



# **ROBERT MORRIS**



**THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM**















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**SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM SOHO**

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#### NOTE

Although this monograph is published on the occasion of a comprehensive retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, the catalogue section is not meant to be a representation of the exhibition per se. Rather, it has been conceived as a thematic overview of that same range of Robert Morris's career featured in the retrospective, arranged roughly chronologically. In the catalogue, Morris's art works are numbered; these catalogue numbers are used as a cross-referencing tool throughout this book. For example, when *Two Columns* (1961) is discussed, it is referred to as "no. 1" because it is the first of Morris's works illustrated in the catalogue, and so forth. In many cases, the works are illustrated with archival photographs taken at the time of their first exhibition. Often, the originals were never meant to exist as unique art objects; instead, they were intended to be made, taken down, and refabricated as they were moved from one installation site to another. Thus, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the objects in the exhibition and those illustrated in the catalogue. All art works reproduced in this monograph are by Morris unless otherwise noted in the captions.

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## P R E F A C E

Peter Lawson-Johnston

That the Guggenheim Museum has undertaken a major retrospective devoted to the work of Robert Morris is perfectly in keeping with its history. The Guggenheim was, at its founding in 1937, devoted to "non-objective" painting; while the scope of the museum's collection has been expanded well beyond that area, abstract art has remained a central focus of the institution. The Guggenheim's commitment to abstraction culminated in 1990, with the acquisition of the prized Panza di Biumo collection of American Minimalist and Conceptual art of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the more than three hundred works acquired were thirty-four pieces by Robert Morris.

Morris was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1931. His artistic horizons were formed by the rise of Abstract Expressionism, which he became aware of during his years as an art-school student at the Kansas City Art Institute (1948–50), the San Francisco School of Fine Arts (1951), and Reed College (1953–55). Thus, when he began his career as a painter, he shared Abstract Expressionism's goals to make expressive and gestural art works. In the late 1950s, however, Morris discovered that his growing dissatisfaction with Abstract Expressionism was paralleled in avant-garde dance, in which young performers were critiquing the expressivity of Modern dance such as that choreographed by Martha Graham. In the early 1960s, Morris all but abandoned painting and began to make large-scale sculpture out of industrial materials. He initially conceived his sculpture in connection with avant-garde dance. This exhibition begins with works of 1961, but encompasses the extraordinary range of Morris's artistic output, which includes not only sculpture but legendary performances that parody art criticism while illuminating the continuity of art history; Duchampian readymades; felt wall sculptures; giant labyrinths and earthworks; intimate drawings; and installations that examine the omnipresent threat of technology spinning out of our control.

The announcement of the Morris project in 1989 was an acknowledgment of his central role in the art of the past three decades. It also reflected the important role that Morris's work had played in leading Thomas Krens to the directorship of the Guggenheim one year earlier. The association between the two began in 1976, when Krens, then Assistant Professor in the Art Department at Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, headed a program to bring visiting artists to the campus for semester-long residencies. Morris's project was a monumental mirror piece (installed in the Guggenheim Museum SoHo as part of the current exhibition) that was originally conceived for and presented in the interior courtyard of

the nearby Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, then under the directorship of George Heard Hamilton. The experience of working with Morris to realize the piece, as well as Morris's power to conceptualize the aesthetic ambitions of 1960s and 1970s art, produced in Krens strong convictions about the importance of the scale, the conditions of installation, and the compositional openness of that new work and the powerfully revolutionary aesthetic experience it could shape.

Accordingly, Krens began to act on two fronts, the first related to the scope of Morris's own work, the second connected to Minimalist and Postminimalist art in general. In 1978, he began work on a catalogue raisonné of Morris's oeuvre, a project that was originally scheduled to be completed in five years, but, because he is such a prolific creator, is still on-going.

By the mid-1980s, Krens was convinced that art museums in general were not prepared to service the demands of scale and the radicality of experience of the art of Morris's generation, which includes such artists of enormous achievement as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson. By this time, Krens, in addition to his teaching duties, had assumed the directorship of the Williams College Museum of Art, and from that position he undertook the transformation of his projection about museums and large-scale Minimalist art into a reality that was to become the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. The conversion of this massive factory complex in North Adams, Massachusetts, would become a spectacular demonstration of the new aesthetic in the form of an institution. In 1988, Krens assumed the directorship of the Guggenheim, where, with his acquisition of the Panza Collection, he continued to act on his belief that American museums had failed to acquire in depth the most important art produced since 1950. With this acquisition, the Guggenheim has become the most prominent museum in the world for American art of the 1960s and 1970s.

With this background, then, it is not surprising that Krens should undertake the Morris retrospective not merely in his capacity as Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, but as cocurator of the exhibition. He was joined in this task by the distinguished art historian, critic, and theorist Rosalind Krauss. Krauss, like Krens, has a long-standing relationship with Morris's work; and, as with Krens, that work played an important role in the shaping of her ideas about art. Professor of Art History at Columbia University, Krauss has been coeditor of *October* magazine since its founding in 1976. Krauss's own aesthetic convictions were reshaped at the end of the 1960s through her experience of Minimalism,

most particularly that of Morris and Serra, an experience that revised her sense of the import of Modern sculpture. It was out of the conceptual revelations their work inspired that she wrote the seminal book *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977) and came to organize various important exhibitions of contemporary sculpture. This has meant that for her, too, the project of curating a Morris retrospective has a certain historical inevitability.

In beginning to plan this retrospective, the first full-scale presentation devoted to the artist, the two curators shared a conviction that the richness and complexity of the context of Morris's work could only be served by weaving together all its various aspects in order to show how they create a continuous project. Therefore, they felt, it was crucial to bring Morris's performance works of the 1960s into direct juxtaposition with his early sculpture. To this end, the Guggenheim undertook to reconstruct and film those performances for inclusion in the exhibition. In achieving this ambitious goal, we are extremely grateful to Babette Mangolte, who directed the films superbly; her devotion to this aspect of the project was crucial to its realization. Lucinda Childs, who had herself appeared in the original 1965 performance of Morris's *Waterman Switch*, generously advised us on this production. To the dancers and performers who lent their talents to the reconstructions—Susan Blankensop, Andrew Ludke, Michele Pogliani, Michael Stella, Sarah Tomlinson, and Pamela Weese—we offer our warmest thanks. At the exhibition itself, these performances are shown via the new medium of high-definition video. Such a dramatic presentation was made possible by the Sony Corporation of America.

The Sony Corporation was joined in its support of this exhibition by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency, and The Bohen Foundation.

The complexity of Morris's work made special demands on the team that conceived and produced this catalogue. In an effort to deal with its multiple aspects, we turned to a variety of writers to contribute essays: poet David Antin; critic Maurice Berger; Jean-Pierre Criqui, editor of *Cahiers du Musée*, Paris; Annette Michelson, Professor of Cinema Studies, New York University, and coeditor of *October*; and W. J. T. Mitchell, editor of *Critical Inquiry*, Chicago. Much of the original research that appears in this catalogue was made possible through access to the Robert Morris Archive, deposited by the artist at the Guggenheim. Kimberly Paice, Project Coordinator, utilized this material in the course of her research to document the development of Morris's work; this research led to the catalogue entries in this book. The coordination

and editing of the complicated range of materials that comprises this book was superbly handled by the Guggenheim's Publications department, headed by Anthony Calnek, Managing Editor. Deborah Drier edited this book with great talent. Edward Weisberger, Assistant Managing Editor, skillfully handled many editorial aspects of the book, and Elizabeth Levy, Production Editor, played an important role in its realization. The nature of the work made special demands on the design of the catalogue, demands more than met by Design Writing Research, New York City.

Kimberly Paice also coordinated the exhibition's multiple aspects. Over the course of four years, she has been engaged in the Guggenheim's effort to document and present Robert Morris's work, first as compiler of the catalogue raisonné, and then as Project Coordinator for the present exhibition.

Lynne Addison, Associate Registrar, has successfully handled all aspects of the assembly of the works included in the exhibition. Elizabeth Estabrook, Associate Conservator, has provided important information and assistance regarding the care and display of the diverse objects. Amy Husten, Manager of Budget and Planning, coordinated the complex financial matters.

This project has made extraordinary demands on Pamela L. Myers, Administrator for Exhibitions and Programming, who superbly handled all facets of design, fabrication, lighting, and installation for this exhibition. Her staff, including Scott Wixon, Manager of Installation and Collection Services; Laura Antonow, Senior Lighting Technician; Cara Galowitz, Manager of Graphic Design Services; Anibal Gonzalez-Rivera, Manager of Collection Services; Peter Costa, Senior Museum Technician; and Joseph Adams, Senior Museum Technician, have been instrumental in the preparation and installation process. Particular acknowledgment is due to the skill and devotion of those people who executed the refabrication of much of the early work for inclusion in this exhibition: Peter Read, Jr., Manager of Fabrication Services; Jon Brayshaw, Museum Technician/Carpenter; David Johnson, Museum Technician/Carpenter; Josh Neretin, Museum Technician/Carpenter; Timothy Ross, Technical Specialist; William Graves, Chief Engineer; and Andrew Ludke, Morris's studio assistant.

Finally, our warmest thanks go to Robert Morris himself, whose cooperation was crucial to the mounting of this exhibition. In addition to overseeing the refabrications of many of his early works, he lent generously from his own collection and became deeply involved with the myriad aspects of the installation and catalogue. The exhibition's success is in large measure a function of his efforts

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# INTRODUCTION

## THE TRIUMPH OF ENTROPY Thomas Krens

*I think that what Time Keeper has known all along, Ignatz, is that only death is identical with itself.*  
—Robert Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson"

Robert Morris's entire oeuvre is a single work—"a continuous project altered daily." To see it any other way is to radically underestimate a powerful artist. Yet his body of work begins and ends as a text that consciously seduces, and ultimately resists, a definitive exegesis in any form. And this sets up the problem in the current context: How does one "know" an artist who so actively resists being known—who at the same time provides in and around his work as much information, variety, and complexity as any artist who ever lived?

The means for knowing an artist's work are remarkably prescribed. Retrospective exhibitions and documentary monographs are presumed to tell the story of their subject. Critical and historical analyses are mobilized to define and elucidate the most significant and important aspects of a work. Special efforts at compilation (such as the publication by MIT Press of Morris's complete writings on the occasion of the Guggenheim retrospective) and classification (like a catalogue raisonné and other feats of academic heavy lifting) are occasionally brought to bear. Yet the problem still remains. As Body Bob (one of Morris's fictional aliases in one of his most recent texts) says, even "the whole story can never tell the whole story."

Yet the story, in whole or in part, is the only mediation between the experience of an increasingly hermetic object and the various meanings that may be imbedded in its structure. Morris's work is particularly problematic—more so, perhaps, than that of any other artist of his time—because it is predicated on the notion of its own structural exhaustion. By making his art one continuous and permutable piece, Morris puts himself as an artist in direct opposition to entropy and plays chess with the cultural enterprise, mobilizing energy, intelligence, and insight in a game that he knows by definition he cannot win. Along the way, the work has been both interrogatory and expressive, historically conscious and theoretically adept, and exhaustively diverse in medium and content.

In over fifteen years of working with Morris and researching his work in the process of producing a catalogue raisonné, I am led to the conclusion that there are few fields of study in either the sciences or the humanities that do not, somehow, relate to his work. This is, of course, part of the special richness of his project. Its coherence, however, is not made manifest through any definition—especially not that of Minimalism—but only through direct experience of the work in time and space, undertaken in the context of the ever-changing perceptions of the work in the world that surrounds it.

With the introduction to this catalogue of the first major Morris retrospective in two decades, I must concede the meta-definition of his work not simply to the artist himself but rather to the only element with which the definition of his art is coterminous—nothing less than the oeuvre in its entirety and all of the commentary it generates. What follows, then, is not an explanatory text but rather a document of fragments. Morris's work inevitably leads to this conclusion. If "the whole story can never tell the whole story," the fragment gains a special power because the gaps between the facts and things have the capacity to retain both mystery and context. Human beings are, by nature, interactive and imaginative; we experience and think in episodes and fill in the gaps later on. Knowing is an iterative, creative, and repetitive process. These fragments illustrate a series of episodes in my encounter with Morris's work. Because they are incomplete in a conventional sense, and part of the continuous project, they can suggest a story of the scope of his work better than any seamless text that I could fabricate.

The selection of notes, drafts, and transcriptions was made with the active participation of the artist, and was adapted from the series of essays that are intended as text for Morris's catalogue raisonné, a project I began work on in 1978.

### NOTES AND KEY TO THE REPRODUCTIONS

The pages that follow contain reproductions of twenty-six selected pages of interview transcripts, notes, and drafts for a series of ten essays on the work of Robert Morris that were intended as the text for a catalogue raisonné of the artist's work. This project was undertaken by the author, Thomas Krens, in 1978; the notes and drafts are his.

The principal objective of the catalogue raisonné project was to assemble, with the assistance of the artist, the definitive record of the entire oeuvre. Original plans for the publication incorporated three elements: to provide a complete chronological listing, description, and photograph of every work that Morris has created, to provide a complementary volume of all published texts by the artist, and to treat each article in this literature as a unique and discrete work of art; and finally, to provide a series of commentaries on Morris's work by the author. During the fifteen years that this project has been under development, its scope and course have grown and shifted. The number of art works is now well in excess of 2,500 objects. The archive on Morris's work, which was initiated in 1978 with the records for 400 pieces from the files of the Leo Castelli and Sonnabend galleries, was relocated to the Guggenheim Museum in 1988, when the Robert Morris retrospective was announced as part of the Guggenheim's 1994-95 exhibition program. The current exhibition and its catalogue drew substantially from the catalogue raisonné material in the assembled archive, but the sheer scale mandated by the

Tape 1.1

Tom's outline for book.

PAINTINGS - California

R.M. That precedes everything. Whether that should be included in book or not, I don't know.

WERNER JEFFERSON, photographer of R.M.'s Calif. paintings mentioned.

R.M. I completely stopped painting about 59...60...59. I saved a few. Most I threw away. And I had all these shows out there. But later on, about 68...69, I noticed certain kinds of resemblances between some of the felt pieces and forms of those paintings. Coincidence? I don't know...

Certain problems exist with painting. I quit painting for a particular reason--certain problems I couldn't solve. There was a kind of ontological character to painting I couldn't accept. Because on the one hand you were involved in some activity, on the other hand you ended up with an object. That was something that became more and more disturbing to me on an intellectual level. I couldn't deal with that and unlike Pollock...he was the only one who managed to put those two things together.

One of the first ~~thin~~ objects I made was BOX WITH THE SOUND OF ITS OWN MAKING, which does resolve that problem. I changed media, and I was still dealing with that same thing.

RECEIVED DEC 13 1978

original conception made the publication of the catalogue raisonné not immediately feasible. Expectations that digitized images and texts transferred to laser and CD-ROM disks would soon render the more traditional forms of hard-copy publishing obsolete further argued for the delay of the definitive publication.

Tape 1.2

5

Tom: Talks about 1961, what was made then: Plus-Minus Box, Footnote for the Bride, etc. R.M. says he wasn't showing than... mentions Ilyana(?)

R.M. ...John Cage listened to the BOX WITH THE SOUND OF ITS OWN MAKING for 3 hours. I was extremely uncomfortable. I didn't expect him to listen...

Tom: Was it a continuous loop?

R.M. No. I came in, closed the door, turned on the tape and this tape recorder recorded the whole thing. The sound is played through the box. A speaker is inside, the tape recorder outside. At that time we didn't have small tape recorders.

Tom: How long ~~did~~ it take you to make the BOX.

R.M. Three-three and a half hours. The entire thing--to sanding it. Everything.

That's dated January 1961...something...right on the box. The COLUMN was made in 1960 and put together in 61. Then these other small things were being made. Sometimes I'd work on things 2 - 3 at a time. I didn't have a lot of room to work on big things. That's why the COLUMN was not put together for a while.

left: Author's unpublished transcript draft, dated December 13, 1978, of audiotaped conversation between Robert Morris and the author, p. 1, tape 1, side 1. This is the first transcript of a series of discussions that took place between November 1978 and February 1979 in Williamstown, Mass., Gardiner, N.Y., and New York City. There were approximately thirty hours of conversation, which produced more than 250 pages of transcript text.

right: *ibid.*, p. 5, tape 1, side 2.



(A)

When Marcel Duchamp stopped working in 1923 on his large glass, wire, lead, and paint construction entitled La Marie <sup>MJS NU</sup> ~~de~~ a ~~de~~ Par Ses Celebaires, Meme, it was his intention to publish a collection of drawings, textual notations, and various photographs related to the conception, development, and execution of this difficult piece. In fact, according to writers who knew Duchamp, he saw the efforts of these two parallel endeavors - the object and its essentially textual notations - as a single, unified work of art produced between 1911 and 1923. But this perception, in of itself presented problems in the 1920's. Physically, the exhibition of the large glass was extremely unweildy. The piece was heavy, over eight feet tall, and fragile. After its single exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926 the glass was shattered in transit, and the piece disappeared into a private collection ultimately to be repaired by Duchamp only ten years later. The notes and drawings presented a different problem - one that was only solved eleven years after The Large Glass was abandoned, when Duchamp was able to finance the publication of a facsimile edition of 94 of the notes, drawings, and photographs, in random order, in The Green Box. During the eight years that lapsed between the exhibition of The Large Glass and the publication of The Green Box, the complexity of the piece was virtually unknown, and its conceptual elegance completely unappreciated. Even then, notes Duchamp, scholar George Heard Hamilton, "Duchamp's elegant invitation to the reader to thread his own way, with the aid of the notes, through the artist's mind went unattended by all except Andre Breton."<sup>N</sup> Breton's precipient essay of 1935, and Professor Hamilton's own Compendium and Translations of twenty-five of The Green Box documents related to the concept of readymades remained the only scholarly investigations into the multiple meanings and mechanisms of the piece for more than thirty years after Duchamp's work on it ceased.

There are similarities between this situation, and the one we confront with Robert Morris's work. One can suggest that the gap in Duchamp's work between the time and manufacture of a complex work of art with many layers of meaning, and the process of revealing those many layers of meaning, might find analogy in Morris's work. As unlikely as that might seem in what appears to be our overdocumented and over-

COM

Underlining the paradox, on the other hand, it ~~can~~ be argued that these are significant gaps in the available information on the work of Robert Morris. \* Numerous extant works, for example are literally unknown, having never entered, for one reason or another, the ~~area~~ <sup>arena</sup> of critical consideration. Other work is virtually unknown, having been lost, destroyed, only temporarily installed, or located at some distance from an active area of critical consciousness. Much of the work that is known is only imperfectly or partially understood, or on occasion, totally misunderstood. \* Despite his writing Morris has never been very forthcoming on the intent or meanings behind individual works, and the much discussed crisis of criticism that has plagued the American art world for at least the last two decades had certainly not moved toward resolution as far as its treatment of Robert Morris's work is concerned. And finally it can be said that potential and actual layers of meaning interest is certain work has been purposefully camouflaged or obscured by the artist, for reasons ranging from a Duchamp-like fascination with the erotic element in the partially concealed, to conscious attempts to structure his art in such a manner as to extend the temporal vitality of a given piece by releasing its meanings at an indeterminate future date, a delayed art work, again, perhaps, much in the manner of Duchamp. Perhaps Morris just intuitively sensed that with some work, that to preserve its relevance was to preserve its mystery.

*and fundamental problems of criticism and interpretation*

**left:** Author's unpublished draft of the untitled introductory essay for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, November 1980, p. 1.

**right:** Ibid., unpaginated notes.

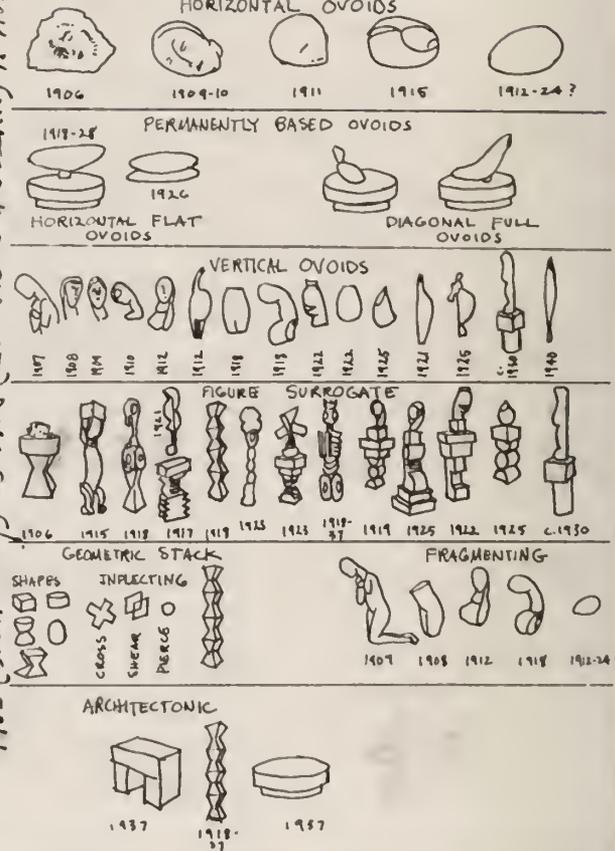
*Handwritten note:*  
 110

The particular problem posed by the oeuvre of Robert Morris, at least as far as this study is concerned, can be presented as nothing so much as a critique of both the art historical and critical method. The degree to which his concerns have shifted from moment to moment while retaining a consistent relevancy for his art, has made the prospect for overview and analysis precarious. George Kubler's art historical model can be used to examine one aspect of the problem. Kubler has proclaimed that the "aim of the historian, regardless of his speciality in erudition, is to portray time," but allows that "Time, like mind, is not knowable as such, which is the fundamental paradox of the historian. Kubler's reference, of course, is to the basic level at which a human beings only direct experience of the world is through nerve endings that report immediate sensory stimulation. [In a preconscious state the human being is at one with his environment and feels no need for complex figurations of truth and knowledge.] With the development of consciousness has come the need to possess and conquer the "unknowable" aspects of the world. Nietzsche suggests that the drive for knowledge, this "will to power," was instinctual, a reflection of the human inability to tolerate undescribed chaos. "The so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer the senses, the memory, the instinct, etc. have developed as a consequence of this drive." The character of the chaos of the world was "not of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever other names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms." As Nietzsche suggests, this need for power through anthropomorph defining compels humanity to create an unending proliferation of interpretations whose only origin that shudder in the nerve strings, being a direct sign of nothing, leads to a primary signified.

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*Key Document. This drawing is a map of Brancusi's achievement and it either anticipates or follows the mapping activity that is both the foundation and the literal blueprint for Morris's minimalist period (Green Gallery) to 1968 (200 Pieces of Steel...).*

APPENDIX D  
 ESSENTIAL FORM-CLASSES  
 HORIZONTAL OVOIDS



left: Author's unpublished draft of the untitled fourth essay for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, December 1980, p. 1.

right: Author's unpublished notation, December 1980, on photocopy of Morris's unpublished 1966 Hunter College master's thesis, "Form-Classes in the Work of Constantin Brancusi," Appendix D, p. 92. The handwritten notation, which begins on the front of the sheet and continues on the verso, reads as follows:

Key document. This drawing is a map of Brancusi's achievement and it either anticipates or follows the mapping activity that is both the foundation and the literal blueprint for Morris's minimalist

enterprise. His work from 1963 (Green Gallery) to 1968 (200 Pieces of Steel . . .) is nothing less than a systematic catalogue of the major form classes of solid geometry keyed to human scale. Box (1962) is both a primary architectonic form and a coffin, scaled to Morris's own dimensions. This is a key work—not only his first "true" minimal piece, but in both its form and roughness, the bridge and mediation between the dispassionate and passionate aspects of Bob's nature—reflecting the "scientific" and "analytical" minimalist enterprise on the one hand, and the extreme ontological awareness that ripples through every aspect of Bob's work and being, on the other. (Build the death essay here.)

V

Morris's relationship to the epistemological field in general is the singular characteristic of his work throughout the course of its development, and undoubtedly provides the key for a continuous understanding of his stylistic departures. His knowledge in a variety of fields is more detailed and comprehensive than that of the informed laymen, but less than that of the specialist- except in his own field where he is the specialist- and he has continuously applied that epistemological knowledge to his work. Therein lies a major impulse in Morris's art. He uses history as his medium in a larger and subtle sense of the word, beyond the consciousness of history as a linguistic structure, perhaps in a ritualized use of the shifting epistemological framework, Levi-Strauss began the flight from history in the 1970's by pointing out that we are a "hot" society rapidly cooling off. The structural analysis performed on the history of art by Jack Burnham concluded the end of art history as it had come to be known; "the driving force of avant-gardism has been its mystique as an undetected syntactical structure."<sup>2</sup> And Morris himself has acknowledged that the structuralist gesture once detected, exhausts itself qua gestalt. The revelation that the historical avant-garde operated by transparently logical, essentially linguistic mechanisms, that in the mid-20th century modern historicism encountered its own irrelevance, that the continuation of art making in this post-historical situation must necessarily revolve around the ritualized activities of a process drained of historical meaning

It has often been said of Morris that he is one of the most fully aware and historically conscious practicing artists of his time. During the course of the four year development of this project there was nothing in my numerous exchanges with Morris that suggested otherwise, but the depth of that awareness and consciousness, and its possible meanings, only gradually became apparent. As the chronological biography and oeuvre of this artist was slowly and even laboriously reconstructed from imperfect and incomplete collections of sources- among them must of the over 1600 works of art, gallery listings, personal archives and files, private and museum collections, published texts, notebooks, personal and business correspondence, textbooks, reviews, articles, catalogues, the artist's personal library, interviews, films, and video tapes, just to mention a few- a picture of the artist's thought also began to emerge. It is a picture that is far from complete in its detail, but a picture that demonstrates certain patterns or consistencies; such as a practical awareness of the major developments in thought that describe the history of ideas; and a particular interest in exploring the relationship between art and various of these developments expressed in other fields. Morris is a student of Art History. He read Freud and spent five years in analysis. He discussed the theoretical implications of Duchamp with John Cage, formalism with Clement Greenberg, David Smith with Rosalind Krauss, and structuralism with Jack Burnham. He understood something of the varieties of criticism and philosophy, and the methodologies that lay behind them. His master's thesis was a structural analysis of Brancusi. His minimal sculpture was based on an interest in psychology, perception, and Piaget. He was acquainted with the philosophy of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Kant, and Wittgenstein and aspects of their thought appeared at certain times in his work, as did Velikovsky's. He reasoned like a philosopher. He is politically sensitive. Aspects of Foucault's "archeology" and Derrida's "deconstruction" and "difference" influence his art.

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left: Author's unpublished draft of the untitled fifth essay for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, November 1980, p. 1.

right: Ibid., p. 6.

*Kuhn's theory*

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of painting in 1949 and his claims for the potential of sculpture were not a function of a critical epiphany occasioned by a dramatic breakthrough of an individual or group of artists. Rather it was based on a careful reading of the history of both art and culture that produced the theoretical conclusion that the modern sensibility was increasingly demanding an immediate, pure and non-referential experience from its art, and furthermore, it "asks for the exclusion of all reality external to the medium of the respective art." 14 That this perspective was not yet a conscious explicit, or operational aspect of modern art in 1949 only underlines the point. Looking into the future for the characteristics of the "new" art, Greenberg saw only that the theoretical structural options open to a painting concerned with the immediate and the concrete experience were severely limited to the literal qualities of the medium, to "configurations of pigment on a flat surface" or to "colors placed on a two dimensional surface."

If Greenberg was essentially correct in his analysis, why was he compelled eleven years later to qualify his original judgement and allow that the state of painting seemed stronger than ever? It is in the answer to this proposition that the origins of Robert Morris's work and sensibility are to be found. Again, Kuhn's analysis of the mechanics of scientific revolutions suggests an analogy. In science, Kuhn found that the pursuit of revolutionary theories is even less a regular activity of normal science than the pursuit of discoveries. As long as the tools that a paradigm supplies continue to prove capable of solving the problems it defines, science moves forward and penetrates deeply through the confident employment of these tools. Theoretical paradigmatic changes

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most often generates from a "breakdown of normal-problem solving activity" (my italics), or from an exhaustion of the predominant paradigm's ability to continue its development or maintain its predominant position by the means most familiar to it. This potential loss of relevance, (potential, because at the onset of the crisis it is unclear whether the impaired functional ability is either structural or temporary), therefore precipitates a crisis, which, in turn, inspires an extraordinary search for solutions that may generate the momentum for new formations and rules and a resulting paradigm shift. Among numerous examples, Kuhn cited the theoretical breakthroughs of Galileo and Newton as examples of responses generated by the breakdown of normal science

Galileo's contributions to the study of motion depended closely on difficulties discovered in Aristotle's theory by scholastic critics. Newton's new theory of light and color originated in the discovery that none of the existing pre-paradigm theories would account for the length of the spectrum, and the wave theory that replaced Newton's was announced in the midst of growing concern about the anomalies in the relation of diffraction and polarization effects to Newton's theory.

Likewise, Kuhn found all theoretical developments in the history of science demonstrated similar structural circumstances that is "that crises are a necessary precondition for the emergence of novel theories." But the transition from one operational model to another is not an immediate event, nor is it willingly accepted by all the practitioners in the field. "Though they may begin to lose face and then to

the collective subscription to a common methodology or body of knowledge, in the activities of the scientists or artists at the point of crisis through the period of transition, that an explanation of Greenberg's dilemma can be found.

left: Author's unpublished draft of the untitled seventh essay for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, December 1980, p. 4.

right: Ibid, p. 5.



What should exist between the artist and the critic, on the one hand, is a kind of competitive intellect, each trying to move the other one further along, rather than the critic as a mere flag waver for the artist, because the artist is represented after all, by an object rather than words. There are certain creative people, in the fullest concept of the word, to whom the visual object represents a certain kind of wasted energy, and don't choose to enter that kind of manual situation. Yet, they do not make totems, for all the power of their reasoning, and totems move people. There is a point, however, when the reserves are true. Perhaps by force of event of situation, certain words become immortalized in a text of a particular declaration. If the event associated with that declaration became important enough, the declaration would come to represent the event, being the object/symbol of a watershed or moving situation. But those events that particularly get honored in such a way

Warrior-Priest-Politician-Artist-Critic-Scientist-Diety

Individual-Warrior-Priest-Politician-Artist-Critic-Scientist-Diety  
(the stages of life)

are essentially politician. The artist is attempting to usurp the space of the warrior, and, and in the circle, the critic of the diety. In fact, it's not a line, it's a circle.



Are these people the paradigms of the stages of development? The evidence would seem to indicate not. Don't all of these "occupations" supposedly acceptable to "free entry (and exit) just become a matter of choice and personal preference. And what are the characteristics of the situation that come to be characterized by that choice. Not particularly inspiring. The socialist state is one of no competition and no development. For all the virtues of pacificity, it traditionally has not been very affective. Or has it? Things, changes if this magnitude, cannot happen overnight. There has to be a huge commonality of purpose and that takes time to generate, but once generated, it is very hard to change (here I am talking about style)

If the above logic is true, why am I wasting my time on a critical edge. It's the next step away from being a scientist. Although the scientists may be our only chance to jump from scientist stage to diety stage, artists may legitimately think it may not be able to be done. But that's really nineteenth century. The truth is the artists have made a mistake, and they don't find out about it until it's too late in the game.

Ever since Artforum published the first of Morris's four installments entitled "Notes on Sculpture" just over a year after the Green Gallery show, the public persona of Robert Morris as Renaissance Man has contributed in no small way to the almost mythic aura that came to surround his work. ~~With a writing style~~ With a <sup>writing</sup> style and message that was uncharacteristically dense for an artist-cum-writer, Morris revealed the conceptual mechanics behind relatively simple geometric plywood forms in the Green Gallery show. He was certainly not the first artist to write about art in recent times. The acerbic commentary of Ad Reinhardt and the thoughtful analyses of Duchamp by Robert Motherwell and Richard Hamilton did much to fertilize Morris's emerging sensibility in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Don Judd began writing criticism <sup>for</sup> art publications in 1963 and Peter Plagens' glib art world banter belies an insight, prescience, and syntactical style that is demonstrably more exciting than his paintings. But with a stroke of the pen, so to speak, Morris elevated the art to one of high seriousness, ~~inspired a cue, from George Kubler~~ <sup>inspired a cue, perhaps, from George</sup>

arguably beyond the level of then-current art criticism. Taking a cue, perhaps, from George

left: Author's unpublished notes and diagram for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, ca 1981

right: Author's unpublished handwritten note, ca. 1980, which reads as follows

Ever since Artforum published the first of Morris's four installments entitled "Notes on Sculpture" just over a year after the Green Gallery show, the public persona of Robert Morris as Renaissance Man has contributed in no small way to the almost mythic aura that came to surround his work. With a writing style and message that was uncharacteristically dense for an artist cum writer, Morris revealed the conceptual mechanics behind

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LEONARDO  
INTRODUCTION

1

"Item. The aforesaid Testator gives and bequeaths to Messer Francesco Melzi, nobleman of Milan, in remuneration for much appreciated services done to him in the past, each and all of the books the Testator has at the present time, and the instruments and portraits pertaining to his art and calling as a painter."<sup>1</sup> In a short biography of Leonardo da Vinci's life written in 1540, the Florentine Anonimo Magliabechiano confirms that this entry from the last will of Leonardo dated April 23, 1518, Amboise, was indeed inacted. Of Melzi's disposition of the instruments, portraits and other of Leonardo's effects, nothing is known. It is known that the drawings and writing of the master in the form of Leonardo's notebooks were kept intact and returned to Florence. Melzi worked on the material the rest of his life, until his death in 1570, presumably organizing the notebooks according to his interpretation of Leonardo's wishes for a

1965, and identified as Codex Madrid I and II. Madrid I is a well organized notebook dealing with applied mechanics and mechanical theory. II is a mixture of rough notes and sketches about canal building, geometry, fortifications, painting, perspective, optics, designs for the casting of an enormous bronze horse for the Sforza family, maps, and topographical sketches. In addition to the Windsor Volume and the Codex Arundel, there are now in England two other Leonardo manuscripts. The first, known as the Codex Forster, is in the Kensington Museum, bequeathed by John Forster in 1876. Forster received the codex from his friend, Lord Lytton, who bought it in Vienna. The other is in the possession of Lord Leicester, most probably acquired by Thomas Coke, First Earl of Leicester, who lived in Rome before 1775. Notations on this manuscript indicate it was owned by Giuseppe Ghezzi, a painter who lived in Rome in the early 18th century. Despite the wealth of extant Leonardo material in the form of drawings and notebooks on an incredibly wide variety of subjects described in the above provenance, Vincian scholars have generally concluded that the almost 6000 pages that have survived after countless tamperings and losses are only a fraction of the heritage once in Francesco Melzi's possession. Ladislao Reti has researched the concordance of the Codex Urbinas and discovered 235 traceable surviving originals against the 1008 headings listed by Melzi, concluding therefore, that as much as 75% of the material used by Melzi is missing today.<sup>5</sup> The vast amount of scholarship invested in Vincian studies has been directed primarily toward provenance and dating. A chronological

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**left:** Author's unpublished final draft of the first part of the untitled sixth essay for the Morris catalogue raisonné project, p. 1. This essay consists of two texts, to be typeset in two parallel columns, each approximately 2,500 words in length. The text to appear in the left column is a provenance of Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks constructed by the author, which describes the loss of approximately seventy-five percent of the original notebook material inventoried at the time of Leonardo's death in 1516. The text for the right column is Morris's transcription of one of the audio-performance elements of *Voice*, which describes the disfigurement of the artist in a childhood accident.

**right:** *Ibid.*, p. 9.



INTRODUCTION NOTES: August 1992

[1. SET UP THE ARGUMENT FOR THE "UNKNOWABILITY" OF MORRIS'S OEUVRE AND ITS TEXTUAL AND CONTEXTUAL RICHNESS BY REFERENCE TO DUCHAMP]

In 1923, when Marcel Duchamp stopped working on his masterpiece, *La Marie mise à nu par ses célèbres, Mères*, it was his intention to publish, more or less simultaneously, a collection of drawings, textual notations, and photographs related to the conception, development, and execution of this difficult and complex work. In fact, although the work was produced over a twelve year period, Duchamp saw the efforts of these two parallel endeavors—the actual object, on the one hand, and its process documentation, on the other—as a single, unified work of art. But his intention to present it as such met with difficulty. The work itself resisted definitive completion, and progress on it was intermittent (a fact that was perhaps most dramatically attested to by Man Ray's famous photograph of dust gathering on the surface of the large glass—dust that had to be carefully lacquered at two month intervals to render the seven sieves in different degree of opacity). Physically the piece was large, unwieldy, and extremely fragile. After a single exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926 the glass shattered in transit. There it remained in its packing case for another ten years, ultimately to be "repaired" by Duchamp, with the fracture lines cemented intact and incorporated into the work as yet another chance element. The notes and drawings presented a different problem. They came to public and critical attention only in 1934, when Duchamp was able to finance the publication of a facsimile edition of 94 of the notes, drawings, and photographs in random order in a work that was entitled *Green Box*. Certainly during the eight years that lapsed between the exhibition of the *Large Glass* and the publication of the *Green Box*, the interactive complexity of the unified work was virtually unknown, and its conceptual brilliance unappreciated. Even then, notes George Heard Hamilton in his and Richard Hamilton's 1960 topographic version of the *Green Box*, "Duchamp's elegant invitation to the reader to thread his own way, with the aid of the notes, through the artist's mind went unattended by all except André Breton." Between Breton's precipient essay of 1935 and the Hamilton/Hamilton commentaries a quarter century later, critics and art historians were virtually silent on the topic of Duchamp and his masterwork. A war intervened. Picasso, surrealism and abstract expressionism came to dominate the popular and informed visual imagination. The art world had moved on.

[2. ANALOGY OF THE TIME CAPSULE. BACK TO THE LARGE GLASS. MORRIS AS AN ARTIST WITH AN EYE ON HISTORY, RECOGNIZES THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF INSTANT COMMUNICATION AND THE TRANSFER OF MEANING IN PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL TERMS. SKETCH OUT THE FUTURE MODEL OF READING MORRIS'S WORK THROUGH AN INTERACTIVE DATABASE]

Any exercise in analysis ultimate ends in self referential subjectivity. Understanding and knowing demands appropriation; the "knower" is in a superior position to the "knowee." Morris resists appropriation and understanding every step of the way. He knows that the ultimate power of his art resides in its inscrutability, and that once the paradigm has been defined, inscrutability vanishes. The conventional approach has most critics and historians assume that the artist has a consistent message that they want to convey, and most artists act as if that is true. Perhaps they lack the verbal and analytical skills to accomplish the full communication of their message; perhaps the message is simply not powerful enough. To sell and survive as artists, they must engage active collaborators in getting the message out. With Morris its more complex. He regards himself as an intellectual superman and a physiological everyman. He is always just one step away from the ontological quiver. That he has

drained the activity of art making of values is the ultimate act of valuation. His objective is to resist appropriation, resist understanding, but without ever relying on subterfuge or misrepresentation. So the game for him is a continual play with meanings, conscious and subconscious, exercises, processes, experiments, mobilizing his strengths through the accumulation of work and history, leaving an intellectual imprint rather than a discernable visual style. His is the contrarian's response to changes in the environment; look to the other direction.

His feats of making are prodigious, and he has written extensively. It is impossible to engage and surround this material in any reasonable detail, subject it to a critical excess, and reduce it to a convenient series of statements that capture its essence. The most significant aspect of Morris's oeuvre, like Duchamp's *Large Glass* and *Green Box*, (besides its richness, complexity and subjectivity) is its interactivity with textual and conceptual reference. There is, however, a logistical problem. Duchamp made about 150 works; Morris well over 3,000 so far. The *Large Glass* was a lens, a filter, a lighthouse, a point of reference for the rest of the work. The sheer quantity of Morris's work, the force of his personality, and the difficulty of lighthouse construction in contemporary society has removed the possibility of a single work in all of Morris's oeuvre with such a towering presence.

Therefore, Morris's *Large Glass* is his entire oeuvre. To see it with a similar clarity and to realize its potential use as a reflective device, a mirror lens through which to scope the relentless activity of a remarkably self aware artmaker in a given chronological and historical context where transcendent meaning has been drained from the basic activity requires a new technology. Imagine this. Thirty years from now, squadrons of enterprising curators and art historians working for the Guggenheim (a division, perhaps, of Time Warner Entertainment Japan) with far more computing power and efficiency at their fingertips than we ever dreamed of in 1993, will undertake to organize a vast hypertext catalogue/interactive database of everything that Morris has ever made (and make no mistake that this is an artist of prodigious output), written or recorded, and everything that anyone has ever said, recorded or written about him. Every photograph, film and video tape or disk that contains an image of Morris or his work will be added to the great concentration. All the information will be catalogued, indexed, cross referenced and stored. Visual Designers will be hired to develop story lines and shape the vast quantity material into an HD-TV spectacular at the high end, a sort of latter day Masterpiece Theater. Supplemented and inspired by those works of art that are actually available and on view in museum collections that will testify to the power and necessity of direct experience, the viewer/reader will have access to the thousand themes of Robert Morris. On this giant interactive video game, the Morris psyche will be exposed. The tapes of *Unce* and *Hearings*, the story of his childhood, the thousands of minutes of interviews and performances from the relentless progression of residencies at colleges and universities around the country, the articles, the reviews, the commentaries, the grocery bills, and the tax records, the snap shots and the target from that summer day when Morris and I shot pistols in his backyard. But God is in the details, as Morris well knows, and it will be an enormously engrossing tool. Subjects can be scanned, computing is instantaneous, Morris and his art will be more susceptible to understanding and appropriation than ever before. Did Bob plant this time capsule.

[3. NOW IS NOW. MORRIS'S OEUVRE IS A SINGLE WORK. JUST AS THE THE EXHIBITION AS PART OF THE PROCESS. THE WORK IS NOT REDUCIBLE; BUT, THE MUSEUM THAT HAS THE BEST AND LARGEST COLLECTION OF MORRIS'S WORK UNDERTAKES THE ENTERPRISE, MORRIS'S COMPLETE WRITING ARE SIMULTANEOUSLY PUBLISHED (this is the key); THE WORK IS INSTALLED UPTOWN AND DOWNTOWN AS BEST AS CAN BE ACHIEVED UNDER THE PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS OF THE EXHIBITION SPACES, THE WRITERS WHO HAVE BEST KNOWN MORRIS'S WORK ARE ENGAGED TO WRITE ESSAYS. ITS NOT COMPLETE, BUT THE OBJECTS, THE TEXTS, THE RESEARCH IS BROUGHT TO THE HIGHEST AND MOST COMPREHENSIVE LEVEL YET.]

left: Author's unpublished first draft/notes for the introduction to the present exhibition catalogue, August 1992, p. 1.

right: Ibid., p. 2.

The visibility of process in art occurred with the saving of sketches and unfinished work in the High Renaissance. In the 19th century both Rodin and Rosso left traces of touch in finished work. Like the Abstract Expressionists after them, they registered the plasticity of material in autobiographical terms. It remained for Pollock and Louis to go beyond the personalism of the hand to the more direct revelation of matter itself. How Pollock broke the domination of Cubist form is tied to his investigation of means: tools, methods of making, nature of material. Form is not perpetuated by means but by preservation of separable idealized ends. This is an anti-entropic and conservative enterprise. It accounts for Greek architecture changing from wood to marble and looking the same, or for the look of Cubist bronzes with their fragmented, faceted planes. The perpetuation of form is functioning Idealism. Key point

In object-type art process is not visible. Materials often are. When they are, their reasonableness is usually apparent. Rigid industrial materials go together at right angles with great ease. But it is the a priori valuation of the well-built that dictates the materials. The well-built form of objects preceded any consideration of means. Materials themselves have been limited to those which efficiently make the general object form.

Recently, materials other than rigid industrial ones have begun to show up. Oldenburg was one of the first to use such materials.

39

art as icon. Under attack is the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a finished product. Duchamp, of course, attacked the Marxist notion that labor was an index of value, but Readymades are traditionally iconic art objects. What art now has in its hands is mutable stuff which need not arrive at the point of being finalized with respect to either time or space. The notion that work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object no longer has much relevance.1

The detachment of art's energy from the craft of tedious object production has further implications. This reclamation of process refocuses art as an energy driving to change perception. (From such a point of view the concern with "quality" in art can only be another form of consumer research--a conservative concern involved with comparisons between static, similar objects within closed sets.) The attention given to both matter and its inseparableness from the process of change is not an emphasis on the phenomenon of means. What is revealed is that art itself is an activity of change, of disorientation and shift, of violent discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness for confusion even in the service of discovering new perceptual modes. 1/11/77

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

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**left:** Author's notations on p. 39 of the draft for *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1994), October 1993

**right:** Author's notations on p. 56 of the draft for *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1994), October 1993

unfinished  
 definition provided by viewer  
 also need to consider way elitist subsequent artists also  
 complete work  
 73 Cubism tends to formalism vs. materials/process approach

75 automation removes taste and personal touch by coopting  
 forces, images, processes  
 76 artist steps aside for more of the world to step into his art

77 minimal art of early and mid-sixties -- based on method of  
 construction  
 rectilinear forming precludes arranging of parts

80 materials not brot into alignment with static apriori forms  
 but material is probed for openings that allow artist  
 behavioristic access

113 the dumb dense energy of things  
 art facts both generate and destroy speech  
 art facts are dedocated tp o,[i;ses beupmd ratopma;ozomg

114 tidal undertow has informed most art discourse: rational,  
 deterministic, and progressive mainstream of history connects art  
 facts that are borne along  
 mediate twin properties of interruption and flow

[note how much he uses the image of the river -- Heraclitus]

most art discourse conforms to this Hegellian oceanography  
 in modernismbecomes comical and even fascistic  
 linear as inevitable, developmental  
 defense against the discontinuous, merely sequential, and  
 unnecessary  
 in a society so governed by pragmatism, nonutilitarian needs  
 ready rationalization

abstract art seeks to rescue its status from mere decoration --  
 say it signifies something beyond its existence as mere object  
 and thus not to become what Levi-Strauss calls the signifier  
 without a signified

116 effort to bestow on artistic development dialectical progress  
 is effort to deny contingency of man's acts  
 rationalize discontinuities

118 pm raises this to critical self-consciousness  
 sees developments as moves rather than permutations of forms  
 with questioning of dialectical development, flooding pluralism  
 emerges  
 only conceptualism claimed dialectical necessity  
 dial necessity had been way abstract art justified itself  
 Morris sees this argument as intended to secure value and power  
 in other words, is ideological

Krauss, The Mind/Body Problem

analytic philo displaces mind/body problem onto medium of  
 language  
 all else is nonsense

critique of metaphysics -- rejection of substance

[can see how this comes together with poststructuralism  
 also see how this leads to the lack of continuity, substance  
 that Antin stresses  
 series of works that not clearly connected by underlying  
 intention or anything else]

4 Morris's performance piece reconfigures Beckett

7 Box with the Sound of Its Own Making  
 first of M's many interventions in mind/body problem

sounds made constructing box play from box  
 mocks notion of privileged access to contents  
 also mocks notions of autonomy, self-containment of  
 consciousness

8 frequent recourse to language

9 way lang functions has less to do with Duchamp and ore to do  
 with Beckett, mind/body problem and analytic philosophy

Beckett -- language ventriloquizes itself thru Unnameable  
 capacity of language to spin itself out in infinite regress  
 carries along helpless vagrants of B  
 12 charactrs want to stop but impersonal voice wants to continue  
 invasion of language as malicious because unstoppable

13 Morris's 21.3 -- repeats Panofsky's taped lecture  
 but is as if someting slipped  
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15 Beckett's world of extreme ordinariness  
 related to minimalism

unable to arrest spin into seriality, run the risk of  
 absurdity, madness, nonsense

16 how to make a pictorial mark that would have no interior, no  
 connection to virtual space  
 no internal or expressive meaning

usually neo-Dada wh becomes pop set over against minimalism as  
 figurative to abstract

20 as early as 1961, Morris involved with art as language

**left:** Author's unpublished notes from his reading of the draft  
 for *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert  
 Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), October 1993.

**right:** Author's unpublished notes from his reading of the draft  
 for Rosalind Krauss's "The Mind/Body Problem: Robert Morris in  
 Series," in the present exhibition catalogue, October 1993.



# ESSAYS

## THE MIND/BODY PROBLEM: ROBERT MORRIS IN SERIES

Rosalind Krauss

**AYER, A. J.** — There are two important reductions to perform on the assertion, "I think that *p* is true." The first is to lop off the head of the sentence—the "I think" part—as wholly redundant, since to state "that *p* is true," is to assert that I think it. The second is to attack the feet of the proposition, getting rid of its "is true" appendage, since "that *p*" all by itself is, very simply, a statement that *p* is the case rather than *not p*.

Thus beautifully shorn, "that *p*" then rises up out of the foam of metaphysics like a mermaid returned to the litness of a fish: mercifully released from what A. J. Ayer never ceases to term "nonsense." For tacking "is true" onto the proposition produces the verbal illusion that there is, on the one hand, something called Being and, on the other, something called Truth. And if this is what floats Ontology, it is the "I think" that underwrites Epistemology.

There can be no mind/body problem if consciousness is simply reduced into a set of propositions about sense-contents. Since these sense-contents are the verbal translations of sense-experiences that may be of the external world—I see *x*; I hear *x*—or may be introspected from the world internal to the perceiver—I feel a pain; I remember *x*—they form a series of propositions that are structurally equivalent, all of them taking the form *that p*.

The Cartesian distinction between two different substances, one spatially extended and physical, the other unextended, immaterial, and mental, is thus dissolved by a third form that comprehends them both (though it explicitly disallows the very notion of "substance"). Analytic philosophy displaces the mind/body problem into the medium of language and the logical analysis of propositions. Everything else is dismissed as "nonsense."

It is in Samuel Beckett's novel *Watt* that the hammer blows of this analysis receive their most comic response. Indeed, certain of the passages in *Language, Truth, and Logic* could have been pronounced by Watt, as for instance that part of Ayer's refutation of Berkeleyan idealism: "Having now left my room, I have good reason to believe that [its table and chair] are not in fact being perceived by anyone. For I observed that no one was there when I left, and I have observed that no one has since entered by the door or the window; and my past observations of the ways in which human beings make their entry into rooms gives me the right to assert that no one has entered the room in any other way." Watt's elaborate performances of logical analysis in order to explain the circumstances in Mr. Knott's house ("to explain had always been to exortize, for Watt") have precisely this gait. "For were there other

fingers in the house, and other thumbs, than Mr. Knott's and Erskine's and Watt's, that might have pressed the bell? For by what but by a finger, or by a thumb, could the bell have been pressed? By a nose? A toe? A heel? A projecting tooth?" (W 117).

And yet, in Watt's mouth, this very medium of rational analysis quickly takes on the character of series: "Not that Watt felt calm and free and glad, for he did not, and had never done so. But he thought that perhaps he felt calm and free and glad, or if not calm and free and glad, at least calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, or if not calm and free, or free and glad, or glad and calm, at least calm, or free, or glad, without knowing it" (W 133).

And series, organized within the realm of *Watt* in terms of a linguistic progression, frequently produce the kinds of openings onto infinite regress for which the novel is famous: "And the poor old lousy old earth, my earth and my father's and my mother's and my father's father's and my mother's mother's and my father's mother's and my mother's father's and my father's mother's father's and my mother's father's mother's and my father's mother's mother's and my mother's father's father's and my father's father's mother's . . ." (W 45).

Now, infinite regress is precisely the opening onto insoluble logical conundrum that analytic philosophy's recourse to language is meant to plug. And, thus, it can be said that these series, in *Watt*, perform instances of language spinning out of control and distressingly leaching into Ayer's very domain of "nonsense": language perversely biting its own tail, so to speak.

The most extraordinary series of all the series in *Watt* is Watt's act of communicating to the narrator, Sam, what happened to him at Mr. Knott's house, which Watt does as the two of them walk, pressed against one another, belly-to-belly and forehead-to-forehead, Sam moving forward and Watt backward, then Watt moving forward and Sam backward, along the extremely narrow passage formed by two parallel chain-link fences, the one the garden fence of the insane asylum Sam is in, the other the fence of the asylum where Watt now resides.



Waterman  
Switch

The serialization that occurs in this communication is not just in the logic of linguistic relationships but in the very fiber of the syntax and the letters through which Watt speaks: "Day of most, night of part, Knott with now . . . Geb nodrap, geb nodrap" (W 162). So that Sam

must comment, "These were sounds that at first, though we walked pubis to pubis, seemed so much balls to me" (W 165).

Now, "pubis to pubis" is, perhaps, the most efficient description of the embrace within which the two dancers are clasped for their promenade in the opening and closing sections of Robert Morris's most celebrated performance piece, *Waterman Switch* (1965). Moreover, it is not just their strangely de-eroticized gait, as the nude couple inches across the stage and back again, that reconfigures the scene between Watt and Sam; Morris has, as well, conjured up a sense of the confining corridor within which Beckett's pas de deux is itself executed. The narrow tracks comprised of two long wooden beams, which are aligned parallel with the front of the proscenium and on which the dancers make their way, recreate both the setting's vector within the novel and its claustrophobic intensity.

Walking just behind the tracks is a third performer, a woman dressed in a man's suit and hat. She moves far more quickly than does the couple, letting out the string from a ball of twine that she attaches at both sides of the stage, to create a kind of linear web. This string, with its labyrinthine associations, has sometimes figured on the list, drawn up by writers on Morris's art, of his numerous references to the work of Marcel Duchamp, here to Duchamp's "mile of string" installation for the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition in New York (1942). But in the context of *Waterman Switch's* unmistakable homage to Watt, the figure is far more convincing as an allusion to Beckett's clowns, and thus to a somewhat different form of endlessness and repetition than that of the bachelor machine.

**BAT. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A?** — Suppose, Thomas Nagel suggests, we were to imagine what it's like to be a bat. "It will not help to try to imagine," he says, "that one has webbing on one's arms, which enables one to fly around at dusk and dawn catching insects in one's mouth; that one has very poor vision, and perceives the surrounding world by a system of reflected high-frequency sound signals; and that one spends the day hanging upside down by one's feet in an attic." It will not help, he explains, because "insofar as I can imagine this (which is not very far), it tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves. But that is not the question. I want to know what it is like for a *bat* to be a bat."<sup>3</sup>

Nagel is rehearsing the mind/body problem in its postbehaviorist, neodualist phase. Whatever we may think, he is saying, of the original Cartesian formulation of the problem—that there are two different

types of *substance* in the world, the physical and the mental—its conclusion, that there is an irreducible, ontological distinction or gap between the objectivity of the world and the subjectivity of consciousness, remains. All the attempts to reduce the mental to the physical, which is to say "consciousness" to "the brain," will simply not work. The pattern that allows us to reduce one level of description to another, more fundamental level, as when we reduce water to H<sub>2</sub>O or genes to DNA, saying that the first is really nothing but the second, doesn't wash when we want to claim that subjectivity can be reduced to something objective like the neurophysiology of the brain. Because subjectivity, or consciousness, is what it's like *for the bat* to be a bat. And that we will never get to by examining its brain states.

To hold out for "what it's like to be a bat" is, of course, to stare down the analytic philosophers and their charge that discussions of "the mental" lead nowhere except directly into the "nonsense" of infinite regress. For one of the features the neodualist has to claim for "consciousness" is that it has privileged access to its own contents—which is to say that it cannot be mistaken about what is the case *for* it; that it is, in this sense, "incorrigible"—and it is to this claim that the analytic philosophers can always reply, "But, how does it know?" The threat of infinite regress that arises from this "how does it (or you) know?" is that if I add to my claim that "I am feeling pain" or "I am seeing blue" the further condition that, subjectively speaking, I cannot be mistaken about these things, I must, in order to claim this incorrigibility, have something like an inner pattern or rule (the "constancy hypothesis" is an example), which I consult or to which I compare this particular sensation of pain or of color, that would allow me to *know* that I'm right about this case of toothache or of blue. And this, the analytic philosophers point out, leads to the problem of knowing that I'm right about applying that rule to this case, which would then lead to needing another rule to adjudicate over this instance of application, which would then necessitate another rule, and so on.

It's the story of the man who claims that the world is supported on the back of a giant turtle, and when asked how *that* turtle would itself be supported, replies, "On another turtle." And when his interlocutor persists, "But how would *it* be supported?" the first man answers, "No problem: it's turtles all the way down."



Box with the  
Sound of Its Own  
Making

In 1961, when Morris made *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, he had constructed the first of his own, many interventions into the domain of the mind/body problem. A nine-inch cube, handcrafted in walnut, the box—roughly the size of the human skull—contains a recording of the sounds of the sawing, hammering, drilling, and screwing that took place during the process of its own fabrication. With what could be thought, then, to be its “memory” inside it, the box seems to confront its viewer from the other side of that divide that separates object from subject: “What is it like,” it seems to say, “to be a box?”

That this question is being asked tongue-in-cheek, however, is not just a function of the obvious fact that a box can’t think. No painted portrait or sculpted marble is literally conscious; but that has never stopped viewers from imputing thoughts and feelings to them, from granting them, that is, a kind of interiority modeled on the dualist’s idea of consciousness. Rather, the box’s irony is clear from the *behaviorist* form of the object’s own response. Which is to say that “what it’s like” is simply the sum of all those acts, themselves wholly external and observable, through which the box was in fact built. The box has no “privileged access” to this, because it happened in full public view. Further, not only does the object deride the idea of the privacy of subjective experience, it also seems to mock other, associated notions of subjectivity such as the autonomy, or self-containment, of consciousness.

Taking up the analytic philosopher’s taunt about the threat of infinite regress that hangs over the very claim to the internal privilege and “in corrigibility” of mental events, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, even as it performs a kind of cogito of carpentry, burlesques the idea of the closed circuit of self-reference. For although we could say that the box “contains” its own founding experience, it is equally obvious that that founding originated elsewhere: in the mind and activity of its maker; and that *that* activity itself responds to the minds and activities of other makers; and that *that* . . .

*Photo Cabinet*, which Morris made in 1963, the year *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* was first exhibited, is yet another machine for the production of infinite regress within the situation of a professed privacy and interiority. The cabinet, which bears on its door a photograph of itself with its door opened, opens to reveal yet another door bearing a photograph of *itself* with its door opened, which would open to reveal . . .

And a third work in this group, *Metered Bulb* (1963), joins *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* by puncturing the idea of autonomy and self-containment along another trajectory broached by the earlier object. For the presumed self-containment and autoreferentiality of the work, which bears both a light bulb and an electric meter to monitor the current the bulb consumes, is exploded by the cord connecting the work to

the plug in the wall, that in turn connects to the circuitry in the building, that in turn connects to the current in the ground, that in turn connects . . . The mockery of this electrical dependence had, of course, been wired into the very possibility of *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*’s ability to “think.”

**CARD FILE** — To reduce the “mental” to “language” is to transform the presumed privacy of thinking into the public medium of speech and the logic of propositions. It is as well to exchange the mysterious domain of what can be known only to the knower for the overt space of shared events.

Morris’s frequent recourse to language, beginning with *Card File* in 1962 and then proliferating within his work both in terms of performance, as in *21.3* (1964), or a variety of verbally embossed lead pieces (1963–64), and various graphic exercises beginning with the *Memory Drawings* of 1963 and continuing to the *Blind Time* drawings of 1973 and up through the *Investigations* drawings of 1990, has often been related to the example of Duchamp and the role of his copious “Notes,” made not only for the construction of the *Large Glass* but for a multitude of projects throughout his career.<sup>3</sup> While it seems obvious that this was an important source for Morris, it also seems clear that the way language actually functions in the early works—like *Card File*—in which it is employed, has less to do with Duchamp and more to do with Beckett, the mind/body problem, and analytic philosophy.

For unlike Duchamp’s “Notes,” where autonomy and self-reference are not at issue, *Card File* once again parades its own presumed self-containment and completion, with, once again, the same problems of infinite regress rife within it. An ordinary flat file containing note cards onto which an alphabetized account of its own process of conception (the cards headed “Conception,” “Considerations,” or “Decisions,” for example) and fabrication (for example, “Prices” and “Purchases”) is entered, the work performs a critique similar to that of *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*. But this time, Morris specifically indicates that the public space in which its “thinking” or “remembering” now takes place is the medium of the linguistic event—the *that p*—neatly typed on its parade of four-by-six-inch cards.

An examination of these note cards reveals, however, that the same kind of comic riff is being performed here on the orderliness and system of analytic procedures as had been let loose on them in the world of *Watt*. One of the categories, for example, is “Categories,” on the card for which is given the total number of categories—14—generated by *Card File*.



Card File

Another category is "Number," in which, in addition to the number of categories, we are given the number of accidents (2), of cards (49), of changes (0), of decisions (12), of losses (1), of mistakes (4), of purchases (4), of things numbered (14), and so forth. It is hard not to look at such an account without remembering the elaborate conundrum Watt tries to solve as he wonders how a dog is brought nightly to Mr. Knott's house to eat what might or might not be the remains of Mr. Knott's food, for which, in the course of his attempt at a solution, he totals up not only the solutions

*that had not apparently prevailed, but also some of those objections that were perhaps the cause of their not having done so, distributed as follows:*

<i>Solution</i>	<i>Number of Objections</i>
1st . . . . .	2
2nd . . . . .	3
3rd . . . . .	4
4th . . . . .	5
<i>Number of Solutions</i>	<i>Number of Objections</i>
4 . . . . .	14
3 . . . . .	9
2 . . . . .	5
1 . . . . .	2 (W 95)

The pointlessness of this system in the face of what might be relevant to "solving a problem" is linked, in *Watt*, to the very serial madness that is generated inside language when it is itself considered as an open system, as in "and my mother's mother's father's and my father's father's father's and my mother's mother's mother's and . . ."

In its turn this brings us to the distance that Beckett himself takes from what might be thought of as the linguistic euphoria of *Language, Truth, and Logic*. For just as Beckett sees the infinite regress that opens within the world of the "mental" into "turtles all the way down," he also sees the regress that threatens the apparent simplicity of the move from sense-experience to the propositional form of sense-contents. Because in order for this move from the denotation of something in the world—*p*, say—to a proposition about *p*—*that p*, say—we must, in order to move from the truth of *p* to the truth of *that p*, have a further proposition, let's call it *Z*, that states that *that p* is true if *p* is true, which itself refers to a proposition, *Y*, that states that "Y is true if *Z*, *that p*, and *p* are true," and so on to infinity.

If Beckett takes up the linguistic "solution" to the mind/body problem, then he does so ironically, not

understanding language to have dissolved the difference, but merely to have added an irrational third term, one that itself is interminable, because serial. Beckett calls this third thing the "wordy-gurdy," which is somehow played *through* his characters, as their bodies rot (trying, as Molloy says, to "finish dying"), their minds empty out ("Unquestioning. I, say I," says the Unnamable), but *language*, ventriloquizing itself through them—"I'm all these words, all these strangers, this dust of words, with no ground for their settling. . . . That there is I, on the one hand, and this noise on the other, that I never doubted, no. . . ."—persists.<sup>8</sup>

It is this independent persistence of language as some kind of maleficent entity, capable of spinning itself out into infinite progressions, or of stories burgeoning from within stories burgeoning from within stories . . . that carries along the helpless vagrants and clowns and Watts of Beckett's universe, the ones who say "I": "Unfortunately it's a question of words, of voices, one must not forget that, one must try and not forget that completely, of a statement to be made, by them, by me . . ." (T 354). So that although the characters themselves, the ones who say "I," want to stop, it's the voice—impersonal but insistent—that continues: "It clamours against my walls, it is not mine, I can't stop it, I can't prevent it, from tearing me, racking me, assailing me. It is not mine, I have none, I have no voice and must speak, that is all I know . . ." (T 281).

This invasion by language as anything but a resolution of the mind/body problem but instead as a malicious, because serial and unstoppable, third force, reaches desperate proportions in the last words of *The Unnamable*—"you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on"—but in *Watt* it still has its amazingly comic cast, as when Mary is described as "eating onions and peppermints turn and turn about, I mean first an onion, then a peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint . . ." (W 50).

A year before *Waterman Switch*, in 21.3 (1964) Morris had taken up the character of the clown for his continuing exploration of Beckett's serial linguistics. Dressed in a "professor" suit and standing at the podium, Morris silently recited what the "voice"—a tape Morris had recorded of Erwin Panofsky's explanation of the levels of visual meaning—insinuated. First Panofsky writes, there is *p*: the man on the street lifting his hat to me in greeting, a sense-experience whose formal pattern of colors and shapes I endow with a "natural meaning"—man lifting a hat, or *that p*. Then there is the culturally interpretive level, in which this is read as a greeting (call this iconography), from which one can go on to higher levels of interpretation

(call them iconology). So Panofsky also begins by gliding effortlessly and imperceptibly from the sense-experience into the statement that expresses its truth: *that p*.

Yet for the audience watching 21.3, it was as if—as Erskine had explained to Watt—“something slipped,” so that the self-evident smoothness of language hooking into denotation, with sense-contents being transparent to experience, noticeably begins to fail. As the mimed performance increasingly goes out of sync with the tape and opens a gap between the performer and the “noise” that speaks through him, the professor turns clown, most burlesquely when the gurgle-clink-gurgle sound effect seriously lags after the water-pitcher-pouring-drinking routine of the lecturer, or the tape registers coughing and throat-clearing episodes way before Morris does them. Thus the ease with which we apply “natural meanings” to observed objects and move from *p* to *that p* falters, and we wonder where we could find a rule that would right this state of affairs, realizing, of course, that that rule would need its own justification, which would need its own . . .

**DANCE** — The dance world into which Morris was introduced by his wife, Simone Forti, underwent an extreme reorganization in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Channeled through the performers who gathered at the Judson Memorial Church, in New York, this new conception of a dance of ordinary movement, or of “task performance,” actively sought a way to make a gesture that would have no “interior.” Balletic gestures, it was felt, are always expressive of an inner meaning: of the distilled emotions of the music or of the body, of an inaccessible, virtual field structured by pre-established convention and folded away from real space and time. The dancer’s body normally labors to externalize these meanings; for without them the body would be ordinary, nothing more than that of the jogger, or the worker, or someone just walking down the stairs.

By embracing a dance of “ordinary movement” the Judson dancers were declaring solidarity with a notion of “ordinary language,” which is to say, of that philosophy that dissolves the mind/body distinction into a behaviorist view of language.<sup>10</sup> The meaning of a word is its use, they would quote Wittgenstein as saying (whether or not they had ever read him).<sup>11</sup> To know what a word means, then, is not to have a picture of its “meaning” in one’s mind, to which one can refer; it is, rather, nothing but a function of one’s manifest ability to use the word, to perform it. If the supposed picture in the mind is wholly subjective, private, something to which I alone have access, the implementation of the word is public. I either use it correctly or I don’t.



Site

It was in this spirit that the Judson dancers conceived of the notion that walking down the street or simple lifting or bending were just fine as repertoires of “dance” movements. And it was in this same contempt for the privacy of “mental” space that Yvonne Rainer would side with ordinary-language philosophy in truculently declaring, *The Mind Is a Muscle* (the title of her most celebrated dance).

This is the context in which Morris composed his dance *Site* (1964), whose movements, the shifting of heavy sheets of plywood around the stage, are those of ordinary labor. Interiority is also referred to in *Site*, for as the last plywood panel is removed, a nude posed as Manet’s *Olympia* is revealed, reclining in an imitation of the image sequestered within the virtual space that lies behind the picture plane of traditional painting. But if interiority is referred to, it is only to be rejected. Since *Site*’s *Olympia* is flesh and blood, she joins her body to the anti-illusionism expressed in the very idea of a dance of ordinary movement as well as that refusal of the interiority of painting that would become the manifesto of Minimalism, whether in Morris’s own “Notes on Sculpture,” or Donald Judd’s essay “Specific Objects.”<sup>12</sup>

It was Beckett’s world of extreme ordinariness—of tramps and hat-passing routines, of actors scratching themselves and talking about farting or halitosis, or taking off and putting on their shoes—that attracted these New York dancers and performers very powerfully to his work. The Mabou Mines, an important theater collective, itself connected to Minimalism through the intermediary of the composer Philip Glass, was formed through this very attraction and a need to stage Beckett’s work. And *Waterman Switch* would develop out of Morris’s own experience of the novel *Watt*, among other things. A serious walk with Watt, however, produces its own extreme reservations about the certainties of linguistic behaviorism. Unable to check its spin into seriality, its language opens out into absurdity, madness, “nonsense.”

**EXPRESSIONISM, ABSTRACT** — The kind of attack on the virtuality of balletic gesture carried out by the dance of task performance had been paralleled in the 1950s by Jasper Johns’s attack on the virtuality of the pictorial gesture, particularly on those gorgeous smears and swipes and oozes of viscous pigment through which the Abstract Expressionist painter was thought to have conveyed his inner self. A work like Johns’s *Device Circle* (1959), in which a stick attached at its midpoint to a canvas is rotated 360 degrees to register, as it moves, a circular swathe of smeared paint, mocks both the meaning and the presumed expressiveness of such a “gesture.” A function of the “device,” the smear is wrenched out of its putatively private world of feeling and into the public one of task.

Rebelling against his own initial training as a latter-day Abstract Expressionist, Morris encountered Johns's "device" from within the Judson's search for ordinary movement. And it was from this position that he considered the artist's problem of how to make a pictorial mark that would have no interior, no connection to virtual space, no expressive overtones. *Self-Portrait (EEG)* of 1963 was one of Morris's answers, a solution that, much more overrrly than Johns's, ties the issue of the device to the question of selfhood, subjectivity, private experience—in short to the mind/body problem.

To make the work, Morris had his electroencephalogram taken for a period that would produce a line the length of his own body. For good measure, during this seismographic recording of his brain waves, Morris decided that he would "think about" himself. In this sense, we could say, if there were ever a line expressive of the artist's "self," this is it. And yet the absurdity of the claim is equally obvious. Neither a picture of Morris's thoughts nor an image of his person, *Self-Portrait (EEG)* has turned to medical technology for a "device" to produce a line that will itself intersect, but only ironically, with the traditional aesthetic genres. And at the same time it slyly asks the question, "What is it like to be a brain?"



Self-Portrait (EEG)

Contemporaneous with *Self-Portrait (EEG)*, another work associates this search for a device "to make a mark" not only with the mental but with language. Morris's *Memory Drawings*, based on a page of writing that summarized his own research into the then-current theories of human memory, are executed in a written line that gradually comes to "picture" the deterioration of memory, as Morris repeatedly attempted to recall and rewrite the initial page, allowing several days to pass between each repetition.

If, in certain versions of his *Device Circle* paintings, Johns used a ruler instead of a paint-mixing stick as his smearing "device," this was undoubtedly a reference to Duchamp's own notorious "device": a set of three metersticks deformed by chance but ironically given the title "standard," in reference to the standardization of measure. Duchamp's *Trois Stoppages étalons* (*Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913–14), made by recording the shape assumed by a meter-long piece of string dropped onto a surface from one meter above, and repeating the experiment two times, generated in this arbitrary manner a set of templates that the artist then used to design various works, among them *Network of Stoppages* (1914) and parts of *Tu m'* (1918). Devices produced by chance, the lines they trace have no internal, expressive meaning, for they clearly have no gestural

relation to their maker. But, further, insofar as they mock the very meaning of measurement for which the units—such as inches, feet, or yards—must be invariant and repeatable in order to signify, Duchamp's metersticks form a certain parallel with a behaviorist critique of a mentalist notion of meaning as that which is guaranteed by internally held ideas or rules that allow us to know how to use a word correctly from one instance to another.

**FLUIDS, BODY** — The double filiation of the long series of ruler works (such as *Three Rulers*, *Swift Night Ruler*, and *Enlarged and Reduced Inches*) that Morris pursued during 1963 was a declaration of his own connection to Duchamp through Johns. Begun as early as 1961, in the page onto which, over the course of two and a half hours, Morris repeatedly copied out the "Litanies of the Chariot" from Duchamp's *Green Box* (his notes for the *Large Glass*), the connection was declared again in 1962 with *Pharmacy*, and then over and over in 1963, with works such as *Fountain*, *Fresh Air*, and *Portrait*. This connection, which has been endlessly discussed in the literature on Morris, was given its most important early analysis by Annette Michelson, who went so far as to declare, "Duchamp's work constitutes a text, whose interpretative reading is Morris's uniquely personal accomplishment."<sup>13</sup>

While much historical writing on the development of the 1960s splits artistic production into *either* a neo-Dada concern that itself evolved into Pop art, *or* a Minimalist position focused on large-scale sculpture, and by so splitting it, presents these as two opposing postures—the first figurative and the second abstract—certain texts contemporary with this production argued for the continuity of a sensibility shared across this landscape. Barbara Rose's "A B C Art," for example, postulated that a common concern for the way the ordinary object could be mobilized to critique the terrifying complacency of American culture meant that between Pop and Minimalism there were both shared strategies (repetition, scale, banal materials) and shared sources, among them the immediate example of John Cage and Merce Cunningham, but more remotely that of both Duchamp and Russian Constructivism.<sup>14</sup>



Fountain

It is this notion of continuity that Michelson argues for Morris's own production, refusing to divide it into a set of neo-Dada, absurdist maneuvers, resulting in small-scale, Fluxus-like objects, on the one hand, and the massively inert works of his Minimalism, on the other. Of the six Duchampian tropes she sees Morris elaborating, two of them—transparency/reflection (as in the *Large*

Glass's use of glass and mirror) and the revised found-object—function within his Minimalist sculpture; one—the strategy of framing—is shared by both the sculpture and the more “conceptual” direction of his development (as when in *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal* [1963] he “unframes” an object he previously made by withdrawing aesthetic value from it); two more—art as money and the subversion of measure—relate exclusively to the Conceptual work; and a final one—art intervening in the ecologically sensitive field of the social (as in Duchamp's suggestion in the *Green Box* to “cut off the air”)—had extended by 1969, the date of her text, into Morris's Process art.

As important as this argument is in dissolving the difference between the two “halves” of Morris's formative work, and in thus joining and extending Rose's own snubbing of an art criticism (and an art history) based on fairly useless categories of morphology or style, Michelson's list of tropes omits the whole register of Duchamp's “Notes.” As a result, the field of language, itself conceived as a self-justifying artistic activity, drops from consideration. If Duchamp had decided that much of his work could remain at the level of proposals—as in his famous projection for a “transformer designed to utilize the slight, wasted energies such as: . . . the exhalation of tobacco smoke / the growth of a head of hair, of other body hair and of the nails. / the fall of urine and excrement. / movements of fear, astonishment, boredom, anger. / laughter. / dropping of tears. . . .” (a proposal Morris “completed” in his *Portrait*)—this idea of art-as-language had been incorporated into Morris's work as early as 1961.

That the linguistic field had somehow to be added as a kind of third force to those mediums in which the expressive body, whether as dancer or as painter, had traditionally performed its gestures from within a conventionally mandated verbal silence had already been remarked by Rose, as she described the invasion of dramatic speeches into the New Dance:

*In fact the use of taped narratives that either do not correspond with or contradict the action is becoming more frequent among the dancers. The morbidity of the text Rainer chose as “musical accompaniment” for Parts of Some Sextets, with its endless deaths and illnesses and poxes and plagues (it was the diary of an eighteenth-century New England minister) provided an ironic contrast to the banality of the dance action, which consisted in part of transporting, one by one, a stack of mattresses from one place to another.*

And although she makes no comment on their conjunction, Rose opens the part of her text in which she presents the parallel between the dancer's recourse to language and the sculptor's production of ironic statements (“Or consider Carl Andre's solution for war, ‘Let them eat what they kill’”), with an epigram

composed of paired remarks by Duchamp—“There is no solution because there is no problem”—and Beckett—“I could die today, if I wished, merely by making a little effort, if I could wish, if I could make an effort.”<sup>17</sup>

However, although Beckett puts in various epigrammatic appearances in the critical literature on Minimalism and on Morris—the line from *The Unnamable*: “I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me,” twice used as exergue by Maurice Berger, for example<sup>18</sup>—it is only Morris himself who has ever pointed to what it was in Beckett that functioned as a crucial, enabling, strategic model: “In [Beckett's] spaces, a Murphy, a Malone, or a Watt endlessly and precisely permuted his limited store of ideas and meager belongings,” Morris wrote, commenting about the humor involved in the wordy-gurdy ceaselessly playing inside these characters' skulls, that “an undefiant separateness and even a confidence in the autistic permeates them.”<sup>19</sup>

But if Duchamp and Beckett join hands in celebrating a kind of hilarious absurdity, it is only Beckett who sees the wordy-gurdy as a strategy for endlessness and permutation, which is to say as a logical conundrum that leaves the mind/body problem forever unsolved. It is only he who performs the conclusion that, far from dissolving the dilemma of “turtles all the way down,” language will in fact operate its own infinite spinout.

Rose had described Morris's early work as taking up either “Duchampesque speculations on process and sex or illustrations of Cartesian dualism,”<sup>20</sup> a dualism that Michelson saw Morris as collapsing into what she called the phenomenological firstness—namely, the indivisible impact of a sense-experience that is “a mere sense of quality . . . without any elements or relations”—of his large-scale sculptural production.<sup>21</sup> This impact, which she characterized as tautological—“a cube is a cube”—gave Morris's Minimalist work, she argued, its aggressively anti-Modernist, antimetaphysical stance.

