed of sound, added a certain raciness to her project. Qualities of acceleration and action could by inference be attached to Baer’s brand of modern painting as from 1947, when Charles “Chuck” Yeager initially broke the sound barrier, through 1967, when the world’s airplane speed record of Mach 6.72 was achieved. In short, the term Mach was particularly recognized as radical, or the most technologically advanced.<sup>82</sup>

Again, this aligned Baer’s work with that of the cubist painters who were contemporaneously linked through art historical discourse to the French philosopher Henri Bergson’s understanding of reality as temporally grounded and spatially

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> On October 3, 1967, William J. “Pete” Knight flew a United States Air Force X-15 at 4,535 miles per hour, or at Mach 6.72, over Edwards Air Force Base at an altitude of 354,000 feet. The only aircraft that has been recorded as flying faster or higher is the U.S. Space Shuttle.



contingent.<sup>83</sup> Explicating the importance of Bergson to the cubist painters, Fry summarized:

In such works as his *Introduction à la Métaphysique* of 1903 or *L'Evolution Créatrice* of 1907 Bergson stressed the role of duration in experience: with the passage of time an observer accumulates in his memory a store of perceptual information about a given object in the external visible world, and this accumulated experience becomes the basis for the observer's conceptual knowledge of that object.<sup>84</sup>

In other words, perception functions as a palimpsest of sorts. Any understanding of reality can only be gained through an experienced duration or what amounts to the temporal and spatial layering of information within the observer's mind. The cubist reliance on Bergson's theories as a rationale and organizational system for the fractured nature of their paintings is, therefore, aligned with Baer's use of Mach. Both can be seen as strategies intended to re-invigorate modern painting through a connection with the most up-to-date and exciting scientific theories. Moreover, specifically in the case of Baer, it allowed her to further the advancement of modern painting while still relying on a tried and true aesthetic strategy, one codified and supported by Greenberg. After all, in his own narrative regarding the development of modernism, a trajectory beginning with Edouard Manet in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and culminating one hundred years later in the work of Jackson Pollock, cubism was centrally placed.

Further, by highlighting how vision operates, and how optical data is received and understood by the individual subject, Baer's painterly techniques foreground the relationship between illusion and reality, a point of contention in the debate with Morris and Judd. She jars her viewer with a disjuncture between what is perceived and what

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<sup>83</sup> Fry, 38-40.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 38.

exists as tangible, materiality. For Baer, perceptual distortion reveals how vision is influenced by context, a condition which could also highlight for the viewer that reality (despite Stella's claims) is not necessarily what you see. As an ultimate retort of sorts to painting's critics, Baer concluded in her study of Mach Bands:

Advanced art is radical, and radical in its most literal meaning describes a *root, base, foundation*. Advanced art is thus an art which works for and effects change, within the general *Modernist* dialectic, towards a more basic and particular substance of art. At present, a radical redefinition of current painting is pertinent and possible.<sup>85</sup>

Here, Baer leaves no doubt that formalist painting is at the forefront of aesthetic developments, its radical nature dialectically propelling the discipline towards a more refined and self-critical "substance of art." Moreover, the idea that art can effect change ties back to Baer's interest in processes of viewership and the ways in which the spectator is made aware through the very act of looking of their own subjective position.

But how does Baer's investigations of a modernist imperative, one that "works for and effects change," square in the 1960s with formalist critics such as Greenberg and Fried? As both critics were at this time searching for artists who they felt continued a modernist tradition, their relation to Baer seems an important issue to address.

Interestingly, despite her allegiance to a modernist project and her inquiry into the formal attributes of painting such as flatness and the problem of illusionism, Baer was not picked up by either of these critics which of course begs the question of why.<sup>86</sup> On the surface,

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<sup>85</sup> Jo Baer, "Art & Vision: Mach Bands," Part III.

<sup>86</sup> As Baer recently explained in an interview with the critic Judith Stein, Greenberg embraced her for a very short period after her letter appeared in *Artforum* defending the radicality of modernist painting. But her relationship with Greenberg was short-lived as he was more interested in work that explored color relations. As Baer explained: "Clem said, 'Jo, you know this is all very well,' by which he meant that he couldn't promote my work if it was all white and gray. Too stark. 'Why don't you use pink or some other color?' And I said, 'Because Ken Noland already does that. You don't need me doing it.' ... I wasn't a Color Field painter. I was working with degrees of light." See Judith Stein, "The Adventures of Jo Baer," *Art in America* (May 2003), 104-11, and 157.

Baer seems to advance a formalist narrative, in that she was concerned with opticality and the theoretical underpinnings of modern art. Moreover, her work adheres to an intellectualized abstract, pictorial language. It is non-representational, despite the content it might imply. Yet, content seems to be the crux of the issue as by the late 1960s, formalist critics are less interested in the political implications of modern art. Speaking in 1968 about the state of avant-gardism Greenberg evoked the rhetoric of cold war politics and paranoia:

In effect, the avant-garde is being infiltrated by the enemy, and has thus begun to deny itself. Where everything is advanced nothing is; where everybody is a revolutionary the revolution is over. Not that the avant-garde ever really meant revolution. Only the journalism about it takes it to mean ... a break with the past, a new start, and all that. The avant-garde's principal reason for being is, on the contrary, to maintain continuity: continuity of standards of quality—the standards, if you please, of the Old Masters.<sup>87</sup>

This continuity can be read, at least to some degree, as reactionary in nature. That is, at a historical moment when all sorts of new types of art production were vying with painting for dominance on the art scene (assemblage, happenings, pop, op, minimalist and environmental), Greenberg argued for what Shep Steiner has termed “a kind of relaxation” of modernist political imperatives. He called for a retreat into pictorial values in order to preserve the relevance of modernism itself. Though, as Steiner explained this ‘kind of relaxation’ was for Greenberg at the expense of what was “an as yet unfulfilled set of hopes” that the critic held for modern painting.<sup>88</sup> In other words, Greenberg effected a compromise of sorts meant to ensure the continued development of modernism

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<sup>87</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant Garde Attitudes,” The John Power Lecture in Contemporary Art, University of Sydney, Friday May 17, 1968. Originally published by The Power Institute of Fine Arts University of Sydney (1969). Available at <http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/avantgarde.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Shep Steiner, “Great Moments in American Painting: Dogged Looks From the Other Side of the Fence” (Ph.D. diss., The University of British Columbia, 1997), 152.

in order that its more politicized allusions might at some point be reintroduced.

Consequently, as Baer pushed for a radical form of modern painting, Greenberg looked the other way.

Therefore, by the late 1960s, Baer was the ultimate modernist. She understood the critical possibilities of the modernist project at a moment when they were being ignored not just by minimalists like Judd and Morris, but also by formalist critics like Greenberg and, as by the central figures considered in Chapter 2, Fried. Greenberg's call to "maintain continuity" and to evaluate the pictorial and aesthetic advances that modern art in the 1940s and 50s had achieved, went unheeded by Baer; a move which underscored the critic's loss of authority during this period. Baer's continued inquiry into the self-reflexivity of painting, as an engaged visual experience, proves modernism was by no means as cohesive or undisputed as Greenberg would have us believe.<sup>89</sup>

This lack of cohesion, which by the late 1960s increasingly fractured the possibility of a unified modernist vision, was made even more manifest in the work of Eva Hesse. Like Baer, Hesse responded to a minimal representational language that prioritized the experience of the viewer. But she focused more on highly specific corporeal associations, sensual and tactile in nature, than on the scientifically grounded mechanisms through which vision works. Consequently, Hesse's production tangibly connects with the phenomenological implications of Morris' sculpture. Yet, in her case, it is not just any body that is alluded to through the viewing experience, but a female body.

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<sup>89</sup> Francis Francina, "Introduction," *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, ed. Francis Francina (New York: Routledge, 1985), 29-47. Modernism as a practice has always been, albeit to varying degrees, contradictory in nature. See, for example, Francina's consideration of modernism in the 1930s, particularly his consideration of the positions on modernism put forth by Alfred Barr, Meyer Shapiro and Clement Greenberg.

Deviating from the rationally ordered minimal cube of Judd or Morris, Hesse's box is 'made sick' through a handcrafted intervention (the obsessive threading of 30,670 holes in *Accession II*) which at once metaphorically pays homage to and subverts the cold and impersonal minimal cube. For example, as evident in a photographic detail of her *Accession II*, looking down into the interior corner of Hesse's tube-filled box, the dark triangular joint is covered with what appears as a hairy, organic substance (recall fig. 44). The shape, coupled with these soft protrusions, reminds the viewer of a woman's body, specifically of female genitalia, an intimacy that immediately thwarts any depersonalized reading of the work.<sup>90</sup> As Elisabeth Sussman has recently noted in relation to a collage by Hesse from 1964, there is an immediate connection in the artist's work between boxes and sex (fig. 51).<sup>91</sup> The bodily connotations evident throughout Hesse's oeuvre, have led to critical interpretations of her work that privilege biography, a condition reinforced both by the artist's tragic and untimely death at age thirty-four, and the posthumous publication of her private journals. Understood in this way, Hesse's sculptures have been considered transparent and available representations of her own corporeal experience, as if the artist herself was somehow contained within the materiality of the work.<sup>92</sup>

*Accession II* can be perceived, therefore, as the 'other' of Chave's reading of minimal sculpture as authoritarian and depersonalized. Using subjectivity and personal experience

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<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of the sexual connotations of the *Accession* series, as a vagina dentata, a 'snatch,' and a man-trap, see Anna Chave, "A Girl Being a Sculpture," *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* (New Haven and London: Yale University Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>91</sup> Elisabeth Sussman, "Letting It Go As It Will: The Art of Eva Hesse," *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>92</sup> "Much of the writing about the artist cannot resist taking advantage of the free mileage it gets from Hesse's early death." See Anne Wager, "Another Hesse," *Eva Hesse*, ed. Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002) 93, originally published in *October* 69 (Summer 1994) and in expanded form in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Or as James Meyer explains, "Indeed, Hesse's posthumously published journals have inspired a virtual cottage industry of criticism based on a psychologizing of the artist and her work. Such readings risk the presumption that one can 'know' Hesse and her art based on a

to literally poke holes in its structure, Hesse constructed a “feminized” answer to the phallic, power-hungry minimal cube.

If Hesse’s *Accession II* functions as what might be called a punctured and invaded cube, in relation to a feminized body, or as a “sick cube” in relation to her situation, it also speaks referentially to a new social body as well. The years 1965-70, which marked Hesse’s turn from painting to sculpture, coincided with the worst years of the Vietnam War. At this time in the U.S., protesting bodies engaged in all forms of civil disobedience were stand-ins of a sort for those bodies fighting and killed in Vietnam. For antiwar activists, among others, there was an increased awareness of the political implications of the body, including the social processes through which the individual is made a subject, an issue that Michel Foucault took up in his *Discipline and Punish*. Specifically, he considered the ‘refinement’ of penal practices from the early modern period to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the processes through which power relations are internalized by the individual subject. As part of this practice, the body is “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.”<sup>93</sup> Though Foucault was writing in 1975, the corporeal inscription of power relations to which he referred was evident in the late 1960s, and discussed by many factions of the counterculture including the New Left.<sup>94</sup> Yet, Marcuse and others argued that the body

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decoding of personal testimony.” See Meyer’s “Non, Nothing, Everything: Hesse’s Abstraction,” *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>93</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 25. Foucault’s text was originally published in French in 1975 and first translated into English in 1977.

<sup>94</sup> These concerns about the repression of the body were also considered in the realm of popular culture. Think, for example, of the folk songs of Bob Dylan particularly “Blowin’ in the Wind” from 1962, particularly the third verse: “How many years can a mountain exist / Before it’s washed to the sea? / Yes, ‘n’ how many years can some people exist / Before they’re allowed to be free? / Yes, ‘n’ how many times can a man turn his head / Pretending he just doesn’t see? / The answer, my friend, is blowin’ in the wind / The answer is blowin’ in the wind.”

also contained a liberatory potential, as evident in the earlier part of the decade in the fight for civil rights through sit-ins, freedom rides, and Martin Luther King's marches in the South.<sup>95</sup> This connection between the body and agency can be related in the late 1960s both to the antiwar movement and to an emergent feminist politics. While Hesse was not overtly invested in either project, her work plays with similar concerns regarding individual subjectivity and personal experience in the ways in which the relationship between art object and viewer are reworked.

Hesse's sculptures, therefore, with their emphasis on the bodily, instigated a dialogue (albeit indirect) with both body bags, paraded past the stores on Sixth Avenue (fig. 52), and the feminist movement, centered in the late 1960s around the National Organization for Women (NOW).<sup>96</sup> While a connection to the sensual and feminine has survived in Hesse's reception, the relation of her work to the body politic has been less emphasized. In fact, a recent re-evaluation of Hesse's work, through an exhibition organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, focused mainly on the formal implications of Hesse's sculpture as well as conservation and display.<sup>97</sup> As Sue Taylor noted in a review of the show, "a number of fascinating issues—gender, ethnicity and psychology—are largely elided in this project, whose overall formal emphasis is in

<sup>95</sup> In fact, this awareness of the body as a site of political struggle through which the individual is made subservient to the state, was a concern inherited from the Civil Rights Movement of the early 1960s. Lyndon B. Johnson addressed this very issue of the social infliction of power on the body of the individual in a speech entitled "To Fulfill These Rights" delivered at Howard University in 1965. Speaking in support of civil rights legislation, Johnson was concerned specifically with the issues of ability and opportunity: "Men and women of all races are born with the same range of abilities. But ability is not just the product of birth. Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in – by the school you go to and the poverty or the richness of your surroundings. It is the product of a hundred unseen forces playing upon the little infant, the child, and finally the man." Lyndon Johnson, "To Fulfill These Rights," *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon Johnson, 1965*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 635-40. Reprinted in Unger and Unger, 136-42.

<sup>96</sup> Artists-Writers Protest in conjunction with the Art Workers Coalition, march up Sixth Avenues, May 1969.

<sup>97</sup> This retrospective of Hesse's work was organized in 2002 by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (February 2-May 19, 2002) also traveled to the Wiesbaden Museum, Germany (June 15- October 13, 2002). See Elisabeth Sussman, Ed. *Eva Hesse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002).

keeping with the current critical backlash against earlier Hesse scholarship, with its stress on the artist's life and illness."<sup>98</sup> This positioning of Hesse is reminiscent of the critical interpretation of Baer's work put forth by Sarah Rich in that it advocates an assimilationist model through which Hesse's work can be incorporated within a formalist canon (which I am sure would have horrified Greenberg in the late 1960s). Moreover, this sort of reading erases the lived and personal experiences that informed both the production and reception of Hesse's sculpture, a leveling which my own interpretation of Hesse's significance argues against. And in fact, it was her difference that secured Hesse a place in the New York art scene of the late 1960s. Recognizing the feminine and sensual connotations of her sculpture, Lucy Lippard included the artist in the *Eccentric Abstraction* show at the Fischbach Gallery in New York in 1966. This exhibition considered how the strict logic and rationality of form evident in minimal sculpture was subverted and transformed by a younger generation of artists, as if the minimal was by this time too recognizable to the viewer, rendering it "no longer 'abstract.'"<sup>99</sup>

But what exactly did Hesse offer her audience in the late 1960s, beyond her embrace of the sensual, which set her off from minimal art proper? After all, the abstract nature of her work and her interest in seriality led to critical interpretations that despite the sagging, leaning, and sometimes collapsing nature of her sculptures connected Hesse to the group.<sup>100</sup> For instance, in her *Accretion* from 1968 (fig. 53), Hesse constructed fifty

<sup>98</sup> Sue Taylor, "Vessels and Vacancies," *Art in America* (November 2002), 138.

<sup>99</sup> Meyer, "Non, Nothing, Everything: Hesse's Abstraction," 70-1. But exactly what Hesse was trying to achieve by subverting a minimal language is up for grabs. For example, Meyer argues that Hesse "did not so much satirize or critique the minimal so much as displace its forms and syntax."

<sup>100</sup> Though it is important to note that Hesse has also been considered a 'post-minimalist,' one of a group of artists who initiated a reaction against minimalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This term was first coined by Robert Pincus-Witten in his *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977) to refer to a younger generation of artists working slightly after the heyday of minimal art. But as Anna Chave has clarified, Hesse's age (just a few months younger than Carl Andre) and the emergence of her work simultaneously with that of many of the minimal artists complicates the categorization of her work. See Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* (March 2000), 160, footnote 19.



virtually identical fiberglass and polyester resin tubes, repetitive in nature and fifty-eight inches high (a height that mimicked the artist's own). Originally installed in the Fischbach Gallery leaning against a thirty-nine foot wall, each discrete tube implied a regularity and order (despite their random placement), a seriality akin to that evident in a Carl Andre floor piece or a series of Judd's boxes. Seen in this way, each of *Accretion's* fifty individual components can be taken together as one coherent sculpture, a condition reaffirmed by Hesse in her naming of the work—accretion, what the artist defined as “the growing of separate things into one, the whole resulting from this.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, on the surface Hesse's work mirrored on both a formal and conceptual level the model of minimal sculpture put forth by both Judd and Morris, specifically in their insistence on simplistic forms and the inherent ‘wholeness’ of the sculpture. As Judd articulated in an interview with Bruce Glaser in 1964, it is important that all parts of a work of art should perceptually bind together, in sculptural production: “you should have a *whole*... the whole's it. The big problem is to maintain the sense of the whole.”<sup>102</sup>

Hesse's critical association with minimalism was furthered not only by the formal qualities of her sculpture, but also by her close relationship with many of the core minimal artists, particularly Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Donald Judd and Robert Morris. Morris even included Hesse in his *Nine at Leo Castelli*, an anti-form exhibition organized in 1968. But, as Anna Chave explained in her essay “Minimalism and Biography,” notwithstanding this alliance, Hesse's work as that of a female artist has been interpreted

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in Naomi Spector, “A Selection From the Notebooks of Eva Hesse,” *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*, ed. Nicholas Serota (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1979), n.p. Reprinted in Robin Clark, “Accretion and Expanded Expansion,” *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 246.

<sup>102</sup> Glaser, 154. This is not to imply that there was an accepted definition among the minimalist regarding what wholeness exactly is and how it is best achieved in the work of art. For a concise evaluation of Judd's understanding of wholeness, see Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 88-90.

differently from that of her male counterparts.<sup>103</sup> While LeWitt, Andre, Judd and Morris have been able to avoid the conflation of their personal life with their artistic reception, in Hesse's case much emphasis has been placed on the biographical details of the artist's life. In fact, the tragedy of her untimely death from a brain tumor in 1970 spurred on her reception, the terms of which were largely set by the publication of Lucy Lippard's monograph on Hesse in 1976.<sup>104</sup> Relying on a particularly feminist interpretation of the work, Lippard included excerpts of the artist's own writing from letters to colleagues, personal notebooks and diaries. This revealed Hesse's own internal exploration of subjectivity as unstable and the ways this was mediated and explored through an aesthetic process. Such emphasis on Hesse's lived experience is exactly what makes an analysis of her production so interesting and simultaneously problematic. The question is how to make sense of Hesse's own self-conscious reflections regarding her place in the world, her relationships, and her artistic experimentation, without reducing the sum total of her production to biographical aspects of her life. In an interview with Cindy Nemser conducted a few months before her death, this difficulty is acknowledged. Speaking particularly about certain critics who had "stayed away" from Hesse's work, Nemser attached a fear factor to such distancing, "That is probably one of the reasons. You scare them. Sure you scare them."<sup>105</sup> In other words, Nemser was implying that some critics

<sup>103</sup> This is not to argue that Hesse felt marginalized from the group because of her gender, but rather that her focus on the body left many critics unsure of how exactly to deal with her work. However, both Anna Chave and Anne Wagner have taken up this issue of Hesse's placement as a female artist within a dominantly masculine art movement. Compare, for example, the claims made in Chave's "A Girl Being a Sculpture" and "Minimalism and Biography," in which she discusses the difficulties of Hesse's position (of which she was self-aware) with Wagner's opposing analysis in *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>104</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

<sup>105</sup> Cindy Nemser, transcripts of interview with Eva Hesse, Eva Hesse Archives, Archives of American Art, reel no. 1475, frame nos. 20, 40, 41, 94. Partially reprinted in Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," 151. Throughout this interview, Hesse moves back and forth regarding her position on the integration of art and life. For the most part, however, she seems to argue for a unified vision.

were afraid of Hesse's individualized and expressionistic tendencies. After a period in which minimalism had downplayed the subjectivity of the artist, through the complete removal of the artist's hand, Hesse's work once again foregrounded this issue, particularly by re-establishing an overt relationship between the artist's own life and her art.<sup>106</sup>

Additionally, it was this reliance on the particular that set Hesse's work off from the somewhat controlling phenomenological experience offered by Morris' sculpture and the scientific and technologically grounded painting of Baer. Though, as previously discussed, central to the production of all three artists was a reworking of the relationship between the art object and its viewer. For Hesse, this was in part achieved through the formal and tactile qualities of her sculptures. Her use of latex, fiberglass and even cheesecloth, materials supple and pliable by nature, evoke organic and carnal associations which trigger a process of identification between the spectator and the work. As Maurice Berger argued in his essay "Objects of Liberation: The Sculpture of Eva Hesse," the relationship between body and object was central to Hesse's method.<sup>107</sup> That is, her production generates identifications between the body of the viewer and the art work, an aesthetic process resulting in what Lucy Lippard called 'body ego,' the "strong, virtually visceral identification between the maker's and/or viewer's body and abstract or figurative form."<sup>108</sup> According to Lippard, Hesse's work instigated this process through

<sup>106</sup> Hal Foster writes about this aspect of minimalism: "The minimalist suppression of anthropomorphic images and gestures is more than a reaction against the abstract-expressionist model of art; it is a 'death of the author' (as Roland Barthes would call it in 1968) that is at the same time a birth of the viewer." But it is exactly this 'death' that Hesse shakes up. See Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 50.

<sup>107</sup> Maurice Berger, "Objects of Liberation: The Sculpture of Eva Hesse," *Modern Art and Society: An Anthology of Social and Multicultural Readings*, ed. Maurice Berger (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994) 231-51. Reprinted from Helen Cooper, ed. *Eva Hesse: A Retrospective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery in collaboration with Yale University Press, 1992), 119-35.