But Beckett's absurdist metaphysics, with the mind shackled to the body on the one hand and to language on the other, and attacked by infinite regress on all sides, functions as a kind of common ground for Morris's production, in all its many guises. *Portrait*, beyond its relation to Duchamp, weighs in to the mind/body debate, as its rows of bottled “substances,” or distillations of the “self,” constitute a version of the pineal eye—the Cartesian attempt to locate that part of the body where the connection between it and its mental counterpart takes place. The comic, Beckettian mode of this rehearsal, however, is taken up by the serial nature of the bottles and the suggestion this makes of the endlessness of the search for mental substance within all the various flows of the body.

Further, *Column* (1960), which Morris constructed

as his “dance work” for the Living Theater, has also to be seen from the vantage of Beckett’s mind/body ribaldry. This column, a gray-painted, hollow, rectangular prism, the height of a person (six feet tall), was conceived as a performer. Revealed at the center of the stage where it remained standing for three and a half minutes, it was offered as a brute thing that, however, had to be reinterpreted as a body inhabited by something like its own volitional center, or “mind,” at the moment when it suddenly and spontaneously fell over. That this eerie quality of a volitional object was intentional is testified to by Morris’s insistence that there was to be no external source of the column’s movement—like a cord one could pull in order to topple it. To this end Morris (like the homunculus that would have to inhabit the mental sphere in order for the dualist arguments to make sense, according to the derisive attacks of the linguistic behaviorists) decided to stand inside the column and, at the appropriate moment, to propel its fall. When, during rehearsal, this resulted in a head wound, the performance took place with Morris in the infirmary and the column manipulated by a string. But still the meaning was clear. There are no bodies independent from the series, spatial or verbal, within which their orientation is determined.

From the beginning, then, permutation in Morris’s sculpture was attached to the Beckett problem, and thus to a Watt “*endlessly and precisely permut[ing] his limited store of ideas. . .*”

**GESTALT** — Which brings us to the problem of how to interpret the notion of gestalt in Morris’s earliest explanations of his Minimalist work, work that appeared to have been pared down to nothing but mute, large, gray-painted shapes. As Judd wrote of these objects: “Order, in the old sense, can’t be read into something that is just a rectangle or a triangle”<sup>22</sup>; and, commenting on the extreme reductiveness of early pieces like *Slab* or *Cloud* (both 1962), Judd recalled Robert Rauschenberg’s self-mocking defense of his own set of totally blank *White Paintings*: “If you don’t take it seriously, there is nothing to take.”<sup>23</sup>

That extreme simplicity would reduce the experience of something like *Slab* to Michelson’s “phenomenological firstness”—or the explosive impact of a single, irreducible, perceived aspect: shape—seems to be the point of Morris’s stress on the importance of gestalt in his own search for “unitary” forms. Accordingly, his “Notes on Sculpture” explained: “Characteristic of a gestalt is that once it is established all the information about it, *qua* gestalt, is exhausted. (One does not, for example, seek the gestalt of a gestalt.)”<sup>24</sup> The gestalt or the “firstness” would then cut through the old mentalist dilemma of how the various aspects of objects (the fact that they must be a bundle of properties—dimension, texture,

weight, etc.) are related to one another by a consciousness that claims to “know” them.<sup>25</sup> Minimalism, it could be argued, was bringing into being objects that somehow, miraculously, only had *one* property: the gestalt.

It was in this context that Rose connected Morris’s use of “elementary, geometrical forms that depend for their art quality on some sort of presence or concrete thereness” to Wittgenstein’s philosophical questions about “pointing to the shape” of something. To this effect she cited the *Philosophical Investigations*:



Slab

“There are, of course, what can be called ‘characteristic experiences’ of pointing to (e.g.) the shape. For example, following the outline with one’s finger or with one’s eyes as one points.— But *this* does not happen in all cases in which I ‘mean the shape,’ and no more does any other one characteristic process occur in all these cases.”<sup>26</sup> Applying this notion of “pointing to the shape” to Morris’s work, she concludes: “The thing, thus, is presumably not supposed to ‘mean’ other than what it is; that is, it is not supposed to be suggestive of anything other than itself.”

But Wittgenstein’s questions about pointing to the shape are not meant to invoke the gestalt as a kind of stopping of the experiential buck at “firstness.” They are, if anything, intended to make fun of the very idea of gestalt. For in the battle between the behaviorists and the dualists, gestalt is itself regarded as a turtle in the great chain of “turtles all the way down.” In the eyes of the linguistic behaviorists, gestalt is a mentalist notion, like the constancy hypothesis, that operates like a rule by which we recognize this or that set of sense data as a “square” or a “triangle.” Which is to say that in the constancy hypothesis our claims to know that we are seeing a square are backed by referring to a mental image—or gestalt—of a square, in order to check that we are right. But in order to be sure that we’ve matched the two correctly, we would need, Wittgenstein winks, the model of another square, and so forth.

That the gestalt cannot be so disentangled is part of the lesson of “pointing to the shape.” Because how would we make it clear that it’s the shape we “mean” and not the color, say, or the size of the thing we’re pointing to; or how would we know that we’re pointing to an object and not just holding up a finger for our interlocutor’s attention; or why is *pointing* something that moves from the finger to the object and not up the arm to the body of the pointer? Pointing to the shape, Wittgenstein insists, is part of a whole matrix of relations that he calls a “form of life,” or more frequently, a “language game.” And further,

what does not underwrite the successful playing of the game "pointing to the shape" is a mentalistic form called gestalt.

In fact, the second part of Morris's own "Notes on Sculpture," published later in 1966, also implicitly questioned an idea of gestalt as "firstness" or "concrete thereness." There may be no "gestalt of a gestalt" he argued, but this is only to say that if formal relations are not conceived as *internal* to the Minimalist object, this is part of a strategy to take "relationships out of the work and make them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision." The result of this, so far from finding an unanalyzable "firstness," is instead to end up with an endless set of permutations operating as two properties—space and light—add themselves to the shape of the object and serialize it:

*Some of the best of the new work, being more open and neutral in terms of surface incident, is more sensitive to the varying contexts of space and light in which it exists. It reflects more acutely these two properties and is more noticeably changed by them. In some sense it takes these two things into itself as its variation is a function of their variation. Even its most patently unalterable property—shape—does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work.*

**HAPTIC** — The body, in Morris's version of the mind/body "problem," was projected early on not only in the space it displaced—as in *Column*—but in the traces it deposited—as in *Portrait*. And another form



Passageway

these traces took, beginning at the end of 1963 and continuing into 1964 and beyond, was the experience of impact, of the body encountering the resistance of a material external to it and, leaving its mark on that material, being itself deformed or inflected by it. These are the traces of the body's membranous contact with an exterior, as its own outer surface is pressured by the pressure it exerts. Beckett's Unnamable describes this: "I know I am seated, my hands on my knees, because of the pressure against my rump, against the soles of my feet, against the palms of my hands, against my knees. Against my palms, the pressure is of my knees, against my knees of my palms, but what is it that presses against my rump, against the soles of my feet?" (T 279).

Body contact, we could say, creates an awareness of the body as sheathing, isolating it as a kind of boundary that can be peeled away from the self and presented as pure corporeality. It is body as physical pressure, as touch, as what might be called the *haptic* (or tactile)

as opposed to the *optic*. Yet as Beckett has shown us, pressure is pressed. So it also could be said to ask: What is it like to be a body?

The behaviorist, shunning the "what is it *like*" part of this question, points to the body's connection to its world in the execution of those tasks through which it performs its wholly public meaning. And "task performance" is indeed registered as a series of traces captured in the impressionable surface of warm lead in works like *Hand and Toe Holds* (1964), in which two lead bars, spaced five feet apart, record the clutching of hands and feet. Although lead was the medium Morris most frequently employed to register imprints, plaster served him in another work, *Stairs* (1964), in which three steps were fashioned so that a section of each of the treads could be flipped open to reveal the imprint of a foot that had been captured as it performed the task: walking up stairs.

Yet the body's imprint is not the only way to capture this sense of its surfacing into external space. Two other early works address this problem, although at an entirely different scale and through very different means. The first, *Passageway* (1961), was a curving cul-de-sac of a corridor that formed the "exhibition," which visitors entered only to discover themselves pressured between the two walls of a blind alley that led nowhere but to the point at which it narrowed to nothing. This work was not the neo-Duchampian gesture of Yves Klein's exhibition-as-empty-gallery (1958), but rather an attempt to make palpable the body's physical limits experienced as a reciprocal pressure between itself and the space around it.

In 1961 Morris also made *Pine Portal*, a free-standing doorway, nothing but threshold, doorjam, and lintel. The work is a piece of task performance: walk through it. In a second version, Morris lined the doorway with mirrors. Now walking through the doorway meant that each time one did it a "trace" of one's passage was registered, albeit ephemerally; in one's peripheral vision there would be a trail extending outward from one's body and into a kind of unlocatable spatial fold that appeared like a weird afterimage: the memory of one's progress, wrenched away from one's body and made strangely out of sync with it. What is it *like* to be a body?



I-Box

**I-BOX —**

Q(uod) E(rat) D(emonstrandum).

**JUDD, DONALD** — If the rubric "primary structures," under which Minimalism made its collective museum debut in 1966, tended to direct the critical reception of this work down the misleading path of an aesthetic of

ideal forms, the notion of “system,” argued via another exhibition later that year (*Systemic Painting*), applied this same idealism to the issue of serial composition.<sup>28</sup> If Minimalist artists tended to work in series, it was argued, this was in order to demonstrate the wholly rational basis for their work, each object the next element of a mathematical progression.

It was Judd who first publicly objected to this idea of rationalism as a way of responding to Minimalist work. Speaking of European geometric art (he gave the example of Victor Vasarely), which was, in fact, pledged to what he saw as “rationalism, rationalistic philosophy,” he countered, “All that art is based on systems built beforehand, *a priori* systems; they express a certain type of thinking and logic that is pretty much discredited now as a way of finding out what the world’s like.”<sup>29</sup> Judd’s description of the type of order he thought his own work and that of his colleagues was substituting for such *a priori* systems was instead, he claimed, “just one thing after another.” And no matter how tenaciously the rationalist reading of Minimalism persisted, Judd was always just as dogged in his rejection of it. In 1983, speaking of this problem to students at Yale University, he said: “One conspicuous misinterpretation for example is the idea of order: most writers in the United States have always said that it’s Platonic in some way and involved in some great scheme of order. . . . That’s certainly wrong.”<sup>30</sup>

Sol LeWitt, whose work more than perhaps any other Minimalist’s has been saddled with a rationalist reading — his art having been characterized as Cartesian, as “the look of thought” — added his own exasperation to Judd’s protest. “In a logical thing,” he explained in a recent interview, “each part is dependent on the last. It follows in a certain sequence as part of the logic. But, a rational thing is something you have to make a rational decision on each time. . . . You have to think about it. In a logical sequence, you don’t think about it. It is a way of not thinking. It is *irrational*.”<sup>31</sup>

There are many images of this irrationality. For an example in language one could easily cite:

*Here he stood. Here he sat. Here he knelt. Here he lay. Here he moved, to and fro, from the door to the window, from the window to the door; from the window to the door, from the door to the window; from the fire to the bed, from the bed to the fire; from the bed to the fire, from the fire to the bed; from the door to the fire, from the fire to the door. . . .* (W 203)



Nine Fiberglass Sleeves

It is this kind of series, we can agree with Morris, that takes “relationships out of the work and make[s] them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision.” Which is to say, the series, transferred into the realm of sculpture, enacts the object’s endless capacity for permutation as “it takes these two things [space and light] into itself as its variation is a function of their variation.” But far from being an underlying idea or reason that would ground one’s experience of the work, or group of works, allowing one to essentialize it around a kind of diagram of itself that justifies it from within, series operates in the art of Morris, Judd, and LeWitt as it does in Beckett’s linguistic spirals: *irrationally* and endlessly.

**KUBLER. GEORGE** — Writing a master’s thesis on Brancusi’s use of bases, during the academic year 1965–66, Morris followed out George Kubler’s notion of form-classes.<sup>32</sup> This is a notion of series that is itself idealist, walling off a particular form — classical landscape, say — from its historical context and seeing it project a formal problem from its inception in a prime object — the frescoes of Pompeii or Boscoreale, for example — across those centuries through which it is taken up — as in Poussin’s landscapes — only to be dropped and taken up again — as in late Cézanne. As Morris considered the prime object in Brancusi’s work — the ovoid of the head detached from the rest of the body and presented as a separate whole — it became clear, however, that the form of its “development” was just as much a function of the object’s different placements and orientations in space as it was

the simplification and reduction of detail. Idealism, that is, began to yield to material context. In fact, Morris began to reason, that very reduction toward an increasingly bald *shape* only served to make more naked and unmistakable the changes brought about with each new position of the form in space.



Two Columns

The reflectivity of the mirrorlike surfaces of Brancusi’s polished bronzes heightened this sense of the way the shape was newly inflected by every change in its placement.

**L-BEAMS** — Conceived during the period he was examining this Brancusi problem, Morris’s *L-Beams* (1965) enact the pressure that placement exerts on an object’s shape — whether it is an object seen from outside and thus encountered as a body; or an object experienced from inside, as though it were one’s own form nagged, so to speak, by the mentalist question, “What is it *like* to be a body?” And each *L*, as it reflects the apparent distribution of weight and dimension, according to its position — the upright *L* appearing split between the solid half cleaving to the floor

and the "lighter" half reaching skyward; the *L* lying on its side seeming thickened and dense; while the *L* poised on its two extremities takes on an arched, lightened quality—resonates with its sardonic account of the mind/body problem. There is the body; there is the self; there is the series.

To suck any residual idealism out of the idea of permuting the form-class, Morris had, by 1967, hit on the strategy of making works that, though they would be simple geometries based on squares, circles, and



L-Beams

ovals, would be sectional and organized such that they could be submitted to an interpermutational spin. *Stadium* (1967), for example, an eight-part, inwardly sloping donut, could be reorganized so that its four side sections migrate to join another, more rectangular piece, or else they could be left freestanding to form a linear wedge. In the exhibition in which these works, made of fiberglass, were shown, they were, in fact, rearranged daily by the artist. A chart that had its own kind of insane reasonableness formed something like the text or score for these reorganizations.

But to encounter *Stadium*, even outside the context of the exhibition, was to have the strange feeling that something at the scale of the human body and possessing the simplicity of geometric shape—projecting a concomitant sense of the body's internal coherence and thus serving as a kind of model for the self's identity over time and space—could just as easily transmute into something else, which could in turn transmute into another thing, and another . . .

**MIRRORED CUBES** — By 1965 it should have been obvious that something was going on in Minimalism besides "concrete thereness," for the galleries in which the various works were displayed were even then awash with the effects of optical illusionism. Judd's work, for one, was opulent with the reflective shine of Plexiglas and industrialized lacquer surfaces, which Robert Smithson acknowledged in 1966 by coining the paradoxical term "uncanny materiality" to describe the way the glinting surfaces acted to swamp and "engulf the basic structure."

This contradictory relationship between the presumed clarity of the "primary structure" and the reflective abyss into which the object seemed to vanish was more than evident in Morris's *Mirrored Cubes*, first exhibited in 1965. Trapped in the cross fire of the mutual reflections set up by the surfaces of the four facing blocks, the gestalt itself is absorbed by the constantly delayed experience of its presence as it seems to depart into infinite regress. It is, perhaps, in

this work more than any other that seriality is defined as the opposite of progress, being instead a kind of trapdoor opened at the back of experience through which certainty will continue to drain away into infinity.

The fact that the mirror displays its cross-reflections as the straight line of an endlessly receding trajectory makes of it another type of "device" to "make a mark." Impersonal and mechanical, it has—like the encephalograph's capacity to transform the density of the body and the complexity of the mind into the linear trace—the capacity to transmute the three dimensions of space into a peculiarly linear diagram of itself.

Ten years after *Mirrored Cubes*, Morris began to concentrate on this type of production of the mark. In 1975 he devised an untitled installation in which four mirrors, hung on the four opposing walls of the gallery, were accompanied by paired frames hanging at an angle in front of each, such that to look through any of the frames into the mirrored surface was to have the illusion of looking at a receding line of frames within frames within frames . . . The three-dimensional, cubic volume within which one was standing seemed to flatten or unbend into the spatial impossibility of a straight line. Two years later, in *Portland Mirrors* (1977), a work of monumental scale and magisterial simplicity, this mirrored "device"-for-marking had the effect of turning Minimalism inside out: the art of massive, closed volumes now seeming to empty into the medium of the infinitely long line.



Williams Mirrors

**OBSERVATORY** — But nature also "makes a mark," and by the early 1970s Morris had begun to think about the structures both made (like Stonehenge) and found (like caves) by prehistoric societies to convert the arc of the sun's revolutions into the straight line of the intelligible, arrowlike trajectory, and thus to "read" the solstice. *Observatory* (1971) is a massive project through which to think and to experience this culturally ancient notion of marking, which is to say, of entering into a text that one has not oneself written, and that will continue to be produced to the end of solar time.



Observatory

Thinking the "mark" at this scale led Morris to Peru, in 1975, to see the massive and mysterious Nazca lines: an ancient people tracing the sun's own hand in order to make a

mark. "Aligned with Nazca," Morris's reflection on the enigma of these lines, opens with an epigram that seems to hang over the text like its own kind of unexplained talisman. It is taken from Beckett's *Murphy*:

*"I am not one of the big world. I am of the little world." was an old refrain with Murphy, and a conviction, two convictions, the negative first.*<sup>34</sup>

**POLLOCK, JACKSON** — "Anti Form" was Morris's first written analysis of what he would later call "The Phenomenology of Making." It is continuous with the problem, posed by the opening rebellion against the Abstract Expressionist gesture, of finding a "device" to make a "mark." Except that both texts, the first from 1968 and the second from 1970, stage this new phase of the rebellion not *against* but specifically under the aegis of Jackson Pollock.<sup>35</sup>

Taking up that problem in the reception of Minimalism in which repetition and serial organizations of simple elements seemed always open to an unwanted, dualistic reading — Judd's despised "rationalism" — because, as Morris wrote, "the duality is established by the fact that an order, any order, is operating beyond the physical things," Morris turned approvingly to Pollock's example: "Probably no art can completely resolve this. Some art, such as Pollock's, comes close."<sup>36</sup>

This was so, Morris argued, because Pollock's order seemed to be fused with the very matter he was manipulating, so that "to make a mark" was not to work according to a formal system, but to expose a process that continues over a duration absolutely coterminous with the making of the object. Acknowledging that "only Pollock was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work," Morris saw this as a function of Pollock's relation to his tools: "The stick which drips paint is a tool which acknowledges the nature of the fluidity of paint. . . . Unlike the brush it is in far greater sympathy with matter because it acknowledges the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter."<sup>37</sup>

Making the mark in sympathy with the nature of one's tool had, of course, been inherent in the Judson dancers' manipulation of bizarrely commonplace props in their search for an aesthetics of "task performance." And so the notion of process art as a form of performance came naturally to Morris, as when in 1969, for an exhibition in Edmonton, Canada, called *Place and Process*, he proposed to ride several . . .



Tangle

**QUARTER HORSES** — back and forth over a 200-yard span (reminiscent of Watt's and Sam's shuttle), for the time necessary for either the horses or himself to drop from exhaustion. The result — before he was forced to stop — was a deep track etched into the ground, the product of this centaurian "device."

The other aspect of Pollock's gesture, however, was that it made clear that one of the properties of his material — paint — is its relation to gravity. Artistic form, Morris now observed, is always the result of a continual struggle against gravity, as canvas is



Pace and Progress

stretched over wooden frames or clay modeled over metal armatures or plaster applied to a supporting lathe. Without those internal props to enable the materials to hold as (geometric) forms, the cloth or plaster would yield to gravity and become *formless*. What Pollock demonstrated with his dripped and thrown paint was, Morris argued, the division between the internal, rigid armature that maintains form in the field of the vertical, and the openness of matter to the gravity that pulls it into the horizontal field, forcing it to yield to the ground. To forsake armatures and work directly with soft materials like cloth or latex was to produce art in which "considerations of gravity become as important as those of space," and where, "random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material."<sup>38</sup>

In the "Anti Form" essay, Claes Oldenburg was designated as one of the first to use such materials and was represented through an image of his *Giant Soft Fan* (1967), one of its flaccid blades attaching the limp object to the ceiling of the gallery, its spaghetti of electrical cord falling floorward and sprawling on the ground. Although he did not illustrate this in the article, Morris himself had also explored this yield to gravity and its defiance of "form" in two early . . .

**ROPE PIECES** — made in 1963 and 1964, in which the free fall of the material into formlessness (and in one case from vertical to horizontal) had been contrasted with the geometric frames from which the ropes emerge.

But beginning in 1967, Morris had embarked on a far more systematic exploration of gravity's production of anti-form, for it was then that he began to work with felt. Laying great lengths of fabric on the floor, as had Pollock, Morris then marked the material with line, as had Pollock, except that where Pollock's line was formed by liquid paint soaking into canvas, Morris's was made by a razor slicing into the surface of felt. All that was then necessary to "make" the work was to lift it onto the wall, where gravity pulled

against the order of this line and opened the work to the continuous disorder of anti-form.

Morris, of course, was reading Pollock's painting directly and aggressively against the grain of its most orthodox, Modernist interpretation. In the eyes of the pictorially devout, Pollock's linear web was prized specifically because it seemed to defy gravity, hovering weightlessly before one's eyes like an effulgent cloud, a field of purely "optical" experience that demanded that one think it apart from anything bodily or physical—"a mirage," as Clement Greenberg had said. The dripped line itself, frequently softened by its bleed into the unsized canvas, was hailed by Greenberg as an innovation in the development of drawing precisely because it was able to avoid the sensation that it had produced a cut. "A brush stroke can have a cutting edge that goes into deep space when you don't want it to," he had explained. For Greenberg, the importance of Pollock's liquid line was that it avoided the edge that would cut into space, the edge that, by isolating forms, would differentiate figure from ground. By not cutting, it could allow the canvas to read as an unbroken continuity, a singular, undivided plane. And that plane would then, according to the Modernist logic of opticality, yield an analogue of the immediacy, the unbrokenness of the visual field, and of the viewer's own perception of that field, in an all-at-onceness that, according to the Modernist logic, was the very essence of vision itself. By avoiding the production of forms (cut out within the field), the work, then, could produce *form* itself as the law of the formulation of form.

But for Morris, everything in Pollock's line had indeed to do with the cut, with something slicing not into space but into the continuity of the canvas plane as it conventionally stretches, rigid, across our plane of vision. The lengths of felt Morris began to work with were submitted to a process of systematic cuts; he sliced into their pliant fabric surfaces, disturbing their planar geometries even while the cuts themselves were geometrically regular slashes. The irregularity came when the work was lifted onto the plane of the wall, where, hanging from hooks or suspended from wires, gravity pulled open large gaps in the fabric surfaces, gaps that could be called neither figure nor ground, gaps that somehow operated *below* form.<sup>11</sup>

The horizontal field as the domain of gravity is also the operator of entropy, in which the energy necessary to maintain the separateness and distinctness of form drains out of a system, and in place of differentiations between things, one arrives at the "de-differentiation" of the formless. Form, Morris had thus argued in his essay, "is an anti-entropic and conservative enterprise."



Knots

In this sense, the anti-form of Morris's felts, as well as aggressively horizontal works such as *Threadwaste* (1968), or profligate Process pieces such as *Steam* (1967), hooks into the notion of entropy as that was being thought by . . .

**SMITHSON, ROBERT** — in the simple illustration used to explain it in his "Monuments of Passaic." One of Smithson's monuments was a child's sandbox, whose horizontality Smithson stressed by comparing it to an open grave. Using it to explain the irreversibility of entropy, Smithson advised his reader:

*Picture in your mind's eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on the one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be a restoration of the original division but a greater degree of greyness and an increase of entropy.'*

Indeed, Smithson's imagination was filled with the entropic production of anti-form, exemplified by his notion of the *de-architecture* of "entropy made visible," as realized in his *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), and his own enactment of form's yield to gravity, as in *Asphalt Rundown* (1969).

But the parallel between Smithson and Morris, at this moment in the late 1960s, relates to what we might call the *Watt* factor, which is to say that anti-form, an irreversible, abyssal endlessness, is itself a type of seriality that has its true site in language. "In the illusory labels of language," Smithson wrote,

*an artist might advance specifically to get lost, and to intoxicate himself in dizzying syntaxes, seeking odd intersections of meaning, strange corridors of history, unexpected echoes, unknown humors, or voids of knowledge. . . . but this quest is risky, full of bottomless fictions and endless architectures and counter-architectures. . . . At the end, if there is an end, are perhaps only meaningless reverberations.'*<sup>12</sup>

Smithson had always countered the rationalist reading of Minimalism, and specifically of LeWitt's

supposed manipulation of "concepts," by describing LeWitt's yield to paradox, his welcome—extended to the "pit-falls of language." Far from language guaranteeing the order of logic, Smithson insisted: "Everything LeWitt



Threadwaste

thinks, writes, or has made is inconsistent and contradictory. The 'original idea' of his art is 'lost in a mess of drawings, figurings, and other ideas.' Nothing is where it seems to be. His concepts are prisons devoid of reason."<sup>44</sup>

Beckett returns, then, through the very guise of anti-form. As the body tries to finish dying, something nonetheless, relentlessly continues. Taking the form of a text, its logic is that of repetition to infinity, the mad imitation of form produced by the abyss. The textuality of Morris's own anti-form was made explicit in the diary he kept for *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969), in which he talks about the bodily disgust produced by his labors.

**THE TEXTUAL BODY** — The voice that puts in its appearance in Morris's work of the early 1970s, the relentless, argumentative, internal drone that fills both *Hearing* (1972) and *Voice* (1974), continues to attach the third force of language to the staging of the mind/body problem. But, perhaps, the most effortlessly beautiful of these enactments is to be found in the series called *Blind Time*, initiated in 1973 and returned to in 1976, in 1985, and again in 1991. These drawings, made by



Blind Time

carrying out graphic tasks geared to the description of simple geometries — either those of the rectangular sheet of paper itself, or of shapes to be applied to the sheet — were pure exercises in "touch." For Morris, with his eyes closed, would perform his task by "making a mark" that would deposit a record of his attempt in a smear of velvety powdered graphite mixed with plate oil.

These marked areas, everywhere redolent of the hand's pressure, the fingers' extension, the palm's spread, take on exactly that haptic quality Morris had explored in the *Leads*: the experience of the body's limit as a sense of pressure pressing against the pressure pressing back. In this, the objective geometries the body describes in the world — the vertical and horizontal bifurcations of the rectangular sheer, for example, or the masking tape deposited as a "square" — take on the resonance of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's argument about the body's role in the phenomenology of perception. It is what he called the "internal horizon" of the body's density, the fact that it has a front and a back, a left and a right, an up and a down, that allows us to "surface" into a world always already anticipated as meaningful. Mind, in this sense, is present in the very dimensionality of carnality: What is it like to be a *body*?<sup>45</sup>

The phenomenological reading of the *Blind Times*, though it captures the striving after an exquisite

balance between an inside (the artist's intentional marking) and an outside (the external record of the success or failure of the task), tends to ignore the presence of the text, neatly, fanatically, penciled into the left corner of every sheet. Entering the third term, language, into the equation, the text pulls apart the beautiful equilibrium that marries subject and object, mind and body. For the text is either the command to do the task, given beforehand, or it is the record of the task, once completed. But whether preceding or following, the text is what opens up the regressive paradox of how to know whether one has understood the task; it is, we could say, what introduces the turtle.

Never one *with* the task, the textual command is also what pushes the series onward from one task to another: "... then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another peppermint, then another onion, then another ..."

**UNCANNY MATERIALITY** — Smithson found the disappearance of the "unitary" form behind a surface of reflections "uncanny," a disruption of what was expected from Minimalism. It was a case of "uncanny materiality," he said.<sup>46</sup>

Freud tells us that what is experienced as uncanny is precisely this displacement of the single, coherent, collected (phallic) form by an aureole of multiple, shifting, spooky things gathered



Mirrored Cubes

around an unspeakable absence.<sup>47</sup> This is the image of the Medusa, he said; this is the dreadful recurrence of what the child must strive to repress: the appearance of the "castrated" mother, proof of the oedipal threat. The uncanny, he explained, is the return of this threat, in a reminder that what were once narcissistic extensions of oneself — and thus, according to the infantile logic of the "omnipotence of thoughts," protections of oneself — have suddenly turned against one and become dangers to one's very being. It's this sense of the double that is no longer a guardian but now a menace that accounts, Freud says, for the location of the uncanny in the doppelgänger, in the mirrors through which departed spirits can re-enter the space of the living, in the bodies of androids, and in the endless series of substitutes for the threatened penis.

The uncanny is thus itself a serial production, whose vehicle can often be the mirror, but whose medium is the body, and the mind, and language. The casting of body parts, in a multiplication of phalluses and phallic stand-ins, to form a frame around an opening, in the Hydrocal works of the 1980s, was one form in which Morris pursued this uncanny seriality.

**VETTI, HOUSE OF THE** — Another, of course, was through the felt pieces, the folds and pleats of which Morris came increasingly to read as genital. The random swells and repetitions of the *Felts* from 1970



House of the Vetti

gradually bloomed at the end of the decade—and never so directly as in *House of the Vetti* (1983)—into the explicit petals of the uncanny body. It is, perhaps, the brilliance of these works that the meticulousness of their “system,” as in the repeated, supple bands of *Inverted Shoulder* (1978), is now able

to restage the image of Minimalist seriality under the sign of the uncanny and the repetition of the repressed. So that the later *Felts* conduct a rereading of Minimalism by entering its own series into a new one, which in turn may enter into . . .

**WATT** — “Watt had watched people smile and thought he understood how it was done” (W 23).

“ . . . Watt’s smile was further peculiar in this, that it seldom came singly, but was followed after a short time by another, less pronounced it is true. In this it resembled the fart” (W 25).



Inverted Shoulder

**X, Y, Z** — . . .

1 Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952, 1936), pp. 88–89.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 146.

3 Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (Paris: Olympia Press, 1953), p. 75. Hereinafter, textual references to *Watt* are preceded by “W.” Jacqueline Hoeler’s study of *Watt* was the first to place the novel in colloquy with logical positivism, although she specifically argues for a connection to the Wittgenstein of the *Treatatus*. See Hoeler, “Watt,” in *Samuel Beckett*, ed. Martin Esslin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 62–76.

4 Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 169.

5 Benjamin Buchloh analyzes Morris’s early relation to Duchamp’s readymade as having gone beyond an understanding of it as a form of speech act (“this is a work of art if I say so”) disruptive of traditional forms of art making, to an understanding of art as having a semiotic function. Thus, he argues, was a result of Morris’s engagement with Duchamp’s *Notes*. See Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October*, no. 55 (winter 1990), pp. 105–43.

6 The exception that proves the rule is Duchamp’s “Litanies of the Chair,” the script of a song to be endlessly repeated within the closed circuit of the bachelor machine, the song itself referring to other forms of self-enclosure such as onanism. Of all the notes by Duchamp, it was the “Litanies” to which Morris was attracted and that, in 1961, he copied out to make a drawing. But unlike Beckett’s infinite regress, which operates upon the structural possibilities of language and its

permutability, Duchamp’s “Litanies” merely illustrate or thematize repetition; they do not enact it in the language.

7. This argument forms the basis of Gilles Deleuze’s attack on the certainties of analytic philosophy in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 16–17.

8. These passages are from Beckett’s trilogy, which consists of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*. All were first published in French in 1950, 1951, and 1952, respectively; they were subsequently published in English as a trilogy, in Beckett’s own translation (London: John Calder, 1959). The above citations are from the English trilogy, as follows: “wordy-gurdy” (p. 367); Molloy’s statement (p. 9); the two statements by the Unnamable (p. 267 and pp. 356–57). Hereinafter, textual references to the trilogy are preceded by “T.”

9. Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology. Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962; 1939), p. 26.

10. Annette Michelson’s important early essay on Morris analyzes his work in relation to, among other things, Judson dance, which she calls the “dance of ordinary language” and of “task performance” (see Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue [Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969], pp. 55–59).

11. In her essay “A B C Art,” Barbara Rose relates the Minimalist sensibility to Alain Robbe-Grillet and the “French objective novel,” which, however, she cautions against assuming that these artists themselves had read. “This is quite the contrary to their knowledge of Wittgenstein,” she then adds, “whom I know a number of them have read” (*Art in America* [October–November 1965], reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock [New York: Dutton, 1968], p. 292). One of the artists who had read Wittgenstein in the early 1960s was, according to his own account, Jasper Johns.

12. Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), pp. 42–44, reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 222–28; Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), pp. 181–89.

13. Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” p. 50.

14. Rose, “A B C Art,” pp. 271–97.

15. Duchamp, “Notes,” in *Marcel Duchamp, Salt Seller*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 191.

16. Rose, “A B C Art,” p. 294.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

18. Berger opens the first chapter of *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 19) with this citation, as he also places it at the top of “Wayward Landscapes,” his text for this catalogue.

19. Morris, “Aligned with Nazea,” *Artforum* 14, no. 2 (October 1975), p. 35, italics added.

20. Rose, “A B C Art,” p. 284.

21. Michelson, “Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,” pp. 17–19, 43.

22. Judd, “In the Galleries,” *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 5 (February 1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975*, p. 165.

23. Robert Rauschenberg, quoted in Judd, “In the Galleries,” *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 6 (March 1964), reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 117.

24. Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” p. 228.

25. Richard Rorty, describing the mind/body problem’s relation to the development of epistemology and problems of the claims to know, speaks of this issue of multiplicity (embedded in intuitions) versus singularity (vested in concepts) as analyzed by Kant. Running through the first *Critique*, Rorty says, is “the assumption that manifoldness is ‘given’ and that unity is made. That assumption is spelled out in the claim that inner space [contains] . . . a collection of ‘singular presentations to sense,’ but that these ‘intuitions’ cannot be ‘brought to consciousness unless ‘synthesized’ by a second set of representations (unnoticed by Hume)—the concepts—which enter into one many relations w/ batches of intuitions.” The “Transcendental Deduction, Rorty says, “is supposed to show that we can only be conscious of objects constituted by our own synthesizing activity,” as when Kant claims

of all representations, combination is the only one which cannot be given through objects. . . . For where the understanding has not previously combined, it cannot dissolve, since only as having been combined by the understanding can anything that allows of analysis be given to the faculty of representation (Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979], p. 153).

26. Rose, "A B C Art," p. 291.

27. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966), pp. 22–23, reprinted in Battcock, pp. 233–34.

28. *Primary Structures*, organized by Kynaston McShine, was at the Jewish Museum, in New York (April–June 1966); *Systemic Painting* was mounted at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum by Lawrence Alloway (September–November 1966).

29. Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," *Art News* (September 1966), reprinted in Battcock, p. 151.

30. *Donald Judd: Complete Writings*, vol. 2, p. 25, as cited in Yve-Alain Bois, *Donald Judd*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Pace Gallery, 1991), note 12.

31. Sol LeWitt, quoted in Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p. 58. Yve-Alain Bois called my attention to this statement.

32. Morris's master's thesis, "Form-Classes in the Work of Constantin Brancusi" (Hunter College, 1966), made use of the concept as articulated in George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

33. Robert Smithson, "Donald Judd," in *7 Sculptors*, exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1967), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 22.

34. Beckett, quoted in Morris, "Aligned with Nazca," p. 25.

35. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33–35; "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8, no. 8 (April 1970), pp. 62–66.

36. Morris, "Anti Form," p. 34.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

39. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 169.

40. Greenberg, as quoted in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1989), p. 535.

41. For an expansion of this argument, see my *Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 243–320.

42. Smithson, "The Monuments of Passaic," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, pp. 56–57.

43. Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," *Art International* (March 1968), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, p. 67. For an analysis of Smithson's relation to language, see Craig Owens, "Earthwords," *October*, no. 10 (fall 1979), pp. 121–30.

44. Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art," p. 69.

45. For such a reading, see "Blind Time Drawings, 1973" pp. 244–49 in this catalogue.

46. Smithson, "Donald Judd," p. 22.

47. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogart Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1953–1973; 1919), pp. 214–35.

*I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me.* —Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

In 1973, Robert Morris traveled to Peru to observe the Nazca lines. A year later, in a critical analysis of his journey published in *Artforum*, the artist made his most significant argument for an aesthetics of the self. The first section of "Aligned with Nazca" constitutes what Michel Foucault would call a "description of the monument"—a meticulous and personal diary of the artist's process of investigation, his own temporal relationship to the site as spectator. The description Morris provides centers on a dialectic between the repressive, overpowering verticality of urban spaces and the more expansive, liberating realm of the Peruvian plain. What impressed him most about Nazca was neither its large scale nor its publicness; instead, he saw in the Nazca lines "something intimate and unimposing," something that could help us to rethink the way our bodies relate to the world.

Morris went on to propose that his phenomenological passage at Nazca could serve as the model for aesthetic experiences that return to the individual those processes of perception and cognition lost through scientific or mathematical thinking. This freedom, he reasoned, was contradicted by the logic, geometry, and abstraction of 1960s Minimalist space; in effect, the art of that decade, oriented to the vertical axis of urban, industrialized space, was involved in a critical dialogue between viewer and object that was relatively stable and wedded to the institutional hierarchies of the museum and the gallery. If the crumbling intellectual architecture of modern society could offer little access to the private, individual space of the self, Morris reasoned, then the shift away from the Minimalist *object* represented by the Earthworks and installation art of the early 1970s might provide the possibility of greater access.

Morris's argument was predicated on a critical view of the static art object: while orthodox Minimalism and some of the object-oriented art of the early 1970s were built on logical systems that reiterated the cold, industrial geometry of our oppression, the new Earthworks and installation art engendered "solipsistic, even autistic discovery in its construction of either a psychological landscape or a physical enclosure for the self." The labyrinthine structure of this work, he argued, allowed for a more resonant, more complex understanding of how we are supported, manipulated, and subjugated by the world around us. But even these spaces were problematic in their abstract relation to the world, in their inability to get at the emotional and physical complexities of selfhood:

*The gloom Beckett hollowed out for himself in the post-World War II years are spaces discontinuous with the rest of the world. In those spaces, a Murphy, a Malone, or a Watt endlessly and precisely permuted his limited store of ideas and meager belongings. Here counting and farting inside a greatcoat stuffed with the Times Literary Supplement was a world in itself. Beckett must surely be seen as the first instance of the artist fashioning out space itself as an extension of the self. But the spaces of and for the self now being built in the plastic arts have little to do with the dust, the grimness, or even the humor of Beckett. For if these spaces imply aloneness they indicate none of the anxieties of isolation. An undefiant separateness and even a confidence in the autistic permeates them.<sup>4</sup>*

While endorsing the new art for allowing the "perceiving self [to] take measure of certain aspects of its own physical existence," Morris ultimately understood the extent to which it also exposed "a single individual's limit in examining, testing, and ultimately shaping the interior space of the self."<sup>5</sup> In other words, those resolutely abstract spaces were still incapable of facilitating our reach into the deeper contradictions that drive our alienation—those moments of dust, grime, and even humor that define the complexities of our lives. Rather than rejecting the possibility of art as a vehicle for shaping our notion of selfhood, however, his argument suggested a rather extraordinary possibility for the visual arts: space *itself* as an extension of the self. For his model, he looked to the barren and ironic lives of Murphy and Malone—men who exist in a world that is at once intellectually abstract and viscerally real, a world where people are both lost and centered in their own pain and confusion, a world where contradiction and paradox rule every action and every thought. If Beckett's universe is beset by a seemingly limitless autism—where protagonists journey around and around in circles condemned never to find their emotional or physical center—it is also a place where people struggle against the oppression that robs them of this center, where the individual replaces the mythic center with the irony that it is only after we accept the fragility of our selfhood that we can truly establish a semblance of self-identity.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of a paradoxical and complex space of the self—where selfhood is defined through states of unity and fragmentation, through mimetic detail and sensory experience—was not new to Morris. A decade earlier, in a series of dances created from 1962–65, he had embraced just such an articulation of the self. Although these dances represent his only full-scale

choreographic works, they formed a conceptual core for much of his thinking about the vicissitudes of the self: *War* (1963, no. 56), a jousting tournament between Morris and the artist Robert Huot, examined masculine power and aggression; *21.3* (1964, no. 57), a disorienting art-history lecture, questioned the extent to which conventional perceptions understood through language can be taken for granted; *Arizona* (1963, no. 55), a study of the body in motion, examined the relationship between useless and productive tasks; *Site* (1964, no. 63), a juxtaposition of Morris as manual laborer and a naked Carolee Schneemann as Manet's Olympia, explored the nature of the artist's labor and its relation to play and freedom; *Check* (1964), a dispersal of forty performers into a large audience, refigured the artist/spectator relationship; and *Waterman Switch* (1965, no. 69), a nude encounter between Morris and Yvonne Rainer and a transvestite accomplice played by Lucinda Childs, broached the scandalous subjects of sexuality and liberation. While these dances centered on various processes and task performances, the reliance on props, sound tracks, words, and role-playing allowed greater access to the humanistic, emotional space of the self often banished from the resolutely abstract, antinarrative realm of 1960s Minimalist sculpture and dance. In these works, Morris examined his own role as actor: neither a directly autobiographical "I" nor a neutral task performer, he walked the fine line between representing different personae and attempting to find a place for those fragments of his own history that might allow him to examine, test, and shape the interior space of the self.

He holds a shield adorned with a photograph of President Eisenhower. His opponent wears a suit of armor made of junk. They have agreed in advance to make their weapons harmless. They begin their dance in total darkness. A large gong sounds continually. They stand at opposite sides of the stage. They taunt each other with voodoo dolls. They hesitate. They charge at each other. They clash. He releases a pair of white doves. They fight as the doves flap overhead. They run out of weapons. They fight hand-to-hand. They fall to

**War**, 1963. Morris in costume for performance in collaboration with Robert Huot at Judson Memorial Church, New York.

**21.3**, 1964. Morris in performance at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theater, New York.

Man Ray, **Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy**, 1924. Gelatin-silver print, 8½ x 6⅞ inches (21.6 x 17.5 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Samuel S. White III and Vera White Collection.



the floor. They roll toward the audience. Blackout. The gong sounds for three more minutes.

He stands barefoot in the middle of a large, darkened stage. He raises a single finger to indicate the start of the first section (a counting gesture that will introduce each subsequent episode). He wears blue sunglasses and a blue denim shirt and trousers. He twists his upper torso so slowly that his movements are almost imperceptible. His actions are accompanied by a monotonous sound track, a rambling list of instructions used by farmhands for sorting cows. He leaves the stage. Blackout. He returns. He stands center stage. He rearranges a blue T-form constructed of a lamp stand and two sticks attached by a swivel joint. Blackout. He stands with his back to the audience. He throws a javelin at a blue target, accompanied by a sound track of labored breathing and a heart beating. Blackout. He twirls an electrical cord capped by two blue lights over the heads of the audience. The lights slowly dim. Blackout.



Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m'*, 1918. Oil on canvas and paintbrush, 27 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 122 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (69.9 x 311.8 cm). Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of the estate of Katherine S. Dreier

He steps up to a spotlighted podium situated in the middle of a darkened stage. He adjusts his glasses. He is dressed in a gray suit, white shirt, and striped tie. He drops his left hand. He feels his chin. He begins his lecture. His words come out haltingly, echoed by a tape recording of the speech that moves in and out of synchronization. He fills his glass with water. Several moments later, a pouring sound is heard. His lecture, a verbatim excerpt from Erwin Panofsky's *Studies in Iconology*, describes a single, everyday gesture: "When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat, what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but a change of certain details within a configuration that forms part of the general pattern of color, lines, and volumes which constitute my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this as an event (hat removing), I have already overstepped the limits of purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning." The lecture reaches a crescendo of clashing sounds and actions. Silence. Blackout.

The self for both actor and audience was defined in Morris's first three dances—*War*, *Arizona*, and *213*—within a fragmented visual and aural field; in these performances, identity was an extension of an elliptical or skewed temporal setting. The violent clashing of *War*, for example, coupled with the loud, repetitive gongs, was disruptive and even threatening to the audience. Although the spectator maintained a passive, "egocentric" relationship to the action on stage

throughout most of *Arizona*, a position that neither disrupted nor questioned the viewer's sense of self, the disorienting finale of twirling lights made it impossible for the viewer to be comfortable or compliant.<sup>6</sup> The audience's concentration on the luminous specks and their vertiginous, mesmerizing repetition served to suppress responses rooted in narrative or memory; it was pushed into a centerless space and hence into a kind of autistic solipsism in which the psychological center was perpetually unsure—maintaining his place in the absolute center of the action but masked by the darkness of the hall, Morris was fairly invisible at this point. In contrast to Panofsky's notion of perception emerging into clear meaning bound by historical convention, the clash of reduplicated voices and the intentional lapses in synchronization that permeated *213* also frustrated the spectator's ability to render

meaning from the performance. In this strange theater, in which even the most benign instance of spontaneity was eschewed, the content of Panofsky's argument—about the cultural codes that define the tipping of a hat—was confused by the histrionic clash of dissonant sounds and overwrought actions. In this sea of dislocations and miscues any sense of coherent personhood was lost as well: although Morris remained resolutely at the center of his performance, the viewer could not maintain a consistent connection with either an autobiographical "I" (the artist), a recreated "he" (the art historian), or even with a stable "you."

Morris's projection of a fragmented self to some extent parallels the work of his principle influence of the 1960s, Marcel Duchamp. For Duchamp, identity was always riven, torn between multiple possibilities that could be named only by absurd aliases: Marsélavy, Rose Sélavy, R. Mutt, marchand du sel. "The idea of being is a human invention . . . an essential concept [that] doesn't exist at all in reality, and which I don't believe in," Duchamp said of his ambivalence toward the concept of a conventionalized and fixed notion of selfhood.<sup>7</sup> Duchamp's strategies for de-essentializing identity—his machines for shattering the mythic integrity of language, sexuality, and representation—found their way into Morris's formal and theoretical



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, lost. Photo by Alfred Stieglitz, reproduced in *The Blind Man*, no. 2 (May 1917), p. 4.



Marcel Duchamp, *Anémic Cinéma*, 1926. Still from 35 mm black-and-white film. Private collection.

vocabulary through his reading of Robert Lebel's monograph on the Dadaist master in 1959, the year of its publication.<sup>8</sup> "I was bored with the deaf and dumb objects of high modernism, objects which, more or less, have refused to accept their transitive and conditional status," Morris has said of Duchamp's influence. "My fascination with and respect for Duchamp was related to his linguistic fixation, to the idea that all of his operations were ultimately built on a sophisticated understanding of language itself."<sup>9</sup> Duchamp was indeed fascinated with transitive and contingent states. *Optique de précision* (1924), or the spiraling puns of his film *Anémic Cinéma* (1926), for example, are works that demonstrate his interest in perceptual states that would allow art to enter into the realms of process, temporal experience, and language. This arena of operations not only fascinated Morris, it shaped the aesthetic, theoretical, and ideological dynamic of his work of the 1960s and early 1970s.

Searching for a solipsistic subject that could sustain its own complexities and division, Duchamp looked beyond the standards of normalcy that had often defined the stable self in twentieth-century Western thought; for him, as Annette Michelson has argued, it was the linguistic and behavioral structure of autism that formed the most convincing parallel to our sociological disequilibrium.<sup>10</sup> Just as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23) identifies the subject as perpetually divided between the worlds of the bachelor and the bride—a metaphor, of course, for the inner contradictions that define sexuality—Duchamp's work continually mirrors a divided psychological self: the artist in drag as his female alter ego Rose Sélavy; the French window that

is also a *Fresh Widow* (and copyrighted by Rose herself); the inverted urinal (*Fountain* [1917]) that alludes simultaneously to the male excretory system and the form of the female sex.

The internal contradictions that motivate Duchamp's work allow identity to swing between other polarities as well. One such oscillation of subjectivity, rooted in the use of the figure of speech known as the "shifter," plays a central role in Duchamp's dislocation of identity and the inherently autistic nature of his work.<sup>11</sup> The term "shifter" was initially used by Roman Jakobson to describe "that category of linguistic sign [that] is 'filled with signification' only because it is empty."<sup>12</sup> Essentially, shifters assign personal identity by contextualizing and defining meaning within a sentence, phrase, or physical gesture. The pronoun "this" is a shifter, its meaning wholly dependent on its referent; it is only when we qualify the shifter—"this pen" or "this cup," for example—that meaning can exist at all. The personal pronouns "I" and "you" are also shifters because their referents are entirely contextual, shifting in meaning as the conversation volleys back and forth between speakers. As Rosalind Krauss has argued, it is precisely a collapse of control over these qualifying factors of language that characterizes Duchamp's transposition of the shifter into visual language. The sense of psychological centering inherent in the normal use of personal pronouns—the smoothly functioning shifters that demarcate the boundaries of a conversation—often breaks down in his work.

The problem of naming an individuated self is also central to the condition of childhood autism. For all children, however, the ordering and application of



personal pronouns is difficult to master, and, in fact, the conceptual distinction between “I” and “you” is one of the last things to be learned. In cases of adult-onset aphasia, where the ability to orient speech correctly is entirely lost, personal pronouns are among the first things to deteriorate; in the case of the autistic child, achieving this orientation is almost impossible.<sup>15</sup> As Krauss points out, it is precisely this distinction between the “I” and the “you” that most often fails in Duchamp’s regressive world: the aimlessly pointing finger in the painting *Tu m’* (1918); the complex alliterations and inversions in the revolving puns of *Anémic Cinéma* that continually confuse the subject-object relationship; the tense interchange between the “I” and the “other” that charges the transvestism of Rose Sélavy. Indeed, many of Bruno Bettelheim’s clinical observations on autism in children—the collapsed shifters, obsession with revolving disks (as with an oscillating fan), fantasies of being a machine, and withdrawal from coherent speech into a world of private allusions and riddles—are evident throughout Duchamp’s oeuvre.<sup>16</sup>

These autistic formations are to some extent also present in Morris’s dances and his Duchamp-inspired constructions of the early 1960s: the repetitive, dizzying sounds and hyperactive, disjunctive play of *War*; the confounding of convention and meaning in viewing *21.3*, where the self, defined by common experience and memory, yields to the solipsistic subject who must renegotiate a confusing, labyrinthine world; the hypnotic effect of the spinning lights in *Arizona*, or the construction *Pharmacy* (1962), in which two small shapes, juxtaposed between two circular mirrors, seem to spiral in endless repetition<sup>17</sup>; the compulsive and mechanistic “tasks” of *Arizona*; the linguistic play and private puns of a number of Duchamp-inspired constructions (e.g., *Performer Switch* [1960], *Swift Night Ruler* [1963, no. 32], *Cock/Cunt* [1963, no. 34]); the wasteful onanism of *Litanies* (1961), in which, for two and a half hours, the artist repeatedly wrote out the text of “Litanies of the Chariot,” copying it directly from the typographic version of Duchamp’s *Green Box* (published in 1960); *Self-Portrait (EEG)* (1963, no. 44), which consists of an electroencephalogram of the artist, a dislocated and unreadable trace of his emotional and intellectual



**Self-Portrait (EEG)**, 1963. Electroencephalogram and lead labels, framed with metal and glass, 70<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 17 inches (179.7 x 43.2 cm). Collection of the artist

**Pharmacy**, 1962. Painted wood and mirrors, 18 x 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 36 inches (45.7 x 29.2 x 91.4 cm). Collection of the artist.

**Site**, 1964. Morris and Carolee Schneemann in performance at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theater, New York



Yvonne Rainer, **The Mind Is a Muscle: Trio A**, 1966. Yvonne Rainer in performance with David Gordon and Steve Paxton at Judson Memorial Church, New York.

center; the two dozen or so objects and drawings of rulers, rods, and other objects of measurement produced between 1961 and 1964 that fundamentally challenged “objective” or fixed standards by manipulating or skewing calibration.

He stands upstage and right of center. His arms are folded. His back is to the audience. He is dressed in work clothes and boots. He wears a papier-mâché mask that reproduces, without expression, his facial features. Downstage left, a white box conceals the hardware for the sound track, a tape of construction workers drilling with jackhammers. He walks upstage center to a large structure composed of white-washed plywood boards. He slowly begins to dismantle it. He takes the first board off stage. He returns. He removes the rest of the boards, relocating them to other parts of the stage. He takes away the last panel. She is revealed reclining on a lounge of pillows and white fabric. Naked, except for a dusting of white powder and a ribbon around her neck, she recreates Olympia’s pose. He walks downstage left. He moves one of the plywood boards into various positions. He carries it on his back. He kneels next to it. He puts the board down. He walks upstage center. He covers her with a board. He returns downstage left. He turns his back to the audience. Blackout.

While the dances were influenced by Duchamp’s autistic economy as well as by the work of Morris’s avant-garde dance contemporaries, his

approach to personality and meaning was not entirely commensurate with either sensibility. Morris was never comfortable, for example, with the formalism of the Minimalist choreographic milieu out of which he emerged. Having participated in Ann Halprin’s San Francisco improvisational dance workshop in the late-1950s—where task performance, non-narrative improvisation, and intuition were championed—and the performance projects of La Monte Young in the early 1960s, Morris was drawn to the passive, operational, and task-oriented choreography of the Judson Dance Theater in New York.<sup>10</sup> Deconstructing the style, conventions, and aesthetics of ballet and Modern dance, these choreographers—who, in addition to Morris, included Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer—advocated the elimination of narrative and the employment of everyday movements and activities in their dances. They placed emphasis on the temporal actions and interrelationships of the performer rather than on his or her personality or autobiography. The operational exercises choreographed by some members of the Judson group—and simultaneously explored in Morris’s dances—were coexistent with the rise of Minimalist sculpture in the mid-1960s and, to a degree, shared its concerns. A chart by Rainer, who

lived and worked with Morris in the mid-1960s, lists the areas of convergence between the new sculpture and the new dance:

OBJECTS

1. factory fabrication
2. unitary forms, modules
3. uninterrupted surface
4. nonreferential forms
5. literalness
6. simplicity
7. human scale

DANCES

- energy equality and "found" movement  
 equality of parts  
 repetition and discrete events  
 neutral performance  
 task or tasklike activity  
 singular action, event, or tone  
 human scale<sup>18</sup>

As an example, Rainer pointed out that the actions and gestures in her dance *The Mind Is a Muscle: Trio A* (1966) were not mimetic but literal. Eliminating narrative references and the prescribed narrative time of Modern dance, Rainer's choreography was "geared to the actual time it takes the actual weight of the body to go through the prescribed motions."<sup>19</sup> In the end, it was the task itself and the stresses sustained by the body in expediting that task that determined the dance's structure. "The demands made on the body's (actual) energy resources," observed Rainer, "appear to be commensurate with the task—be it getting up from the floor, raising an arm, tilting the pelvis, etc.—much as one would get out of a chair, reach for a high shelf or walk down the stairs when one is not in a hurry. The movements are not mimetic . . . for in their manner of execution they have the factual qualities of such actions."<sup>20</sup> The pedestrian character of *The Mind Is a Muscle* was reflected in the work's rejection of the hierarchies of traditional dance: the position of "principal dancer" was eliminated (David Gordon, Paxton, and Rainer held equivalent roles on stage); the narcissism attached to the "beautiful" dancer's body was suppressed (ordinary street clothes were worn); and romantic, balletic gestures were discouraged. "The artifice of performance has been reevaluated," observed Rainer. "Action, or what one does, is [more] interesting and important than the exhibition of character and attitude, and that action can best be focused on through submerging of the personality; so ideally one is not even oneself, one is a neutral 'doer.'"<sup>21</sup>

But Morris's dances, involved as they were with eccentric movements, intricate sound tracks, narrative and historical references, and elaborate texts, avoided this kind of choreographic literalness as well as the anonymous posing favored by many Judson choreographers. The ideological content of *Site*, for example, was built on an analogy between working-class labor and the work of the artist (a Marxian reading of aesthetic production gleaned from his faithful reading of Herbert Marcuse when a student in philosophy and psychology at Reed College in the mid-1950s).<sup>22</sup> To facilitate this understanding, the



Arizona, 1963. Morris in performance at Judson Memorial Church, New York.

artist grounded the discourse of *Site*, as he did to some extent that of *Arizona* and *21.3*, in specific professional subjectivities: here, female prostitute and male worker. In contrast to Duchamp, for whom "Rose signals a deautobiographizing process in which the work [is] detached from the artist as a particular person or master,"<sup>23</sup> Morris's performers were permitted a degree of self-representation: Schneemann's nudity, for example, was also characteristic of much of her own notorious choreography of the mid-1960s, while Morris, wearing a mask of his own face, was engaged in "various job activities [he] had while working in construction."<sup>24</sup>

As if to underscore the impossibility of being a neutral doer unscripted by ideology or history, Morris's dances contained numerous autobiographical references: *Arizona*'s "method for sorting cows" reiterated the actual instructions for sorting cows used by the adolescent Morris and his father, who was in the livestock business; the artist's lassoing motion recalled his work as a horse wrangler in the 1950s; *21.3* related to his experience as a graduate student in art history at Hunter College in New York from 1961–63; and *Waterman Switch* was the name of a section of roadway in San Francisco he had surveyed

in the early 1950s. Of this autobiographical content, Morris observes:

*Although I had sympathy with Duchamp's notion of a self that is never centered, I wanted to manifest a particular kind of presence in my performances. I wasn't interested in showing the perfect, narcissistic body doing effortless work and masking every psychological nuance. Modern dance bothered me a lot. I was trying other ways to establish a persona. To some degree I even drew on the events of my own past to shape this persona. While many of the Judson performers were involved in blank-faced, neutral movements, I was self-consciously trying to create a persona—to frame it, to name it, to acknowledge that this character is a person and the audience must deal with that person.<sup>25</sup>*

It is not surprising then that in a recent essay, Morris, referring to himself by special names that characterized various aspects of his work (the Minimalist sculptor “Major Minimax,” for example, or the earthworker “Dirt Macher”), combined corporeal signifier and proper name—“Body Bob”—to refer to his choreographic persona.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, Morris played a tangential role in only one dance piece—*Check*. This work, which the artist considered his least successful dance, was performed only twice—at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1964 and at the Judson Memorial Church in New York in 1965. Engaging the audience more directly than any of the other dances, *Check* was organized around strategies of infiltration and displacement. About 700 chairs were placed at random in the center of a large room, with aisles around the perimeter. Forty performers—men, women, and children—executed various actions in these aisles and then “wandered” through the entire space. At a given signal, the forty assembled into groups for simple, simultaneously

**Two L-Beams**, 1965. Painted plywood, two units, each 96 x 96 x 24 inches (243.8 x 243.8 x 61 cm).



**Waterman Switch**, 1965. Morris, Lucinda Childs, and Yvonne Rainer in performance at the Festival of the Arts Today, Buffalo.

rendered actions. Repeatedly dispersing upon a signal to resume their wandering, the performers formed what Morris has termed a “proto-audience.” Since the approximately 700 spectators were free to sit or stand as they watched, the performed actions were mostly invisible to them. “Purposely antithetical” to his previous dances, Morris reminds us that in contrast to these, *Check* had “no central focus, climax, dramatic intensity, continuity of action.” As such, it suggested some of the neutrality and task-orientation of the Judson Minimalists without the narrative and interpersonal complexities of his other dance pieces.<sup>27</sup>

The stage is set with fake stones and two sets of plywood tracks. A tape recording of rolling stones drones on. The stones roll along the stage. Blackout. A lush aria from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Simone Boccanegra* blares. He is clutched in a tight, face-to-face embrace with her. They are both nude. Their bodies glisten with a coating of mineral oil. Another woman appears. She is dressed as a man in a suit and tie. She walks alongside them as they navigate the parallel tracks. She holds a ball of twine. She is seemingly directed by the taut line stretched over her shoulder to a point off stage. The aria ends. Blackout. The woman dressed as a man stands at center stage holding the end of a long pole capped by a red flag. Holding the flag

end of the pole in front of him, he runs around in circles. His recorded voice talks about rearranging the stage. Blackout. Three real stones appear on stage. At stage rear, an Eadweard Muybridge locomotion study of a muscular man lifting a stone is projected. The three barefoot actors stand on the rocks holding a thick rope. A sound track of his voice permeates the hall. He is reading a passage about water from Leonardo's notebooks. Blackout. The two nude figures once again walk along the tracks accompanied by the Verdi aria. He holds a mercury-filled vial in his hand. He pours the mercury down her back. They walk to the end of the track. Blackout.

The idea of completely losing himself in his art was anathema to Morris—an artist who was so fearful of relinquishing control that he refused to enter the *Labyrinth* (1974, no. 119) in Philadelphia lest he succumb to his own severe claustrophobia. As such, his dances were built around autobiographical cues and self-referential gestures that continually returned the artist to the center of his work. Perhaps the most dramatic, albeit metaphoric, representation of this return occurs in Morris's last dance, *Waterman Switch*. "It is an absurd love duet," wrote David Antin, "and there is a sense that the artist is 'simulating' . . . being stripped bare."<sup>28</sup> As Antin suggested, the dance deliberately recalled Duchamp: the woman dressed as a man—a brilliant inversion of the transvestism of *Rose Sélavy*—guiding the naked and glistening Bride and Bachelor beyond the postvirginal point of no return.<sup>29</sup> No wonder, then, that the final scene of *Waterman Switch*, essentially a duplication of the first, ended with Morris pouring mercury down Rainer's back—a metaphor for ejaculation. This allusion is significant in the context of Morris's performances, for in coming, as Duchamp literally did when he ejaculated onto the surface of his "painting" *Paysage fantaisie* (1946),<sup>30</sup> Morris symbolically emerged out of the disorientation of sexual desire and excitement—that state, situated somewhere between pleasure and pain, in which aspects of a person's emotional and physical equilibrium are momentarily shattered—and into a place where at least the fantasy of unity is possible.<sup>31</sup> As such, this final symbolic return to psychic and physical equilibrium, as well as the purposeful, ideologically impacted body language of *Site* or the cow-sorting method of *Arizona*, suggest moments in Morris's dances where the body emerges out of its autistic whirl and into a kind of visceral groundedness.<sup>32</sup>

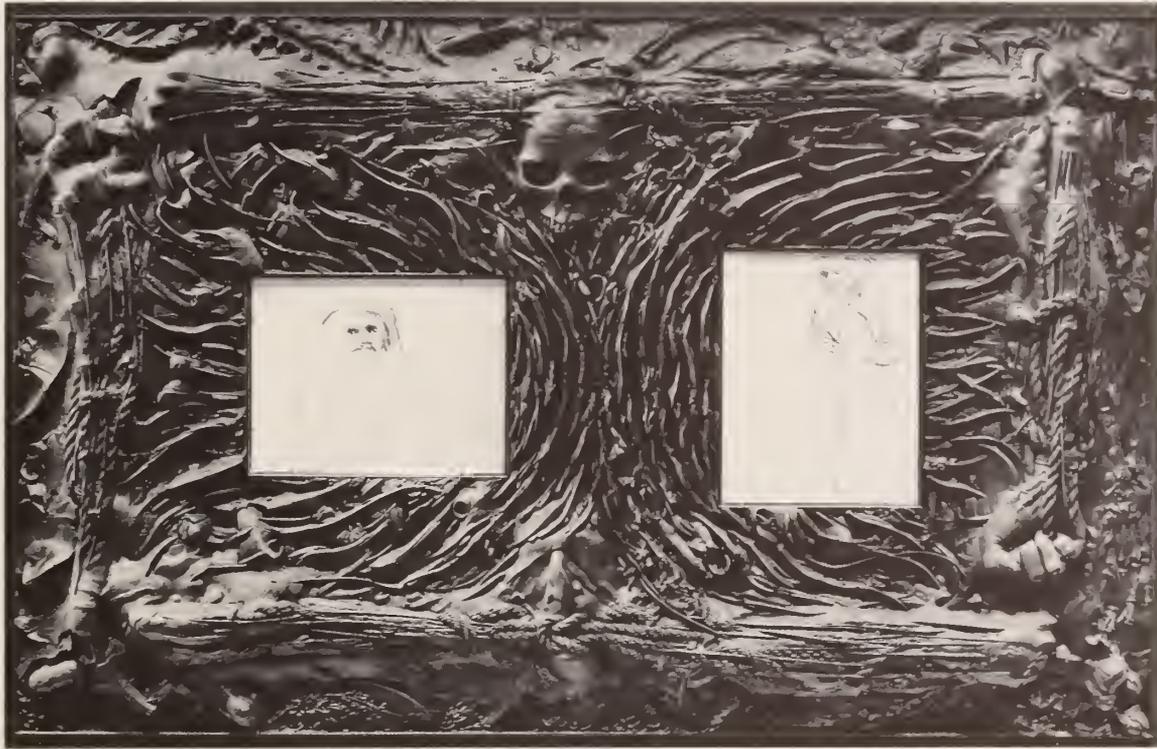
Inasmuch as Morris's dances depict an emergent self—bodies that find their identities through temporal experience and struggle—they relate to his stark gray cubes, plinths, and *L-Beams* of the mid-1960s. In this performative kind of Minimalist sculpture, Morris sought to prolong and intensify the viewer's temporal experience of the object by frustrating the visualization of form through a disruption of its three-dimensional gestalts. For

example, in *Battered Cubes* (1965, no. 67), an arrangement of four identical cubic forms, two sides of each cube were sloped in order to question the durability of the known shape, the gestalt, at the same time that this gestalt was made even more visible by affirming the impulse to see the shape as a cube (despite the displacement of two of its sides). In the simplest shapes, such as cubes and pyramids, "one sees and immediately 'believes' that the pattern within one's mind corresponds to the existential fact of the object."<sup>33</sup> The altered gestalts of *Battered Cubes* prevent the spectator, who now moves around the piece as if in a Minimalist dance, from immediately apprehending the individual shapes in the arrangement; one has to negotiate the work *in time* to fully understand its nuances.

In another work, *Three L-Beams* (1965, no. 3), Morris juxtaposed three large, *L*-shaped polyhedrons. The three identical forms, with their massive eight-foot extensions, were arranged in positions relative to the floor: one lying on its side, one upended, one inverted. This displacement creates an optical illusion. While the logic of the form's uniformity is understood, the variability of their positioning precludes seeing them as the same. And because their similarity must be judged by standards that exist prior to actual experience, the *L-Beams* are particularly challenging in their difference. The viewer's preconceptions must be set aside, for what is known mentally is rendered somewhat irrelevant by public experience. With such accumulations of memory and knowledge made inoperative, the viewer must start from the level of brute perception in order to grasp the reality of what he or she is seeing.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the viewer's decentered relationship to these gestalts impacts profoundly on his or her understanding of selfhood as constituted within the aesthetic experience; the engagement of these works suggest that the meanings we establish and express through our bodies and our gestures "are fully dependent on the other beings to whom we make them and on whose vision of them we depend on to make sense."<sup>35</sup> In effect, in these works, Morris is undermining the myth of the self as a contained whole, for the viewer must now grasp his or her position in space through an exocentric relationship with the world. Ultimately, the artist's altered gestalts serve as a "certain kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning upon the body as it surfaces into the world in every external particular or its movements and gestures—of the self understood, that is, only in experience."<sup>36</sup>

This notion of a self constituted in experience rather than as an a priori, contained whole relates as well to Morris's dances—a field of activity where selfhood is neither stable nor constant but emerges in time for both the performer and the viewer. Yet if



**Fathers and Sons**, 1955/1983. Painted Hydrocal and ink on paper, 33 1/4 x 51 3/8 inches (84.5 x 130.5 cm). Collection of the artist.

Minimalist sculpture permits the spectator insight into the self through the phenomenological experience of visual dislocations, these disjunctions, as Morris himself has observed, still function within the context of mathematical logic; in other words, the destabilization that permits the viewer to refigure his or her relationship to the world is dependent on an inherent contrast between culturally encoded forms and the viewer's perception of a degree of deviation from these normative gestalts. Discussing Minimalism and its evolution into the later object-oriented art of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Morris wrote, in "Aligned with Nazca":

*Analysis as a strategy was present in earlier minimal work in its reliance on simple systems. But if that work was an art of wholes with underlying, understated structures of information, later object art became an art of parts which visible, underlined structures of information bound together. Such work, while object-bound, moved toward diminishing the density of the physical unit until a point was reached where physical manifestations merely illustrated the information structure.<sup>37</sup>*

The radical possibility, suggested by the artist, for a Beckettlike space of the self would not be possible in such a limited, institutionally bound realm of logical

operations. One must look, therefore, to Morris's dances to find the kind of space that he suggested in "Aligned with Nazca"—a visual and sensual field that involves a notion of selfhood as tied to an earlier, atavistic stage in human psychological development, a stage where identity is formed outside of mathematical logic.

Indeed, no psychological moment appears to parallel the sensibility of Morris's dances more than does the "mirror stage"—that instance in childhood development, according to the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, when self-identity comes into being.<sup>38</sup> There is a period of development (between eight and eighteen months of age) when the infant first recognizes him- or herself in the mirror and hence identifies with an image of what it looks like to be an integral person. If the mirror stage is seen as the true source of the unified and authentic self, as it often is in humanistic psychologies, then, Lacan argues, our selfhood can only be inauthentic. "Not only does the illusion of integral selfhood originate in the masking of an actual fragmentation [the disjunctive physical awkwardness of a child of this age]," writes Louis A. Sass on Lacan's theory, "it does so by means of a certain *alienation*: for the sense of self is, after all, a mirrored image at a distance, a being who stands outside of the self, like the other



**I-Box**, 1962 (open view). Painted plywood cabinet covered with Sculptmetal, containing photograph, 19 x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (48.3 x 32.4 x 3.5 cm). Collection Leo Castelli.

(i.e., as a *moi*, not a *je*; self-as-object rather than self-as-subject)."<sup>9</sup>

But if alienation is implied by the mirror stage, most particularly in its earlier phases, when the subject vacillates between an image of totalization and one of fragmentation and disarray, the subject's emergence into the realm of the "Symbolic," as Lacan calls it, implies an axis of linguistic self-identification that allows the child's nascent identity to emerge. In assessing two endpoints for the mirror stage—the initial assumption of the image that is the gestalt that forms the ego itself, and the subject's internalization of this image and his setting up of its social function—Lacan allows for the point at which the child can refer to her- or himself in a sentence as the subject ("I") and not the object ("me"). In other words, it is the ability to utter this "I" that permits the child to see the self-as-subject. Because the word "I" is also a shifter, lingering for only a moment before moving on to the next speaker, it can engender only a fleeting sense of center and being—a unified source of "casual efficacy [that] is an effect of language . . . that . . . can be experienced only if one lets oneself be taken over by this transpersonal system that preexists and transcends one": "I identify myself in language, but only in losing myself in it like an object."<sup>10</sup> And so, just as the *moi* is ironically born in the self-alienation of visual reflection (the "Imaginary"), the *je* can take form only after the subject loses him- or herself in the impersonal, larger system of language.<sup>11</sup>

While Morris allows the subjects of his dances to be taken over by the larger system of language (his fascination with Duchamp was after all built on the Dadaist's ability to submit art more fully to the linguistic realm), he does not permit his performances entirely to overtake him. If the Surrealists allowed the subject to be subsumed by the paradoxical freedom inherent in giving oneself over to the flow of a larger system (becoming lost in the loops and skeins of automatic writing, for example), Morris maintained a level of resistance: for him, constituting the "I," though neither a definitive nor an absolute act, was an ideological gesture. Morris's reading of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955), a Marxian critique of Freud that advanced a cultural and sexual politics of desublimation, and R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1959), a liberatory approach to the psychiatric treatment of mental illness, would only have underscored the idea that a disunified self was also a disempowered self incapable of the kind of social agency that was important to him.<sup>12</sup> Of this weakness, Sass writes:

*If [the idea of an illusory self] overcomes the division between man and world, it does so by effacing both these poles, thereby giving up most of the aspirations of the modern Western tradition. Instead of being reconciled, self*

*and world simply disappear into the middle term, the language-like structures that replace these supposedly outmoded polarities. Thus freedom and self-expression are given up since the volitional and individual self turns out to be an illusion . . . truth is illusory, since there is no world but what the structures allow to appear; further . . . the unity that is achieved is a unity devoid of vitality—since it is that of a mechanical rather than organic system. And so the most that such a perspective could promise is . . . not to overcome alienation but “to make ourselves at home in our alienated being.”*<sup>43</sup>

To watch a schizophrenic person descend into an abyss of delusions, paranoia, and self-destruction is, of course, to witness a tragic dismantling of control, a loss rendered more perilous by society's relentless intolerance, even hatred, of the mentally ill. Laing, for example, while advocating the concept of a liberated self that blurs the restrictive boundaries between so-called normal and pathological behavior, also acknowledged that the Modernist romance with ego loss was problematic for most human beings: “If the individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it, to prevent himself [from] losing his self.”<sup>44</sup>

While Morris's desire to transcend the formalist myth of organic completeness was commensurate with Duchamp's fracturing of subjectivity, he has always been ambivalent about the aesthetic realization of a hopelessly fractured or neutralized self. Even the elliptical paths of *Arizona* and *21.3* avoided a limitless autism; instead, they sporadically centered around fragments of coherent speech, proper names, logical actions, and specific personae, bits of information that allowed the spectator to cull some aesthetic, psychological, and political meaning. The lucid cow-sorting narrative in *Arizona*, for example, serves as a provocative backdrop for Morris's enactment of a series of useless tasks; this list of actual instructions for discharging a difficult job recapitulates the hierarchies of labor and production where workers follow, rather than give, instructions. In this context, Morris acts as an empowered ringleader (and, as in all of his performances, a “principal dancer”): working outside of these repressive hierarchies, he functions at the center of an aesthetic world controlled and manipulated by him.

Morris's fundamental refusal to lose himself in his art, a refusal that manifests itself throughout his oeuvre—from his dances and conceptual self-portraits of the mid-1960s, to his diaristic writings of the 1970s and 1980s, to a recent drawing of himself and his father—is ideologically grounded, reminding us, as

Foucault has observed, that “caring for the self [can constitute] a practice of freedom.” Such a formation of the subject, Foucault reasoned, allows the individual to circumvent to an extent the systems of power and domination that govern our lives and to achieve a degree of political agency that would be impossible in a state of psychosis or autism. While such a self-orientation has, throughout history, been denounced as a “kind of self love . . . a kind of egoism or individual interest in contradiction to the care one must show others or to the necessary sacrifice of the self,”<sup>45</sup> Foucault's ethos of freedom, while somewhat naïve in its disavowal of the role of self-interest, rejects these admonishments as repressive and coercive. In the oppressive world of selflessness, the subjectivity of the individuated self must yield to broader social contracts of truth; in effect, personal narratives surrender to official texts. These games of truth—by foreclosing the individual voice—empower only the dominant culture that establishes the parameters of truth. By advancing a wholly unpuritanical view of power—in believing that power itself is not evil, that it can be wrested away from the dominant culture and returned to the disenfranchised—Foucault calls for a practice of the self as a means of empowering the individual subject.

Roland Barthes eloquently argued, in his essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), that literary criticism was, to its detriment, obsessed with the “human person” of the author. But Barthes's defense of the textual over the “sway of the Author”<sup>46</sup> would seem to underestimate the political power of authorship: if, for example, the dense poetics of Mallarmé suppress the author in the interests of writing, they do so invariably at the expense of politics—obfuscating the social voice in an opaque, albeit elegant, web of metaphors and fractured meaning. In the formalist criticism of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the exigencies of form, texture, and composition reigned, the “human person” of the author was banished from the text. Such formalist biases did not die easily, for even the avant-garde of the 1960s continued to be embarrassed by those cultural figures (most often women and people of color) who, in moments of “weakness,” spoke the forbidden language of the self. Despite such proscriptions, from the late 1950s onward, Morris's own discourse as an artist, choreographer, and writer oscillated between the required anonymity of avant-gardist practice, the autism characteristic of a more transgressive modernism, and reference to the personal, the individual, and the autobiographical. By the mid-1970s, in his writings at least, he was able to enter into a fully formed discourse of the self that included the narrative of his own life, a discourse that consistently invoked a powerful “I” that spoke over the loudmouthed, bullying voices of critical authority.<sup>47</sup>

It is illuminating to end this discussion with *I-Box* (1962, no. 25). The work—a box with a door in the shape of the letter “I” that conceals a photograph of Morris naked and grinning—cannot be read as a conventional self-portrait. The self is spelled out in *I-Box* not as absolute but as somewhat arbitrary, its articulation hinging on an external action—the swinging of a door. While the act of opening the door exposes an improbable self-portrait that challenges art-historical prohibitions and taste, the act of closing it denies representation of a specific self. The work recalls Beckett’s drained vision of the world, where “I” is often little more than a vacant word, a coffin that enshrouds its subject in claustrophobic isolation. But, as in the dance pieces that would follow, it is Morris himself—like Beckett’s Molloy or Malone—who stands at the center of his particular universe, continually reciting a fragile word that both breaks the rules of Modernist anonymity and proclaims the language of self-identity and potentially of empowerment: “I.”<sup>10</sup>

From the dance pieces on, this self-referential, performatory word—the “I”—would continually resurface in Morris’s work: the political activist who campaigned against the Vietnam War and the institutional hierarchies of the museum in his Conceptual projects of the early 1970s; the workman who invited the public into the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1970 as he installed a monumental landscape of concrete, timbers, and steel; the explorer who negotiated the complexities of vision and perception as he walked mirror in hand through a snowy landscape in his film *Mirror* (1969, no. 137); the blind man, lost in a self-imposed darkness, who closed his eyes, drew on paper with graphite and plate oil, and later scrawled a record of his actions at the bottom of the drawing; the dominator who posed half-naked in a helmet and S&M drag in a poster for his 1974 Leo Castelli exhibition; the son who stands next to his father in a recent painting; the autobiographer who, in a series of essays, recalls episodes from his own life. Whether naked in *Waterman Switch*, or donning work clothes in *Site*, Morris helped reshape the role of the artist (as well as the spectator) in an age of significant aesthetic and social reconstruction. Entering into the labyrinth of the self, Morris strove to access selfhood without diminishing its complexities or confusions: within the temporal and conceptual framework of each dance, the self was permitted to represent itself in the interstice between fragmentation and unity, decenteredness and control, abstract gesture and language itself. In this sense, Morris’s dances achieved what no other work in his oeuvre could (with the possible exception of his performancelike installations of the early and mid-1970s): the construction of space *itself* as an extension of the self.

I would like to thank Mason Klein for his generous advice and criticism; his ideas on Marcel Duchamp and the “divided self” helped to clarify a number of issues in this essay. I would also like to acknowledge my debt to the groundbreaking work of Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson.

1. Though not specifically discussed, the work of several artists was used to illustrate Morris’s text: Vito Acconci, Michael Asher, Alice Aycock, Chris Borden, Peter Campus, Marvin Lorrfield, Mary Miss, Ree Morton, Bruce Nauman, Joel Shapiro, and Phil Simkin. See Robert Morris, “Aligned with Nazca,” *Artforum* 14, no. 2 (October 1975), pp. 33–35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

5. As R. D. Laing wrote in *The Divided Self*, a significant influence on Morris’s early thinking about selfhood: “With Samuel Beckett, for instance, one enters a world in which there is no contradictory sense of self in its ‘health and validity’ to mitigate the despair, terror, boredom of existence. In such a way, the two tramps who wait for Godot are condemned to live.” See R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin, 1965), pp. 40–41.

6. Morris discussed this discomfort in “Notes on Dance,” *Tulane Drama Review* 6 (winter 1965), pp. 180–83.

7. Pierre Cabane, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), pp. 89–90. For more on Duchamp’s fracturing of identity, see Rudolf Kuenzli, “Introduction,” in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 4–8.

8. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959). One work that helped shape Morris’s conceptualization of a multivalent selfhood was the rectified readymade *Wanted* (1923). Below “mog shots” of Duchamp, this parody of a wanted poster announces a \$2,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of “George W. Welch, alias Bull, alias Pickens etcetera, etcetera. Operated Bocket Shop in New York under name HOOKE, LYON, and CISQUER. Known also under the name RROSE SFLAVY.” By constructing an image that draws a direct parallel between subversion of identity and criminality, Duchamp acts as a kind of negative facilitator, revealing how the mechanisms of power, domination, and manipulation are fueled by the need to name and identify things in the world in order to control them. Learning of *Wanted* from Lebel, or from its recycled version as the poster for Duchamp’s 1963 retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum, Morris had proposed for himself a similar antisocial role, appropriating Duchamp’s joke for a handwritten diary notation from the early 1960s: “WANTED. R. M. Horse, R. Morris, etc., etc., one of NY’s 11 most wanted men. Confidence activities in defrauding garbage collectors. HT 5.8, WT 157, scar on chest in pattern of U.S. Map. This man is known to have sought employment as tap dancer, pt. time brain surgeon. Last known employment in an air works. Last contacted operating on licensed air works.” In contrast to Duchamp, however, Morris’s description contained his proper name, height, and weight as well as lightly veiled autobiographical allusions to his work as a dancer and artist.

9. Duchamp’s refusal to submit to the delimiting and arbitrary act of naming things in the world according to convention attests to his constant recapitulation of the linguistic sign as arbitrary. As Mason Klein writes: “It is specifically the equivocation that occurs in the unconscious, at the foundation of our subjectivity, that Duchamp addresses: the sense of self loss that is a function of the unconscious. Duchamp, in this sense, is aligned with Lacan’s major thesis that within this inability to establish reference for the subject is the concomitant failure to establish identity, a clearly bound referential ‘I.’” See Mason Klein, “Towards a Phenomenology of the Self: Marcel Duchamp’s *Étant donné* . . .,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (City University of New York, forthcoming).

10. Annette Michelson, “*Anemni Cinema*: Reflections on an Emblematic Work,” *Artforum* 12, no. 2 (October 1973); reprinted in *Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*, ed. Amy Baker Sandback (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 143–48. This schizoid character was also suggested by such early commentators



**Mirror**, 1969. Still from 16 mm black-and-white film.  
Courtesy Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films.

on Duchamp as Michel Carrouges, Lebel, and Jean Reboul. See, for example, Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, p. 30.

11 See Rosalind E. Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part 1," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), pp. 196–206.

12. Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, verbal categories, and the Russian verb," *Russian Language Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 197.

13 See Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part 1," p. 197.

14 Michelson writes:

*Duchamp's persistent interest in Rotary Spheres, in the forms of rotation and motion, the insistence upon the usefulness of objects (exemplified in his joy at the possibility of Anémic Cinéma being considered as a therapeutic device to be used in the restoration of Visson), the elaborate linguistic play, the recasting of natural laws into highly artificial and controlled codes, the subversion of measure, the constant movement between alternatives [that] supported his esprit de contradiction, the disdain of community, the extreme interest in scientific discovery, the enchantment with the pseudo-science of parapsysics, represent only a few strategies of the autistic economy so remarkably converted by him to the uses of art and speculative thought (Michelson, "Anémic Cinéma: Reflections on an Emblematic Work," p. 145).*

Michelson's categories of autistic behavior are taken from Bettelheim's description of Joey, a severely autistic child who lived for some years at the Orthogenic School in Chicago. For a detailed description of the case, see Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self* (New York: Free Press, 1972; 1967), pp. 233–339.

15 Morris's construction interposes a glass plate between two circular mirrors. Two pharmacy bottles, one red, the other green, are depicted, one on each side of the glass plate. The comparison to Duchamp's devices for rotation goes beyond the formal: by juxtaposing the images on the glass plate between the mirrors, Morris sets up an infinite, spiraling reduplication of red and green forms.

16. For more on Morris's development as a dancer and choreographer, see Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 26–28, 49, 81–105.

17 For a detailed history of the Judson Dance Theater, see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–64* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993; 1983).

18. See Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Amidst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 263–73.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 270

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 267

22 Morris explored this relationship in an advertising campaign published in a number of art magazines in November 1970. Morris presented himself as a worker artist who could be hired on an hourly basis to design and execute a range of nontraditional art projects. "Explosions," "Events for the Quarter Horse," "Speeches," "Alternate Political Systems," "Earthworks," and "Demonstrations" were some of the possible selections. Morris's one-person employment agency—the Peripatetic Artists Guild (PAG)—also invited other artists to add their names to a workers' file. (While a number of artists responded, few patrons materialized.) Successful or not, the PAG suggested the art world's economic basis, since it was built on an explicit equation between labor and remuneration, between art and money. The artist was no longer heralded as the retired creator of special aesthetic objects, as the talents of PAG artists extended into a range of activities more often associated with blue- and white-collar labor. For more on the PAG, see Berger, *Labyrinths*, pp. 93–96.

23 See Carol James, "An Original Revolutionary Messagerie Rose or What Became of Readymades," in *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), p. 278.

24. Morris, in conversation with the author, New York, October 22, 1992.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson (Or Is That a Mouse in My Paragone?)" in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 287–315.

27. For more on *Check*, see Morris, "Notes on Dance," p. 179; Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 102, note 1. Morris made his comment about the failure of *Check* in a telephone conversation with the author on December 7, 1992.

28. David Antin, "Art & Information, 1: Gray Paint, Robert Morris," *Art News* 63, no. 8 (April 1966), p. 58.

29. Between acts of the ballet *Relâche* (1924), Duchamp and Brogna Perlmutter appeared nude in Francis Picabia's tableau vivant of Lucas Cranach's *Adam and Eve*. Referring to a documentary photograph that indicated the discreet placement of a fig leaf over Adam's genitalia, Morris asked Duchamp if the camouflage was present in the actual performance. Duchamp answered that it was not, though it probably was. This exchange suggests that Morris's use of nudity in *Waterman Switch* was meant to attack the normalizing mechanisms of bourgeois repression. This intention clearly succeeded given the dance's scandalous run in Buffalo, New York, where the local newspapers attacked the "sensational attraction" for its supposedly prurient use of nudity.

30. Another work of the period also relates to Duchamp's ejaculation painting: *Portrait* (1963, no. 43), essentially a self-portrait of Morris, names its subject with bottles of body fluids (including semen), permitting that which is "excreted," literally left behind, to serve as proxy for human existence.

31. For more on the condition of disequilibrium in sexual desire, see Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1985), pp. 24–39.

32. Morris's recent self-description of his role in *Waterman Switch* is particularly telling in its self-referential, self-conscious, and corporeally grounded tone: "I think we should get Body Bob up here. Maybe they have his number: the 'Heroic.' Does that ring a bell, Ignatz? Well it wouldn't be that meat ball from *Waterman Switch*, greased up, bare assed and overweight, inching down the tracks" (Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson," p. 293).

33. Morris, as quoted in Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 53. This situational status for sculpture conversely affirms the visual strength of the gestalt. Despite the altered side of each polyhedron, the eye will continue to read its form as a cube, only later realizing its irregularity.

34. For an important and early discussion of the phenomenological imperatives of Minimalist sculpture, and most particularly of the *L-Beams*, see Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977), pp. 259–67.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Morris, "Aligned With Nazca," p. 33.

38. While the "mirror stage" has, over the past quarter century, become a kind of hackneyed intellectual support on which to hang a multitude of arguments about selfhood and culture, its application here is more than warranted. Morris himself has been fascinated with mirrors, and the relationship of the reflected image to the formation of identity and meaning, throughout his career: the mirror has appeared periodically in his work—from the mirror-lined *Pine Portal with Mirrors* of 1961 (no. 10) and *Mirroral Cubes* of 1965 (no. 66) to an elaborate installation of skewed mirrors at the Leo Castelli Gallery in March 1979. Indeed, in his introductory essay to a small catalogue on his *Mirror* works, Morris mentions Lacan directly: "Recently the French psychoanalyst Lacan has, in his opaque way, pointed to the infant's experience with the mirror as essential to the construction of selfhood." See Robert Morris, *Mirror Works* (New York: Leo Castelli Gallery, 1979), unpaginated.

39. Louis A. Sass, "The Self and Its Vicissitudes. An 'Archaeological' Study of the Psychoanalytic Avant-Garde," *Social Research* 55, no. 4 (winter 1988), p. 599.

40. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Alvin Sheridan (New York: Norton,

1977), as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 601.

41. For insightful discussions of the "mirror stage," see Sass, "The Self and Its Vicissitudes," pp. 597–609; and Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," *Yale French Studies*, nos. 55–56 (1977), pp. 338–95.

42. For more on Morris's intensive reading of these authors and his notion of activism and political agency, see Berger, *Labyrinths*, pp. 47–79, 129–62. Perhaps Morris's greatest political effort was his involvement in anti-Vietnam War protests in New York in the early 1970s. For more on the artist's social activism, see *ibid.*, pp. 107–27.

43. Sass, "The Self and Its Vicissitudes," pp. 604–05.

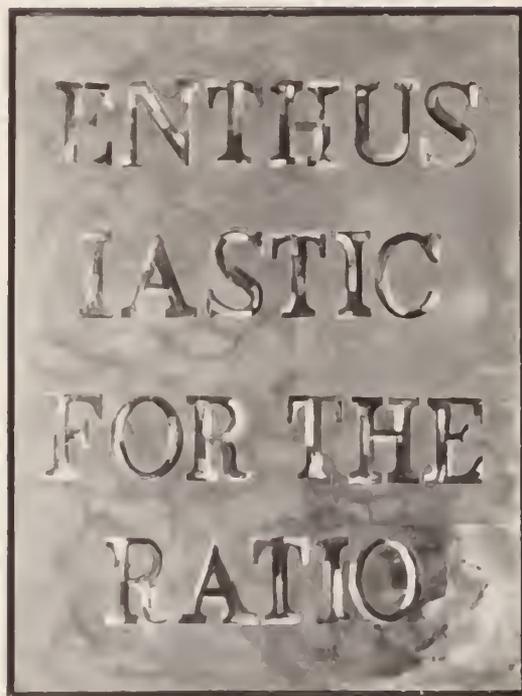
44. Laing, *The Divided Self*, pp. 42–43.

45. See Michel Foucault, "The Ethic and Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," in *The Final Foucault*, eds. James Bernauer and David Rasmussen, trans. J. D. Gautier (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), p. 11. I would like to thank Morris for directing me to this text.

46. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), pp. 142–48.

47. Morris's autobiographical position reached its apex in the recently published essay "Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides as Allegories (or Interruptions)" (*Art in America* 77 [November 1989], pp. 142–51). The essay openly juxtaposes a critical text concerning the relation between art and its discourses with a series of autobiographical "asides," stories from the artist's own life, ranging from his childhood fascination with Egyptian art to more recent encounters with Duchamp and Barnett Newman. "Today, just as in the past," he writes in relation to the economic interests that pervade and dominate the art world, "there are stories besides the commercial ones which bear on legitimizing art works. And a time of such heightened avariciousness may be a time when those other supporting narratives of art need to be examined" (p. 143). Rigorously exploring three paradigmatic (and for the most part preeminent) approaches to art in the twentieth century—the formalistic, the political, and the psychological—Morris's text repeatedly returns to the private, primal scenes of his own intellectual and aesthetic development. These asides serve as more than interruptions; they resound with Morris's frustration, even disillusionment, with the institutionalized language of cultural discourse.

48. In the radical psychiatry of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the schizophrenic's refusal to speak in the first person is romanticized as a kind of surrealist rebellion against the repressive order of language: "There are those of us who will maintain that the schizo is incapable of uttering the word *I*, and that we must restore his ability to pronounce this hallowed word. All of this the schizo sums up by saying: they're fucking me over again. 'I won't say *I* anymore, I'll never utter the word again; it's just too damned stupid. Everytime I hear it, I'll use the third person instead, if I happen to remember to. If it amuses them. And it won't make one bit of difference.'" The quotation from their statement is taken from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1952), a work that, in a certain sense, refutes their basic premise. As in most of Beckett's writings, the voice that speaks often utters this illusive "I" in an effort to find, albeit momentarily, a center for enacting various gestures of self-protection. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 23.



**Enthusiastic for the Ratio**, 1989. Encaustic on aluminum, 47 1/8 x 76 1/4 inches (121.6 x 194.9 cm). Collection of the artist

At the end of 1990, the Corcoran Museum of Art in Washington, D.C., opened a massive Robert Morris exhibition with the rather melodramatic title *Inability to Endure or Deny the World*. The exhibition was devoted entirely to Morris's work in painting and drawing and appeared to cover his whole career, but it seemed more like a setting for his recent encaustic on aluminum paintings, which accounted for nearly half of the eighty-four works on display. On January 20, the Sunday *New York Times* Arts and Leisure section, which usually responds to major museum shows of well-known artists with respectful reviews, greeted the exhibition with a savage attack by Roberta Smith that raised the question of authenticity and cast doubt over Morris's entire career: "I've always thought of Morris . . . as an artistic kleptomaniac and, consequently, a bit of a fake." The accusation, framed in terms of the notion of originality, charged that for thirty years he had echoed "ideas and motifs deftly lifted from the work of other artists" and questioned whether he had ever achieved much art that was "squarely and convincingly his own."

*The New York Times* is not especially distinguished

in criticism, but Smith isn't Hilton Kramer, who counts as the official art-world scold. Moreover, what she said bears a certain relation to art-world gossip. I had heard comments like this before, though I hadn't paid much attention to them.

A couple of years ago a very intelligent art dealer sitting in my living room told me that Morris had stolen everything from Joseph Beuys. At the time my inclination was to laugh, because I could hardly think of two more dissimilar artists. It was like someone telling me that Ellsworth Kelly had stolen everything from Chaim Soutine. But reading the Smith review, I remembered another occasion back at the beginning of the 1970s, walking on the beach with a well-known young sculptor who complained bitterly that almost as soon as he got an idea, Morris would rip it off in an exhibition at Castell's. It seemed like a funny Sollo fantasy, and I remember dreaming up an elaborate scenario as a solution for what I took to be a temporary paroxysm of downtown art-world paranoia:

*All you have to do is come up with a great idea. You write it down in a book, notarize it, and give it to your lawyer,*

*who with two witnesses places it in a safe-deposit box with one key that is placed in the hands of a neutral trustee who has no idea what bank the box is in. Then you just go hang out in your usual way. Sooner or later you'll run into Robert, and, because you can't keep your mouth shut, you'll wind up telling him about your great idea. Then, when he puts on the show at Castelli's, you appear at Artforum magazine with your lawyer, your witnesses, and your trustee, and you let the editors open the safe-deposit box with the dated and notarized page from your notebook, and you claim Robert and the whole show as your Conceptual piece.*

But I knew the whole plan, even in fantasy, was fundamentally flawed. I knew that if the sculptor had set up this elaborate charade and shot off his mouth to Morris about his great idea, nothing in the world would have kept him from shooting his mouth off about his even better idea for protecting it. So my plan was never tested, and like most gossip of its kind, the sculptor's vehement opinion has neither been supported or refuted. It just sits out there at the edge of the art world like a gray cloud that will neither rain nor blow away. And because it was just another piece of art-world weather, I never thought of doing anything about it until it resurfaced in Smith's review, when I realized there was a whole cluster of beliefs about contemporary art that Morris's work collides with, and that these were worth discussing in the context of Morris's major retrospective at the Guggenheim.

First there is the assumption that an artist can establish a kind of proprietary right to an idea. (You can't steal an idea unless somebody already owns it.) This proprietary right obviously also depends on the assumption that artists have ideas and that their work embodies them. (If you don't have ideas nobody can steal them, and if they don't show up in your work no artist will think to steal them.) But how do you acquire the proprietary right to an idea?

This is where primacy comes in. There is a loosely held belief that being the first one to have an idea gives you property rights to it. This is what we might call the gold-rush model: if you get there before anybody else, you can stake out a claim. If you can prove it, we will recognize it. But in a global art world this is a little hard to do. Even in a small one it's not so easy. Who poured first? Helen Frankenthaler? Morris Louis? Mark Rothko? But in spite of the difficulty of proof, the notion of primacy remains, sustained, at least in principle, by analogy with invention or discovery, and memories of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, the

Wright brothers, and the U.S. Patent Office. In practice, this ownership right is more often established through persistent employment. Josef Albers owns squares. Ad Reinhardt owns black. Christo owns wrappers. Jeff Koons owns sleaze kitsch. And this relation of ownership eventually becomes mutually self-defining. So that an artist will come to be defined by the idea he or she owns, and the idea by its artist owner. In this sense having an idea is a little like having a dog. A Doberman owner is clearly a quite different person from someone who owns a Jack Russell terrier.

Now it is in this absence of persistence that Smith finds the main symptom of Morris's "inauthenticity." "Since the 1960's Morris' art has mirrored nearly every twist and turn in American contemporary art. He's been associated with Neo-Dada, Minimalism, Conceptualism, and performance art, earthworks, process art and installation art." Morris has apparently owned a lot of dogs. So Smith can't tell what kind of dog owner he is.

This is not surprising. The notion of persistence has always been important for art criticism. That's because there is the understanding that if an artist does related things in work after work, the sequence of works can be read as a series of related actions that unite to form a trajectory of intention. This has been one of the fundamental suppositions of traditional art history—that all of an artist's works laid out in temporal order form a kind of artistic biography. And it is not a great step beyond that to George Kubler's somewhat more archaeological proposal, in *The Shape of Time*, to lay out all the artifacts of a culture in temporal order to obtain an artistic biography of the culture.<sup>3</sup> In such biographies apparent breaks in the sequence should count for a great deal.

In October 1970, after some twenty years of making nonfigurative process paintings, Philip Guston opened a large exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery, in New York, with thirty-three paintings and eight drawings populated by hooded cartoonlike figures. Every critic who dealt with the show felt called upon to explain this apparent break in Guston's career. For some, it went beyond that. In order to approve of the new work, sympathetic critics had to find an aspect of this new series of paintings that would connect them to the process paintings that had defined Guston's artistic identity up to the day of the new exhibition: He took three lessons in a correspondence course in cartooning when he was twelve. He'd always admired Barney Google and Krazy Kat. He used to do caricatures of his artist friends. The dark, blocky



**Litanies.** 1963. Lead over wood, steel key ring, twenty-seven keys, and brass lock, 12 x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (30.5 x 18.1 x 6.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson

**Leave Key on Hook,** 1963. Key, lock, and patinated bronze box, 13 x 7 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (33 x 19.1 x 8.9 cm). Private collection.

shapes in his later nonfigurative works suggest objects. His palette remains the same, etc.

This kind of biographical, recuperative criticism reaches a lyrical culmination in a 1978 article in *Art in America* by Smith. "When you take Guston's career as a whole," she assures us, "the new Gustons aren't the betrayal they may at first seem: they're a surprisingly consistent summation. In them Guston seems to have revisited all his past successes and failures, touching base again and again with all areas of his previous development." Compiling an extensive if somewhat haphazard and questionable array of thematic, technical, and psychological recurrences in his work, she triumphantly concludes that "Guston has had a certain vocabulary of arrangements under continuous consideration, but has taken his whole life to get them into balance." On the other hand, hostile critics like Kramer used the break to argue that Guston had abandoned the authentic, though minor, mandarin art that was a direct consequence of his personality and character to adapt to a new art public's low-cultural taste for narrative and other pop genres.

Persistence apparently functions in the art world not only as a trademark, proclaiming the artist's property rights, it also operates as an assurance of authenticity. The particular art-world system in which the works of Beuys, Guston, and Morris are made, distributed, and evaluated tends to require that artists have a consistent "personality." This is deduced from their works and whatever supporting information the artists or the artists' associates and supporters provide, and then becomes a kind of warranty for all future works. The system operates somewhat like the early American automobile industry, in which the Yankee thrift and ingenuity associated with the "personality"

of Henry Ford, founded as it was on the invention of the Model-T (and publicized accounts of his opinions and behavior), could reliably be invoked to justify adaptations in the Model-A and subsequent economy models but got progressively harder to reconcile as the company began to produce the more upscale Mercury and then the positively luxurious Lincoln Continental. Split personalities or multiple identities are not favored in the art world either. The positive reception of Guston's new figurative work required an account of a two-year struggle for his soul between two kinds of drawing before the cartoon style won out. Only after the account of his struggles had been circulated was it acceptable for him to say, "I wanted to tell stories."

Now, in December 1964 and March 1965, Morris had two exhibitions at the Green Gallery in New York that appeared to have virtually nothing in common with each other. One was an installation of large, freestanding, elementary forms of uniformly painted plywood (see pp. 170–71)—among them, *Floor Beam*, a square, sectioned beam with one rounded edge; *Cloud* (1962, no. 12), an elevated square slab; *Corner Piece* (1964, no. 64), a corner wedge; and *Boiler* (1964), a boiler-sized cylinder. The other featured the enigmatic *Leads* (1964, nos. 78–85)—static gray reliefs, some embedded with small objects, or molds of such objects, electrodes, batteries, and other machine parts or suggestions of machine parts; others bearing traces of earlier actions, invoking arrested or potential functions and motions as mysterious or threatening memories of probably dangerous events.

For almost anyone who had seen both shows, the discrepancy in style between the two bodies of work might have counted as a career break. But Morris's public career was, in fact, still quite short. He had only come to New York in 1961. So for the New York art world of the time, his career was barely four years old,

Exhibition at the Green Gallery, New York, December 1964–January 1965. Left to right, clockwise: *Table*, *Corner Beam*, *Corner Piece*, *Cloud*, and *Floor Beam*.

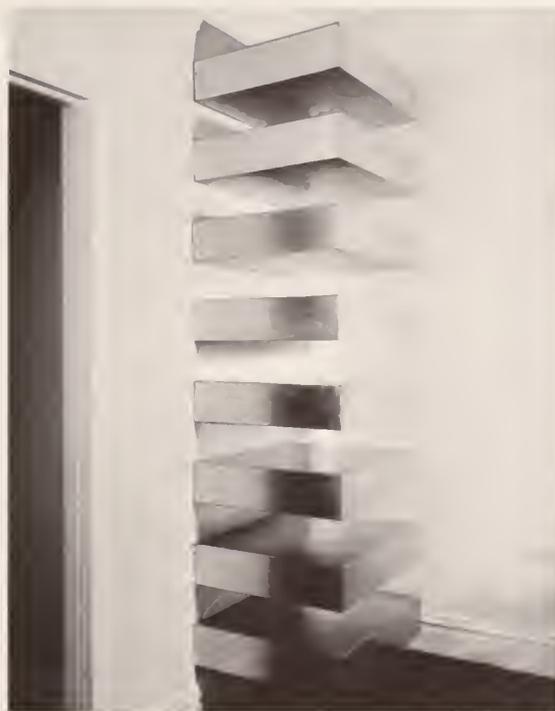


and for most members of this world, it was probably shorter than that, since his first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery hadn't occurred till 1963. Still, Morris had already staked out a place with works like *Litanies* (1963, no. 21) and a number of other paradoxical objects like *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11) and *I-Box* (1962, no. 25). It was a place in what most critics were then calling neo-Dada, which meant that they read his work as taking account of Marcel Duchamp's readymades and Jasper Johns's gray paintings from a position at some distance from, but somewhere alongside, Fluxus's absurd objects.

The large, geometric sculpture in the "white show,"<sup>8</sup> on the other hand, seemed to declare itself as altogether different, situating Morris among sculptors like Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt. Morris reinforced his claims to this position with his own critical writing, the two-part "Notes on Sculpture" that he published in *Artforum* in 1966.<sup>9</sup> These precise and polemical essays engage with all of the basic theoretical issues raised by the Minimalist sculptors and established him alongside Judd as a major spokesman for the group; their republication in 1968 in Gregory Battcock's widely read anthology *Minimal Art* consolidated his reputation for a more popular audience as a leading theoretician of this elementary, object-oriented sculpture just at the time that he was beginning to abandon it.

Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" explicitly rejected nearly all of the ideas upon which the lead reliefs and the self-referential and enigmatic objects had been based: "The relief has always been accepted as a viable mode. However it cannot be accepted today as legitimate. The autonomous and literal nature of sculpture demands that it have its own, equally literal space—not a surface shared with painting."<sup>10</sup> This polemical and deliberately pedantic essay stakes out Morris's claim to be *chef d'école* of the new object sculpture as it goes on to reject intimate scale and all internal relation of parts, including incident, configuration, texture, and color. It also proceeds to separate his work from that of Ronald Bladen and Kenneth Snelson, and from some of the works of Andre and Judd, by rejecting both monumentality and conspicuously displayed mathematical, logical, or technological ordering systems in favor of the simple polyhedrons and more or less human scale of the instantly knowable, uniform, and obdurate shapes in Morris's second Green Gallery show.

Since Morris's neo-Dada works (first aired in 1963) had not had a very long public career—significant articles had not been published about them in the art journals, photographic reproductions of them had not been widely circulated—they never became established as his trademark and, consequently, didn't mark out a distinct public personality. Moreover, his writing very quickly established a Minimalist persona



Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1968. Galvanized iron, ten boxes, each 6 x 27 x 24 inches (15.2 x 68.6 x 61 cm). Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

for him—precise, intellectual, and humorless—that seemed to make his 1960s career intelligible. It suggested an idea of development. He had come into his own as a Minimalist. And it offered the New York art world the opportunity to consider all of the absurdist or paradox pieces as "early works," in spite of the fact that no one was really in a position to establish the chronological order of the conception or fabrication of many of them. In fact, during much of the period between 1961 and 1967, there was considerable overlap between what seem to be two different working logics, though it may be truer to say that while paradox remained a working element in nearly all of Morris's successful sculptural projects, it simply ceased to be foregrounded.

Even the most clearly Minimalist pieces, works as apparently neutral as plywood slabs invisibly elevated inches above the floor or a plywood pyramid wedged into a room's corner, whose color it nearly matches, become absurd through displacement. Simple cubes with mirrored faces become nearly invisible, turning into floor. *Ring with Light* (1965–66, no. 68), a circular fiberglass ring eight feet in diameter, is divided in half and emits light from an unseen source at the two cuts. But while many pieces are marked by this sleight of hand, it is delivered deadpan and is never mentioned in the writing. So it never becomes part of the persona.



**Corner Piece**, 1964. Painted plywood, 78 x 108 inches (198.1 x 274.3 cm).



**Mirrored Cubes**, 1971 refabrication of a 1965 original. Plexiglas mirrors on wood, four units, each 21 x 21 x 21 inches (53.3 x 53.3 x 53.3 cm).



**Ring with Light**, 1965–66. Fiberglass and fluorescent light, two units, each 24 inches (61 cm) high, 14 inches (35.6 cm) deep, overall diameter 97 inches (246.4 cm). Dallas Museum of Art, General Acquisitions Fund and a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

By 1967, Morris is already moving away from the closed object to the more open pieces—the felt works (for example, *Stacked and Folded* [1967, no. 92] and *Tangle* [1967, no. 93])—and, by 1968, their apparently strong material and weak “formal” properties are being exaggerated in the truly formless scatter pieces, where hard and soft, viscous and friable materials, natural and fabricated, are heaped or spread on the pristine gallery or warehouse floor. In an appropriately polemical fashion he lays out a set of arguments for this in his 1968 *Artforum* article “Anti Form” and in 1969 curates *9 in a Warehouse*, an exhibition of work by nine artists relating to this idea at the Leo Castelli Warehouse in New York. The exhibition is accompanied by another *Artforum* article, “Notes on Sculpture, Part IV: Beyond Objects.”<sup>11</sup>

Question: Is this a career change?

Answer: Not really.

The hard-edged object work is given its rationale in terms of a kind of abstract, audience-oriented psychology—the perceptual adventures of an otherwise unoccupied individual in an otherwise empty space. The newer work appears to evoke the relationship of the maker, rather than the viewer, to the different properties of its varied materials—those soft and hard, sharp and brittle scraps and shards, snarls of fiber, piles of powder, and pools of gunk. Yet both types of work remain equally abstract arrangements, and the anti-form pieces derive their perceptual aestheticism not only from their contrasts with each other, but from their contrast with the architectural elements of the spaces in which they’re arranged. By the 1980s, Morris himself would characterize these works as a straightforward continuation of the abstract, Modernist impulses of Jackson Pollock, demythologized, made literal, and typically bound to simple mechanical operations that determine their final appearance.<sup>12</sup> And while the “Anti Form” essay and “Notes on Sculpture, Part IV” present this work as an attack on “the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a finished product” and promise an art that “has in its hands . . . mutable stuff which need not arrive at a point of being finalized with respect to either time or space,”<sup>13</sup> the argument is placed in the same abstract art space as the earlier essays and speaks in the same assured Minimalist (that is, rationalist) voice.

Morris’s Conceptual works of the 1970s appear to be a straightforward continuation and extension of the ideas articulated in connection with the anti-form works. The essay that introduces them places an intensified emphasis on process: “Whatever else art is [it is] at a very simple level . . . a way of making.”<sup>14</sup> But, in it, Morris broadens the context of this making from the phenomenological to the social context of labor and production: “What I wish to point



**Untitled**, 1968. Felt, rubber, zinc, aluminum, nickel, steel, overall dimensions variable. Collection of the artist.

out here is that the entire enterprise of art making provides the ground for founding the limits and possibilities of certain kinds of behavior and that this behavior of production itself is distinct and has become so expanded and visible that it has extended the entire profile of art."<sup>15</sup>

These were the political 1970s, the Nixon government was continuously expanding the Vietnam War, and many not especially political artists were finally beginning to question their relation to the cultural institutions of the gallery and the museum, which despite their support seemed to function primarily as the legitimators of a brutal, technocratic imperialism. Accordingly, a political tone begins to color Morris's writing.

This political stance shows up characteristically in a November 1970 "advertisement" by Morris that appeared in several art magazines. In an elliptical style typical of its commercial models, here strongly ironized by hyperbole and comic juxtaposition, the ad presents

*THE PERIPATETIC ARTISTS GUILD*

and announces

*ROBERT MORRIS*

*Available for Commissions Anywhere in the World*

offering to undertake

*EXPLOSIONS—EVENTS FOR THE QUARTER HORSE—  
CHEMICAL SWAMPS—MONUMENTS—SPEECHES—OUTDOOR  
SOUNDS FOR THE VARYING SEASONS—ALTERNATE  
POLITICAL SYSTEMS—DELUGES—DESIGN AND  
ENCOURAGEMENT OF MUTATED FORMS OF LIFE AND  
OTHER VAGUELY AGRICULTURAL PHENOMENA, SI CH AN  
DISCIPLINED TREES—EARTHWORKS—DEMONSTRATIONS—  
PRESTIGIOUS OBJECTS FOR HOME, ESTATE, OR MUSEUM—  
THEATRICAL PROJECTS FOR THE MASSES—EPIC  
AND STATIC FILMS—FOUNTAINS IN LIQUID METALS—  
ENSEMBLES OF CURIOUS OBJECTS TO BE SEEN WHILE  
TRAVELING AT HIGH SPEEDS—NATIONAL PARKS AND*

At first glance, the ad reads like a modern expansion of Leonardo's letter to Ludovico Sforza:

*I have plans for bridges very light and strong and suitable for carrying very easily, with which to pursue and at times defeat the enemy. . . . Also I have ways of arriving at a certain fixed spot by caverns and secret winding passages, made without noise even though it may be necessary to pass underneath trenches or a river. . . . I can make cannons, mortars, and light ordnance of very beautiful and useful shapes. . . . Also I can execute sculpture in marble, bronze or clay, and also painting. . . . Moreover I would undertake the work of the bronze horse, which shall embue with immortal glory and eternal honor the auspicious memory of the Prince your father and of the illustrious house of Sforza.*

But, at the same time, all of the projects listed in the ad are only mildly disguised characterizations of works Morris had already done, proposed, or would have liked to do. And in the ad both the comedy and commentary are contemporary. "EXPLOSIONS"? Why not? Leonardo was the Werner von Braun of his day. The passage from "CHEMICAL SWAMPS" to "MONUMENTS" to "SPEECHES," which we could reasonably characterize as "OUTDOOR SOUNDS FOR THE VARIOUS SEASONS," reads like a narrative of the standard politician's response to environmental crisis, which the artist offers finally to clean up through "ALTERNATE POLITICAL SYSTEMS," or wash away in "DELUGES" (Leonardo again?). After which the modern Leonardo prophetically offers biotech disasters in "MUTATED FORMS OF LIFE AND OTHER VAGUELY AGRICULTURAL PHENOMENA." "VAGUELY" is a nice touch here. "EARTHWORKS" might be a little obvious, though in the context of Leonardo, it can suggest fortifications, but "DEMONSTRATIONS" is nicely equivocal—either scientific or political or both (was the 1945 blast at Los Alamos scientific or political?)—and sets up the transition to "PRESTIGIOUS OBJECTS" that are offered for the neatly expanding series "HOME, STATE, OR MUSEUM," before moving to more purely public spectacles "FOR THE MASSES." This leads to a chain of appropriately spectacular claims to create "EPIC AND STATIC FILMS" (are they both?), "FOUNTAINS IN LIQUID METAL" (that's one better than Versailles), highway art or airline art ("ENSEMBLES OF CURIOUS OBJECTS TO BE SEEN WHILE TRAVELLING AT HIGH SPEEDS"), "NATIONAL PARKS AND HANGING GARDENS" (evoking Yellowstone or Babylon), and with "DIVERSION OF RIVERS," returning once again to Leonardo (this time to his proposal to protect Italy from the Turks by diverting the Isotzo), before finishing with a comically anticlimactic offer of mere "SCULPTURAL PROJECTS."

If the list seems too short, the ad assures us that "the above is but a partial listing of projects in which the artist is qualified to engage. No project is too small or too large."

If the figure of irony hovers over this text, it is not the simple kind that Webster's defines as "a sort of humor, ridicule or light sarcasm which adopts a mode of speech, the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words." Here it appears as an intermittent and variable force, a swiveling wind that blows a discourse now this way, now that, and, though sometimes more and sometimes less, always off its anticipated course. It seems to cast doubt on the nature of the arena in which the artist is offering to function and, through the exaggerated grandeur of his ambitions, claims, and doubtful competences and his dangerous, perhaps lethal, and occasionally quite trivial projects, on the role of the artist as well.

The ironic tone also raises some question about the way we are to take the advertisement's proposal for funding these art transactions, however seriously they appear to be put forward. The key elements involve the shift in the handling of the payment to the artist from sales or fees, which the ad explicitly rejects, to a "\$25.00 per working hour wage plus all travel, materials, construction and other costs to be paid by the owner-sponsor," and the fifty-percent taxation of the owner-sponsor to be held in trust to help finance other projects. Twenty-five dollars an hour was a very good working wage in 1970, equivalent then to fees for skilled professionals or master craftsmen. But the main thrust of the proposal was to characterize the artist's activity as computable wage labor, something difficult to both verify and compute if the artist's thinking time is calculated as part of his or her labor. For some artists this would mean microseconds, for others weeks, and for yet others the difficulty of calculating the duration of their dreams. The artist tax on future sales of these projects was not a novelty. It had been proposed in complete seriousness for conventional art objects like paintings or sculptures, and perhaps Morris was being serious here. But it is hard not to see the tone of an ad that offered among its projects "chemical swamps" and "alternate political systems" as containing an element of dubiousness and absurdity.

Irony is a difficult figure to control, perhaps impossible. Once its presence is located in an artist's work, it threatens to appear everywhere within it, casting the possibility of doubt over any and every assertion or representation the artist makes. It also characterizes its employer in a different way. He's no longer a simple dog owner, he means something different in owning his dog—perhaps like Gerard de Nerval walking a lobster on the rue de Rivoli "because it doesn't bark and knows the secrets of the deep."

The one artist most clearly committed to the figure of irony has been Duchamp, and, consequently, he is the artist about the significance of whose works critics have found it nearly impossible to agree. Nothing that Duchamp ever made or did, from the readymades to his dining habits, could ever escape its effects. In Morris's case, there is sufficient reason to connect him with irony beyond his continued assertion of his relation to Duchamp. One text of the 1970s stands out from all his others and is crucial in this regard.

"The Art of Existence. Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Process" seems like a straightforward account of the work of Marvin Blaine, Jason Taub, and Robert Dayton, three unknown environmental artists who Morris tries to connect with artists like Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and Bruce Nauman.<sup>18</sup> All of the theorizing takes place in the first four paragraphs. The rest is a first-person journalistic account of Morris's meeting with the artists and his experiences with them and their work, and it has all the plausibility of Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), with which it shares an abundance of contingent detail.

None of the projects of these three artists was so far removed from the work of other well-known artists of the period, or even from that of Morris himself. Blaine was constructing a hillside chamber observatory to record the sunrise of the vernal equinox; Taub was designing experiments in extra-audial perception of radio waves; and Dayton was making a series of gas chambers for altering sensory states. Any of these projects could have been proposed to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art for their 1967 *Art and Technology* show. But the unusual position of Morris as audience and sole art-world witness of these works, and his uncharacteristic detailing of his responses not only to the works but to all sorts of surrounding contingencies, soon began to arouse suspicion:

*I had moved to a side plank in order not to interfere with the rectangle of light now expanding down the wall to within about six feet of the center plank. I was feeling the dampness and even a slight chill. We all had coffee from a thermos and as I looked up I noticed that the top edge of the light was shrinking downward. . . . On the way to the airport the following day the extremely taciturn Blaine revealed that he had notions for several other works that he might realize next summer.<sup>19</sup>*

This is the rhetoric of what the French would call classic fiction. And the work of the next two "unknown artists" becomes more and more fantastic, leading to increasingly trivial or disagreeable responses:

*I did not know what this "shaping of the perceiver" was about until Taub turned on the equipment and invited me to enter the framed up enclosure. As soon as I stepped into*

*one of the circular spaces I felt rather than heard a sound which seemed to be inside my head. It seemed similar to what one experiences when one hears ringing in one's ears except the experienced sound was much lower.<sup>20</sup>*

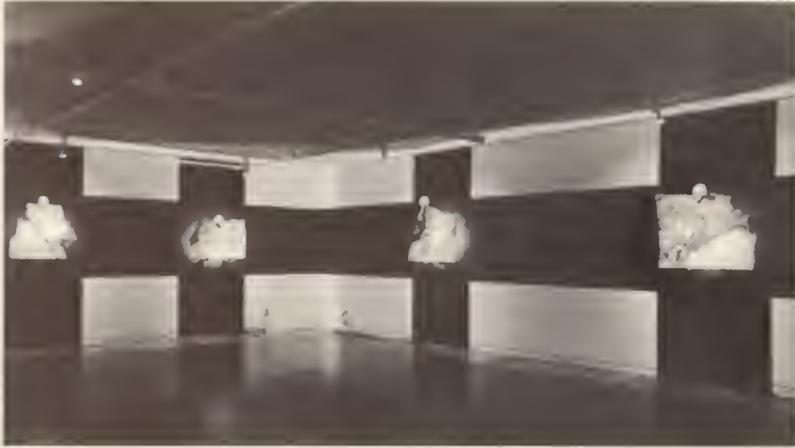
The text culminates in the visit to Dayton's gas chambers in a studio "outside Sacramento." After nearly blinding himself working to achieve visual effects with liquid crystals and highly corrosive acids, he has turned to working with gases in order to alter psychic states. Dayton is the most colorful of the three artists, and he receives the most elaborate personal description:

*Dayton himself is a fairly unnerving personality. He keeps his head shaved, which seems to accentuate the deep scars on his face and neck. He also wears a monocle around his neck which he occasionally peers through if he needs to see a detail or read a gauge. He seems to enjoy playing up a certain sinister ambience that surrounds his work. When I was with him he frequently squinted at me through the thick glass of his monocle and would leeringly compare the venting systems of Buchenwald and Belsen. When he first showed me the inside of the rooms he asked if I thought shower heads as gas inlets would be unsightly.<sup>21</sup>*

He offers to give Morris a "retrospective gassing," which proceeds from his early work with bromine and iodine clouds, moves on to his "middle period fart palette," composed of various mixtures of butyl acetates, nitrobenzene, and butyl mercaptan, finally passing on to a set of gases that to Morris "presented the most interesting and unfamiliar experiences."<sup>22</sup> Finally Dayton reveals that he is embarking on a project for a "Negative Ion Chamber" that would be "juicier than Willy Reich's Orgone Box" because it promises to get rid of "brain 5-hydroxytryptamine," loads Morris up with a pack of scientific articles on the effects of negative ions, and as Morris drives off calls after him in his Dr. Strangelove persona, "Screw the MOMA, but see what you can do for me at Auschwitz."<sup>23</sup>

So it's a fiction, a kind of parabolic fiction strongly marked by the figure of irony. The question is, What is the target of the irony? The aims of artists like Asher, Irwin, or James Turrell? Or of Morris himself? The "dematerialization of art," a discourse that figured so largely among the artists of the 1970s? Or all of the above, which appears likely enough now, and was, I always thought, readable at the time?<sup>24</sup>

Though not to everyone. Because two months after Morris's essay appeared, a letter in the March issue of *Artforum* denounced Morris for ripping off his three unknown artists by presenting them in his article and taking possession of their work in a context that he had created and given a name to. The letter, written by a Mark N. Edwards of Madison, Connecticut, in a



**Preludes (For A. B.)**, 1979–80. Italian onyx, silkscreened text, electric light, metal, plastic, paint. Collection of the artist.

tone somewhat similar to Smith's review of the Morris retrospective, goes on to accuse the artist of a pattern of rip-off going back to the Castelli Warehouse show, in which his curatorial presence also assured him authorial credit for ideas generated by younger artists.

The intent of the Edwards letter is easy enough to figure out, but the inflated, garrulous, and self-obscuring rhetoric in which it was written might arouse suspicion. Was there really a Mr. Edwards? Or was the Edwards letter written by Morris? If so, it was composed to reveal the absurdity of a circulating *Solo* slander by placing it in the mouth of an apparent fool from a Connecticut town called Madison. The denunciational style of the letter and its incoherent argument appear perfectly calculated to achieve this effect within the art-world context of its circulation. But how much further does the irony extend? As far as Morris's answer?

*Mr. Edwards is evidently interested in rescuing damsels in distress. I'm not.*

*Robert Morris*

Possibly, but to what effect is not quite clear. And it doesn't necessarily follow from the absurdity of the letter that Morris wrote it. Morris is not Molière, and might not have had the literary skill or experience to construct such an elegant piece of buffoonery. Or he may not have had the inclination. Edwards's nature might have constructed it for him, or graduate art-school education at Yale (Madison is close to New Haven). But the truth is of less importance than the way in which suspicion of irony continues to spread. Yet in spite of "The Art of Existence," and two unusual Conceptual exhibitions—*Hearing* (1972, no. 88) and *Voice* (1974, no. 126), and the curiously comic S&M poster that accompanied the *Voice* exhibition

and produced its moment of local scandal (no. 125)—Morris's works of the 1970s didn't invoke ironic readings. Given the nature of most of his exhibitions, there seemed little reason why they should.

But in the 1980s Morris's work took a stranger turn. A funereal installation at Sonnabend in New York in 1980 called *Preludes (For A. B.)* featured a series of proposals for cenotaphs crowned by death's-heads. This was followed by an installation at Leo Castelli in New York, later the same year, called *Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night)* (1980, no. 101), and an installation in 1981 at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C., called *Jornada del Muerto* (the name of the desert valley south of Los Alamos, where the first A-bomb tests took place), both of which initiate a massively scaled and obviously emblematic meditation on death, the atomic bomb, and planetary extinction. How to take these works was not very clear to anyone who had followed Morris's artistic career through the 1960s and 1970s.

The Minimalist work of the 1960s and the anti-form work of the 1970s share a mode of meaning making derived from our response to the materiality of the objects and the working procedures used to fabricate or arrange them. In the work of the 1980s, the physical and material properties are entirely subordinated to an overriding and graphically presented metaphorical discourse. Any meaning that is going to be read out of them has to pass through the metaphorical space of some dominant emblem, which might appear to be a fairly traditional Western European mode of art and meaning making. The main difficulty in interpretation here is how to position the artist in relation to this discourse.

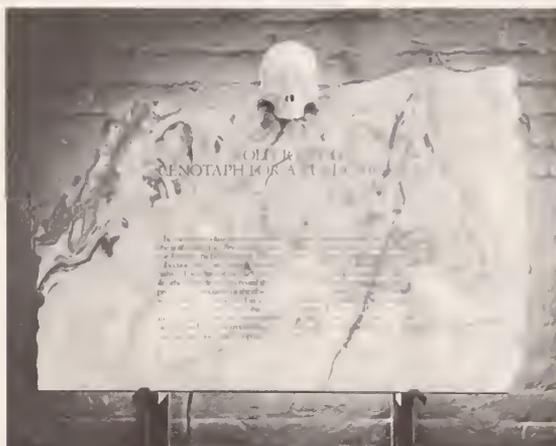
Is this, we might ask, the Roberta Smith problem? Not quite. It takes more than radical change in the mode of meaning making to raise the problem of inauthenticity. It requires some context setting that would create a primary scene employing a mode of meaning making sufficiently successful to be worth adapting to or ripping off. And, of course, one was available. The Conceptual art of the earlier 1970s had exhausted the appetites of the few collectors willing to pay art-world prices for its rather exiguous physical products, and a dealer world starved for more clearly marketable objects rushed to assist the development of American punk painting, which was quickly assimilated to a German painting taste for a kind of revived expressionism. Both deployed a crude and emblematic drawing style and a muddy palette over an expressionist menu of thematics drawn from the junkyard of German and American urban decay, and, by 1980, under the name Neo-Expressionism, this kind of painting had become immensely popular and financially rewarding. It was widely exhibited and written about in all the journals. And in the prose of Donald Kuspit,

its most prolific American publicist, it was seen as an urgent philosophical engagement with the forces of destruction and death.<sup>27</sup>

In 1980, Morris does *Preludes*, his proposals for cenotaphs, at Castelli and at Sonnabend he exhibits his *Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night)*, an extraterrestrial view of disaster with twisted mirrors near the ceiling. No one could say he was closing in on the market for Neo-Expressionist painting. But the shows could be seen as establishing a claim on the discourse with death. Then, in 1982, come the Hydrocal reliefs (pp. 282–87), deeply embedded decorative molds prolific in body parts and skeletal fragments, which, by 1983, come to act as elaborate frames for Turner-esque pastel, watercolor, and oil images of brushy and swirling color whose undulating movements the frames echo and repeat in three-dimensional form. By 1986, these works are presented in an exhibition at the Newport Harbor Art Museum, in Newport Beach, California, accompanied by a catalogue containing an extensive essay by Kuspit, “The *Ars Moriendi* According to Robert Morris.”<sup>28</sup> Such developments might seem to validate the full Smith reading.

But the context has to be drawn a little wider than that. By the 1970s almost all confidence in the Modernist paradigm as it was understood in the art world had collapsed. Partly this was a consequence of the special and trivialized Greenbergian version of Modernism generally accepted within the art world, and partly it was a consequence of Modernism’s successes and the inflated estimation of their significance. In any event, by the mid-1970s, the entire project of post-World War II American Modernist art—by which I mean to include all the work of Abstract Expressionism, through Hard-edge painting and Pop art, to the Minimalist sculpture of the 1960s and its continuations in the anti-form sculpture and systematic Conceptualism of the 1970s—successful in its own terms, had come to occupy a narrow museological space, walled in by money and power, in which it was unable to engage significantly with the rest of the intellectual and social environment.

Modernism had come to this pass from a very different sense of its career and mission. The end of World War II left the United States, which was largely undamaged by the conflict, with a great reservoir of savings, great productive assets, large foreign markets, a near-total absence of serious economic competitors, and a great sense of confidence resulting from its victory over what looked, to most Americans, like the pure forces of evil. If serious artists had no direct relation to this growing affluence, they were powerful participants in the milieu of cultural confidence that resulted from it.



**Preludes (For A. B.): Roller Disco—Cenotaph for a Public Figure**, 1979–80 (detail). Italian onyx, silkscreened text, electric light, metal, plastic, paint, 35 x 34 x 7 inches (88.9 x 86.4 x 17.8 cm). Collection of the artist.

The first generation of Abstract Expressionists were adults before the war, but they all came to their artistic maturity by the end of it. Which is to say that they had finally managed to free themselves from the particular forms of Modernist painting—Cubism and Surrealism—that had haunted their work through the 1930s and early 1940s, though Cubist and Surrealist art had long since lost critical force and acquired the deadly status of connoisseur objects.<sup>29</sup> And if the Abstract Expressionists were eventually paid handsomely by the successful and increasingly materialistic society that they were so critical of, still they were the last group of artists in the long career of Modernism to see themselves, and the work they made, as resolutely outside of and against the dominant culture.

Their successors within the Modernist tradition—the generation of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, and the Pop artists—were firmly married to the culture. If there was cultural criticism in their work, it took the same form as cultural promotion. The advertising image, the commercial photograph, the film still, and the TV image cheerfully mingled with paint. For a brief moment during the early 1960s there was the illusion that art could enter into a significant communication in the public sphere and that such a public space existed. For many, this illusion was fostered by the Kennedy presidency, with its image of a government presided over by intellectuals (“the best and the brightest”) and the promise of a hip, high culture (JFK was supposed to have written a book, and Jackie had dreamed of meeting the dance impresario Diaghilev). And the Minimalist and the systemic and technological sculptors, the Hard-edge painters, and the Pop and post-Pop use of figuration



**Jornada del Muerto**, 1981. Nylon, felt, photomechanical reproduction, mirrors, steel, human skeletons. Installation at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., December 1981–February 1982

seemed, with a few notable exceptions, to parallel, glamorize, and glorify the society's productive techniques.

But the Vietnam War gradually opened a gap between the intellectuals who exercised power and the intellectuals who opposed it, revealing that no rational communication could take place between them. The sense of a social fabric tearing apart was intensified as the civil-rights movement disintegrated into separatisms, the Black Power movement, and urban race riots, and as the New Left splintered when the feminists seceded from a movement dominated by male commissars. All of this was punctuated by a sequence of assassinations—John Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Robert Kennedy. Valerie Solanis even shot Andy Warhol, bringing the point closer to home.

In 1973, as the spectacle of Watergate unfolded

before millions of TV watchers, the fundamental separation between language and action became manifest. Anyone who watched the testimony for long hours, hearing dubious memories produce chains of supposed fact that could only be supported by equally or even more dubious memories recited by respectable-looking men who had been caught in unrespectable circumstances, learned what the speech-act theorists had been teaching in the academy—that the referential power of language disintegrates in a social setting where the unspoken social treaties underwriting its uses are broken. It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say that Richard Nixon gave birth to American postmodernism.

It didn't take long for artists to generalize this understanding to all signification and to conclude that not only was there no common ground in the body politic, there was no universally common ground in

the phenomenology of the human body either, which much critical theory was coming to see as also a socially constructed representation. The essential failure of Morris's interactive show at the Tate Gallery in London in 1971, while at least in part due to the stuffiness of the English museum tradition, was also the consequence of the show's Minimalist phenomenology, undertaken in a social context where an invitation to a conception of the body grounded in its physical mechanics was predictably seen by participants as an invitation to a fun fair.<sup>30</sup> While Morris intermittently returned to his phenomenological concerns throughout the 1970s, they were simply extensions of his 1960s work and found continually declining resonance in the art world, while he was already pursuing other interests. Seen from this vantage point, the contest of texts presented in *Hearing* and *Voice* seem more like attempts to respond to those aspects of the breakdown of the modernist paradigm that nearly everyone in the art world would soon come to call post-Modernism, while *Labyrinth* (1974, no. 119) appears to have had its origins in Morris's older Modernist concerns with the physical body in space. But the mark of post-Modernism in the art world was a performative mode that expanded to fill the gap left by the fading significance of the autonomous object<sup>31</sup> and, to that extent, with their real and implied performances, both the Tate show and *Labyrinth* articulate a response to the new situation in spite of their institutionally neutral settings.

Still, what the new situation of the 1970s seemed to require was an abdication from universalist claims. As the master narratives of history and art history collapsed, local and contingent narratives came to replace them. So the earliest and most effective new work invoked the most particularly contingent and local in the form of a floating and equivocal autobiography and unique approaches to the twin Modernist taboos of narrative and representation. These concerns were most evident in pieces like Eleanor Antin's epistolary photonovel *The Adventures of 100 Boots* (1971–73), Jonathan Borofsky's dream texts and images, Yvonne Rainer's performance *This is the story of a woman who . . .* (1973), and virtually all of Laurie Anderson's early 1970s performance and text works. Somewhat later, for a generation that seems to have spent most of its childhood watching television or shuffling the pages of *Cosmopolitan*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *Playboy*, and *Seventeen*, the master narratives encoded in literature were replaced by a master image reservoir located in the mass media, which produced the sense of an immense surfeit of images having no reference points beyond the manipulated desires generating them. This led to the much overdiscussed appropriations mode that was most effectively deployed by artists as different as Barbara Kruger,

Sherry Levine, Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman, and even David Salle, largely supported by fragments of late-Modernist French theory. Both the performative new narrative and the appropriations mode flanked Neo-Expressionism, which had in common with the new narrative intermittent attempts at representation and, at least in its beginnings, a sense of a contingent and limited competence before whatever imagined reality confronted them. Because the one thing that unified most of the punk painting, bad painting, graffiti painting, and Neo-Expressionist painting was its rudimentary technique, the near childishness of its means, and the pathos thus evoked before the apparent cultural and psychic disasters it wished the weak instrument of painting to confront.

But Morris had abandoned performance by the 1970s, his only experiment with narrative was "The Art of Existence," and he generally avoided autobiography until the publication of "Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides," in *Art in America* in November 1989.<sup>32</sup> In 1980, however, he turned to metaphoric representation, a vast scale, and a hugely amplified address on a commonplace theme, in giant installations whose most obvious property is magniloquence. Are we to suppose that for a sophisticated artist like Morris an installation like *Preludes* constitutes straightforward discourse? Each focal point of the installation is a proposal for a cenotaph. So consider the text silkscreened beneath the skull presiding over

#### *Roller Disco:*

##### *Cenotaph for a Public Figure*

*The individual's favorite possessions—the golf clubs, the shoes, the tie pin, the Ferrari, the bowling ball, the art collection, etc.—are carefully sawed in half. The edges of the cuts are filed or otherwise cleaned to reveal the precise cross-sections of the objects which are then embedded in a transparent plastic matrix. The objects are arranged so that the cross-sections face upward. The matrix forms a vast circular floor and a top layer of smooth, transparent plastic is poured as a finish surface. A large building is erected over this floor, the building is held up with a maze of elaborate wooden trusses. No pole or column intersects the floor. The appropriate decor and sound system are installed. A suitable name is found. A discreet advertising campaign is initiated. Only the highest quality roller skates are allowed.*<sup>33</sup>

The recitation of "the golf clubs, the shoes, the tie pin, the Ferrari" is a broad parody of the contents of royal burials like the Viking ship at Sutton Hoo. The texts are broad and sardonic and displace the installation's purported solemnity, just as the skeletons climbing the twisted steel clouds, in *Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night)*, created a sci-fi disaster movie as they evoked the image of the drifting



**Untitled** 1984 Painted Hydrocal and pastel on paper, 63 1/2 x 73 1/2 x 15 inches (161.3 x 186.7 x 38.1 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York



**Untitled** 1983 Painted Hydrocal and pastel on paper, 90 1/2 x 95 x 11 inches (229.9 x 241.3 x 27.9 cm). Private collection



**Untitled**, 1984 Painted Hydrocal and pastel on paper, 69 1/2 x 86 1/2 inches (176.5 x 219.7 cm) Collection Gerald S. Elliott

ruins of a wrecked space ship. "What were they looking for out there, Scotty?" In *Jornada del Muerto*, helmeted black skeletons ride absurd phallic bombs. If we are looking at atomic disaster, we're looking at it expressed through nearly comic-book imagery. If these works seek to engage with social crises, they propose to engage through the most obvious of representational clichés. So they seem to position themselves more significantly in relation to the problematics of representation for a public art than they attempt to represent anything in particular. The sense they produce of an exasperated ineffectuality of communication carried over to the rest of Morris's work of the 1980s through to the decorative Hydrocal reliefs that become fin de siècle frames for the sweetly colored *Burning Planet* paintings, which don't function so much as paintings than as mere signifiers of the Sublime reduced to the status of decoration—the nearly inevitable fate of this kind of expression, carried out here with the strong possibility of parody.

But what do they parody? There are I think two possible readings. Since the frames suggest nothing so much as the German fin de siècle, German Neo-Expressionism, particularly in its more expansive moments, as in Anselm Kiefer's large, decorative, and essentially banal paintings, becomes a possible target. Parody works on whatever it's closest to. Nerval walking a lobster on the rue de Rivoli shared a sidewalk with any number of gentlefolk walking poodles. But Morris's own ambitions for a grandly scaled, representational public art are even closer. Self-parody, then, is most probable, especially if one remembers his 1971 S&M poster. The work, perhaps, functions to parody both.

The paintings and drawings in the 1990 Corcoran show that produced the Smith review are, however, in an entirely different vein. The encaustic paintings are literally huge, often ten to twelve feet high or long, but the combination of images and texts of which they're composed produces a rebuslike effect that discounts their size and makes them operate like oversize drawings. Because the image bank is drawn from a mélange of art history, popular magazines, and older works by Morris himself, even when the source is obvious its emblematic significance is by no means clear; this is further complicated by the elliptical texts with which they live in an often enigmatic relation. If the Hydrocal-framed paintings were public, these paintings are not. They seem hermetic in their intentions, either deliberately puzzling like the products of a private emblem book, or analogues for memory, or even, if one remembers Freud's famous rebus metaphor for dream structure, analogues for dreams.

The play of meaning in the *Investigations* drawings (1990, pp. 292–95) seems somewhat freer, where the voice of Wittgenstein speaks like an oracle among a

floating mix of media images—Jackson Pollock, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, Marian Anderson, Bernard Baruch(?)—meditating on the difficult relations between language and feeling and action: “For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression,” or “But the exclamation is so in a different sense from the report: it is forced from us—it is related to the experience as a cry is to pain.”<sup>34</sup> The significance of the language is not hard to track, but the images are harder to read because their allusions, more or less obscured by time, may count for less than their ambiguous appearance or the roles they play in a personal image reservoir to which we have only limited access.

We may have a fair idea of what the image of Pollock would count for in Morris’s imagination. But what does Anderson count for? Or should we really ask what the image of the black, open-mouthed singer with the closed eyes counts for? Passion? Expressive power? And is the pictorial position of this image, which is literally situated above three others—one of an earthwork, a second of a social grouping of people, over a third of a group struggling in what looks like a swamp—one of transcendence or distance? And what relation does this have to Wittgenstein’s ironic line on the nonlogical power of experience: “Nothing could induce me to put my hand in the flame—although after all it is only in the past that I have burnt myself?”

The paintings seem more simply structured, employing clear binary contrasts and mirror imaging, and sometimes they are much more obvious, as in the comic diptych *Enthusiastic for the Ratio* (1989), in which a great beast in a panel on the right sits quietly reading a very small book across from a “rationally” divided, colored panel on the left. Some, like the quadripartite *Memory Is Hunger* (1990), in spite of their simplicity, are, nevertheless, not obvious. In her catalogue essay, the curator, Terrie Sultan, identifies the title as a quote from Ernest Hemingway’s memoir *A Movable Feast* (1964) and the four figures, distributed one to a panel counterclockwise, as Goya’s *The Colossus* (ca. 1812), a somewhat blurred image of a Holocaust victim, a slightly dissolved version of Morris as he appeared in his S&M poster, and a soldier (given the outfit he’s wearing, it might as well be Hemingway in his guise as the Great White Hunter).<sup>35</sup> Then there is the title printed across all four panels, above which are printed, partially reversed and inverted, the Latin words *EDISCERE* (“to learn by heart”) and *ESURIRE* (“to hunger”).

If the relation between the white hunter and the dissolved image of Morris suggests a loss of power, and that between the Colossus and the Holocaust victim a relation between power and powerlessness, the title is a meditation on loss and on the grotesquerie of both power and powerlessness. As for the text, the absence

of connectives between “to learn by heart” and “to hunger” allows for multiple associations: “To learn by heart is to hunger,” “To hunger is to learn by heart,” “All we learn by heart is hunger,” “We only learn by heart if we hunger,” and so on, through as long a sequence as we are disposed to imagine. So the parts are fairly simple and reasonably clear for an audience that can check a source and read a little Latin. But the relation of the texts to the images is at least as variable as the pieces of text to each other, and this leaves the work with a clear if indeterminate discourse.

Not so with *Time and Loss and Grief and the Body* (1990), a bipartite painting in which the image of a sailor, spyglass in hand, his feet anchored in the rigging of his ship and his body miraculously cantilevered out over the water, scans the horizon for some distant sight on the right half of the painting, which is repeated on the left half in a more blurred image in which the sailor’s face has become a death’s-head. The center of the painting bears the repeated words of the title painted over and under and overlapping each other within an illusionistic space. Sultan identifies the image and interprets it in a reasonable way, writing that “the intensely athletic gesture of the leveraged figure of Buster Keaton, an image taken from the film *The Love Nest* (1923), represents an expression of searching and loss, a leap into the void that is also an act of physical prowess; to those familiar with the source, it also evokes a richly absurd humor.”<sup>36</sup> To those familiar with a second source of this image, its resonance doesn’t end here or simply in humor.

The film still of Keaton appeared eighteen years earlier as an emblematic illustration for an essay by Yvonne Rainer originally published in the issue of Les Levine’s journal *Culture Hero* devoted to the critic and poet Jill Johnston.<sup>37</sup> Rainer’s essay is a nostalgic, comic, and melancholy memoir of the two women’s intertwined lives, their complex relation within the 1960s art and dance world, and their eventual separation. It’s shot through with recollections of dancing, art making, parties, breakups and reconciliations, accidents and illnesses, and through them flicker fragmentary memories of Rainer’s relationship with Morris and its ending. So the image of Keaton operates like an image in a dream, evoking not only Keaton’s athleticism and its loss through alcoholism but, through the association with Rainer, the loss of a lover, the loss of a lover’s body, the loss of one’s own young body, and the complex of youth, athleticism, creativity, and life that was the past. This painting, though fortuitously interpretable in the way a dream may be, is no more a public work than any other dream; and I suspect that there are other paintings and drawings like this among the works that were exhibited at the Corcoran.

So where does this leave the question of



**Investigations**, 1990 Graphite on vellum, 18 x 18 inches (45.7 x 45.7 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.



**Memory Is Hunger**, 1990 Encaustic on aluminum, 11 feet 11 1/2 inches x 7 feet 10 3/4 inches (3.64 x 2.40 m) Collection of the artist

authenticity? In spite of my own distaste for the biographical recuperative mode, the persona that emerges from Morris's body of work is fairly consistent—that of a restless, ironic, and intellectual artist who engages with whatever surrounding discourses happen to interest him and leaves them as soon as they cease to interest him. This kind of persona is very different from that of a Judd or a LeWitt, or even a Christo, whose works consist of a single stylistic gesture that is allowed to unfold over a wide field. The recurrence of the gesture within their art suggests a persistence that occasionally verges on virtuosity within a narrow range of choices from the austere to the decorative. But it's not as if Andre or Judd or LeWitt individually arrived at some idea of simplicity and elementary organization. Because it was not an idea but a sculptural discourse about simplicity and the elementary that developed in the communal space of the American art world at the end of the 1950s, a discourse that for some artists seemed exhausted by the 1970s, though not for most of those whose reputations had been made by it. It's hard to see why a persistent persona is more authentic than a nervously attentive and mobile one. A nomad is surely as authentic as a homeowner.

1. Roberta Smith, "A Hypersensitive Nose for the Next Thing," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1991, sec. II, pp. 33, 34.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

3. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

4. Smith, "The New Gustons," *Art in America* 66, no. 1 (January–February 1978), p. 102.

5. Hilton Kramer, "A Mandarin Pretending to Be a Stumblebum," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1970, p. 31. For a full account of the controversy over Guston's new figuration, see Robert Storr, *Philip Guston* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

6. For a general sociological account of art making and the networks of its distribution, see Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

7. Storr, *Philip Guston*, p. 47.

8. Many people saw these painted plywood objects as white. It was only later, when Morris had so persistently repeated his use of gray paint—to the point where it became something of a trademark—that the December–January Green Gallery show would be admitted to as not white but, in fact, "gray."

9. Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* (February 1966), and "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum* (October 1966), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 222–35.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

11. Morris, "Anti-Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33–35, and "Notes on Sculpture, Part IV: Beyond Objects," *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969), pp. 50–54.

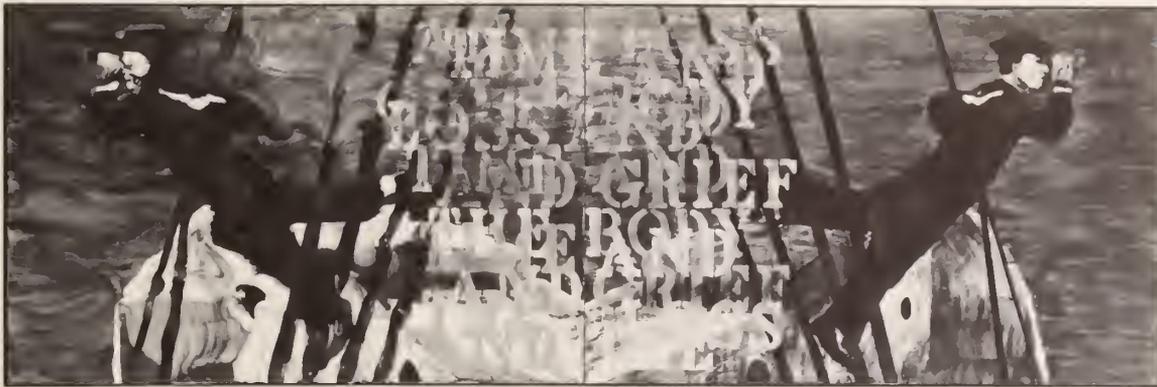
12. Morris, "American Quartet," *Art in America* 69, no. 10 (December 1981), pp. 92–105.

13. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part IV," p. 54.

14. Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 9, no. 8 (April 1970), p. 62.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

16. The advertisement is reprinted in Maurice Berger, *Labyrinth: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 94.



**Time and Loss and Grief and the Body.** 1990. Encaustic on aluminum, 3 feet 11 7/8 inches x 11 feet 11 inches (1.22 x 3.63 m). Collection of the artist.

17. Leonardo da Vinci, *Codex Atlanticus*, 391 r., as cited in Serge Bramly, *Leonardo: Discovering the Life of Leonardo da Vinci* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 174.
18. Morris, "The Art of Existence. Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Process," *Artforum* 9, no. 5 (January 1971), pp. 28–33.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. A more benign view of the work is taken by Berger in his otherwise excellent book on Morris: "In 1971 [in "The Art of Existence"] Morris parodied the critical fixation on creative and personal expression by devising an elaborated field of 'biographical' information about a group of fictional artists" (Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 103, note 10). The notion that this is a parody of something is suggested by the gradually mounting exaggeration of the accounts, and the narrative does evoke the figure of irony. The direction and extent of the irony is, however, not so easy to fix.
25. The letter is so curious that it is worth quoting in full:

Sirs:

*We may well be witnessing the twilight of Robert Morris' artistic life. His article on three "younger" artists in your January issue seems to be an all-out attempt to put off the inevitable. He seems intent on assuring his place in the art of the '70s, perhaps without contributing any of the products himself. By recognizing the life-styles and work of three unknown artists, he attempts to reinvent himself once again and create a prototype of relevant activity through which he can survive another decade. He attempts a resurrection of his worn-out self through the unconventional nature presented by the three artists who, as explained by Morris, wish to remain anonymous and outside the system. This kind of literary deception allows Morris to enter into a situation and come away with the essence while leaving the donors with nothing. His desperate need for recognition can barely be sustained by his present artistic activity. Morris has remained a rather amorphous figure who has had a great effect on contemporary esthetics. His intentions have been disguised to the present. The public is now on to him: rather than seeing him as the art world's chief iconoclast, we choose instead to see him as a deceptive, yet pathetic, figure fading away.*

*His past work has insured his credibility; time is his worst enemy. The public can no longer take him at face value, neither as a significant artist nor as a particularly sensitive weather vane. Most of those he has helped, as in the Castell warehouse show, have sworn off further contact with him. He got these artists together in a formalized space, summed them all up, and put it all forth in a personalized form. Hardly responsible for that which he himself produced afterwards, his sense of politics and gift at manipulation, perpetuated this design.*

*He has again done this through his involvement with the three artists*

*in the article, as shown in the diagram taken from Marvin Blaine's work, another piece of Morris' art grafted from the thought and development of another artist.*

Mark N. Edwards  
Madison, Conn.

(*Artforum* 9, no. 7 [March 1971], p. 8).

26. *Ibid.*
27. See Donald Kuspit, *The New Subjectivism: Art in the 1980s* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1988).
28. Kuspit, "The *Ars Moriendi* According to Robert Morris," *Robert Morris: Works of the Eighties*, exhibition catalogue (Newport, Calif.: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1986), pp. 13–21.
29. This was even true of Jackson Pollock. Clement Greenberg is very acute on this point: "Pollock was very much of a late Cubist as well as a hard and fast easel painter when he entered his maturity. . . . Until 1946 he stayed within an unmistakably late Cubist framework" (Greenberg, "American-Type' Painting," *Art and Culture* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1961], p. 217).
30. For a discussion of Morris's Tate retrospective and the variety of reactions to it, see Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 121.
31. For contemporary documentation of the declining fortunes of the object, see Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966–1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973). For a more recent critical interpretation, see Henry Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).
32. Morris, "Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides," *Art in America* 77, no. 8 (November 1989), pp. 142–51.
33. The proposal is illustrated in the catalogue for the exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum. See *Metaphor*, ed. Howard Fox, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1982), p. 58.
34. *Robert Morris: Inability to Endure or Deny the World*, ed. Terrie Sultan, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Museum of Art, 1990), p. 50.
35. Sultan, "Inability to Endure or Deny the World," in *ibid.*, pp. 17–18.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
37. Reprinted in Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1963–73* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 317.

## FRAMEWORKS

Annette Michelson



Auguste Rodin, **Mask of Hanako**, 1908, executed 1911  
Pate de verre, 8 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 4 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (21.9 x 48.3 x 8.9 cm) The Rodin Museum, Philadelphia, Gift of Jules E. Mastbaum.

Mirror, screen, frame. Here are three structural elements that appear and reappear, circulating through Robert Morris's practice. To chart that circulation, locating and defining the function of these components in their principal signifying modes, is a task that, undertaken and fulfilled, would serve to explicate the work. It would, that is, trace and reveal its steadiness of course, providing counter testimony to the false impression of a discontinuous enterprise.

There is, in Morris's work, a recurring figure that appears, somewhat paradoxically, to unite the three elements—the labyrinth—as in the lozenge-shaped *Section of an Oval Labyrinth* (1973, no. 123) and the circular *Labyrinth* (1974, no. 119), eight feet high, of gray-painted wood and Masonite. Neither mirror, screen, nor frame, the labyrinth, nonetheless, performs a mimetic synthesis of their functions, framing and screening movement in space while offering the symmetry of a mirror image. And these works offer, as well, the intimation of dark works to come, for the labyrinth is, as Roland Barthes once remarked, "the typical form of the nightmare."

It is, however, through consideration of the frame proper, of its changing role within continuity, that one may thread one's way through Morris's production. To follow it, one begins in mid-course, shifting back and forth in time.

In 1977, Morris published "Fragments from the Rodin Museum," an account of a visit, in the fading light of a winter's day, to that site in Philadelphia. Focusing largely, though not exclusively, on three works—*The Gates of Hell* (1880–1917), *Naked Balzac* (1892), and *Mask of Hanako* (1908)—he pauses, nonetheless, to remark, in a long footnote, on the

**Untitled (Labyrinth)**, 1974 Plywood and Masonite, painted, 8 feet (2.44 m) high, 30 feet (9.14 m) diameter  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection



problem generated by the incompleteness of major projects, surrounded, as it were, by part objects of a sculptural desire.

When, Morris wants to know, is an unfinished or unattached component a part—a body part—and when is it a fragment? (He notes, for example, that a bust is such a part, and not a fragment.) Considering the plaster model of the *Balzac* within the compass of this question, he remarks on the absence of a fist and asks of a hypothetical, proximate model of such a fist if it would have had the status of a “fragment.” Hypothesizing further, postulating arms in the vicinity of an armless body, he concludes that “they too would have been addressed as fragments of the body . . . had the body not been nearby, we would simply have ‘arm fragments.’” The meditation continues with a question posed through the striking image of “a once-whole body equally divided as though by a sword from crown to crotch.” Does this division, he asks, “yield two fragments? More than likely two halves have been produced. At what point in a progressive removal of parts do we encounter the threshold, the dividing line, beyond which we no longer have a figure and its fragment(s)?”<sup>3</sup>

Although Morris acknowledges the fragment as “a kind of part,” he sees that it differs, in a crucial sense, from a bust or from a mask. The latter two, it may be said, present an expressive autonomy through which they are, as it were, framed. Fragments, on the other hand, appear stripped of frame. And Morris remarks of a mask (presumably that of Hanako): “As though trying for those contours, those planes, those eccentricities of shape and line, which in themselves tread dangerously near the lump, but taken all together (and how else can a face be taken?) catch the look of the subject.”<sup>4</sup>

In his own essay on Rodin, Leo Steinberg had anticipated these questions. Or, rather, he had approached them inversely:

*It is because of the comparative primacy given to movement, gesture or act, that any unmoved part of the body becomes dispensable. Rodin himself said as much when he explained to Degas why his Walking Man had no arms—“because a man walks on his legs.” This principle of dispensability determines the limits of fragmentation. An anatomy can be stripped down so long as it yields a clear gesture. But the dispensability rule also hands us a criterion of judgment. Rodin tends to spoil a work when, in obedience to the anatomical norm, he makes a partial figure “complete.”*

Morris had begun his account of the visit by speaking of his own sense of entering into a “world of



Auguste Rodin, **The Gates of Hell**, 1880–1917. Bronze, 20 feet 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches x 13 feet 2 inches x 2 feet 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (6.37 x 4.01 x .85 m). The Rodin Museum, Philadelphia, Gift of Jules E. Mastbaum.