<sup>108</sup> Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, 187. Lippard's definition is also noted in Berger's text.

anthropomorphic and sexual allusions, evident in “the combination of shape and highly sensuous textures, the way forms swell or sag, lie or lean, the ways in which one can feel one’s own body assuming those positions or relating to those shapes as to another body.”<sup>109</sup>

In a photograph from 1965-6, the sexualized nature of Hesse’s work, and the ways in which the viewer is made to ‘feel’ his or her body through the process of viewership, is immediately apparent (fig. 54). Bulbous forms, ovoid and testicle-like shapes, and skeins of string are arranged against one wall of the artist’s studio.<sup>110</sup> The finish on many of these individual works glistens in response to the studio lighting, as if the pieces themselves were slick with moisture, or somehow made wet. References to genitalia of both sexes are equally evident, an inference to Hesse’s ever present interest in contradiction, a condition interwoven throughout her work.<sup>111</sup> Sagging breasts, limp penises, and penetrated circular forms create a host of internal relations fetishistic in nature. Displayed together, these works exude a palpable physical presence marked by sexuality, humor, and eroticism. Their uncanny familiarity establishes a surreal environment of psychological and sexual associations through the flaccid, hanging and

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. This reading of Hesse’s work as evoking human-like characteristics is not something the artist condoned. “I don’t think I had a sexual, anthropomorphic or geometric meaning.” From Cindy Nemser, “A Conversation with Eva Hesse,” Eva Hesse, ed. Mignon Nixon (Cambridge: MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 9. A selection from this 1970 interview was originally published in *Artforum* 8 (May 1970). Though the version printed here comes from Nemser’s *Art Talk: Conversations with Twelve Women Artists* (New York: Perseus Books, 1996).

<sup>110</sup> From left to right, the individual sculptures are *Untitled* (1965), *Ennead* (1966), *Ingeminate* (1965), *Several* (1965), *Vertiginous Detour* (1966), *Total Zero* (1966), *Untitled* (1966), *Long Life* (1965), *Untitled* (1966), *Untitled* (1965), and *Untitled or Not Yet* (1966).

<sup>111</sup> Nemser, 9. The issue of contradiction through the juxtaposition of opposing forces— male/female, chaos/order, rational/irrational, etc.— has been recognized as a central theme of Hesse’s from the 1960s onwards. In part, this has to do with Hesse’s own musings on the subject. Referencing this in her interview with Nemser, Hesse explained, “I remember always working with contradictions and contradictory forms... the whole absurdity of life... everything for me has always been opposite. Nothing has ever been in the middle... I know that, in forms I use in my work, that contradiction is certainly there.”

inflated organic forms.<sup>112</sup> The soft, tactile quality of Hesse's sculpture is a long way from the rigid geometry and sharp edges of Morris' *L Beams*, though it connects by the end of the decade to his call for anti-form work.<sup>113</sup>

But the bodily experience offered by Hesse's sculptures, predicated on the juxtaposition of absurd and opposing exaggerated forms, articulates something very different from the embodied experience articulated through the work of Morris. Though both artists play with theatricality, creating sculptures that speak directly to the viewer and often compel a very physical and immediate response, Hesse's work operates on a more internal and emotive level. In other words, the public aspect of Morris' art, his examination of external power relations, which again Rosalind Krauss described as frustrating the internalization of meaning, is trumped in Hesse by the reintroduction of the private. Hesse encourages her viewer to begin a solipsistic process of subjective exploration, to instigate what Berger described as "a private and liberatory search for the 'self.'"<sup>114</sup>

For Berger, this impetus in Hesse's work towards self-examination and its potential for liberating the subject links back to Marcuse and a politicized notion of eroticism. By desublimating the repressed sexuality of late-capitalist culture, in this case through the evocative formal and physical qualities of Hesse's sculpture, Berger argued that a greater level of freedom both internal and in the public life of the subject might be

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<sup>112</sup> Hesse's connection to surrealism, particularly in this work from 1965-6, was acknowledged in the mid-1960s in part because of her friendship with the artists Mike Todd, Paul Thek, and Joe Raffaele, all of whom shared an interest in the psycho-sexual aspects of surrealist production from the 1920s and 30s. See Scott Rothkopf, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 177-8.

<sup>113</sup> See Robert Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6 (April 1968), 33-5.

<sup>114</sup> Berger, "Objects of Liberation: The Sculpture of Eva Hesse," 235. Hesse's definition of solipsism is reproduced by Berger: "the theory or belief that *only knowledge of the self is possible* and that for each individual the self itself is the only thing really existent and that therefore reality is subjective." It was originally recorded by Hesse in her diary in an undated entry from 1968-9.

gained.<sup>115</sup> While this provides one means of accessing some of the radical content of Hesse's work, particularly when contextualized within its late 1960s moment, Berger's reading is predicated on a very fixed understanding of political engagement. He equated in what was almost a one-to-one formula the experience proposed by Hesse's sculpture with the Marxist imperatives of Marcuse himself.<sup>116</sup> But the implications of what Hesse offers her audience vis-à-vis the modalities of viewership are, I am arguing, much more complex taking into account questions regarding the societal construction of gender, the physical limitations of the body, and fixed notions of sexuality. What is needed is a nuanced evaluation that centrally places the internal and psychological possibilities open to her audience through processes of identification and self-examination. Thus, just as Hesse's use of sexuality should not lead to interpretations that reduce her work to biography, the vision of liberation embodied in her sculpture should not be reduced to any standardized notion of political activism. Otherwise, the subtleties of how Hesse's work actual operates for a myriad of viewers might be overlooked.

Further, the looking inwards which Berger associated with Hesse's work must be distinguished from that evident in the production of the Abstract Expressionists, who in the immediate post-WWII period were also interested in psychological and subjective exploration, but with more apparently universalizing aims in mind. For this group of artists, self-analysis was the primary tool for re-evaluating the human condition at a traumatic historical moment and in light of questions regarding the very future of modern

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<sup>115</sup> Berger, 241.

<sup>116</sup> This reading of Hesse and its connection to a Marcusean imperative is similar to the argument Berger makes regarding the mid-1960s work of Robert Morris. See Berger, *Labyrinths*, 12. But again, distinctions must be made between the embodied experience advocated by Morris and the bodily as both subject matter and means of engagement in the work of Hesse.

man.<sup>117</sup> And I do mean “man” as embedded within their theoretical discourse was a particularly gendered vision of the new postwar subjectivity decidedly masculine in nature.<sup>118</sup> For Hesse, however, it was more about the particular than the general, a condition linking her work to an emergent postmodernism. Her sculpture demonstrates a preoccupation with how self-awareness (whether artist or viewer) and subjectivity is mediated and formed through the individual’s encounter and bodily identification with the work of art. In this way, Hesse’s understanding of subjectivity seemingly aligns with that put forth by the feminist scholar and historian Teresa de Laurentis:

subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction—which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world.<sup>119</sup>

Within this model, there is no one ‘truth,’ authoritative vision, or ideological imperative embedded within the subject’s viewing experience. Rather, the point is to encourage a multiplicity of potential interpretations all equally meaningful and through which a greater understanding of the instability of subjectivity (and meaning) might be achieved. Seen in this manner, Hesse’s insistence on the body in all of its physicality, its crassness and sexual explicitness, was tantamount to a critique of the modernist project, but significantly a critique lodged from within. Seemingly aware that Morris’ minimal cube was no longer working, and that Baer’s reliance on science and technology could not completely reinvigorate the trajectory of modern art, she looked to other forms and

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<sup>117</sup> See Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London, 1993).

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-68.

materials, tactile and sensual in nature, for the basis of her production. Following up on minimal art's preoccupation with the cube, Hesse, I argue, actively subverted the hard-edged, industrial shapes that by the late 1960s were so fashionable in New York galleries by introducing permeable, ephemeral materials and by asserting more naturalized forms. An examination, therefore, into her work not only adds another layer to the complexity of the debates concerning the minimal viewer, specifically incorporating issues of gender, but also demonstrates her subversion of what were at the time well-established minimalist strategies. Aware that as a woman sculptor, dealing with a bodily and erotic subject matter, she was speaking from a position not represented by mainstream modernism, Hesse challenged the authority and rationality of minimalism by disrupting what were some of its primary interests. Thus, while her sculpture can be set in relation to the specific artistic strategies utilized respectively by both Morris and Baer, specifically regarding the issue of viewership, it must also be seen as different. Though all three artists transformed the viewer from a detached, formalist beholder into a body situated within the here and now, Hesse was unique in that her work critiqued the modernist paradigm on a more fundamental level. Her sculpture, which speaks to anxieties regarding the exclusions of a modern project, demonstrates that the seeds of postmodernism emanated, at last in part, from within late 1960s modernist debates.

The work of these artists, and the specific strategies they adopt, therefore takes up some of the contested issues at stake in the art world of the 1960s, as well as in society-at-large. That is, their practice can not be so easily isolated from its surrounding context—

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<sup>119</sup> Teresa de Laurentis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 159.



a context made all the more volatile by the Vietnam War, the antiwar movement, and an emergent identity politics. At this time, the body was centrally placed within contested public battles, over such issues as draft evasion, political activism, and abortion rights. However, because of a formalist hegemony in the art establishment evident both then and now, art historians rarely talk about this condition. Instead, most have chosen to ignore this potential influence, rather than to recognize its presence as percolating just under the surface of contemporary aesthetic and cultural debates. Read against the grain, the production of Morris, Baer, and Hesse reveals that the dominance of formalist discourse was ruptured in the late 1960's, at a moment when politics seeped unabashedly into the domain of modern art. The practice of these artists gave form to some of the pressures of the social moment as each addressed questions regarding the nature of capitalist society and the individual's role and experience within it. More interested in "the personal is political" than in the direct representation of ideological and institutional critique, these artists adhere to a representational language still grounded in formal and compositional issues. Morris, Baer, and Hesse therefore connected with the larger social conflicts raging around them, while still producing an abstract type of production, a criteria still expected at this time of advanced art.

When in 1967 Clement Greenberg took on minimal art in his infamous essay "Recentness of Sculpture," he dismissed it on the basis of its 'novelty' status, as if its newness was all it offered, a condition inevitably guaranteed to be short-lived.

Comparing minimal sculpture to the triteness of everyday objects, he conflated all minimal art, arguing, "Minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—

including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, minimalism’s flirtation with the mundane rendered it incapable of any lasting aesthetic transformation, it was too much business as usual, a charge closely aligned with Chave’s later critique. But such blanket criticism I would argue evades a larger issue, particularly how to come to terms with an art practice located in a highly specific historical moment that dramatically shifted the definition of aesthetic experience from object to viewer. That is, a shift from a formalist preoccupation with art as a self-contained entity, to the belief that the audience is fundamentally implicated in the production of the work. For someone, like Greenberg, highly invested in the insularity of art, the minimalist prioritization of the subject must have seemed totally incomprehensible, what he described as “a kind of art nearer the condition of non art.”<sup>121</sup> Thinking back to Marcuse, however, and the possibilities he saw in transforming the terms of aesthetic experience, the work of these three artists, all loosely aligned with a minimalist project, might be better understood. At least it cleaves apart the very specific positions Morris, Baer, and Hesse articulated during this period regarding issues of viewership, notions of the political, and the role of art in relation to social practice. While a minimal work might be “a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper,” when contextualized within the everyday experiences that contributed to its meaning, it could also be a lot more.

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<sup>120</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture” (1967), *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, 253-4.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

Conclusion: Fracturing Modernism: Minimal Sculpture and the Dilemma of the Modern Individual in Late 1960s America

In April of 1968, the director Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* debuted in cinemas across North America to mixed reviews, a rather inauspicious beginning for a film that was soon to develop a cult following (fig. 55).<sup>1</sup> The slow deliberate pace of the movie, its classical soundtrack, and its break from traditional Hollywood conventions of plot structure, dialogue, and resolution, challenged many initial viewers looking for some sort of recognizable story within what was billed at the time as "the ultimate trip."<sup>2</sup> Beginning with the "dawn of man," the film charts the evolution of humankind from prehistory into the future: from ape ancestors in Africa, to the colonization of the moon in the near future, to the first manned space flight to Jupiter eighteen months later. As a somewhat stabilizing presence, the sleek, black geometric form known as the monolith appears in all of these locations (figs. 56, 57, and 58). Whether conceived of as an extraterrestrial being, a metaphor for human consciousness, or a deity, this plinth-like structure exudes mystery and significance.<sup>3</sup> Kubrick discussed the difficulties of imaging

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<sup>1</sup> For example, as Roger Ebert recalled at the Los Angeles premiere of *2001: A Space Odyssey* on April 4, 1968 the actor Rock Hudson stormed out of the Pantages Theater asking, "Will someone tell me what the hell this is about?" The film critic for *Newsweek* magazine Joseph Morgenstern described the film as a "crashing bore." While the historian Arthur Schlesinger argued the film was "morally pretentious, intellectually obscure, and inordinately long." See Roger Ebert, *Review of 2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Retrieved July 1, 2003 from [http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert\\_reviews/2002/03/2001space.html](http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/2002/03/2001space.html); Joseph Morgenstern, "Review of *2001: A Space Odyssey*," *Newsweek* (April 15, 1968); and Arthur Schlesinger as quoted in Jerome Agel, ed., *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (New York: Signet, 1970), 246.

<sup>2</sup> The film originally ran 178 minutes, but after many initial reviewers found both the visual imagery and the soundtrack based on Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* particularly unrelenting, Kubrick cut 17 minutes. Among those who immediately connected with the film, however, and its special effects sequences were factions of the counterculture who often watched *2001: A Space Odyssey*, particularly its 23 minute psychedelic light show, under the effects of hallucinatory substances such as marijuana and LSD. In fact, responding to this demographic, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer described the film in its second set of publicity material as "the ultimate trip." See Piers Bizony, *2001: Filming the Future* (London: Aurum Press, 1994), 21.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Agel's book regarding the making of *2001: Space Odyssey*, "At one screening of the film in Los Angeles, a young audience member rose to his feet at the film's conclusion, ran down the aisle and crashed through the screen, all the while shouting, 'It's God! It's God!'" See Agel, 301.

this sort of presence in an interview in 1969, and in doing so referenced an image of minimal art that in the late 1960s dominated gallery space in both the U.S. and abroad.<sup>4</sup>

From the very outset of work on the film we all discussed means of photographically depicting an extraterrestrial creature in a manner that would be as mind-boggling as the being itself. And it soon became apparent that you cannot imagine the unimaginable. All you can do is try to represent it in an artistic manner that will convey something of its quality. That's why we settled on the black monolith -- which is, of course, in itself something of a Jungian archetype, and also a pretty fair example of 'minimal art.'<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, Kubrick's steely black monolith with its machined, planar surfaces referencing the power of modern technology and industry underscores the potency associated with minimalism's reductivity. What the art historian Anna Chave called the "blank face of minimalism"<sup>6</sup> is transformed in *2001: A Space Odyssey* to evoke the abstract and the unexplainable. The purpose of this thesis, however, has been to track a less elusive and timeless history of minimalism's geometric form. By considering mainstream minimal artists— Donald Judd and Robert Morris— and those artists posited as on the fringe of the movement, like Barnett Newman, Jo Baer, and Eva Hesse, the previous chapters have explored the competing stakes that differentiated aspects of minimalist practice.

Emphasized here are the distinct ways that minimal sculpture addressed how modern

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<sup>4</sup> For example, "The Art of the Real: 1948-1968" which related minimal art to New York School painting of the 1940s and 50s was organized by the Museum of Modern Art and traveled to the Grand Palais, Paris (November 14- December 23, 1968), the Kunsthaus, Zurich (January 19- February 23, 1969), and to the Tate Gallery, London (April 22- June 1, 1969). The exhibition "Minimal Art" which was organized by European curator Enno Develing was on display at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (March 23- May 26, 1968), the Städtische Kunsthalle and Kunstverein, Düsseldorf (January 17- February 23, 1969), and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin (March 16- April 13, 1969). For an examination of the critical reception of both of these exhibitions, see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 253-70.

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph Gelmis, "An Interview with Stanley Kubrick," *The Director's Chair Interviews*. Retrieved July 10, 2003 from [http://industrycentral.net/director\\_interviews/SK07.HTM](http://industrycentral.net/director_interviews/SK07.HTM).

<sup>6</sup> Anna Chave "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64 (January 1990), 55.

bodies could negotiate the claims to identity and the crises facing the modern individual that were brought to the fore in 1960s America.

The sculptural production of Newman and Hesse, which opens and closes this study, brings into focus the impact of what were alternative versions of minimalism on the authority of formalist modernism. Both Newman and Hesse died in 1970, just a little more than a month apart (at age 65 and 34 respectively), and they each shared a formal interest in seriality, non-figuration, and geometry.<sup>7</sup> For Newman, coming to artistic maturity in the years immediately after World War II, painting was an intellectualized practice, a way to explore the contingencies of the human condition when faced with an overly hostile social world. Concerned with themes of redemption and transcendence, his work permitted metaphysical readings,<sup>8</sup> and investigated the position of the subject in the context of Cold War America. Conversely, for Hesse, producing only during the late 1960s, sculpture was a form of process, a means to mediate issues of identity and the body through the parody and play of overly sexualized forms. While working with a reductive language ostensibly similar to both Newman's work and that of core minimal artists like Judd and Morris, Hesse reacted in an almost satirical manner, humanizing and eroticizing the sculptural forms she appropriated and "feminizing" the stereotypically masculine rhetoric historically attached to minimal work.

Newman's 1968 sculpture *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, built of barbed wire, enclosed in steel and splattered with red paint, figures both the dilemma of the modern individual faced with the violent suppression of dissent, but also the crisis attending Newman's own reception in the 1960s when his work, which he claimed in 1962 "would

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<sup>7</sup> Eva Hesse died on May 29 and Barnett Newman on July 4, 1970.

mean the end of all state capitalism and totalitarianism,”<sup>9</sup> was depoliticized by formalist readings. The literal directness of Newman’s sculpture—featuring real barbed wire—is at odds with the aesthetic strategies invested in Hesse’s *Untitled* from 1970 (figs. 59 and 60). Using very different means, specifically soft, pliable materials instead of hard, sharp wire, Hesse also addressed the problem of the individual. But the individual is here conceived of as both embodied and gendered, a condition instigating a politics of the body that is distinct from Newman’s allusions to macro-level political conflict. Produced of rope and string, dipped in latex and suspended from the gallery ceiling, Hesse’s *Untitled* establishes an immediate connection to the body of the viewer, through an alliance initially formed by its organic and somewhat amorphous shape. Of different weights and thickness, the drooping, skeins of string seemingly glistening with some sort of gelatinous matter call up allusions to viscera and intestines; that is, the baseness of the human body, yet rendered here through highly evocative and sensual form. In this way, Hesse’s piece aligns, however loosely, with ideas inherent in the writings of the French surrealist Georges Bataille, specifically his notion of the formless, which he defined as a term of deprecation and dismissal in a bourgeois society that insists on classification and order above all else.<sup>10</sup> For Bataille, to be without material or recognizable form was to trouble tidy, methodological arrangements. Therefore, an inquiry into the excesses of the human body—its fluids, orifices, processes—was itself subversive in nature, and opened up ways to potentially reintegrate social and psychological experiences, or what had been

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<sup>8</sup> See Thomas Hess, *Barnett Newman* (New York: Walker, 1969); and John Golding, “Newman, Rothko, Still and the Abstract Sublime,” *Paths to the Absolute, Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko, and Still* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 195-232.

<sup>9</sup> Barnett Newman, “Interview with Dorothy Gees Seckler” (1962), *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 251.

<sup>10</sup> Georges Bataille, “Critical Dictionary: The Informe,” *Documents* 1, no. 7 (Paris, 1968), 382, reprint in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 31. These definitions were originally published in various issues of the journal *Documents*, Paris, 1929-30.

constructed historically as the Cartesian split between body and mind. The point here is not that Hesse was necessarily aware of Bataille's writings or the ways in which he challenged conceptions of public taste. Rather in a way akin to Bataille's notion of the formless both the chaotic *and* corporeal nature of Hesse's *Untitled* similarly bother the established terms of minimal sculpture. Hand crafted production replaced for Hesse the depersonalization of industrial manufacture, while the bodily and erotic content reasserted the subject— a gendered subject— in the work.

Newman and Hesse offer alternative representations of the challenge that both the social upheavals of the 1960s and the reconfiguration of relations of power posed to notions of the individual. Newman's rigid "lace curtain," a crowd control barricade colored by the blood of bodies pushed up against its spiked wire, overtly figures how power operates on the individual, while at the same time drawing attention to the social purchase invested in his earlier and concurrent colorfield work. The uniqueness of this piece in Newman's oeuvre is noteworthy. Throughout his career, Newman had strictly rejected representational content and his move away from abstract signs speaks to what were real, lived anxieties.<sup>11</sup> The form of *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* and its mode of physically confronting the viewer with an apparatus used to control public protest was rooted in palpable pressures exerted on the artist and on all citizens to make sense of a world turned upside down.

Here Newman, like many other cultural and social theorists of his day,<sup>12</sup> turned to anarchism for answers, or what he described as "the only criticism of society which is not

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<sup>11</sup> For more on Newman's rejection of representational content, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 113-4.

<sup>12</sup> During the 1960s, a series of readers and theoretical expositions on the history of anarchism were compiled. A sampling include: Irving Louis Horowitz, *The Anarchists* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964);

a technique for the seizure and transfer of power by one group against another.”<sup>13</sup> While in no way a stable theoretical concept, anarchism was for Newman an intellectually rigorous process that allowed for the rejection of all established and programmatic doctrine. Functioning on an abstract and philosophical level, anarchism interrogated the nature of freedom, the development of the individual’s potential in the face of larger social forces, and the position of the subject vis-à-vis the state. Working within this framework, at a time when collective activism and mass organization was widespread, Newman was able to maintain an emphasis on individuality which had been since the 1940s a priority of the New York School.<sup>14</sup> From his perspective, social change would not originate in mass protests on the streets of Chicago. In fact, Newman was largely critical of the activities of the New Left.<sup>15</sup> Instead, for Newman the potential for change, and an understanding of the modern individual’s contemporary condition, could only be explored through an elite and sophisticated theoretical practice based in intellectual and creative thought.

The writings of the sociologist and urban critic Richard Sennett provide another perspective on the issue of individualism during this period, and on the interface between the solitary and the communal. While, like Newman, Sennett looked to anarchy as a model, he was more interested in its descriptive function as referring to something

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George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962; reprint, Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1967); and Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*, trans. Mary Klopfer (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1970).

<sup>13</sup> Barnett Newman, “The True Revolution is Anarchist!,” *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O’Neill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 45. This text was originally published as a foreword to Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the tension between individuality and collective organization in the 1940s, see Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 27-31.