Auguste Rodin, **Naked Balzac**, 1892. Plaster, 29<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (75.6 cm) high. The Rodin Museum, Philadelphia, Given by Mr. and Mrs. Sheldon M. Gordon, Mr. Gerson Bakar and Mr. and Mrs. Norman Perlmutter.



congealment" and by evoking an insistent and ironic auditory rhythm, an imaginary sound score (a performing musical band), that accompanied his first impression of *The Gates of Hell*. In a paratactically ordered series of notations, driven, perhaps, by the imagined thump and beat of brass, he offers an iconographic inventory, a *dramatis personae* with its repertory of attributes, physical and moral. Thus: "Adam, Eve (before and after the fall), Christ, St. John, Mary Magdalen, Bacchus, Psyche, Orpheus, Ariadne, Ugolino, Aphrodite . . . [and] sin, melancholy, sorrow, despair, desire . . . [and] slitherings, pulsing, throbbing, sagging, tumescent, bulging, hacked, slicked, gouged, polished, ripped, probed, kneaded, torn."

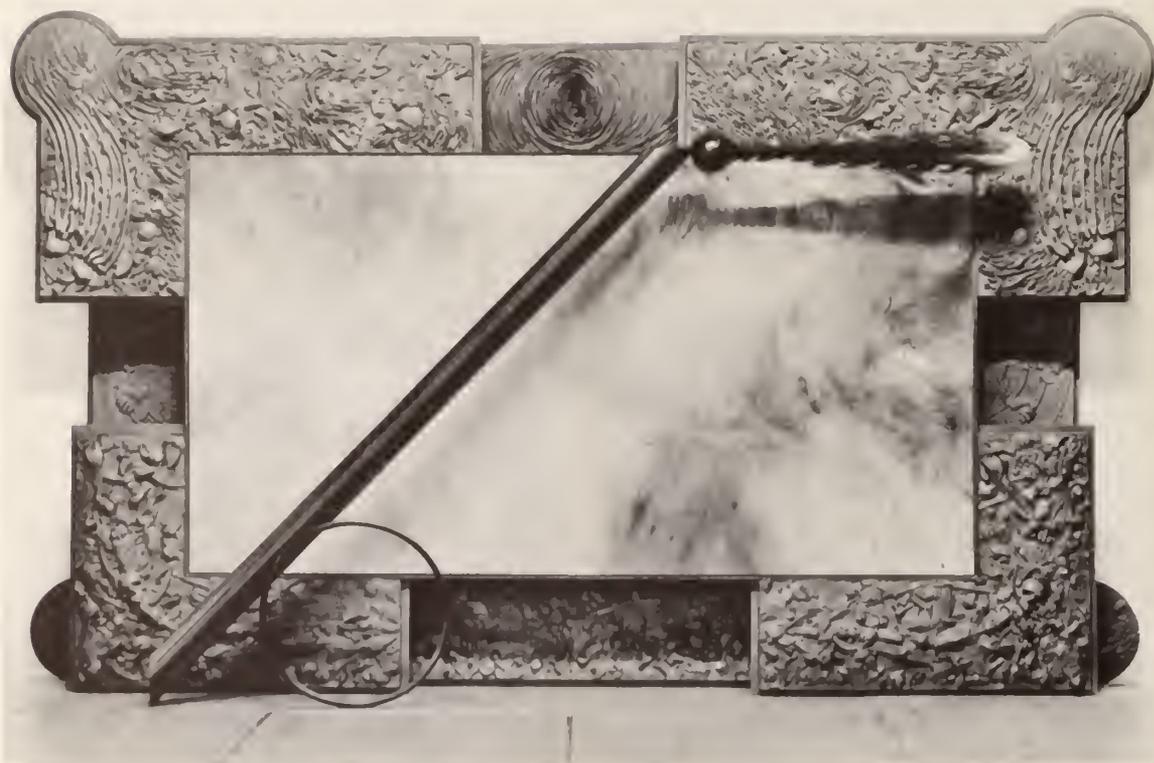
Such are the figures that Steinberg had seen as "coasting and rolling" as if "on air currents," deployed as if "under gravitational pressures," their weightlessness and "native invertibility" enabling their successive variation and redeployment, a "turn and return," in what Steinberg terms Rodin's "Noah's Ark." To think of these as fragments will not quite do; rather, we might say, they are components of a larger whole, elements of a vocabulary, of a discourse on the body, *parts* of sculptural speech, subject, perhaps, to syntactical variation, by turns subtle and spectacular.

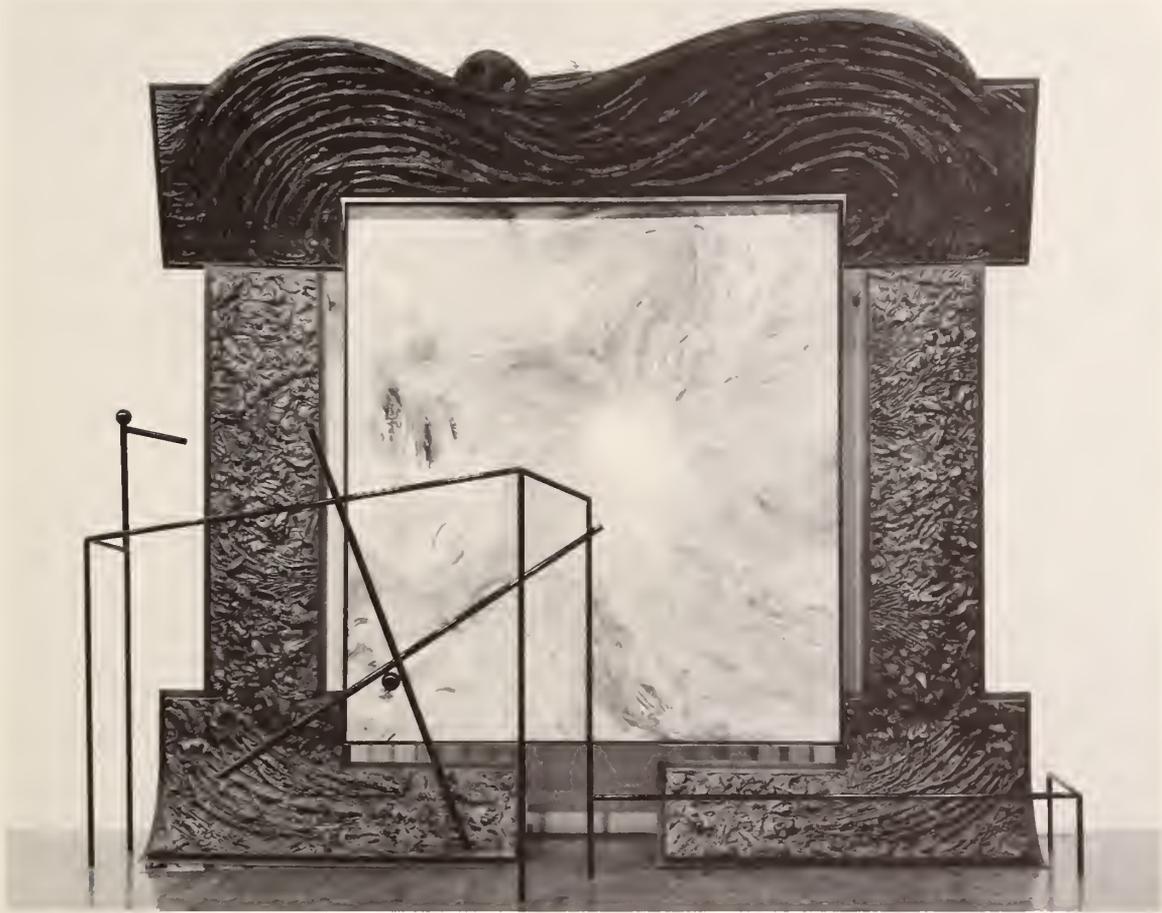
The figures swim and roll and float and plunge within the framed framing space of the *The Gates of Hell*, which, although conceived as opening upon—framing—a view of Hell, are presented as closed and cannot, in fact, be opened. To this matter of opening and closure we shall return.

Experienced, however, by Morris "not as animated clay, but as a population melting down into . . .," these figures produce in him the impression of "a state of affairs existing in the first moments after some basic molecular process has gone awry." And Morris pauses, in another explicative footnote, to locate a descriptive problem. Into what substance would this "population" dissolve, transmute: shit, syrup, grease? None of these, really. The figures that he will, in another text, see as the inhabitants of a mental space, that of *The Thinker* as "operator,"<sup>30</sup> are, in any case, neither frozen nor distorted but, rather, in the process of melting. And he concludes that his own "very phrase, 'Population melting down into . . . ' is the clinker."<sup>31</sup>

"The clinker," indeed. Defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a mass of bricks fused by excessive heat, or one of hardened volcanic lava, the clinker, additionally and colloquially, denotes a clinching statement or argument. Would it not, then, have been the visit to the Rodin Museum, and the

**The Astronomer.** 1984 Painted Hydrocal, 9 feet 6 inches x 15 feet 10 inches x 2 feet 7 inches (2 91 x 4 83 x 79 m)  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.





**Enterprise**, 1984. Painted Hydrocal, oil on canvas, and steel, 11 feet 9 inches x 12 feet 4 inches x 5 feet (3.58 x 3.76 x 1.52 m). Collection of the artist.

ensuing meditation on the fragment, that produced the argument or program for the works that culminated in 1984 in the series of paintings known as *The Burning Planet?* Considering them, however, and framing an answer to Morris's question, one begins with a query—"Paintings?"—and a reply in the form of another question—"Yes, of a sort, but of what sort?"

One of large dimension, to begin with. Of painted Hydrocal, oil on canvas, and steel, *The Astronomer* and *Enterprise*, to name two, measure 9 feet 6½ inches by 15 feet 10 inches by 2 feet 7 inches and 11 feet 9 inches by 12 feet 4 inches by 5 feet, respectively. Images of conflagration, swirls of smoke and fire, flaming vortices, they are seen head on, framed in a manner that implies a direct articulation of Morris's observation that a return to the Baroque seems timed to the intimation of impending global catastrophe.

This sort of painting gives, above all, the sense of a displacement of the locus of signification from the center outward, centripetally, for it is the startling frames that confer meaning upon the images within, making of them the representations of an

eschatological vision. These frames, of painted, cast Hydrocal, are composed of swimming or floating forms, assembled in decorative configurations. Swarms, effluvia, nexuses of body parts, genitalia, hands, tendons, bones, skulls, cast in multiple, placed and displaced, inverted, repeated, rotated, form the grandiose and symmetrically designed frame that stands in ironic tension to the pictorial representation. The horrific impact of the huge, heavy frames, of their elements—these *are* fragments wholly disarticulated from any given body—is underlined by the manner in which they are recomposed into the symmetry of what Walter Benjamin termed "an emblematics of destruction."<sup>11</sup> The frames are dark, the painted Hydrocal minimally reflective. It is as if the image were the point of departure for the grisly obscenity of body fragments that have been "propelled, discharged into space," as Steinberg remarked of Rodin's figures, and "congealed," as Morris put it, into the new "gates" of *Enterprise*. And, indeed, the tall, massive gates of the frames open onto the pictorial space of catastrophe that *they* nominate—in a disturbance of



figure ground relation and, consequently, of frame and framed—as an Inferno.

To understand the place of such a work within Morris's enterprise, the manner in which an apocalyptic vision appears to have elicited this radical disturbance of framing conventions, we must think of the frame within its enabling context, historical and theoretical. One is, in fact, led to take account of the change in the status and function of the frame within and beyond the Modernist context. For a tradition that had focused upon the picture frame's substance, dimension, color, and ornamentation began to end within the Modernist regime. Simplification set in motion a trend toward an evident sublation of the substantial frame or, as in the movement from Seurat to Mondrian to Stella, toward its internalization. The intervention of the readymade, of the Earthwork, and, it has been suggested, of work such as the unstretched lengths of fabric of Daniel Buren, "articulates another strategy. We will call it "disframing," a process that eventually produces the questioning and disturbance of the space and institution of exhibition.

For the moment, however, one wants to stress the way in which traditional notions of pictorial composition began, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, to be replaced by those which display the wide-ranging freedom from convention proposed by both snapshot and film shot. It is the effect of this replacement through new conceptions of framing, and not, as generally assumed, relief from the burden of representation, that would clearly and powerfully define the impact of photography on painting. Consequently, one's notion of the picture frame is illuminated by consideration of the cinematic frame.

In a celebrated text, André Bazin distinguished between these two modes of framing, that of painting and that of cinema.<sup>10</sup> Claiming that the enhancement of composition is merely a secondary result of the picture frame, he defined the frame's task as stressing the heterogeneity of the pictorial microcosm and the natural macrocosm within which the picture is inserted. It was this that generated the Baroque complexity of the traditional frame, which was designed to establish a geometrically indefinable gap between picture and wall, that is, between "painting and reality."<sup>11</sup>

Citing the "prevalence everywhere of the gilded frame" as maximally reflective, its gilt providing "that quality of color and of light having of itself no form, that is to say pure formless colour," Bazin maintains that since the picture frame establishes the space of contemplation as one limited to that within, pictorial space is to be characterized as centripetal. The space of

Auguste Rodin, *The Gates of Hell* 1880-1917 (detail)

the cinematic image is, on the other hand, centrifugal. For the frame of the cinematic image can be understood, contrary to the common presumption, as a *mask*, excising from view the phenomenal world presumed to extend in an infinite continuum beyond the image on screen. The spectator is thus positioned, and—as a function of the moving camera—repositioned in an awareness of off-screen space, of “the world” beyond the image.<sup>15</sup>

This reading of the screen image was, of course, intended to support Bazin’s validation of cinema’s vocation as an instrument of representation in the service of an epiphanic revelation of the phenomenal world.<sup>16</sup> Its present interest for us, however, lies in Bazin’s intimation of the picture frame as marker of heterogeneity and as gap, and the way in which this intimation takes its place in a theorization of the frame that culminates in Jacques Derrida’s reading of Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*.<sup>17</sup> For Kant views the frame as an instance of the *parergon*, secondary to the ground or *ergon*, the primary, central locus, the core or field of artistic practice and of signification. This distinction between *parergon* and *ergon* is seen to inform the tradition of art history and of aesthetics in the West, shaping the very questions that we ask about the nature and origin of the work of art. And it is these questions, moreover, renewed through the centuries, that have given credence to hierarchy and teleology, to the establishment of what Derrida calls “a series of oppositions (meaning/form; interior/exterior; content/container; signified/signifier . . . )”<sup>18</sup> through which art not only functions as a system but helps to ground a larger cultural semiotic.

It is for this reason that “the philosopher who repeats this question without transforming it, without destroying it in its form, in its form of question, its onto-interrogative structure, has already submitted all *space* in the discursive arts to the voice of the logos.”<sup>19</sup> And our response to “this permanent request” mounted by aesthetics to distinguish between a core of meaning and context “organises all philosophical discourse on art, on the meaning of art and on meaning itself from Plato to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. It presupposes a discourse on the limit or boundary between the inside and outside of the art object, in this case *a discourse on the frame*.”<sup>20</sup>

The problematic nature of the border appears not only at the inner edge, between frame and picture, but also at the outer edge, between frame and world. The surface of the *parergon* separates it not only, as Kant would have it, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung. When seen from this perspective, the presentation of Rodin’s *The Gates of Hell* as closed redirects the *parergonal* function of these frames toward that of the *ergon*: the container is thus contained, the extrinsic made intrinsic.



Untitled (Pine Portal), 1961. Laminated fir, 96 x 48 x 12 inches (243.8 x 121.9 x 30.5 cm).



**Untitled (Williams Mirrors), 1977** Twelve mirrors, each 84 x 96 inches (213.4 x 243.8 cm). Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown.



**Untitled (Fiberglass Frame), 1968.** Translucent fiberglass, 72 x 96 x 18 1/2 inches (182.9 x 243.8 x 47 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection.



**Barrier, 1962.** Painted plywood, 79 x 90 x 12 inches (200.7 x 228.6 x 30.5 cm)

One could say, then, with Bazin, that the border presents a problematic ambivalence corresponding to what he termed "the geometrically indefinable space"<sup>21</sup> between picture and wall such that our notion of the extrinsic and intrinsic, of what is frame and what is framed, can be thereby questioned. It is this questioning, sustained over three decades in Morris's "frameworks," that here concerns us.

I have elsewhere claimed that Morris's work of the 1960s was driven by a willed transgression of the decorum imposed by the *doxa* of Modernist sculpture's "opticality."<sup>22</sup> I shall now go on to say that it initiated a questioning and disturbance of presuppositions (in this case, regarding the frame) that eventually generated the "clinkers" of *The Burning Planet* series. It is the continuity of this questioning that confirms one's earlier view of the manner in which Morris assumed—from the beginning, under the aegis of Marcel Duchamp and with a special resolution—the philosophical task that, in a culture not committed, on the whole, to speculative thought, devolves with a particular stringency upon its artists.<sup>23</sup> One has occasion to observe that in this he was not quite alone. And the question that arises is: what drives this trend?

An account, by no means complete, of Morris's frameworks would have to include the following:

— *Pine Portal* (1961, no. 8). This work is correctly cited as an instance of Morris's sculptural concern with the proportions of the human body.<sup>24</sup> Of course, it also functions as frame.

— *Barrier* (no. 15), among other works of 1962.

— A class of works made in the pivotal years 1966 to 1968 (for example, *Quarter-Round Mesh* [1966, no. 89]) presents structures that offer maximal visibility, with all parts, surfaces, and joinings open to view.

— *Fiberglass Frame* (1968, no. 16), a work of translucent fiberglass, with its opening up of the frame's inner edge.

— Two works in aluminum (nos. 75–76), both untitled, that, by virtue of their height (respectively, 66 and 60 inches) offer maximum visibility of parts and surfaces and frame floor space.

— *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66), the startling work initiating a series of catoptric ventures Morris was to renew frequently, as in *Williams Mirrors* (1977, no. 134). *Mirrored Cubes* absorbs and shifts, frames and reframes, the exhibition space for the mobile spectator, even as its reflective surfaces obscure contour, edge, or border.

It was with *Pine Portal* that the problematization of the frame was initiated. Here is a freestanding object that is sculpture *as* frame. One begins by noting the model provided by Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23) for the framing function of this structure in its enviroing space (as in other works by Morris and those of other artists of his

generation). One notes, as well, the proleptic character of the work's title, which, in this early variation on the gate, solicits the spectator's passage through it from position of observer, to that of object framed, before the eventual return to first position.

*Pine Portal* is not, however, a work to be considered in isolation. Rather, it must be understood in relation to *Barrier*, a counterstatement composed *within the same mode of address to the spectator*, but articulated through a structure designed to *impede* passage. These two objects, made a year apart, form a pair of variations, couched in the dialectic of approach and avoidance, upon the frame as freestanding sculptural object. They challenge, respectively, by solicitation and obstruction, conventions of Modernist sculpture regarding spectatorial and sculptural space. Additionally and crucially, their collapse of *ergon* and *parergon* within the single freestanding object represents, in its simplicity, a radical intervention in the field of sculptural practice.

The later work in Hydrocal, picture frames such as those of *Enterprise* and *The Astronomer*, will require extremity of scale and baroque sculptural complexity to produce their very different effects of shock and irony in relation to the pictorial field. These effects, however, are indissociable from the force and clarity with which the *parergonal* problematic is thereby—that is, through scale and complexity—made manifest. They extend the work begun by *Pine Portal* and *Barrier*, the interrogation of “the discourse upon the frame” that marks Morris's enterprise as philosophical in its thrust.

That Morris was not alone in his problematization of the frame is strongly evident if we look at the work of contemporaries; it is, in fact, during the 1960s that work upon the frame seems to expand and to intensify. A particularly interesting case is that of Michael Snow, who undertook, in the early years of the decade, also under the aegis of Duchamp, a related project, elaborated across the various mediums—film, photography, sculpture, installation works, musical performance.

Snow's project, which continues to develop, begins with *Window* (1961), *Portrait* (1967), and *Blind* (1967). It is epitomized in two epoch-making films, *Wavelength* (1967) and *La Région centrale* (1974), in which the Bazinian polarities of spatiality (pictorial centripetality and filmic centrifugality) are explored through radical deployment of the optical tracking shot in the first instance and computerized camera movement in the second.<sup>25</sup> *8x10* (1969), described as “an essay on the multitude of ambiguities that can be generated by one framing device in a grid pattern,”<sup>26</sup> is composed of eighty still photographs of a frame subjected to the displacement of a camera that produces, through its framing and through lighting and variation of

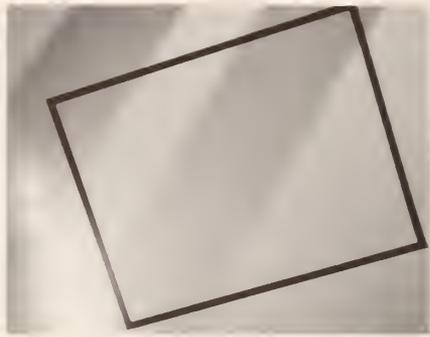
angle, effects of fragmentation, disorientation, and transformation.

In *Atlantic* (1967), Snow made a work of special interest in relation to this discussion of Morris's rethinking of the frame. In this piece, thirty photographs of the sea are set, in deep recess, within a thirty-unit grid, a primary structure of highly polished sheet metal, so that the images are reflected in the four surfaces that compose the obtruding frame of each photograph. The result is the superimposition of one continuous, flooding image that all but annuls the framing function of the grid. Here, the *ergonal* status of the image is challenged by a frame dynamized by size, scale, surface reflectiveness, and tridimensionality.

Snow's project is invoked as a major instance of work upon the frame, which intensified in the 1960s under the dual influence of Duchamp and John Cage, both of whom developed models for formal and institutional modes of framing, disframing, and reframing. But it relates as well, in its shuttling between forms of articulation, to Morris's own involvement in performance and film, to his acoustical installations, Earthworks, drawings, and written texts, as well as to his sustained production of sculpture and the painting to which he returns, a movement that is insistently transgressive in its disregard of the limits or boundaries of the single medium.

We will want, accordingly, to inquire as to the impulse behind this movement and, as a first step in that direction, to consider what, in particular, drives Morris's work on the frame. In so doing we return to the work of the 1980s by way of a detour through film-theory issues and definitions, for recent developments have complemented the foregoing theorization of the cinematic frame with an account of its inscription of desire.<sup>27</sup>

A first question regarding a subjectivity-effect of cinematic technique can set us on our path. Why, it has been asked, should the use of uncommon framings or angles be held, as indeed they are, to be more strongly expressive of subjectivity than the more commonly employed angles, those closer to the horizontal plane and, one might add, closer to traditional pictorial conventions? We do know that the uncommon angle sharpens the spectator's awareness of what has tended to be overlooked, the identification with the camera, with the author's viewpoint. For ordinary framings are not experienced as such, while “the uncommon angle reawakens me and . . . teaches me what I already know.”<sup>28</sup> Through change of angle, then, the spectator becomes directly aware of his or her own place as spectator within the cinematic event. One could, therefore, claim that the typically fetishistic position of the disavowing spectator (“I know very well [that this is only a film] but all the same . . .”<sup>29</sup>) is qualified, undermined, if only momentarily.



Michael Snow, *8 x 10*, 1969. Three black and white photographs from a sequence of eighty. Private collection.

To Bazin's insight as to the function of the frame (grounded as it is in phenomenological method), more recent film scholarship has thus brought the psychoanalytically informed sense of the inherently erotic valence of the cinema's framing device. Film plays upon the edges of the frame, involving censorship in the placing and displacing of a boundary that bars the look, that puts an end to the "seen." It, thus, produces an excitation of desire. It is in this sense that, despite its austerity with respect to narrative and, most generally, to human presence, Snow's film work may be said to be essentially erotic. "The way the cinema, with its wandering framings (wandering like the look, like the caress), finds the means to reveal space has something to do with a kind of permanent undressing, a generalised strip-tease, a less but more perfected strip-tease, since it also makes it possible to dress space again, to remove from view what it has previously shown, to take back as well as to retain."<sup>80</sup>

Here, then, is a rethinking of the cinematic frame that acknowledges the intensity of film's accommodation, through its technical potential and formal development, of "scotophilia," or pleasure in looking. It, thereby, sets in motion an analysis of the frame that complements both the phenomenologically based inquiry of Bazin and Derridian interrogation. It will, moreover, help to clarify the central role of Morris's work on the frame as it moves from the register of formal and material representation (as in *Pine Portal* or the cast Hydrocal of *Enterprise*) to that of symbolic articulation. For while the cinema, as in the example of Snow's work, represents one privileged instance among others of work on the frame, to consider the meaning of its problematization within Morris's trajectory is to entertain a view of film as forcefully expressive of a general, sustained, and multidirectional transgression, fueled by the scopic drive, of the boundaries, the framework, that which is off limits, that which was once forbidden to the child's view.

Scotophilia is, like its counterpart exhibitionism, subject to restriction and transformation. As an instance of the symbolic pleasure in looking, Freud cites the anticipation voiced by "simple-minded girls, after becoming engaged . . . reputed often to express their joy that they will soon be able to go to the theatre, to all the plays which have hitherto been prohibited and will be allowed to see everything."<sup>81</sup> Pursuing the analysis of this joy to its source, he writes: "The pleasure in looking, or curiosity, which is revealed in this was no doubt originally a sexual desire to look . . . directed towards sexual happenings and especially on to the girls' parents. . . . In this way going to the theatre became an obvious substitute, by way of allusion for being married."<sup>82</sup> This curiosity is, as Freud pointed out, regularly directed by children toward their parents' sexual life; it is an

infantile curiosity and, so far as it still persists later, an instinctual impulse with roots reaching far back.

Despite the general repression and sublimation later exacted (and the child's desire to know about the sexual organs and processes, not just to see them, is an indication of restraint already imposed), it is evident, as Karl Abraham proposed in his own study of scopophilia, that many important psychological phenomena owe their origin in part to this process. Among them would be the impulse toward investigation, observation of nature, pleasure in travel. To these he adds "the impulse towards artistic treatment of things perceived by the eye" and "the desire for knowledge."<sup>33</sup>

It is the conjunction of these latter two aspects of scopophilia that forms the core of Freud's study of Leonardo da Vinci,<sup>34</sup> his inquiry into the dynamics of the incessant, lifelong, gnostic pursuit across mediums, techniques, and disciplines documented by the artist in his *Notebooks*. It is, in fact, this sublimated form of desire, the "epistemophilia," or desire for knowledge, which is indissociable from scopophilia, that we may understand as generating the semiotic field within which Morris's recurrent meditation upon the frame—his material, textual, and symbolic re-enactment of disframing and reframing—takes place. It is the field within which Morris's textual production, his theoretical work, singular within his artistic generation for its acuteness and steadiness, is produced. Morris's view of Rodin's *The Gates of Hell*, in sharp contrast with Steinberg's, extends the line of analytic manifestos produced in the 1960s, the period of his Minimalist work. The discussion in his essay "Notes on Sculpture" of strong gestalt or unitary-type forms, for example, was directed at the logic of

Carl Dreyer, *Joan of Arc*, 1928. Still from black-and-white 35 mm film. Private collection.



Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane*, 1941. Still from black-and-white 35 mm film. Private collection.

related parts that characterized "retardataire Cubist aesthetics."

In 1962 (the year after *Pine Portal*), Morris made *I-Box* (no. 25), whose letter-shaped door swings open to frame his photograph, full length, "naked and grinning."<sup>1</sup> This work, which plays upon the *ergonal* / *parergonal* relation, is one manifestation, among many, of that exhibitionist dimension of Morris's work in performance and photography that awaits fuller study in relation to the voyeuristically grounded production that concerns me here. Such consideration would take account of the precedents set, once again by Duchamp, in performance (in the nude, in Francis Picabia's *Ciné Sketch* [1924]) and in photography, through the personae of Rose Sélavy and "Belle Haleine," among others.

The necessary condition of Morris's enterprise, the feasibility of both his practice and its theorization, is inscribed, from the beginning, in the openings effected within artistic production and its reception by the powerful challenge, issued in the 1960s, to the Modernist *doxa*—its agonistic ethos (the either/or of Abstract Expressionism) and its proscriptive aesthetic. Cage, in response to the epiphany granted him in the silence of Harvard University's anechoic chamber, impelled, by the sound—by the dictate—of his heart, had, in a movement analogous to Duchamp's, broken through the formal and institutional constraints of musical tradition to embrace and frame, in a spirit of radical ecumenicity, that vast found object, the World. In so doing, Cage claimed and cleared a space in which task, discipline, material, and method, newly defined, gave to specificity of artistic enterprise (a basic tenet of high Modernism) an infinitely wider field of operations, a logic more subtle and complex.

In this latitudinarian climate, which appeared to a Modernist critical establishment as a promiscuous confusion of realms, the emergence of performance art and of Minimalist sculpture were linked. For not only were mirror, frame, and screen enlisted as material elements within Morris's films and performance works, but one could understand the rearrangement in differing configurations of the forms in such works as the *L Beams* (1965, no. 2–3) or *Stadium* (1967, no. 71) as sculptural performances in time.

The assault launched by a Modernist critical establishment on "literalism" and "theatricality" thus had the aspect of a desperate defense by the sclerotic theoretical apparatus of a movement in decline, of a critical orthodoxy unequipped in its Symbolist-derived fetishization of "presentness" to deal with the polymorphic, polysemic renewal of temporally grounded artistic practice. Thus, the "good object" of Modernist *doxa* was defined as characterized by

*continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual 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. (Here it is worth noting that the concept of interest implies temporality in the form of continuing attention directed at the object, whereas the concept of conviction does not.) I want to claim that it is by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre.<sup>2</sup>*

The censoriousness of this assault signals that the introduction of temporality into spectatorship was indeed perceived as a transgressive channel and as a symbolic articulation of desire.<sup>3</sup> And such was undoubtedly the case both on the most general level and in relation to the individual work.

The "confusion of realms," driven by the impulse to dissolve the limits between supposedly discrete and autonomous mediums such as sculpture and theater, was promulgated within the single sculptural object by Morris's violation—through scale, neutrality of surface, and the strong gestalt of his Minimalist structures—of that barrier of virtual space within which critical tradition had framed the sculptural work.<sup>4</sup> It was this infraction that was to guarantee the "co-presence" of spectator and sculptural object (the latter understood as not less important but as "less self-important"), sponsoring that "co-presence" within a unified space.<sup>5</sup>

These infractions and transgressions, sustained and extended through three decades of theorized practice—of sculptural production, textually confirmed—we may now see as sustaining that problematizing of the frame that I have postulated as central to Morris's project. To recognize this necessarily entails our understanding of that project in its multiple forms—performance, film, acoustical installation, mirror and other installations, earthworks—as constitutive of a field that can be coherently read as a system of interrelated gestures, studies, and positions generated by the epistemophilic drive. And this field is to be construed, not symptomatically but semiotically. The hermeneutic of this project thus requires the acknowledgment of a generalized eroticization, in a consummately sublimated form, of an entire body of work.

1. Roland Barthes, quoted in Pierre Rosenstiehl, "The Doxécadédale, or 'In Praise of Heuristics,'" *October*, no. 26 (fall 1983), p. 25.

2. Robert Morris, "Fragments from the Rodin Museum," *October*, no. 3 (spring 1977), pp. 3–8.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5. Leo Steinberg, "Rodin," in *Other Criteria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 363.

6. Morris, "Fragments from the Rodin Museum," p. 3.

7. Steinberg, "Rodin," pp. 339–40.

8. Morris, "Fragments from the Rodin Museum," p. 4.

9. Morris returned to a consideration of *The Gates of Hell* in "Three

- Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides as Allegories (or Interruptions)," *Art in America* 77 (November 1989), pp. 142–51.
10. Morris, "Fragments from the Rodin Museum," p. 3.
11. A thorough reading of these works, of the manner in which they manifest a return to the Baroque as response to the threat of catastrophe suggests, indeed, their function as *Trauerwerke*, for which the model of analysis is provided by Walter Benjamin in his study of sixteenth-century Getman drama. See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977).
12. Buren's place within this development has been pointed out to me in conversation with Rosalind Krauss, to whom I am indebted for more than one helpful critical comment.
13. André Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," in *What Is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 164–69.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
15. *Ibid.*
16. For an analysis of this aspect of Bazin's ontology of cinema, see Annette Michelson, "What Is Cinema?" *Artforum* 6, no. 10 (summer 1968), pp. 67–71.
17. Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," in *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 16–147.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 45. Italics are in the original.
21. Bazin, "Painting and Cinema," p. 165.
22. See Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), p. 39.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
24. Maurice Betger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 49.
25. I have discussed these films in some detail in Michelson, "Toward Snow," *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971), pp. 24–42; and "About Snow," *October*, no. 8 (spring 1979), pp. 111–25.
26. Dennis Young, "Origins and Recent Work," in *Michael Snow: A Survey*, exhibition catalogue (Toronto: Gallery of Ontario and the Isaacs Gallery, 1970), unpaginated.
27. Recent psychoanalytically informed film theory is indebted to the pioneering study by Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, et al. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982). In the following discussion of the framing process, I have drawn, in particular, on pp. 54–55 and 75–77.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
29. This statement of disavowal is formulated by Octave Mannoni in *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* ([Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969], pp. 9–33) as epitomizing the fetishist's position defined on the basis of Sigmund Freud's 1927 essay "Fetishism." This latter essay is published in Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, vol. 5, ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1959), pp. 198–204. This formulation, although not uncontested, has gained fundamental status and widespread currency in the theorization of cinematic spectatorship.
30. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, p. 77.
31. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Pelican Freud Library, vol. 1, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richards, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 258.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Karl Abraham, "Restrictions and Transformations of Scopophilia in Psycho-Neurotics; with Remarks on Analogous Phenomena in Folk-Psychology," in *Selected Papers*, trans. Douglas Ryan and Alix Strachey (New York: Brunner, Mazel, 1979), pp. 169–234.
34. Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Alan Tyson (New York: Norton, 1964).
35. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 222–28.
36. Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 36.
37. For this passage, followed by a statement of "the need to defeat theatre," see Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967), reprinted in Battcock, p. 146. The metaphysical presuppositions that inform this view are analyzed in Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," pp. 19–23. For an analysis of the symbol and its claim to "presentness," see Benjamin's discussion of Friedrich Creuzer's "Mythologie," in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 163–67.
38. There exists a philosophical tradition, that of Hegelianism and its Lacanian extension, within which time is linked to desire. For explication of the Hegelian source, see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), especially "A Note on Eternity, Time, and the Concept: Complete Text of the First Two Lectures of the Academic Year 1938–1939," pp. 100–49.
39. Sources for the concept of sculptural "virtual" space include Chapter 6 of Suzanne Langer's *Feeling and Form* (New York: Macmillan, 1977; 1953); Bruno Adriani's *Problem of the Sculptor* (New York, 1943); and Adolf Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, trans. and rev. with the author's cooperation by Max Meyer and Robert Morris Ogden (New York, 1907).
40. See Mottis, "Notes on Sculpture," p. 234.

**WALL LABELS: WORD, IMAGE,  
AND OBJECT IN THE  
WORK OF ROBERT MORRIS**

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The appearance of Robert Morris's work in a major Guggenheim retrospective ought, one would think, to settle the question of his status. The label "Major Artist" may now be safely inscribed over the entrance to the exhibition, and the works may be safely labeled as masterpieces, no matter how unprepossessing they may look. All that remains is the packaging of Morris's work in a canonical history that will position him in the contexts of Modernism and post-Modernism, and unpack the meanings of his objects in the terms provided by post-Structuralist theories of art.

The wall label disturbed my sleep. It grew to threatening proportions, entwined itself around me, babbled in my ear, wrapped itself over my eyes. It was a tangled, suffocating shroud of seething words in my dream. But in dreams begin responsibility, as the insomniac poet said. Have I had a dream of warning? I get up edgy.<sup>1</sup>

It is a tribute to both the intransigence of the art-viewing public and the resilience of Morris's art that the packaging, labeling, and securing of both the Work and the works is not likely to proceed untroubled. More than any American artist of his generation, "Morris" (considered as the name of a total oeuvre) has managed to remain unpredictable, hard to classify, and difficult to label in the terminology of styles, artistic movements, and periods. And yet, if one had to produce a "representative" American artist for the period of the 1960s to the 1990s, one could hardly do better than Morris. One of the complaints about his work, in fact, is that it is *too* representative, that it merely holds up a mirror to the art of its time, working across all the genres of post-Modern artistic practice (Minimalist and Conceptual sculpture, performance art, land art, scatter pieces, felt works, painting, drawing, photography, readymades, image/text composites, Process works) without committing itself to any single mode or style.

Morris's work both invites and resists labeling, lending itself to instant (mis)recognition in terms of the generic labels endemic to post-Modernism, while refusing the overall label of the individual artistic style or "look." There is no way to identify "a Morris" by its visual appearance from across a room, no way to predict with any certainty what his new work will look like, and yet his work never seems to appear without inviting ready-made labels.<sup>2</sup> His turn in the late 1980s to works that look like monumental paintings (the Holocaust paintings [nos. 145–46] and *Firestorm* drawings [nos. 147–48]; the third series of *Blind Time* drawings; the *Investigation* drawings [nos. 149–51] and the associated series of large encaustic paintings on

aluminum) could hardly have been predicted from his previous work. Those who had defined Morris as a practitioner within specific mediums had grown used to labeling him as a sculptor, and (more importantly) as a sculptor who saw his medium as expressing concerns "not only distinct but hostile to those of painting."<sup>3</sup> The reaction of critics to this "shift" to painting was predictable. There was, on the positive side, a rush to certify his credentials as a painter by bringing out his early exercises in Abstract Expressionism.<sup>4</sup> On the negative side, he was accused (as so often before) of merely being an eclectic experimentalist and imitator of prevailing fashion. The large encaustic paintings, with their enigmatic stenciled texts, were seen as belated attempts to capitalize on the fashion for image/text composites pioneered by younger American artists in the late 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

My own insomnia begins. What have I previously ignored, not wished to think about? A mere wall label? An institutional excrescence, a blurb of public relations jargon, a mere supplement? Ah, there's the rub. Beware of supplements.

The problem of labeling Morris is, I want to suggest, not merely a pragmatic or curatorial issue concerned with the management of an unusually large and diverse oeuvre. Rather, it reflects a whole set of issues internal to Morris's work and characteristic of the shifting relation of art and language in the era for which he is such an apt representative. Morris has consistently been engaged not just with the elaboration of a verbal program that lies "behind" the art, as a theoretical scaffolding or prop for the objects, but also with the exploration of art itself as language, of the object or image as a complex intersection of the seeable, the sayable, and the palpable. Accordingly, in his writing and his art this intersection has consistently been staged, not as a settled boundary between words and images, words and objects, but as a site of play, anxiety, and disruption. The fact that we do not know what a Morris "looks like," that he offers no consistent visual style, is at once cause and consequence of the difficulty with labeling, the problem of mustering an adequate, much less authoritative, descriptive language for his work.

The wall label disturbed my sleep. It raises the insomniac's cold sweat. This wall label begins to throb with ambiguous threat, refusing its repressed status as linguistic blurb. This institutional, tautological annoyance slithers and coils in the shadows. It begins to grow larger

than the works proper in my dream galleries; a snarling, looming, hypnagogic presence.

This difficulty with labeling is, moreover, not simply a problem with Morris but reflects a central obsession of post-Modernism, which has itself consistently been labeled as the exploration of a new relation between art and language. Modernism—at least in Clement Greenberg's classic formulation—sought to evacuate language, literature, narrative, and textuality from the field of the visual arts.<sup>6</sup> Post-Modern art, not surprisingly, has been defined as the negation of this negation, “an eruption of language into the aesthetic field.” From a gridlike art of “purity” and opticality, expressing what Rosalind Krauss calls a “will to silence,”<sup>7</sup> we have (so the story goes) moved to an art of noise, discourse, and speechifying, characterized by impure, hybrid forms that either couple the visual and the verbal or erase the difference between image and text. The depurification of artistic opticality has been accompanied by a dethroning of the notion of the artist as the creator of an *original* image, a novel visual gestalt that bursts fully formed from the mind of the artistic “seer” to dazzle and fixate the spectator. In the place of this art of the purified and original image, post-Modernism has offered pastiche, appropriation, ironic allusion, an art addressed to spectators who are more likely to be puzzled than dazzled, and whose thirst for visual pleasure often seems deliberately thwarted.

Like all art-historical master narratives, this one is a myth, a compound of half-truths and oversimplifications that, nevertheless, has a certain power to frame the production and reception of art. It is a story to which Morris himself has contributed, both as narrator and actor, writer and artist.<sup>8</sup> It is, in short, a story whose historical effects must be reckoned with, even by those who want to resist them, or who want to situate this story in relation to larger, longer, or more nuanced histories. A larger historical frame, for instance, would ask us to consider the relation of this (mainly American) story of art to the fortunes of American culture in the era of the Cold War and the nuclear nightmare, a period that, at the very moment of this retrospective, seems now to be clearly “behind” us, replaced by the quite different concerns of a post-nuclear, post-Cold War “New World Order,” and the final victory of capitalism as a world system. A longer view would ask whether the changing relation of art and language central to post-Modernism was not already occurring in its basic forms in early European Modernism (notably in

Dadaism, Surrealism, and in the work of the various other historical avant-gardes).<sup>9</sup>

From this standpoint, the cult of visual purity and the will to silence might look more like a temporary aberration, an interlude associated with the removal of Modern art, especially abstract painting, from its European context into the purified spaces of the Museum of Modern Art. The “eruption of language into the aesthetic field” might seem less transgressive, and look more like the restoration of a basic condition of art, which has, after all, been impure for most of its history. A more nuanced view, finally, would have to address the ways in which the cults of both visual purity and visual/verbal hybridity intersect with transformations in visual and textual culture more broadly considered. If Greenberg's kitsch became the impure negative foil for his purist avant-garde at a certain cultural moment around World War II, we would have to notice that this dialectic between mass and elite culture takes on a variety of other forms in other places and times, both before and after the moment of high Modernist abstraction in the United States. However much Minimalism may have departed from the pictorialist and expressive tendencies of formal abstraction, there is no doubt that it continued this tradition in its search for purity and its aesthetic elitism. In this respect, Minimalist visual art, especially sculpture, seems quite antithetical to the decorative, patterned musical Minimalism of Steve Reich or Philip Glass. John Cage's “silence” provides the appropriate musical setting for Morris. Marcel Duchamp, not the mass media, provides the model for the hybrid visual/verbal character of his objects: “One foot in images, the other in language, this is the least immediate and most discursive form of art-making.”<sup>10</sup>

Now I am awake, yet the label refuses to shrink. Here beneath the dim lamp its rectangularity seems to pulsate, its language groans and threatens. This blot of words screeches and sobs and finally recedes to a menacing tell-tale tick of mumbling under the floor boards.

The relation of art and language, object and label, is one of the principal paradoxes of Minimalist sculpture. On the one hand, one is confronted by simple, spare, elemental, usually “untitled” objects that seem deliberately “inexpressive,” “deadpan,” and “inarticulate.”<sup>11</sup> What can objects labeled *Slab*, *Beam*, or *Box* say to us? What can we possibly say about them? The labels seem to say it all, to exhaust the object and the visual experience of the object. The whole situation of Minimalism seems designed to



**Card File**, 1962. Metal and plastic wall file mounted on wood, containing forty-four index cards, 27 x 10 1/2 x 2 inches (68.6 x 26.7 x 5.1 cm). Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



**Knots**, 1963. Painted wood and hemp rope, 5 1/8 x 15 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches (13.7 x 40 x 8.9 cm). The Detroit Institute of Arts

defeat the notion of the "readable" work of art, understood as an intelligible allegory, an expressive symbol, or a coherent narrative. On the other hand, Minimalism is often characterized as an unprecedented intrusion by language—especially critical and theoretical language—into the traditionally silent space of the aesthetic object. As Harold Rosenberg put it: "No mode in art has ever had more labels affixed to it by eager literary collaborators. . . . No art has ever been more dependent on words than these works pledged to silent materiality. . . . The less there is to see, the more there is to say." Even worse than the "literary collaborators" and the chatter of the ever-helpful critics, according to Rosenberg, is the fact that the Minimalist artists themselves became writers. All the traditional divisions of labor in the art language game were confused. The mute, inarticulate sculptor, who was supposed to make infinitely expressive images for the delectation of the infinitely receptive (and articulate) aesthete, has been replaced by the articulate sculptor who makes mute objects for a puzzled beholder.

Then with a certain trembling it strikes me, there is no such thing as a "mere wall label." The phrase ratchets through my feverish brain. This label, this mutter of slurred information has a secret ambition. No doubt about it, its aim is nothing less than dominating my images there on the wall. Its linguistic hysteria begins to erode the encaustic from my panels.

In one sense, this paradox has now been prematurely resolved by institutional art history. The canonization of Minimalism, the fixing of its label in the succession of twentieth-century styles, has now made these mute objects, once so strange and silent, seem full of memorable association and anecdote for those in the know. The writings and conversation of the artists, most notably of Morris—"the most subtle of the Minimalist dialecticians," according to Rosenberg<sup>1</sup>—have now become inseparable from the experience of the knowledgeable beholder. But what about the ignorant beholder, the one who walks into the gallery or museum cold, and experiences Minimalism as a shock of deprivation and disappointment? We can't even console ourselves that this shock is something like that of the original puzzled beholder (for example, Rosenberg) in the 1960s, because the context now is quite different. The jury is no longer out. The works have the authority of canonical labeling. If you don't get the point, it is a judgment on you, not on the works. What do we say to the innocent viewer now? What is the present availability of these works? Do they have any fate beyond canonization in a system of labels and myths?

The wall label has disturbed my sleep. I must get a grip on myself, or at least on the label. I must squeeze it back to its true ignoble



**Untitled.** 1984. Painted Hydrocal and pastel on paper, 65 1/2 x 84 3/4 x 8 inches (166.4 x 215.3 x 20.3 cm). Collection Sherry Fabricant.

proportions. But it is elusive as it gleams there in the dark with its Poe-like atmospherics of linguistic threat and verbal iconoclasm.

Morris himself seems unsure on this point, noting already in 1981 that Minimalism had run out of steam: "As the dialectical edge of Minimalism grew dull, as it had to in time, and as the radicality of its imagery, contexts or processes became routine, its options dwindled to a formula: use more space."<sup>15</sup> But Morris was only a drop-in Minimalist in the first place, albeit its most articulate spokesman. His interest from the beginning was much more complex and general than a desire to create a "look" within a style or movement. He had been concerned, like many artists of his generation, with nothing less than the philosophical task of art, the employment of sculpture—understood as a hybrid grafting of word, image, and object—as the vehicle for a reflection on art.<sup>16</sup> This makes Morris unpopular and impolitic. He is an "artist's artist," not in the usual sense of technical, stylistic virtuosity (despite his reputation as a perfectionist craftsman),

but in the depth of his intervention in the basic issues of aesthetics, particularly in the history of sculpture, in what Krauss aptly calls its "expanded" field.<sup>17</sup> Morris makes philosophical objects that need not have any *visual* family resemblance, no "look" that can be labeled. What they have in common is strictly *not* visible, *not* representable, and is difficult to label except perhaps as something like "philosophy." It is a body of questions and decisions, some rational, others arbitrary; a series of concerns, experiments, concepts, procedures, attitudes—in short, a discursive field or grid, like a card file, a catalogue of the considerations and topics that might come up in the making of an art object labeled *Card File* (1962, no. 26). This means his work is hard to consume, much less digest, at the level of visual pleasure. The objects don't even do us the courtesy of "illustrating" Morris's discourse in any straightforward way. One might think of his objects less as examples or illustrations than as *cases* to be opened, pondered, and (sometimes) closed,<sup>18</sup> specific word/image/object assemblages that, when successful,

exceed and explode (or incorporate) the labels that accompany them.

Show yourself in the light, wall label. Come out of the shadows of the gallery. But this protean linguistic monster hides behind the institutional leadenness of its prose.

In short, one actually has to do some hard thinking, some serious talking to oneself or a friend in the presence of this work. One has to understand the dialogue provoked by the objects in situ as part of what the works are. The objects take time, much more time than a label allows, certainly more time than we've got (though it is reported that Cage sat and listened for three and a half hours to the entire tape loop of *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* [1961, no. 11]). And this time is not a hermeneutic duration, a process of interpretation and description that leads to the hidden truth or meaning, but a movement from apparent order to a labyrinth of knots, unsolved problems, conundrums, and disagreeable absences.<sup>10</sup> As an emblem of this movement, one might consider Morris's *Knots* (1963, no. 51), a notched wooden bar with knots that displays a rational, machine-tooled object as the "support" for a chaotic tangle, or his various measurement pieces (pp. 134–41) that display the constructed, conventional, and arbitrary character of rational measurement.

Morris couples the purism of the abstract formalist tradition with the relentless, corrosive irony of Duchamp to produce a "rational," or at least "systematic," art that aims at perfect lucidity about the possibility that art and history (not to mention art history) might be nightmares from which we can never awake. Like Walter Benjamin, he asks us to contemplate his objects as "dialectical images," documents of civilization that insist on being seen simultaneously as documents of barbarism.<sup>11</sup> The cool, gray formalism of the polyhedrons and the chaotic anti-form of the scatter pieces are incompatible within the short circuit of "look" and "label," but rigorously connected within a dialectics of the object. Morris's "baroque" phase of *Firestorm* drawings and Holocaust paintings, made in the 1980s, is, at the level of "look" and "label," a regression to expressionist painting. And their look and scale is surely appropriate to a meditation on the monumentalization of death and annihilation in the 1980s, the decade of greed, Star Wars, and Reaganomics—the final glorious days of triumph over the "Evil Empire," the transition from the prospect of sudden nuclear catastrophe to slow environmental destruction. No wonder they look like ornaments suitable for Darth Vader's boudoir. They are not "expressions" of this period, however, but quotations of Neo-Expressionism framed within sculptural counterquotations. In these works, the sculptor confronts the painter, insisting on the *frame* as

an equal partner in the work "proper," not as a mere supplement or neutral setting for the picture. The Hydrocal frames, with their imprinted body parts and postholocaust detritus, stand as the framing "present" of the works, trophies or relics encrusted around the past event, the catastrophe that left behind the fossils in which it is enframèd. Frame is to image as body is to the destructive element, as present is to past. Or (to be literal about it), frame is to image as a remote possible future is to a less remote future. Someday, the works suggest, the past will be enframèd in a present that makes these works look natural.

The "knot" arises when one realizes that this future would be one in which these paintings could never exist. Morris makes them look as if they were meant to survive a nuclear holocaust, but he (and we) are well aware that survivors of such a scene would have little interest in his or anybody else's art. This is art for a possible future in which art would not exist, monuments to a time beyond monuments. They critique a world in which, as Benjamin put it, "mankind . . . can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order."<sup>12</sup>

An anonymous editorial comment appended to Morris's 1981 *Art in America* essay, "American Quartet," accused the artist/writer of ghoulishness and gloom in his meditations on the aesthetic monumentalizing of death and destruction. Drawing a relation between the words and images, the visual monuments and critical commentary in Morris's own essay, the editor's polemic located the artist's "cultural charnel house" in the present of 1981, not in some projected future:

*For it suggests the image of works we deem significant, those which elicit extensive critical interpretation and even merit perpetual reinterpretation, as some sort of cultural carcasses, swarming and half-buried with seething words which, like the movement of a mass of maggots, impart both a certain disgusting motion and transformation to dead things.*

The very structure of this art-critical hoax (the "editor" turned out to be Morris himself) epitomizes a typical Morris procedure. The essay is structured around the flagrantly Minimalist image of a table, whose four corners represent Morris's canonical "grid," his picture of the four major figures and tendencies of American art (Jackson Pollock's Abstract Expressionism, Duchamp's metasystems, Edward Hopper's mimetic realism, and Joseph Cornell's decorative surrealism): "Considered as a totality, the model suggested here has three distinct levels: the upper grid, like a table-top, which locates positions and orientations, the four key paradigmatic lines (or legs) which form foci and boundaries as well as indicate a vertical dimension of enduring traditions;

and at the roots of these traditions we pass into a theoretical realm."<sup>26</sup> Morris evokes the tradition of the *tavola* and Condorcet's notion of the historical/conceptual tableau, the classic rationalist device for spatializing a discursive totality, treating his "polygon" as a stage for art-critical gestures that mimic the characteristic gestures of its four "key points" or "lodestones." Thus, his own prose (as the outraged editorial commentary complains) "wander[s] around a great deal," like the tracks of Pollock; it portrays the artist in the "sealed space of alienation" in the style of Hopper; it stuffs the virtual "box" of its conceptual grid with fragments of the entire history of Modern art in the manner of Cornell. Then it turns, in the manner of Duchamp, and deconstructs the entire structure as "the ghoulish image of critics mumbling and chewing their dead artifacts on the table of commentary."<sup>27</sup>

Are you innocence, sincerity? Are you but a few simple guiding words, a soothing "orientation"? Ah, but I catch your sneer, your twitching suspect words, your double meanings, your dominating strategies disguised beneath your platitudes. You wish to triumph once again (endlessly and forever) over the imagistic. Your agendas are always hidden.

Morris's ambivalence about the adequacy of the visible form, then, does not imply either complacency or certainty about the place of philosophical language or critical discourse. You can't run from the objects to the labels or narratives provided by Morris' own writings. "American Quartet" is a self-devouring image/text; it eats itself alive. Neither the image nor the word nor the object can be relied on to stabilize experience or meaning. Perhaps it would be better to say that the stabilizing of relations among words, images, and objects is exactly what Morris's work tries to resist: "The only authenticity is one which has refused every identity conferred by an institution, a discourse, an image or a style, as well as every delight and oppression offered by that gulag called the autobiographical."<sup>28</sup> The rude blocks and beams of Minimalism are, in Morris's usage, neither allegories of cultural totalities nor figures of Platonic perceptual foundations<sup>29</sup>; they are better seen as something like the bricks that Ignatz Mouse hurls at Crazy Kat whenever K. K. utters some profound moral truism.<sup>30</sup> That is why Morris's Minimalist objects don't really reward an analysis that looks for phenomenological foundations as opposed to phenomenological *process* and contradiction. The choice of extraordinarily clear elementary polyhedrons, executed in specific materials at a precise scale in relation to the human body, is aimed at revealing the disjunctions in the perceptual process, not at establishing elemental foundations. As the viewer moves in relation to the object, or the object moves into new situations, its "open and neutral" shape undergoes infinite variation:

*Even its most patently unalterable property—shape—does not remain constant. For it is the viewer who changes the shape constantly by his change in position relative to the work. Oddly, it is the strength of the constant, known shape, the gestalt, that allows this awareness to become so much more emphatic in these works than previous sculpture. A Baroque figurative bronze is different from every side. So is a six-foot cube. The constant shape of the cube held in the mind but which the viewer never literally experiences, is an actuality against which the literal changing, perspective views are related. There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable. Such a division does not occur in the experience of the bronze.*<sup>31</sup>

The terms here go back at least as far as Plato's division between the "intelligible" and the "visible," and the question raised is how one is to distinguish a "provocative" or "dialectical" object—"things that are provocative of thought"—from things that are not. Plato's answer is that "provocative things . . . impinge upon the senses together with their opposites."<sup>32</sup> That is what makes them dialectical—that is, occasions for the experience of difference and contradiction, and thus provocations to dialogue. The staging of the object, its insertion into a space and an institutional context that invites aesthetic reflection, is, obviously, a necessary but not sufficient condition for the provocation to dialogue. The object itself—its specific materials, facture, lighting, color, orientation—offers factors that must be taken into account. Above all, its *scale* (especially in relation to the norm of the human body) invites "the intelligence . . . to contemplate," in Plato's words, "the great and small, not thus confounded but as distinct entities."<sup>33</sup> In Morris's terms, the goal is to explore the delicate intermediate realm "between the monument and the ornament," between the gigantic proportions of mass perception and the private sphere of intimacy, an in-between space that Morris consistently associates with a "public mode" of perception.<sup>34</sup>

Another way to define the delicate intermediate zone opened up by this sort of object is to ask exactly how valuable or important the object is, what sort of claims it puts on the beholder. It's clear, for instance, that Morris's polyhedrons are not unique objects, but material realizations of three-dimensional concepts, open to indefinite reproduction. Many of his Minimalist objects of the 1960s have been lost or destroyed, and have since been refabricated in other (often more expensive and durable) materials than the original plywood. The decision to recreate many of these objects in plywood for the Guggenheim retrospective, rather than to borrow the refabrications from the collections where they now reside, illustrates the peculiar chameleon quality of the pieces. On one hand, this choice would seem to reflect a certain historicist nostalgia for the "original" materials and



**Cloud** 1962 Painted plywood, 10 x 72 x 72 inches (25.4 x 182.9 x 182.9 cm).



**Slab**, 1962 Painted plywood, 12 x 96 x 96 inches (30.5 x 243.8 x 243.8 cm)

feel of the objects; on another, it cheerfully flouts the cult of the original by substituting mere copies that will certainly not be fabricated by the hand of the artist, negating the world with his Skilsaw. The materiality, visual presence, and autographic identity of Morris's works is not unimportant, but it is not everything. Of equal importance is their mobility, reproducibility, and textual pictorial legal identity in drawings, specifications, and considerations of "intellectual property." The object itself, as Morris put it in "Notes on Sculpture," "has not become less important. It has merely become less *self*-important" than traditional objets d'art are considered to be.

An early and relatively simple example may help to clarify these issues. The work called *Slab* (1962, no. 13) presents at least three disjunctive identities: (1) it is a literal object, a hollow square plywood box painted gray, eight by eight feet wide and twelve inches high; (2) it is an *image* of a slab, a hollow, painted simulacrum whose look and label suggests gray, stony solidity, not hollowness; (3) it is a work of art with a title, a provenance, a set of labels and descriptive terms for its materials, dimensions, construction, and placement, open to any number of refabrications and language games: traditional responses to form, beauty, and emotional association; the game of artspeak and historical labeling; the game of philosophical meditation on the relation of objects, images, and words. *Slab* is public in the sense that it is open to all these language games (and others as well). Or better yet, it is like a door into a public sphere, one that can be left closed and labeled with a look (like a rest room) or opened into a philosophical gaze and inquiry that may have no determinate outcome, no systematic payoff.

Read as a text rather than as a label, the word "slab" is the key that opens the object as a case of philosophical provocation. In particular, it opens the object to reflection on one of the most ancient and durable theories of the relation between language and objects, the theory that language itself is a system of labels, that

*individual words in language name objects — sentences are combinations of such names — In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.<sup>8</sup>*

This "picture of language" is so ancient and pervasive that it hardly needs the authority of Wittgenstein (or Saint Augustine, to whom Wittgenstein attributes it) to be a public commonplace. What *Slab* does, however, is to materialize this picture, to stage it for public reflection. Morris is following Wittgenstein's instructions to "imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right," a scenario

that might be likened to employing Minimalist sculptures as props in a performance piece.<sup>40</sup> In Wittgenstein's language game, the simple objects are imagined as functional elements in a practical activity:

*The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with build-stones; there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block," "pillar," "slab," "beam". A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language.<sup>41</sup>*

Wittgenstein then proceeds to demonstrate that the Augustinian model of the word as name or label for an object is radically incomplete, and that even in a primitive scene like the one he has imagined, the words do a great deal more than name or label the objects. They function in a language game, one in which the meanings of words are not given by the objects they designate but by their practical use in what Wittgenstein called "a form of life." *Slab* signifies, then, not just the object but something like "bring me a slab." It is a token in a system of exchange, a command, an index of a social relationship: "Is the call 'Slab!' . . . a sentence or a word?—If a word, surely it has not the same meaning as the like-sounding word of our ordinary language. But if a sentence, it is surely not the elliptical sentence: 'Slab!' of our language."<sup>42</sup>

Wittgenstein's language game turns "slab" from a label into an imperative declaration in a form of life we might call "work" (specifically, the social division of labor between a master builder and his workers). Morris's *Slab* is an invitation to transform a curatorial label into a perceptual and intellectual form of public work. The "work," therefore, does not encrypt its skill, time, and effort in the traditional model of the "case," whose inside/outside structure unites the "work of art" with the commodity fetish as a container of hidden value and meaning—what Marx called "congealed labor power" and Freud diagnosed as the fetishism of objects concealing the labor of the unconscious.<sup>43</sup> It is better described in the terms of Freud's "uncanny," that is, as a "case" that is simultaneously strange and familiar.<sup>44</sup> We do not stand in fixated admiration of Morris's "work" (either his object, or its significance as a trace of his skill, time, and labor) but find ourselves placed in relation to the object as a coworker, a potential collaborator. The work (both the object and its making) is disseminated, made exoteric and public, even "broadcast," as, for example, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*. In this case, the work is not aiming at self-reference to the

artist's ego, his autobiography, or even his objects, but a decrypting of the hidden "creative process" that parodies the cult of secrecy associated with Romantic expressive creation and the associated production of cult objects.

Morris's *Slab* (as word, image, or object) does not tell us what to do: its grammatical mood is interrogative, not imperative. It invites the contemplation of a simple, primitive object in relation to a straightforwardly unambiguous label, the Augustinian model of the relation between words and things, language and the world. This work can be invisible, effortless, and reassuring: there is the object, there is the label, perfectly coordinated, end of story. But the slightest hesitation exposes the beholder to a labyrinth of knots. If *Slab* is an expression in a language game, should we translate it as "this is a slab" or as "this is *Slab*"? Is *Slab* a proper name or a generic label? Is the object it refers to a type or a token, a unique individual work or a concept to be replicated in an indefinite series of objects? Is this object (whether type or token) really "simple," and are "simples" what names really designate?<sup>45</sup>

*But what are the simple constituent parts of which reality is composed?—What are the simple constituent parts of a chair?—The bits of wood of which it is made? Or the molecules, or the atoms?—"Simple" means: not composite. And here the point is: in what sense "composite"? It makes no sense at all to speak absolutely of the simple parts of a chair.<sup>46</sup>*

The rejection of "composite" objects, the construction of a sculpture without syntax, that is, with no internal relations of parts, in favor of simple elementary forms is generally taken to be the central program of Minimalism. The real point of this program, however, is not to reify a notion of the absolutely simple but to explore the complexity and compositeness of the simple, to crack the atomic structure of both common sense and rational positivism.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps, then, we should translate the simple word "slab" as a Wittgensteinian imperative like "look at this slab and say the word aloud or to yourself," or as a series of Wittgensteinian questions: "How do you see this object? What do you see it *as*? What does the name have to do with what you see?" In either case, the "translation" of the label is clearly not the end of the process, not the solution to a puzzle or allegory. It is only the opening move in a language game that has no determinate outcome. (Cage went to the show where *Slab* was first exhibited and reported that he didn't see any works of art in the gallery, just a slab on the floor.) Wittgenstein urges us not to be troubled by the simple, primitive, and incomplete character of this kind of game:

*If you want to say that this shows them to be incomplete, ask yourself whether our language is complete:—whether it was so before the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus were incorporated in it: for these are, so to speak, suburbs of our language. (And how many houses or streets does it take before a town begins to be a town?) Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods: and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.<sup>18</sup>*

Are Morris's Minimalist objects better seen as the post-Modern suburbs of the language game of art, or as primitive building blocks deployed in its oldest districts, provocatives to the ancient questions about words, images, and objects posed by Plato and Augustine? Such questions might also be thought of as a translation of what it means to say "slab?" in the presence of this object.

In retrospect, then, the attempts to divide the work of Morris and the Minimalists from traditional forms of art by using categories like "literalness" and "figurality" and "objecthood" versus "artifice" begin to look more like temporary rhetorical strategies than durable categories. As so often in the history of art, the new is defined as a negation of the old, and both the acceptance and the refusal of the new are expressed in exactly the same terms, with the valences of value reversed. Both the indictment of Minimalism (chiefly by Fried in "Art and Objecthood") and its canonization by defenders of the American 1960s avant-garde are conducted in the language of an absolute break with the past, an undialectical negation of a reified "tradition." This is not to say that there was nothing new, original, or transgressive about Minimalism, but that the terms in which its newness might best be articulated are still open to inquiry, and are not to be settled by a merely historicist recapitulation of the debates of the 1960s and the so-called "verdict of history." The objects themselves are now in a new situation, awakening to find themselves somewhere near the end of "post-Modernism," if that word has any meaning as the designation of a period. Their provocativeness today cannot be what it was in the 1960s, though it cannot be separated from it either.

The provocation of *Slab* runs all the way from the historical situation of its first production and reception to its current exhibition in a blockbuster show, where (one hopes) it will continue to burst various kinds of mental blocks. Another kind of language game that might be played with *Slab* and its brethren would reflect on their position within the history of sculpture, the relation between machine and hand-made objects, and the importance of the base. In a very real sense, Morris is asking us to look at the foundations of sculpture *as* sculpture: the plinth or

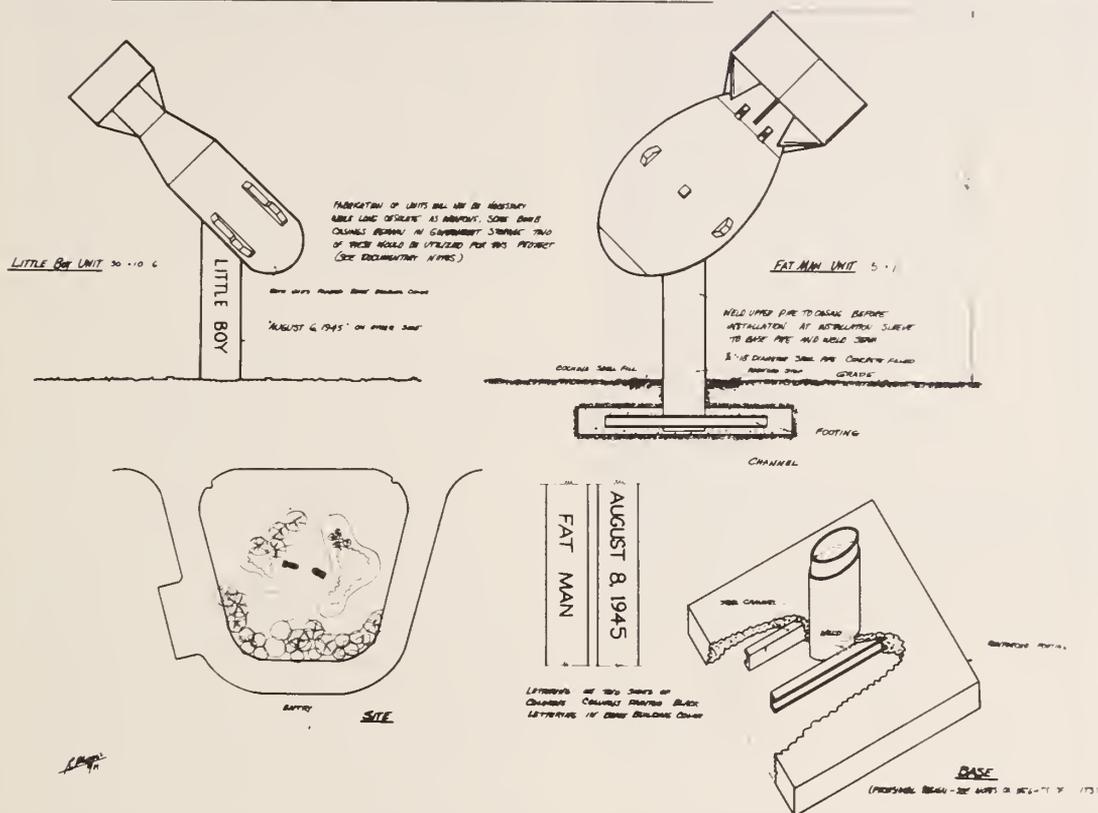
pedestal—which is sculpture's equivalent of a frame—is itself put on display. Perhaps, like the monolith in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Morris's slab is an extraterrestrial teaching machine whose shutting aspects can now be switched on. Its simplicity, blankness, and muteness are inseparable from, yet antithetical to, its eloquence, wit, and complexity. Its rational purity and radical renunciation are inseparable from its flirtation with scandal, fraud, and boredom (at least in relation to traditional notions of artistic propriety, authenticity, and aesthetic interest). Insofar as the label "Minimalism" provides a way to stabilize the object, to enframe it ideologically, to deny boredom and demand interest, to defeat skepticism and compel conviction, it dulls the edge of the dialectical image presented by the object, and Ignatz's brick misses its mark.

In the light you seem so small there on the wall and straightforward in your brief rectangularity and nearly prim in your crisp paragraphs. You wish to appear luminous with the innocence of your cogent facts.

Perhaps the best indication of Morris's desire to keep his objects free of Minimalist doctrine, to keep the shuttle in motion, is his insistence on a certain intermediate scale between the private and the public work, the intimate and the monumental. The exhaustion of Minimalism came, in his view, when it seemed to have nowhere to go but up and out: "As the radicality of its imagery, contexts or processes became routine, its options dwindled to a formula: use more space."<sup>19</sup> This is why Morris finds the employment of a Minimalist vernacular in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial so offensive, for the VVM is, in his view, a one-sided, nondialectical appropriation of the vanguard style of the 1960s to bandage a wound that would better be kept open: "Could there ever be a more ingenious act of substituting private grief for public guilt? Has political criminality ever been more effectively repressed than by this weeping wound to the will of the critical? Has there ever been a more svelte Minimal mask placed over governmental culpability?"<sup>20</sup>

Morris's own work has, in general, been devoted to procedures of unmasking, which means that it has to both construct and remove various kinds of masks—the labels affixed to objects, the fetishistic character of images and visual pleasure, and (most fundamentally) the mask of the "object itself," the notion of the irreducibly elemental thing. His proposed sculptural tribute to the veterans of World War II was a piece of ready-made Minimalism, the casings of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, which were to be installed in the plaza of a Florida Veterans Administration hospital. The proposal was doubly decorous in its evocation of tradition and populist American ideology: what more appropriate war memorial than the weapons

SCULPTURE PROPOSAL - VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL - BAY PINES, FLORIDA



Sculpture Proposal—Veterans Administration Hospital—Bay Pines, Florida, 1981. Ink on Mylar, 38 x 42 inches (96.5 x 106.7 cm). Collection of the artist.

of the last war (cf, the cannon on the courthouse lawn)? What more appropriate image for a veterans hospital than the objects that (we are told) “saved American lives” in World War II? There is even a certain ironic aptness in the perfect fit of these hollow casings with the traditional hollowness of Minimalist sculpture, and Morris’s own habit of treating the object as what I have called a “case” rather than as an example or illustration. But these cases/casings offer the sort of mask that can slip off all too easily, revealing the merry wink and the death’s-head grin beneath to representatives of a public that wants its memorials to erase guilt and historical memory. *Sculpture Proposal—Veterans Administration Hospital—Bay Pines, Florida* (1981) remains in the archive of rejected proposals, a time bomb just waiting to go off.

Morris’s early Minimalist pieces may now be, in the space of a retrospective, bombs that have already gone off, or that have been defused by the labels of canonization and art-historical explanation. Once one “gets the concept” of *Slab* or *Beam* (1962), we must

ask, what need is there actually to *look* at the pieces? Hasn’t their material and visual presence been made superfluous by the welter of discourse that surrounds them? Don’t we already know, as a staple of everyday common sense, that simple polyhedrons take on different appearances from different angles? Why do we have to look at *these* constructions to test or confirm that knowledge? What might we learn by actually beholding *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* that isn’t already contained in its label and what might be inferred from it? We can certainly understand this object’s parodying of the expressionist Action Painting aesthetic without ever actually seeing it.

The occasion of a retrospective is, in Morris’s case, a thoroughly experimental event, for we cannot know the answers to these questions beforehand. Insofar as the blockbuster show has become a mass-cultural spectacle in recent years, an occasion for rapid consumption of vast quantities of visual pleasure, these objects will not feel comfortable, either with themselves or their beholders. What’s to see? What’s to



*I-Box*, 1962 (open view). Painted plywood cabinet covered with Sculptmetal, containing photograph, 19 x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (48.3 x 32.4 x 3.5 cm). Collection Leo Castelli.

like? The audience has to do all the work. And what sort of perceptual or intellectual work can it be expected to do, trooping through in busloads, listening to taped commentaries, swimming toward the wall labels like so many life preservers? Morris's work may simply serve as a reminder of the austere elitism that divides certain kinds of art from mass culture. As a "historical" figure defined by the label of Minimalism, he represents an aspect of the 1960s that many of us missed, bedazzled by Pop and Op. The audience may feel reproached, the critics defensive.

You are the paragon of gentleness as you tell them what to think. You proto and pre-critical patch of writing. You totalitarian text of totalizing. You linguistic grenade. You footnoteless, illustrationless, iconoclastic epitome of generic advertising. You babbling triumph of the information byte. You, labelless label, starved and washed and swinging that swift and fatal club of "education" to the head.

The blockbuster show is supposed to provide artistic fetishes and totems that can be inserted into mass circulation—that is, objects that acquire "aura" through their incarceration in the gulag of the artist's or beholder's autobiography (the source of fetishistic "mimacy") or through their monumentalization as the sacred totems of mass culture. Morris's work consistently steers between these alternatives, seeking the delicate situation of the philosophical object, a

dialectical image/text that is materialized in a specific constructed thing, with a relation to specific human bodies in a particular situation. This delicate situation is also something like a public sphere, in the sense of an open, relatively uncoerced speech situation. The only way I know of conveying this sense of Morris's openness is to dwell on a few specific, perhaps typical objects in a relatively common language. (I've suggested that Wittgenstein's vocabulary and his willingness to pause over the obvious is an appropriate, though by no means exclusive, model.)

*I-Box* (1962, no. 25), for instance, activates an infinite, labyrinthine circuit among the elementary questions: What is an image? What is a word? What is an object? What sort of creature weaves its world, and its model for itself, out of this specific assemblage: a box with a door shaped like the letter *I*, a photographic image of the maker of the box naked behind the door? The first gesture of the opened box is to flaunt the impasse of the short circuit, the joke that is too obvious, the puzzle that is solved without effort, as easy as opening a door. Like René Magritte's *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1928), it invites us to say, "of course," or "so what?" and move on. Magritte's pipe is only an image, not an object. *I-Box* is even simpler. It doesn't even offer a paradoxical gesture like Magritte's "contradiction" between the words and the image. Morris's image of himself naked is unequivocally labeled by the word "I." Word and image are apparently redundant, capturing the self in a double cipher.<sup>22</sup> As David Antin puts it, "You don't know anything you didn't know before. . . . Everything that is revealed is concealed."<sup>23</sup> But *I-Box* is also like Magritte's pipe in insinuating a hesitation: is there not something more?

The answer, of course, is that there is as much more as an observer is willing to invest. If one takes *I-Box* as a *case* for meditation on the fundamental elements it isolates for attention (not merely as an example to be labeled "artistic self-reference"), one risks being lost in a labyrinth of questions. What is the word "I" that it makes sense used in this way? What sense does it make in this case? Does it actually *refer* to something, or to someone? To the photographic image of Morris, or to the body to which the image refers, or to the box in which it serves as a door and a proper name? If it is a label, to what does it apply? What model of the relation between words, images, and objects does this little assemblage construct?

We might begin by interrogating the "I" of *I-Box*, noting that the equivocal character of its reference (to the artist, to the artist's image, to the box) straightforwardly illustrates the impossibility of fixing the reference of the "I." The "I" has no firmer relation to the invisible "self" or visible body of the artist than it does to the box or to the material shape of an I-beam. It is revealed as what linguists call a "shifter,"

an indexical sign whose referent can only be determined in the context of a specific speech situation (thus, the first person designates the speaker, the second person the listener or addressee).<sup>54</sup> Like the words "here" and "now," its meaning shifts with time and the flow of discourse, the give and take of conversation. The word "I," in short, is like a door, swinging on the hinge of dialogue, now open to use by anyone, now closed by someone's appropriation of it to him- or herself. When the door of *I-Box* is closed, its reference is open, unfixed; when the door is open, its reference closes in on and frames the image of the artist.

Is *I-Box* merely an example or illustration of a linguistic commonplace then? Or does its materiality and visual presence make it a *case* of self-reference, a kind of metapicture of a whole language game?<sup>55</sup> A better question might be: what kinds of mind-language-perception games can be played with this object? I would suggest four: (1) a fort-da game of concealment and revelation of a "self," a peek-a-boo game as simple as the opening and shutting of an "I/Eye," a shuttling between privacy and publicity, the secret and the disclosure; one that seems to show everything (the naked photographic truth) and nothing (the empty verbal sign) in rapid succession; (2) a game of allusions to genres and prototypes within the mediums of painting, sculpture, and photography—the linkages of this object with self-portraiture, pornography, and scandal; with surveillance (it looks like a police photo); with the encrypting of sacred icons and fetishes in protective niches, arks, tabernacles, or casements—in this case, wood encased in gray metal; with the calligraphic tradition of the letter as work of art, the historiated initial, fusing the body with the verbal sign of what hides inside the body—a self that can say "I," inside a body enframed as the written character *I*; (3) a game of metaphors, analogies for the way we think of the self, and of the body, as an inside-outside structure, with the senses (especially the eye) conceived as apertures or thresholds like windows and doors; the relation of visual and verbal signs, showing and speaking, seeing and reading, to a self that speaks and writes versus the self that displays itself and looks back; (4) a game of "signifying," in which a whole set of pieties about art and the self (and the selves of artists) are mocked and parodied: the fetishism of the art object as an effluence of its divine creator is laid bare, the tabernacle is opened and desecrated. *I-Box* mocks a form of life in which we talk of the self as an invisible presence concealed behind a wall, hidden inside a hollow case or body. Wittgenstein argued that "the human body is the best picture of the human soul."<sup>56</sup> Morris literalizes this claim, opening the case to show us that inside there is nothing but another outside. The label on the surface conceals nothing but another surface to trap the look.

What does it mean that this inner surface is a naked male body, displaying its manhood and wearing a facial expression that can only be described as "cocky"? How would it change the meaning of *I-Box* if it revealed a naked female body? A full consideration of these questions would take us into a whole new essay on the language games of gender as an intersection of body, image, and label in Morris's art. One might begin such an inquiry by noting that most of Morris's works seem designed to neutralize all traces of autobiography and personal identity, to treat the sexually labeled body of both the artist and the beholder as a theatrical role or a site of experimentation. And yet his work could hardly be described as gender neutral, insofar as the contingent fact of his own gender and the historical gendering of the artistic role are irreducible material and cultural givens, like the materials of wood, photographic paper, and Sculptmetal.<sup>57</sup> Certainly Morris's "cockiness" in *I-Box* can be read as a parodic mockery of the phallic male genius that had become institutionalized by Abstract Expressionism, just as *Slab* mocks the subordination of the sculptural support to the phallic verticality of the statue. (Compare, in this regard, Morris in fascistic S&M getup in the scandalous poster [no. 125] for his 1974 Leo Castelli Gallery exhibition, and his performance piece *Site* [1964, no. 63], which staged Carolee Schneemann as Manet's Olympia, with Morris playing the role of Minimalist stagehand.) Along with Cage, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and the emergent American avant-garde of the 1960s, Morris seems consistently to undermine the notion of a foundational identity in gender, and to treat sexual categories as labels that circulate in the exchanges of bodies, images, and discourses.<sup>58</sup>

In the fall of 1990, Morris had a nightmare about a wall label. His account of this nightmare has been a counterpoint to my own attempt to write about his work without relying on labels. I don't offer the text of this dream as the unique key to Morris's meanings or as the occasion for any psychoanalytic decoding of his work. In fact, I'm very skeptical about the authority of this dream. It strikes me as flagrantly literary, with its echoes of Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" and the scene of Eve's temptation in Milton's *Paradise Lost* ("it babbled in my ear"). It is the sort of dream one makes up (perhaps unconsciously) for one's analyst. The simultaneously phallic and labial images associated with the label (it "entwines" itself, "slithers and coils in the shadows," and "seems to pulsate" like an uncontrollable erection that Morris must "get a grip on"; yet it is devouring, locquacious, "prim," and "chaste") suggest a highly conscious fantasy about a Medusa-like phallic female whose "aim is nothing less than dominating my images there on the wall." The particular images that Morris refers to in this dream are the encaustic-on-aluminum panels he executed in the spring and summer of 1990



**Untitled**, 1974 (poster for *Voice*).  
Offset lithograph, 36 1/4 x 23 7/8 (93.3 x  
60.6 cm). Collection of the artist



**Site** 1964 Morris and Carolee  
Schneemann in performance at Stage  
73, Surplus Dance Theater, New York.

and first exhibited at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, in Washington, D.C., in December of that year. Morris suspects that the label's "linguistic hysteria" will "erode the encaustic from my panels."

It is regrettable that this series does not appear in the Guggenheim retrospective, if only because these paintings, produced under the foreshadowing prospect of a major retrospective, are themselves a retrospective not only of Morris's own artistic career but of the fortunes of art and language, the look and the label, in what Arthur Danto has called this "Post-Historical Period of Art."<sup>10</sup> The paintings are very much of a piece with the Gothic phantasmagoria of Morris's nightmare, employing gloomy, lurid colors and an iconography that evoke a range of art-historical references from Mantegna's *Dead Christ* (after 1466) to Holbein's anamorphic skull (1533) to Goya's *Black Paintings* (1816). Most notable, however, are the texts that have been stenciled onto the surface of the images. Like the wall labels of Morris's dream, they are "elusive as [they] gleam there in the dark with its Poe-like atmospherics of linguistic threat and verbal iconoclasm." Morris's command to "show yourself in the light, wall label" has not been heeded, even in his own paintings. The letters swim in and out of legible focus, refusing either to disappear or to come into the light to explain the images.

We can, of course, label the labels on these paintings as references (along with the encaustic medium) to Johns's employment of stenciled lettering in his early paintings, just as we can label virtually every image in the paintings as an allusion to some art-historical or popular source. In conversations with Morris about these pieces at the time of their production, however, it became clear to me that he was indifferent to the identification of sources as keys to meaning, that, in fact, he had forgotten many of them himself. The immediate subject of the paintings is the process of artistic retrospection itself, more specifically the relation between image, object, and label in memory. The first thing one notes about Morris's labels is that many are almost unreadable; the second is that they are almost uninterpretable. The labels do not *label* the images; they only look like labels, functioning more like stray bits of associative language that (like the elusive pictorial allusions) flicker in and out of verbal recognition. It's impossible even to label the labels as some single, generic type of verbal expression: they include proverbial sayings reminiscent of the titles of Goya's enigmatic *Caprichos* of 1797–98 ("Rotten with Criticism," "Memory Is Hunger"); Nietzschean echoes ("Slave Morality"); fragmentary descriptions of states of being ("Inability to Endure or Deny the World"); associative puns ("Horde/Hoard/Whored"); and fantastic verbal collages like the conflation of the transcript of Dutch Schultz's death ravings with phrases from Jacques Derrida, appended

as the "text" to a recognizable rendering of Mantegna's *Dead Christ*.

These text/image composites may be *nearly* unreadable, but, of course, we do finally read them; their obscurity invites interpretation, and I have no doubt that future scholars will drag both the images and their labels into the light of art-historical analysis. When that is done, however, my hunch is that everything revealed will remain concealed (not that this devalues the process of revelation). Take as an instance one of the more transparent compositions in this series, the magnificent tribute to Pollock entitled *Monument Dead Monument/Rush Life Rush* (1990). This painting is based on the famous Hans Namuth photograph of Pollock at work. Morris has doubled the Namuth image and assembled it as a vertical diptych, the upper and lower panels appearing as inverted, mirror images of one another. The lower (upside-down) panel is more clearly delineated, the upper having been subjected to heat, which caused the encaustic to melt on the aluminum support, blurring the contours of the image. The mirrorlike, vertical (a)symmetry of the images is matched laterally by the labels that run up and down its margins: on the left, "Monument Dead Monument" ascends; on the right "Rush Life Rush" descends.

What tribute does this painting pay to Pollock, the man who has been called "the greatest American painter of the twentieth century," the painter whose work had a decisive influence on Morris's earliest work, and the epitome of the expressionist aesthetic against which early Minimalism set its face? A highly equivocal tribute, I should say, one that refers us back to—even re-enacts—the original pouring process of Action Painting, the figure of the artist merging with his art, his life rushing out in paint, at the same time as it refers us back to the monumentalizing of this process into an artistic dead end—the myth of the macho expressionist creator whose private fetishes become public totems. Morris's picture is like a hall of verbal/visual mirrors in which the reflected object is the genesis, production, reproduction, and consumption of art itself. The asymmetry of this artistic life cycle, its tendency to "advance" by processes of devolution and negation, remembering, forgetting, and disremembering, is articulated verbally by the labels, visually by the dissolving reflection that surmounts the more focused "original," and materially by the processes enacted in the object. If Pollock showed us that the primary material fact about paint is that it pours, Morris shows us that the primary material fact about wax (encaustic) is that it melts. What we are left with is neither merely a tribute to Pollock's rushing life, nor a sardonic commentary on his subsequent monumentalization, but a vision of the birth and death of a monument, its vital origin, its fixing as a



**Improvident, Determined . . . , 1990.** Encaustic on aluminum, 11 feet 11<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches x 7 feet 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (3.64 x 2.41 m). Collection of the artist.

memorable icon, and its melting down in forgetfulness and chaotic oblivion.

These retrospective paintings look radically different from most of the sculptural productions that will enjoy pride of place in the Guggenheim retrospective. But their deepest concerns are all of a piece with the earlier work. They share the same concern for investigating the identity of the work of art as a nexus of vision, language, and objecthood. They seek to occupy the same precarious threshold between form and anti-form, between the private fetish and the public totem. Above all, they play the same game of philosophical provocation and psychopoetic experimentation that has characterized Morris's work from the first. We would not be far wrong in calling them "conversation pieces," occasions for debate on a whole series of artistic and nonartistic issues, from the nature of looking at and labeling objects, to the historical character of artistic production, to the institutional history and discourse that makes these conversations possible. On the "issues of the day," whatever they will be in the winter of 1994, these works will be almost inaudible and unreadable, like the gray paintings Morris executed in



PLEASE MAKE IT QUICK, FAST AND FURIOUS YOU GET AHEAD WITH THE OOT AND DASH SYSTEM OH MAMMA I CAN'T GO THROUGH WITH IT  
PLEASE I WILL CHECK AND BE DOUBLE-CHECKED AND PLEASE PULL FOR ME I HAD NOTHING WITH HIM HE WAS A COWBOY IN ONE OF THE  
EVEN DAYS A WEEK FIGHT YEAH OKAY NOTHING TO BE SAID AGAINST THE LAWS WHICH GOVERN THIS PROBLEMATIC NO FRIENDS NOTHING  
JUST WHAT YOU PICK UP AND WHAT YOU NEED OH GO AHEAD THAT HAPPENS FOR CRYING I DON'T WANT HARMONY I WANT HARMONY OH  
MAMMA MAMMA NO THERE WERE ONLY TEN OF US AND THERE ARE TEN MILLION FIGHTING SOMEWHERE IN FRONT OF YOU SO GET YOUR  
HONS UP AND WE WILL THROW UP THE TRUCE FLAG I SAY TO THEM AND TO YOU, MY BELOVED THIS IS MY BODY AT WORK OH PLEASE  
T ME UP LED LED' OH YEAH SURE IT IS NO USE TO STAGE A RIOT THE SIDEWALK WAS IN TROUBLE AND THE BEARS WERE IN TROUBLE  
ID I BROKE IT UP LOVE ME ANALYZE THE CORPUS THAT I TENDER TO YOU THAT I EXTEND ON THIS BED OF METAL PLEASE OH MAMMA  
THAT IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULDN'T BE SPOKE ABOUT PLEASE I MAY TAKE ALL EVENTS INTO CONSIDERATION NO NO AND IT IS NO IT IS  
INFUSED AND IT SAYS NO A BOY HAS NEVER WEPT NOR DASHED A THOUSAND KIM SORT OUT THE QUOTATION MARKS FROM THE HAIRS  
OM HEAD TO TOE THANK YOU SAM YOU ARE A BOILED MAN I DO IT BECAUSE YOU ASKED ME TO PLEASE LOOK OUT IT WAS OESPER  
E AMBROSE A LITTLE KID THEY WON'T LET ME UP THEY DYE MY SHOES AND IF YOU LOVE ME ENOUGH YOU WILL SEND ME SOME  
WS I KNOW WHAT I AM DOING HERE WITH MY COLLECTION OF PAPERS FOR CRYING OUT LOUD IT ISN'T WORTH A NICKLE TO TWO  
YS LIKE YOU OR ME BUT TO A COLLECTOR IT IS WORTH A FORTUNE OK OK I AM ALL THROUGH I CAN'T DO ANOTHER THING  
MAMMA MAMMA THEN YOU WILL BURY ME IN ORDER TO SLEEP PEACEFULLY COME ON MAX OPEN THE SOAP DUCKETS TALK TO THE  
PRO LET THEM LEAVE ME ALONE YOU WILL FORGET ME ME AND MY NAME

Prohibition's End or the Death of Dutch Schultz 1989

Encaustic on aluminum, 97 1/2 x 71 1/2 inches (248.6 x 182.2 cm)

Collection of the artist

1963 on newspapers covered with headlines about the Cuban Missile Crisis. On the fundamental questions of what art is for, what it might attempt, and what our relation to it might be, they may be bombs refused by popular disrespect, bricks flying in the night toward an unknown destination.

1. Robert Morris, entry from unpublished *Dream Journal*, October 28, 1990. All further extracts set in sans serif type are from the same source.
2. One notable exception to this generalization might be Morris's use of flat gray paint on the Minimalist objects of the 1960s. As David Antin notes, this gray became "a signature and to that extent, perhaps, somewhat independent of any individual work, like Newman's stripes" ("Art & Information, 1: Grey Paint, Robert Morris," *Art News* 63, no. 8 [April 1966], p. 56). At the same time, the paradoxical implications of using a neutral color like gray as a signature of a personal style can hardly be ignored. The noncommittal character of grayness is more like a mask for any personal identity, a kind of coloristic "John Doe" signature that signals Morris's refusal to underwrite his works with claims to authentic or personal self-revelation.
3. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artsforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 223.
4. See Barbara Rose, "The Odyssey of Robert Morris," and Terrie Sultan, "Inability to Endure or Deny the World," in *Inability to Endure or Deny the World*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), pp. 6–10 and 11–23, respectively.
5. See Roberta Smith, "A Hypersensitive Nose for the Next New Thing," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1991, sec. H, p. 33.
6. See Clement Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoön" (1940), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 23–37.
7. Craig Owens, "Earthwords," *October*, no. 10 (fall 1979), pp. 125–26.
8. Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 8.
9. See Morris's essay "Words and Images in Modernism and Postmodernism," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (winter 1989), pp. 337–47; and W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (winter 1989), pp. 348–71, for a discussion of this history.
10. See Morris's discussion of writer/artists like Gabo, Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian, who, he writes, "contributed to a growing body of theoretical texts, some in the form of manifestos, which grew up alongside the material production of the images. . . ." ("Words and Images in Modernism and Postmodernism," p. 341).
11. Morris, "American Quartet," *Art in America* 69, no. 10 (December 1981), p. 104.
12. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), pp. 236, 199.
13. Harold Rosenberg, "Defining Art," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 1967, reprinted in Battcock, p. 306. See also, Michael Fried's characterization of the Minimalist object as "literalist" (understood as a hypostasization of objecthood) and dependent upon an "ideological" position, "one that can be formulated in words, and in fact has been formulated by some of its leading practitioners" ("Art and Objecthood," *Artsforum* [June 1967], reprinted in Battcock, pp. 116–17).
14. Rosenberg, "Defining Art," p. 305.
15. Morris, "American Quartet," p. 96.
16. See Annette Michelson's important essay, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), pp. 7–79, for the first serious treatment of Morris as a philosophical sculptor.
17. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 276–90.
18. Sometimes, of course, Morris's "cases" cannot be opened. We may know that the Minimalist pieces of the 1960s are hollow, but the impossibility of looking inside them is part of the point. Morris's *Leave*



**Monument Dead Monument/Rush Life Rush, 1990.**  
Encaustic on aluminum, 11 feet 11 1/2 inches x 7 feet 10 7/8 inches  
(3.64 x 2.41 m). Collection of the artist.

*Key on Hook* (1963, no. 28), a cabinet with lock and key and the inscription "Leave key on hook inside," suggests another situation—a case that could be "looked into" one and only one time and then would be closed forever.

19. I'm thinking here of the "case" as the concept is used in sociology and psychology ("case" studies and "case" histories), and the concomitant ambiguity about the theoretical/empirical status of the elementary units of research. For an outline of the basic concept of the sociological "case," see Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker, *What Is a Case?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9. The literal and material figure of the "case" as a hollow container, and its figurative extension to hermeneutics (the secret or solution to a mystery hidden inside a case), is also relevant here. I'm grateful to James Chandler for bringing the sociological analysis of the case to my attention.
20. Fried accurately gauged, I think, the peculiar temporality involved in the viewing of Minimalist sculpture, contrasting it to the sense of "instantaneousness" he associates with Modernist painting and sculpture. See Fried, "Art and Objecthood," pp. 144–46.
21. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 256.
22. I owe this analogy to Janice Misurell Mitchell.
23. Morris's inscriptions to these works move across the temporal dimensions suggested by the relation of frame to image. Thus, the inscription for *Untitled* (1984): "None *will* be ready when it touches down. Yet we *have seen* it gathering all these years. You *said* that there was nothing that could be done" (*italics added*).
24. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical



Hans Namuth, **Jackson Pollock**, 1950. Black and white photograph, 8 x 10 inches (20.3 x 25.4 cm)

Reproduction (1986), in *Illustration*, p. 242

25. Morris, "American Quartet," p. 105

26. *Ibid.*, p. 95

27. *Ibid.*, p. 105

28. Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson (Or Is That a Mouse in My *Paragon*)," in *Continuum: Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 287–315

29. See below, however, for a discussion of the Platonic concept of the "provocative," and an application of a dialectical model to the phenomena of form, object, label, and image

30. See Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson," in which the artist recapitulates his entire career as a series of Krazy Kat dialogues, with Minimalist objects as Ignatzian bricks

31. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," p. 234

32. Plato, *Republic*, Book VII 8, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 159

33. *Ibid.*, p. 159

34. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," p. 233. See also, Fried on the question of scale in relation to the human body in "Art and Objecthood," pp. 128–29.

35. The "existence" of numerous Minimalist works as nothing more than folders of documents, "blueprints or certificates that confer title to conceptual items," makes them especially problematic for critics who remain fixed on the notion that a work of art is nothing if it is not a material object. See John Richardson's attack on the Guggenheim Museum for overinvesting in this sort of paper currency, "Go Go Guggenheim," *The New York Review of Books*, July 16, 1992, p. 19

36. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," p. 234

37. I am using the term "public sphere" in the sense made familiar by the critical tradition associated with Jürgen Habermas, particularly his historical study of publicity, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, 1962). The term is not to be confused with the notion of "public art" in its legal or bureaucratic sense. For more on this subject, see *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

38. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Blackwell, 1958, 1953), p. 2

39. *Ibid.*, p. 3

40. The analysis of the importance of Wittgenstein's philosophy to Morris's art would require a separate study in its own right, and would probably take its key from the *Investigation* drawings (1990, pp. 292–95), a remarkable series connected with texts from the *Philosophical Investigations*

41. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 3

42. *Ibid.*, p. 8

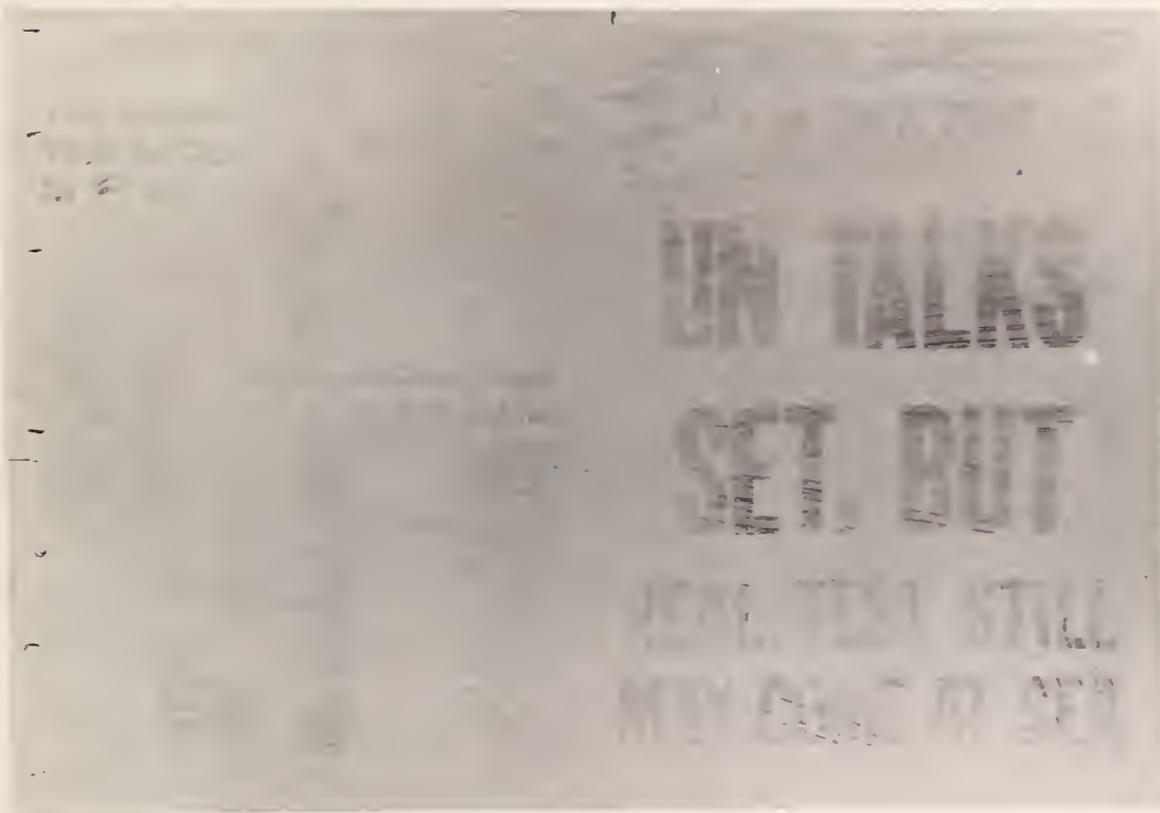
43. See my discussion of the parallel between the Romantic conception of the work of art and Marx's concept of the commodity fetish in W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1986), Chapter 6. Fried's remarks on the "hollowness of most literalist work . . . as though the work in question has an inner, even secret life" are useful here, though I think insufficiently literal. The hollowiness of Morris's objects is, in my view, an index of their insistence that they have "nothing to hide" and (as Cage might have said) that "they are hiding it." This antitermenutic openness about the hidden interior, the mockery of the sealed, hermetic "case," is the precise phenomenological basis for Morris's effort to produce objects that have the ability to activate a public sphere.

44. See Sigmund Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 219–52

45. Richard Wollheim's classic essay, "Minimal Art," was the first, I believe, to use the type-token distinction for the description of Minimalist objects. See Wollheim, "Minimal Art," *Arts Magazine* (January 1965), reprinted in Battcock, pp. 487–99

46. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

47. Wittgenstein's remarks on the "simple" and the "composite" must



**Untitled**, 1962. Painted newspaper page, 15 x 21<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches (38.1 x 54.6 cm). Collection of the artist.

also be understood as attempts to shatter the atomic concept of the "simple" associated with both his own earlier work in the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* (1921) and the work of Bertrand Russell and the logical positivists.

48. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 8.

49. See Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (New York: Braziller, 1967), Chapter 1, for a discussion of the foregrounding of the base.

50. Morris, "American Quartet," p. 96. On the question of scale, see also Morris, "Notes on Sculpture"; Fried, "Art and Objecthood"; and note 20 above.

51. Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson," p. 302.

52. See Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), Chapter 2, on the "calligram" as "double cipher."

53. Antin, "Art & Information," p. 56.

54. The word "shifter" is Roman Jakobson's term. See the entry on "Deictics," in Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language*, trans. Catherine Porter (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), p. 252.

55. For more on this concept, see W.J.T. Mitchell, "Metapictures," in *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 35–82.

56. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 178.

57. In this context, I must disagree with Hal Foster's suggestion that "the minimalist delineation of perception . . . is somehow before or outside history, language, sexuality power—that the perceiver is not a sexed body, that the gallery or museum is not an ideological apparatus" ("The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals*, exhibition catalogue [Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986], p. 172).

58. See Caroline Jones's discussion of the reaction by the Cage generation against the macho cult of Abstract Expressionism in her essay, "Finishing School: John Cage and the Abstract Expressionist

Ego," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (summer 1993), pp. 628–55.

59. Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992), p. 10. I hope it is clear, however, that I regard any notion of the present as having gone "beyond history" as quite premature.

**ON ROBERT MORRIS AND  
THE ISSUE OF WRITING:  
A NOTE FULL OF HOLES**

Jean-Pierre Criqui

*There is neither pleasure nor utility in playing with an open deck.* —Baltasar Gracián, 1647

In my beginning is my end, so to speak, it being hard to deny that in what follows I have only managed to draw a few circles around an imperceptible point. It might even be that at certain moments the imperceptible coincides with the improbable, subjecting these very lines to caution. Nonetheless, let's begin.

In his most recent publication, Robert Morris turns to his series of drawings called *Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)* (1991, nos. 152–56), onto which are inscribed citations from Donald Davidson's writings, and explores the implications of the remarks the philosopher had earlier made on these works and his own de facto enrollment within them. From the opening sentence of Morris's text, the reader cannot but be struck by the author's reference to himself in the third person ("Morris"), redoubling as it does the type of decentering or subjective distancing that the works under discussion themselves put in place—works carried out blindfolded, so that the artist's experience of them, necessarily deferred until the moment when, regaining his sight, he suddenly becomes the witness of his own finished drawing, puts him in the place of any other spectator. One might notice the way in which this redoubling, this ruse that is as transparent as it is effective, through which Morris sets up an analogical relationship between the commentary and the work, establishes the former as the mirror of the principle of the latter, which in turn manifests itself (the latter) as the consequence of a verbally explicit program (the former). In this there is a circularity it would be well to keep in mind.

At certain points in this text, the constant use of the third person yields to a hardly less peculiar "we," for example, when it is averred that "in interpreting Morris's reasons for using Davidson's writing we would be guided by the twin norms of Davidson's Principle of Charity: holism and rationality." The "I" the reader would normally have the right to expect appears only once, and that in the following sentence: "In 1978 I lured a woman who had been blind since birth to execute, under my direction, the second series of *Blind Time Drawings*." Yet the most remarkable thing about this assertion is that it is false. It is easy to establish that the series dates from 1976.<sup>1</sup> That Morris himself refers to it in an interview he gave in 1977 removes the last shred of doubt.

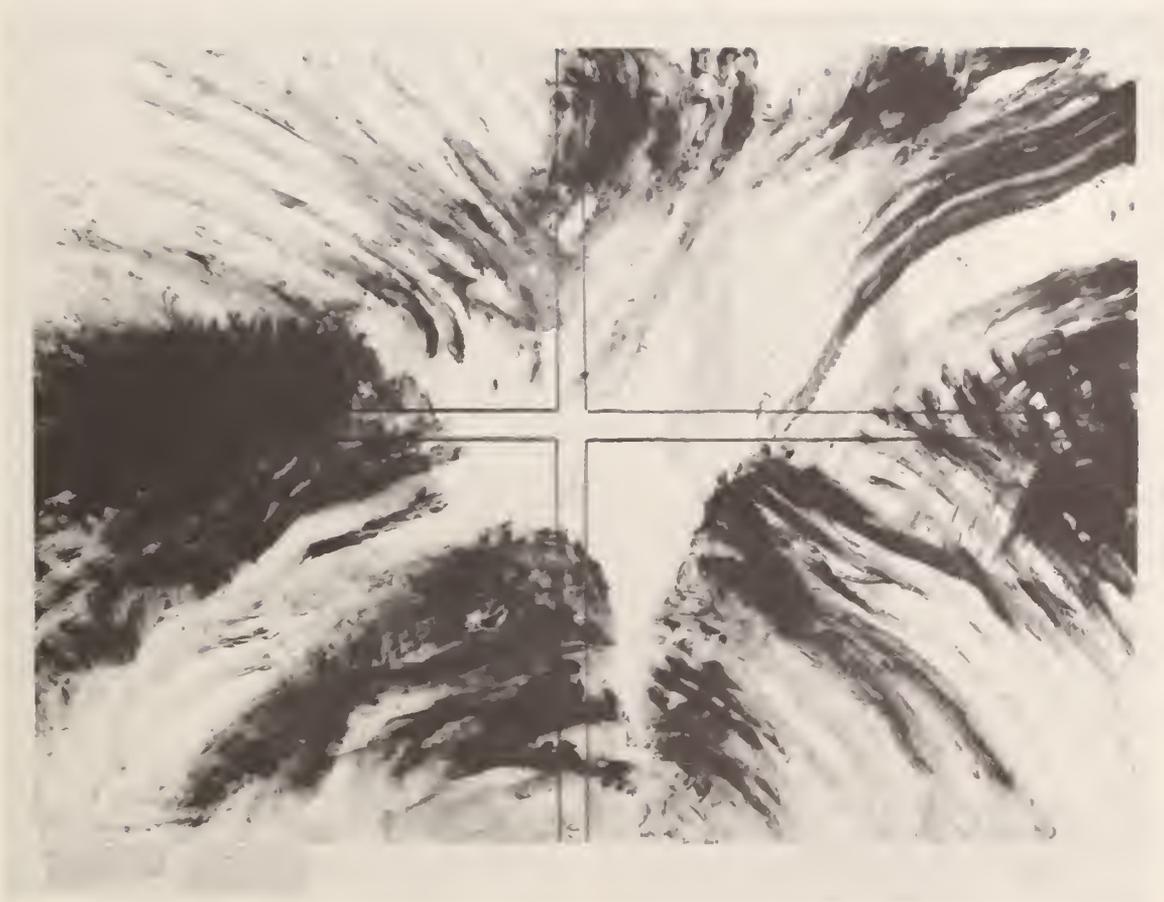
Whether the falsity of the proposition in question was made by its author on purpose, whether it arose

from a simple error on his part, or whether it is the result of a typo matters little in the end. There is, in any event, an incredible irony in the fact that the only "I" here referring directly back to Morris himself is articulated within the context of the "false." I would underscore the fact, however, that all the *Blind Time IV* drawings, judging from the illustrations in both Morris's and Davidson's texts, are equally engaged with the problem of falsehood. In one drawing, the Davidson quotation that has been chosen concerns the relation between metaphor and falsehood; this happens in another drawing as well, with the philosopher specifying something that is not uninteresting for the point we are making: "The parallel between making a metaphor and telling a lie is emphasized by the fact that the same sentence can be used, with meaning unchanged, for either purpose." What is more, in this latter example, Morris's own program for the drawing, which is inscribed in its lower-left corner, is a sort of portrait of the artist as a liar:

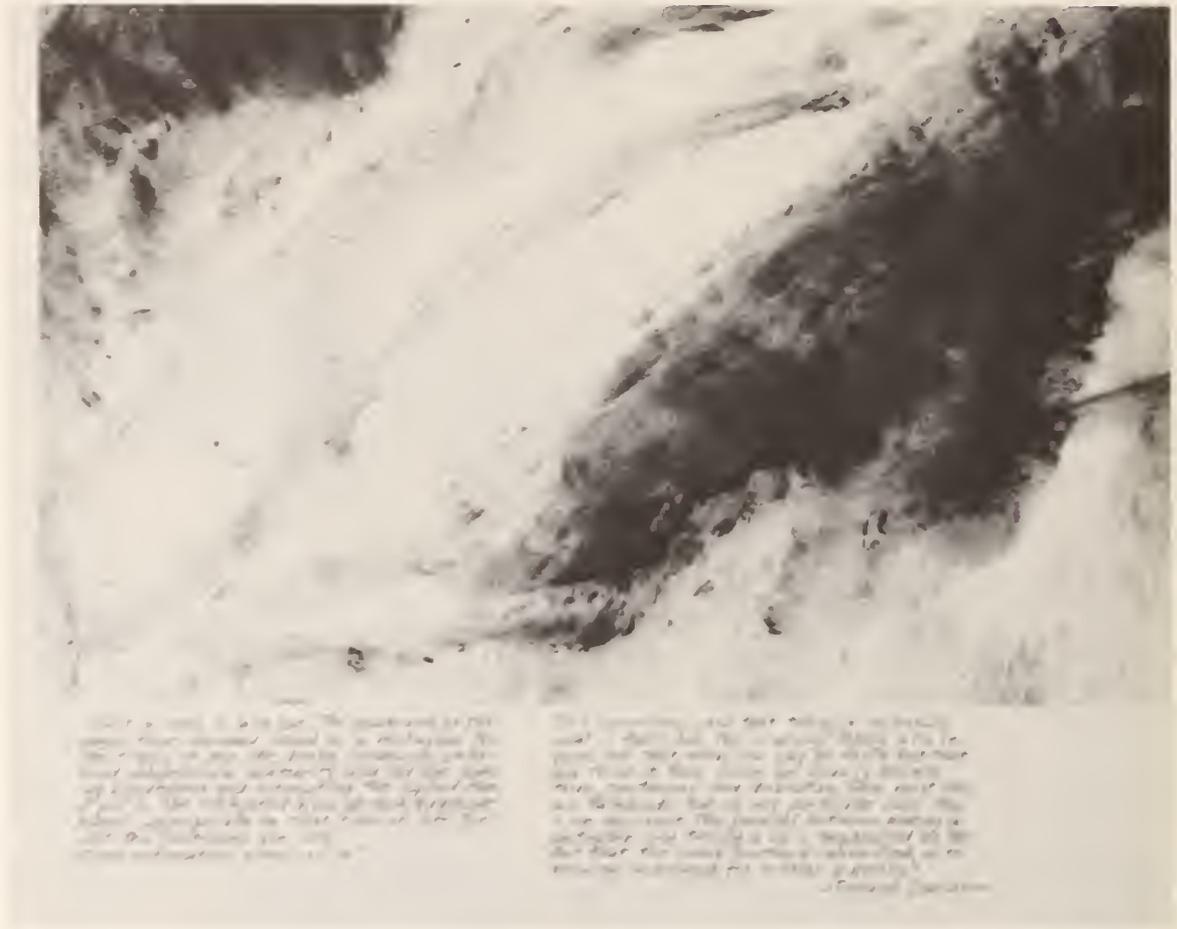
*First a cross is laid out. The quadrants of the page thus divided stand as a metaphor for the times of my life, being clockwise, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and old age. Working blindfolded and estimating the lapsed time, I put in the estimated area of each quadrant marks appropriate to that time of life. The last two sentences are lies.*

Haunted by a play of echoes and mirrors that some would call baroque,<sup>2</sup> "Writing with Davidson" suggests a textual space in which the concept of the essay designated (for both the author and the reader) by the term "text signed by an artist" is extravagantly deconstructed. In a 1974 essay, after referring to the "complete theoretical systems" elaborated by Hans Hofmann and Josef Albers, Lawrence Alloway names Morris, Barnett Newman, and Robert Smithson as the three contemporary American artists who had, even though in a more "informal" manner, pursued similar projects. Yet, leaving aside Newman and Smithson (the mention of whom, particularly the second, doesn't really go without saying), could we today affirm—in reconsidering Morris's writings via the retrospective lens of "Writing with Davidson"—that these texts in any way respond to the will to construct a "theoretical system"?

Even more fundamentally, is it legitimate to consider the essays published by various magazines under Morris's name as a group separate from the rest



**Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**, 1991. Graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.5 x 127 cm). Collection of the artist.



Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson), detail.

of his work, sufficiently autonomous and homogeneous to constitute what the exegetes traditionally qualify as a corpus? Something that, in the manner of the wandering corpse staged by Alfred Hitchcock in *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), persists in claiming its right to consideration, to identification? In order to sketch out a reply to this question, we must recall the way in which, even before the 1966 "Notes on Sculpture," Morris's visual art set itself up under the sign of language. To underscore the range of this relationship, I will only refer to the following: *Performance Switch* (1960), and its direct address to a "viewer/user"; the drawing *Litaneis* (1961), in which the artist appropriated one of Marcel Duchamp's texts through the act of copying/drawing it, as well as the lead piece of the same name (1963, no. 21), with its bunch of keys, each engraved with a word, and *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal* (1963, no. 22), in which Morris "withdrew" aesthetic significance from *Litaneis*, in response to nonpayment for the work, *Cross* (1962), a series of works that recycle the pages of the *New York Post* and other New York dailies, *I-Box* (1962, no. 25),

where Morris's image is framed as the "I" by virtue of that letter being a constructed element, the almost identical form of which figured in *Column* (p. 90), used in a 1960 performance; and *21.3* (1964, no. 57), which scatters to the wind the requirements of rationality and intelligibility necessary to the ritual of the lecture. As in *I-Box*, this imbrication of the visual and the verbal in *21.3*, according to which the object proposes itself from the start as a *written work*, often goes along with a kind of reflexiveness that seems the parodic (and nightmarish) double of what Modernist theory carried as a kind of banner (the medium itself as art's subject): such, among others, is the case of *Card File* (1962, no. 26), a perfectly tautological object where the written notes assembled by its author assume a function comparable to that of the noises inside the *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11).

I would be willing to bet that a meticulous inventory would show that those works by Morris that, in one way or another, have recourse to language, whether in the form of writing or of speech (we might

think of pieces with taped accompaniment, such as *Hearing* [1972, no. 88] and *Voice* [1974, no. 126], where the amount of text involved vastly exceeds that of any of his publications), are by far the most numerous. From which it follows that we have to look at his “writings”—and already the term can scarcely be used without signaling its radical ambiguity—with a different eye from the one we turn to the contributions by Albers or Newman in this area: so much writing within the art object itself necessarily suggests that something artistic is transpiring in what seems to relate to writing alone, in the sense of commentary or of theory building.

Not that this latter form—the text as a tool in the registration of and dissemination of ideas—is a stranger to Morris. It’s the very fact that, between 1966 and 1970—from “Notes on Sculpture” to “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated”—the six articles published in *Artforum* so obviously fall within this category that the label of a hard and fast theoretician has stuck to him.<sup>9</sup> During this brief period, which corresponds to the respite from a recourse to language in his visual work, his art traverses the full span leading from the constructed object (its bond with the space that houses it and the spectator that makes this his experience) to its bursting apart into the notion of “anti-form.” Paralleling this voyage in the direction of process, the writings constitute its witness: “The Minimal presented a powerful solution: construct instead of arrange. Just as that solution can be framed in terms of an opposition (arrange/build) so can the present shift be framed dialectically: don’t build . . . but what? Drop, hang, lean, in short act,” we read in “The Phenomenology of Making.”<sup>10</sup> By means of his interest, as the philosopher Marcel Mauss would say, in the “techniques of the body,” implied in the activity of “making” (where, in Morris’s view, as many “forms” can be found as in the final products), Morris reconnects with the underlying spirit of his work from the first half of the 1960s, beginning with the dances and performances. At the end of “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making,” theater and dance, as well as film and music, are mentioned for their ability to act such that “the making process is not behind the scenes but is the very substance of the work.”<sup>11</sup>

The burlesque element that we recognize in many of the pieces and projects from the opening years then resurfaces, and in the most extraordinary manner, in the next of Morris’s essays. “The Art of Existence. Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Process,” published in *Artforum* in January 1971, at first proposes itself as the next link on the chain initiated by “Notes on Sculpture,” and leads one to believe that its author is simply developing his ideas on the need to break with the work of art’s traditional physical autonomy. This essay begins with the declaration:

*It seems a truism at this point that the static, portable, indoor art object can do no more than carry a decorative load that becomes increasingly uninteresting. One waits for the next season’s polished metal boxes, stretched tie dyes and elegantly applied liquitex references to art deco with about as much anticipation as one reserves for the look of next year’s Oldsmobile—Ford probably has a better idea.*

From which there follow reflections on the interest of a certain number of recent works, defined as “environmental,” that, being “literally objectless,” treat the issue of process in such a manner that, transferred from upstream to downstream (from, that is, the artist to the viewer), it will henceforth be “located within the one who participates in the experience of this art.”<sup>12</sup> Michael Asher, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and Bruce Nauman are cited, both the first and last being illustrated as well.

After this preamble, Morris announces that his essay will attend to the work of three young artists whom he knows personally and who are devoted to what he calls “existence art”; “so far as I know these artists are unaware of each other’s work,” he writes.<sup>13</sup> His ambition will be to describe their work as faithfully as possible—the precise function of critical activity after all, which places itself in the direct descent from the Greek literary genre of *ekphrasis*, which is generally thought of as the original aesthetic commentary and which consists of the description of, among other ornamented objects, paintings and sculptures.<sup>14</sup> The first artist, Marvin Blaine, excavated a room into the side of a hill in Ohio, a sort of uterine cavity to which one gains entry through a narrow passage and about the travails of the construction of which Morris reports at length and in the most serious possible tone. He then tells how, the previous June 22, he attended the progressive invasion of this chamber by the “sunrise equinox” (a fantastical date since, as its name indicates, the equinox designates the moment in the year, at the end of March and of September, when night and day are of equal length; it’s the summer solstice, of course, that occurs at the end of June). What follows becomes more and more curious. Asked about James Turrell, Blaine claims never to have heard of him; yet the ghost of Joseph Kosuth and the shadow of Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970) hover for an instant over the page as Morris recounts: “A friend of Blaine’s riding in the car volunteered the information that a good friend had been killed at Kent and the five of them had decided that from now on they were going to do ‘pig art.’ ‘You know, pig art as art as art.’”<sup>15</sup> The summing up is left to Blaine, who fiercely claims not to be an artist and demands that, lest his efforts be perceived as art, no photographs be made of them.

The slightly credulous (or distracted) reader, who at this point still thinks the article to be reportage,

certainly begins to have doubts with the entry on the scene of Jason Taub, a Californian artist whose artistic medium—for he, we are told, unlike Blaine, considers himself absolutely an artist—is constituted by radio frequencies, specifically in their extra-auditory dimension. Taub (the word means “deaf” in German), who admires Michael Asher but, nonetheless, finds his work too “aestheticized,” shows himself to be more concerned with technology and scientific research (“In conversation, Taub spun out lengthy theoretical explanations for the perception of radio frequency—most of which I neither remembered nor understood,” the author confesses<sup>19</sup>) and submits his visitor to certain more or less agreeable perceptual experiments.

But with the third character to whom we are presented, the text descends into a level of pure farce. Robert Dayton, who lost two-thirds of his sight as the result of an accident with sulfuric acid, and inspired by the anesthetics used while he was hospitalized, constructs “gas chambers,” which Morris—peculiarly compliant—is invited to enter in order to experience the effects of various diffusions. One of Dayton’s projects—the physics of which, as it is described for us, suggests a cross between Frankenstein and Erich Von Stroheim—is a “Negative Ion Chamber” that he promises will be “ten times juicier than Willy Reich’s Orgone Box.”<sup>20</sup> “Screw the MoMA, but see what you can do for me at Auschwitz,” he cries as his guest takes his leave.<sup>21</sup> In accordance with the narrative morality long ago postulated by Samuel Butler in the memorable phrase “I do not mind lying but I hate inaccuracy,” the author supplies documentary accompaniment for his three reviews: for Blaine, a drawing of the underground chamber, made by Morris; a sketch and a notebook page, both from the hand of Taub; and, finally, a drawing by Dayton of his “gas chamber,” part of the equipment of which is also shown in a photograph (each of these graphic documents seeming to have come from a different hand). According to the same tongue-in-cheek logic, the article’s conclusion—after the delirious episode with Dayton—resumes the detached and dryly objective tone of the opening:

*While there is nothing startlingly new about environmental art, this work (especially that of Taub and Dayton) allows for an interaction between the work and the perceiver that functions on a new level. . . . It is the establishment of this new plane of experience, which to me seems qualitatively different from the possible response to external objects, that seems significant.<sup>22</sup>*

Beyond its satirical character, which breaks with the genre and the status of the Morris texts hitherto published in *Artforum*, beyond the barbs thrown at various practitioners of Earth art or the dematerialization of the object (a passage from “Some

Notes on the Phenomenology of Making” already alluded to the “totally physically paralyzed conclusions of Conceptual art”<sup>23</sup>), the most striking feature of “The Art of Existence” is, I think, the affinity the projects it describes have with several of Morris’s (*Steam* [no. 102], installed in 1969 outside the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., for example, or *Observatory* [no. 109], constructed in 1971 in the Netherlands, two years after the publication of the essay in question). This implies that the imaginary artists making their appearance in “The Art of Existence” are not (or we should say, are not only) composite characters, by means of which the author is settling scores with certain of his bêtes noires, as in the satirical tradition dear to Swift or Voltaire, but, at least in part, a group of aliases, or heteronyms.

The word “heteronym” suggests the example of Fernando Pessoa, who over the course of his life invented many authors, certain of them given the most eloquent of last names: Seul, Anon, Search, and so on. Pessoa not only wrote the biographies of these men, he wrote their works as well.<sup>24</sup> While Morris does not enjoy the privilege, as Pessoa did, of calling himself “No one,” the burden of originality has, perhaps, been lightened by the existence in art history of at least one perfect homonym—Robert Morris, the eighteenth-century English architect and theoretician. At any rate, in much of his work, both visual and textual, Morris exploits a notion of the divided, polymorphous, changing, and “diabolical” self. (The famous “My name is Legion,” spoken by the possessed man of Gerasa in the Gospel of Mark, would provide Morris with a rather becoming emblem.<sup>25</sup>)

But the maxim of this multiple self could also be: “Works of art are afloat on a sea of words.” It is thus that “Some Splashes in the Ebb Tide,” an intensely metaphoric, rhetorical text, which Morris published in 1973, takes itself as its own object:

*An anxious major task of art’s discourse over the last half-century has been to mediate and rationalize constant change and sameness: holding in suspension the individual identity of art facts as a sequence of shattering disjunctions while at the same time delineating their family resemblances in a causal, hereditary, genealogical series. Art’s vague claim to a mythical status resides in the maintenance of this contradiction. . . . But in what relation does this discourse stand to the art facts—those curious productions in themselves which seem with their first appearance to be already halfway suspended into language? . . . art facts seem to contain the dual power to both generate and destroy speech. For as they call speech out from its own domain it seems on approach to melt and merge with art facts, to become hallucinated and entangled, losing its ability to surround and separate. On the other hand, speech seems almost to flow from art which reflects language as much as light.<sup>26</sup>*

8/7/62, 8:45 pm

Discovered in black brief case: 3 blank cards, 6 cards with the following categories: Considerations, Future, Locations, Changes, Responses - Actual, Responses - Predicted, on one card the scribbled note: "Role of ideas - make the work not self-contained, refer to, stand for, sign" and further down on card the notation: "Sign . (See Loses) Form"

#### Recoveries

A card from **Card File**, 1962 (no. 26).

In these words, one might hear the echo of a very ancient principle, that of the Sophists, which posits being as an effect of saying. Shamed from the time of its condemnation by Plato and Aristotle (who saw in it the empire of *pseudos*, kingdom of the false and of falsehood), sophism has, nevertheless, been intermittently resurgent. The discourse of sophistry refuses to be submitted to the law of noncontradiction; it is not sustained by truth, but by contingency and appearance. A part of it is connected to play, in the latter's capacity to produce reality. Morris's taste for the palimpsest, the mask, and the palinode make him a profoundly sophistic artist, an oxymoron reminiscent of Ravel's description of himself as "artificial by nature." He is a *factor*, as in the word "fiction," in which there is an etymological superimposition of the notions of modeling (as in sculpture), pretense, and novelistic invention.<sup>45</sup>

In Morris's 1978 essay "The Present Tense of Space," which tries to establish the difference between an aesthetic of the "I" and an aesthetic of the "me," the history of art—meaning here "art within its history," not the discipline—is seen as a kind of latent material, something like the words in a dictionary, awaiting a narrator to propel them into motion: "Make a narrative. Claim a development in retrospect. Invent history," without worrying about the inevitable

"contradictions"; or, as the essay concludes: "The pursuit of the contradictory, be it in art or in sword-making, is the only basis for perceiving dialectical reality."<sup>46</sup> A typical symptom of his love of rhetorical reversals and of arguments that turn against themselves is Morris's unhesitant reliance here on an entirely theatrical notion of "presentness"—understood in a sense exactly opposite to that proposed by Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood," his famous attack on Minimalism.<sup>47</sup> So much for the clarity of the debate and for the comprehension of future scholars.

As for "American Quartet," published in *Art in America* in 1981, it presents itself as an essay on the founding roles played in American contemporary art by Joseph Cornell, Duchamp, Edward Hopper, and Jackson Pollock. In an uncustomary manner, Morris's text is followed by five long paragraphs in italics, entitled "Commentary," in which an editorial "we" presumes to dissociate itself from the foregoing analysis:

*We always enjoy reading Morris's articles. But it must be said that, like his art, they have tended to wander around a great deal. We cannot let this one pass without noting certain gaps, stretches of muddy prose, some extremely questionable assumptions, constructs which perhaps exist mostly in Morris's mind. etc."*

Some time later, a letter to the Editor appeared that protested this "unsigned editor's 'Commentary.'" To which came the riposte:

*The Editor replies: We were afraid no one would ask—although most readers, after an initial double take, recognized Robert Morris's own fine Duchampian hand behind the unsigned Commentary. And indeed, the fact that it was unsigned was a further (intentional) . . .*

Without question, the most important and most complex essay published by Morris in recent years is "Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides as Allegories (or Interruptions)," which dates from 1989. Its epigraph places it under the authority of Michel Foucault, who there enjoins one "to get free of oneself." In order to reply to this commandment, Morris intercuts his reflections on the state of current art with reminiscences on his past. The opening meditation attempts to distinguish three contemporary types of aesthetic discourse: Modernist abstract, with its insistence on purity and transcendence; sociopolitical, with its desire for truth and rationality; and finally a third, characterized as "both pervasive and submerged"—"It's a kind of negative discourse in some ways. Negations are as much a part of it as assertions." The second meditation concerns his childhood in Kansas City, his beginnings as an artist, and his encounters at that time (with the work of Duchamp, Newman, Ad Reinhardt): the accounts are funny, intense, or both at once—apologues without a moral that are more telling than whole catalogues about the way in which those "art stories" that we end up calling the history of art take shape.

Envoi.

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

Translated from the French by Rosalind Krauss.

1 Robert Morris, "Writing with Davidson: Some Afterthoughts after Doing *Blind Time IV: Drawing with Davidson*," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 4 (summer 1993), pp. 617–27. A revised version of Davidson's text, originally published in the catalogue for the exhibition of these drawings (Allentown, Pa.: Frank Martin Gallery, Muhlenberg College, 1992), appears in the same issue of *Critical Inquiry* ("The Third Man," pp. 607–15).

2 Morris, "Writing with Davidson," p. 618.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 622.

4 1976 is the date given, for example, in the exhibition catalogue *The Drawings of Robert Morris* (Williamstown, Mass.: Williams College Museum of Art, 1982), unpaginated.

5 See Jonathan Fineberg, "Robert Morris Looking Back: An Interview," *Arts Magazine* 55 (September 1980), pp. 114–15. (A note at the end of the published interview specifies that it took place in 1977 before an audience.)

6 This occurs in a note relating to questions raised by Morris concerning the use he has made of Davidson's writing.

*The very practice of excerpting (his act of cutting up) from writing, such as Davidson's, writings possessed not only of a deep conceptual power and stylistic grace but of a simple wholeness and clarity raises questions of a somewhat different order. But if such questions are suppressed here by remaining unarticulated—the very suggestion of their existence buried in an oblique footnote devoted to Morris commenting on Morris writing on Morris—they are nevertheless typical of those Morris raises throughout if announced, seldom articulated, if articulated, seldom followed up, if followed up, seldom answered ("Writing with Davidson," p. 618).*

The form of self-accusation, and of self-mockery, that floods this proposal is a trope whose importance should not be underestimated. It highlights the plurality of voices borrowed by Morris in his desire to escape any fixed position, any thesis. A little farther on Morris writes that "in our search to make sense of human behavior, art as well as the murder of kings would seem open to interpretation," and then makes the following commentary: "While Morris makes a number of questionable assertions throughout this text (not to mention the ubiquitous and questionable unanswered question) none sends up a red flag quicker than this one. The suggestion of wanting to 'make sense' of art threatens to topple onto him the weight of a vast critical enterprise that dismisses such an urge as not only naive but impossible" (p. 627).

7 Lawrence Alloway, "Artists as Writers, I: Inside Information" (1971), in *Network: Art and the Complex Present* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 202.

8 Among Morris's early texts are "Notes on Dance" (*Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 [winter 1965], pp. 179–86), "Dance" (*The Village Voice*, February 5, 1966, pp. 8, 21–25); and "Dance" (*The Village Voice*, February 10, 1966, p. 15).

9 The six essays are (1) "Notes on Sculpture" (*Artforum* 4, no. 6 [February 1966]) and (2) "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2" (*Artforum* 5, no. 2 [October 1966], reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock [New York: Dutton, 1968], pp. 222–35).

(3) "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3" (*Artforum* 5, no. 10 [June 1967], pp. 24–29), (4) "Anti-Form" (*Artforum* 6, no. 8 [April 1968], pp. 33–35), (5) "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects" (*Artforum* 7, no. 8 [April 1969], pp. 50–51), (6) "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: 'The Search for the Motivated'" (*Artforum* 8, no. 8 [April 1970], pp. 62–66).

I am not overlooking the fact that "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3" escapes somewhat from the realm of commentary, by virtue of its more or less aleatory organization, in which text blocks float in the space of the page in an evocation of the Minimalist volumes then being shown in the space of the galleries. Nevertheless, the fact that Morris, at the very moment when these "theoretical" essays were appearing in print (published "A Method for Sorting Cows," which he had read in taped voice over as part of performance *Art ana* (1963, no. 55)), clearly shows that Morris was not interested in being solely identified as an artist-critic (*Art and Literature* [winter 1967], p. 180).

10. Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," p. 66.
11. Ibid.
12. Morris, "The Art of Existence. Three Extra-Visual Artists: Works in Process," *Artforum* 9, no. 5 (January 1971), p. 28.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., p. 29.
15. It is interesting to recall that one of the main problems raised by Philostratus's *Eikones*, the famous collection of *ekphrasis* edited at the turn of the second century A.D., is whether the paintings described in such minute detail actually existed. In the same line of thinking, one might reflect on the fact that the *ekphrasis* considered as the absolute founder of the genre—the description in Homer's *Iliad* of the forging of Achilles's shield by Hephaistos—is the work of an author known in the classical tradition as blind.
16. Morris, "The Art of Existence," p. 30.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 33.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," p. 63.
22. Concerning Pessoa and the dizzying proliferation of his literary personae, I refer to the collection of essays by Antonio Tabucchi, *Une Malle pleine de gens* (trans. J.-B. Para [Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1992; 1990]), which contains in an appendix the astonishing "Letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro on the genesis of the heteronyms," written by Pessoa in 1935: "The origin of my heteronyms is located in my profoundly hysterical tendencies. . . . The mental origin of my heteronyms is to be found in my organic and continual tendency toward depersonalization and dissimulation" (p. 145).
23. Mark 5, 1–20. Jean Starobinski provides a remarkable commentary on this passage in "Le Combat avec Légion," in *Trois Fureurs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 73–126.
24. Morris, "Some Splashes in the Ebb Tide," *Artforum* 11, no. 6 (February 1973), p. 43.
25. On the first (that of Protagoras, Gorgias, and others, which was denounced by Plato) and second phases of Sophistry (which crystallized in the oratorical art of second-century Rome and played a role in the contiguous development of *ekphrasis* and the novel), see the two volumes of anthologies assembled under the direction of Barbara Cassin, *Positions de la sophistique* (Paris: Vrin, 1986); and *Le Plaisir de parler* (Paris: Minuit, 1986).
- "The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy," Gilles Deleuze's text on the "reversal of Platonism" and its continuation in the modern acceptance of the power of the false, first and foremost in the work of Nietzsche, remains a fundamental reference for thinking about these issues in relation to recent art practice (*The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 1969], pp. 253–79). In addition, Clément Rosset's *L'Anti-nature* (Paris: PUF, 1973) usefully summarizes the principal oscillations between natural and artificial thinking within the development of Western philosophy. Not surprisingly, one notes Morris's recent quote, in "Writing with Davidson" (pp. 622–23), from the seminars of Jacques Lacan, one of the great contemporary sophists: "I make a distinction between language and being. That implies that there could be word-fiction—I mean starting from the word" (*Encore, Seminar XX* [Paris: Le Seuil, 1975] p. 107).
26. Morris, "The Present Tense of Space," *Art in America* 66, no. 1 (January–February 1978), pp. 70, 80.
27. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967), reprinted in Battcock, pp. 116–47.
28. Morris, "American Quartet," *Art in America* 69, no. 10 (December 1981), p. 104.
29. See the letter, signed "Donald Hoffmann," in *Art in America* 70, no. 2 (February 1982), p. 5. There is material in this letter for considering Morris and his writings in the light of the history of the counterfeit and of literary dissimulation. For the former, the hook by Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990),

makes most suggestive reading. For dissimulation (and its often urgent necessity), the classic work is Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (London: Free Press, 1952). Less known, but in the direct lineage of Strauss, is the short and fascinating text by Alexandre Kojève, *L'Empereur Julien et son art d'écrire* (Paris: Fourbis, 1990).

Morris's form of dissimulation, which is accompanied by a large dose of *sprezzatura*, has something in it of that of the secretaries, counselors, and courtesans of the Renaissance and the Classical Age—from Machiavelli to Baltasar Gracián by way of Castiglione. One of the most bizarre and perverse examples is the treatise by Torquato Accetto, *Della dissimulazione onesta* (1641), recently translated into French by M. Blanc-Sanchez as *De l'bonne dissimulation* (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1990). In his prologue, Accetto explains the shortness of his work as follows: "But I should be pardoned for having been made to publish my work in its present, partly bloodless state, because to write in disguise has meant that I dissimulate and that, to this end, much of what I wrote at the outset had to be amputated."

30. Morris, "Three Folds in the Fabric and Four Autobiographical Asides as Allegories (Or Interruptions)," *Art in America* 77, no. 9 (November 1989), p. 148.

31. "No art comes without its stories. An art story is at once a prescriptive text which imposes rules by which its participants learn to play a certain kind of game; a genealogy of certain events and of certain sets of enduring, often conflicting desires; and a concatenation of traits, tropes, obsessions and historicized accounts by apologists who would seek to legitimize an ideological position. In short, an art story is a discourse particular to an enterprise which pretends to revolve around the production of a certain unstable class of more or less individually produced handmade artifacts" (ibid., p. 143).

32. Morris, "Notes on Art as/and Land Reclamation," *October*, no. 12 (spring 1980), pp. 101–02.



# CATALOGUE

Beginning in 1954, Robert Morris, a young San Francisco Abstract Expressionist painter, and Simone Forti, a dancer and choreographer, attended a number of Ann Halprin's dance workshops; soon, the two began their own workshop in San Francisco in order to "explore what we felt Halprin repressed." Forti's pioneering work—her improvisational development of voice narrative sequences, and her use of props and rule games to structure movement—was formative for Morris's own development as both dancer and sculptor.

Morris visited New York City in the spring of 1960, returning to California for another of Halprin's summer workshops. He moved permanently to New York with Forti early that fall. Soon after, Morris became part of the group of dancers, choreographers, composers, and visual artists associated with the Judson Dance Theater, which included, among others, Lucinda Childs, Alex Hay, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Rauschenberg. Previously trained by Merce Cunningham, the dancers brought certain conventions with them, such as partnering or turning around the center of one's own body as if "on point." These conventions were critiqued from the point of view of John Cage's musical ideas, understood as examples of how to break with traditional composition. The result was the development of a vocabulary of the ordinary, in which "the objectification of movement," lived time, repetition, and task- or play-driven gestures prevailed. Forti's ideas, again, set the agenda for most of what was developed at the Judson Dance Theater: contact, improvisation, games with rules, voice as text and as sound in dance, task-generating movement—"in short, those strategies aimed at crushing the narcissistic dancer and her bag of tricks based on professional training. All of these things Forti invented singlehandedly." Morris emphasizes the importance of the ideas Forti developed in her concert at Yoko Ono's Chambers Street loft in 1961.

It was in 1960 that Morris rejected the enterprise of painting and built his first sculptural object, entitled *Column*, which he then adapted as a performance at the Living Theater in New York. For the event, he positioned an unadorned, gray-painted rectangular column in the center of the stage. There it stood erect for three and a half minutes, after which time he toppled it with a string from offstage, and it remained prone for another three and a half minutes. Clearly a "performer," the column concentrated into two positions—standing and lying down—the multitude of possible dance gestures, just as it literalized the way dance is meant to fill otherwise empty time. That the column was understood as

a surrogate of the dancer's body was reinforced by Morris's intention that, although stripped of all "expression," the object should seem to move of its own accord. He, therefore, had planned to be inside the hollow column during the performance and, in fact, occupied it during the rehearsal of the piece. The subsequent head injury Morris received as a result of his unbuffered fall led to the necessary expedient of using an offstage string in the final performance.

The anthropomorphism that marked this first "abstract" sculpture continued to characterize the objects that Morris made in the years of his developing Minimalism: *Two Columns* (1961, no. 1) and the *L-Beams* (1965, nos. 2–3), all of which allude to the original Living Theater performance's emphasis on the positioning of bodies in space. Just as the anti-expressive reduction of the column-as-performer, with its naked relation to gravity and its requirement that the spectator submit to the conditions of real time, drew Morris closer to the ideas that were to mark Forti's and the Judson Dance Theater's task-oriented dance vocabulary; that vocabulary was to reverberate within Morris's evolving sculpture, with its body-related scale and its emphasis on the real time in which perception unfolds.

Not only does *Two Columns* synchronously restage the two positions successively taken by the column in the Living Theater performance, but the self-conscious doubling of the column seems as well an embrace of the notion of the "form-class," which was developed by George Kubler in his influential book *The Shape of Time*.<sup>1</sup> For Kubler, a form-class is an autonomous formal problem that exists independent of any given historical context. Thus, for example, he saw the study of the luminous structure of landscape as conducted by the mural painters of Herculaneum and Boscoreale, then by seventeenth-century artists, and, finally, by Cézanne as successive stages of a single problem, one whose internal logic must be grasped, and even partly recapitulated, by any artist wishing to develop the form-class further. This notion of morphological sequence played an important role for Morris in his Hunter College master's thesis on Constantin Brancusi. In keeping with Kubler's logic, Morris subscribes to the notion, interchangeable with formal sequence, that "the entity composed by the

1. *Two Columns*—1973 refabrication of a 1961 original—1973 version: painted aluminum, two units, each 96 x 24 x 24 inches (243.8 x 61 x 61 cm), Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art, 1961 version: painted plywood





problem and its solutions constitutes a form-class,<sup>1</sup> and that the form-class develops through the "gradually altered repetition of the same trait."<sup>2</sup> The overall system of form-classes admits prime objects, for which there are no clear-cut antecedents, and their replication and development by slight alteration. This reasoning was applied by Morris to his analysis of the development of formal sequences in Brancusi's work, beginning with the horizontal and vertical positioning of the ovoid. It also provides an entry into his own work, especially the *L-Beams* and *Columns*, where a prime object or form is developed serially through the alteration of the same trait by the extremely economical means of repositioning. While for *Untitled (Three L-Beams)* (1965, no. 3), Morris had initially planned a group of nine L-beams, he soon realized, in examining the problem at hand, that a set of three beams in various positions—one "seated" upright, one poised on both arms forming an inverted V, and one lying on its side—would better establish the form-class he had in mind.

1. Communication from the artist, February 1993.

2. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989, 1977), p. 233.

3. Communication from the artist, December 1992.

4. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

5. Morris, "Form Classes in the Work of Constantin Brancusi," unpublished master's thesis, Hunter College, 1966, p. 1.

6. Kubler, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 2. Morris is careful to distinguish his own ideas from Kubler's when, as he puts it, Kubler comes "dangerously close to the abhorred metaphor of biology" (*ibid.*, p. 3).



**facing page: 2. Untitled (Two L-Beams)**, 1966 refabrication of a 1965 original. Painted plywood, two units, each 96 x 96 x 24 inches (243.8 x 243.8 x 61 cm).

**3. Untitled (Three L-Beams)**, 1969 refabrication of a 1965 original. Painted plywood, three units, each 96 x 96 x 24 inches (243.8 x 243.8 x 61 cm).

While in California in 1960, Morris was introduced to the composer La Monte Young by John Cage. After his subsequent move to New York, Morris was invited by Young to participate in a series of concerts and performances that he had organized. These included lectures by Henry Flynt,<sup>1</sup> a concert by Simone Forti, a performance by Jackson MacLow, and a work by Young himself. For Morris's event, guests were invited to "An Environment" at the Fluxus artist Yoko Ono's studio on Chambers Street, which was to be open several hours each day from June 3–7, 1961.

No doubt anticipating the kind of Merz environment common to Fluxus, viewers entered the loft, only to find themselves in a plywood-lined corridor that curved for fifty feet, narrowing slowly but steadily to a point. They quickly realized that the passageway's compression, and the fact that it exerted a brute control over their bodies and their expectations—converting the experience into a reverse kind of "performance"—comprised the entire event. Some of the guests found the work's laconic gesture unpalatable, while others experienced it as pleasurable irony. The dancer Yvonne Rainer took a pencil from her pocketbook and scrawled "FUCK YOU BOB MORRIS" across one of the walls. Indeed, the work's interior was besmirched with a variety of graffiti, insults, and autographs, and Morris recalls touching up the walls at the end of each day.

While the extreme simplicity of *Passageway* demonstrates a substantive departure from the chaos that shaped Happenings, which had begun to appear in New York by 1959, it inevitably recalls their desire to manipulate audiences as well as to draw upon an insistent aggressiveness. Yet Morris had exchanged the loose, episodic, and theatrical form, with its narrative implications, and the expressive texture of the Fluxus event—which may be seen as deliberately continuous with Abstract Expressionism—for a radical contraction of impact.

Concentrating on one gesture—that of entry—and staging the work so that this gesture would be performed by each member of its "audience," Morris made *Passageway* into a spatial envelope that could mold each participating body to its task. In this sense, *Passageway* was an extension of *Column's* (see p. 90) marriage of dance and built structure. Where the 1960 work had reduced the body's position to the mere difference between vertical and horizontal, the later work produced the single vector of a body advancing in space. Each of Morris's early large-scale sculptures, such as *Pine Portal* (1961, no. 8), *Portal* (1961, no. 9), or *Barrier* (1962, no. 15), manifests this understanding

of a newly conceived medium. Morris was able, in all these works, to use the specificity of gesture as it is articulated in dance to create an interactive shape, a sculptural "prop" that would simultaneously confront the performing body and concentrate within its own prismatic form that body's gestural energy.

If *Passageway* seems to move Morris away from the example of Cage, Fluxus, and Happenings to a position as a nascent Minimalist, the early reception of Minimalism may be understood as forming a bridge between these phenomena. As Barbara Rose began to articulate it in 1963, a new and insurgent Dada, or "neo-Dada," based in large part on the ideas of Cage, had taken hold in contemporary artistic practice.<sup>2</sup> Implicit in this neo-Dada, she wrote, was the use of commonplace objects to produce an imagery of "the failed American Dream." In this way, such formally diverse art as the Happenings of Jim Dine, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Whitman, the paintings and combines of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, and the sleek-surfaced "New Realism" (now known as Pop art) of Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselman were given common cause.

Two years later, in her essay "A B C Art," Rose wove Minimalism into the fabric of neo-Dada, arguing that what linked the two phenomena, despite Minimalism's nonimagistic and Pop's figurative vocabulary, was the literal, cool, and unexaggerated deployment of the readymade.<sup>3</sup>

1. Morris recalls that at times he was the only person in attendance at Flynt's lectures.

2. Early Happenings include Jim Dine's *Car Crash* (1960), Red Grooms's *The Burning Building* (1959), Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), and Claes Oldenburg's *Snapshots from the City* (1960).

3. Barbara Rose, "Dada Then and Now," *Art International*, January 25, 1963, pp. 23–28.

4. Rose, "A B C Art," *Art in America* (October–November 1965), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 274–97.

4. *Passageway*. 1961. Painted plywood, 8 x 50 feet (2.44 x 15.24 m). Inset: Morris standing inside *Passageway*.



## BOX FOR STANDING, 1961

A photograph taken in Morris's Church Street studio in 1961 shows the artist standing, arms at his sides, inside a pine box. Made to his precise measurements, the work engulfs him like a coffin. His downward gaze and expressionless face convey little; the image's sense of purpose and overall intensity seem, therefore, to derive from the artist's upright posture alone.

That the photograph shows Morris "performing" his sculpture links this work to *Passageway* (1961, no. 4) and the earlier *Column* (1960, p. 90). Like *Passageway*, it can be seen to have certain ties to the early Happenings and, through them, to the bridge being constructed in Europe between late Surrealism and early Nouveau Réalisme. From Meret Oppenheim's *Banquet*, made for the 1959 *International Exhibition of Surrealism*, to Jim Dine's *Car Crash* (1960) or Robert Whitman's *E.G.* (1960), the prone, entombed body had played a central role in the imaginative space being explored by both European and American artists. But unlike these episodic performance pieces, Morris's *Untitled (Box for Standing)* (1961, no. 6)—as had *Passageway*—concentrates its impact in a single gesture, that of the upright coffin, in which the body, held in a vertical position, performs one movement only, the resistance to gravity.

It is this gesture, enacted in real time and space, that moves *Box for Standing* away from a sculpture of representation. Several rounded tombstonelike works in pine (for example, no. 5), also fashioned in 1961, still cling to the conventions of representational sculpture, enclosing the physical object within a veil of illusion and projecting it, thereby, into virtual space. Rejecting the notion of representation, *Box for Standing* demonstrates that what had been largely unthinkable within Modern sculpture had become the very core of Morris's conception of the medium. According to the protocol of these works, the body, although no longer the represented subject, offers its measure to the sculpture and is shown, in turn, to take its experience and knowledge from interacting with its environment.

A set of photographs, made shortly after finishing *Wheels* (1963, no. 7), shows the artist engaged in play. In these images, Morris interacts with the sculpture, a pair of gray-painted cast-iron wheels, four feet in diameter, joined at their centers by a metal bar several feet long. The artist, shifting and moving as he assumes various postures, remains fully in view. The movements seem exploratory—he lifts the wheels by the bar, as if curling a set of weights; stands on the bar, arms outstretched, stands precariously poised with a foot on each wheel. Here again, Morris demonstrates a direct bodily affiliation with his objects.





-facing page, top: *Morris in Box for Standing.*

-facing page, bottom: **5. Untitled (Rough Tombstone).** 1961  
Fir, 60 inches (152.4 cm) high.

**6. Untitled (Box for Standing).** 1961. Fir, 74 x 25 x  
10½ inches (188 x 63.5 x 26.7 cm).



**7** *Wheels* 1963 Laminated fir and painted cast iron,  
47 1/4 inches (121.3 cm) diameter The Art Gallery of Ontario,  
Gift of the Volunteer Committee Fund, Toronto  
Facing page *Morris with Wheels*



## PORTALS, 1961

In the history of Modern sculpture, many notions of the proper way to work materials have been entertained, direct carving, modeling, casting, welding, polishing, and burnishing among them. If the Minimalists, especially Morris and Carl Andre, cannot be aligned with any of these methods, it is a result of their insistence on the basics of building and arranging, which made unnecessary more conventional means of sculptural manipulation. The elementary methods, industrial materials, and standardized units that these artists embraced and, indeed, brought to prominence in the late 1960s bear distinct ties to fundamental building techniques, manifestly architectural problems, and the spatial and temporal matrices of everyday life (that is, nonart). Privileging such ancient structural combinations as the post-and-lintel system or the rows of bricks used in Egyptian architecture, they integrated art work into everyday life, so that, as Clement Greenberg lamented, the work is "readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table, or a blank sheet of paper."<sup>1</sup>

Two of Morris's earliest works were, quite literally, frames for doors in the form of simple post-and-lintel structures. *Untitled (Pine Portal)* (1961, no. 8), an elemental, unpainted wooden frame, was made at the same time as his tombstones (for example, no. 5) and *Columns* (pp. 90–92); this portal was then developed into *Untitled (Portal)* (1961, no. 9), a more substantial gray-painted work, which looked something like a straight arch on two rectangular columns. Bearing within them the notion of passage—that one should pass through them or that standing inside is a state between entering and exiting, coming and going—the issues raised by these works are connected to many of the issues suggested by *Passageway* (1961, no. 4). And like that environment, the *Portals* heighten a sense of self-reflexivity in the viewer's relation to them, an experience that Morris expanded upon in the same year, when he added a mirrored lining to the wooden portal in *Untitled (Pine Portal with Mirrors)* (1961, no. 10). In that work, passage involves a decentering of the body vis-à-vis the frame—as though to pass through the doorway is to leave a dispersed and doubled image of oneself as a kind of deposit or trace. Morris's *Portals*, and, similarly, *Passageway*, *Box for Standing* (1961, no. 6), and the *Columns*, establish themselves doubly as architectural appendages and as corollaries to the space of the body, coextensive with it by virtue of its movement or how it occupies space.

Under the pressure of these fundamentally architectural strategies, the sense of metaphor and

of an abstracted ideal space in which to experience sculpture, on which much of this century's sculpture relies, dissolves, a dislocation best underscored by the elimination of the base. These objects—doorways, columns, and the like—rest on and draw their uncanny immediacy from the floor on which they sit and on which we walk. For it cannot be said that a portal is *like* a portal; it simply *is* one. Another consequence of this new grounding was that sculpture's organizing core underwent significant modulation and extension. For one thing, the new sculpture disrupted the practice of viewing as a stable relationship between a centralized sculptural object and its viewer; spatial and temporal events were destabilized and decentered.

In short, these early works issue from Morris's involvement with the "capacity of the body to make something directly, in its own space,"<sup>2</sup> using simple tools and commonly available materials, manipulated in terms of explicitly straightforward procedures. "These procedures," he has written, "involved a priori decisions and basic construction methods."<sup>3</sup>

1 Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), p. 25.

2 Communication from the artist, February 1993.

3 *Ibid.*

8. *Untitled (Pine Portal)*. 1961. Laminated fir, 96 x 48 x 12 inches (243.8 x 121.9 x 30.5 cm)







**facing page: 9. Untitled (Portal), 1961.** Painted plywood, 96 x 48 x 12 inches (243.8 x 121.9 x 30.5 cm)

**10. Untitled (Pine Portal with Mirrors), 1978** refabrication of a 1961 original. Laminated pine and mirrors, 84 inches (213.4 cm) high. Collection of the artist.

## BOX WITH THE SOUND OF ITS OWN MAKING, 1961

One of Morris's earliest sculptural objects, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11) can be understood in terms of the artist's self-apprenticeship to Marcel Duchamp. Morris's work evokes Duchamp's *With Hidden Noise* (1916), a ball of twine sandwiched between metal plates that contains within it something unidentifiable that makes noise when the object is shaken. Contrary to Duchamp's intentions, however, the sound emanating from *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* is meant to dispel the idea of secrecy, substituting instead the experience of an intelligible process and its duration. Together with *Cloud* (1962, no. 12), *Frame* (1962, no. 14), *Wheels* (1963, no. 7), and some smaller pieces, the work was first exhibited at the Gordon Gallery in New York, in a group show (February 27–March 24, 1963) that included the work of several Japanese artists to whom Morris had been introduced by Arakawa.

Just as Morris's *Column* (1960, p. 90) operated in a space between sculpture and theater, *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* violates the Modernist separation of the genres by using sound to open up the closed silence of the traditional plastic arts. Thus, the visual experience of the cube's form—its extreme geometrical simplicity—is ruptured internally by the auditory encounter that the experience of the object demands: issuing from the depths of this handcrafted box is a tape recording of all the sounds—sawing, hammering, measuring, sanding—produced during the three hours it took Morris to build it.

In what could be thought of as a collapse of outside and inside, of past and present, the making and the made are conflated in the experience of the object. This kind of recording or inscription of production characterizes Morris's later anti-form, or Process, work, for example *Felt* (pp. 212–21), *Threadcast* (1968, no. 104), and the series of *Blind Time* drawings that he began in 1973 (pp. 246–51 and 300–05). By April 1968, a reconsideration of the ideological rift between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, which his own early work had opened, led Morris to a rejection of the latter in favor of the former. In his 1968 essay "Anti Form," he states his admiration for the way the process of executing the work remains legible on the surface of an action painting. Jackson Pollock's "recovery of process," which involves "a profound re-thinking of the role of both materials and tools in making," came to signal for Morris the truth to physical properties of materials and the force of gravity that would give shape to his process-oriented works. Just as Morris considers the early rope works to be proto-anti-form, *Box with the Sound of Its Own*

*Making* is often cited as an early example of what would become a large body of process-saturated work.

Some of the early critical writing on Minimalism drew a parallel between the minimal imagery of Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist art and the minimal "work" involved in Duchamp's gesture of making art simply by signing readymade objects.<sup>1</sup> In this context Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* was greeted not only as an allusion to *With Hidden Noise* but also to such Duchamp-inspired work as Jasper Johns's *Tango* (1955), a monochromatic painting with a music box behind its surface.<sup>2</sup>

1. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33–35.
2. Barbara Rose, "A B C Art," *Art in America* (October 1965), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 271–77. Richard Wollheim developed this parallel in the essay that, later, would lend its name to Minimalism. See Wollheim, "Minimal Art," *Arts Magazine* (January 1965), reprinted in Battcock, pp. 387–99.
3. Marcia Tucker, *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1970), p. 13.



Marcel Duchamp, *With Hidden Noise*, 1916. Metal and rope, 5 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches (12.8 x 13 x 11.4 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.



**11. Box with the Sound of Its Own Making, 1961.** Walnut box, speaker, and three-and-one-half-hour recorded tape,  $9\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{4} \times 9\frac{3}{4}$  inches (24.8 x 24.8 x 24.8 cm). Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Bagley and Virginia Wright.