<sup>15</sup> Newman addressed this issue in his introduction to Kropotkin’s memoirs: “The reissue now of this classic anarchist literary masterpiece at this moment of revolutionary ferment, when the New Left has already begun to build a new prison with its Marcusean, Maoist, and Guevara walls, is an event of importance for the thinking young and their elders, if they will listen— in particular now when it has become as easy for



chaotic or disordered. Here, Hesse's *Untitled*, with its drooping string and seemingly random arrangement, comes back to mind. In his *Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity & City Life* (1970), Sennett argued that the uniqueness of modern "man" was being smothered by purified cities and puritanical social arrangements.<sup>16</sup> That is, the true potential of humankind was repressed by rigid organizational patterns and living arrangements such as those found in suburbia or in other highly organized community structures. As an antidote to the "one-dimensionality" and lack of individuality produced, a concept borrowed from Herbert Marcuse, Sennett called for "a context of disorder and diversity" such as that found in urban areas.<sup>17</sup> Framed in this way, cities are spaces where difference is possible and where critical thinking can potentially take place. As Sennett explained, in cities modern individuals are forced into a kind of self-reflexivity:

to have some consciousness of themselves, they will continually be asking what it is in them that fails to be adequate for the social world they live in, what parts of their own lives are reconcilable or irreconcilable with the lives of the people around them. They cannot be unconscious of themselves if they are to survive.<sup>18</sup>

For Sennett, community still exists in urban contexts but in a form much different to that of more rural areas, with the result that critical thinking was less likely to ossify into rigid and proscriptive models of thought.<sup>19</sup> Urban environments could be more productive and

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anyone to proclaim himself an "anarchist" as it used to be for anyone to call those with different ideas "dirty anarchists." See Newman, 45.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity & City Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). For Marcuse, this one-dimensionality is a byproduct of uncritical and conformist practices in Western societies, both capitalist and communist. In order for any social change to take place, individuality and personal freedom must be asserted. Uniqueness and diversity, therefore, functions as a means of resistance against the forces of a technological society heavily invested in the perpetuation of the status quo.

<sup>18</sup> Sennett, 183-4.

<sup>19</sup> Here, Sennett puts forth an alternative perspective to that of the Algerian psychiatrist and cultural theorist Franz Fanon who argued against city living. For Fanon, the bureaucracy of a city and the often anonymous

enriching for the individual in that they tolerated diversity and multiple perspectives. Moreover, the tensions caused by disorder and upheaval could function productively to encourage self-criticality, a heightened awareness of the subject's personal experience, and his or her intersection with the pressures of social life.

With Sennett's observation in mind, Hesse's *Untitled* initiates a much more nebulous process of interrogating issues of subjectivity and power relations than that evident in Newman's sculpture, one in which the body of a potentially different kind of viewer is centrally placed. While for Hesse, this body is not necessarily physically damaged, at least not in the way that Newman's splattered red paint implies, it is a politicized body in terms of issues of personal identity, such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. The messy, corporeal, and erotic nature of Hesse's sculpture allows for a range of possible viewing positions in which to recognize the unstable nature of subjectivity and to engage in the performance of the self. Here, I am relying on Judith Butler's notion of performativity as a process whereby the subject is constructed through reiteration.<sup>20</sup> For Butler, subjectivity and identity are constantly being accomplished through discourse, dress, and gesture. Yet, while continually re-enacted subjectivity is never completely stable or fixed. As the primary participant in this procedure, the individual can subvert and transgress (at least to some degree) accepted social codes. Considered in light of Butler's theories, particularly her material grounding of the subject, Hesse's work can be seen to offer her viewer an opportunity to explore the highly personal nature of

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social relations which it encourages, prohibits the formation of a community united by closeness and able to push for collective social and political change. Sennett responded: "But the fear of cities displayed by men like Fanon leads itself to a terrible limit on human freedom. Avoiding city life may preserve the ardor of solidarity, but at the cost of enforcing a terrible simplicity, that of the tribe or small village, on the revolutionaries." See Sennett, xv.

<sup>20</sup> See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 1-23.

experience through the visceral associations called up, for example in *Untitled*, by the hanging string and rope. The variability of its installation—displayed in the center or corner of the gallery, the specific skeins of string hung close together or far apart—further frustrates attempts to fix the exact parameters and meaning of the sculpture.<sup>21</sup> Like much surrealist work of the 1920s and 30s, Hesse's *Untitled* instigates a conceptual and psychological process in the viewing subject, where meaning is not reified within the art object, but articulated through a larger dynamic between artist, object, and audience.

Indeed, while both Newman and Hesse are concerned with notions of individualism, their representation of what this means, stand as radically opposed. For Newman, individualism represents a philosophical tradition connected with anarchistic beliefs in the sovereignty of the subject and the refusal of any sort of infringement against personal rights. Whether functioning didactically, as in *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, or on an abstract and metaphysical level as in his more dominant colorfield work, there is always an underlying belief in the universality of human experience.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the viewing position of the audience becomes generalized. Art is conceived of as an intellectual and philosophical practice, or as Newman claimed in 1944, "an expression of pure thought, of important truths..."<sup>23</sup>, and in 1947 a situation where the viewer "participates" in the work due to its large size and abstract form.<sup>24</sup> But, by the late 1960s,

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Clark talks about the mutability of Hesse's hanging pieces as "a metaphor for that which can't be fixed or known." See Robin Clark, "Hanging Works," *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 272-4.

<sup>22</sup> Leja, 250-1. As the art historian Michael Leja has claimed, Newman (like many other New York School artists) insisted on the intellectual character of art. Art as "a realm of pure thought" could be used to connect with and mediate, through a highly constructed primitivist discourse and an exploration of the unconscious, the condition of modern man in the immediate post World War II period.

<sup>23</sup> Barnett Newman, "On Modern Art: Inquiry and Confirmation," *Selected Writings and Interviews*, 67. This essay was originally published in Spanish as "Sobre el arte moderno: examen y ratificación," *La Revista Belga* (November 1944).

<sup>24</sup> From Irving Sandler, *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 191, from an introduction Newman wrote for Theodoros Stamos exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York City, February 10- March 1, 1947, n.p.

the nature of this truth and the concept of participation is destabilized, an issue further highlighted when juxtaposing Newman's earlier universalized viewer with the highly subjective viewing positions evoked by Hesse's work. Producing at an emergent moment (termed by some the postmodern) when the exclusions of modernism were increasingly apparent, her sculpture was predicated on an increasingly individualized experience where the audience is empowered with a different sort of agency, to make of the work what it will. As she explained:

I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions. What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this. It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know. The formal principles are understandable and understood. It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go.<sup>25</sup>

This preoccupation with the unknown, this lack of fixity, demonstrates Hesse's awareness that the meaning of her work, how it reads to its audience, is contingent on subjective response of the viewer, as well as a host of other external factors. The "pure thought" and "important truths" Newman referenced and intended to convey to the viewer were inconceivable for Hesse forging work at a moment when concepts of absolute truth and of authority—of the artist, of the state, of the citizen—were put under challenge.<sup>26</sup> Thus, for Hesse, the individual—artist or viewer—is considered as always in process. The very act of looking, however, becomes invested in a politics of representation in which the importance of the body is central.

<sup>25</sup> As quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 131.

<sup>26</sup> This understanding of the experience of Hesse's work can be aligned with what were at the time emergent theories on the de-centering of the subject put forth by French post-structuralist writers such as Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault. For these theorists, the homogeneous or contained individual was seen as an ideological construct. See, for example, Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (1971), *Image, Music, Text* (London, 1977), 155-64; Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Books, 1971),

Reconsidering what was at stake in minimal sculpture of the 1960s has a particular relevance to the present. In our post-September 11<sup>th</sup> world, in which the US is engaged in a war against terrorism and an invasion of Iraq, the intolerance of dissent whether antiwar protestors or activists challenging state and media fed nationalism has emerged once again. As one example, in an antiwar rally and march held in downtown Chicago on March 20, 2003, the day the war with Iraq began, the question of how to voice dissent in an increasingly militaristic and closed society was once again brought to the fore. An account of the event which was posted on an independent media website described how over 800 demonstrators were surrounded and arrested by police, despite the fact they were engaged in a legal and non-disruptive protest.<sup>27</sup> The letter accused the authorities of unlawful and unfair conduct: "We were threatened by some of the officers and ridiculed by others. We were compared to and processed like terrorists under the new Patriot Act not like the peaceful protesters we were."<sup>28</sup> The response of one Chicago police officer reinforces such claims. Posted on the same website as the commentary of "Patriotic," the writer began with castigating the protesters: "You should be ashamed and humiliated by your actions that put you in this situation." After taking on point by point Partridge's charges of unlawful treatment, Patriotic ends with the following proscriptive: "To all of you whining tree-hugging Saddam loving pigs: Before you get involved in

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123-73; and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (1969), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives sin Post-Structuralist Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 141-60.

<sup>27</sup> The commencement of military action against Iraq was announced on March 20, 2003. The letter describing the treatment of protesters by police was written by Amy Partridge, a Ph.D. candidate in Performance Studies at Northwestern University. It was posted on a Chicago independent media site ([www.chicago.indymedia.org](http://www.chicago.indymedia.org)) on March 23, 2003 and circulated electronically through group email and antiwar mailing lists.

<sup>28</sup> Amy Partridge, *Thursday Night Arrests—First Hand Account* (March 22, 2003). Retrieved May 27, 2003 from [http://chicago.indymedia.org/display.php3?article\\_id=22236&group=webcast](http://chicago.indymedia.org/display.php3?article_id=22236&group=webcast).

something that could land you in jail, know your law. The comments made here only show your ignorance. Stop thinking this is TV. Life is dramatic enough.”<sup>29</sup>

The pervasiveness of this sort of rhetoric and the re-emergence of “love it or leave it” nationalism has resulted in the stifling of debate and has effected international relations. As the U.S. jockeyed for support in its rush to war, the role of the visual also factored in this process. At the United Nations in downtown New York, a tapestry reproducing Pablo Picasso’s painting *Guernica* was, beginning on January 27, 2003 abruptly covered over as the possibility of military intervention in Iraq was discussed (fig. 61).<sup>30</sup> Originally produced in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War, Picasso’s painting has long been heralded as a major antiwar statement meant to memorializing the suffering of innocent civilians during the Spanish Civil War.<sup>31</sup> Displayed outside of the Security Council chambers since 1985,<sup>32</sup> the tapestry of *Guernica* was hidden by a plain blue cloth bearing the United Nations logo. Fred Eckhard, Press Secretary for the U.N., assured

<sup>29</sup> Patriotic, *You all can’t be this dumb!* (March 24, 2003). Retrieved May 27, 2003 from [http://chicago.indymedia.org/display.php3?article\\_id=22672&group=webcast](http://chicago.indymedia.org/display.php3?article_id=22672&group=webcast).

<sup>30</sup> Rendered in a style that combines cubist and surrealist pictorial strategies, Picasso’s painting documents the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica by the German Air Force working in collusion with General Francisco Franco’s nationalist regime. In the three hours of bombings, over sixteen hundred civilians were either killed or wounded by this atrocity, their suffering memorialized by Picasso through a fragmentary composition made up of women, children, and animals, some screaming, others already dead. These simply rendered, monochromatic figures combine to create a poignant and expressive statement regarding the innocent lives irrevocably affected by war. See Betsy Pisik, *The Picasso Cover-up* (February 3, 2003). Retrieved February 4, 2003 from <http://washingtontimes.com/world/20030203-13680812.htm>; and *Guernica Reproduction Covered at the UN* (February 2, 2003). Retrieved February 3, 2003 from <http://artdaily.com/news.asp?not=1&idn=2&fnot=2/2/2003>.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Picasso’s *Guernica* was also the center of controversy in protest held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1969. Jointly sponsored by the Art Workers Coalition and the Guerilla Art Action Group, protesters demonstrated in front of *Guernica* with posters depicting the aftermath of the My Lai massacre, the murder of over four hundred Vietnamese villagers by US soldiers the previous year. Superimposed over an image of dead bodies, the text of the poster reads: “Q. And babies? A. And babies.” The point was to draw a parallel between Picasso’s antiwar message, produced in protest against the brutality of the Spanish Civil War, and the more current war-related atrocities in Vietnam. See Jon Hendricks and Jean Toche, *GAAG: The Guerilla Art Action Group 1969-76 A Selection* (New York: Printed Matter, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> This tapestry was donated by the Rockefeller family purposely for this location in front of the Security Council Chambers. As they also provided the money to purchase the United Nations compound, the gift of this antiwar tapestry and the particular siting of the work appears highly pointed. That is, it can be seen as a sign of faith in the U.N. mandate to work towards international peace.

those who inquired about the cover-up that the move was only temporary.<sup>33</sup> So temporary it appears that the drapes were installed only on Monday and Wednesday, the days the council discussed the question of military action in Iraq.

These contemporary events speak to current anxieties regarding the position of the individual in relation to the social and the importance of art as a site of arbitration between the two. But they are also issues uncannily reminiscent of those operating during the 1960s involving the viewing subject, the art object, and social practice. What is at stake in my reconsideration of the 1960s is not only to forge another layer of interpretation to be added to existing readings of minimal sculpture. It is also about interrogating how debates— regarding the individual, the role of art, and the nature of the political— inform everyday positions and experiences. Here, in evaluating my own contribution to the established discourse on minimal art, I am arguing that to complicate an understanding of both minimalism and the late 1960s, the visual arguments put forth by different artists and critics need to be considered relationally and contextually, and not cordoned off in a separate and exclusive aesthetic realm.

In a period that called for attention to the theater of war, for experiencing and participating in either the fighting in Vietnam or rallying in the streets, and which promoted new modes of perception and the role of the body as a form of countercultural action, the strategies of minimal artists are of import. Fried's antagonism to 'theatricality,' Barnett Newman's refiguration of 'participation,' Morris' challenge to 'experience,' Baer's focus on 'perception,' and Hesse's interest in a flaccid, distended, and exhausted 'body' reverberate with debates, terms, and issues circulating in a larger

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<sup>33</sup> As the tapestry hangs right behind the speaker's platform, he explained, the U.N. logo seemed a more appropriate backdrop for officials updating the press on the council's proceedings than what was typically

public sphere. Indeed, these distinct models of engagement and viewership that minimal sculpture encouraged or provoked underscore how the strategies of minimalism in the 1960s challenged formalist modernism's notion of autonomy by bringing its implicit exclusions and hierarchies to the fore. That such critiques emerged in the 1960s from within high art and modernism itself, and not only from later post-structuralist and postmodern interest in who art serves and excludes, points to the range of complex challenges contained within minimal art's geometric forms, precise lines, and machined surfaces.



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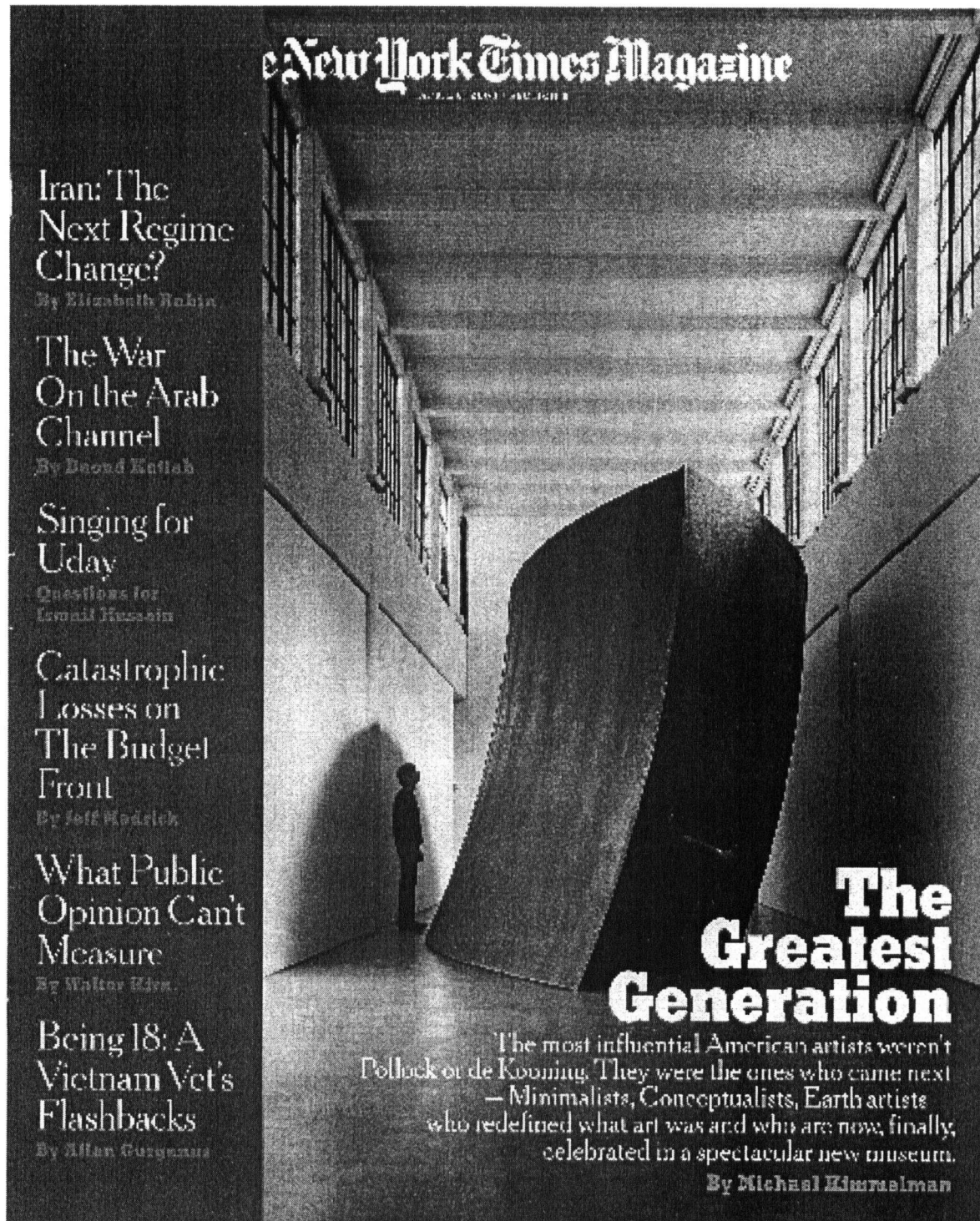


fig. 1. "The Greatest Generation." Cover, *New York Times Magazine*, 6 April 2003.

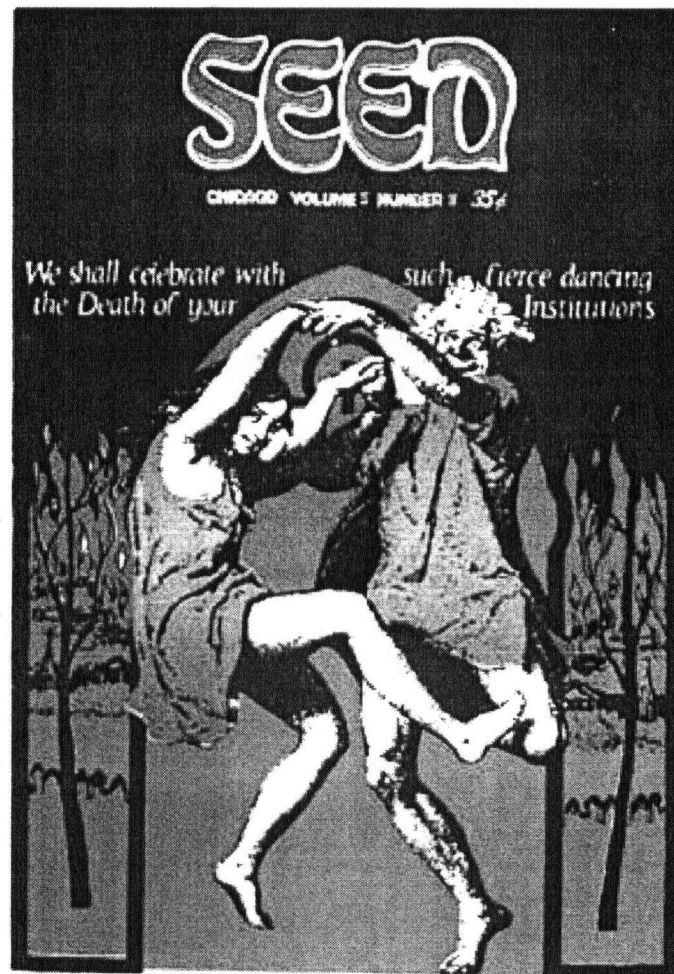


fig. 2. "We Shall Celebrate With Such Fierce Dancing The Death Of Your Institutions." *Seed* 5, no. 8 (Chicago: Seed Publishing, 1970). University of Connecticut Library website: [http://www.lib.uconn.edu/~eembardo/voices/revolutiongallery/pages/seedv5n8\\_jpg.htm](http://www.lib.uconn.edu/~eembardo/voices/revolutiongallery/pages/seedv5n8_jpg.htm)



fig. 3. "Yippie Reports on Czechago, U.S.A." *Berkley Barb* (Berkeley: August, 1968). Marvin Tatum Collection of Contemporary Literature. University of Virginia Library website: <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-bin/imgload.cgi/109>







fig. 5. The Guerilla Art Action Group, "A call for the immediate resignation of the Rockefellers from the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art," Lobby of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. November 18, 1969. Photographer unknown. In Lucy Lippard, *Get The Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change*. (New York: E. P. Dutton Inc., 1984), 11.



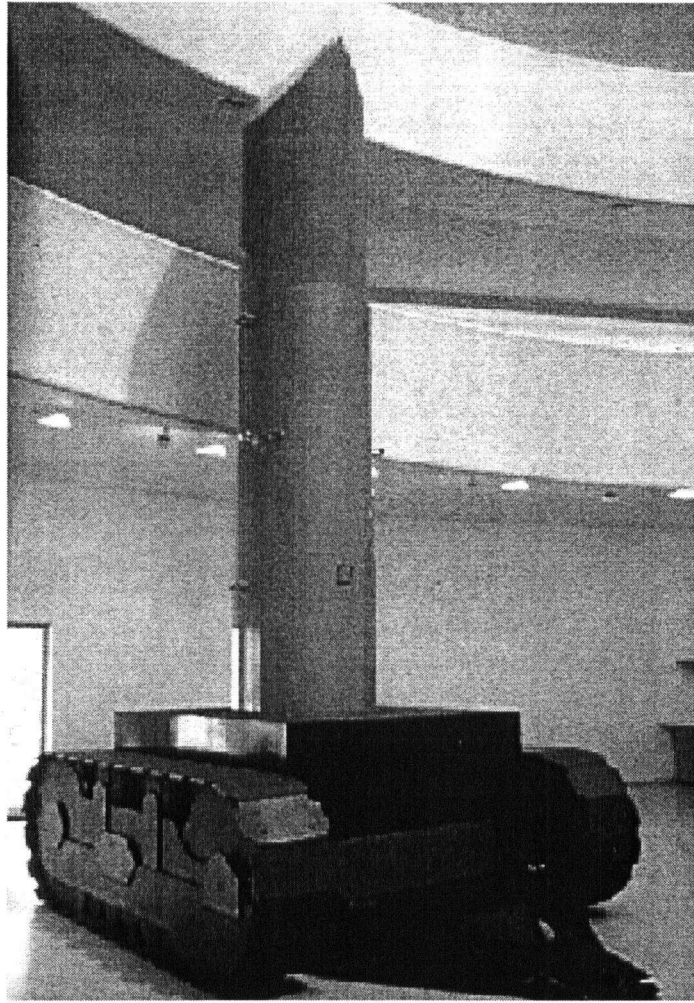


fig. 7. Claes Oldenburg, *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks* (1969-74). Cor-Ten steel, steel aluminum, cast resin; painted with polyurethane enamel. 23.6 x 24.11 x 10.11 ft. Yale University. Artist's website: [www.oldenburgvanbruggen.com/lipstick.htm](http://www.oldenburgvanbruggen.com/lipstick.htm)



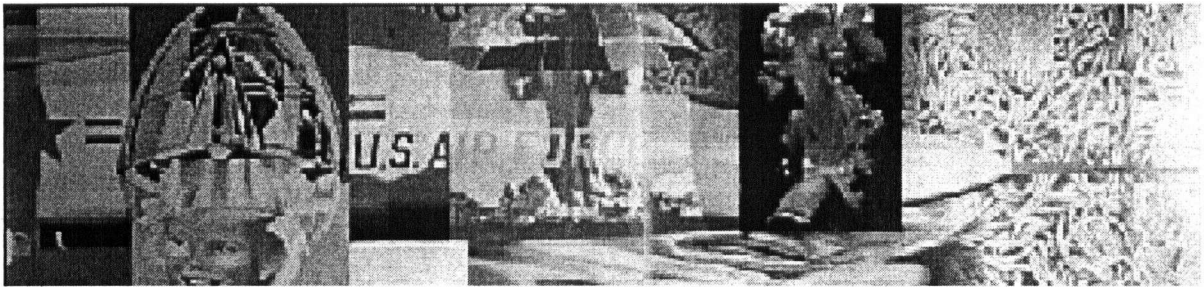


fig. 8. James Rosenquist, *F-III* (1965). Oil on canvas and other media. 10 ft. x 86 ft. (51 panels). Museum of Modern Art, New York. Artist's website: [www.jimrosenquist-artist.com](http://www.jimrosenquist-artist.com)

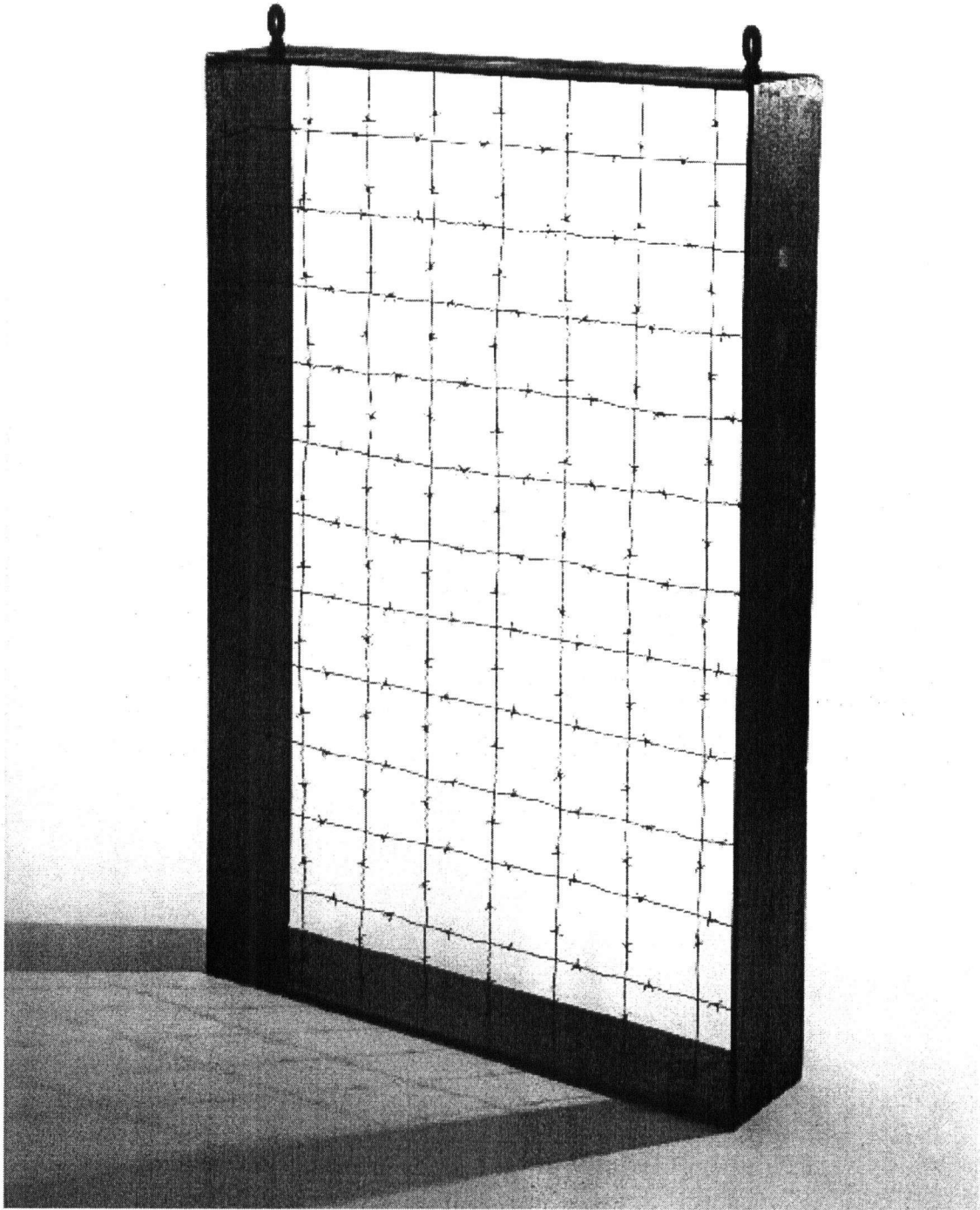


fig. 9. Barnett Newman, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley* (1968). Steel, paint, and barbed wire. 70 x 48 x 10 in. The Art Institute of Chicago. In Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 299.



fig. 10. "Michigan Avenue, August 28, 1968." Anonymous photograph. Chicago Historical Society. In David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), n.p.



fig. 11. "Antiwar Demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago." Anonymous photograph. In Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America From Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), n.p.



fig. 12. "Richard Feigen behind Newman's *Lace Curtain*, Chicago 1968." Photographer unknown. In "Artists vs. Mayor Daley," *Newsweek*. 4 November 1968.



fig. 13. Exhibition Poster for "Richard J. Daley" Exhibition, Chicago 1968. In Therese Schwartz, "The Politicization of the Avant-Garde, Part II." *Art in America* 60, no.2 (March/April, 1972), 70.





fig. 14. James Rosenquist, *Tattered Image* (1968) for "Richard J. Daley" Exhibition, Chicago 1968. In "Artists vs. Mayor Daley," *Newsweek*. 4 November 1968.

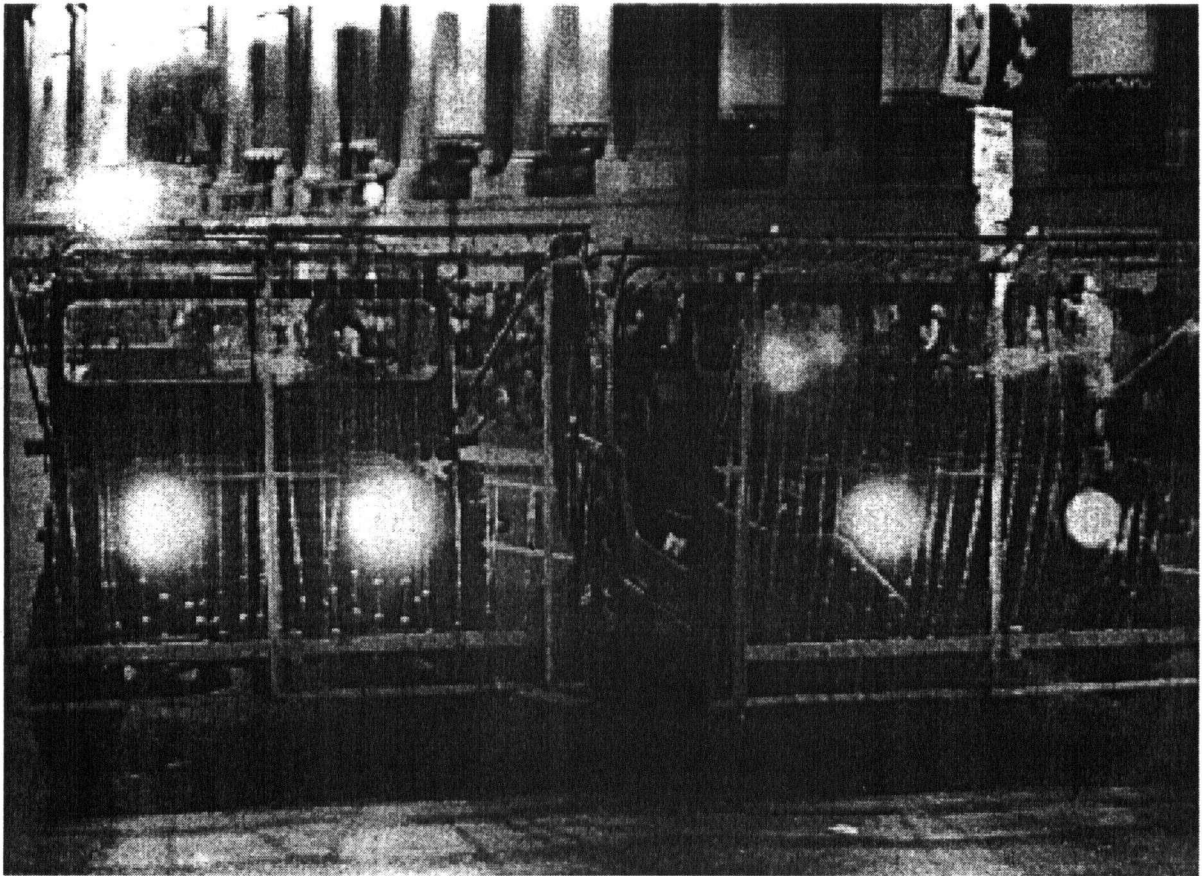


fig. 15. "Michigan Avenue, August 1968." Anonymous photograph. Chicago Historical Society. In David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), n.p.





fig. 16. "Mayor Daley on floor of Democratic Convention, August 1968." Press Photograph. In "Artists vs. Mayor Daley," *Newsweek*. 4 November 1968.

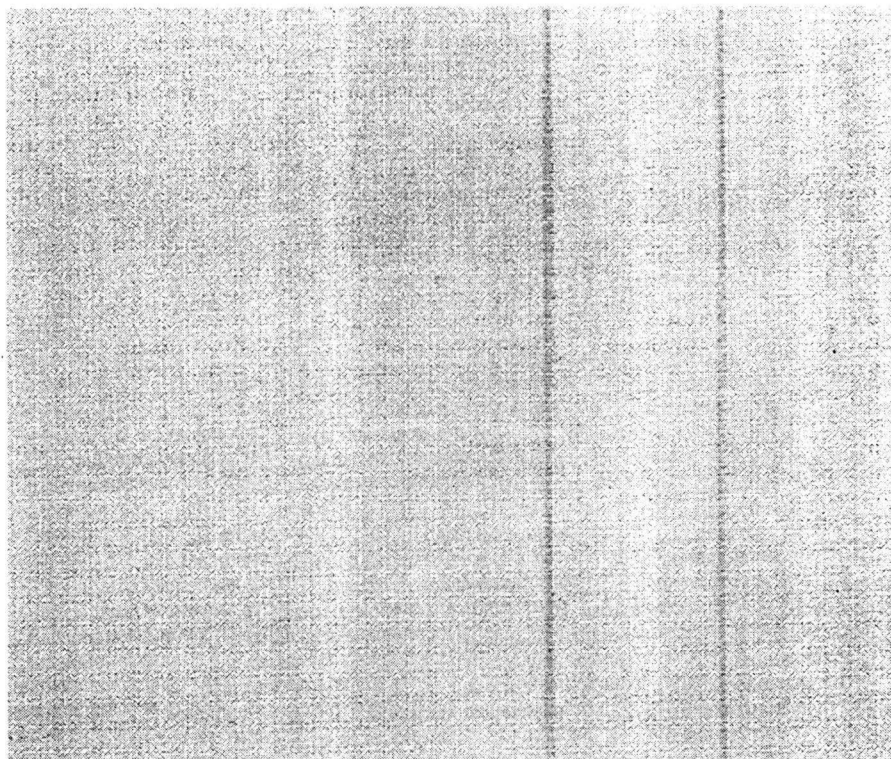


fig. 17. Barnett Newman, *The Moment I* (1962). Oil on canvas. 102 x 120 in. Kunsthau Zurich. In Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 9.

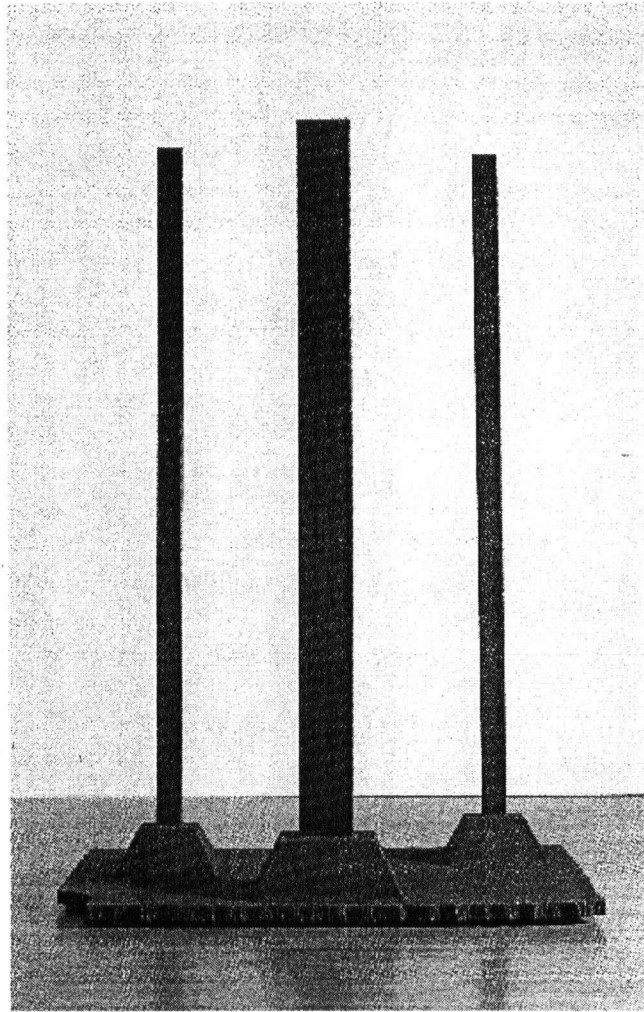


fig. 18. Barnett Newman, *Here II* (1965). Cor-Ten steel. 112 x 79 x 51 in. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. In Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 95.

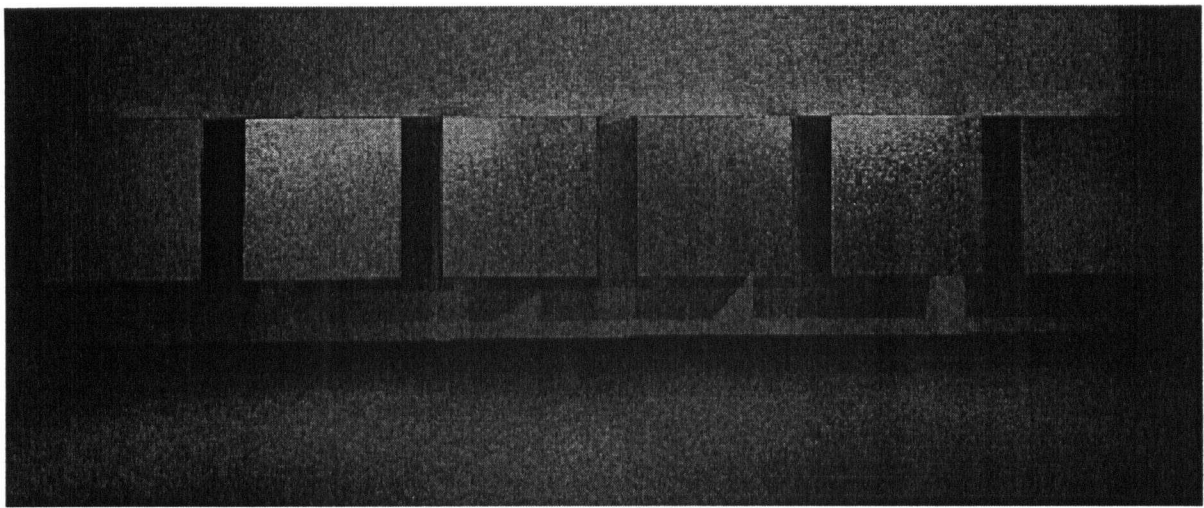


fig. 19. Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1966). Galvanized iron as shown at the Dwan Gallery, New York, 1967. 47.24 x 47.24 x 47.24 in. x 11.8 in. intervals. Donald Judd Estate, Marfa. In Alexander Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 294.

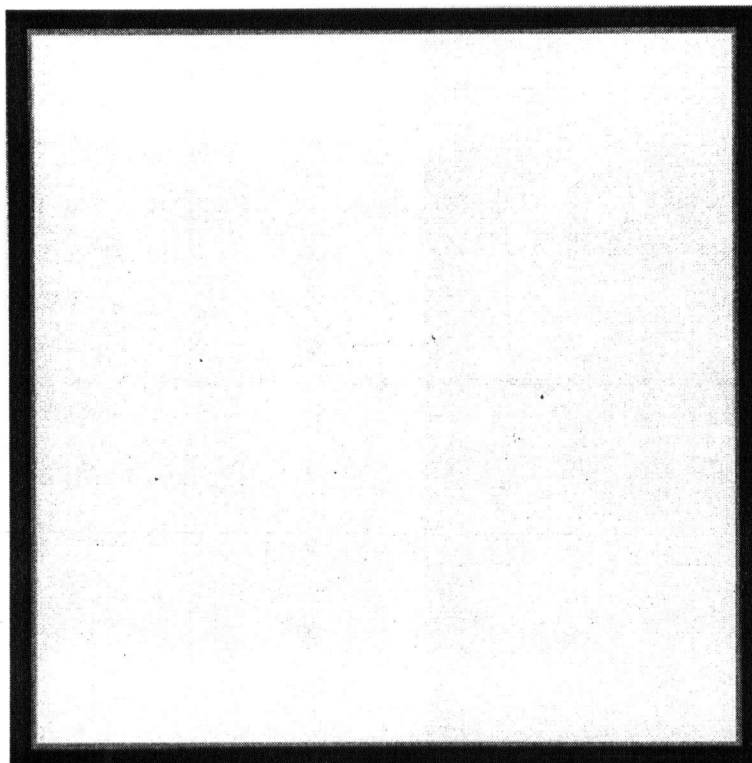


fig. 20. Jo Baer, *Untitled (White Square Lavender)* (1964-74). Oil on canvas. 72 x 72 x 3 in. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. In *Jo Baer: Paintings from the 60's and early 70's* (New York: Paula Cooper Gallery, 1995), n.p.

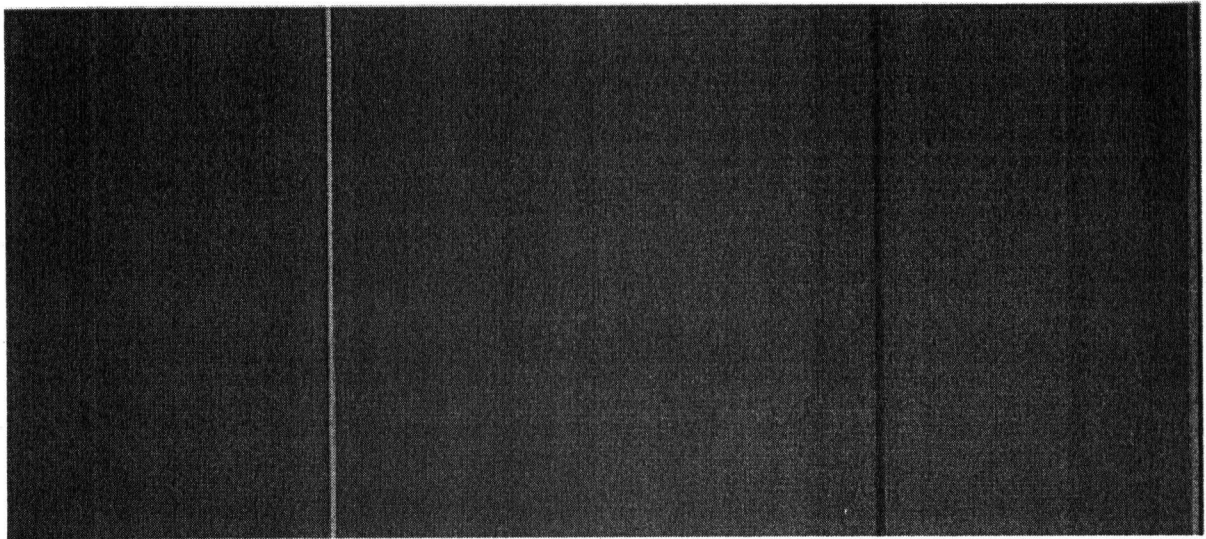


fig. 21. Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-51). Oil on canvas. 96 x 213.27 in. In Ann Temken, *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 179.

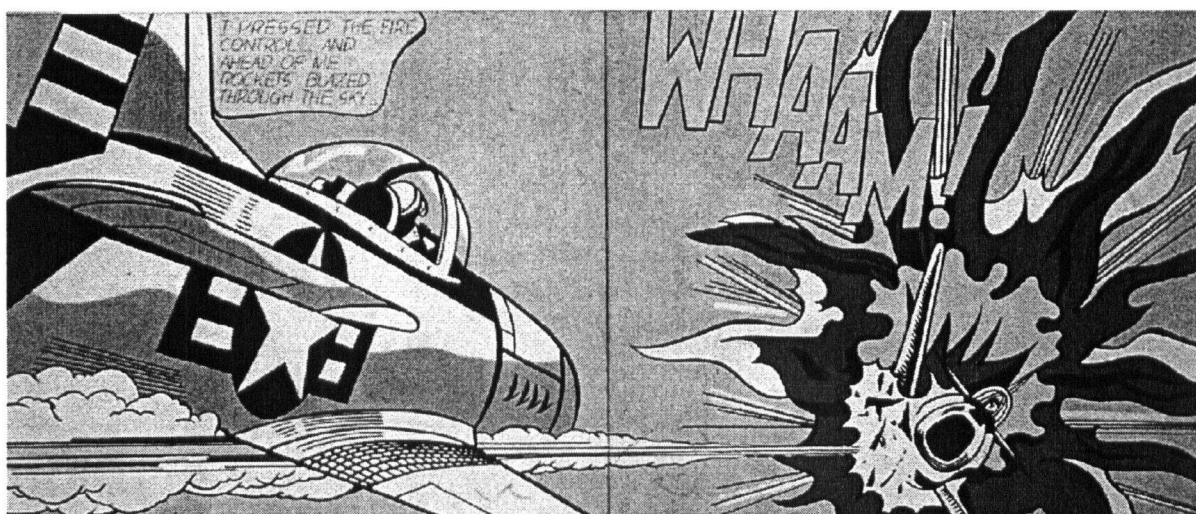


fig. 22. Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam!* (1963). Magna on canvas. 68 x 108 in. Tate Gallery, London. Lichtenstein Foundation website: [www.lichtensteinfoundation.org/cast63.htm](http://www.lichtensteinfoundation.org/cast63.htm)





fig. 23. "United States, Sao Paulo Bienal." *Art in America* (October/November, 1965). In Ann Temkin, *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 79.