## EARLY MINIMALISM

When Donald Judd first encountered Morris's earliest Minimal works, exhibited at New York's Green Gallery in spring 1963, he described them as "a standing open square, a gate, a pair of wheels, a suspended slab." While the spareness of the works was "potentially interesting," there "isn't, after all, much to look at." The following year Judd continued to "wonder why anyone would build something only barely present," and he compared the effect of the works to one of Robert Rauschenberg's white canvases, quoting Rauschenberg's quip: "If you don't take it seriously, there is nothing to take."<sup>2</sup>

Identifying Morris with this "flat, unevaluating view," Judd saw him as having made the most reductive possible aesthetic statement, namely that something could identify itself as art simply by being "purposefully built," saying: "It sets a lowest common denominator." This lowest denominator, he went on to argue, was not that of the readymade whose "only claim to be [art] is that it is being exhibited." Rather it seemed to emerge from the features of the one work he found himself admiring, *Untitled (Slab)* (1962, no. 13), an eight-foot-square plinth supported a few inches off the floor: "The space below it, its expanse—you are displaced from sixty-four square feet, which you look down upon—and this position flat on the floor are more interesting than the vaguely sculptural and monumental upright positions of the other three pieces."<sup>3</sup>

In the winter of 1963–64, confronted with *Untitled (Cloud)* (1962, no. 12), the hanging version of *Slab*, Judd was to see the value of pressing composition out of the work—"Order, in the old sense, can't be read into something that is just a rectangle or a triangle"—which was productive of a singularly unitary encounter: "Morris's pieces are minimal visually, but they're powerful spatially."<sup>4</sup> Judd had worked his way to an experience of what Morris asserted was the ambition of his early Minimalist work: to bring into existence the logically impossible thing "with only one property," impossible since anything we perceive is given to us as extended, colored, textured, illuminated, in short, as a bundle of properties. But in reducing the visual detail of his works, making them operate as a pure displacement of space, Morris was able to deliver them as "unitary forms," or what he called *gestalts*, saying that the *gestalt* provides the cognitive energy to bind a form together in a way that can't be analyzed or broken down into separate parts.<sup>5</sup>

In 1964, Barbara Rose connected this idea of a pure *gestalt* with the question of how to "point to the shape" of something, raised by Ludwig Wittgenstein

in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Indeed, "pointing to the shape" is one of the first of the language games in this text, games fashioned to reduce linguistic statements radically enough to separate the idea of privately established meanings of words (maintained by an individual's "intention," or his or her individual memories or feelings) from meanings put in place by publicly executed use.

This question of displacing the private, interior conception of meaning by the public one is addressed in the second of Morris's "Notes on Sculpture," where he makes clear that a large, "public" scale for sculpture, such as that of *Slab*, will force the viewer to stop making relationships between aspects that are internal to a given form and, instead, focus on the public nature of the relationship between the objects and "the literal space in which they exist and the kinesthetic demands placed upon the body." Because of this, the old notion of composition is replaced by relationships that are "a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision."<sup>6</sup> The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. Clearly, the desire to forge an idea of "public meaning," determined by use rather than private intention, was part of the refusal of the Abstract Expressionist aesthetic signaled by so much else of Morris's early work.

1. Donald Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 37, no. 8 (May 1963), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959–1975* (Halifax Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 90.

2. Judd, "Hartford," *Arts Magazine* 38, no. 6 (March 1964), reprinted in *Donald Judd*, p. 117.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

4. Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 5 (February 1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd*, p. 165.

5. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 222–28.

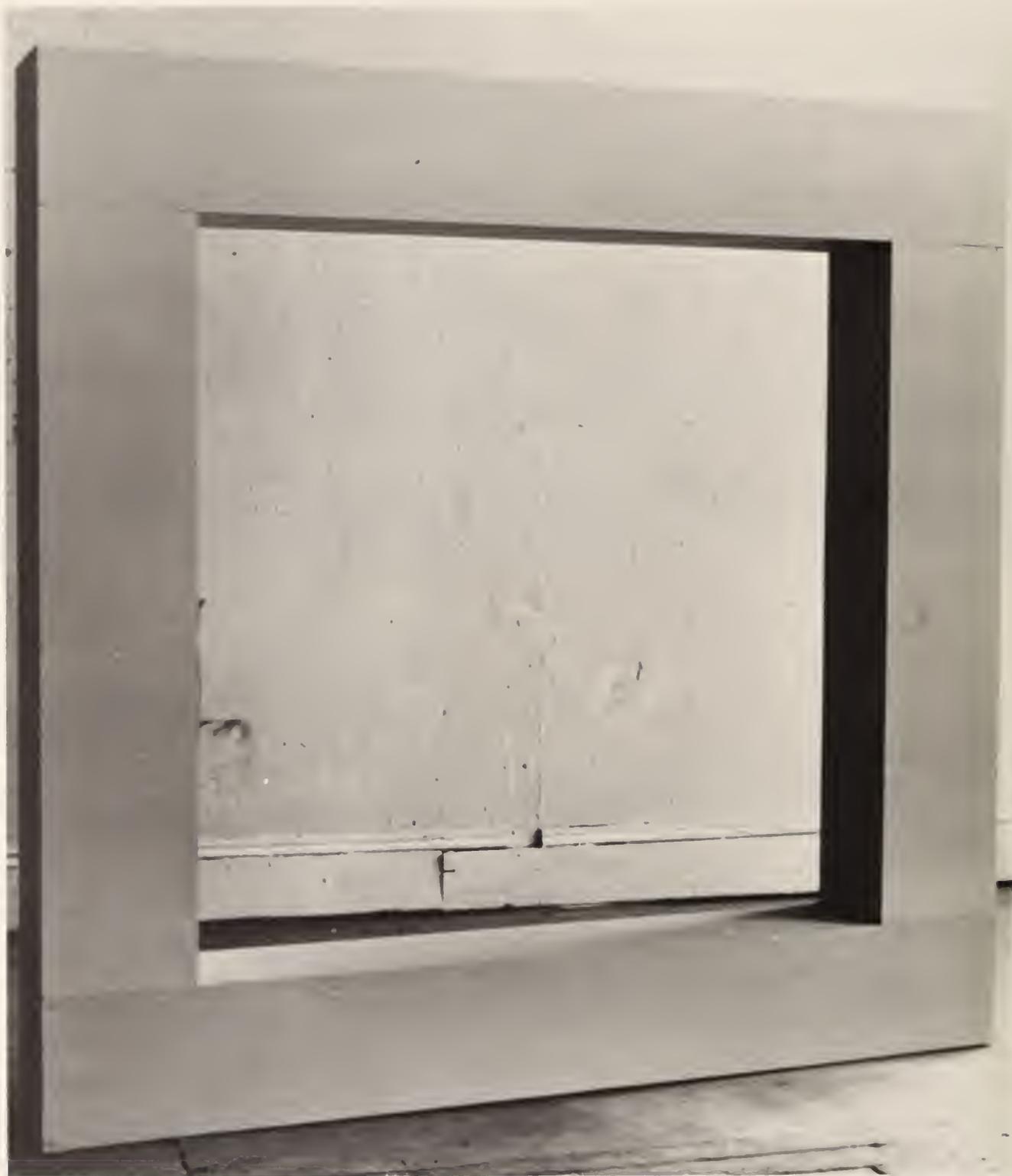
6. Barbara Rose, "A B C Art," *Art in America* (October–November 1965), reprinted in Battcock, p. 291.

7. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966), reprinted in Battcock, pp. 228–55.

**facing page top: 12. *Untitled (Cloud)*.** 1962. Painted plywood, 10 x 72 x 72 inches (25.4 x 182.9 x 182.9 cm)

**13. *Untitled (Slab)*.** 1962. Painted plywood, 12 x 96 x 96 inches (30.5 x 243.8 x 243.8 cm)





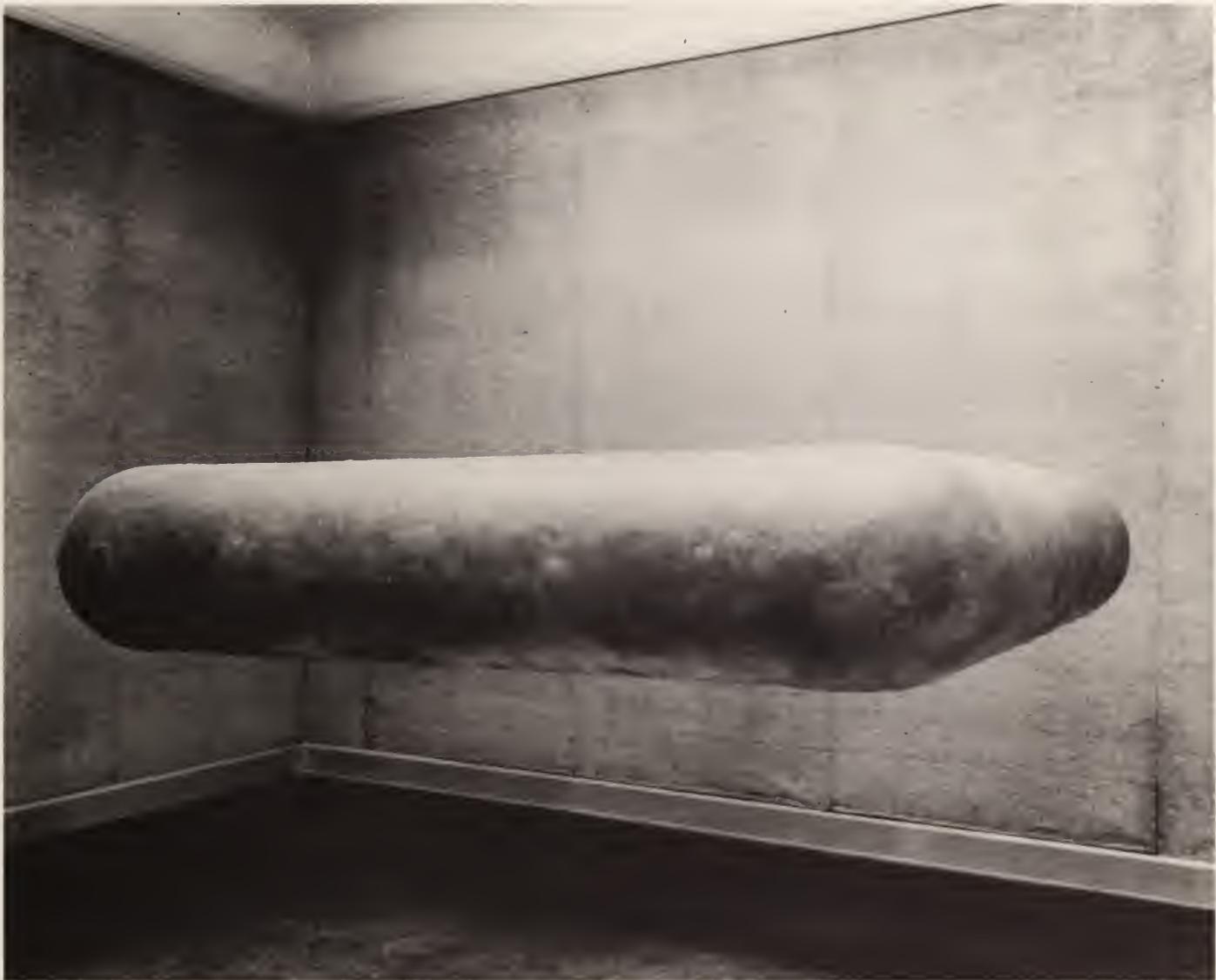
**14 Untitled (Frame)**, 1962 Painted plywood,  
84 x 84 x 12 inches (213.4 x 213.4 x 30.5 cm)



15. **Barrier**, 1962 Painted plywood 79 x 90 x 12 inches  
(200.7 x 228.6 x 30.5 cm)



**16. Untitled (Fiberglass Frame), 1968** Translucent fiberglass,  
72 x 96 x 18 1/2 inches (182.9 x 243.8 x 47 cm) Solomon R  
Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection



17. **Untitled (Fiberglass Cloud)**, 1967. Translucent fiberglass and nylon threads, 18 x 96 x 96 inches (45.7 x 244 x 244 cm). Tate Gallery, London.

## THE DUCHAMP CONNECTION

Morris encountered the art of Marcel Duchamp in the early 1960s by means of Robert Motherwell's book *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Robert Lebel's Duchamp monograph (the first to appear), and the two Duchamp-inspired members of the New York avant-garde, John Cage and Jasper Johns. Duchamp's program—his notion of art as strategic operation, the declared symbiosis between theory and practice—clearly affected the development of Morris's own closely linked theoretical and artistic modes of production. Accordingly, in her catalogue essay for Morris's 1969 exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Annette Michelson associated a body of his work with six themes drawn from Duchamp's practice: "transparency, translucency, reflection"; "the reconstructed, revised found object"; "subversion of measure"; "framing" (and unframing); "art as money"; and "ecology as order and/or chance."

The theme of reflection appears in Morris's second mirror piece *Pharmacy* (1962, no. 19), named after Duchamp's assisted readymade *Pharmacie* (1914), in which Duchamp had merely added a red and a green dot and his signature to a kitsch print of a winter landscape. Morris's work consists of two circular mirrors on posts facing each other. Stationed between them is a square of glass, on one side of which Morris painted a red vase, on the other a green one. These vases and mirrors constitute an enclosed system resulting in an infinite series of cross-reflections, the work also contains a reference to the original "site" of Duchamp's work, the French pharmacy, in the window of which one traditionally finds two large glass jars, one containing red liquid, the other green.

The readymade, which Duchamp initiated with the 1911 *Bottle Rack*, used the found object to mock, from within the aesthetic system, both the increasingly evident status of art as commodity and the presuppositions of Modernist ideas about form. But perhaps the readymade, the theme through which Duchamp himself had declared his own break with painting (dismissing it as retinal obsessiveness), was even more formative for Morris. Not only did it brush against the grain of Modernism's more-conventional notions of composition, but as a model of the contingency of value, as well as a transgressive way of thinking about production and consumption, the readymade proved valuable for Morris at a juncture when he, too, was disavowing painting. As Duchamp had before him, he modified found objects through various interventions—sound, language, lived time, and memory. He made use of found and nonrelational compositions in diverse serial and permutation pieces,



Marcel Duchamp *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* 1915–23. Oil and lead wire on glass, 107 x 69 1/4 inches (272.5 x 175.8 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. Bequest of Katherine S. Dreier.

straining, as he would through other techniques, prior limits on facture, composition, and authenticity.

With Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as the *Large Glass* (1915–23), in mind, Morris considered the notion of the bachelor apparatus. He explored mechanical or repetitive movement in *Cock Cunt* (no. 34), *Fountain* (no. 18), and *Swift Night Ruler* (no. 32), objects, all dating to 1965, in which the internal relations of the work convey onanism often coupled with disappointed desire. Morris's *Fountain* is a steel-ribbed trash can suspended from a painted, wooden armature, inside the bucket a mechanical pump noisily circulates water. By virtue of its title and neo-Dada sensibility, the work openly hails Duchamp's own *Fountain* (1917), a signed, up-ended urinal submitted as an entry to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York. But

beyond that, Morris's reinterpretation of the earlier object through the concept of circulation lends itself to a discussion of the transmission of artistic, linguistic, and commodity forms, and the ways in which signs are pressed into the service of systems of meaning and exchange. The dialogical relation between these fountains was reasserted in Hans Haacke's *Baudrichard's Ecstasy* (1988), in which a gold-painted urinal is displayed on an ironing board (as Duchamp once recommended be done with a Rembrandt), from which is suspended a bucket, housing a pump forcing water up into the bowl of the urinal. The circulatory action in Morris's version, as well as in Haacke's rendition (portraying the readymade as humorous critique of structural-systems theory), recalls the cause-and-effect narrative elaborately posited and thwarted in the *Large Glass*, where the circulation of erotic gas is held forever in check, fulfilling neither Bride nor Bachelors.

The deadpan eroticism and the affectless treatment of the body evident in Duchamp's *Large Glass*, and his later cast body parts (*Prière de toucher* [1947], *Female Fig Leaf* [1950], *Objet Dard* [1951], *Wedge of Chastity* [1954], *With My Tongue in My Cheek* [1959]), as well as his *Etant Données* (1946–66), distinguish numerous works by Morris as well: lead reliefs enframe embedded imprints of vulva, hands, and feet; cast brains are overlaid with dollar bills and silver (nos. 41 and 42); ruler and yardstick pieces, which, while signaling the "subversion of measure" enacted in Duchamp's *Trois Stoppages etalons* (1913), include matter-of-factly crude sexual allusions (for example, no. 34). Likewise, Morris portrayed the alienated body in performances such as *Site* (1964, no. 63) and *Waterman Switch* (1965, no. 69). The *Large Glass* also informed several works by Morris that derive their titles and momentum from linguistic elements in Duchamp's work. In 1961, Morris executed *Litanies*, a drawing that combines delicate scrawling with the words of "Litanies of the Chariot," terms elaborated in the *Green Box* (1934), a group of Duchamp's notes for the *Large Glass*. In one of these notes, Duchamp remarked that the Chariot, itself a bachelor machine, was to glide back and forth in a symbolic circuit as it recited the litanies: "SLOW LIFE," "VICIOUS CIRCLE," "ONANISM," "HORIZONTAL," "ROUND TRIP," "FOR THE BUFFER," "JUNK OF LIFE," "CHEAP CONSTRUCTION," "TIN CORDS IRON WIRE," "ECCENTRIC WOODEN PULLEYS," "MONOTONOUS FLY WHEEL," "BEER PROFESSOR." Morris's lead *Untitled (Slow Life Plaque)* (1963, no. 20) bears the litanies emblematically on its front.



Hans Haacke, *Baudrichard's Ecstasy*, 1988. Mixed media, 45 x 54 x 14 inches (114.3 x 137.2 x 35.6 cm). Courtesy John Weber Gallery, New York.

A third work, *Litanies* (1963, no. 21), is a lead-covered box, on the lid of which is a key ring holding twenty-seven keys, each inscribed with a word from the Duchamp text. The work, exhibited at the Green Gallery in Morris's first solo exhibition in New York, was acquired by Philip Johnson. When Johnson was late in paying for the work, Morris decided to follow another Duchampian strategy, the majestic conveying of aesthetic significance, by withdrawing his aesthetic seal from *Litanies* in a work called *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal* (1963, no. 22), an act of reversibility that Michelson reads as "unframing."<sup>1</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has discussed this reversal in terms of legalistic language and administrative style, calling it a Duchamp-inspired shift toward authorship effected through legal contract and institutional discourse. The right-hand side of *Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal*, labeled "EXHIBIT A," shows frontal and side views of the disputed work, delicately embossed to yield a shadowy presence evocative of the absence being claimed. The left-hand side encloses the typed, notarized "Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal"

In 1969, Morris created a work entitled *Money*





**facing page: 18. Fountain**, 1963. Painted wood, galvanized steel bucket, hook, circulating pump, and water,  $35\frac{7}{8} \times 12\frac{5}{8} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$  inches (91 x 32 x 37 cm). Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main.

**19. Pharmacy**, 1962. Painted wood and mirrors, 18 x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 36 inches (45.7 x 29.2 x 91.4 cm). Collection of the artist.

for *Anti-Illusion. Procedures Materials*, an exhibition of contemporary art organized by Marcia Tucker and James Monte at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Like many of the other objects in the show, it involved a logic of process. The piece initially consisted of a contractual agreement and related correspondence between Morris and the trustees of the Whitney, as well as a canceled bank check. It documents Morris's original proposal, which was to invest a small sum, to be provided by the museum, in blue-chip art and then to turn it around at inflated prices on the European market for the museum's profit. Because the trustees refused the proposal unless the project could be guaranteed as risk free, Morris was limited to performing modest and sheltered bond investments on Wall Street, these carried out under the supervision of the trustee Howard Lipman. The expanded version of *Money* (1973, no. 24) contains additional documentation of these financial transactions. Morris's strategy of making art from the procedures of investment clearly relates to Duchamp's production of bonds for investing in a system to win at roulette at the Monte Carlo Casino and to his *Tzannek Check* (1919), an art work that Duchamp issued as payment for a dental bill. *Money* also falls under the category of Duchamp-influenced use of legality in art as discussed by Buchloh.

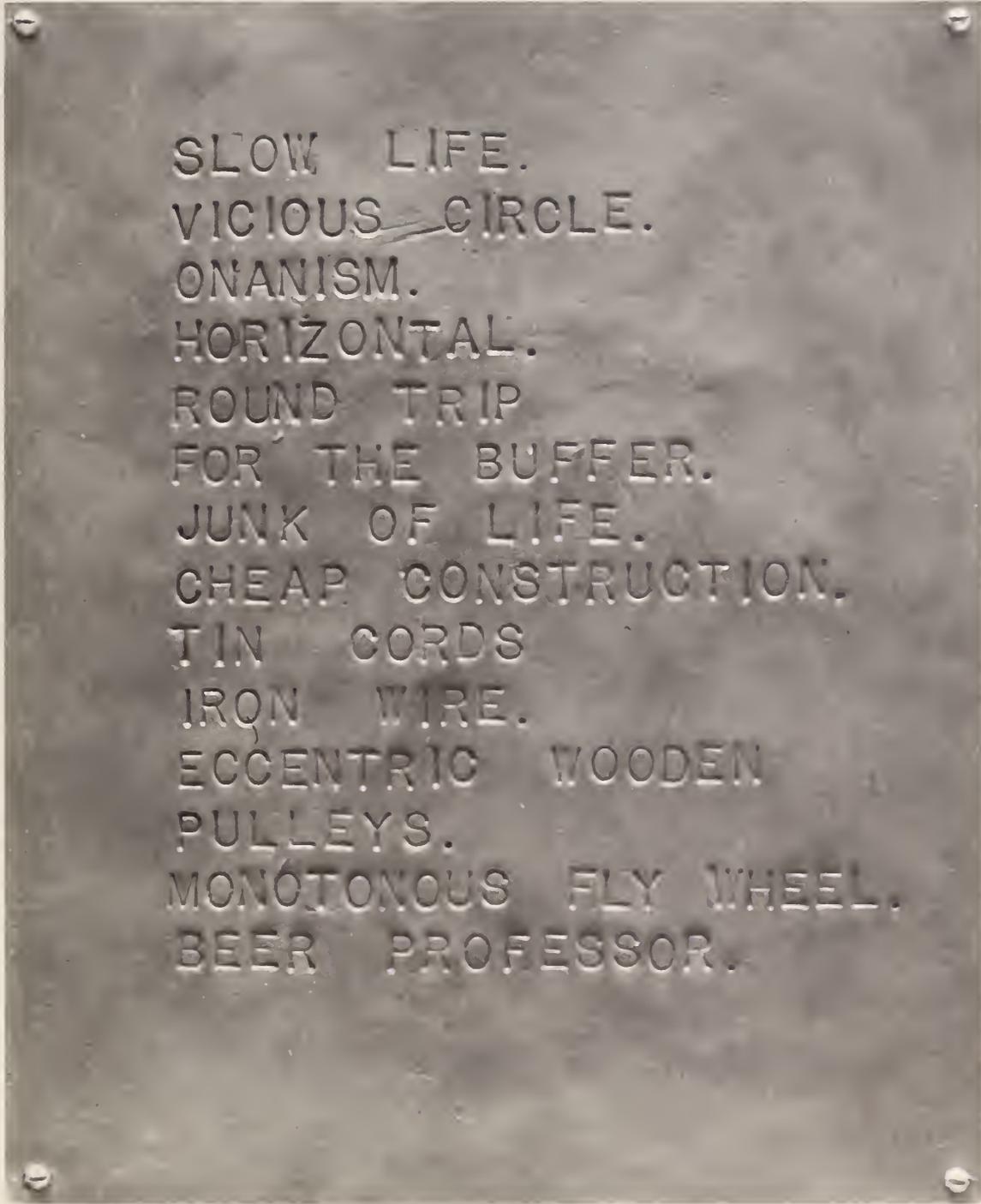
1 Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1981, 1951); Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Grove Press, 1959).

2 Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), pp. 50–53.

3 "The nexus of production and consumption that we find in the ready-made is fraught in many ways. The use, for example, of industrially produced objects may be thought of as a productive way of consuming these objects, making something of them, namely art. In turn, the art is consumed by viewers and is in that way productive of something else. And so on."

4 Michelson, p. 53.

5 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969," *October*, no. 5 (winter 1990), pp. 105–43. An earlier version of this essay was published in *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989).

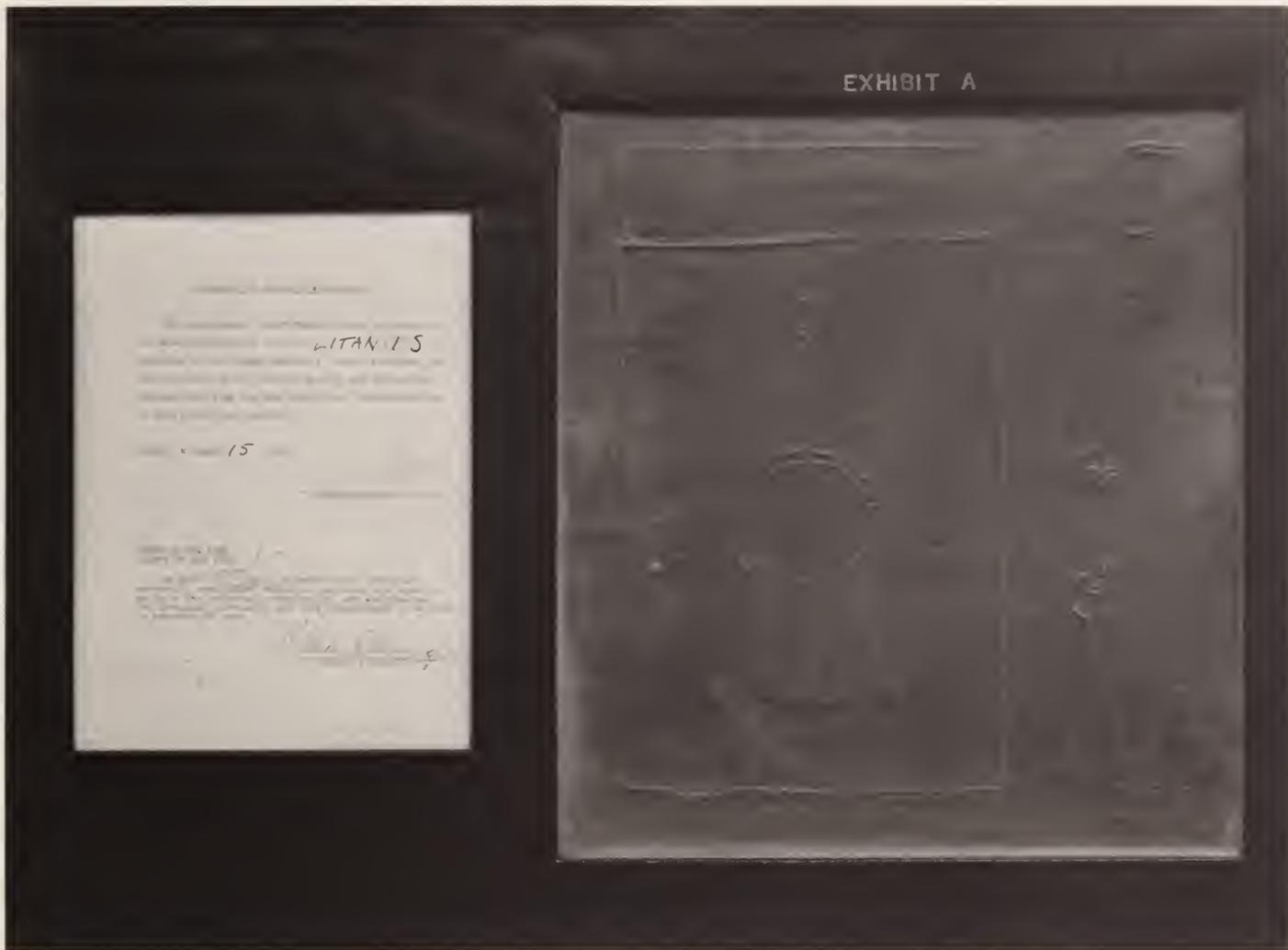


SLOW LIFE.  
VICIOUS CIRCLE.  
ONANISM.  
HORIZONTAL.  
ROUND TRIP  
FOR THE BUFFER.  
JUNK OF LIFE.  
CHEAP CONSTRUCTION.  
TIN CORDS  
IRON WIRE.  
ECCENTRIC WOODEN  
PULLEYS.  
MONOTONOUS FLY WHEEL.  
BEER PROFESSOR.

20. **Untitled (Slow Life Plaque)**, 1963. Lead over wood panel painted with metallic powder in synthetic polymer, 10 x 8 x 3/4 inches (25.4 x 20.3 x 1.9 cm). Collection of the artist.

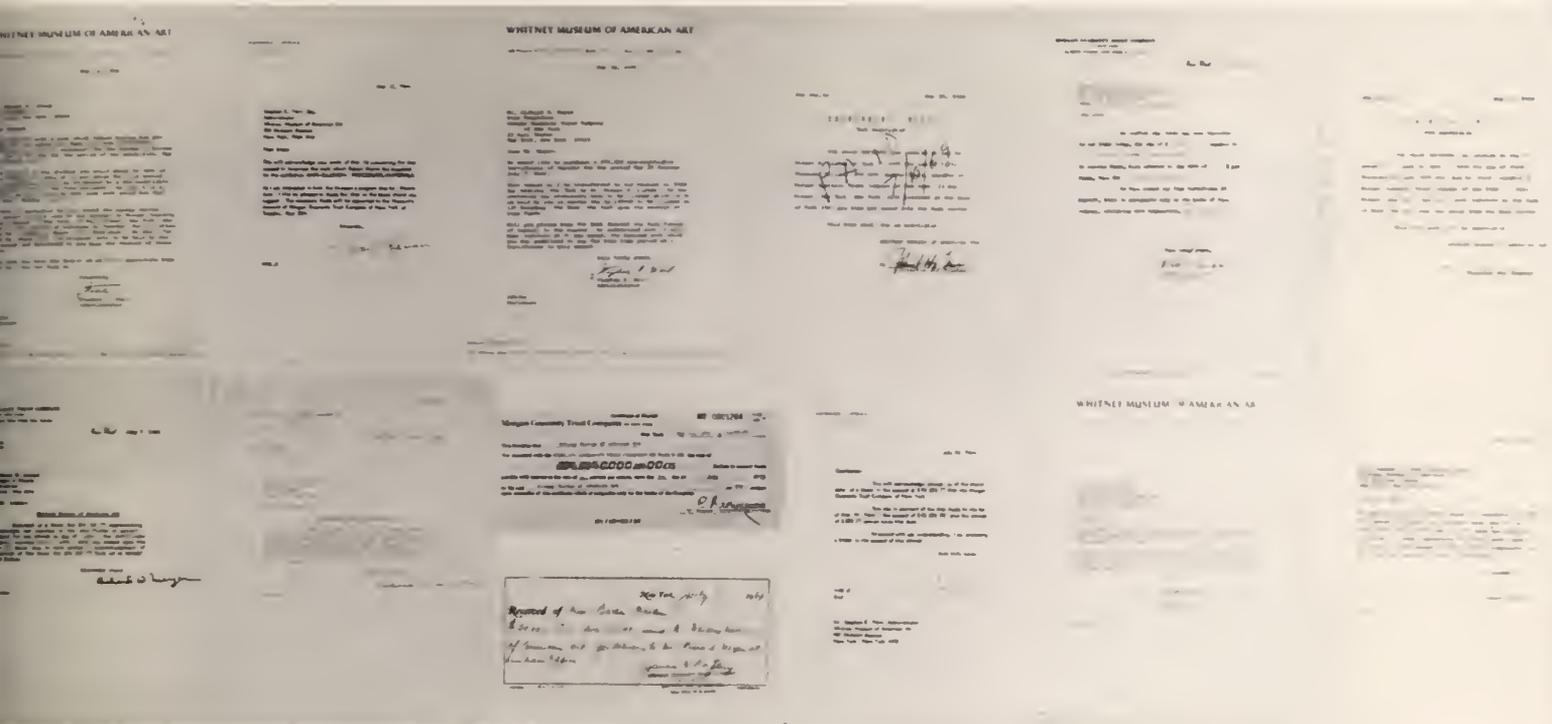


21, *Litanies*. 1963 Lead over wood, steel key ring, twenty-seven keys, and brass lock. 12 x 7<sup>1/4</sup> x 2<sup>1/4</sup> inches (30.5 x 18 x 6.4 cm) The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson



**22. Statement of Esthetic Withdrawal, 1963.** Typed and notarized statement on paper and sheet of lead over wood, mounted in imitation leather mat,  $17\frac{5}{8} \times 23\frac{3}{4}$  inches (44.8 x 60.4 cm) overall. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson.





24. Money, 1973 (expanded from 1969 version). Fifteen sheets of typed office stationery and two certificates, 36 x 96 inches (91.4 x 243.8 cm). Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

## I-BOX, 1962

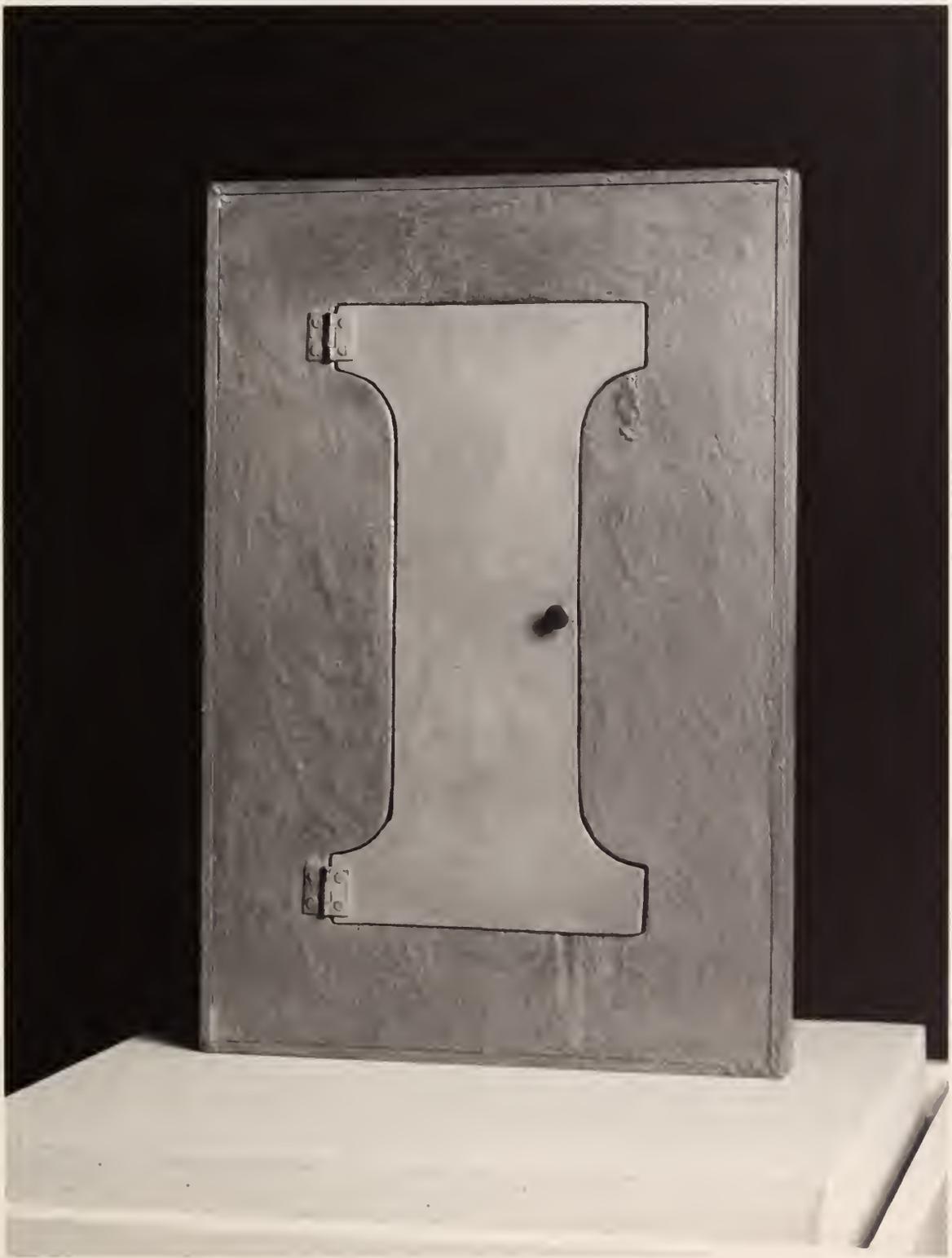
In 1963 at the Green Gallery in New York, Morris exhibited a selection of recently made small sculptural objects, among them *Portrait* (1963, no. 43), a set of gray-painted bottles containing his own bodily fluids; *Self-Portrait (EEG)* (1963, no. 44), a work based on his electroencephalogram; and the related and enigmatic *I-Box* (1962, no. 25). It was the last, perhaps because of its impressively unassuming irony, that attracted most critical attention. Offering itself to many registers of interpretation, it is an object whose simply articulated format gives way to an unexpected complexity.

Through the external form of a chalky pink door in the shape of the letter *I*, the work literalizes the "I" of its maker, for this door opens to reveal a photograph of the naked Morris, another, more "personal" self, posed in front of a wall, standing with his head tilted back somewhat derisively, with a twinkle in his eye and a partial erection. However nontraditional and surprising, the *I-Box* was, therefore, thematically consistent with the focus on self-portraiture of the other works in the exhibition.

Indelibly marked by a self-conscious disavowal of the artistic conventions associated with Abstract Expressionism, the moment in which the *I-Box* was produced was in large part conditioned by the work of Jasper Johns. During the 1950s, Johns had developed devices and strategies for undermining Abstract Expressionism's continuation of Modernist aesthetic concerns, particularly those of visual immediacy, through which it was thought possible to obtain a direct connection to the vital being of the maker, and of aesthetic disinterestedness, which was understood to be promoted by abstraction.<sup>1</sup> By shifting the confluence of brushwork and iconography toward a new banality—the expressively individual "stroke" applied now to mass-produced objects such as targets or maps—as well as refiguring the body as a site of interest, his work contradicted tenets linked to the formalist moment in the reception of twentieth-century art. For instance, in *Target with Plaster Casts* (1955), Johns juxtaposes a painted target with a row of wooden boxes with doors that, when opened, reveal cast-plaster body fragments; referring to peepholes and voyeurism, this arrangement flies in the face of disinterested viewing, just as it also holds the dream of immediacy at bay.

The irony demonstrated in *I-Box* was also designed to operate against the grain of Abstract Expressionism. Where for the Abstract Expressionists the canvas had been labeled an arena in which to act, and it was, therefore, understood as the site of the "I"'s

25. *I-Box*, 1962 (closed view). Painted plywood cabinet covered with Sculptmetal, containing photograph, 19 x 12<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (48.3 x 32.4 x 3.5 cm). Collection Leo Castelli





Jasper Johns, **Target with Plaster Casts**, 1955. Encaustic and collage with plaster casts, 51 x 44 x 3½ inches (129.5 x 111.8 x 8.9 cm). Collection Leo Castelli.

facing page: **I-Box** (open view)

inscription, the *I-Box*, in an inversion of terms, openly trivializes such heroics, at once refiguring the self associated with art making in terms of a mechanical process (photography) and subverting the notion of experiencing art as an intentional totality, the action painter's heroism here transcoded in raw sexual terms.

In the case of *I-Box*, the physical self is encoded through the camera; and, from the vantage point of today, we might argue that the self is both hidden and revealed through the convention of the box in a manner that invokes a history of hidden and disclosed pornographic pictures. In any case, the work entails a moment of recognition as well as a momentary confusion—the subject of masculine artistic mastery, namely the Abstract Expressionist, is unveiled, undone, made comical.

Such a reading would imply that this same “I” signals the eye, and thus anticipates and interjects a viewer seeing and apprehending the object, the implication at first being that the work is a variation of a peephole. Through the movement of ellipsis, however, this reading breaks into two alternate and noncoincidental meanings, doubly centered on the image, yet invertible and shifting.<sup>2</sup> Here, the reference is not to the viewer, but rather to the unaverted gaze of the artist, grinning knowingly at the camera, with his penis partially erect. These features insinuate that the pleasure in the image is, at least in part, Morris's own. Thus the (abjecting) pleasure of the voyeuristic experience is split and confused: whose pleasure is being reproduced through this picture? The work seems to bear witness to the notion that the pleasure in the “I,” at once Morris's narcissistic and playful disruption of viewing and, at the same time, the viewer's uneasy pleasure in looking at it, relies on a double capture of the same image. Here, the *I-Box* emerges as significant insofar as it operates as a hinge between forms: as a divided and dividing pleasure, in the interstices between sculpture and photography. Beyond the issues of genre addressed in this work, Morris undertakes the interposition of the complex and interrelated discourses of subjectivity structured around language on the one hand, and the sexual bases of power on the other. He combines reference to the subject's constitution of a unified self through the utterance of the “I” and to the phallus, also unitary, which join to signal the notions of oneness and totality.

1 See also “Metered Bulb and Location, 1963,” pp. 132–33, for further discussion of Johns and his importance to Morris's work.

2 The strategy of ellipsis referred to here is described by Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: Athlone Press, 1986), p. 162; originally published in French as *Cinema 1: L'image mouvement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983).



## CARD FILE, 1962

The locus of the "Caucus-race," an absurdist game described in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* in which the players start and stop as they wish, move more slowly when trying to move more quickly, and mysteriously end up where they began, is that of systematized senselessness. It is this field that Morris entered from time to time in order to disrupt, or make self-conscious, the movement and process of generating a work of art. An example is the early neo-Dada *Card File* (1962, no. 26), a wall-mounted, vertical flat file containing a group of alphabetically indexed cards that record the steps the artist followed in conceiving of and making it. Like Carroll's players, the work is guided by an absurd logic of disclosure that, in explicating the supposedly hidden progression that leads from "creative" intention, to the act of composition, to the final art work itself, comments on and rethinks that process.

First shown in 1963 at the Green Gallery in New York, and subsequently in *Language*, a show at the Dwan Gallery in New York, *Card File* operates according to an internal system of cross-referencing that drives a step-by-step procedure for the viewer to follow. Traveling the circuitous route mapped by the cards, one moves, ironically, through the intentions and process by which the work was elaborated.

Archival orderliness—or so it seems until one notices the "mistakes" and lost cards—is the disguise that this work assumes in order to perform what is a fragmentary, non-narrative, and irreducibly complex process. The forty-four file cards, gathered under various subject headings—"Accidents," "Categories," "Decisions," "Forms," "Interruptions," "Losses," "Mistakes," "Owners," "Signature," and "Stores," among them—bear an assortment of typed remarks that indicate considerations and circumstances that figured in the work's making. Thus we read that Morris purchased the cards at Daniels Stationary [sic], lost them, recovered them, discussed the work with a friend, conceived the work in the New York Public Library, made mistakes, was interrupted by Ad Reinhardt, and so on.

In its obsessive autoreferentiality, *Card File* gives the lie to any notion of creative spontaneity, burlesquing the traditional idea of the art work as the sum of the intentions and actions of the artist.

**following three pages: 26. Card File, 1962** (full view and six cards) Metal and plastic wall file mounted on wood, containing forty-four index cards, 27 x 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 2 inches (68.6 x 26.7 x 5.1 cm) Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



7/11/62, 3:15 pm

While drinking coffee in the New York Public Library.

Conception

7/17/62, 5:30 pm

That everything relevant will not be recorded.

Dissatisfactions

7/18/62, 2:45 pm

On trip to find file met Ad Reinhardt on corner of 8th Street and Broadway. Talked with him until 5:30 by which time it was too late to continue trip. (See Names)

Interruptions

7/14/62, 7:30 pm

Discover small pack of 3 x 5 cards missing: unable to remember what was written on them.

Losses

7/12 - 14/62

Lost small package of cards. (See Losses).

Total number of typing errors: 12 (at 12/31/62)

11/27/62, 6:35 pm

Third entry on Working - 2 card out of order.

11/27/62, 6:45 pm

"Stationery" misspelled. Discovered by Dick Bellamy,

11/18/62, 2:55 pm. (See Names).

12/17/62, 4:30 am

The inclusion of the category, "Completion".

Mistakes

Accidents: 2

Cards: 49 (at 12/31/62)

Categories: 44

Changes: 0

Dates: 7/11/62 -

Decisions: 12

Deleted Entries: 5

Delays: (See Decisions - 3)

Interruptions: 1

Losses: 1

Mistakes: 4

Things Numbered: 14

Owners:

Purchases: 4

Recoveries: 1

Stores: 5

Trips: 5

Working Periods: 17

Number

## CABINETS, 1963

In their mocking focus on concealment and interiority, both *Untitled (Leave Key on Hook)* (1963, no. 28) and *Photo Cabinet* (1963, no. 27) locate Morris's relation to Marcel Duchamp—relevant here are *Box in a Valise* (1941), the miniature museum of Duchamp's art stored in an attaché case, and *With Hidden Noise* (1916), which had also informed *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11)—in a specifically post-Abstract Expressionist moment. As their titles suggest, these two works look like real cabinets, with doors that may be opened and closed. Yet each frustrates viewer expectations. As David Antin has observed of Morris's cabinets, "The main interest of any box is on the inside (see Pandora)." *Leave Key on Hook*, made of patinated bronze, bears the directive embossed on its front, "LEAVE KEY ON HOOK INSIDE CABINET." But one cannot follow it, because the door, perversely, has been padlocked shut. Inside the cabinet, in addition to the key, there is a word stamped on the back wall that Morris claims to have since forgotten. Playing with the structure of secrecy, the logic of the sealed cabinet is that it forecloses the very desires that it sets in motion. Furthermore, the inaccessible interior takes on the double aspect of curiosity and sexuality, aspects that clearly enhance the viewer's experience of the object.

*Photo Cabinet*, made of wood painted gray, plays not on the secrecy of the sealed container but, instead, on the mystery of the door. Its portal opens but only to reveal a second door, on which has been affixed a photograph of yet another cabinet (or is it the first or, perhaps, the second?) with an open door. The photograph does not present an exact facsimile of the cabinet's interior—it is smaller in size than the cabinet, and its white edges function to frame the view—allowing it to serve as a Brechtian device that frustrates the inclination to believe that the image really is the interior. A *mise-en-abîme*,<sup>2</sup> the infinite structure of reduplication put into place by *Photo Cabinet* works to question the possibility that a representation may ever capture its referent. In its format, *Photo Cabinet* invokes associations with *I-Box* (1963, no. 25), which similarly contains within itself a photographic pun on the interiority of its subject, in that case, Morris himself.

1 David Antin, "Art and Information, 1. Grey Paint, Robert Morris," *Art News* 65, no. 2 (April 1966), p. 58.

2 The term *mise-en-abîme*, which literally means "put into the abyss," refers to a structure created as if by two mutually reflecting mirrors. It is used to speak of those visual or literary works that contain within themselves a miniature representation of all or part of the larger whole. The play within a play in *Hamlet* is an example.



27. *Photo Cabinet*, 1963. Painted wood cabinet containing photograph, 15 x 10 1/4 inches (38.1 x 27.3 cm). Collection of the artist.

28. *Untitled (Leave Key on Hook)*, 1963. Key, lock, and patinated bronze box, 13 x 7 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches (33 x 19.1 x 8.9 cm). Private collection.



## METERED BULB AND LOCATION, 1963

If self-reference—in which what a work “represents” is the very structure or terms of its own medium or support—has been one of the great formal resources of Modernism, it has also provided the means for a mocking critique of high Modernist ambition. In this sense, Marcel Duchamp’s conception of the bachelor machine literalizes the logic of autoreferentiality, thereby parodying it as masturbatory, autistic self-enclosure. “The bachelor,” he was famous for having said, “grinds his chocolate himself.”<sup>1</sup>

Various works by Morris from 1962 and 1963 explore this notion of self-reference-as-autism, but none are as specifically connected to Duchamp as *Metered Bulb* (1963, no. 29). Consisting of the self-absorbed dialogue between an electrical meter and a light bulb, the work seems to invoke the bachelor apparatus of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as the *Large Glass* (1915–23). Suspended, like the Bride, from an inverted L-shaped armature of white-painted plywood, the bulb, in its porcelain pull-chain socket, hovers over an electric meter mounted on the back face of the armature. Wired to the bulb, the meter, in the position of Duchamp’s Bachelors, measures, records, and signals the electrical activity of its “partner.” And even though it is clear that the energy source powering this bachelor machine comes from elsewhere, the result is a mordant expression of closed circuitry.

If Duchamp, in the *Large Glass*, had elaborately fashioned a machine by using all the resources of illusionistic representation, Morris’s *Metered Bulb* may be considered a readymade. In this, the work relates to other light bulbs that had recently entered artistic discourse, ones with a perspicuously impossible relation to energy. These were Jasper Johns’s Sculptmetal or bronze trompe-l’œil bulbs from the late 1950s through the early 1960s, which are arranged on rectangular slabs, either without their sockets or with the socket and, perhaps, a piece of double-layered cord that has been twisted and irregularly shorn at both ends. Johns’s reading of Duchamp’s notion of the readymade extended beyond the found three-dimensional object to include readymade systems that would “produce” two-dimensional pictures, systems like counting or the alphabet. In this sense, Johns combined the readymade strategy with an ironic account of self-reference by choosing already flat objects (targets, maps) to play at generating a Modernist account of painting’s two-dimensionality.

Morris opens his “Notes on Sculpture, Part 4, Beyond Objects” with these remarks on Johns.

*More even than in Pollock’s case, [Johns’s] work was looked at rather than into and painting had not done this before. Johns took painting further toward a state of non-depiction than anyone else. The Flags were not so much depictions as copies, decorative and fraudulent, rigid, ridiculous counterfeits. That is, these works were not depictions according to past terms which had, without exception, operated within the figure-ground duality of representation. Johns took the background out of painting and isolated the thing. The background became the wall. What was previously neutral became actual, while what was previously an image became a thing.*<sup>2</sup>

*Location* (1963, no. 30) is such a Johnsian machine, in which self-reference is used to explode the conventions of painting instead of resecuring them pictorially, as the Modernist discourse would have it, “into their area of competence.”<sup>3</sup> Manifestly autoreferential, the work establishes that it is a wall-bound flat object, for its “representational” elements consist of four little adjustable counters that, set into the middle of each edge, indicate the distance of the rectilinear surface from a given wall’s floor, ceiling, and corners. Yet even as it certifies the picture surface as flat, this strategic bending of self-reference to indicate an actual site in real space empties out the formal conditions of the pictorial convention, substituting for them the material conditions of the three-dimensional, low-relief object. Thus, a work such as *Location*, underscoring the contingency of the work’s position and site, stresses at once the possibility of infinite redefinition and the corruption of placelessness—the disembodied and atemporal viewing of high Modernism.

1 Marcel Duchamp, *Green Box* (1934), in *Marcel Duchamp, Salt Seller*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 68.

2 Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 4, Beyond Objects,” *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969), p. 50.

3 Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Arts Yearbook* 4 (1961), reprinted in *The New Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1966), p. 102.

**facing page, top: 29. Metered Bulb.** 1963. Light bulb, ceramic socket with pull chain, and electricity meter, mounted on painted wood. 17 3/4 x 8 x 8 1/4 inches (45.1 x 20.3 x 21 cm). Collection Jasper Johns.

**30. Location.** 1963. Lead over composite board, aluminum letters and arrows, and metallic meters, 21 x 21 x 1 inches (53.3 x 53.3 x 2.5 cm).



## MEASUREMENT, 1963

Looking for a "machine" that would make a mark divested of expressiveness and, therefore, of intrinsic meaning, artists who had become self-consciously anti-Abstract Expressionist turned to the example of Marcel Duchamp. Among the many precedents offered by his work was *Trois Stoppages étalons* (1913–14), an assemblage that attacks the idea of a standard unit of measurement. Using chance to produce wildly disparate "metersticks," Duchamp transformed the unit of measure from something that has a reusable



Marcel Duchamp *Trois Stoppages étalons*. 1913–14  
Schwartz edition, 1964, number 7 of 8. 50 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 9 inches  
(129.2 x 28.2 x 22.7 cm) Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven,  
Katharine Ordway Fund.

and consistent meaning—an "inch," for example, being a unit that signifies the same thing in every context—into what the structuralists would later call "an empty sign."<sup>1</sup>

While, in his various *Device Circle* paintings (for example, *Passage* [1962] and *Out the Window Number Two* [1962]), Jasper Johns had focused on the idea of a dysfunctional ruler, which, reused as a spatula for smearing paint, became a purely contextual machine or device for making the painterly mark, Morris was more interested in the idea of chance producing measurement as an empty sign. This guided the 1963 works he made using manipulated or assisted ruler-identified objects, produced in incommensurable lengths, and arranged in disparate frameworks. Each bears dividing marks, scaled up or down in relation to the intervals marked on an actual ruler, or estimated from memory, but, in both cases, detached from any sense of the consistency necessary to a system of standard measurement. Mainly intimate in scale, though in some cases larger and relieflike, these objects take on a range of problems that build on Duchamp's example. The many variations that Morris brings to bear on the matter of classification indicate that the machine of measurement, with its endless drive to quantify phenomena, may be challenged.

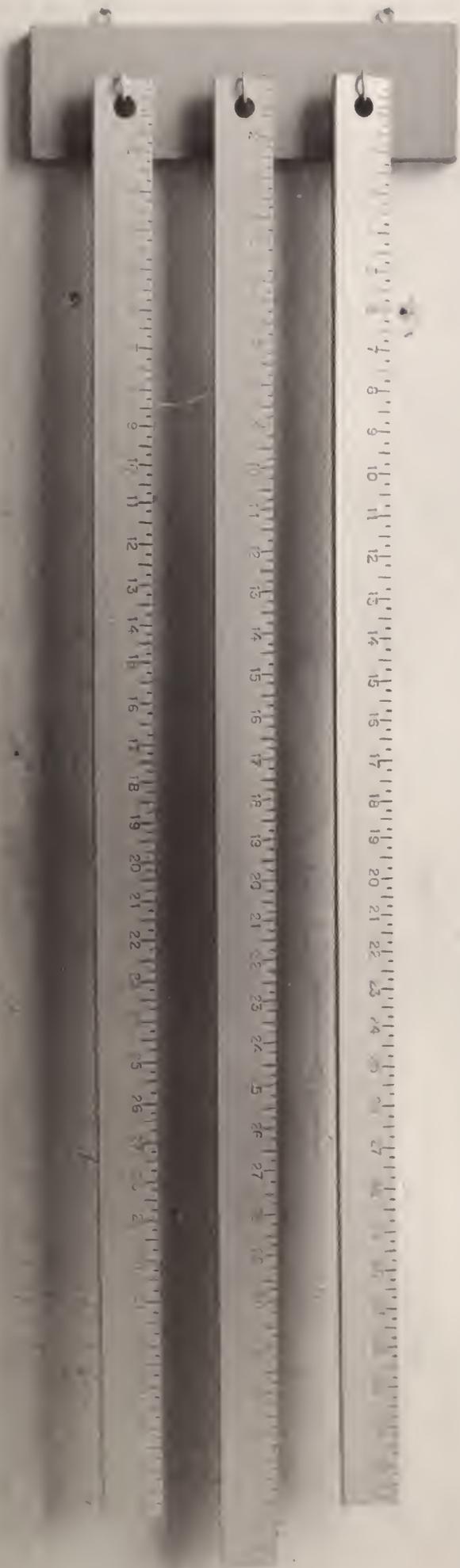
As its title signals, Morris's *Enlarged and Reduced Inches* (1963, no. 38) provides a system for enlarging

and reducing a basic measure. A small plywood box, sheathed in loosely modeled, extremely textural Sculptmetal, with an opening at each end, houses a ruler suspended from wires. Peered at through one opening, a magnifying glass projects an enlarged ruler; peered at through the other end, a reducing lens images a shrunken ruler. In *Three Rulers* (1963, no. 31), three of the artist's custom-made wooden rulers, painted gray and measuring unequal lengths of approximately three feet, are suspended vertically from small metal hooks. This tripartite set and *Suift Night Ruler* (1963, no. 32), which bears its name—an homage to Duchamp's *King and Queen Surrounded by Suift Nudes* (1912)—engraved in bas-relief above it, were first exhibited at the Green Gallery in New York in 1963. In another work, *Estimated Ruler with Shadow* (1963), Morris drew on the play of shadows and perception; here, a gray-painted, small wooden ruler appears to project a large shadow (rendered three-dimensionally in wood) that trails at an angle across the squared wooden surface of the support.

At first, *Untitled (Cock Cunt)* (1963, no. 34) seems anomalous within an otherwise coherent group of "ruler" works. Open, two rulers lie side by side, hinged together along their top edges; closed, the rulers assume a seamless, if dry and arithmetic, embrace. The patently vulgar name of the work, stamped on the base—CUNT—and the back—COCK—of the "mounted" rulers, insinuates a copulatory discourse not immediately obvious in the object itself. Like Morris's later engagements with deadpan eroticism, in this work, too, a cool and removed, yet raw sexuality pervades its measured and precise framework.

1. *Trois Stoppages étalons* was produced by dropping three meter-long threads onto a canvas from a height of one meter, gluing them down in the random shape each assumed as it fell, and then cutting wooden templates (or "meter-sticks") from these disparate profiles. The templates were used to draw lines in both the *Large Glass* and *Tu m'*. The structuralist notion of the "empty sign" is used in relation to the kind of linguistic sign called a "shifter," or "deictic sign," which, like the personal pronouns or words like "here" or "this," take on meaning only in relation to their specific site of enunciation. See Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 217–22.  
2. See also "Leads," pp. 192–201.

31. *Three Rulers*. 1963. Painted wood and metal hooks, 42 x 11 inches (106.7 x 27.9 cm). Estate of Harry N. Abrams.



SWIFT NIGHT RULER

SWIFT NIGHT RULER



REJECTED

E-24-64

SWIFT



**facing page, top: 32. Swift Night Ruler, 1963.** Sliding ruler and wood, painted, 10 x 28 1/2 x 1 inches (25.4 x 72.4 x 2.5 cm): Collection Leo Castelli.

**facing page, bottom: 33. Untitled (Breakage Rejected . . . Accepted), 1963–64.** Glass case on wood base painted with metallic powder in synthetic polymer, containing cracked glass case on wood base, stamped lead, mirror, and two metal rulers, 3 3/4 inches (9.5 cm) high. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson.

**34. Untitled (Cock/Cunt), 1963 (closed and open views).** Two painted rulers hinged together and mounted on painted wood base, 5 1/2 x 16 5/8 x 1 1/2 inches (14 x 42.2 x 3.8 cm). Collection of the artist.



**35. Untitled** 1964 Lead over wood and cast-lead ruler.  
22 x 13 1/4 inches (55.9 x 33.7 cm) Yale University Art Gallery,  
New Haven. Lent by Richard Brown Baker, B.A. 1935



**36. Untitled, 1964.** Lead over wood, ruler, spring, hook, and wire,  $33\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{3}{16} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  inches (85.1 x 15.7 x 6.4 cm). North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Gift of Rhett and Robert Delford Brown.



**facing page, top: 37. Untitled**, 1964. Lead over wood and cast-lead ruler, 21 x 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (53.3 x 38.7 x 3.2 cm). Private collection, New York.

**facing page, bottom: 38. Enlarged and Reduced Inches**, 1963. Ruler hanging inside wood box covered with Sculptmetal, two openings with lenses, one magnifying, one reducing, 5 x 8 x 6 inches (12.7 x 20.3 x 15.2 cm). Collection of the artist.

**39. Untitled**, 1964. Lead over wood and cast-lead ruler, 12 x 34 x 2 inches (30.5 x 86.4 x 5.1 cm). Collection Mrs. Robert M. Benjamin, New York.



## SELF-PORTRAITS, 1963

In 1940, Marcel Duchamp contributed a project to André Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir*, a proposal for "a transformer designed to utilize the slight, wasted energies such as: . . . the exhalation of tobacco smoke. . . the growth of a head of hair, of other body hair and of the nails. . . the fall of urine and excrement. . . movements of fear, astonishment, boredom, anger. . . laughter. . . dropping of tears. . ." Like everything conceived by Duchamp, such a machine could be considered a mechanism, however unconventional, for producing works of art.

Duchamp's ironic machines for the production of the art-mark outside the conventional channels of aesthetic feeling were formative examples for Morris; Duchamp's machines often relocate the gesture's site from the artist's self to the artist's body, thereby mocking the idea that the first can be differentiated from the brute physicality of the second. Morris's connection to Duchamp was forged in the context of Abstract Expressionism, in which every mark produced by the painter was thought to be, before any other representational consideration, a registration of the artist's *self*, his emotional turmoil, his heroism in the face of anxiety. The task-related gestures of the New Dance explored by Morris were conceived as machines to circumvent this expressionism.

The ironic self-portraits Morris produced in 1963 were conceived in relation to this problem of how to produce a mark that would stand the idea of "self"-expression on its head, materializing and mechanizing it. For *Self-Portrait (EEG)* (1963, no. 44), Morris went to New York University Medical Center to have the activity of his brain waves recorded, concentrating on himself for the length of time it took for the electroencephalograph to inscribe lines equal to his height. He also obtained a recording of the brain waves of an aphasiac, presumably for comparative analysis; this second EEG was never used as an art work, but it was mentioned in the later piece *Hearing* (1972, no. 88). The technology of the EEG developed at a time when there was a strong belief in the localization of brain functions and in the possibility of measuring linguistic capacity. By placing electrodes on different areas of the skull, medical technology sought to measure the electrical activity and capacity of an individual (usually "pathological") patient's brain, manifested as waves, against the "average" or "normal" standard. That this technological tracing could serve as portraiture is plainly absurd. It would appear that Morris used the crudity of the machinery involved, as well as the technology's single-minded and insulated scope, to underscore the reductive notion

that it was possible to construct a framework for representing the self.

*Portrait* (1963, no. 43), a "self-portrait" composed of bottled body fluids, operates somewhat differently from the more technologically oriented pieces. In it, small, gray-painted milk-bottle-shaped containers of blood, sweat, sperm, saliva, phlegm, tears, urine, and feces are set into the compartments of a horizontal display box. Unlike Joseph Cornell's use of similar receptacles (as in his *Pharmacy* [1943]), in which the containers reinforce the idea of interiority, subjectivity, and memory, Morris's insistence on the definition of the self as "excremental" is in some ways a very straightforward commentary on the complicated issue of subjectivity as a function of consumption and expenditure.

1 Marcel Duchamp, "Notes," in *Marcel Duchamp*, Salt Seltzer ed., Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, trans. George Heard Hamilton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 191.

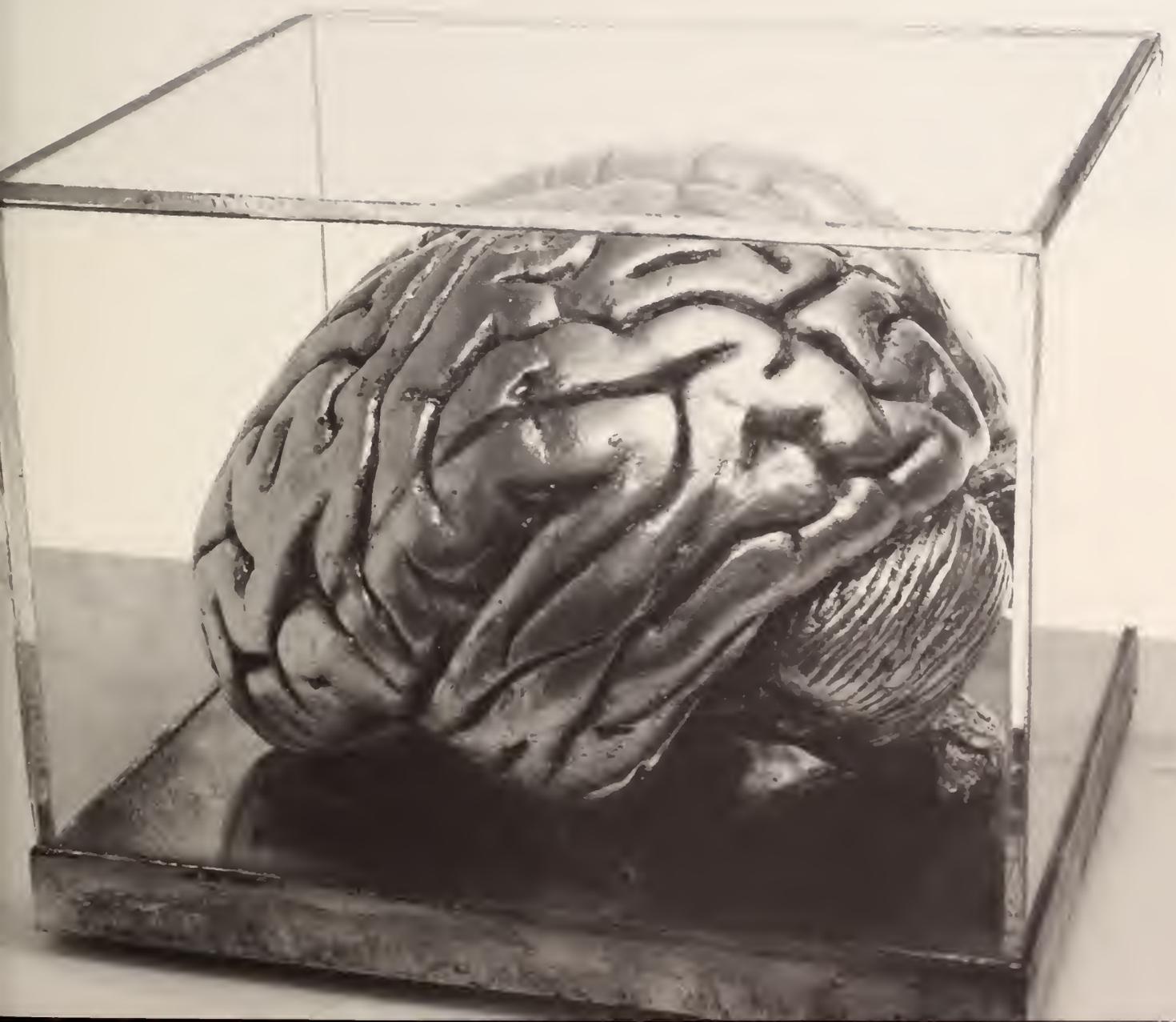


40. **Wax Brain**, 1963. Wax over plaster cast, in glass case, 8 x 10<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 9<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (20.3 x 27 x 23.2 cm). Saatchi Collection, London.



**41. Brain**, 1963 Eight-and-one-half one-dollar bills over plaster cast, in glass case, 7 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 6 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 5 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (19 x 16.5 x 14.6 cm) Collection Leo Castelli

**facing page: 42. Untitled (Silver Brain)**, 1963. Silver leaf over plaster cast in glass case, 6 x 7 x 5 inches (15.2 x 17.8 x 14 cm) Saatchi Collection, London





**43. Portrait.** 1963. Painted bottles containing body fluids, and painted wood frame, 31 x 18 1/4 x 1 3/8 inches (8.9 x 47.6 x 4.8 cm) The University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Edward G. Gallagher, Jr., Memorial Fund.

**facing page: 44. Self-Portrait (EEG).** 1963. Electroencephalogram and lead labels, framed with metal and glass, 70 1/4 x 17 inches (179.7 x 43.2 cm) Collection of the artist



## MEMORY DRAWINGS, 1963

Morris's five *Memory Drawings*, executed in September and October 1963 (nos. 45–49), were accomplished in the context of his interest in the physiological states he had recorded in *Self-Portrait (EEG)* (1963, no. 44). Just as *Self-Portrait (EEG)* shows his interest in the theory of brain waves, so, in preparation for these works, he began by researching contemporary theories of memory, exploring variations of physiological interpretations of its operation. Next, he constructed *Initial Memory Drawing*, a primary text (or "drawing") that consists of a summary of his findings, and in which he divides theories of memory into two classes: "those which seek explanation in changes in composition of the brain cells" and "those which seek explanation in changes in patterns of electrical currents between cells." These models for individual memory can, Morris suggests in this text, be loosely compared to the ways a "cultural memory" is established: "either spatially through preservations of models, pictures, maps, etc., or temporally through sequential records in print, audial recordings, and more recently electronic means."<sup>1</sup> Clearly, Morris was not using the term "cultural memory" to indicate a Jungian notion of a shared transtemporal unconscious, but rather a historically specific kind of memory that has to do with a culture's archive of historical material, from which it learns and creates knowledge. (The idea of the individual memory as a function of a larger archive would later play a major role in Morris's *Hearing* [1972, no. 88].)

*First Memory Drawing* (9/4/63, 9:00 P.M.) was made several days after the generative text describing theories of memory had been established. In it, Morris worked to reproduce from memory the form and substance of the initial page of text. Some days later (the number of which matched a logarithmic progression), he extracted *Second Memory Drawing* (9/8/63, 12:00 P.M.) from his memory, and so on until four "secondary" drawings had been completed. The narrative trail formed by the events of these drawings is caught up in a process of repetition and forgetfulness, in the problematic of short-term memory evolving into that of long-term memory, and in the establishment of a relationship between a formal process and an erosion of textual meaning. The mode of reproduction contains within it the undoing of memory, which is to say it bears witness to a kind of entropy of meaning, indeed of using entropy as a means of making a mark, as generalization sets in, smoothing over and effacing textual nuances.

The *Memory Drawings* attest again to the conceptual basis of Morris's production. In 1963, few

artists would have considered a page of writing to be a "drawing," or the line of script a cursive mark, despite the examples of *calligrammes* and *lettrisme* (or concrete poetry). Insofar as it is reductive, the effect of memory is "aesthetic"—details are subsumed by a broad, general outline. Thus memory itself—like the brain waves of the EEG work—becomes a "machine" bent toward art production, but one used somewhat derisively, with the closing down and congealing effects of entropy in mind.

1 At the time *Initial Memory Drawing* was done, Morris had recently made *Metered Bulb* (1963, no. 29) and was making a series of lead reliefs in which electrical circuitry, batteries, and energy waves figured as compositional elements. Also in 1963, he made a number of drawings of magnetic force lines.

### following five pages:

**45. Initial Memory Drawing.** 1963. Ink on gray paper. 20 1/2 x 13 inches (52.1 x 33 cm). Collection of the artist.

**46. First Memory Drawing (9/4/63, 9:00 P.M.).** 1963. Ink on gray paper, 20 1/2 x 13 inches (52.1 x 33 cm). Collection of the artist.

**47. Second Memory Drawing (9/8/63, 12:00 P.M.).** 1963. Ink on gray paper, 20 1/2 x 13 inches (52.1 x 33 cm). Collection of the artist.

**48. Third Memory Drawing (9/16/63, 3:30 P.M.).** 1963. Ink on gray paper, 20 1/2 x 13 inches (52.1 x 33 cm). Collection of the artist.

**49. Fourth Memory Drawing (10/2/63, 9:00 P.M.).** 1963. Ink on gray paper, 20 1/2 x 13 inches (52.1 x 33 cm). Collection of the artist.

The physical basis for memory has not been determined. Theories advanced to explain memory fall mainly into two classes: (1) Those which seek explanation in changes in composition of the brain cells; and (2) those which seek explanation in changes in patterns of electrical currents between cells. If one leaves the analogy at a crude level, comparisons can be made to the two basic ways in which man establishes a cultural memory, i.e. either spatially through preservation of models, pictures, maps, etc., or temporally through sequential records in print, aural recordings, and more recently by electronic means. Theories have also been advanced which attempt to combine these two processes. Such theories attempt to discriminate between types of memories, assuming the coding of some to physical alteration of the molecular structure of brain cells and others to reflex electrical circuits. The latter process is sometimes appended with a hypothesis of a mechanical nature, viz. through minute changes of synaptic fibers which grow larger or closer together and facilitate electrical pathways. Analog computing machines can be made to learn - a process impossible without storage of information. This storage is effected by specific variations in a time series together with a scanning device. Recent investigations in electroencephalography seem to point to such a scanning mechanism responsible for oscillating currents which tend to fade with concentration and attention. However, the storing of visual images can be more easily ascribed to protein molecular alterations. All suggestions as to the locus of memory, either in terms of composition or action agree on the point that it is not located in any specific area of the cortex. Disconnections of the cortex do not cut out particular memories, but the severing of neural pathways between the visual cortex and the frontal regions, while not disturbing vision, reduces to the unrecognizable that which is seen. The richness of and necessities for the interconnection of all parts of the cortex will undoubtedly be part of whatever theory is eventually established.

Drawing established and memorized 7/10/63, 3 pm.

11/10/63

The physiological basis for memory has not been determined. Theories advanced to explain memory fall mainly into two classes: (1) Those which seek explanation in changes in composition of the brain cells; and (2) Those which seek explanation in changes in electrical currents between cells. If the analogist left at a crude level, comparisons can be made to the two basic ways in which man establishes a cultural memory, i.e. spatially through the presentation of models, pictures, maps, etc, and temporally through the preservation of sequential records in print, audial recordings, and more recently by electronic means. Theories have also been advanced which attempt to combine these two processes. \*Such theories sometimes appear a hypothesis of a mechanical nature - viz. through changes in synaptic fibers which grow larger or closer together and facilitate electrical pathways. †(error. In-sight the following above). Such theories attempt to discriminate between types of memories, assigning the coding of some to molecular changes in the cells and others to variations in electrical reflex circuits. Analog computing machines can be made to learn - a process impossible without the storage of information. This process is effected by specific variations in a time series together with a scanning mechanism. Recent investigations in electroencephalography give evidence of such a mechanism responsible for oscillations which tend to disappear with concentration and attention. However storage of visual images can be more easily assigned to protein molecular alterations. All suggestions as to the locus of memory agree on the point that it is not held in any specific area of the cortex. Disconnections of the cortex do not cut out particular memories but the severing of neural pathways between the visual cortex and the frontal regions, while not effect vision, reduce to the unrecognizable that which is seen. The richness of and necessity for interconnections between all parts of the cortex will undoubtedly be part of whatever theory is eventually established.

First Memory Drawing 9/4/65. 1pm.

N. K. Morris

The physiological basis for memory has not been determined. Theories advanced to explain memory fall mainly into two classes: (1) Those which seek explanation in changes in composition within the brain cells; and (2) Those which seek explanation in changes in electrical patterns between the cells. If the analogy is left at a crude level, comparisons can be made to the two basic ways in which man establishes a cultural memory, i. e. through the preservation of spatial forms such as models, pictures, maps, etc. and through the preservation of temporal records sequential records in print, audiot recordings, and more recently by electronic means. Theories have also been advanced which attempt to combine these two processes, assigning the coding of ~~such~~ theories attempt to discriminate between types of memory, assigning the coding of some to molecular changes within the cells, and others to reflex electrical circuits. Analog computing machines can be made to learn - a process impossible without the storage of information. Storage of information in these machines is effected by specific variations in a time series together with a scanning device. Recent investigations in electroencephalography point to such a scanning mechanism responsible for oscillations which tend to disappear with concentration and attention. However the retention of visual images is more readily explained by protein molecule alterations. All theories, either in terms of composition or action, agree on the point that memory is not held in any specific area of the cortex. Decimations of the cortex do not cut out particular memories, but the severing of neural pathways between the optical cortex and the frontal regions, while not affecting vision, reduces to the unrecognizable that which is seen. The richness of and necessity for the interconnections between all parts of the cortex will undoubtedly be part of whatever theory is eventually established.

Second Memory Drawing 9/1/63, 12 p.m.

N. Morris

The physiological basis for memory has not been determined. Theories advanced to explain memory fall mainly into two classes: (1) Those which seek explanation in changes in composition of the brain cells, and (2) Those which seek explanation in changes in electrical patterns between the cells. If the analogy is left at a crude level, comparisons can be made to the two basic ways in which man has established a cultural memory, i.e. spatially through the preservation of models, pictures, maps, etc., and temporally through sequential recordings in print, and/or recordings, and more recently by electronic means. Theories have also been advanced which attempt to combine these processes. Such theories attempt to discriminate between types of memory, assigning the coding of some to molecular changes within the brain cells and others to reflex electrical circuits. Such theories usually append a hypothesis of a mechanical nature - viz. through minute changes in synaptic fibers which grow larger or closer together and facilitate electrical pathways. Analog computing machines can be made to learn - a process impossible without the storage of information. Such storage is effected by specific variations in a time series together with a scanning mechanism. Recent investigations in electroencephalography point to such a mechanism responsible for oscillations which tend to disappear with concentration and attention. However the recording of visual impressions can be more easily assigned to protein molecule alterations within the brain cells. All theories regarding the locus of memory, either in terms of composition or action, agree on the point that memory is not held in any specific area of the cortex. Decimulations of the cortex do not cut out particular memories, but the severing of neural pathways between the optical cortex and the frontal regions, while not affecting vision reduces to the unrecognizable that which is seen. The richness of interconnectivity for interconnections between all parts of the cortex will undoubtedly be part of whatever theory is eventually established.

Mind Memory Drawing 4/16/63 1:00 p.m.