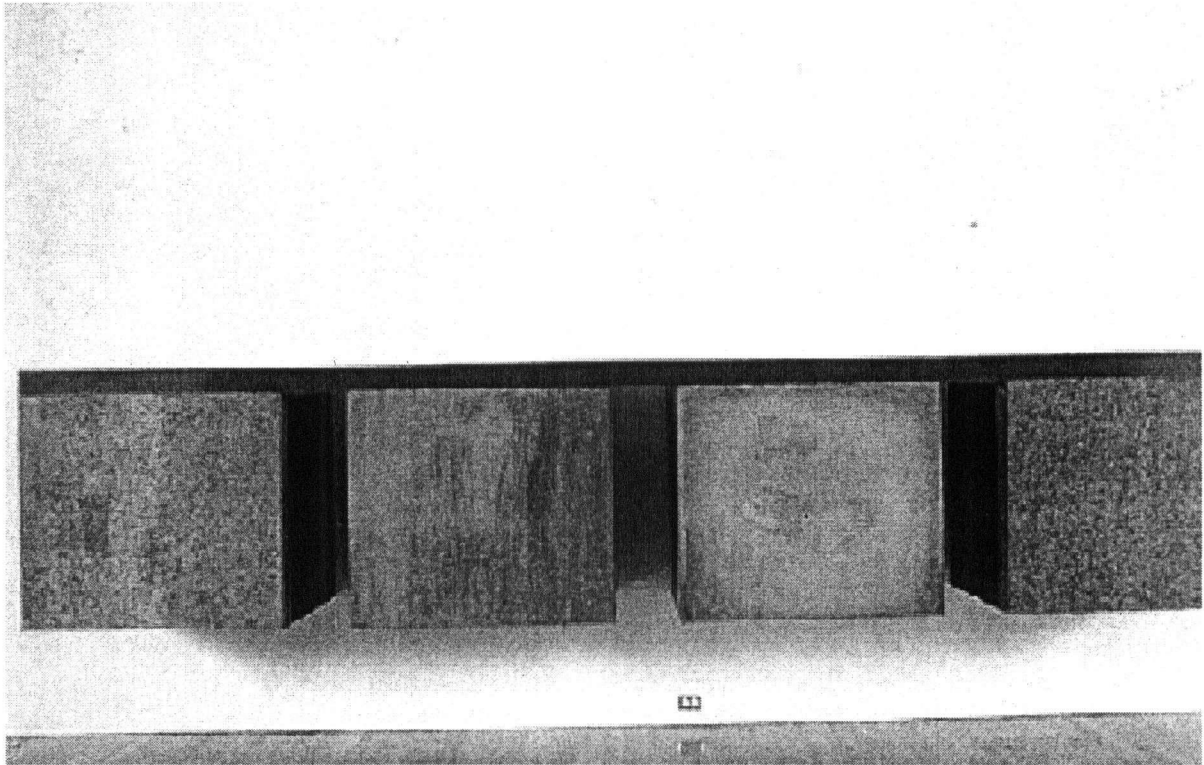


fig. 24. Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1966). Blue lacquer on aluminum, galvanized iron. 40 x 90 x 40 in. Pasadena Museum of Modern Art, California. In David Batchelor, *Minimalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43.

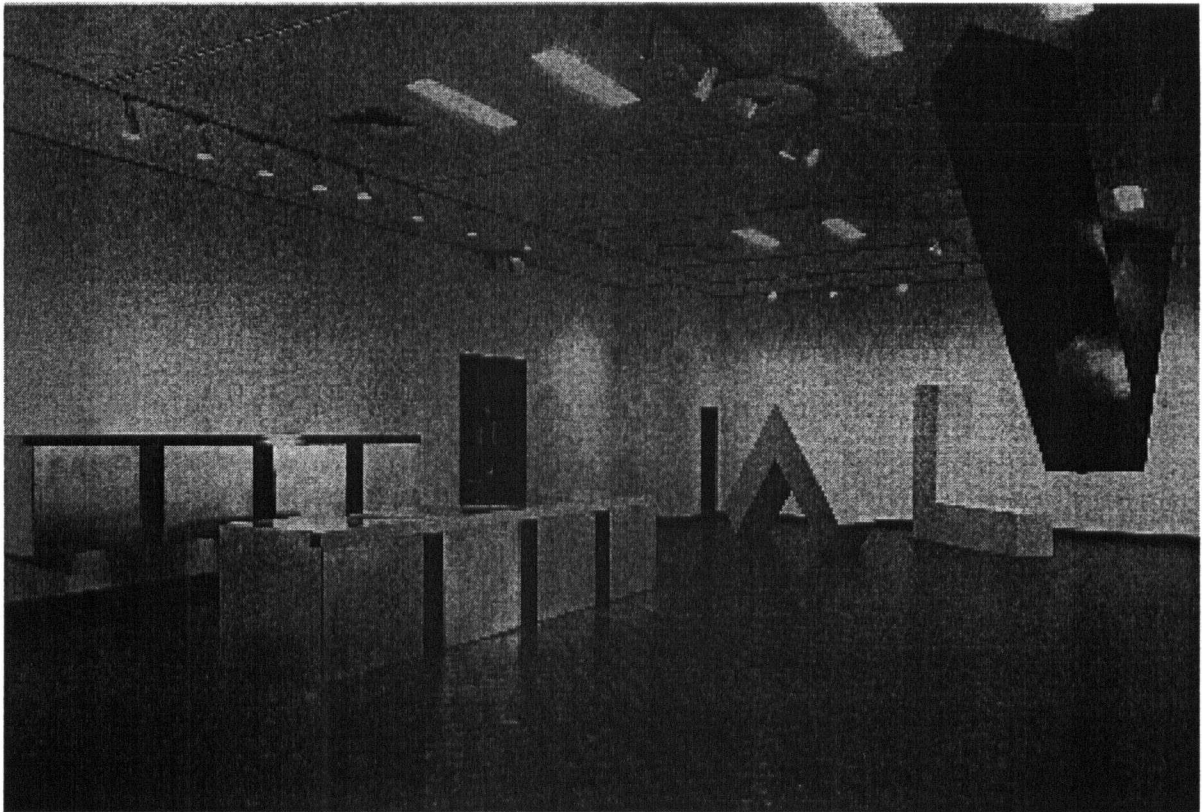


fig. 25. Installation view of Donald Judd's *Untitled* (1966) in "Primary Structure" Exhibition. In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 19.

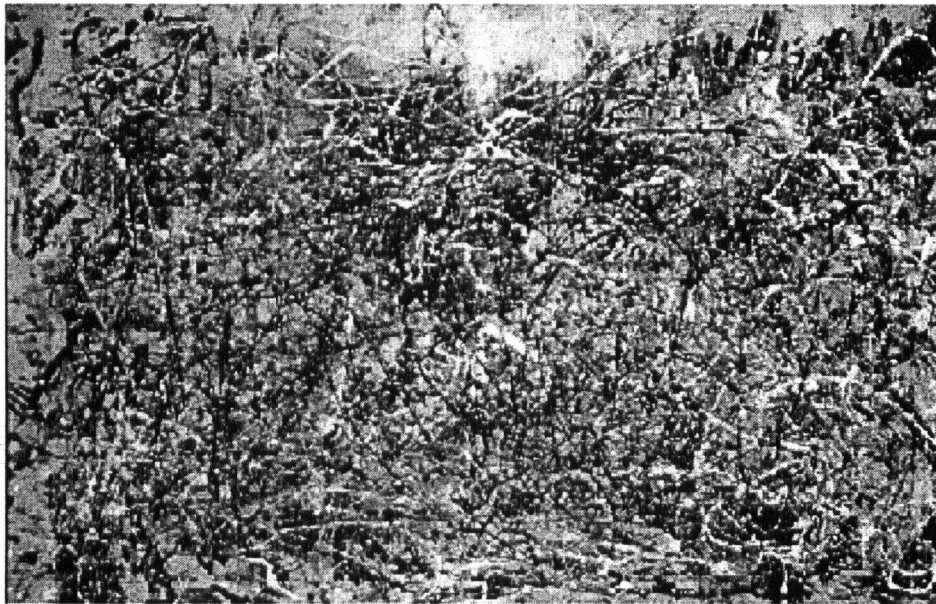


fig. 26. Jackson Pollock, *Number 1* (1948). Enamel and aluminum on canvas. 68 x 8.8 ft. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Museum of Modern Art, New York website: [www.moma.org/collection/conservation/pollock/number\\_1A.htm](http://www.moma.org/collection/conservation/pollock/number_1A.htm)

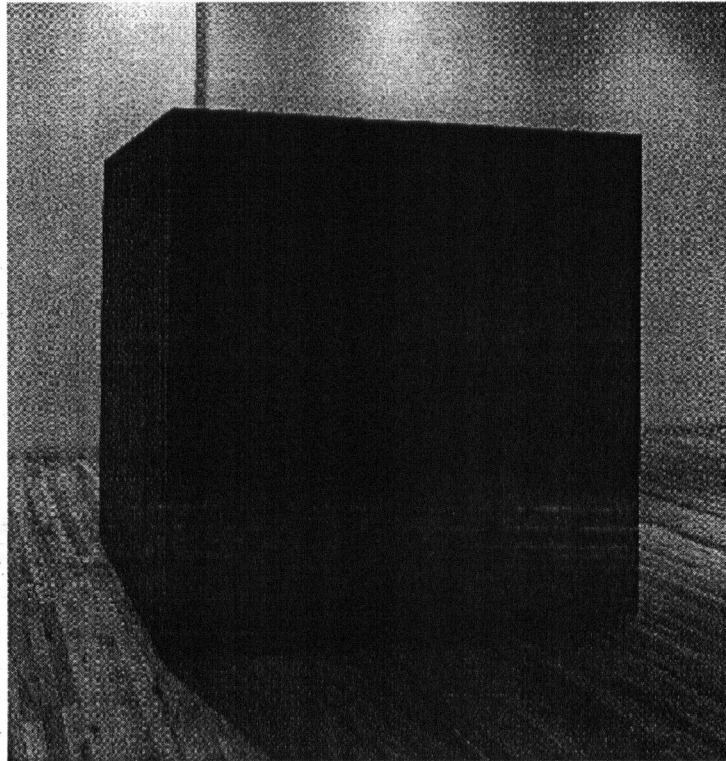


fig. 27. Tony Smith, *Smith Die* (1962). Steel. 72 x 72 x 72 in. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. In Alexander Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 191.



fig. 28. "The Pentagon anti-Vietnam war demonstration, 21 October 1967." Anonymous photograph. In Arthur Mauwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958 – c. 1974* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), n.p.



fig. 29. "The Pentagon anti-Vietnam war demonstration, 21 October 1967." Anonymous photograph. In Arthur Mauwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958 – c. 1974* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), n.p.



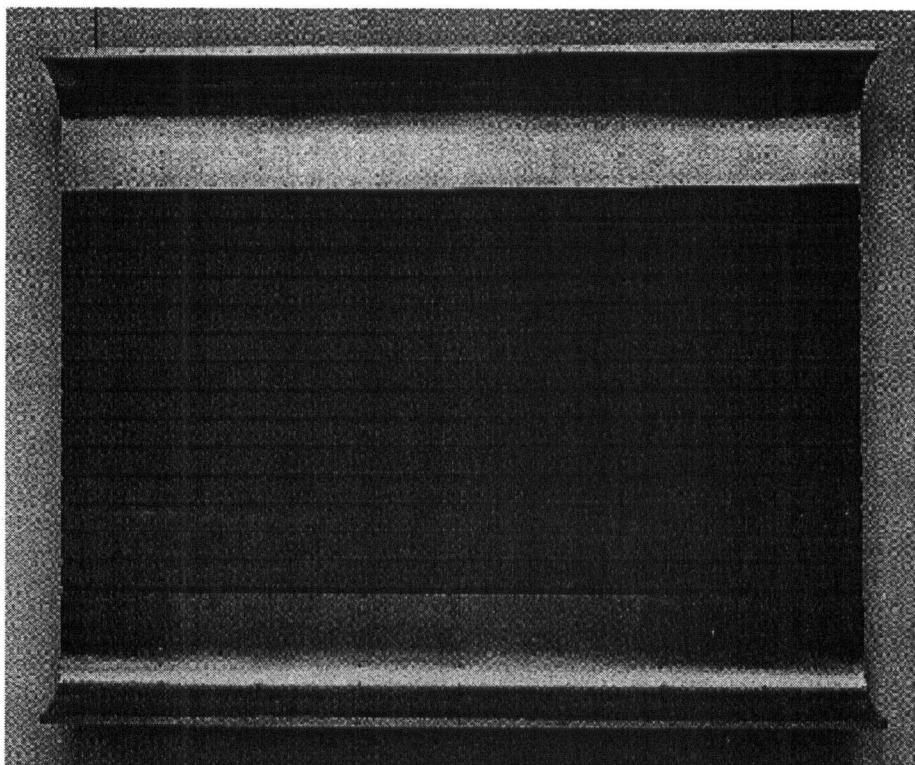


fig. 30. Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1962). 76 x 96 x 11.75 in. Private Collection. In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 56.



fig. 31. Andy Warhol, Installation of *Campbell's Soup Cans* in Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, 1962. Synthetic Polymer on Canvas. 20 x 16 in. In Thomas Crow, *The Rise of the Sixties* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc. 1996), 84.



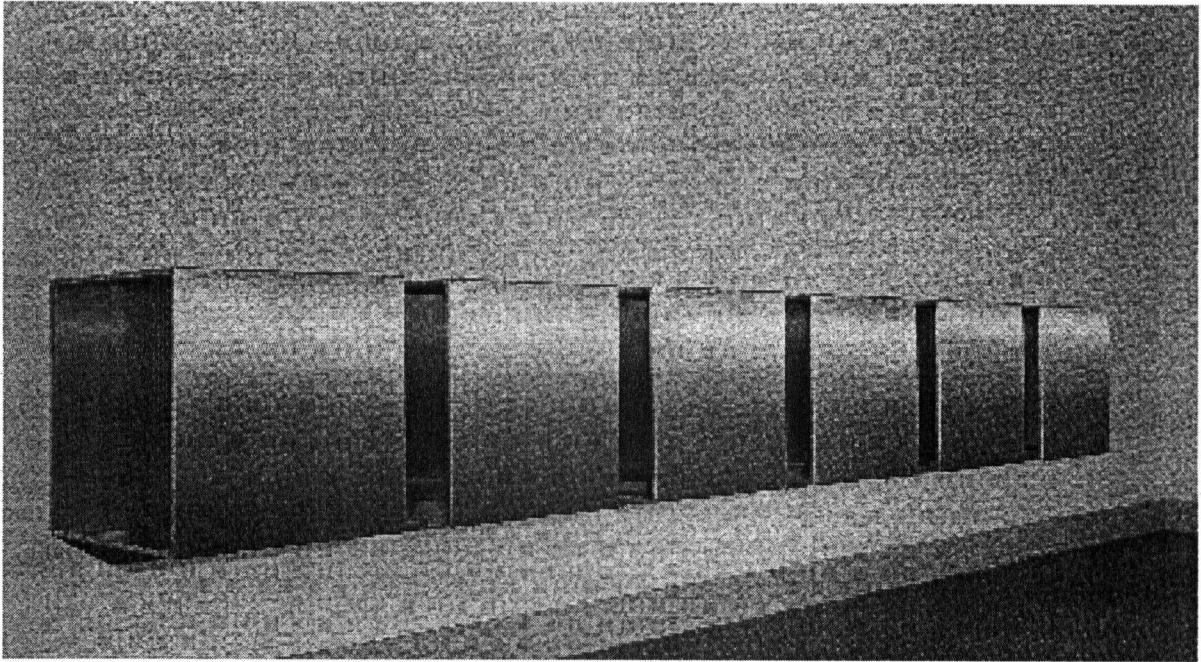


fig. 32. Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1968). Stainless steel top, sides and back and amber plexiglass ends. 34 x 34 x 34 in. at 8 in. intervals. Milwaukee Art Museum. In Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 305.

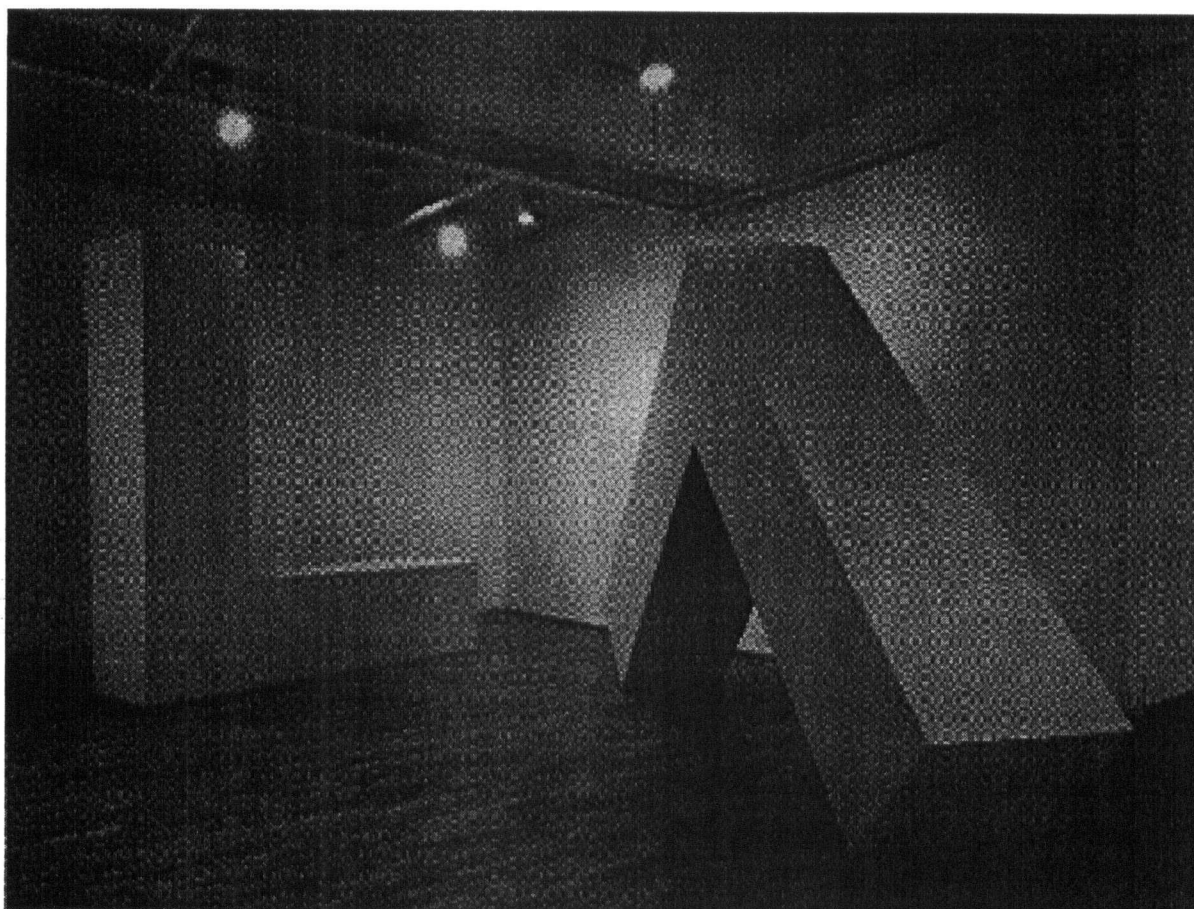


fig. 33. Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-beams)* (1965). Painted plywood. 96 x 96 x 24 in. As installed in the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, 1965. In Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 239.

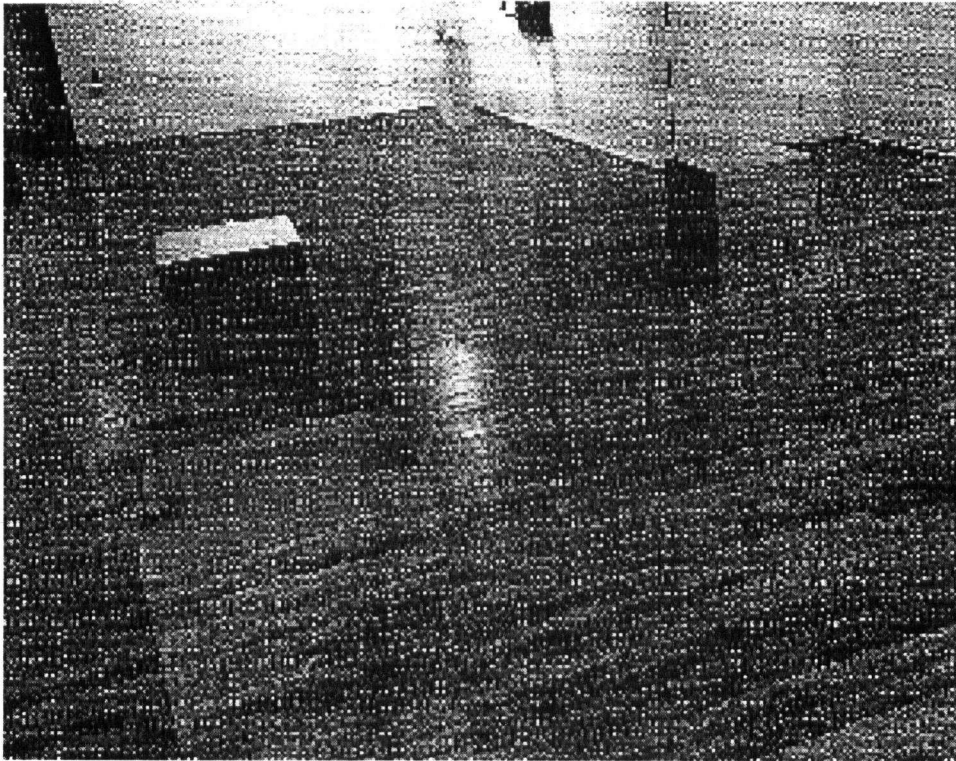


fig. 34. Robert Morris, *Mirrored Cubes* (1965). Plexiglas mirrors, wood. 36 x 36 x 36 in. (destroyed) As installed in Green Gallery, New York, 1965. In James Meyer, ed. *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 80.

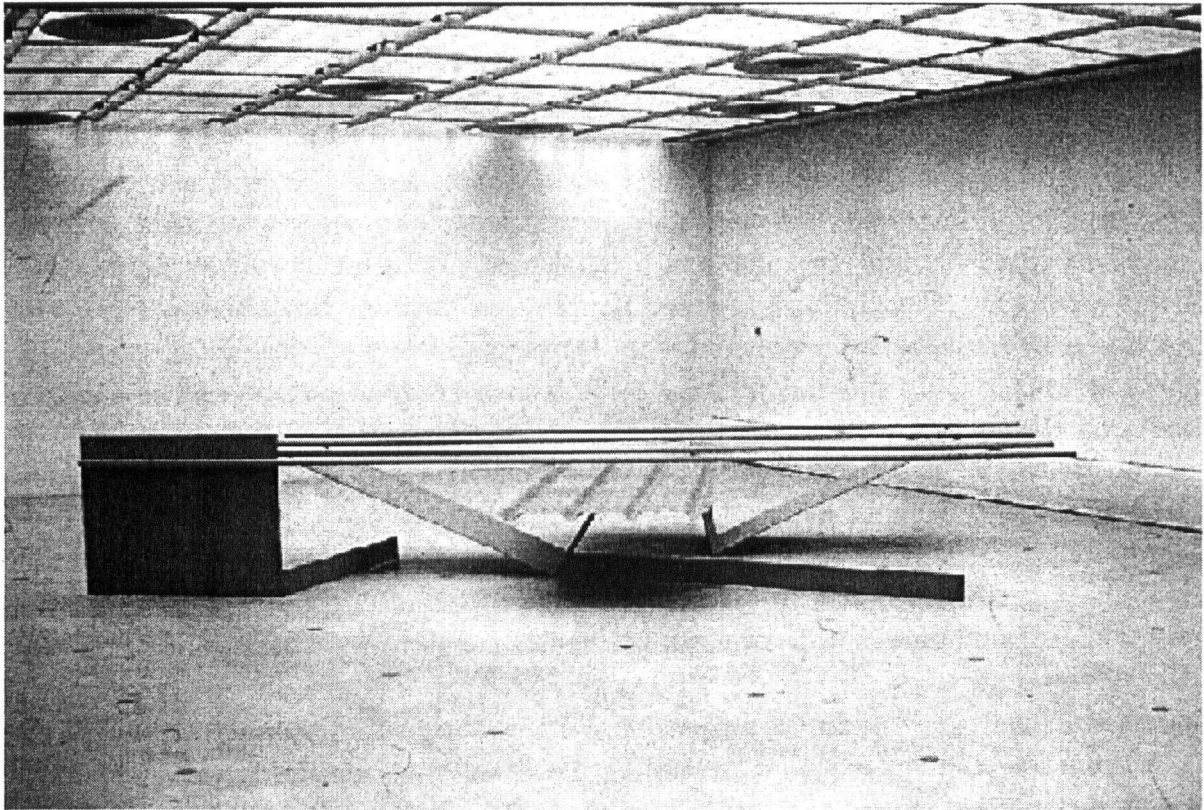


fig. 35. Anthony Caro, *Prairie* (1967). 37.8 x 229 x 126 in. Private Collection. In Alexander Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 183.



fig. 36. "Bread and Puppet Theatre." L.B. Johnson puppet with pro-war badge "All the way with LBJ" and a Vietnamese woman in background. Anti-Vietnam War March on Fifth Ave, New York. Oct 16, 1965. Photographer unknown. In Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural*





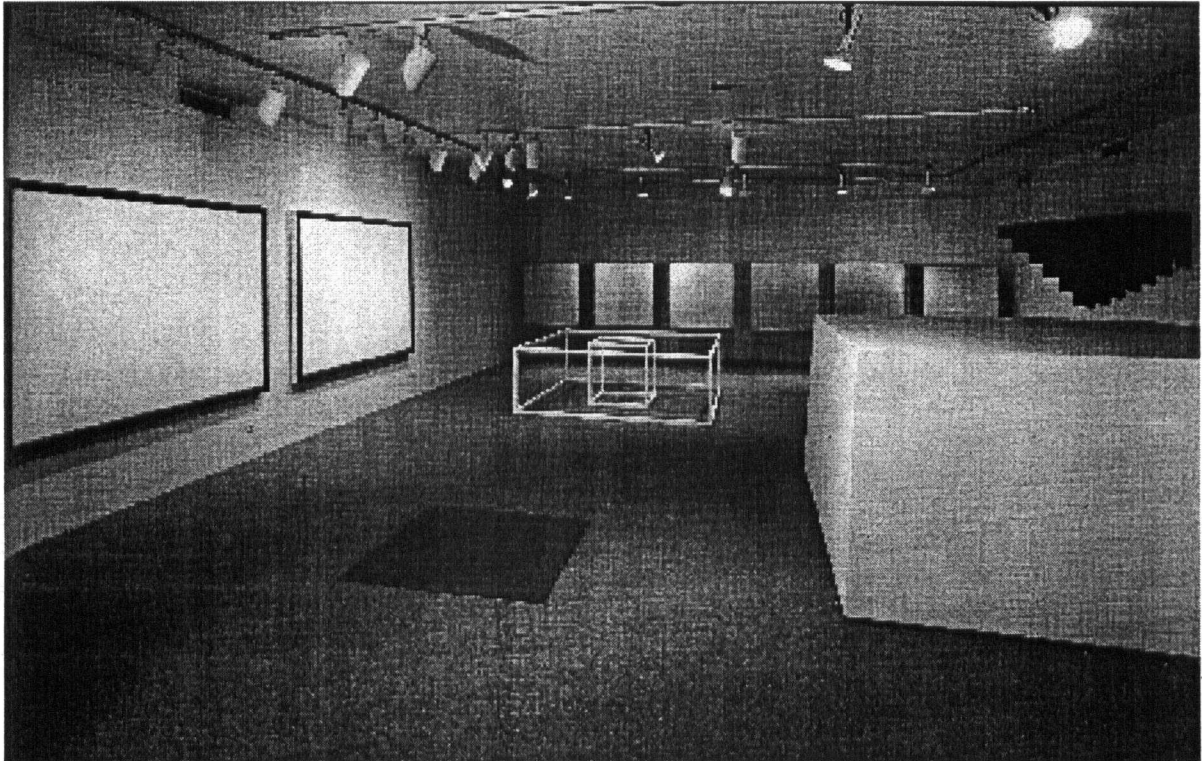


fig. 38. '10.' Dwan Gallery, New York, October 4-29, 1966. Clockwise left to right: Carl Andre, *Field* (1966); Jo Baer, *Horizontal Flanking: large scale* (1966); Donald Judd, *Untitled* (1966); Sol LeWitt, *A5* (1966); Robert Smithson, *Alogon* (1966); Robert Morris, *Untitled* (1966). In James Meyer, ed. *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 79.

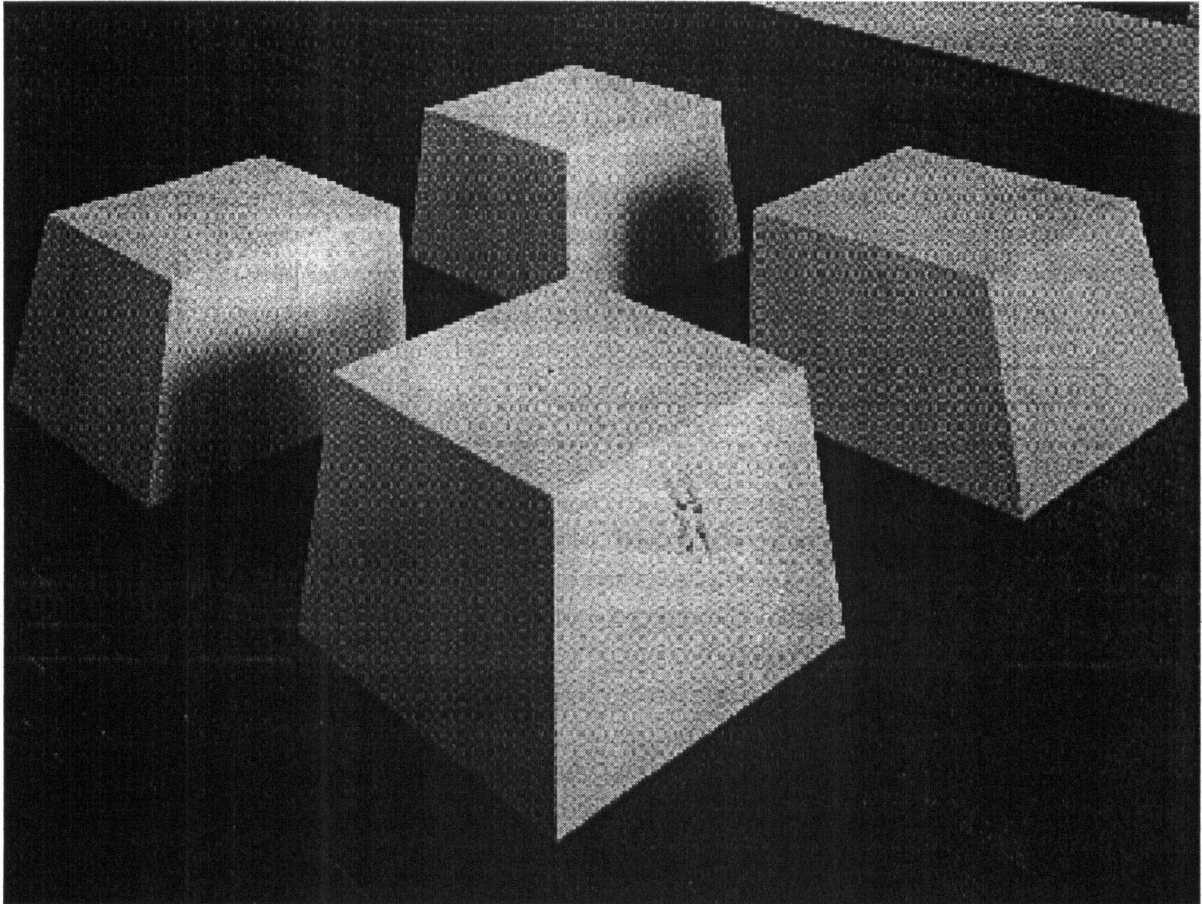


fig. 39. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Battered Cubes)* (1966). 24 x 36 x 36 in. Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 164.



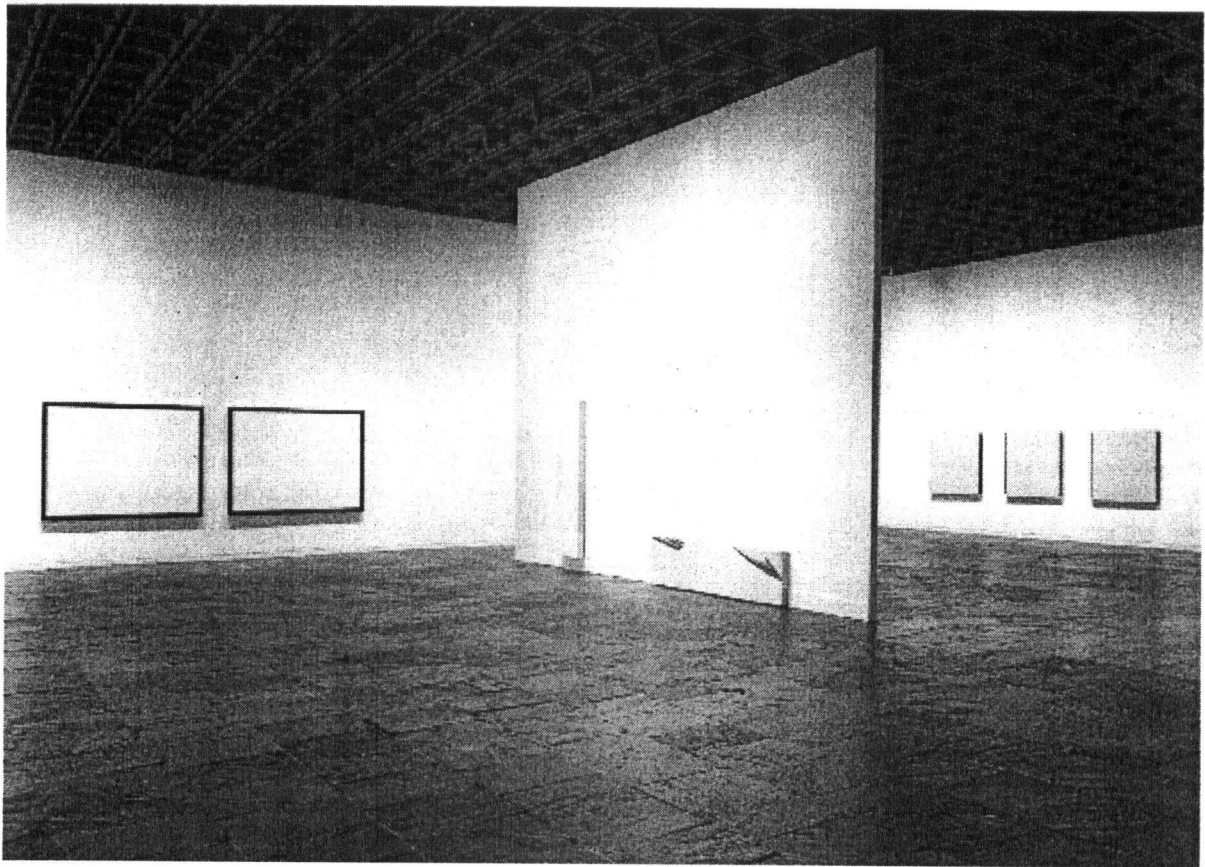


fig. 40. Jo Baer, Retrospective Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1975. In Jo Baer, *Jo Baer: Paintings 1960-98* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1999), 20.

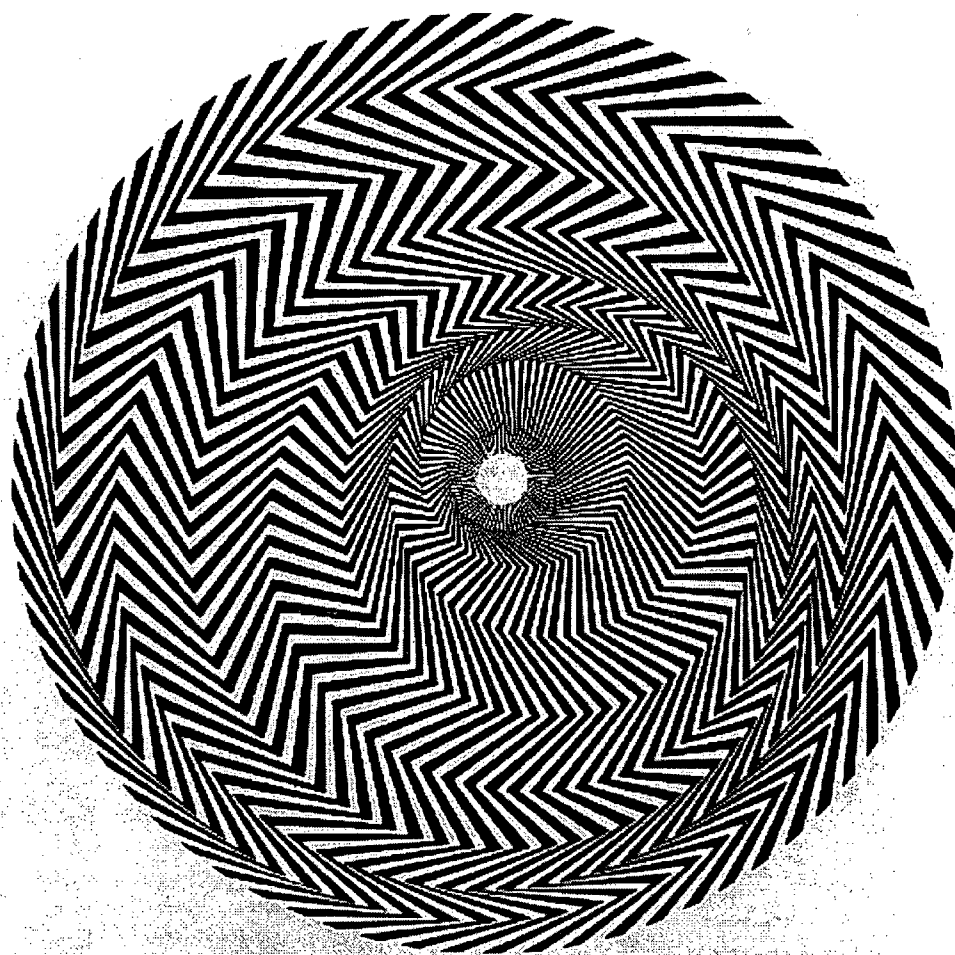


fig. 41. Bridget Riley, *Blaze I* (1964). Emulsion on board. 43 x 43 in. Private Collection. In *Bridget Riley: Reconnaissance* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 2001), 28.

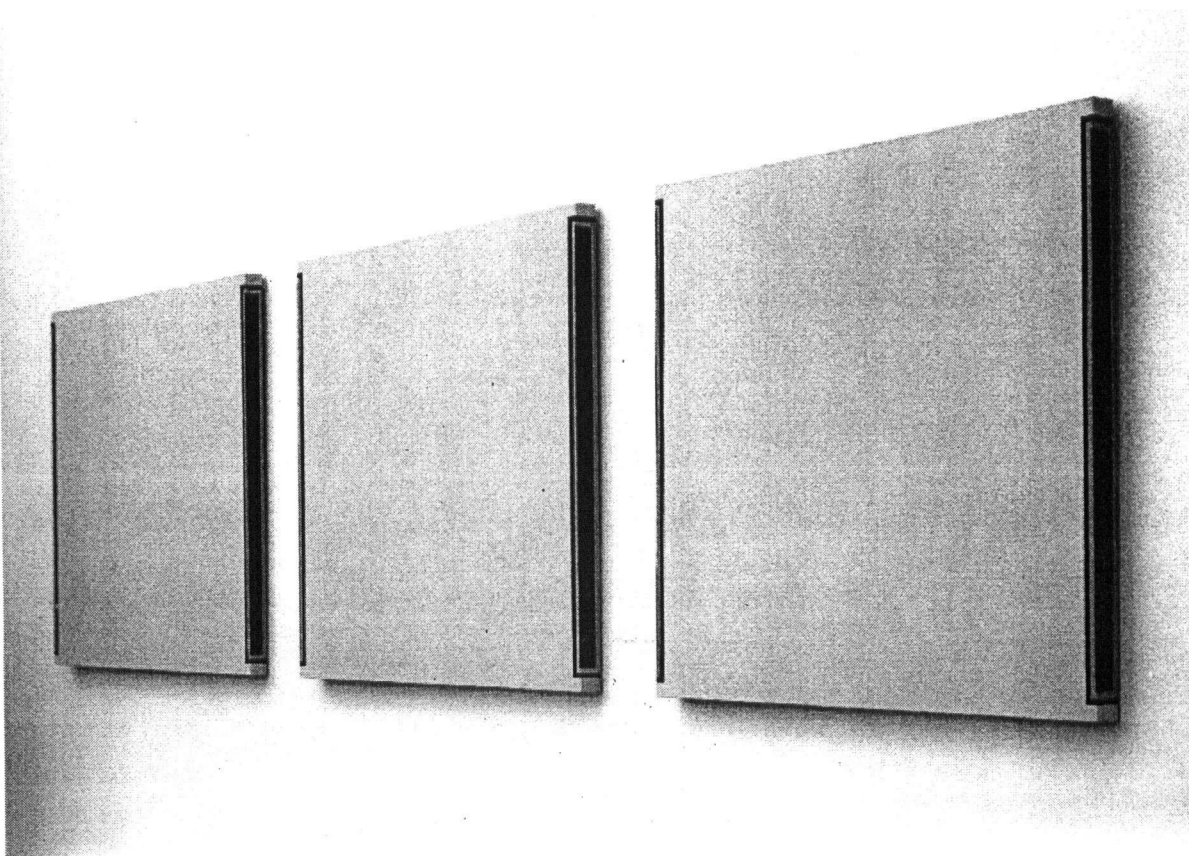


fig. 42. Jo Baer, *Untitled (Wraparound Triptych – Blue, Green, Lavender)* (1969-74). Oil on Canvas. 51 x 52 x 2.3 in. Collection of the artist. In *Jo Baer: Paintings 1960-98* (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1999), 75.

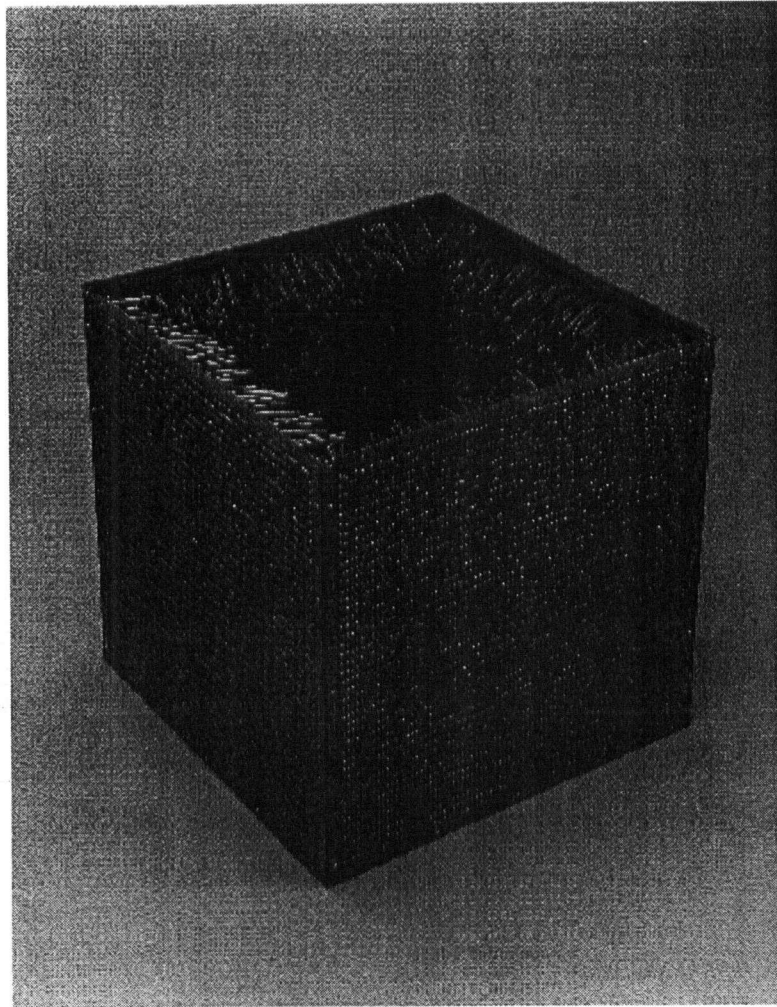


fig. 43. Eva Hesse, *Accession II* (1967). Galvanized steel, plastic tubing. 31 x 31 x 31 in. The Detroit Institute of Art. In Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 344.