A. Merritt

The physiological basis for memory has not been established. Theories advanced to explain memory fall mainly into two classes: (1) Those which seek explanation in changes in composition within the brain cells, and (2) Those which seek explanation in changes in electrical patterns between cells. If the analogy is left at a crude level comparisons can be made to the two basic ways in which man establishes a cultural memory - i.e. spatially through the preservation of models, pictures, maps, etc, and generally through sequential recordings in print, aural recordings, and more recently by electronic means. Theories have also been advanced which attempt to combine these two processes. Such theories attempt to discriminate between types of memories, assigning the coding of some to molecular changes within the cells and others to reflex electrical circuits. Such theories are usually appended with a hypothesis of a mechanical nature - viz. through minute changes in synaptic fibers which grow larger or closer together and facilitate electrical pathways. Analog computing machines can be made to learn - a process impossible without the storage of information. Such storage is effected by specific changes in a time series together with a scanning mechanism. Recent investigations in electroencephalography point to such a mechanism responsible for electrical oscillations which tend to disappear with concentration and attention. However the recording of visual impressions can more readily be assigned protein molecular alterations within the cells. All theories concerning the locus of memory, either in terms of composition or action, agree that it is not held in a specific area of the cortex. Dissections of the cortex do not cut out particular memories; however the severing of neural pathways between the optical cortex and the frontal regions, while not effecting vision, reduces to the unrecognizable that which is seen. The richness of and necessity for interconnections between all parts of the cortex will undoubtedly be part of whatever theory is eventually established.

Fourth Memory Drawing 10/2/63 9.00 pm. N. Hann

## ROPE AND KNOTS, 1962–64

The idea of Modernist art as a progression of formal problems to be successfully solved—turning on the reduction of the various aesthetic mediums to their logically derived essences—was part of the inheritance of Morris's generation, one under which they increasingly bridled. To counter this proposition artists liked to quote Marcel Duchamp's taunt, "There is no solution because there is no problem"; they also reveled in the manipulations of logical systems, such as numerical or alphabetical progressions.

Morris's rope pieces, which reflect a boyhood interest in the art of tying knots, may be said to enact a critique of Modernism's strictures. The Gordian knot, one so difficult to untie that it has taken on idiomatic significance to describe an insoluble problem, figures in Morris's *Untitled (Knots)* (1963, no. 51). Morris's piece begins with a neatly geometrical relief structure divided into five compartments. Each contains the knotted end of a rope that descends into the hopelessly chaotic tangle of something like the "Gordian problem." The interest here in maintaining (rather than resolving, or "solving") a set of physical polarities—hard and soft, rigid and elastic, well-built and unmanipulated, formed and unformed—would continue in Morris's work, driving the relationship between his Minimal and subsequent anti-form works. The objects of this kind, made in 1962 and 1963, demonstrate Morris's desire to articulate abstract arrangements that emphasize material and formal disparities among their components, an intention underscored by the combination of flaccid rope with the "logic" of square or rectangular forms.

In *Untitled (Rope Piece)* (1964, no. 54), a thick piece of hemp rope eighteen feet long emerges from a hole drilled in the center of a wooden triangular form affixed to the wall. Yielding to the force of gravity, the rope drops to the floor, where it snakes around before receding into an opening on the top of a wood cube sitting on the floor a few feet from the wall. The rope and the wood blocks are painted mat gray, as were many of the artist's early works.

Morris's fascination with knots led him to consider their further applications and associations—such as knotting a string to remind oneself to do something—and he ultimately wove them into the body of work related to memory: five drawings (nos. 45–49) of a text on memory, which Morris executed from memory, a piece entitled *Golden Memories* (1963, no. 53); and a curious work entitled *Mnemonic Device* (1962, no. 52). *Mnemonic Device* is a horizontal wall piece with a rope, knotted at intervals, strung across its front, above which one reads the enigmatic instruction "Use Knots

to Remember Previous Knots." More conflicted and less accessible, *Golden Memories* establishes a division between attraction and repulsion, creating a tension between the small, upturned, metal hook on one end of the gray-painted wood rectangle, which repels touch, and the soft, sensuous appeal of the small gilded knot at the other end.

1. Hardly an advocate of either Pop art or Minimalism, Hilton Kramer nonetheless expressed his own disaffection with Modernism in a review of Clement Greenberg's *Art and Culture* (1961): "In Mr. Greenberg's criticism, the impersonal process of history appears in the guise of an inner artistic logic, which has its own immutable laws of development and to which works of art must conform if they are not to end up on the historical ash heap" (*Arts Magazine* 37 [October 1962], p. 60).



**50. *Untitled (Box with Water)*, 1963.** Knotted rope and tin box, covered with encaustic, on wood base, painted with metallic powder in synthetic polymer, 8 x 10  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 5  $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (20.3 x 26 x 14.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson

**facing page: 51. *Untitled (Knots)*, 1963.** Painted wood and hemp rope, 5  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 15  $\frac{1}{4}$  x 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (13.7 x 40 x 8.9 cm). The Detroit Institute of Arts





**52. Mnemonic Device.** 1962 Wood, rope, and paper with inscription 96 inches (243.8 cm) long Collection of the artist

**54. Untitled (Rope Piece).** 1964 Two wood boxes and rope, painted; rope length 18 feet (5.49 m) The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson.



**53. Golden Memories.** 1963 Gilded rope and metal hook on painted fir, with inscription stamped in gold leaf, 5 1/2 x 28 x 5 1/2 inches (14.9 x 72.2 x 14.9 cm) Whitney Museum of American Art, New York Gift of Andy Warhol



## ARIZONA, 1963

*Arizona* (1963, no. 55), the first dance Morris choreographed and executed, was conceived within the developing context of the Judson Dance Theater. Although its fame was eclipsed by *Site* (1964, no. 63) and *Waterman Switch* (1965, no. 69), its strategies for generating movement were influential. The break it declared with Modern dance was located in its stripped-down emotional and symbolic texture; its somewhat bare and syntactical structure was articulated through the interposition of objects and performers, through which specific movements could be isolated. Identifying this new gestural strategy as "task performance" or the "dance of ordinary language," Annette Michelson explained that the Judson dancers' "common aim was the establishment of a radically new economy of movement. This required a systematic critique of the rhetoric, the conventions, the aesthetic hierarchies imposed by traditional or classical balletic forms." Drawing a parallel between two traditions of what she called "virtual space"—sculpture's and ballet's presupposition that the space in which their representations unfold is different from the literal space of their viewers—Michelson linked the "real time" of task performance and the real space occupied by the fledgling Minimalist sculpture as two paired reactions against this tradition.

Although it would be dancers such as Simone Forti, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer who would develop this vein of composition the furthest and with the most distinction, those, like Morris or Carolee Schneemann, who were untrained had easier access to the unconventional. Morris, who remained a dancer for only four years, thus made a particular mark within this medium. Morris's work was consistently structured by tensions between neutrality and violence, between sense and nonsense—tensions that infected both his dance and his sculpture.

*Arizona* opens, as had *Column* (1960, p. 90), with a prolonged motionlessness. Dressed in blue work clothes and goggles, its performer stands alone on stage and, with imperceptible slowness, rotates his body at the waist until his upper torso is sideways to the audience. The duration of this gesture is determined by the length of a text that serves as its "score," Morris's tape recorded reading of his "A Method for Sorting Cows." A straightforward and pragmatic set of instructions, according to which two men learn the procedure for sorting cows into two stockyard holding pens, the text's connection to the performed gesture is at first obscure. Yet as the four segments of *Arizona* unfold, each announced by the performer, who holds up his

fingers to indicate the number of each section, it begins to become clear that the progression of the work's four specific gestures is not unconnected to the opening text. One soon notices that each movement involves a successively greater distancing of the performer from what the first segment had so forcefully established as his center of gravity—the bodily axis around which he rotated.

In the second segment, this axis is displaced from the performer's own body as he takes measurements on a T-shaped object, stepping away from the fixed axis by a distance in inverse proportion to the measured adjustments he makes on it. In the third segment, as the performer suddenly wheels away from the audience to hurl a javelin into a blue target, the transfer of energy from himself to this projectile underscores an ever-widening circuit, with the focus of attention progressively shifting to its outer edge. By the fourth segment, this decentering is made unmistakable as the performer spins two blue electric lights away from his body in lassolike circles that grow larger and larger. As this luminous comet circles over the heads of the audience, accompanied by the whistling sound of its own spin, the performance space goes to black, utterly obscuring the performer.



1. *Arizona* was preceded by *War* (1963, no. 56), which was less a dance than a rule-driven performance in which Morris "jousted" with fellow artist Robert Huot.

2. Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), p. 55.

3. Morris, "A Method for Sorting Cows," *Art and Literature* (winter 1963), p. 180.

55. *Arizona*, 1963. Morris in performance at Judson Memorial Church, New York. Inset, above: Andrew Ludke in 1993 reconstruction of *Arizona* at Television Studio, Hunter College, New York.

facing page, inset, below: 56. *War*, 1963. Morris in costume for performance in collaboration with Robert Huot at Judson Memorial Church, New York.



In February 1964, Morris performed *21.3* (no. 57) before a small audience at the Surplus Dance Theater in New York. Clad in a neat gray suit and tie, he stood behind a podium, masquerading as an art historian for twenty minutes, as he lip-synched his own reading of the opening of Erwin Panofsky's well-known essay "Iconography and Iconology."<sup>2</sup> But if Panofsky approaches the question of "meaning" in the visual arts by means of a careful separation of layers of visual information, moving from brutishly nonsignifying visual shape through stages of conventional gesture, and from there to the illustration of ideas to be found in cultural texts, Morris's performance was intended as a subversion of the very notion of this logic. As happens when a single word is repeated until nothing remains but a shell of pure sound, *21.3* produces the effect of form engulfing meaning, thereby closing off the very distinction between form and content on which Panofsky's demonstration had depended.

During the performance, Morris's facial expressions and reductive gestures, which included looking up at the ceiling, removing his glasses, folding his arms, and pouring a glass of water, were meticulously scripted to miscoincide with the tape of the lecture. The belatedness of speech, combined with the deferral of sounds in the performance, unhooked the very operations and conventions of perception and signification that Panofsky had sought, at each level, to secure.

The method used in the performance recalls *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11), where acoustic elements signify a temporal gap, as well as Morris's engagement with dance, where he explored gesture, functional movements, and intervals of time and space. At a time when performance art was relatively undeveloped, Morris's *21.3* demonstrated a self-conscious theoretical involvement with the discipline of art history, simultaneously marking his opposition to conventional models of analysis and artistic technique. The title for the performance was mockingly selected from the catalogue listing of an art history survey course that he had taught at Hunter College.

<sup>1</sup> *21.3* was part of a series organized by Steve Paxton and performed at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theater. See Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, 1983), p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> "When an acquaintance greets me on the street by removing his hat," Panofsky had explained, "what I see from a *formal* point of view is nothing but the change of certain details within a configuration forming part of the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision." However, he went on, "When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an *object* (gentleman), and the change of detail as an *event* (hat-removing), I have already overstepped the limits of purely *formal* perception and entered a first sphere of *subject matter or meaning*." Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, Mary Flexner Lectures on the Humanities (New York: Harper and Row, 1962, 1939), p. 26.

57. *21.3*, 1964. Morris in performance at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theater, New York. Top and bottom: Michael Stella in 1993 reconstruction of *21.3* at Television Studio, Hunter College, New York.





## IMPRINTS AND BODY CASTS, 1963-64

By 1964, the phenomenological logic of early Minimalism began to intersect with Morris's Duchamp-inflected concern to construct an impersonal "machine" with which to make the aesthetic mark. The result was a type of marking that was both a precipitate of the body, a pure register of its by-products (as had been the body-fluid and the EEG *Self-Portraits* [nos. 43-44] and the *Memory Drawings* [nos. 45-49], all 1963), and an experience of the body inhabiting and displacing space (as in the early *Slabs* [nos. 12-13] and *Columus* [pp. 90-92]). Once again, Morris used the strategy of task performance to bridge these two possibilities. As Marcel Duchamp had done with *Female Fig Leaf* (1950), Morris, in works such as *Untitled (Hand and Toe Holds)* (1964, no. 61) and *Untitled (Stairs)* (1964, no. 60), registered the bodily imprint; but Morris also denoted the body's weight, its passage, its resistance, its intention to exert force and to continue. *Hand and Toe Holds* conveys an active sense of the artist's hand and toes clinging to the lead surface; likewise, *Stairs*, a three-step staircase to nowhere, bears the traces of Morris's footsteps as he "climbed" the work.

In two separate though related pieces, Morris had made ironic commentary on the Modernist concern with the artist's "hand" as proof of aesthetic authenticity. *Untitled (Fist)* (1963, no. 62) is composed of a plaster fist that has been placed atop a wooden box whose single drawer contains a folded glove—no glove can be fitted onto this hand. *Untitled (Glove)* (1963) is a two-tiered glass vitrine, on the top shelf of which is a cast hand, palm-side up, wearing a worker's glove. Beneath is a plaster slab that bears an impression of that same hand. Rather than positing the protean, gestural hand that links marks on the canvas with the body of the artist, these works literalize and detach that hand, rendering it as nothing but a tool in a strategy plainly opposed to painterly heroism.

Other objects related to the *Body Casts* challenge the fantasy of a whole body, refiguring it instead as so many sites—of movement, of torsion, of intellect. Thus, we find Morris offering up the body in fragments: the brain as a refried, no-nonsense muscle in wax (*Wax Brain* [1963, no. 40]), and, alternately, as an object of inflated value, either overlaid with dollar bills (*Brain* [1963, no. 41]) or sheathed in silver leaf (*Untitled (Silver Brain)* [1963, no. 42]).

In certain other works, imprinting is detached from the hand or body part and isolated as the episodic set of traces of how the object was made. This is most clear in *Hook* (1963, no. 58), whose vitrine encloses a two-tiered arrangement of elements that

resulted either from dragging a heavy metal hook across a bed of plaster or from dropping the hook onto sheets of lead, the resultant deformations then stabilized by being cast in plaster. The hook itself sits atop the vitrine, hidden from view in a closed lead box.



Marcel Duchamp, *Female Fig Leaf*, 1950. Bronze 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches (9 x 14 x 12.2 cm) Private collection



**58. Hook**, 1963. Lead box with mirrors and steel hook, glass case with plaster casts on shelves, 16 x 48 x 12 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (40.6 x 121.9 x 31.8 cm). Collection of the artist.

following two pages:

**59. Untitled (Footprints and Rulers)**, 1964. Lead over wood and two cast-lead rulers, 39 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 4 inches (100.3 x 60.3 x 10.2 cm). Collection Anne and William J. Hokin, Chicago.

**60. Untitled (Stairs)**, 1975 refabrication of a 1964 original. Lead over wood, cast-lead footprints inside, 36 x 36 x 37 inches (91.4 x 91.4 x 94 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of the Society for Contemporary Art.







**61. Untitled (Hand and Toe Holds).** 1964 Lead and plaster, two units, 4 x 48 x 2 1/2 inches (10.2 x 121.9 x 6.4 cm) each  
Courtesy Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles



**62. Untitled (Fist)**, 1963. Plaster cast covered with Sculptmetal, wood box, and glove, 6 x 12 x 7 inches (15.2 x 30.5 x 17.8 cm). Collection Leo Castelli.

Morris, accompanied by Carolee Schneemann, first performed *Site* (no. 63) in March 1964 as part of an event at Stage 73, in New York, organized by the dancer Steve Paxton for the Surplus Dance Theater. The program, which ran for two evenings, included Lucinda Childs's *Parties* (in which Morris performed one night, Robert Rauschenberg the other), Alex Hay's *Praxis*, Deborah Hay's *They Will*, and Yvonne Rainer's *At My Body Home*. Rauschenberg rigged the lighting for the events.

*Site* continued to be performed throughout 1964—in New York, at the Pucker Theater in March and the Judson Memorial Church in April, in Europe, at the Moderna Museet, in Stockholm in September, and at the Kunsthalle, in Düsseldorf in October. (For the European venues, another performer was substituted for Schneemann.) The next year, the piece was done at the First New York Theater Rally, a set of performances organized by Paxton and Alan Solomon, former director of the Jewish Museum, at the Royal Academy of Music and Malmö University, in Copenhagen, at the University of Buffalo, and at the Once Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

*Site* began in a darkness pierced by the noise of a jackhammer. Once the stage revealed Morris dressed in white workman's overalls, facing three four-by-eight-foot sheets of plywood painted white. The action opened with Morris beginning to relocate the heavy boards to another area of the stage, and suddenly revealing the naked figure of Schneemann, posed motionlessly on a couch, her body painted white, a black ribbon around her neck, in a recreation of Manet's 1865 *Olympia*. Her arresting figure, while functionally at first, seemed isolated from the associations with prostitution that had surrounded the reception of Manet's painting. Instead, Olympia's pallor was here intended to underscore a desired anti-impressionist quality in the context of the New Dance. Toward this end, Morris wore a mask, taken from a mold of his face made by Jasper Johns, so that the labor he performed—flawily lifting, balancing, bending, dropping, examining, and moving the heavy plywood panels—would appear effortless. His facial expression softened by any physical effort. There was both the grace of a workman going about a construction job, moving from one square of tasks to another with its quiet motions, bracketed by the sound(s) of the task. At the end of the performance, Morris once again blocked the audience's view of Schneemann with the board and resumed his original position, dimming her, the stage going to black.

At a paid-rehearsal dance, *Site* exaggerated

physicality, repetition, and ordinary movements in order to erode and even burlesque the narrative, partnering, and expressive qualities associated with the Modern dance of Martha Graham and others. Instead of an expressive musical accompaniment, which was typical of Judson's approach to the New Dance, noise (the drill) was treated as a structural part of the work. Further, Morris choreographed the piece as a set of relations between objects given a brute equivalence through the leveling use of the color white: the white box on the stage from which the drilling noise issued, the masked worker in white, the white-washed planes of the boards manipulated throughout, and the still, white body of Olympia. As with his Minimal sculpture, Morris made certain, in constructing *Site*, that no part would dominate, a strategy emphasized by his rejection of absolute pauses throughout the seventeen minutes of the performance. His choice of objects enabled him to work through a set of problems, understood not as formal propositions to be progressively resolved, but, rather, as constituting an inquiry into and an expansion of a structural syntax involving space, time, and objects.

*Site*'s title, like that of *I-Box* (1962, no. 25) and of *Landscape* (1963, no. 50), is a pun on Modernist pictorial conventions of visuality. Moreover, the literal dismemberment of the picture plane staged in this dance, coinciding with the revelation of the figure beneath the surface of the image's "support," referred to and antiqued formalist readings of Modernist painting, which privilege the picture plane and its surface-bound forms, disdaining any illusion of a third dimension "behind" the plane. Yet, as Donald Judd would argue in his essay "Specific Objects," once the picture plane is conceived of as a real material element—like Morris's plywood panels—it itself becomes the occupant of a third dimension, and with the collapse of the distinction between two and three dimensions comes the collapse of the distinction between illusionist and real space.

1. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Art Journal* 31 (1971): 51. Reprinted in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings, 1966–1971* (Hartford, Nova Scotia: Gutter & Arrow/Gutter, 1971), pp. 181–89.

63 *Site*, 1964. Top: Morris and Carolee Schneemann in performance at Stage 73, Surplus Dance Theater, New York Center, Andrew Ludke and Sarah Tomkinson in 1992; reconstruction at Television Studio, Hunter College, New York. Bottom: Morris and Schneemann in rehearsal.



## GREEN GALLERY SHOW, 1964-65

The Green Gallery, located on West 57th Street in New York, was directed by Richard Bellamy from 1959 through the summer of 1965. One of New York's most innovative art operations during the early 1960s, its stable of artists included such emerging figures as Mark di Suvero, Donald Judd, Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Larry Poons, James Rosenquist, and George Segal, and it attracted such major collectors as Richard Baker, Philip Johnson, Howard Lipman, and Robert Scull. Bellamy, who had codirected the Hansa Gallery with Ivan Karp, was willing to show novel, nonestablished art and was often prophetic in his choices. The cooperative orientation of the gallery—Bellamy provided his artists with stipends commensurate with the market standard—did not, however, contribute to its financial success, and, as the market became increasingly competitive, it was forced to close.

In late October 1964, having returned from Düsseldorf, where he had spent nearly two months fabricating lead pieces for a show at Galerie Alfred Schmela, Morris was invited by Bellamy to exhibit at the Green Gallery. During November, he fabricated seven pieces for the exhibition, which ran from December 16, 1964 through January 9, 1965. A departure from the neo-Dada lead and Sculptmetal reliefs that he had exhibited at Schmela's gallery and would show at the Green Gallery later in 1965, these seven plywood objects, human in scale, geometric in form, and painted Merkin Pilgrim gray, were related to Morris's involvement with the New Dance, evoking his earlier stage props and commitment to the task-oriented movement of bodies in real space and time.

The show (Morris's second solo exhibition in New York) included the large *Untitled (Boiler)*, *Untitled (Cloud)*, a slab suspended from the ceiling at eye level (revised from its 1962 version [no. 12]); *Untitled (Corner Beam)*, a raised beam spanning a corner of the gallery; *Untitled (Corner Piece)* (no. 64), a regular tetrahedron fit into a corner of the room; *Untitled (Floor Beam)*, a semirectangular beam with one rounded corner running along the length of the gallery's floor; *Untitled (Table)*, an angular piece forming a ninety-degree angle, and *Untitled (Wall/Floor Slab)* (no. 65), a broad slab leaning against a wall. Bridging, or wedged into corners, or bracketing the floor and its adjacent walls, these objects were dispersed throughout the gallery space to allow a dialogue both with the architectural site and the viewer.

Morris's choice of plywood as the material for his early Minimal pieces was important for the "public"



64. *Untitled (Corner Piece)*. 1964 Painted plywood. 78 x 108 inches (198.1 x 274.3 cm)



65. *Untitled (Wall/Floor Slab)*. 1964 Painted plywood. 98 x 98 x 12 inches (248.9 x 248.9 x 30.5 cm).

aspect of their conception. The largeness of their scale, cheapness of their materials, and ease of fabrication meant that the works were never regarded as precious or unique objects; instead they were intended from the outset to be fabricated, knocked down, and refabricated as they moved from one installation site to another. They were conceived, thus, as reproductions, partaking of the logic of the multiple without an "original."



Exhibition at the Green Gallery, New York, December 1964–January 1965. Left to right: *Untitled (Table)*, *Untitled (Corner Beam)*, *Untitled (Floor Beam)*, *Untitled (Corner Piece)*, and *Untitled (Cloud)*.

## MIRRORED CUBES, 1965

*Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)* (1965, no. 66), shown at the Green Gallery, New York, in February 1965 together with a group of *Leads* from 1964, was first fabricated in January 1965. The work, which since then has been refabricated in dimensions varying from twenty-one to thirty-six inches per side, is comprised of four cubes of Plexiglas mirror laminated onto wood, these placed on the gallery floor in a grid pattern based on the size of the room.

The use of the cubic form and of regular placement to imply that each unit is an integer within a larger cubic whole, a notion of cohesiveness reinforced by the interlocking reflections cast by the mirrored surfaces, places this work on a developmental path that would lead to the gray-painted, fiberglass *Untitled (Battered Cubes)* (1965, no. 67) shown at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles. In the latter work, the contrast between the canted outer walls of the cubes and their perpendicular inner faces creates an implicit, enveloping shape, or gestalt, that embraces, and thereby unites, the four separate parts into a truncated pyramid. In this cohesion, *Battered Cubes* fulfills the ideas on the gestalt that Morris was then developing and would publish, early in 1966, in the first part of his "Notes on Sculpture." For Morris, the value of the gestalt—a single, immediately grasped and constant shape—was its capacity to subsume all other qualities or properties of the object into a "unitary" form: "If the predominant, hieratic nature of the unitary form functions as a constant, all these particularizing relations of scale, proportion, etc., are not thereby cancelled. Rather they are bound more cohesively and individually together."<sup>1</sup>

In developing his ideas on the gestalt, Morris, in the second part of "Notes on Sculpture," points out the resistance of certain properties—intense color, say, or "emphasis on specific, sensuous material or impressively high finishes"—to incorporation into the unitariness of shape, a fracture of the visual experience of the underlying whole that he emphatically rejects.<sup>2</sup> Such a ban on "internal relationships" and illusionism, which he shares with Donald Judd,<sup>3</sup> would seem to contradict his practice in *Mirrored Cubes*, with its "impressively high finishes" and guarantee of both internal "divisibility" and fragmentation. Yet this contradiction should be understood as operating in the space between the theory and practice of both Morris



66. *Untitled (Mirrored Cubes)*. 1971 refabrication of a 1965 original. Plexiglas mirrors on wood, four units, each 21 x 21 x 21 inches (53.3 x 53.3 x 53.3 cm)





Constantin Brancusi, *Princess X*, 1916. Polished bronze, 22 inches (55.9 cm) high, and limestone base, 7 1/4 inches (18.4 cm) high. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

and Judd. Like Morris's use of mirrors, Judd's employment of lacquered color and of paradoxical structural relations in his own work of 1965 violated his principle that the experience of the specific object should be exactly coextensive with its physical description. That this contradiction had entered Minimalist practice from almost the very beginning was, in fact, noted by some of the early writers on this work.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Robert Smithson welcomed illusionism as an important development within Minimalism such that "an uncanny materiality" produced by the surface impression would act to "engulf the basic structure."<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps the best way to understand this seeming contradiction within Minimalism is to turn to Constantin Brancusi's work, which, in its resistance to a reading in terms of internal relations, served as a precedent for that of both Judd and Morris. For Morris, who chose the Romanian artist as the subject of his master's thesis, the repetition and geometrical order of the *Endless Column* (1937); the unitary shapes employed, for example, in *Beginning of the World* (1920); the quality of industrial finish in the polished surfaces of works such as *Princess X* (1916); and, as a corollary of that last, the reflection of contingent events recorded in passing on the lustrous bronze façades, which set up a contradiction between idealized shape (the notion of the "Platonic solid") and the happenstance reflection of the viewer—all were to have implications for his Minimalist work.

1. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 228.

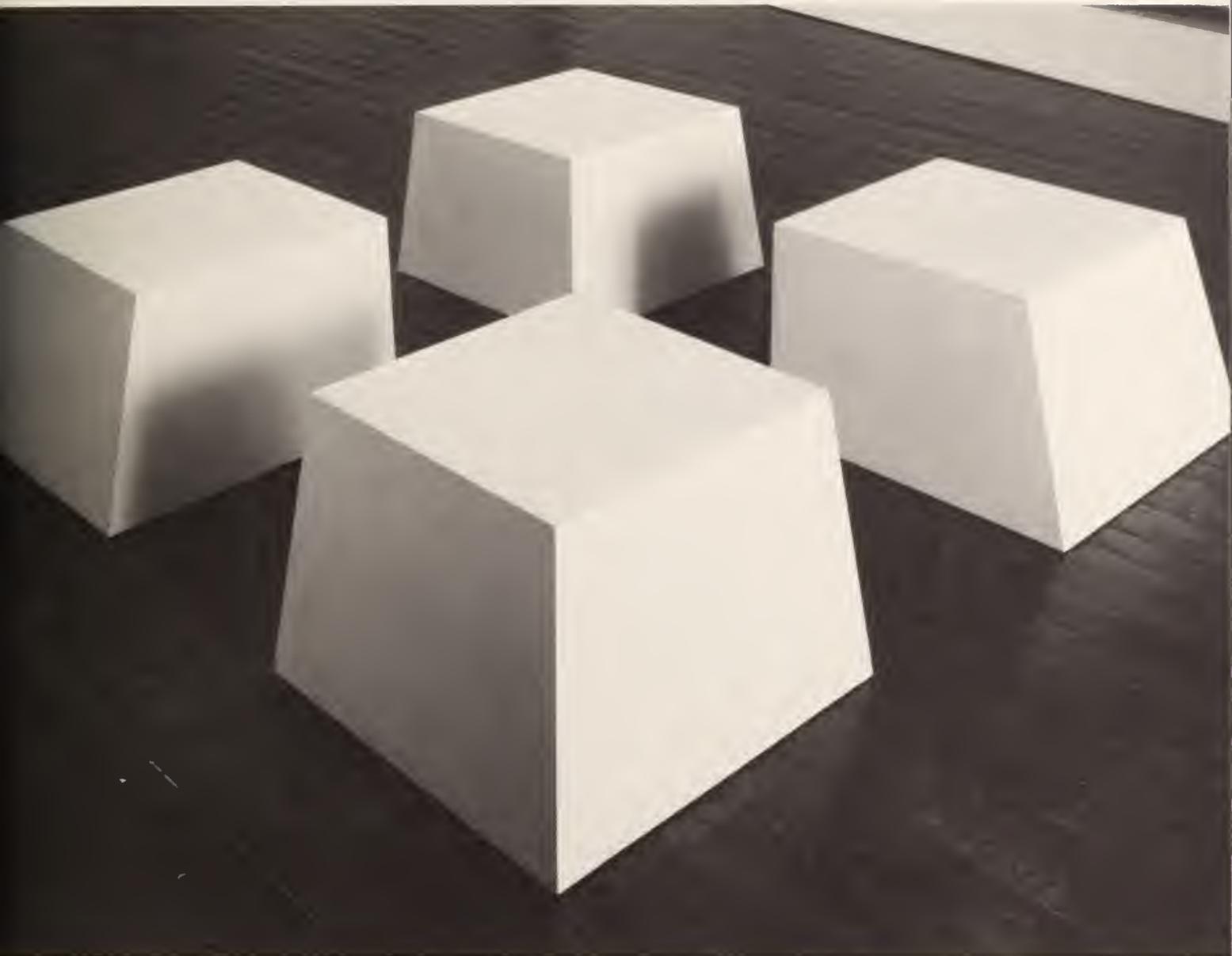
2. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966), reprinted in Battcock, p. 232.

3. "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors—which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art" (Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Art's Yearbook* 8 [1965], reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959–1975* [Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975], p. 184).

4. See Rosalind Krauss, "Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd," *Artforum* 4, no. 9 (May 1966), pp. 21–26.

5. Robert Smithson, "Donald Judd," in *7 Sculptors*, exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1967), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 22.

6. Morris, "Form Classes in the Work of Constantin Brancusi," unpublished master's thesis, Hunter College, 1966.



67. **Untitled (Battered Cubes)**, 1965. Painted plywood, four units, each 24 x 36 x 36 inches (61 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm)

## RING WITH LIGHT, 1965-66

In 1966, Morris showed a group of fiberglass polyhedrons at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles. Among them was *Untitled (Ring with Light)* (1965-66, no. 68), a large ringlike form, eight feet in diameter, composed of two half-circles. Fluorescent light glows from the slits between the half-circles.

The following year the work appeared in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition *American Sculpture of the Sixties*. In his essay "Recentness of Sculpture," which appeared in the show's catalogue, Clement Greenberg criticized Minimalist sculpture for what he considered its anti-aesthetic attempt to create a feeling of "presence" by exploiting the nonart look of the large-scale industrial object. A month after the show's closing, Michael Fried seconded Greenberg by publishing "Art and Objecthood," the most sustained and focused attack on Minimalism up until that time. For Fried, the issue of the object's "presence," which he compared to the presence of another person in the room with the viewer, was again a central issue. Because of its interior illumination, he singled out *Ring with Light* as the quintessential example of what he called Minimalism's "covert anthropomorphism": "It is, as numerous commentators have remarked approvingly, as though the work in question has an inner, even secret, life."<sup>3</sup>

Continuing his argument, Fried proposes that the intrusion of the anthropomorphic object into the viewer's space, even to the point of crowding him within it, is analogous to the performance of an actor before an audience. On that basis he judged the experience of Minimalist sculpture to be irredeemably theatrical, a quality he condemned for blurring the distinction between separate mediums such as painting and sculpture. In this analysis, Fried drew directly on the writings of both Morris and Donald Judd (the two most prolific writers among the Minimalists). Indeed, Judd had argued in his 1965 essay "Specific Objects" that such objects should occupy a space that was not that of painting or sculpture, as a way of avoiding the illusionism associated with traditional forms.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it was Minimalism's aggressive occupation of the real space shared by the object and its beholder, its emphasis on both the contingency of that physical relationship and the temporal conditions of viewing, that led Fried to call this art "literalist." But if both sides in the dispute agreed on Minimalism's phenomenological character, they differed sharply in their estimation of its artistic legitimacy. For Morris and Judd, literalism offered a way of extending the principles of the avant-garde, while for Greenberg and Fried it constituted a

break, both in temporal and spatial terms, with the principles of high Modernism, which they saw as postulating a visual mastery occurring in a cognitive moment divorced from real time.<sup>5</sup>

It was this ideal of pure pictorialism—existing as an instantaneous vision that defines the viewer as a disembodied, purely cognitive receiver—that Fried pitted against Minimalism's mongrel "theater."

If Minimal sculpture came to be derided as "theatrical" by its detractors, Morris's development, which proceeded from a double and inextricable commitment to the Judson Dance Theater and to the rethinking of the sculptural object—each imbricated within the other—more than justified this characterization. Indeed, no other Minimalist had an equivalent connection to the rationalization of the body's gesture as the basis for the development of plastic form. It was the stake of the body's presence within the work of art that became the ground of critical debate around Minimalism, as Annette Michelson's defense, in the name of "An Aesthetics of Transgression," faced off against Fried's accusation of a "literalist" fall from grace.<sup>6</sup>

1 Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), pp. 24-26.

2 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (June 1967), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 116-47.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

4 As Donald Judd wrote, "Half or more of the best work in the last few years has neither been painting or sculpture. Usually it has been related, closely or distantly, to one or the other" (Judd, "Specific Objects," *Art Yearbook* 8 [1965], reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* [Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975], p. 181).

5 "It is, I think, worth remarking that 'the entire situation' means exactly that *all* of it—including, it seems, *the beholder's body*. There is *nothing within his field of vision*—nothing that he takes note of in any way—that it, as it were, *declares its irrelevance to the situation*, and therefore to the experience, in question" (Fried, in Battcock, p. 127, italics added).

6 See Annette Michelson, "Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), pp. 7-79.



**68. Untitled (Ring with Light)**, 1965–66. Painted wood and fiberglass and fluorescent light, two units, each 24 inches (61 cm) high, 14 inches (35.6 cm) deep, overall diameter 97 inches (246.4 cm). Dallas Museum of Art, General Acquisitions Fund and a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

## WATERMAN SWITCH, 1965

Morris's final dance composition was *Waterman Switch* (no. 69), a trio performed by the artist, Lucinda Childs, and Yvonne Rainer, in March 1965, at the Festival of the Arts Today in Buffalo. The work was performed later that month at the Judson Dance Theater in New York, where it met with enthusiastic reviews.

In a manner reminiscent of the earlier *Arizona* (1963, no. 55) and *Site* (1964, no. 63), the seventeen-minute piece divided neatly into distinct segments or fields that resist narrative cohesion. As the performance began, foam-rubber rocks were rolled on stage, where they bounced around to the out-of-sync sounds of a tape recording of rolling boulders. After a brief blackout, a set of gray-painted plywood tracks was carefully dragged by Childs to a central position onstage, whereupon, to the rhapsodic strains of an aria from Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Simon Boccanegra*, Morris and Rainer, clad only in shimmering mineral oil, and locked in a face-to-face embrace, began slowly and methodically to traverse those tracks, shadowed by the figure of Childs, clad in an oversized man's suit and hat. As she moved, Childs unwound a ball of twine over her shoulder, its end stretching behind her and threading its way off stage. Next, Childs stood, holding a long pole, while Morris, holding its other end, which bore a red flag that concealed the lower half of his torso, ran the circumference around her. During this segment, a tape of his voice discussed the dance and its sequences, at once underscoring a reflexive mode of performance and transforming his critical discourse into an object within it:

*I hope eventually to have slides made of this dance. Perhaps if anyone is photographing now they will let me know later. I will then show the slides of this section, for example, somewhere near the beginning, during the time when the stones were rolled on. Later on in the last section actually there will be another "Walking on the Tracks" sequence" and perhaps I could show a few slides of the stones section while this is occurring. It would, of course, be possible to show slides of this section while this section is occurring, but this has been done. I suppose it is more or less possible to imagine a large slide projected against the back of the stage, say over to the right, which would depict three people, one in the center and one at either side almost to the wings. Put them all on stones with their backs toward you. Run a long rope between them. Let each hold it at chest height. The two at either side will slowly, ever so slowly, move toward the one in the center by tilting the roundness of his stone. The rope would be used but more as an aid to balance than as a means to locomotion.*

This disquisition was succeeded, on the tape, by Morris's recitation of a portion of Leonardo's notebooks dealing with the erosive effects of rivers on stones, during which the three performers, each stationed on a boulder, stood with their backs to the audience, holding a rope, and attempted to enact the last sequence of Morris's taped description. Then the stage went dark and a series of slides of Eadweard Muybridge's motion studies—featuring a burly naked man bending over, lifting a rock, and throwing it—were projected. Morris himself entered the last empty frame, duplicating the position assumed by Muybridge's subject.

As the lights came up, Childs repositioned the tracks, moving them to the other side of the stage and extending off it, and Morris and Rainer resumed their creeping journey. When they reached the halfway point, Morris poured a small vial of mercury down Rainer's back, the silver liquid breaking into drops and showering the floor beneath them. Childs unraveled the remaining twine as she walked back and forth across the performing area, its arc seeming to form a labyrinth. The trio exited.

1. *Waterman Switch* was performed as part of an event that also included Childs's solo *Carnation* (1964) and Rainer's *Terrain* (1963). The piece takes its name from a road in California that Morris had examined when working as a surveyor.

69. *Waterman Switch*. 1965. Morris, Lucinda Childs, and Yvonne Rainer in performance at the Festival of the Arts Today, Buffalo



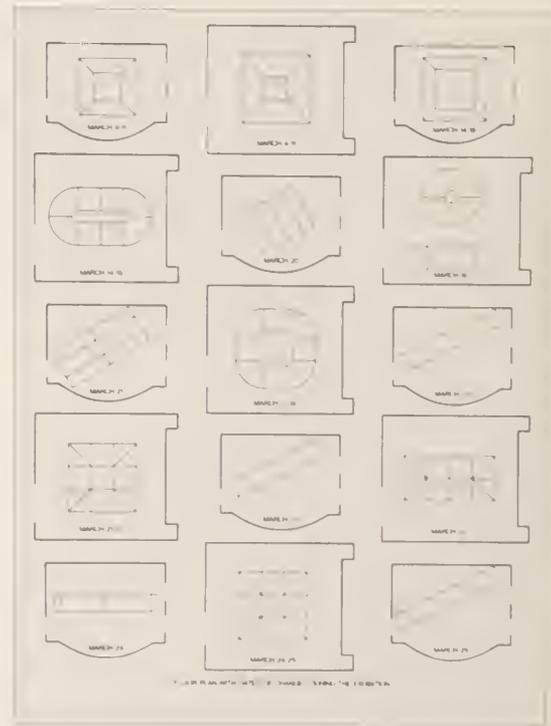


## PERMUTATION, 1967

In a group of works produced in 1967, and exhibited in March of that year at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, Morris explored the notion of permutation, which involved him in a modular conception of sculpture based on elements that could be systematically rearranged and regrouped to form rings, wedges, boxes, and so on. Accordingly, the units making up the works were reconfigured daily (as would be the case in his later piece *Continuous Project Altered Daily* [1969, no. 107]). A hand-drawn chart, with schemata and lists of possible configurations, accompanied the pieces. Like his earlier Minimalist work, these large, cool-surfaced polyhedrons were painted a neutral gray. The permutation pieces, however, are of fiberglass, which, because of its greater malleability and durability, allowed Morris to make works with more complex shapes and detailed curves than was possible with plywood.

Although the permutation works follow the trajectory of Minimalism, they depart from its emphasis on monadic form. Instead, the segmented pieces suggest to the viewer that the shapes are strictly provisional. In an interview with David Sylvester, Morris, nevertheless, made clear that the issue of shape was still central to the effect of the work, explaining that instead of working out all possible configurations of the series, he deliberately privileged continuous arrangements that would produce rings or squares. He further remarked that the idea of permuting his pieces arose, in part, from the difficulties he had experienced in getting some of his sculptures through doorways: "The situation sort of presented itself to me that I might make a series of forms that would have no definitive shapes, but rather *a set of possible shapes*" (italics added).

As with the earlier plywood pieces, the size of the works contributes to the establishment of a relationship with the body of the viewer. But now the gestalt's dependence on contingent factors—such as angle of vision, light, and the size of the room—is echoed by the provisional nature of the shapes themselves. This is an innovation that further reinforced a parallel between the object and the body observing it, both of which are equally subject to the contingencies of physical existence in time and space



70. Floor Plan with Dates of Changes During the Exhibition, 1967 (for *Untitled [Stadium]*) Lithograph, dimensions and location unknown.

Facing page: 71. *Untitled [Stadium]*, 1967 Fiberglass, configuration with eight units, each 47 1/2 x 85 x 47 1/2 inches (120.7 x 215.9 x 120.7 cm) Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection

<sup>1</sup> Morris began to work with Argo Fabricators on Staten Island in 1967. He recommended these fiberglass fabricators to Eva Hesse, who in turn used them extensively.

<sup>2</sup> David Sylvester, "A Dialogue," in *Robert Morris*, exhibition catalogue (London: Tate Gallery, 1971), p. 11.



**below: Untitled (Stadium),** 1971, permanent outdoor installation. Oiled steel, eight units, 4 feet 6 inches x 22 feet x 22 feet (1.37 x 6.71 x 6.71 m) overall. Fairmount Park Association, Philadelphia.

**facing page: Untitled (Stadium),** 1967. Two configurations with four units.





## SERIALITY

Working in series was, perhaps, the most widely adopted practice of 1960s art, in painting as in sculpture, whether in the hands of Minimalists, Pop artists, or Color-field painters. The series—through which a single formal configuration, geometric element, or “found” image would be repeated, with minor variations, from one work to the next—was a way of automating the process of composition. But it was in Minimalist practice that seriality was introduced into the single work, which, as the composite of repeated, unvaried units, implicitly could be expanded without limit. This was true of Donald Judd’s assemblages of stacked boxes and of Carl Andre’s “rugs” of juxtaposed steel plates or his rows of firebricks. As Judd explained of this use of series: “The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another.”

Morris seems to have been less interested in this type of seriality than he was in a version that involved permuting a single form to generate changes in the way its shape would be experienced. When Morris composed Minimalist sculptures through the exact repetition of a given element, his use of this strategy seems, almost from the start, to have been intentionally “compromised” by a use of materials that renders the basic unit optically complex. This is most evident in *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66), where the stable gestalt of the individual cube is shattered by its multiple reflections. But it is also true of the use of expanded steel or aluminum mesh, as in *Untitled (U-Channels)* (1969, no. 72), in which moiré patterns form and re-form with the movement of the viewer. And it occurs in *Untitled (Nine Fiberglass Sleeves)* (1967, no. 73), with its investigation of translucent fiberglass. Composed of nine two-foot-square columns, each four feet high and set out as if on a square grid, so that the interstice between each element is also a two-foot square, the work exploits the “one thing after another” of serial repetition. But despite this “order,” the translucent fiberglass surfaces of the “sleeves,” with their illegible texture and color, create an ambiguous effect, heightened through the use of the material in a semiraw, unpainted state. The fiberglass is irregularly streaked and appears bubbled in places where, in its liquid state, tiny pockets of oxygen were trapped.

Thus, compared to the lucid, gray-painted surfaces of the earlier Minimalist works, the unpainted fiberglass of *Nine Fiberglass Sleeves* suggests an increasingly elusive and unqualifiable materiality, an incanny corporeal presence related to that of

Morris’s skinlike *Felts* (pp. 212–21). The veiled passage of light through the fiberglass produces an effect of intangibility; and the muted reflections of the surroundings playing across the surfaces of the nine units render them, like *Mirrored Cubes*, undeniably divisible and contingent.

1. Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” *Artis Yearbook 8* (1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 188.

2. Morris saw the use of fiberglass as a way to achieve subtly curved forms, which had been extremely difficult to effect in plywood, and as a means of avoiding the need for the shadow presences of nails and joints in his Minimalist works. Subsequently, Morris used the material in a slightly rawer state—unpainted in *Nine Fiberglass Sleeves*, and shaped but not rigidly smoothed in *Untitled (Fiberglass Frame)* (1968, no. 16), the fiberglass version of his earlier *Untitled (Frame)* (1962, no. 11).

### following three pages:

**72. *Untitled (U-Channels)***, 1969. Expanded aluminum mesh, ten units, each 63 x 42 x 61 inches (160 x 106.7 x 156.2 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Panza Collection.

**73. *Untitled (Nine Fiberglass Sleeves)***, 1967. Translucent fiberglass, nine units, each 48 x 24 x 24 inches (121.9 x 61 x 61 cm), each 24 inches (61 cm) apart. Sonnabend Collection, New York.







## INDUSTRIAL FABRICATION

Two paradigms underlie the insistence with which the Minimalists subtracted every experience of the "artist's hand" from the appearance of their work. One of these is the readymade, in which the manufactured object, merely selected, is self-evidently divested of personal intervention by the artist in its fashioning. The other is the "work ordered by telephone," the notorious example through which, in the mid-1920s, the Russian Constructivists had focused attention on the nature of industrial fabrication, which renders handicrafts obsolete. One principle of factory fabrication is that plans drawn up by one person are executed by another at a site that might be far removed from the drafting room.

Although Morris, like Donald Judd, made his early Minimalist works himself, the large, simple plywood polyhedrons were conceived from the outset as multiples. This meant that they were not only involved in the phenomenology of permutation—various *L-Beams*, for example, projected different experiences according to their placement—but that they were committed to the logic of what Morris called "the well-built," by which he was referring to the industrial rationalization of shape.

Morris and Judd crafted their earliest works from plywood, but very soon began to work in materials that both required the intervention of fabricators and intensified the industrial quality of the objects' surfaces. However, the logic of working from plans also carried with it the possibility of "making" works only on paper, to be fabricated at an unknown date in the future. One such example by Morris is *Floor Grid* (1968, no. 91), which was originally acquired by Count Panza di Biumo in the form of plans and not physically realized until 1979.

With the critical (and financial) success of the Minimalist movement, these artists were able, by the mid-1960s, to consult with fabricators such as Alfred and Donald Lippincott to build objects from plans. Although underscoring a radical dissociation from the hand of the sculptor, this practice, nonetheless, relied on the artist's decisions regarding medium, scale, and arrangement. In addition, this new method of production was appealing as a practical way to repeat forms, allowing artists to work in materials that, while unmanageable using handcraft methods, answered demands within Minimalist sculpture for variation in material and scale. The new and fuller range of choices in sculptural production took into account materials such as expanded steel and aluminum mesh, aluminum I-beams, translucent fiberglass, and colorful or reflective plastics, mediums

that, despite their industrial roots, often imparted surprisingly bodily or energetic and shimmering effects. These effects recall issues raised by *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66), whose internally reflective surfaces challenged assumptions regarding the visual stability of the Minimalist polyhedrons, suggesting, instead, an erosion of such stability, as the forms came to be swallowed up in the cross fire of reflections. This by-product of both Morris's and Judd's use of fabrication was what Robert Smithson, by 1967, was to call an "uncanny materialism," discussing it not in terms of the conservation of form but of its opposite: entropy.

1. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), p. 34.

2. Robert Smithson, "Donald Judd," in *Sculpture*, exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1967), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 22.



74. **Untitled (Square Donut)**, 1967. Aluminum, 3 feet 8 inches x 12 feet x 12 feet (1.12 x 3.66 x 3.66 m). Private collection.



**75. Untitled.** 1967 Aluminum I-beams, 5 feet 6 inches x 12 feet x 12 feet (1.68 x 3.66 x 3.66 m) Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection.



**76. Untitled, 1968.** Aluminum, 5 x 14 x 14 feet (1.52 x 4.27 x 4.27 m). Collection of the artist.

## LEADS

Bronze has its own set of associations within the history of sculpture, carrying, for many reasons, the sense of form made permanent. That is why the casting in bronze of Umberto Boccioni's Futurist sculpture *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1911), a consummate Modernist testimonial to movement and to forms perpetually coming into being, delivers the work to a profound historical irony. Later in the century, Jasper Johns, in control of this irony, made it a part of the meaning of his own cast-bronze light bulb and Ballantine Ale cans, contrasting the monumental and rhetorical connotations of bronze with the total banality of the objects he pressed it to support. A similar reading may be applied to the medium of lead, although prior to the aggregates (dating from 1958) of Joseph Beuys, it had only rarely been adopted by sculptors. So, when Morris began making lead reliefs, initially with *Litanies* (1963, no. 21) and again in 1964, before and during a visit to Düsseldorf, the material provided him a relatively new and open ground, on which he could, so to speak, make his own mark.

Morris's trip to Germany was underwritten by the dealer Alfred Schmela, who also furnished the artist with a studio, which he shared with Heinz Mack of Group Zero.<sup>1</sup> At the end of his approximately month-long stay, Morris exhibited a group of lead reliefs at Schmela's Düsseldorf gallery. Among the works shown were *Untitled* (1963, no. 84), *Untitled* (1963–64, no. 80), and *Untitled (Cast Glove and Imprint)* (1963). An earlier group of *Leads*, together with *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66) and several small works, were exhibited at the Green Gallery in New York in March 1965.

The ability of lead to conduct energy, which had played a major, symbolically charged role in Beuys's work, was acknowledged by Morris, who embedded batteries in the surface of some of the *Leads*.<sup>2</sup> But Morris was careful to deemphasize the material's possible symbolic associations—those reaching back into the field of alchemy and readily exploited by Beuys. Rather, its metaphoric significance was understood as one property among others, the most important, for Morris, being lead's relative softness, which makes it so easy to manipulate. In Morris's relatively spare, usually rectangular compositions, the notion of impact combines with a complex dynamic of movement and stasis, which, as Robert Smithson writes in "Entropy and New Monuments," parallels Marcel Duchamp's notion of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–25) as a "delay in glass." In the essay, Smithson

remarks that Morris's *Leads* display many signs of delayed action; in their effort to disclose a "backward looking future," they provide a key to understanding much contemporary work. Naming Morris's imprints of erections and vaginas as tending to illustrate a fossilized sexuality by mixing the time states or ideas of George Orwell's *1984* with those of the B-movie *One Million B.C.*, he links them to Dan Flavin's *Coran's Broadway Flesh* (1962), Johns's *Tennyson* (1958), Claes Oldenburg's ray guns, and Frank Stella's *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* (1959). From Smithson's point of view, they were all caught in the "extreme past and future," the paradoxical juncture of which he locates in a museum of natural history, "where the spaceman and caveman are housed under one roof." Smithson also recalls the lead bra Morris had fashioned for Yvonne Rainer to prevent her breasts from moving while she danced.

The well-balanced combination of the static with the mobile, of different kinds of force with the things on which forces act, the visualization of the results of the actions of different forces, all may be considered to form the "iconography" of the *Leads*. The imagery is sometimes identifiable—ripples of energy seem to have emanated from batteries, conduits, terminals, and coils; a ball pushed into the lead surface has left behind a trace at the point of contact; the imprint of a vulva or an erect penis is relatively decipherable. Elsewhere, in *Untitled (Hand and Toe Holds)* (1963, no. 61), the grip marks of toes and of hands have been impressed into lead bars. In several other works, rulers are embedded in the surface of the plaques, in some cases registering lines of force in the surrounding lead ground.

1 Alfred Schmela's invitation came after seeing *Litanies*, which was exhibited at the Green Gallery in New York in 1965.

2 In certain of the *Leads*, battery-shaped forms fabricated by Morris were used, in others, actual batteries.

3 In 1965, the two artists planned to perform *Chief*, which would have been performed simultaneously by Beuys in Düsseldorf and Morris in New York, but Morris withdrew from the project.

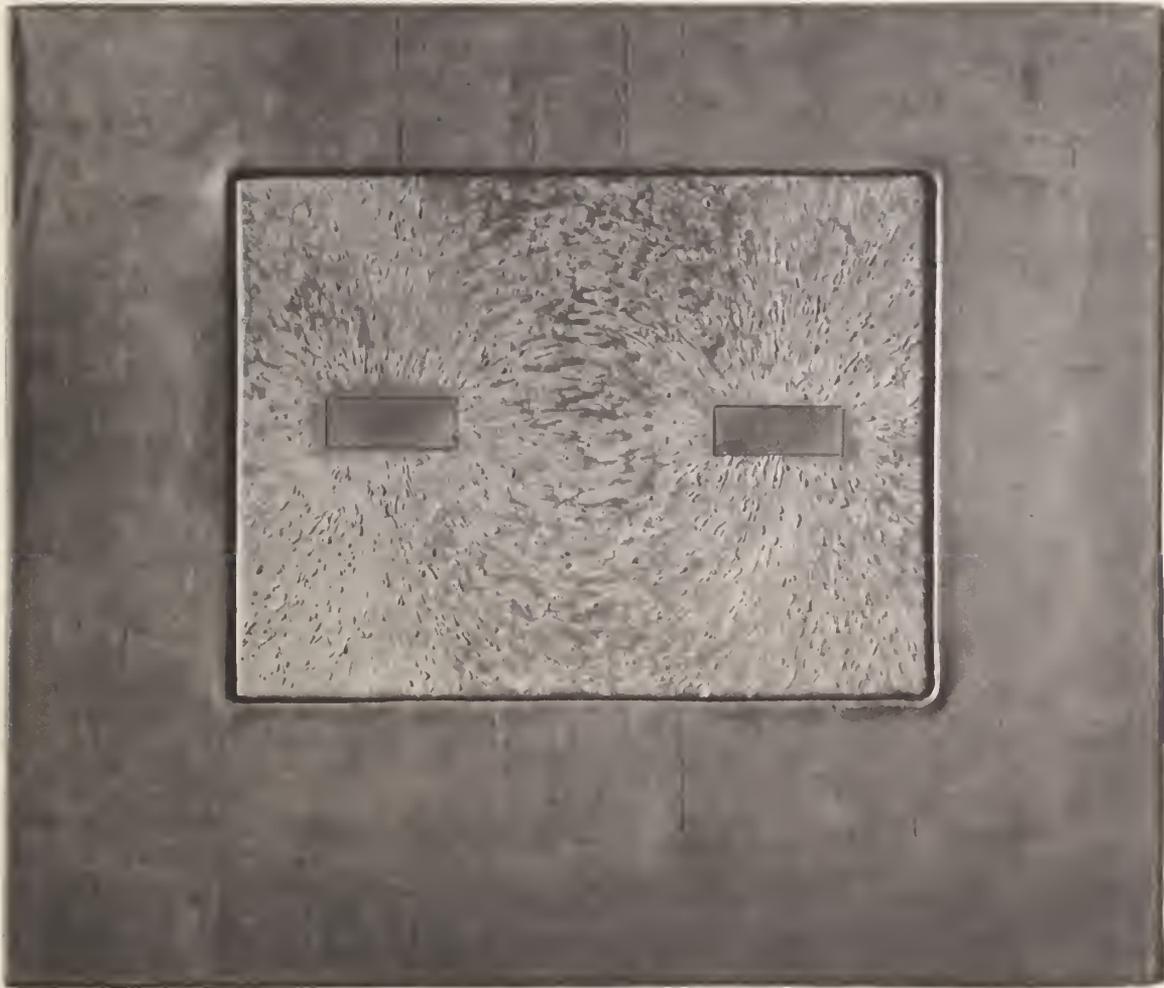
4 Robert Smithson, "Entropy and New Monuments," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 9–18.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 16.



**77. Untitled**, 1965. Polished Sculptmetal over Masonite, lead, ball of twine, lock, battery(?), and wire brush, 6 feet x 11 feet 7 inches x 3 inches (1.83 x 3.53 x .08 m). Collection Mrs. Victor W. Ganz, New York.





**facing page: 78. Leonardo**, 1964. Lead over wood, wax, and wires, 11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 9 x <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (29.2 x 22.9 x 1.3 cm). Collection Florence and Brooks Barron.

**79. Untitled**, 1964. Lead over wood and Sculptmetal, 17 x 20 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 1 inches (43.2 x 51.4 x 2.5 cm). Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles.

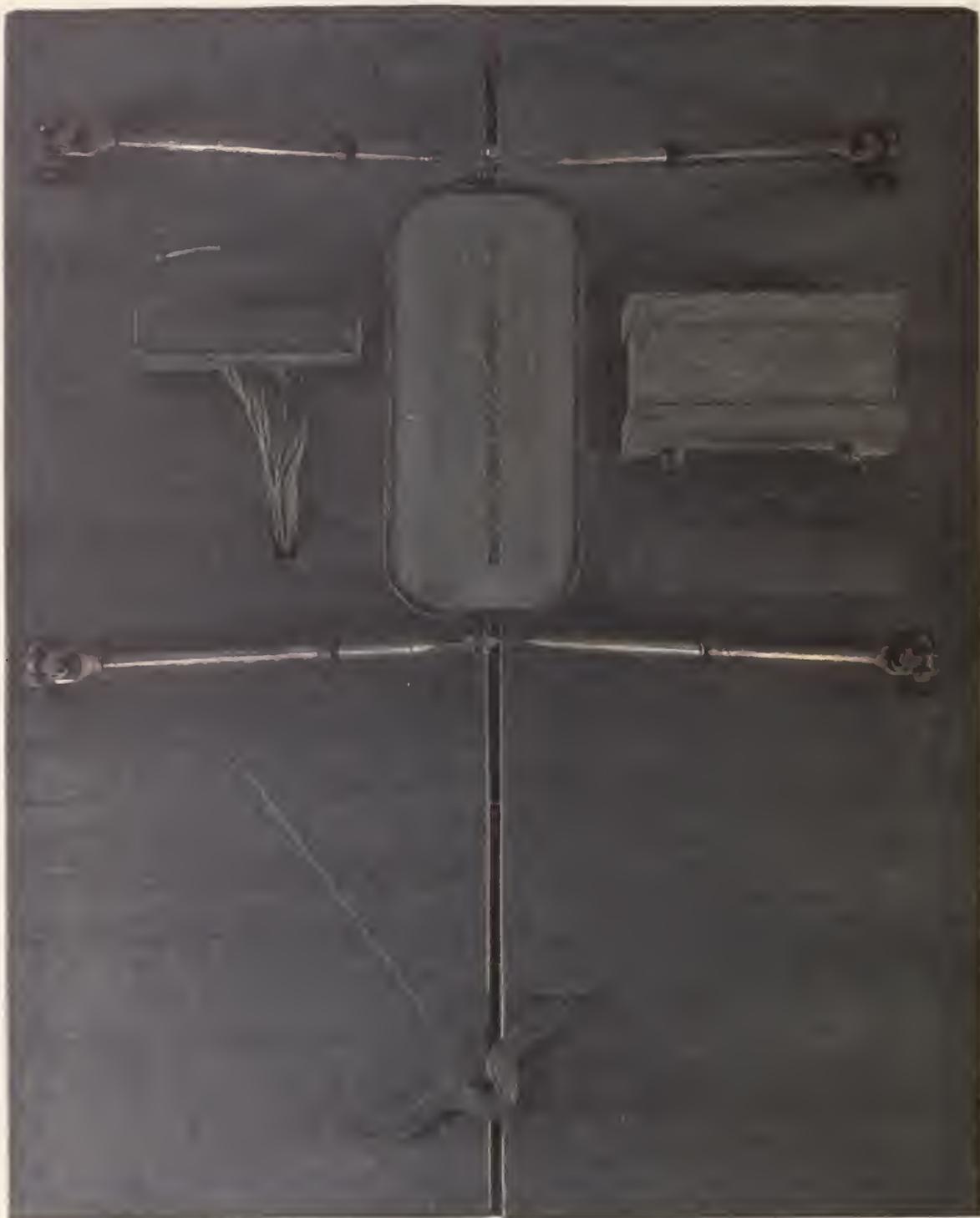




**facing page, top: 80. Untitled**, 1963–64. Lead over wood and rope, 24 x 36 x 2 inches (61 x 91.4 x 5.1 cm). Location unknown.

**facing page, bottom: 81. Untitled**, 1964. Lead over wood and two batteries(?), 19 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 35 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 2 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (50.2 x 90.2 x 7 cm). The Sadoff Collection.

**82. Untitled**, 1964. Lead over wood, plaster cast, Sculptmetal, and two batteries(?), two panels and shelf, 70 x 61 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> x 8 inches (177.8 x 156.2 x 20.3 cm) overall. Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles.



83, **Untitled** 1964 Lead over wood, truck mirror, battery(?), glass, and wire. Two panels. 45 1/2 x 36 1/2 x 8 inches (115.6 x 92.7 x 20.3 cm) overall. Collection Sydney and Frances Lewis



**84. Untitled, 1963.** Lead over wood and two batteries(?), 11 1/4 x 35 1/4 x 3 1/8 inches (30 x 89.5 x 8 cm). Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, Germany.



**85. Untitled, 1964.** Lead over wood and steel spring, 9 x 27 x 2 1/4 inches (22.9 x 68.6 x 5.7 cm). Collection Dr. and Mrs. Marvin H. Grody, Philadelphia.



86. *Memoria (For Alan Buchsbaum)*, 1987 Lead over wood, with silver leaf, acids, graphite, and lacquer, 76 x 65 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (193 x 166.4 x 3.8 cm) Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York



**87. Malice/Doubt**, 1989. Lead on wood, 91 x 73 x 6 inches (231.1 x 185.4 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

Unlike a trial, which is designed to produce a final determination regarding claims brought against a defendant, a hearing purports only to offer a preliminary exploration of information. The title of Morris's *Hearing* (1972, no. 88) refers, in the first instance, to an investigation carried out by voices and its auditory reception by an audience and, in the second, to the strong cultural memory of those Congressional hearings that, in the early 1950s, sat in devastating and final judgment on the ideological convictions of Americans. Mapping political ideology, expressed in references to the extension of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, onto the aesthetic battles of the Minimalist generation, *Hearing* realizes in performance the idea of a "personal" belief system as multiple, diffuse, a concatenation of many voices.

For the duration of the piece's initial installation, the rooms of the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York, were saturated with the recorded dialogue of a fictional investigation. This episodic voice-over issued from speakers near a centrally positioned cruciform tableau that consisted of outsized metal furniture mounted on a platform six-inches high. The shifting, impacted discussion, recorded on a three-and-one-half-hour-long tape, abandoned conventional narrative, opting instead for a montagelike framework. And while a composite of the central character is hinted at, the figure finally remains obscure.

Signs placed around the work warned listeners/viewers against touching the bed, table, and chair on the platform, for six wet-cell batteries buried in a sand-filled trough electrified the lead-covered bed and zinc table, while an immersion heater in the copper chair heated the water within it to the boiling point. The sense of physical threat was augmented by the dynamic of interrogation and self-defense overlaid on the sound track, which consisted of the philosophically grounded sparring of the participants in the hearing. The intelligent self-defense of a Witness (the voices of filmmaker Holms Frampton and writer and critic Stephen Koch) was intermittently interrupted by objections from his Counsel (the voice of actress Norma Fire) and the persistent inquiries, couched in an insinuating, seemingly sincere desire to grasp the Witness's views, of an Investigator (the voice of actor José Ferrer).

In the course of this fictional hearing, the Witness is called upon to address diverse theoretical positions, which qualify as master narratives and cultural commonplaces, the Investigator extracts fragmentary clues from the assorted materials held in evidence, on the basis of which he goes about securing ideological

positions and attempting to attribute them to the Witness. Evidence in the hearing ranges from tapes and card-file entries to cardiographs and works of art.

In response to interpretations advanced by the Investigator, the Witness circles, without overtly embracing, various theories of representation: those concerning language (its acquisition, its status as knowledge); those related to the perception of stable objects (presymbolic phases of infantile recognition, presentation, or immediate intuition, as opposed to representation—the apprehension of Morris's Minimalist plywood pieces is alluded to in relation to prerepresentational objects that exceed notions of "reduction"); and those involving history, which in *Hearing* is considered a wildly negotiable archive, a power-encoded configuration. In due course, the Witness rejects certain ways of approaching these objects, among them: intentionality (securing meaning for an object by way of an artistic intention prior to its creation); formalism (interpreting an object or text through privileging the formal relationships that can be read off its surface); and empiricism (limiting meaning to the observable world).

In his attempts to defend his own beleaguered position, the Witness describes his enterprise in a series of shifting, episodic commentaries that involve the orchestration of objects and a turgid yet playful use of language that is supported by the quotation and paraphrase of propositions advanced by writers such as Noam Chomsky, Marcel Duchamp, Michel Foucault, Gabriel García Márquez, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Piaget, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. From the outset, the piece deploys the notion of authority in ways that are both accusatory—the site of inquisition, and the implicit relations of power and brutality, materialized in the objects on the platform—and self-admittedly complicit in its quoting of "authorities" to structure and support its arguments.

Morris has recently remarked that when he read W. J. T. Mitchell's *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology*, he was reminded of the overriding concerns of *Hearing*, namely, the interposition of words and images, and the struggle between them for dominance within the history of culture, that ever-refigured opposition named so long ago by Leonardo as the *paragone*.

1. W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).



**88. Hearing** 1972. Three-and-one-half-hour stereo tape, stereo tape recorder, amplifier, two speakers, copper chair with water and immersion heater, 48 x 24 x 30 inches (121.9 x 61 x 76.2 cm) zinc table, 36 x 78 x 36 inches (91.4 x 198.1 x 91.4 cm) lead-covered bed 24 x 72 x 10 inches (61 x 182.9 x 25.4 cm), and wet-cell batteries buried in sand in a bronze trough on wood platform 6 inches (15.2 cm) high 12 feet (3.66 m) square with 24 inch- (61 cm-) square sections cut from each corner Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Mass.



Hearing full view



Hearing, detail.

## MESH PIECES, 1966-68



Eva Hesse. *Tori*, 1969. Fiberglass on wire mesh, nine units, 30 to 47 x 12 to 17 x 11 to 15 inches (76.2 to 119.4 x 31.8 to 43.2 x 28.6 to 38.1 cm). Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased with funds contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Korman, Mr. and Mrs. Keith Sachs, Marion Boulton Stroud, Mr. and Mrs. Bayard T. Storey, and various funds.

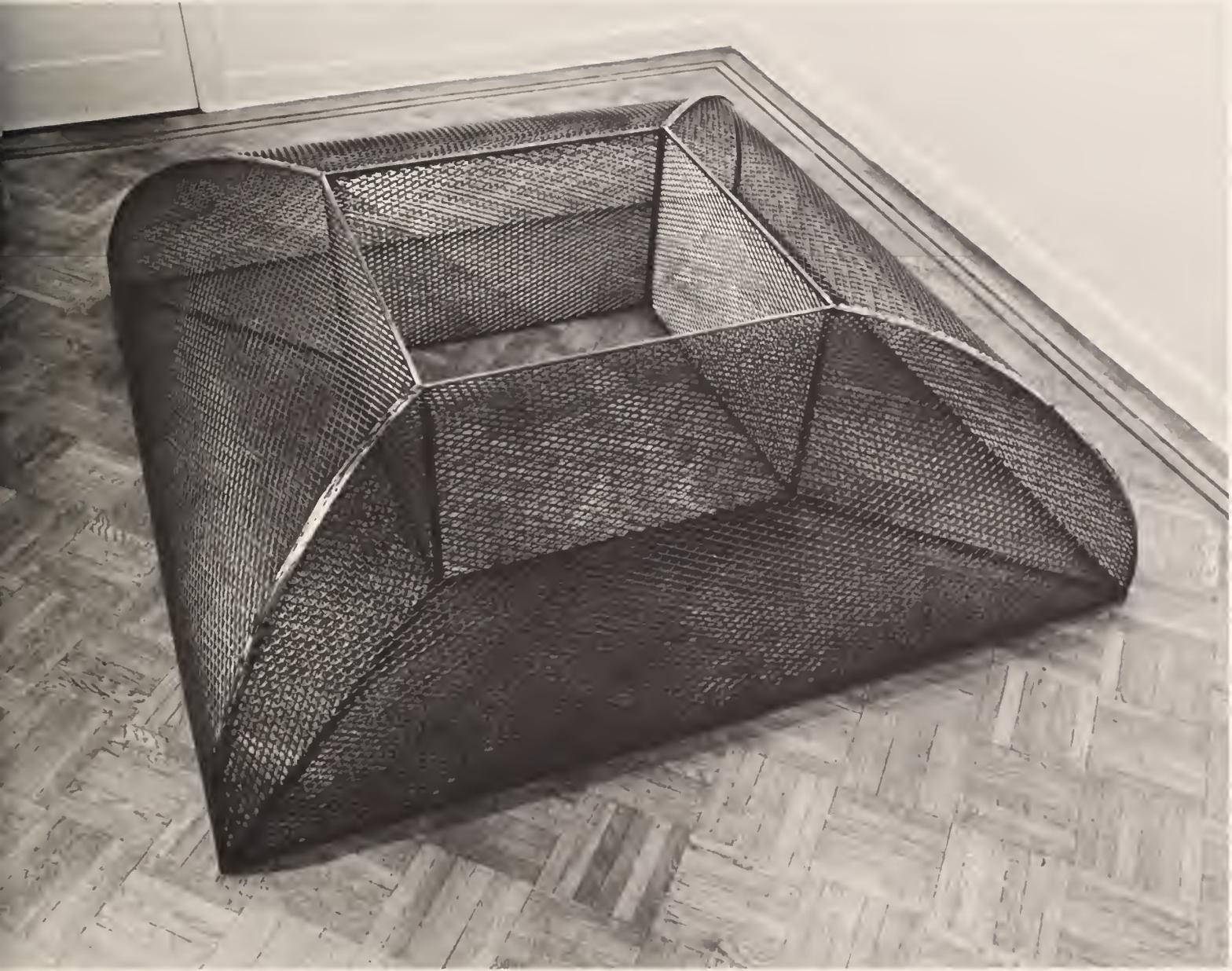
Mesh, which Morris began to utilize in 1966, introduced several qualities to his work, among them, surfaces that were transparent and reflective, and shapes that were of an emphatically provisional character. These new elements were calculated to counteract a simplistic interpretation of Minimalism that was developing in the critical literature. That interpretation—which understood Morris's notion of gestalt as referring to an absolute shape, a kind of Platonic solid existing prior to and apart from real perception—was challenged by this new insubstantiality and transparency (also apparent in the artist's concurrent use of fiberglass). Paradoxically, these complex polyhedrons, at once massive and permeable, seem both to obstruct the viewer physically while allowing passage visually.

*Untitled (Quarter-Round Mesh)* (1966, no. 89) was fabricated in steel and possesses a black semipolished surface, while *Untitled (Slung Mesh)* (1968, no. 90), made of aluminum, has a bright silvery sheen. Both were designed by the artist and fabricated by Alfred and Donald Lippincott at their factory in Connecticut.

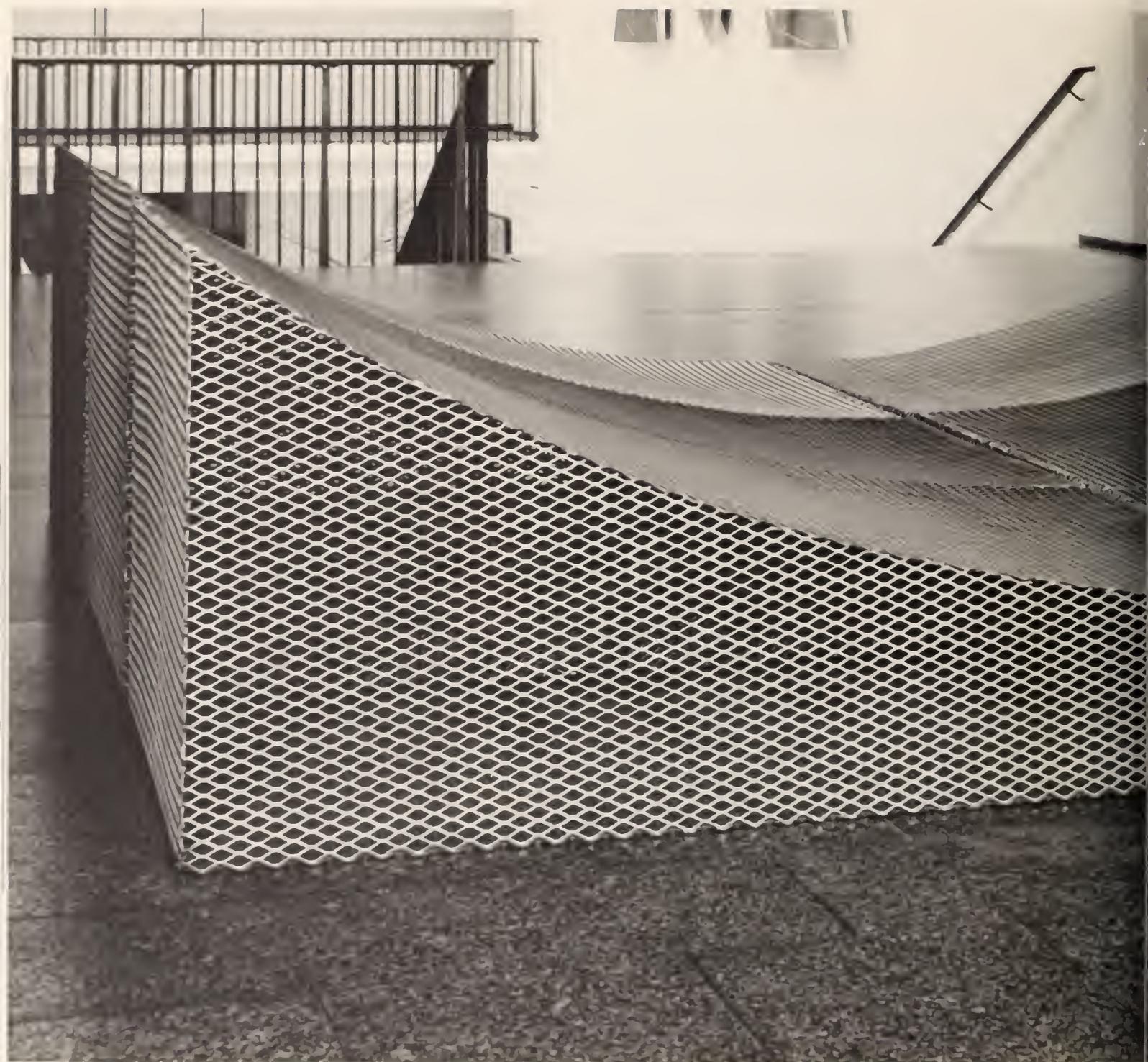
The toroid *Quarter-Round Mesh* is square-bottomed, empty at its center, and thus formally related to the whole series of open-centered works, such as *Ring with Light* (1965-66, no. 68) and *Square Donut* (1967, no. 74).<sup>1</sup> As Morris later explained to Eva Hesse (who subsequently made a nine-part sculpture entitled *Tori* [1969], in wire mesh covered by fiberglass), a toroid form is "a surface or solid generated by the revolution of a circle or other conic section about any axis."<sup>2</sup>

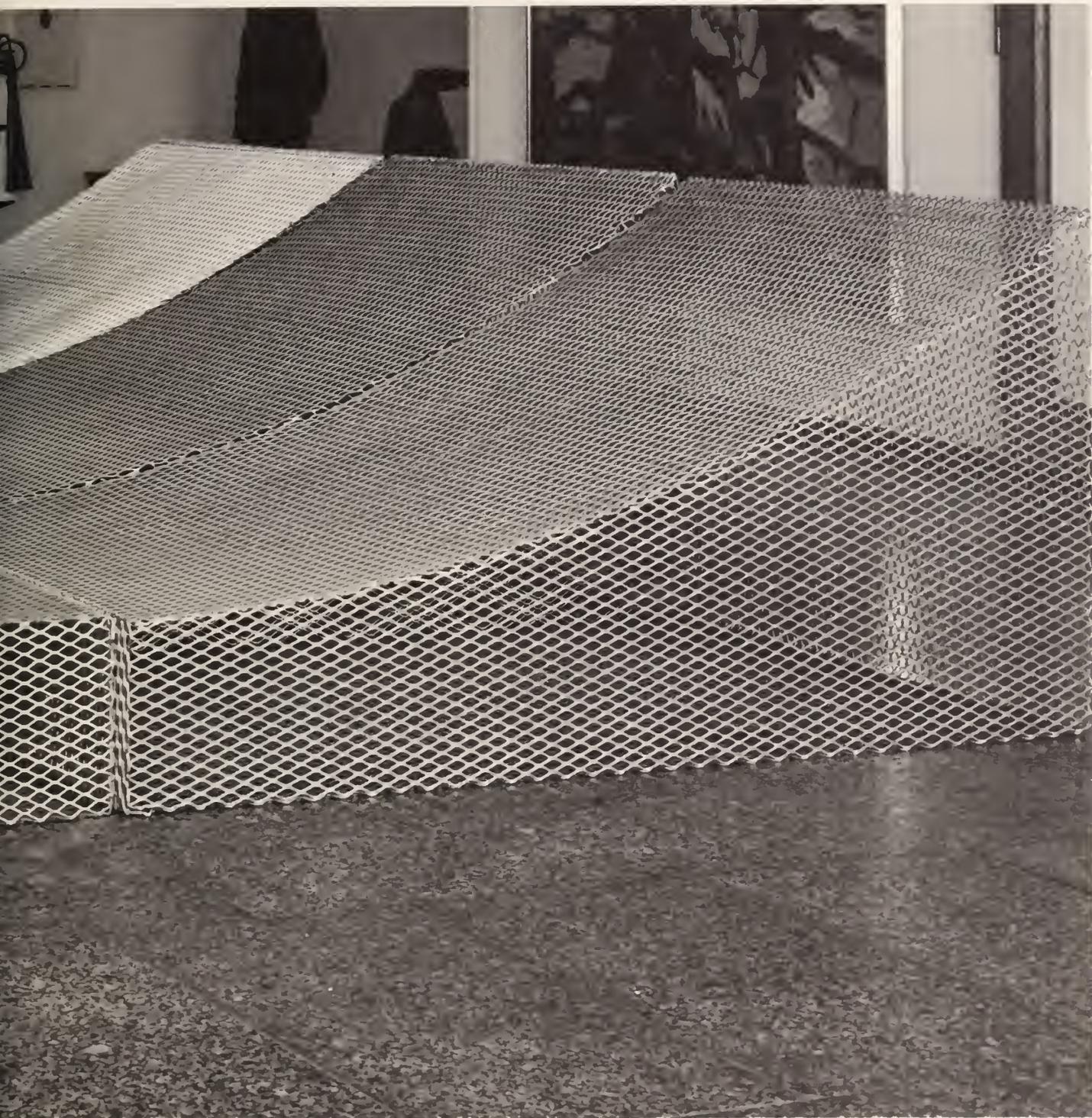
*Slung Mesh* is a massive (three-by-twelve-by-twelve-foot) low-lying "slab," the top of which forms a long open arc. It is assembled from six pieces of aluminum mesh placed together in two rows of three units. The openness of the mesh, which renders the object "transparent," rejects the illusionism of *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66), and introduces a new range of complex and shifting relationships between the object's interior and exterior, between the transparency and the shifting densities of the mesh planes as the viewer shifts his or her position relative to the work. Moreover, the sheen and criss-cross patterning of the mesh surfaces serve to prevent the eye from grasping the whole work, disorienting the viewer both with the rapid alternation of openness and closure and with the hypnotic rippling of the mesh's diamond weave as the different planes overlap.