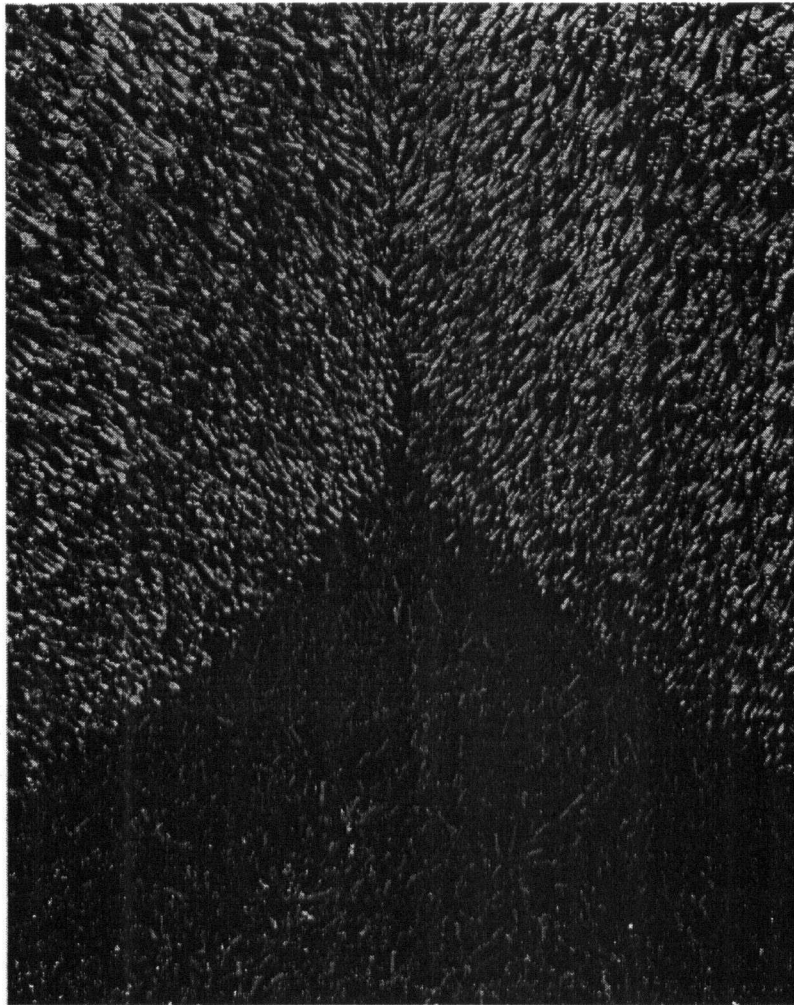


fig. 44. Eva Hesse, *Accession II* (1967). Detail of interior. In Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 345.

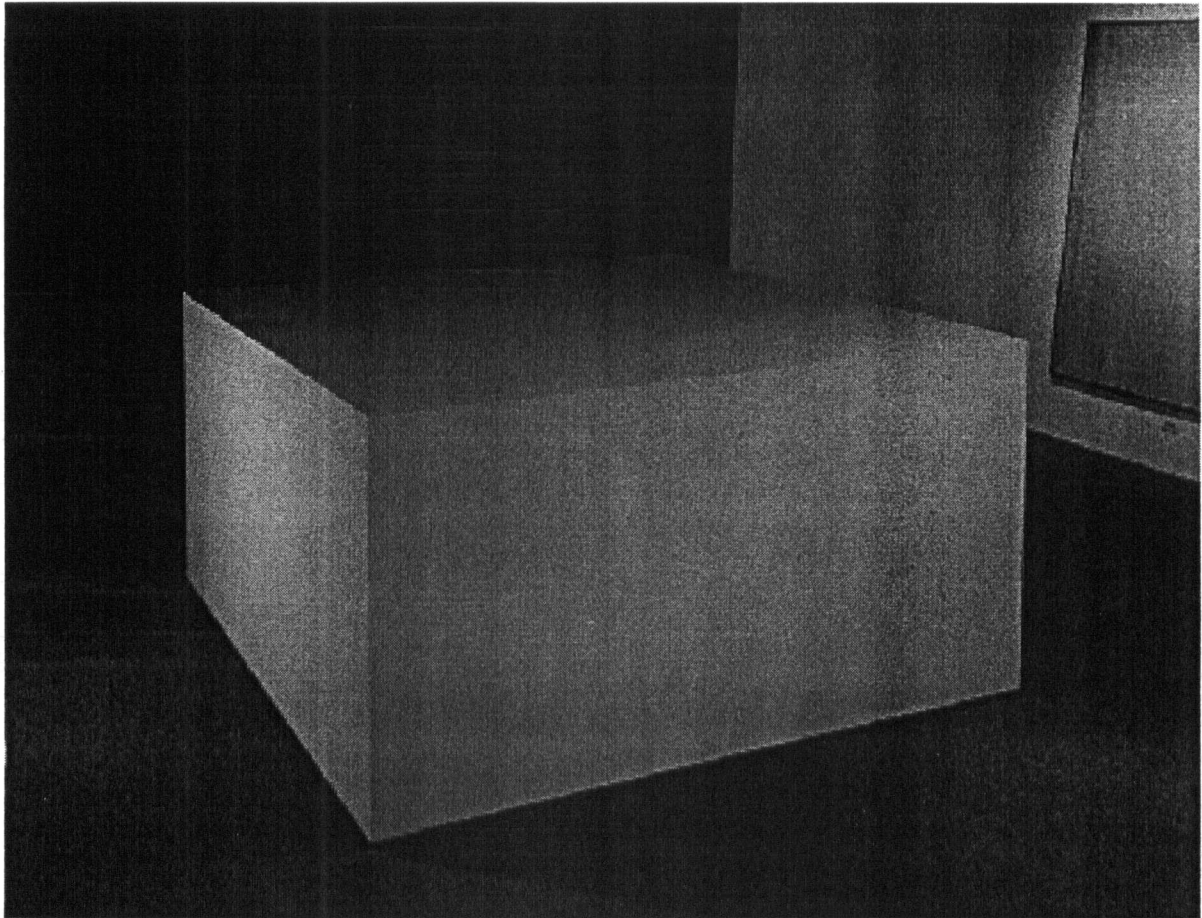


fig. 45. Robert Morris, *Untitled* (1966). Painted plywood. 19 x 38 x 38 in. (destroyed) In Michael Compton and David Sylvester, *Robert Morris* (London: The Tate Gallery, 1971), 43.



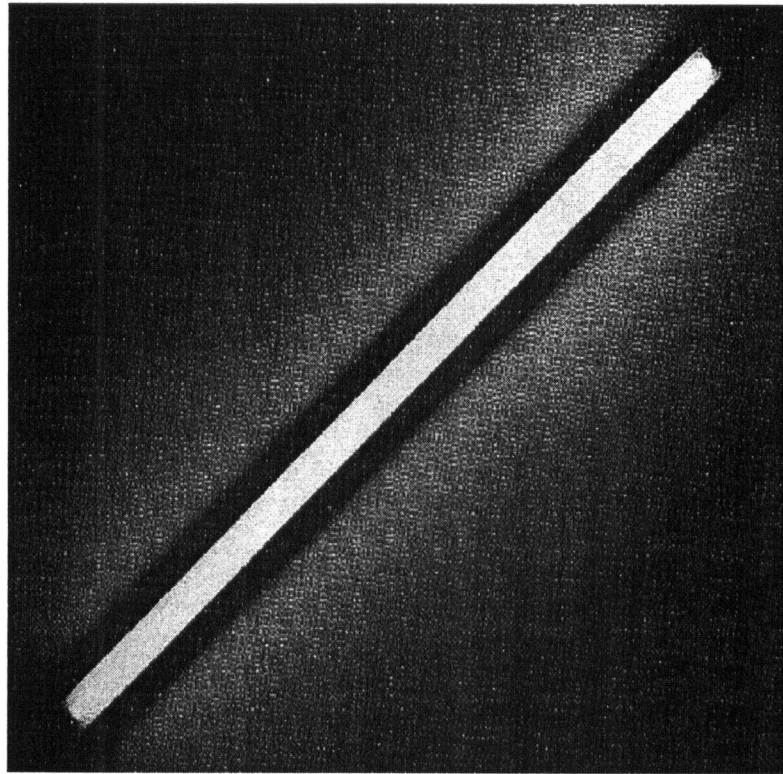


fig. 46. Dan Flavin, *The Diagonal of May 25, 1963* (1963). Cool white fluorescent light. 96 in. Pace Gallery, New York. In James Meyer, ed. *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 63.

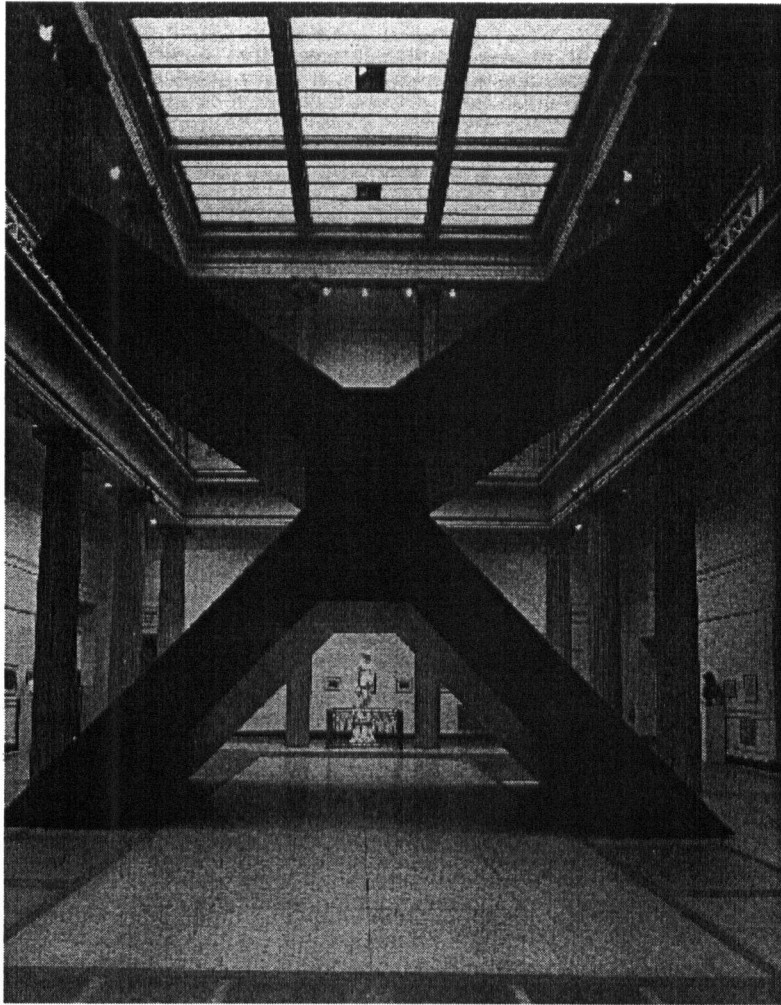


fig. 47. Ronald Bladen, *The X* (1967). As installed in "Scale and Content" at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1967. In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 165.



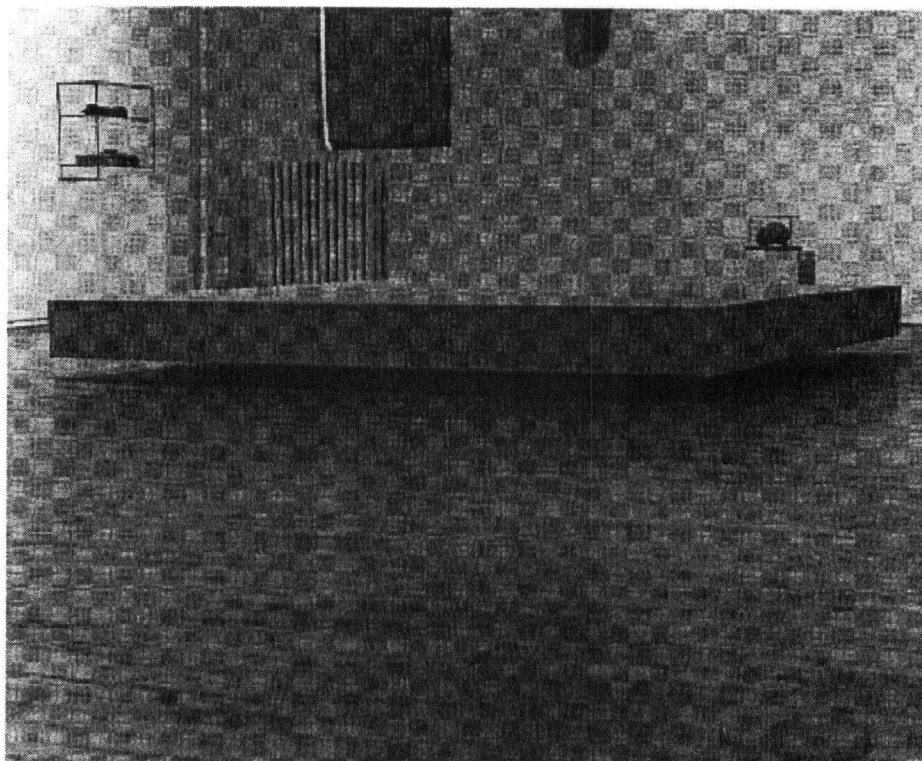


fig. 48. Robert Morris, *Slab* (1962). Painted plywood. 11.8 x 96 x 96 in. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. In Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 283.

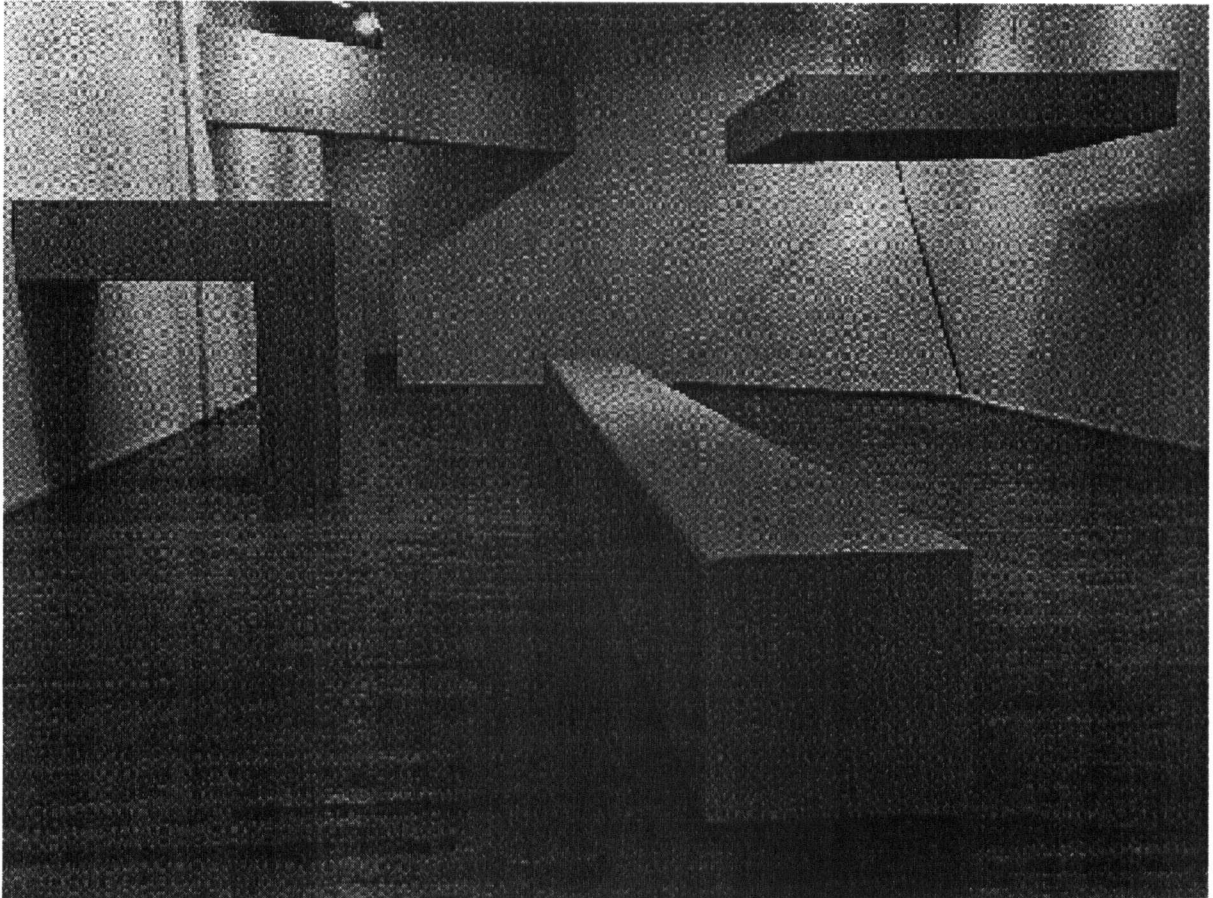


fig. 49. Robert Morris, One-Person Show at Green Gallery, New York, 1964. In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 114.

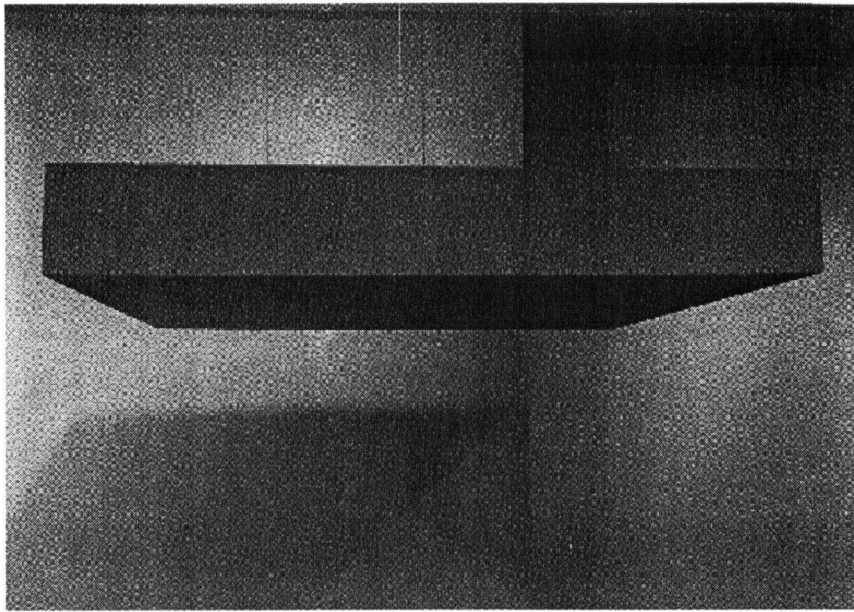


fig. 50. Robert Morris, *Untitled (Cloud)* (1962). (destroyed) In James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 115.

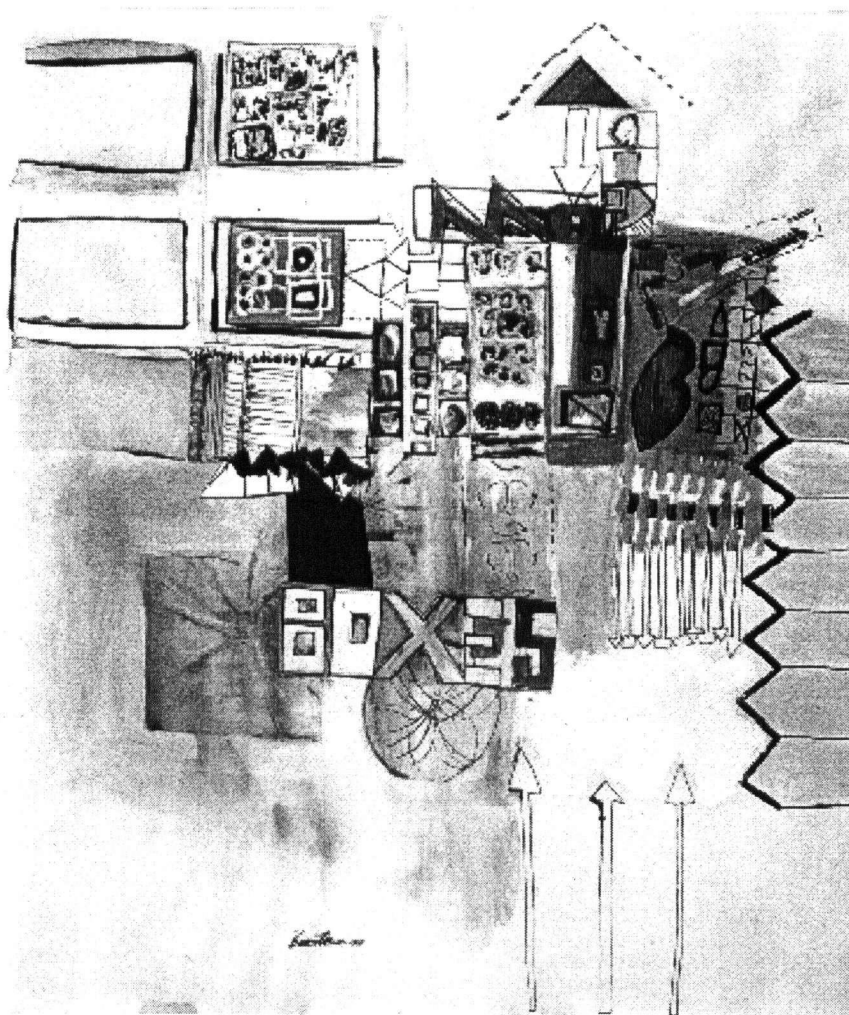


fig. 51. Eva Hesse, *Boxes* (1964). Paper collage with watercolor, ink, and goache. 23.5 x 19.7 in. Mugarbi Collection. In Elisabeth Sussman, ed. *Eva Hesse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 135.

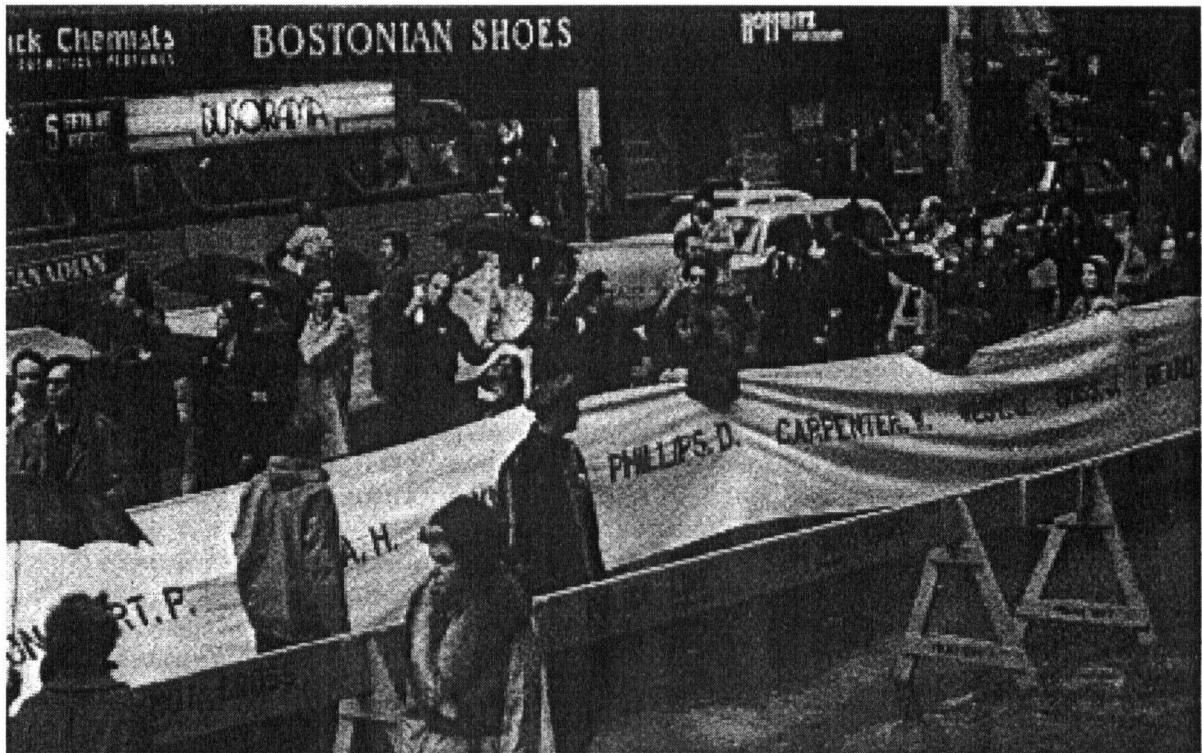


fig. 52. "Artists and Writers Protest / Art Workers Coalition Marches up Sixth Avenue with black body bags and about 1500 yard-long banners bearing the names of American and Vietnamese war dead, May 1969." Anonymous Photograph. In Lucy Lippard, *Get the Message: A Decade of Art for Social Change* (New York: E.P. Dutton, Inc. 1984), 16.



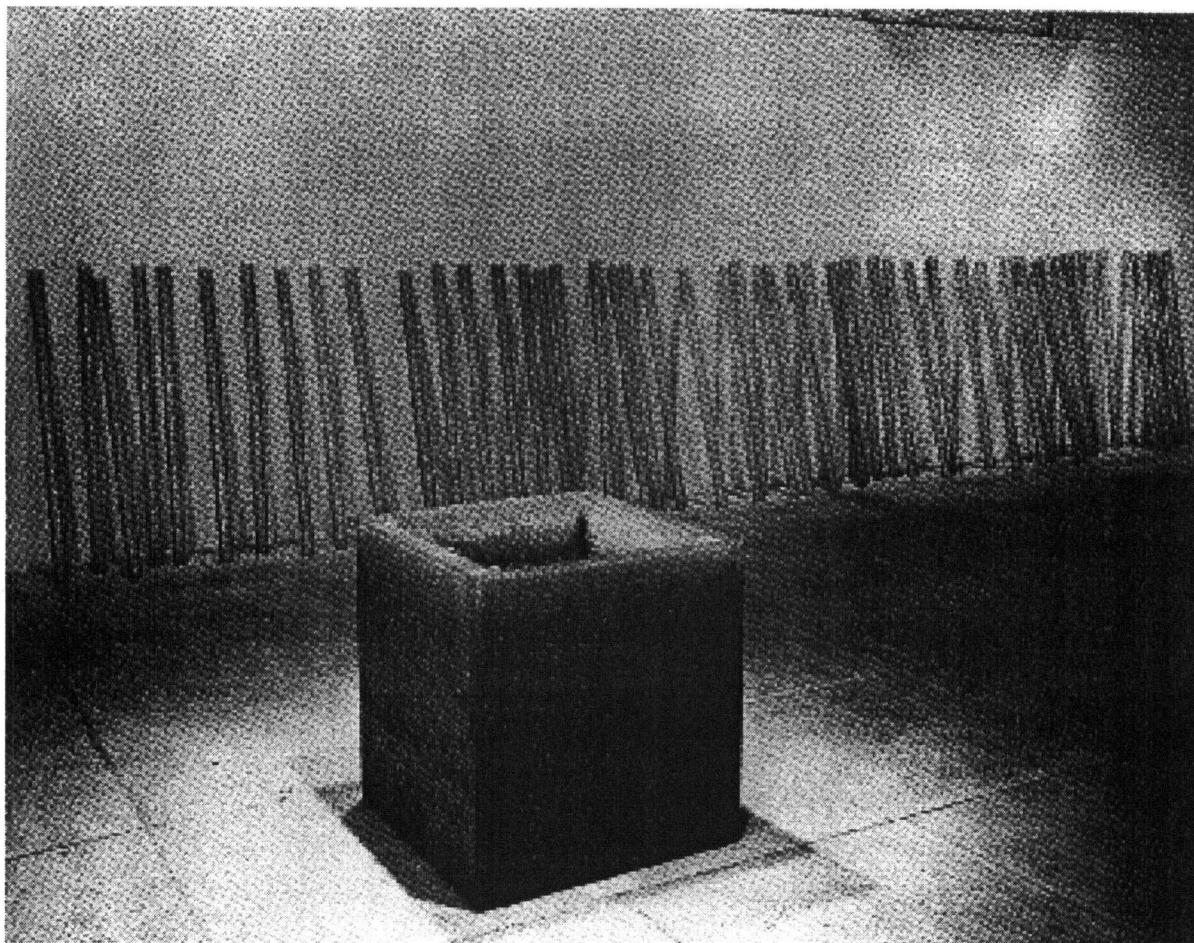


fig. 53. Installation view of "Eva Hesse: Chain Polymers" at the Fischbach Gallery, New York, 1968. Foreground: *Accession III*; background: *Accretion*. In Elisabeth Sussman, *Eva Hesse* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 29.

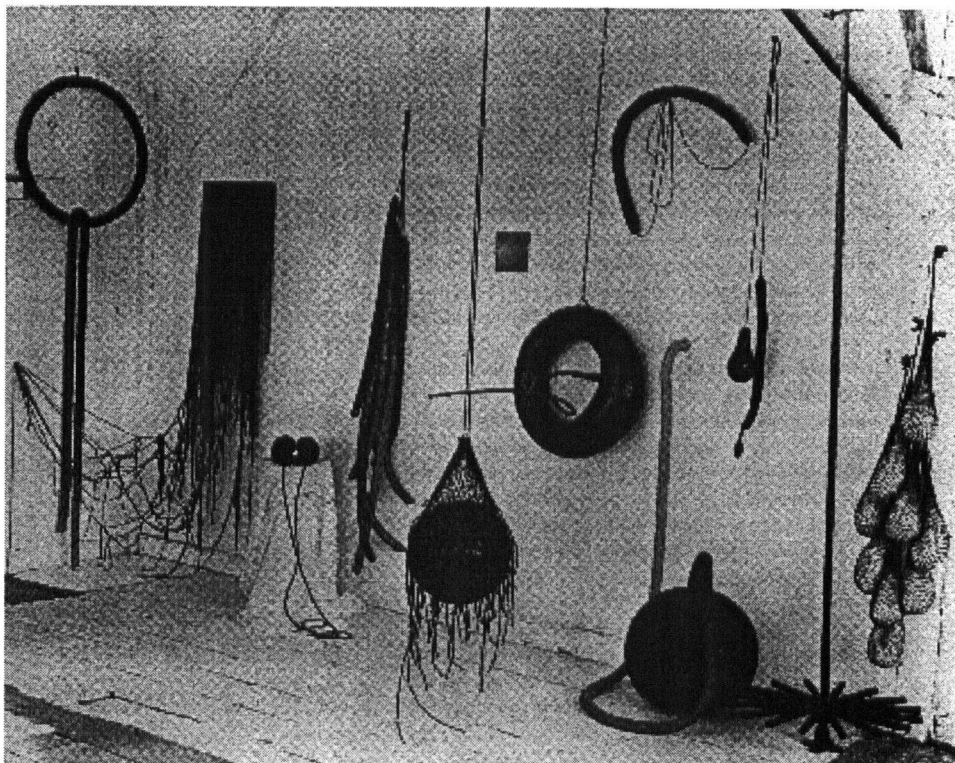


fig. 54. Eva Hesse, "Studio with various artworks from 1965-66." In Elisabeth Sussman, *Eva Hesse* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 61.



fig. 56. "Apes with the Monolith." In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Scanned from *2001: A Space Odyssey* Limited Edition DVD, Warner Home Video, 2001.



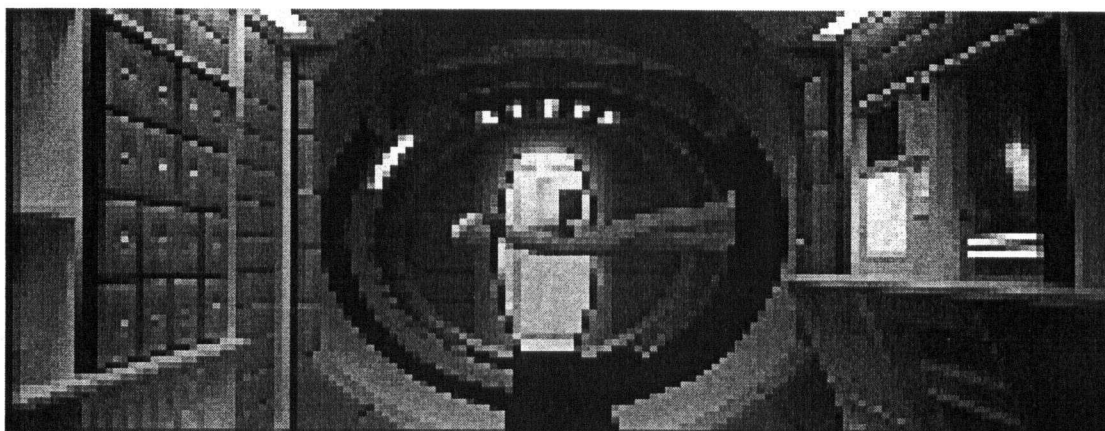


fig. 55. "Spinning Flight Attendant." In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Scanned from *2001: A Space Odyssey* Limited Edition DVD, Warner Home Video, 2001.

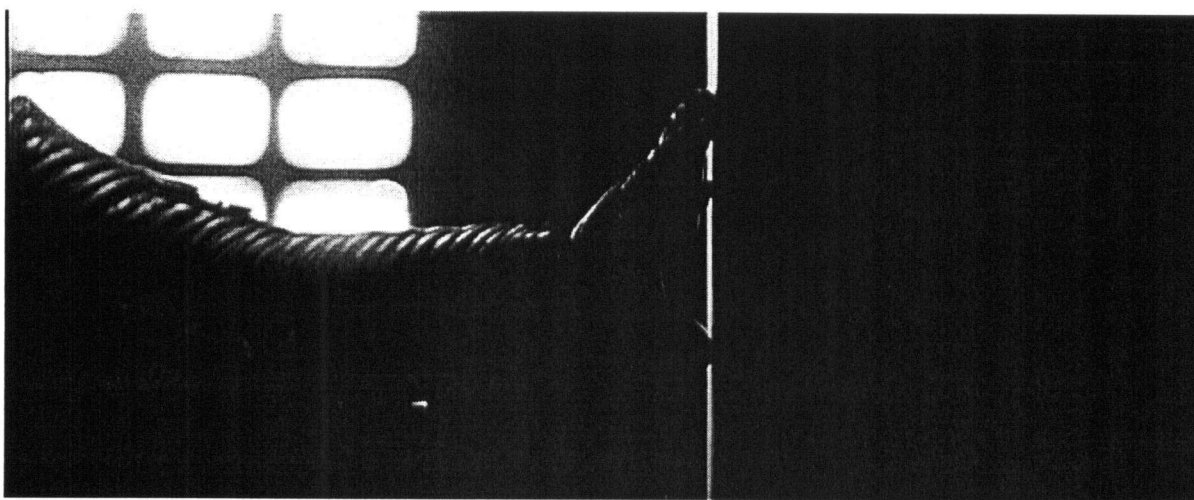


fig. 57. "Hand touching the Monolith." In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Scanned from *2001: A Space Odyssey* Limited Edition DVD, Warner Home Video, 2001.



fig. 58. "Monolith in Space" In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Directed and produced by Stanley Kubrick. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Scanned from *2001: A Space Odyssey* Limited Edition DVD, Warner Home Video, 2001.

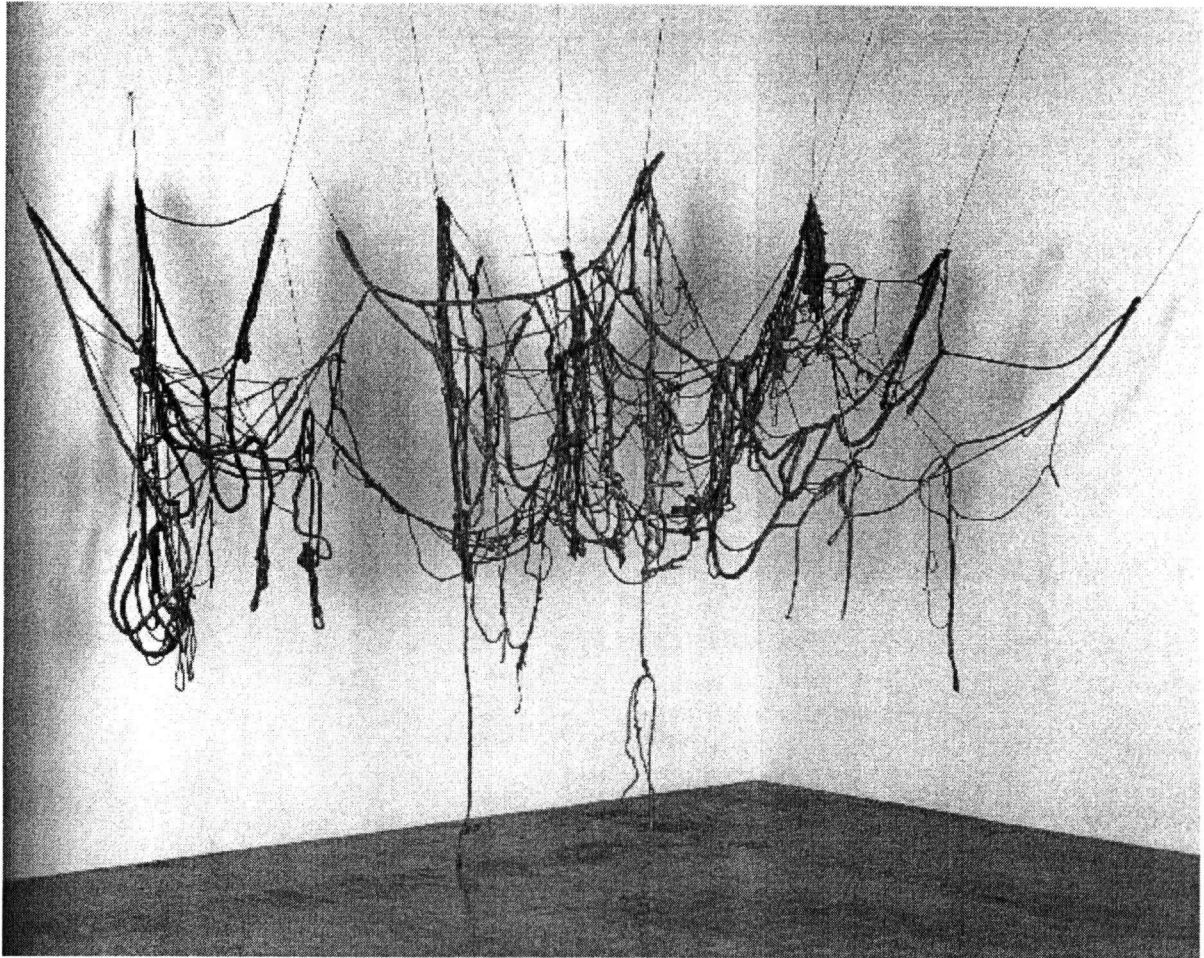


fig. 59. Eva Hesse, *Untitled* (1970). Latex and filler over rope and string with metal hooks. Dimensions variable. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In Elisabeth Sussman, ed. *Eva Hesse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 276.

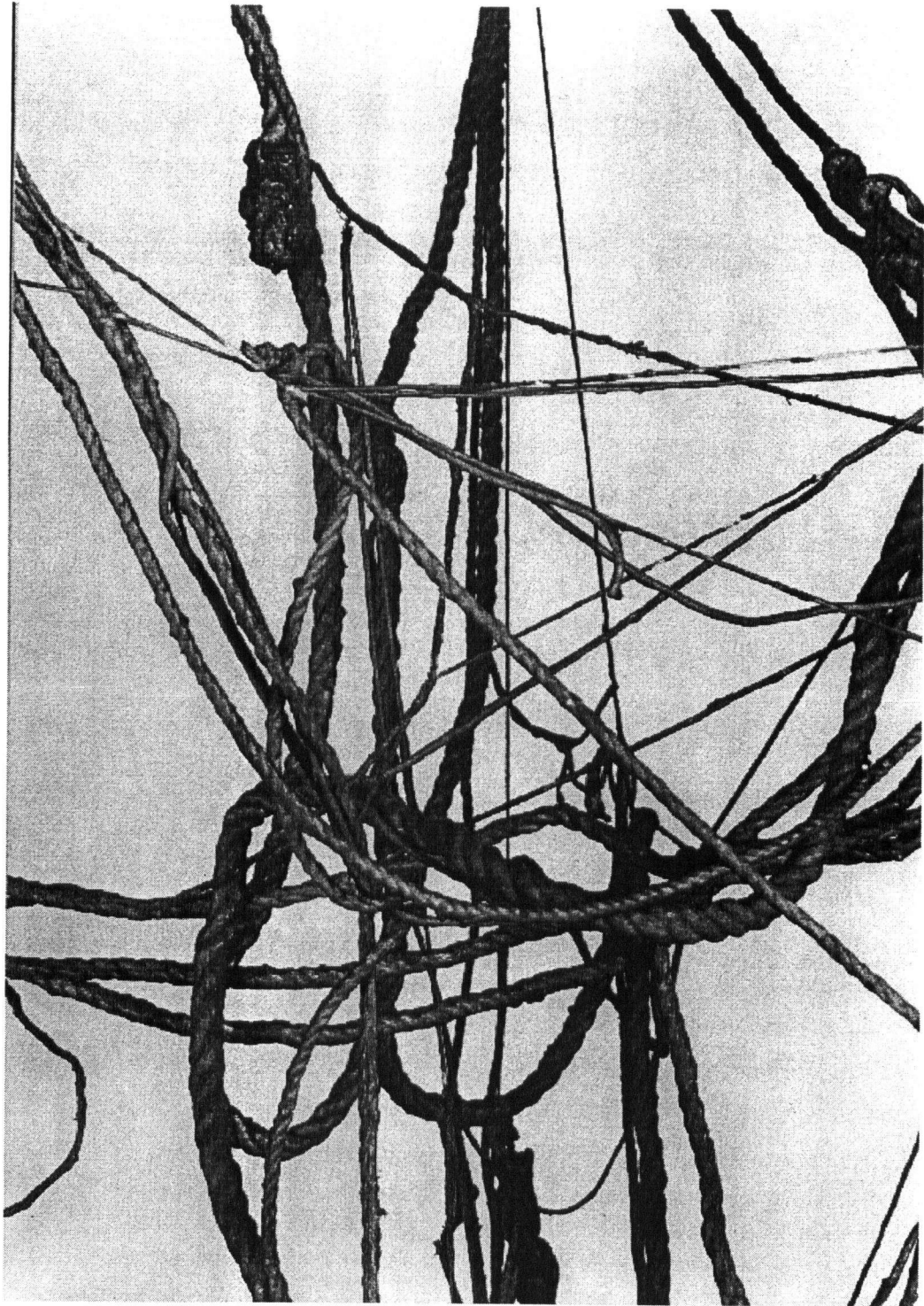


fig. 60. Detail of Eva Hesse, *Untitled* (1970). Latex and filler over rope and string with metal hooks, Dimensions variable. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In Elisabeth Sussman, ed. *Eva Hesse* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 277.



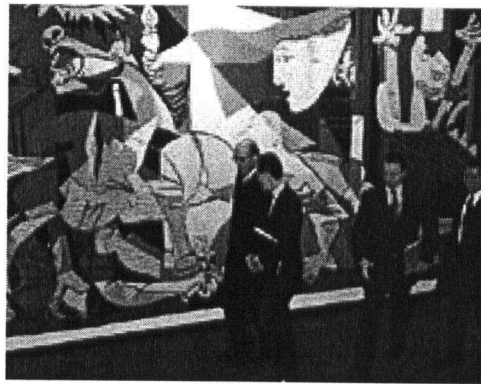
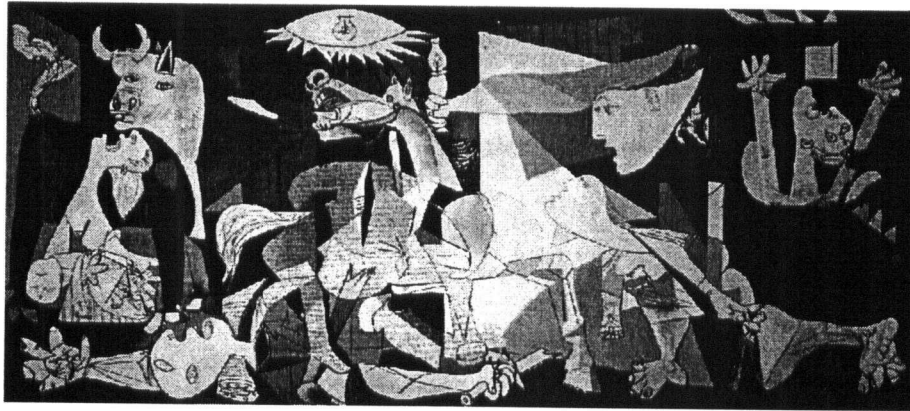


fig. 61. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (1937). Oil on canvas. 155 x 306 in. Reina Sofia Museum, Spain. Reina Sofia Museum website: <http://www.spanisharts.com/reinasofia/picasso/guernica.htm> (and below): "Guernica tapestry covered at United Nations, February 5, 2003." Photographer Unknown. In David Cohen, "What's so controversial about Picasso's *Guernica*?" Posted Thursday, February 6, 2003, at 3:56 PM PT. MSN Microsoft News website: <http://slate.msn.com/id/2078242/>