A related work from 1969, *U-Channel* (no. 72), also made of aluminum mesh, consists of ten five-foot-high bracket-shaped units arranged in two evenly

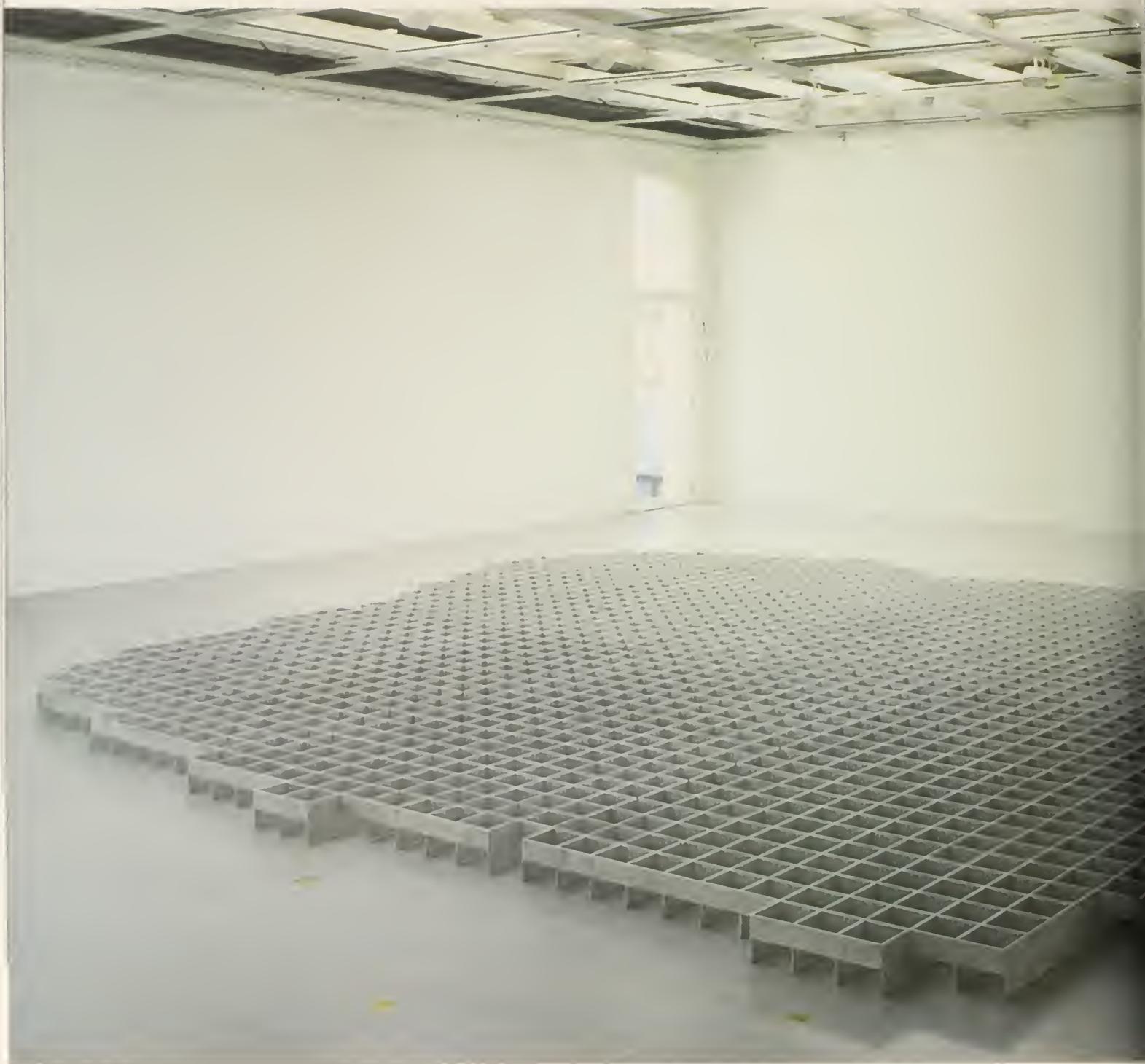


**89. Untitled (Quarter-Round Mesh), 1966.** Steel mesh,  
31 x 109 x 109 inches (78.7 x 276.9 x 276.9 cm) Solomon R.  
Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection





90. **Untitled (Slung Mesh)**, 1968. Aluminum mesh, six units, 3 x 12 x 12 feet (.91 x 3.66 x 3.66 m) overall. Museum Ludwig, Cologne.





spaced rows of five with a pathway left open between the rows. The closed side of the “brackets” are positioned back to back, and the open sides of the units face outward. The contrast between the rigid geometry of the path through the work’s elements and the disorienting visual shifts promoted by the material of which they are made looks forward to the kind of experience Morris would seek in the *Labyrinths* he built in the early 1970s (pp. 250–55).

Visual disorientation, the play of light, and the use of metal in an open-work form relate *Untitled (Floor Grid)*, designed by Morris in 1968 but not fabricated until 1979 (no. 91), to the mesh pieces. Once again, Morris was interested in geometric elements yielding, paradoxically, to quasiformlessness, expressed here by the labyrinthine meander of the vast spread of the work. Conceived in the year he wrote “Anti Form,” *Floor Grid* demonstrates Morris’s sense that certain strategies of art-making as found in the work of Jackson Pollock (both the scale of the drip paintings and their having been executed while on the floor) could combat the simplistic interpretation of Minimalism.

1. *Quarter-Round Mesh* is being shown in the retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in two versions: the first, in the position the artist had originally intended, with the squared side up; and the second, inverted, with the rounded side up, as the work had been exhibited.
2. Morris, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 156.
3. Morris, “Anti Form,” *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), p. 35.

**91. Untitled (Floor Grid).** 1979 fabrication of 1968 plan. Aluminum, 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches x 25 feet x 22 feet (27 x 7.62 x 6.71 m) Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection



92. *Untitled [Stacked and Folded]*, 1967. Felt pieces, 72 x 72 x 1.4 inches (182.9 x 182.9 x 3.2 cm), overall dimensions variable. Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Mass., Gift of Leo Castelli.

Invited by John C. Powers to attend the Aspen Institute's Artists and Scholars in Residence Program, Morris, together with Les Levine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Yvonne Rainer, arrived in Aspen, Colorado late in the summer of 1967. Because no studio space accompanied the stipend they had been provided, the artists surveyed the area and moved into an abandoned building, where they proceeded to work, quite separate from the seminars and other activities of the Institute. It was at this time that Morris, who had already experimented with lightweight felt and rags scattered on the floor, turned his attention to industrial felt, which, heavier and more tactile, seemed to suit his artistic needs better. The first piece he made was assembled from felt strips cut by grade-school children he had hired to work with him. He then went on to work alone. After only a few weeks, Rainer became ill, and she and Morris left Aspen.

Back in New York, Morris continued to work with industrial felt. Piled and heaped, draped, tangled, hung, and dropped, the material signaled a way out of the projective practice of a priori composition, what Clement Greenberg had called Minimalism's "feat of ideation." The rolled and stacked felt forms with which he began had both Minimalism's simplicity of shape and the provisional quality that had informed his work since the permutation pieces of early 1967 (pp. 180–83). The next group of *Felts* had the same irony as the very early rope pieces (pp. 154–57), in which clear geometry is the paradoxical means to extreme chaos. Incising sheets of felt with regular, geometric cuts produced bands of material that, when suspended from hooks on the wall, collapsed into wild tangles of material.

A variety of these rolled, folded, and wall-to-floor tangle felts were shown at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, in April 1968, the same month that Morris's

"Anti Form" essay was published in *Artforum*.<sup>2</sup> There he described the new tendency in sculpture:

*Random piling, loose stacking, banging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied since replacing will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion. It is part of the work's refusal to continue estheticizing form by dealing with it as a prescribed end.*<sup>3</sup>

Brushing against the grain of Minimalism's ethos of industrial construction, these phrases signal a reconsideration of what Morris termed Jackson Pollock's "recovery of process," which, he argued, "involved a profound re-thinking of the role of both materials and tools in making."<sup>4</sup>

As the *Felts* progressed, they became characterized by increasingly predetermined compositions. The material is often arranged around single or multiple hanging points on the wall, either draped over them in spanning rows, as in pieces dating from around 1973 (for example, no. 96), or folded around them, as in the pink and labially shaped *House of the Vetti* (1983, no. 100) and related works. Morris also developed catenary *Felts*, with horizontal slits that sag downward (no. 99), and others with vertical slits that, like limp legs, touch down to the ground (nos. 94, 97).<sup>5</sup>

The erotic quality that increasingly characterized Morris's work with felt was being explored by other artists as well, among them Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, Bruce Nauman, Keith Sonnier, Paul Thek, and Frank Lincoln Viner. Lucy Lippard included some of this work in *Eccentric Abstraction*, the 1966 exhibition she curated at the Fischbach Gallery in New York, and analyzed the new concern with bodily qualities in her essay "Eros Presumptive."<sup>6</sup> It has been widely acknowledged that Oldenburg's soft vinyl-and-kapok sculptures of the early 1960s were a formative influence on these artists, who sought to break with what they perceived as Minimalism's increasing rigidity.

The sensuous, painterly, and multiplicitous *Felts* are thus radically different from the sharp-edged Minimalist works of gray-painted plywood, signaling a new openness toward the process of making, gravity, and formal disposition. More broadly, they must also be seen as part of a larger transformation within artistic discourse. In a 1983 interview with Phil Patton, Morris, explaining his choice of medium, remarked that "felt has anatomical associations; it relates to the body—it's skinlike. The way it takes

form, with gravity, stress, balance, and the kinesthetic sense, I liked all that."<sup>7</sup> If Minimalism had tried to excise everything that constituted the fabric of Abstract Expressionism, then Process and anti-form art—and hence the *Felts*—began, in turn, to question the logic behind Minimalism. For Morris, who had established himself, in large part, as a founding member of Minimalism, this change in attitude was revealed in a clear-sighted self-consciousness that, reflected in his writings of the period, pervaded the new framework within which he chose to make his art.<sup>8</sup>

Felt took on entirely different associations by the time Morris began to examine issues of global warfare and catastrophe in the late 1970s. In *Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night)* (1980, no. 101), the light-absorbing properties of felt are explored to create a dense, claustrophobic environment.

1. Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, exhibition catalogue (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), p. 25.

2. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33–35.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

5. Although the logic of the *Felts* is to work against any fixed shape or composition for a given piece, generally speaking, collectors have not taken advantage of this open-endedness, preferring to maintain the original organization. Morris has suggested that this is because they want their *Felts* to look like the photographs of them. (Conversation with the artist, December 10, 1992.)

6. Lucy Lippard, "Eros Presumptive," *Hudson Review* (spring 1967), reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), p. 210. While Morris's work was not included in *Eccentric Abstraction*, his *Felts* and scatter pieces clearly line up with its stated concerns. Artists included in the exhibition were Bourgeois, Hesse, Sonnier, and Viner.

7. Phil Patton, "The Fire Next Time," *Art News* 82, no. 10 (December 1983), p. 50.

8. Most significant, at this point, are the exhibition *9 in a Warehouse*, which Morris curated at the Leo Castelli Warehouse in New York in 1969, and "Anti Form," "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects" (*Artforum* 7, nn. 8 [April 1969], pp. 50–54), and "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated" (*Artforum* 8, no. 8 [April 1970], pp. 62–66), significant essays that he published between 1968 and 1970.

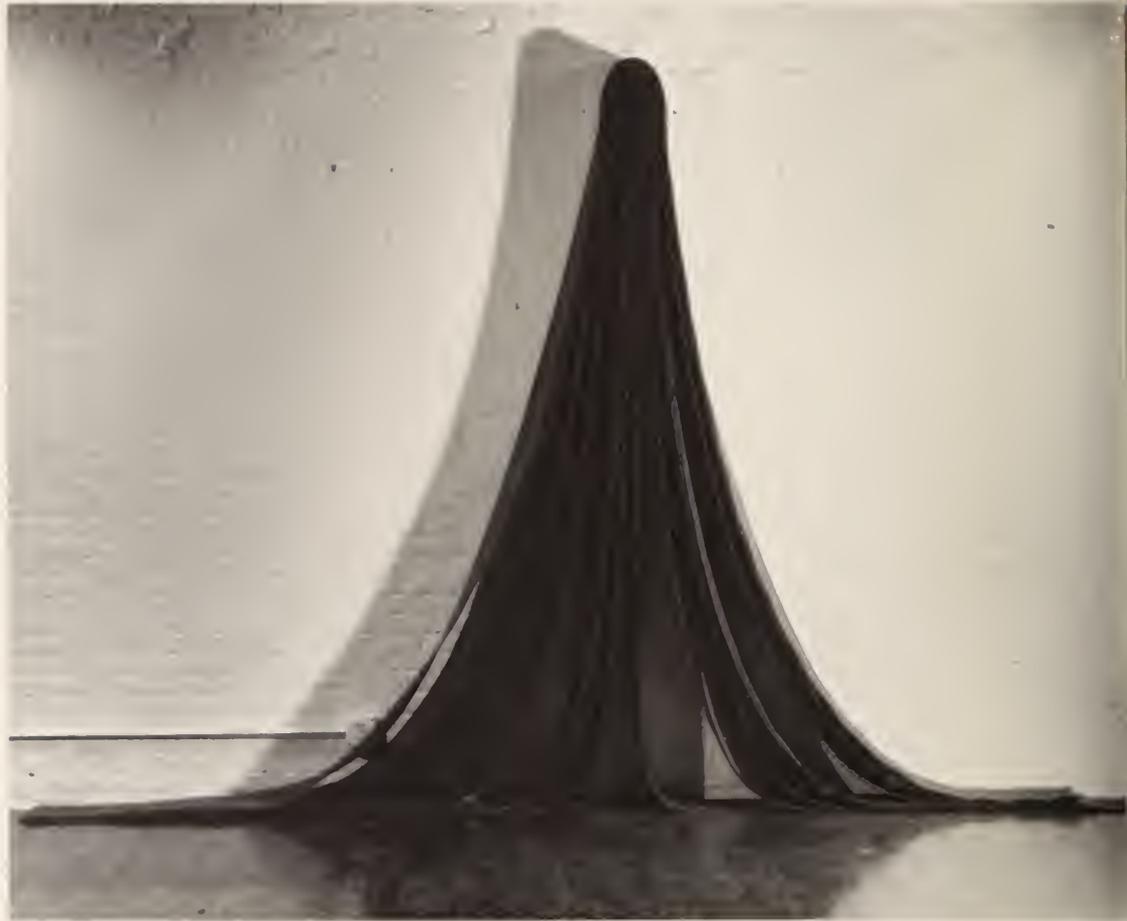
#### Following two pages:

**93. Untitled (Tangle)**, 1967. Felt, 1 inch (2.5 cm) thick, overall dimensions variable. Collection Philip Johnson.

**94. Untitled (Six Legs)**, 1969. Felt, 15 feet 4 inch x 6 feet 1 inch x 1 inch (4.59 m x 1.84 m x 2.5 cm) overall. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gilman Foundation Fund







**95 Untitled (Teepee).** 1970. Felt, seven strips, each 24 feet x 8 inches x  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (7.32 m x 20 m x 1 cm), overall dimensions variable. Collection Barbara Jakobson, New York



96. **Untitled (Shoulder)**, 1973. Felt, 9 x 20 x 3 feet (2.74 x 6.10 x .91 m) overall. Collection Sylvio Perlestein, Antwerp.



**97. Untitled (Inverted Shoulder)**, 1978. Felt and metal grommets. 9 feet 3 inches x 14 feet 11 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches x 6 feet 2 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (2.82 x 4.56 x 1.90 m) overall. Museum Boymans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.



**98 Untitled (Butterfly).** 1980. Felt and metal grommets.  
9 feet x 20 feet x 4 feet 6 inches (2.74 x 6.10 x 1.37 m) overall.  
Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.



**99. Untitled (Catenary)** 1986 Felt, 11 feet x 5 feet 6 inches (3.35 m x 3.40 m) overall Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Gift of the Walker Foundation, 2005

**Following three pages.**

**100. House of the Vetti** 1983 Felt, steel bracket, and metal grommet, 94 x 96 x 36 inches (240 x 243.8 x 91.4 cm) overall Private collection, Madrid

**101. Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night)** 1989 Felt, steel, fiberglass resin, human skeleton, and electric light, 10 x 32 x 16 feet (3.05 x 9.75 x 4.88 m) overall Collection of the artist







The effect of *Steam* (1967, no. 102) is even more intangible and physically tentative than the process-related works made of felt, threadwaste, and earth, or the ever-shifting mirrored cubes and mazes. Steam, drawn from the city's underground supply, driven through pipes, and filtered aboveground through openings in a large rock bed, offered Morris an extremely antisculptural medium. The experience of the work is simply that of a hot, white, amorphous cloud seeping from the ground, billowing skyward, and dissipating into the air some twenty feet up.<sup>1</sup>

As one of the least objectlike works ever conceived or made by the artist, with its indefinite sense of physicality and permanence, *Steam* has on occasion been interpreted as Conceptual art, although it should be carefully distinguished from the latter. Together with *Card File* (1962, no. 26) and *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66)—and in the company of Carl Andre's 120 bricks to be arranged (1966); Mel Bochner's facsimile quotations on negative photostats for the exhibition *Monuments* (1967); Yves Klein's "empty gallery" and his smoke, fire, and water sculptures (1958); Joseph Kosuth's negative photostat dictionary definitions (1967); and Sol LeWitt's buried cube (1968)—*Steam* was offered by John Chandler and Lucy Lippard as an example of what they termed "Dematerialized Art." According to their schema, the shift from "art as product" toward "art as idea" was inextricably tied, as one might expect, to the readymade and to Marcel Duchamp. Their reading of *Steam's* nonphysicality and, therefore, its refusal to be read as product, depends on a contrast between it and Minimal art, where the formerly significant issue of shape has resolved itself out of the picture, and where the sense of oneness, of striving for singularity or specificity, has been retracted.

But insofar as *Steam* insists on the physicality of its materials and the specificity of its site, it finally resists integration into the ideational field of Conceptual art. And insofar as the work must be seen as connected to the working through of ideas on Minimalism, as reflected in Morris's 1970 essay "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," the fact that its own fabrication is made manifest must be understood as a development out of, rather than a repudiation of, Minimalism.

1. *Steam* has been made on three separate occasions: at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, in 1967 (where it was permanently installed in 1971), at the Morris retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1969; and in the sculpture garden, as part of the present retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

2. John Chandler and Lucy Lippard, "The Dematerialization of Art," *Art International* 12, no. 2 (February 1968), reprinted in Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 261.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

4. Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8, no. 8 (April 1970), pp. 62–66.



**102. Steam.** 1974 refabrication of a 1967 original. Steam, multiple steam outlets under a bed of stones, outlined with wood, overall dimensions variable. Western Washington University, Bellingham.



Carl Andre, *Spill (Scatter Piece)*, 1966. Plastic blocks and canvas bag, dimensions variable. Collection John Powers.

By 1969, when his influential article "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects" appeared, Morris had begun to argue for the importance of thinking "beyond objects."<sup>1</sup> Criticizing the inevitable anthropomorphism of any coherent object, the unity of which—no matter how abstract—elicits comparison with the unity of the perceiver's own body, he addressed the shift that had already begun away from Minimalism to Process, or anti-form, art. This, he explained, meant taking on the "conditions of the visual field itself" as "the structural bases [sic] of art," in order to move from a "figurative" to a "landscape mode." Throughout this essay, Morris seems to be describing his own *Untitled (Threadwaste)*, which was mounted in his studio late in 1968 (no. 104) and exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York in 1969.

Prefigured by Carl Andre's *Spill (Scatter Piece)* (1966) and Barry Le Va's glass and lightweight felt pieces,<sup>2</sup> Morris's *Threadwaste* was an outgrowth of both his use of industrial felt and his interest in extending sculptural questions about perception. He writes of transforming the sculptural field, from "particular forms, to ways of ordering, to methods of production and, finally to perceptual relevance." "Threadwaste, industrially used as lubricated packing for the bearings of freight cars, contains so many variegated strands of colored thread that its color is undefinable. To this Morris added miscellaneous felt pieces, copper

tubing, and chunks of asphalt. From within the mass of this material, which comprises the bulk of *Threadwaste*, rise a number of rectangular double-sided mirrors, that, in their reflections, produce an uncanny replication of the scatter piece's horizontal sprawl. Such a positioning of mirrors in the "landscape" recalls both Robert Smithson's *Mirror Displacements* (1968), first installed in the Yucatán, and his *Cayuga Salt Mine Mirror Trail* (1969), which was included in *Earth Art*, an exhibition at the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University.<sup>3</sup> Morris was also included in *Earth Art*, but because he was unable to attend in person, he "telephoned instructions to the Museum for the execution of his piece," asking that "a diagram of the gallery assigned to him be marked off into a one-foot grid." Using this as a map, he then gave the museum staff instructions about the size of the piles of material—anthracite, earth, asbestos—requisite to compose the piece and where in the gallery it should be placed.

Significantly, the landscape mode described by Morris in "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4" emphasizes the predominate horizontality of *Threadwaste* (a horizontality soon to be acknowledged in the term "Earth Art"). What Morris wanted from this new way of experiencing the "conditions of the visual field itself" was not the diaphanous mirage of a Modernist "opticality" but, instead, a "de-differentiated vision," a term he borrowed from Anton Ehrenzweig. This concept of "scanning, syncretistic, or de-differentiated" vision created by the "purposeful detachment from holistic readings in terms of gestalt-bound forms" constituted, for Morris, a new mode of aesthetic experience.<sup>4</sup>

1. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969), p. 50.

2. "The specific art object of the sixties is not so much a metaphor for the figure as an existence parallel to it," wrote Morris (*ibid.*, p. 51). The reference to "specific art objects" is to Donald Judd's essay "Specific Objects," *Art Yearbook* 8 (1965), reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), pp. 181-89.

3. "Fields of stuff which have no central contained focus and extend into or beyond the peripheral vision offer a kind of 'landscape mode' as opposed to a self-contained type of organization offered by the specific object" (Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4," p. 51).

4. Andre first made scatter pieces of plastic blocks emptied out of a canvas bag in 1966, in New York, while in Los Angeles, in the same year, Le Va began to experiment with distributional compositions.

5. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4," p. 51.

6. The exhibition ran from February 11 through March 16, 1969. Morris, quoted in *Earth Art*, exhibition catalogue (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1969), unpaginated.

8. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4," p. 53.



**103. Untitled (Tangle)**, 1967. Felt, 264 pieces,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (1.3 cm) thick, overall dimensions variable. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

**following two pages: 104. Untitled (Threadwaste)**, 1968. Threadwaste, asphalt, mirrors, copper tubing, and felt, overall dimensions variable. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson.





As part of the Dwan Gallery's *Earth Show* in New York in October 1968, Morris installed *Untitled (Dirt)* (1968, no. 106), a 2,000-pound pile of earth (which sprouted a plant during the show), intermixed with industrial felt, grease, peat moss, brick, and loose strips and scraps of various metals—steel, copper, aluminum, brass, and zinc.<sup>1</sup> Morris's desire to work the earth as a material was prefigured in *Model* (1966, no. 105), a projected design for the Dallas–Fort Worth Airport that was never realized. The piece was to have consisted of a smoothly fashioned ringlike mound, and, therefore, unlike *Dirt*, retains a formal continuity with his well-built object-type art. Such works as *Dirt* and *Threadwaste* (1968, no. 104) emerged from the anti-aesthetic concerns that had led to the earlier *Felts* (for example, nos. 92–93), concerns that Morris articulated in his essay "Anti Form." The materials of which *Dirt* was made did not aggregate into a new form, an indication of a refusal by the artist to compromise their intrinsic physical properties.

That *Dirt* went "beyond objects," as Morris wrote, continuing the shift away from the objecthood that had underpinned his formative years in Minimalism, did not signal a disavowal of his strongly held concern with process. Indeed, size limitations on a given work were soon abandoned, when Morris, and other artists operating in the then-emergent idiom of Earthworks, began to work outdoors.<sup>2</sup> The monumental scale that characterized their various projects, both permanent and ephemeral, was seen as necessary to the articulation of a new kind of aesthetic experience and syntax.

In *Dirt*, Morris continued a nearly obsessional self-removal from the final work—gone is any sense of aesthetic composition; there is no working of materials; tools, including the shovel and tractor, have replaced handwork. Indeed, in a repetition of László Moholy-Nagy's 1926 act of ordering the making of a work by long-distance telephone, in 1969, Morris "created" another version of *Dirt* by telephoning instructions for its construction to the museum where it was going to be shown

1. Other works in the exhibition included Walter de Maria's *Pure Dirt* (1968), an installation first shown at the Heiner-Friedrich Gallery in Munich (it is now permanently installed by the DIA Center for the Arts in New York as the *New York Earth Room*); Michael Heizer's *Contour Line: Scribed in Swamp Grass (New Haven Project)* (1968), which traced lines from a topographic map; and Robert Smithson's *Non-Site* (1968), an aerial photograph of mines in Franklin, New Jersey.

2. Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33–35.

3. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969), pp. 50–54.

4. Among the artists creating earthworks were de Maria, Jan Dibbets, Hans Haacke, Heizer, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim, Smithson, and Gunther Uecker.

5. See Morris, "Notes on Art as and Land Reclamation," *October*, no. 12 (spring 1980), pp. 87–102.

6. The second version of *Dirt* was shown in the exhibition *Earth Art*, curated by Thomas Leavitt at Cornell University's Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art in 1969.



**105. Model**, 1967 edition of a 1966 original (unrealized design for Dallas-Fort Worth Airport). 1967 version: acrylic, 20 x 24 x 1 inches (50.8 x 61 x 2.5 cm). 1966 version: plaster.

**following two pages: 106. Untitled (Dirt)**, 1968. Earth, grease, peat moss, brick, steel, copper, aluminum, brass, zinc, and felt, overall dimensions variable.





## CONTINUOUS PROJECT ALTERED DAILY, 1969

Morris's *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969, no. 107) hovers between several states—part exhibition, part sculptural project, part performance—without coming to rest in any one of them. Each day during the project's duration, March 1–22, 1969, Morris went to the Leo Castell Warehouse on West 108th Street, in New York, where he worked with a range of materials much greater than would have been likely even a few years before—among them earth, clay, asbestos, cotton, water, grease, plastic, felt, threadwaste, muslin, electric lights, and recorded sound.

Open to the public every afternoon from Tuesday through Saturday, the warehouse, which resembled a construction site replete with barrels, shovels, wooden platforms, naked light bulbs, and amorphous piles of dirt and clay, echoed with the sounds of building. The activities performed by Morris in the space, with their overt reference to building, moving, and forming, relate to the emphasis on differentiated particlelike substances, process, and making then current in his writing. Sometimes he worked randomly, even playfully, using the material in ways that were "experimental, exploratory, non-directed":

*First day of the Continuous Project in the Warehouse. Dumped out 2000 pounds of wet clay out of 50 lb cans onto floor. No idea what to be done with it. Began aimlessly—throwing it around.*

At other times he made deliberate marks, forms, or structures, as, for example, when he "took wet lumps [of clay] and rubbed on square on wall about 8' x 8' and with wet broom and hoe smoothed it out, very thin." As Morris wrote in 1970 in "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," a great deal may be gained by placing an interpretive emphasis on methods of building, rather than solely on formal results.

In order to inscribe something of the history of the works making into its continuously changing present, Morris photographed *Continuous Project Altered Daily* at the end of each day. These photographs, documenting twelve states in all, were subsequently tacked to the wall, at eye level, just outside the work space. Distinguishing the purpose of this photographic record from Michael Heizer's documentation of his *Double Negative* (1969), a piece that Heizer had sited in the Mohave Desert far from the general viewing public, Morris later commented to Lucy Lippard that "the removal of the work itself and a purposeful replacement of its existence with a photograph has never been a working method" of his. He went on to state that "photographs function as a peculiar kind of

sign. There is a strange relation between their reality and their artificiality; the signifier-signified relation they set up is not at all clear or transparent. One of the things they do is to give too much information and not enough at the same time."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to photographic documentation, Morris maintained a continuous written record of his activities, in which he described his feelings—mostly of discomfort but also, at times, of dissatisfaction and revulsion. In this journal he explains that *Continuous Project Altered Daily* relates to "viscera, muscles, primal energies, afterbirth, feces . . ." and calls it "a work of the bowels, very moving shit, etc."<sup>2</sup> He also acknowledges his relief at seeing the occasional form or structure emerge during the process of working on the project. Indeed, in Morris's account there is something reminiscent of the child described by Charles Baudelaire, who, after deftly breaking open his toy to find its "soul," is sadly disappointed to discover that its soul is ever elsewhere. This image perhaps helps to understand Morris's reference to his piece as "a reverse excavation, building up ruins."<sup>3</sup>

The notion of recording an unsystematic path calls to mind Jackson Pollock's break, through his physical (even dance-like) movements above the canvas, with earlier models of regularized or "systematic" interaction with the two-dimensional surfaces of painting. Taking as a point of departure this and other investigations of how art may be systematized (for example, by the programmed chance of Marcel Duchamp and John Cage, or by the repetitive stripes of Frank Stella), it may be seen that the processes in which Morris engaged—the physical labor of rearranging and disarranging the material elements, adding and subtracting from the amalgamated composition, shoveling, hanging, lifting, dragging, piling, and draping materials—were all part of his claim that art itself is "an activity of disorientation and shift, of violent discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness for confusion even in the service of discovering new perceptual modes." It is also worth noting that the terms Morris applied to his activities in the warehouse are similar to the list of transitive verbs made by Richard Serra to describe the actions he performs in making his sculpture.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important aspects of Morris's project is its refusal to develop in a linear fashion toward a final composition that the artist deems complete. Indeed, on the last day of the installation he tape-recorded his own cleanup of the space, then played the recording back as he made the last photograph—an image of a lone tape recorder, its cord

dangling in front of the arrangement of earlier photographs visible on the back wall. As in *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11), we are presented simultaneously with the space and with the sound of its ordering.

Like the scatter piece *Threadwaste* (1968, no. 104), *Continuous Project Altered Daily* was predicated on ideas of randomness and entropy, expressed as material in a seemingly uncomposed state spread laterally over the floor. The materials remained infinitely rearrangeable and thus within Morris's trajectory of anti-illusionism. The project succeeded both in extending the nonrelational compositions of Minimalism, and in furthering the investigation of materials begun in the anti-form *Threadwaste* and *Dirt* (1968, no. 106). Through its processes of random, or uncalculated, change and through its exploration of the properties of loose, soft, and nonart materials that allow no object (let alone a "specific object") to dictate formal closure, the work subverts conventional artistic discourse about composition, iconicity, and system.

**following two pages: 107. Continuous Project Altered Daily, 1969 (six states).** Earth, clay, asbestos, cotton, water, grease, plastic, felt, wood, threadwaste, electric lights, photographs, and tape recorder, dimensions variable. Installation at the Leo Castelli Warehouse, New York, March 1–22, 1969.

1. Excerpt from the unpublished journal Morris kept while making *Continuous Project Altered Daily*.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Morris cites George Kubler's examination of Machu Picchu in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) as an example of this kind of analysis. See Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8, no. 8 (April 1970), pp. 62–66.

4. Morris, quoted in Lucy Lippard, "Robert Morris," in *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 257.

5. At one point in his journal, Morris speaks of his anxiety and frustration about having described his feelings to another person, "as though [I] had revealed my methods of masturbation." Elsewhere, regarding the spread pile of clay and dirt, he observes his own nausea ("for the brute dirt"), that "perhaps the fecal quality of the lumps of mud revolt [him] more than [he] admit[s]." He also mentions "bumpy, shitty, compositional decorative elements" emerging when he pours latex over one of the platforms covered with material (Morris, unpublished journal, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*).

6. *Ibid.*

7. Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects," *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969), p. 54.

8. See Grégoire Müller, *The New Avant-Garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 94. Serra's list of transitive verbs includes: "to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to tear, to chip, to splinter, to mark, to systematize."





## OBSERVATORY, 1971-77

In 1965, Morris began to think of making an outdoor "observatory," a structure, influenced by Stonehenge, whose purpose would be to track solar phenomena—the winter and summer solstices and the fall and spring equinoxes. Several drawings of this and related chamber projects date from that year. However, it was not until *Sonsbeek '71*, an international sculpture exhibition held in the Netherlands, that Morris first realized this "sculpture" on a grand scale, in the flatlands of IJmuiden.<sup>1</sup>

The resultant work, *Observatory* (1971, no. 109), was a massive structure of earth, timber, granite blocks, and steel in the form of a pair of raised concentric rings with a total diameter of 233 feet. The inner ring was pierced by a door and three slotlike windows and had walls of sod lined in vertical wooden planks; the outer ring, also interrupted by four openings, was a kind of dyke, or embankment, separated from the inner ring by a moatlike expanse. A triangular-shaped passageway and a channel-like slot cut the dyke along its east/west axis, articulating the spring and fall equinoxes. The channel itself projected from the perimeter of the work, ending in an open V composed of two nine-foot-square steel plates. Two other Vs, formed of granite slabs, were wedged into the raised mound of the dyke on an axis with the two remaining "windows" in *Observatory's* inner sanctum, these marking the trajectory of the summer and winter solstices. As Edward Fry remarked, "*Observatory* epitomizes two contrasting kinds of time. The one, outside of human history, is marked by planetary motion and is a reflection of physical and astronomical conditions. The other is human historical consciousness: using his privileged knowledge of the past, based on Western history and archaeology . . . Morris has chosen as the model for *Observatory* the similar structures devised by prehistoric men for marking the seasons."<sup>2</sup>

Minimalism had opened the sculptural object to the passage of real time. Morris discusses the conceptual underpinnings of marking a site with an emblem of its own past that also functions as a compass of its present in his essay "Aligned with Nazca."<sup>3</sup>

1. Subsequent to the work's destruction late that year, funds were raised, and, in 1973, a larger, permanent version of the observatory was built in Oostelijk Eindhoven (no. 108). In 1971 a temporary observatory was also erected at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.  
2. Edward Fry, "Introduction" in *Robert Morris Projects*, exhibition catalogue (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1971), unpaginated.

3. Morris, "Aligned with Nazca," *Artforum* 11, no. 2 (October 1973), pp. 26-39.





**above and facing page, top: 108. Observatory. 1977.**

Earth, wood, granite, steel, and water, 298 feet 7 inches (91.01 m) diameter. Permanent installation, Oostelijk, Flevoland, The Netherlands.

**facing page, bottom: 109. Observatory. 1971.** Earth, wood, granite, steel, and water, 233 feet (71.02 m) diameter. Installation, IJmuiden, Sant-poort-Velsen, The Netherlands.

## RUBBINGS, 1972

In "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," Morris argues that rather than imposing form on matter, form itself should emerge from the processes inherent in the manipulation of a given material. Citing Donatello's sculpture *Judith and Holofernes* (1456), in which cloth draped over the wax model was, in the casting process, encouraged to leave an indexical trace on the finished bronze, Morris brought the issue of the index as a "way to make a mark" (as, for example, in *Self-Portrait [EEG]* [1963, no. 44]) to bear on his considerations of anti-form.<sup>1</sup>

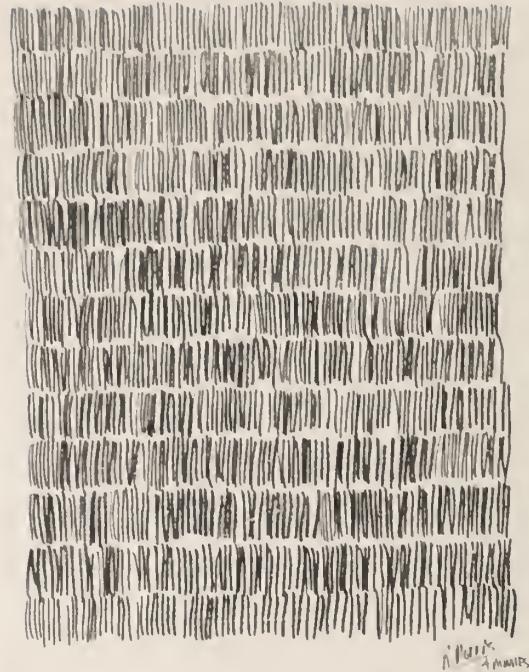
The group of *Rubbings* that Morris executed in 1972 (for example, nos. 111–13) arises out of this renewed concern with the index. These drawings prepare, as well, for the much larger campaign of work on the *Blind Time* series, which began in 1973. Through their performative, and even architectural emphases, the *Rubbings* also recall *Passageway* (1961, no. 4), with its concentration on a single gesture.

Rubbing is a technique used by archaeologists, in which thin paper laid over a carved stone surface is rubbed with graphite or ink, thereby effecting a transfer of visual information from that surface. The technique found a place in twentieth-century art practice, in, for example, Max Ernst's use of *frottages*, or in the method developed by Robert Rauschenberg for pulling newsprint imagery (first soaked in lighter fluid) onto the drawings in his *Dante's Inferno* series (1959–60).

In the case of Morris, the *Rubbings* reproduce a kind of archaeology of his work environment. Forms appear to invent themselves out of the repetitive geometries or architectural features of his New York studio on Mulberry Street: a section of wainscoting and wall, a corner of a door frame, a fragment of baseboard complete with electrical outlet. Morris's technique takes the imprint of these surfaces so forcefully that the paper itself has been manhandled into low relief, the paper becoming a resonating membrane recording the connection between artist and world.

Rubbing thus offered Morris yet another machine for making a work of art: "At those points where automation is substituted for a previous 'all made by hand' homologous set of steps, the artist has stepped aside for more of the world to enter into the art. This is a kind of regress into a controlled lack of control." Combining with the physically deformed surfaces, refigured in venelike chiaroscuro creases from the weight of the artist's hand, this strategy self-consciously makes the process visible even while it voids traditional ideas of composition.

A much earlier set of untitled "stroke" drawings



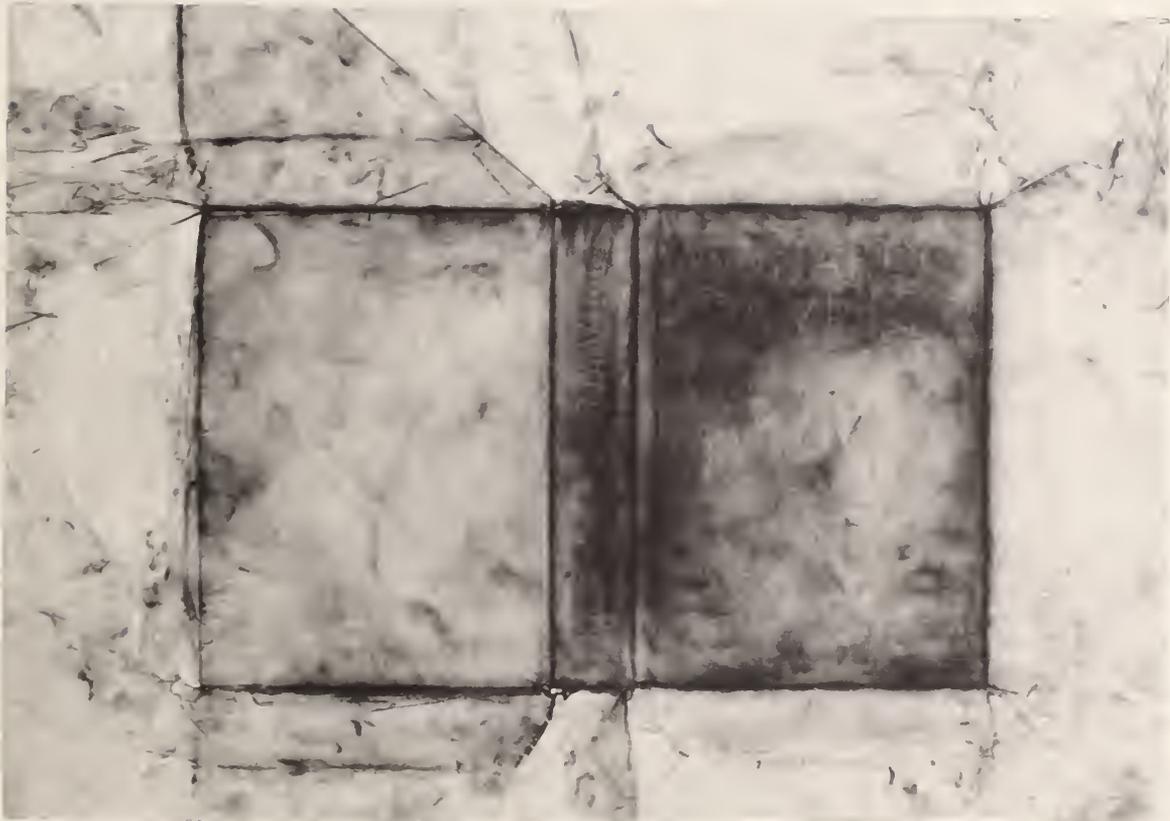
110. 14 Minutes, 1962. Ink on brown paper, 14 x 10 1/4 inches (35.6 x 27.3 cm). Collection of the artist.

from 1962 (for example, no. 110) is interesting to consider in light of the *Rubbings*' strategy of automating composition. In these works, Morris either chose a time period (for example, fourteen minutes) during which he would arbitrarily mark the sheet, or set himself an arbitrary number of strokes to apply (for example, 1,371). While these drawings clearly privilege the process by which they were made, their challenge to the notion of composing also lies in the restriction of the artist's hand to an uninventive, monotonous, and explicitly mechanical task. The rather limited motion implied by the simple scheme of the drawings converts the viewer's narrative expectation into the dispassionate observation of information.

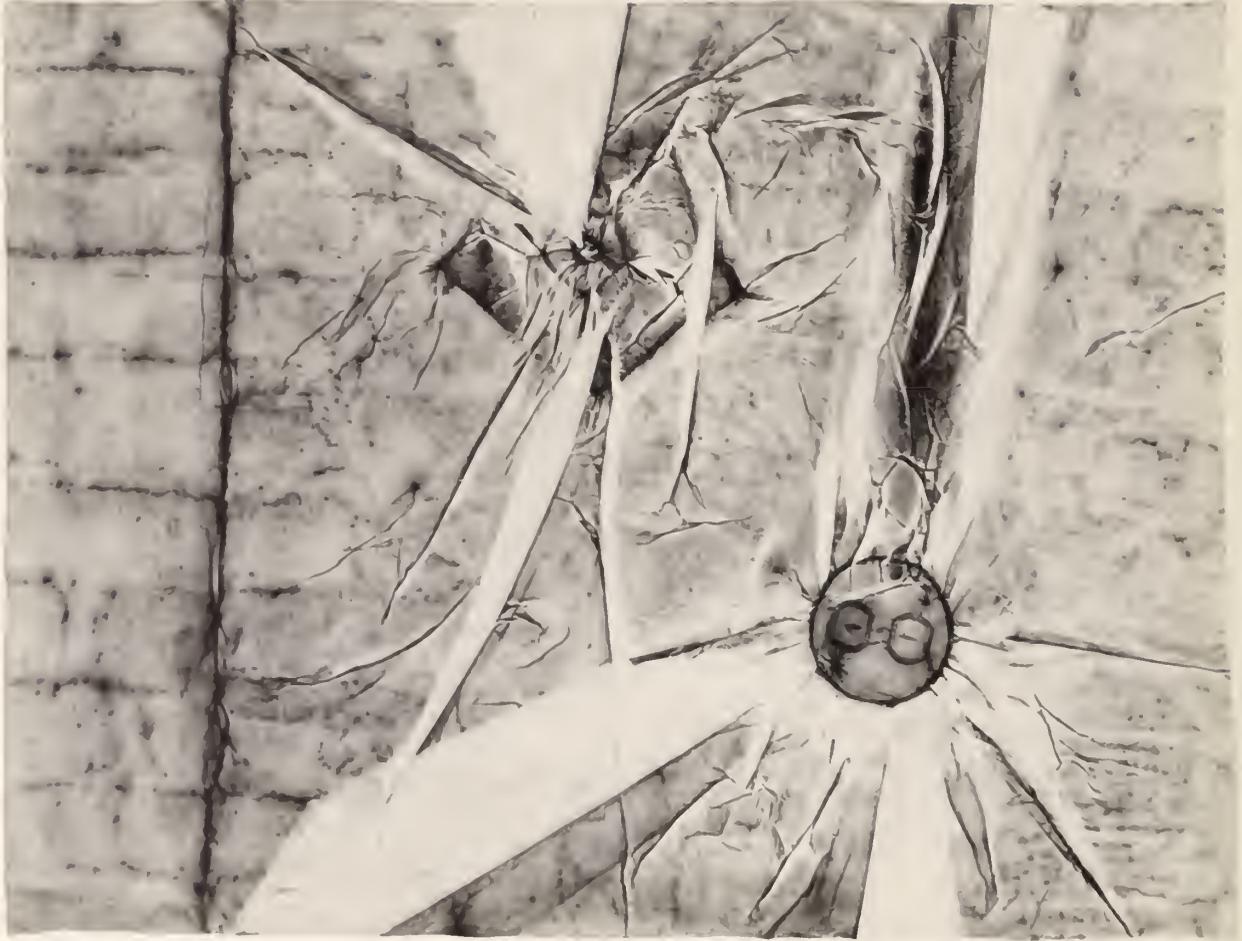
1. Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8, no. 8 (April 1970), pp. 62–66.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

3. The rubbing process, therefore, defuses the search for a culminating point in the work's design and facture. For a discussion of the stakes of privileging the plateau over the climax, see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizoanalysis*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).



**111. Rubbing of Leonardo Book, 1972.** Graphite on fiberglass paper, 25<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 35<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (63.8 x 91.1 cm). Collection of the artist.



112. **Untitled (Rubbing)**, 1972. Graphite on fiberglass paper.  
23 1/8 x 31 inches (59.4 x 78.7 cm). Collection of the artist.



113. **Untitled (Rubbing)**, 1972. Graphite on fiberglass paper, 28<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 36 inches (73.3 x 91.4 cm). Collection of the artist.

## BLIND TIME DRAWINGS, 1973

Morris's first set of *Blind Time* drawings, part of an ongoing series drawn with his eyes shut, was made in 1973. Executed in dry graphite or graphite mixed with plate oil, the resulting configuration was based on a predesignated task that the artist set about performing within an estimated time, using a certain amount of pressure with his hands to smear the velvety but viscous medium across the surface of the paper. Some of the tasks related to the physical givens of the sheet (dividing it into equal quadrants, for example); others turned on the task of creating a simple shape and then duplicating it on a contiguous part of the same page. A legend written in the lower-left corner then recorded the terms for the drawing's completion, as well as, in certain cases, a notation of the experience occasioned by its making. One such legend reads:

*With eyes closed, powdered graphite along the vertical and horizontal axis of the page, and estimating a lapsed time of five minutes, the right hand begins at the right end of the horizontal and rubs upward while the left begins at the left end of the horizontal and rubs downward. Both hands attempt equidistant, vertical motions which progress towards the center: the right decreases pressure in proportion to its estimated distance from the horizontal axis and the left does the reverse. At the center the left hand moves horizontally from the vertical axis while the right moves outward from the axis below. The hands reverse their roles with respect to the pressure during the horizontal motions. Time estimation error: +24 seconds.*

In making regular, geometric, objective shape thus dependent upon, or a function of, what could be called the internal geometries of the body—the artist's experience of his own bilateral symmetry, of the differential relation to gravity of his head as opposed to his feet, and so on—the *Blind Time* drawings enact a rather pure reflection on Minimalism's grounding in the ideas associated with the phenomenology of perception. Everything that Minimalism had done to decenter the idea of fixed, objective shapes, by making even the perception of geometric forms a function both of ambient space and light and of the movements of the viewer, attested to an idea of perception as fundamentally interactive, or what Maurice Merleau-Ponty had termed "an act with two facets."<sup>1</sup> These two facets—simultaneously those of exposure and hiding—constitute depth itself as something very different from the consistently available and transparent lattice of space conceived as a geometric given. Instead, depth is understood as arising *subjectively* from a pre-objective experience—the most

primitive sense that each of us has of our own body's density, and with it the fact that this body has a front that is available to our vision and a back irremediably hidden from it. It is this pre-objective experience of depth that allows the perceiving subject thus to "gear into the world," which for Merleau-Ponty meant to reach out toward objects with an expectation that they too would yield configured meaning, but also to be always and forever tied to a perspective, a place within a system of interlocking horizons.

This notion of seeing as a kind of grasping or meshing—a function of the viewer's intentionality—means that no objects are imagined as being given to us neutrally, to be then modified by the distance from which we see them or the angle of view we are forced to take. The distance and the viewpoint are not added to the object, it is argued, but inhere in the object's meaning, like the sounds that infuse the language we speak with an always-already-given ground of sense, separating it at the start from mere noise or babble.

Perceptual data are thus recharacterized by phenomenology. They are no longer neutral stimuli that enter the bodily sensorium for point-by-point processing, but they are now defined as the *meanings* that things present to a given point of view.

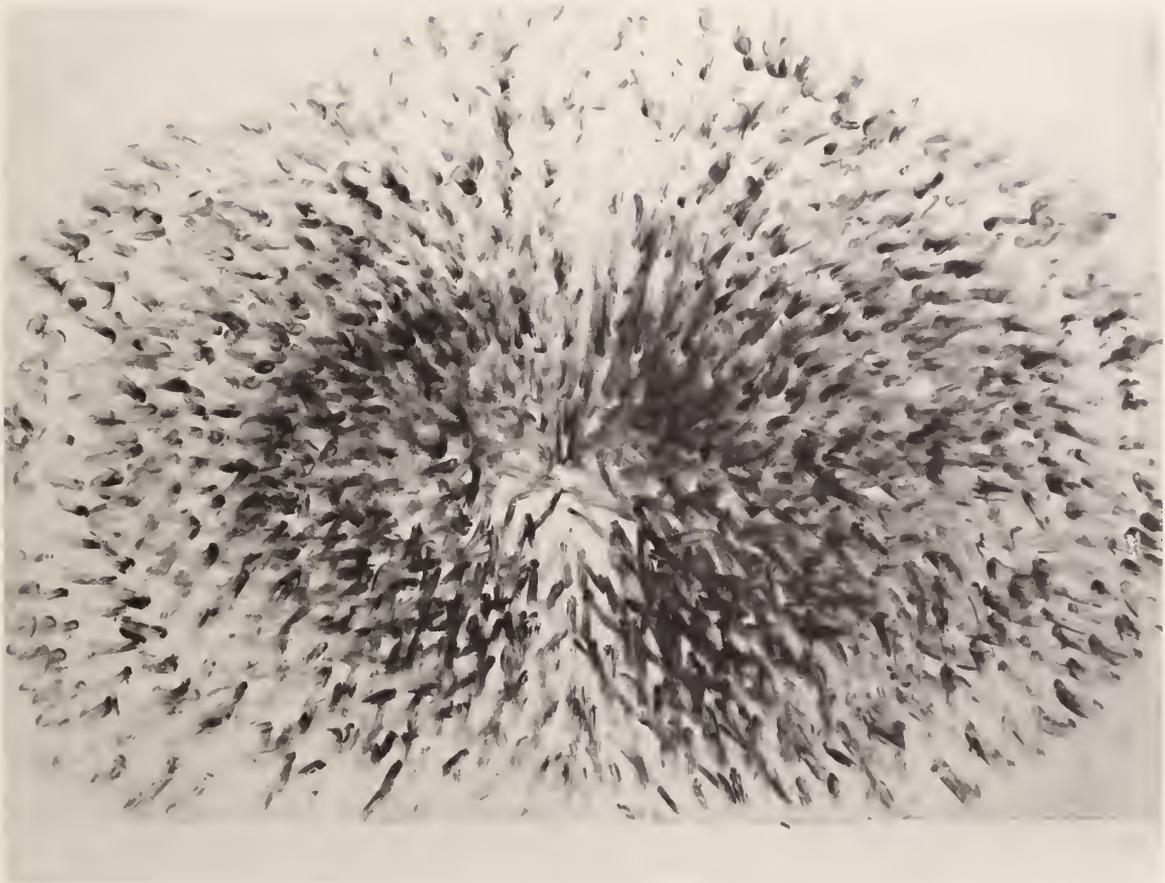
And these meanings, ultimately tied to the "pre-objective experience" of the body's own spatiality, are thus not necessarily "thing-meanings"—tables, chairs, trees, and so on—but can also project what Merleau-Ponty called "a spatiality without things": "When, for example, the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished, our perceptual being, cut off from its world, evolves a spatiality without things. This is what happens in the night. . . . Night has no outlines; it is itself in contact with me."<sup>2</sup>

The *Blind Time* drawings, made with closed eyes, are essentially the projections of this pre-objective, carnal density, a meshing of the body's "inner horizon" with the horizon of the external page. Perhaps the aspect of the drawings that is most eloquent about the interface between external space and bodily construct is their medium: the black velvet of the powdered graphite reading less as a trace or imprint of the hands' passage over the page than as a mirror surface for touch itself—the drawing touching back the artist's hands.

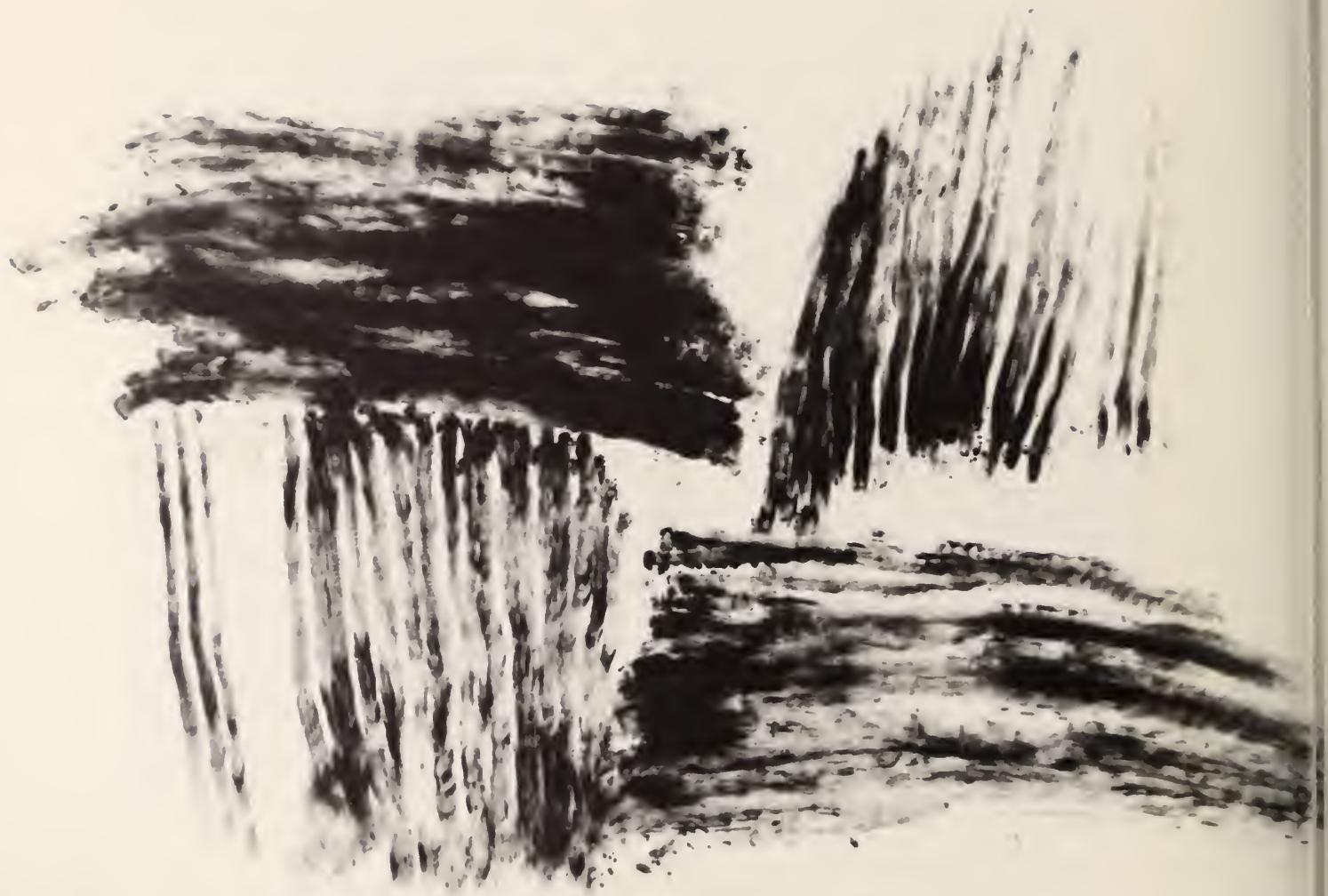
1. A second set of *Blind Time* drawings was made in 1976, a third set in 1985, and a fourth set (pp. 296–301) in 1991.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962, 1945), p. 67.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 283.



**114. *Blind Time*, 1973.** Powdered graphite and pencil on paper, 35 x 46 inches (88.9 x 116.8 cm). Washington Art Consortium, Virginia Wright Fund: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle; Seattle Art Museum; Tacoma Art Museum; Western Gallery, Western Washington University, Bellingham; Whatcom Museum of History and Art, Bellingham; Cheney Cowles Museum, Spokane; Museum of Art, Washington State University, Pullman.



115. **Blind Time.** 1973. Powdered graphite and pencil on paper,  
35 x 46 inches (88.9 x 116.8 cm) Collection Rosalind Krauss



**116. Blind Time**, 1973. Powdered graphite and pencil on paper, 35 x 46 inches (88.9 x 116.8 cm). The Art Museum, Princeton University, Gift of the Walter Foundation and Anonymous Donors.



117 **Blind Time**, 1973 Powdered graphite and pencil on paper.  
35 x 46 inches (88.9 x 116.8 cm) Collection Rosalind Krauss



118. **Blind Time**, 1973. Powdered graphite and pencil on paper, 35 x 46 inches (88.9 x 116.8 cm). Collection of the artist

## LABYRINTHS, 1973-74

During the 1970s, Morris completed three series of drawings. If the first of these, the *Blind Time* drawings (1973, nos. 114-18), investigate process, the second two, the *Labyrinths* (1973, nos. 120-24) and *In the Realm of the Carceral* (1978, nos. 129-33), meticulously drawn in ink, adopt the form of the axonometric projection. The axonometric projection is based on the architectural plan of an object; in its elevation, the object's parallel sides do not converge toward a vanishing point (as they would according to central-point perspective) but are held instead in strict parallel, all receding walls assuming the same diagonal. This manner of drawing, which is sometimes called "mechanical" and is often used by draftsmen to describe elements destined for machine production, was adopted by Morris, in the 1960s, as he thought about his work in relation to industrial fabrication. In the *Carcerals* and the *Labyrinths*, although the angle from which objects are depicted shifts from drawing to drawing, the axonometric viewpoint, which consistently approaches its objects from above, is always maintained. Morris's carefully penned *Labyrinths*—sectional, whole, and distended; elliptical, circular, and triangular—are centered about a point, which is, in turn, layered with coils. Each evokes clear associations with the ancient labyrinths after which the group was, in part, modeled. The resultant forms, taken up contemporaneously by sculptors Alice Aycock, Richard Fleischner, and Patrick Ireland, among others, bear within them categorical reference to the mythical narratives of the Minotaur and Ariadne's thread.<sup>1</sup> They call forth, as well, the architecturally induced phobia of confinement and control, symbolically encoded in the labyrinth's structure, which condemns those inside it to roam blindly, trapped in what Morris has described as the "present tense of space."<sup>2</sup> The stark black and white of the unmodeled drawings produces a strong, flat pattern that is, however, held in tension with the cavernous three-dimensionality induced by the projection, for the surface network of black line represents a cross section of the object, against which the white ground may be read as vertiginous chasm. Indeed, these drawings have a distinctly architectural and sculptural quality, and, in this, they recall Morris's plywood structures of the early 1960s, at the same time anticipating the full-scale *Labyrinths* he was soon to construct.

The first of these was *Untitled (Labyrinth)* (1974, no. 119), which was exhibited as part of the exhibition *Robert Morris Projects*, at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Made of plywood and Masonite,

and painted gray, this labyrinth's form is modeled on the floor pattern of Chartres Cathedral, a structure associated with Medieval pilgrimage and redemption.

Not unlike *Passageway* (1961, no. 4), which drew static viewers into a strangely coercive choreography, Morris's *Labyrinth*, with its narrow curvilinear pathways and eight-foot-high walls, regulates one's passage through it. A distinct and confining space, it is clearly legible from above as an elegant pattern, while, from within, it can only be experienced as elusive. Never dividing to offer choices, nor, like other labyrinths, expiring in cul-de-sacs, this object's strategy is more one of processing the viewer's body through a protocol of confusion and disorientation.

1. See Ronald J. Onorato, "The Modern Maze," *Art International* 21, nos. 4-5 (April-May 1976), pp. 21-25; and Hermann Kern, "Labyrinths: Tradition and Contemporary Works," *Artforum* 19, no. 9 (May 1981), pp. 60-68.

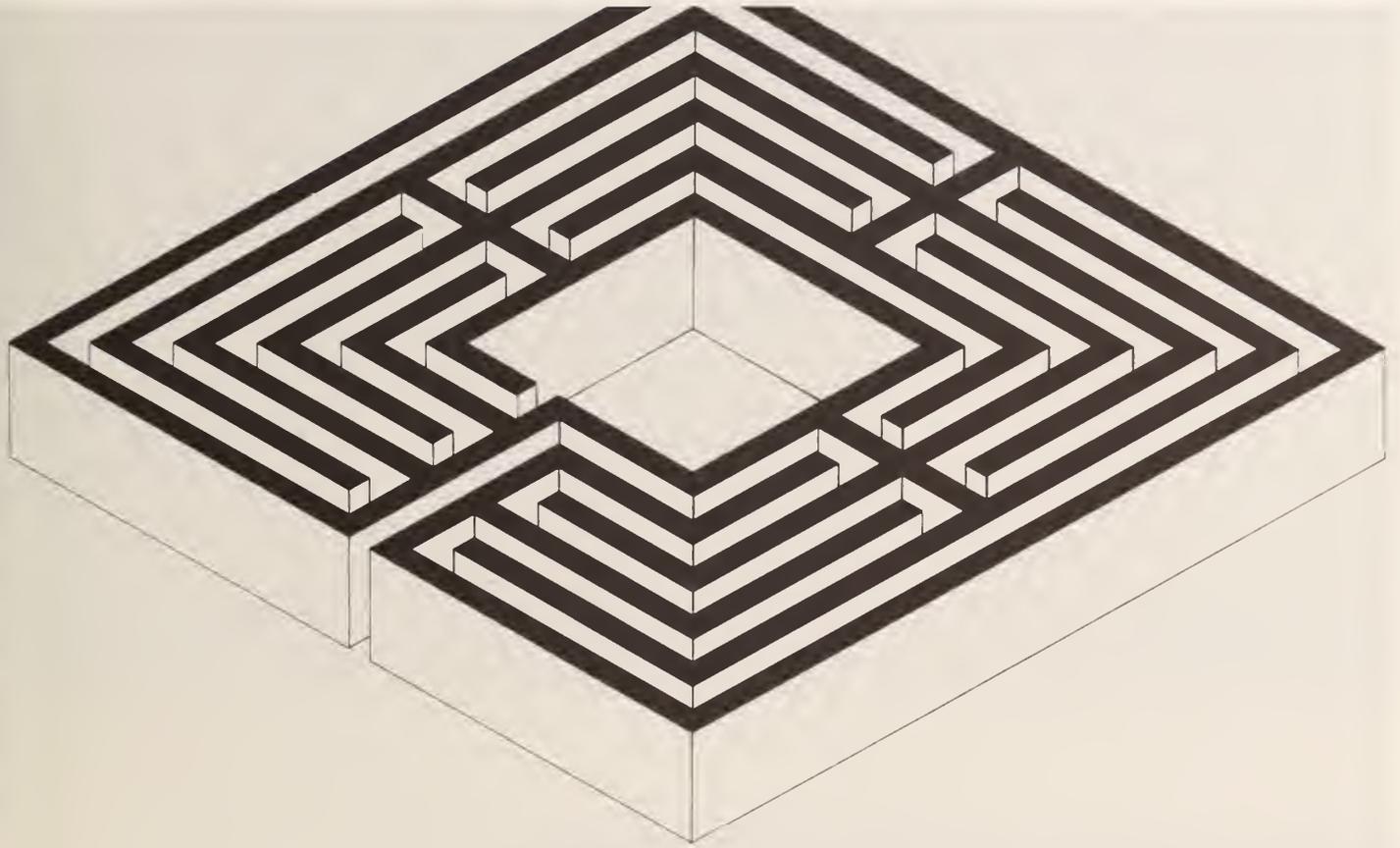
2. See Morris, "The Present Tense of Space," *Art in America* 66, no. 1 (January-February 1978), pp. 70-81.



**119. Untitled (Labyrinth), 1974** Plywood and Masonite, painted.  
8 feet (2.44 m) high, 30 feet (9.14 m) diameter  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Panza Collection



**120. Untitled (Circular Labyrinth)**, 1973. Ink on paper, 42 x 60 inches (106.7 x 152.4 cm). Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain de Picardie, Amiens.



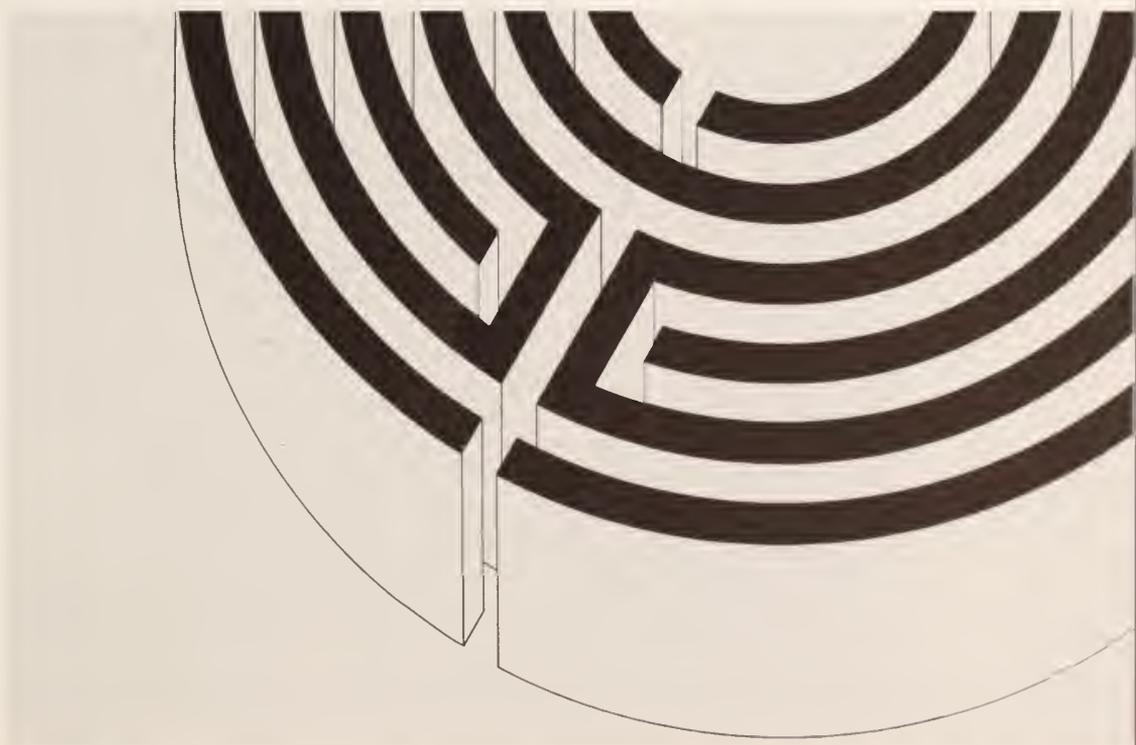
**121. Untitled (Square Labyrinth), 1973.** Ink on paper,  
42 x 60 inches (106.7 x 152.4 cm). Collection Sondra and  
Charles Gilman Jr.



**122. Untitled (Section of a Rectangular Labyrinth), 1973.**  
Ink on paper, 42 x 60 inches (106.7 x 152.4 cm). Courtesy  
Soh Gallery, Tokyo.

**facing page, top: 123. Untitled (Section of an Oval  
Labyrinth), 1973.** Ink on paper, 42 x 60 inches (106.7 x  
152.4 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

**facing page, bottom: 124. Untitled (Section of a Circular  
Labyrinth), 1973.** Ink on paper, 42 x 60 inches (106.7 x  
152.4 cm). Private collection, Venice, Italy



In 1974, two years after Morris presented his sound-sculpture installation *Hearing* (1972, no. 88), he showed another work at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, that focused even more radically on auditory experience. That piece, *Voice* (no. 126), consisted of simple elements: eight sound tracks played through eight loudspeakers placed in the corners of the room and fourteen wooden boxes covered with white felt, which functioned as seats, placed at random throughout the space. As its name implies, *Voice* performed a critique of the customary understanding of the artistic experience as entirely visual and resident in an object, extending even further Morris's notion of anti-form. The sound tracks, a concatenation of often abstract dialogue spoken by a small cast, were structured as a set of loose narratives. The kind of rhetoric employed in the piece is apparent in this passage spoken by one of the voices:

*Sourceless.*  
*Our language is our authority.*  
*Lofly.*  
*Remote.*  
*And if incomprehensible.*  
*A necessary insurance.*  
*Against the private.*  
*The subjective.*

The three-and-one-half-hour-long sound montage was divided into four sections randomly spliced together from parts of eight tracks recorded by speakers/actors Richard Dunham, Jack Firestone, Gene Galusha, William Pritz, Charles Randall, Mark Strand, Cathryn Walker, and Mike Zelenko. Only two tracks were played at one time: the first was dominant and generally intelligible; the second, played at a lower volume, was heard as a continual drone.

The first section, called "The Four," was written by Morris and read by four male actors, each of whom identified the audio speaker from which his voice was broadcast with a point of the compass—NE, SE, NW, SW. In this section, the voices on the main speakers coincided with those on the subordinate track. The second section, "They," was Morris's arrangement of excerpts from Emil Kraepelin's *Dementia Praecox* (1919) and *Manic Depressive Insanity and Paranoia* (1921). Here, one male voice and one female voice alternately took the dominant role. This interaction was further elaborated by the occasional reversal of pronouns between speakers (the male voice referring to itself as female and vice versa), as well as moments of overlapped, repeated, and

simultaneously spoken text that moved between the eight speakers and thus spatialized the sound. The sound of a bulldozer demolishing a building slowly built in volume near the close of the section and continued during the interval after it ended. Beneath these layers of voice and sound, the subordinate track played the sound of ice floes being crushed. The third section was a text in three parts: "Cold Oracle," written by Morris, began with the sound of one male voice moving line by line counterclockwise from speaker to speaker, concluding with the sound of wind; "He/She," also written by Morris, played in counterpoint to a subordinate track of water sounds, from pouring and bubbling to violent surf or storm; "Scar/Records" featured two male voices on opposite speakers simultaneously reading texts, the voices moving clockwise around the room, while a list of entries from the *Guinness Book of World Records* played on the under track. The fourth section, "Monologue," was written by Morris and narrated by Strand.

The sole visual aspect of *Voice* was the poster announcing the show (no. 125), a half-length portrait photograph of the bearded Morris attired in a strange hybrid of S&M and battle gear: dark sunglasses, a smooth curving helmet, a silver spiked collar, and manacles. Muscular, seductive, and threatening, this representation—this persona—is imbued with a violent eroticism (the phallic dome of the helmet furthers the point). Nevertheless, it is clear from the sound narrative presented in the installation—which is largely unknown to subsequent viewers of the poster—that the poster image was intended to refer to one of several levels of masculinity and authority subverted, dissected, or parodied, rather than elevated, in the complex layers of *Voice*.

1. Simultaneous with the exhibition at Castelli, Morris showed a group of *Blind Time* and *Labyrinth* drawings (see pp. 241–49 and pp. 250–55, respectively) at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York.

following three pages:

**125. Untitled.** 1974 (poster for *Voice*) Offset lithograph on paper, 36<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 23<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (93.3 x 60.6 cm). Collection of the artist

**126. Voice.** 1974 Eight fabric-covered loudspeakers connected to eight channels and mounted on wall panels, fourteen wooden boxes covered in felt and arranged in a space approximately 50 square feet (15.24 m<sup>2</sup>), two four channel tape recorders and amplification systems outside this area. Installation at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, April 1974. Collection of the artist

LABYRINTHS-VOICE-BLIND TIME  
OPENING APRIL 6TH-27TH, 1974

CASTELLI-SONNABEND



420 WEST BROADWAY

ROBERT MORRIS





LOCATION OF MAIN VOICES

OCCURRENCE OF VOICES IN TIME

	A	B									
	C	D									
	SEMI-VOICE OR COMBINATIONS										
A	ABC	ACB	B	BAC	BACB	C	CAB	CABO	D	DAC	DABC
AB	ABD	ABOC	BA	BAC	BACB	CA	CAC	CACB	DA	DAC	DABC
AC	ACB	ACBO	BC	BAC	BACB	CB	CBA	CBAO	DB	DBC	DBCA
AD	ADC	ADCO	BD	BAD	BADC	CD	CDB	CDBA	DC	DCA	DCBA
	ADB	ADBC	BOA	BOAC		COA	COAB		DOA	DOAB	
	ADC	ADCB	BOC	BOCA		COB	COBA		DOC	DOCA	

DISCRETE → OVERLAP → SIMULTANEOUS  
 1                    2                    3

TEXTS OF VOICES  
 DIFFERENT → SIMILAR → REPETITION  
 I                    II                    III  
 I.I                  2.II                  3.II  
 I.II                  2.III                  3.II

LOCATION, OCCURRENCE, TEXT SETS (64)

Handwritten manuscript showing sets of letters and their occurrences. The page is filled with dense, repetitive text organized into numbered sections (e.g., A.1.I, A.2.II, B.1.I, etc.). The text appears to be a detailed analysis of voice combinations and their temporal occurrences, corresponding to the tables above. The handwriting is in pencil and ink on graph paper.

127. Location, Occurrence, Text: Sets (64). 1973  
 (chart for Voice) Pencil and ink on graph paper, 29 1/2 x 31 inches (74.9 x 79.7 cm) Collection of the artist

facing page: 128. They, 1973 (manuscript drawing for Voice, Section II) Colored pencil and typewriter ink on paper, 11 x 8 inches (27.9 x 21.6 cm) Collection of the artist

Then

B/A

\* / C

A ligraphy, the words crossing one another in all directions.

C They hold fast what is pressed into their hand, turn it slowly

D about without knowing how to get rid of it. Memory is sometimes

B extinguished. People look at him/her, put their heads together,

A clear their throats, spit in front of him. He/she concluded

C from the remark, "Still waters run deep," that he/she should

~~down~~ worn himself/herself. People whth green hats and black spec-

tacles follow him/her in the street, someone has written him/her

B an obscene postcard. It is not the right town, quite another

A century. The clocks are wrong, the letters are as if from

C strangers, the mortgages are exchanged, the savings bank book

D is not valid, the trees are artificial and as if they had been

B built up specially for him/her. He/she thought that the sun was

A artificial electrical illumination and complained about the weak-

ness of his/her eyes because he/she could not see the real sun

D at night. He/she has a dreaded disease in the fourth stage, his/

B her breath is poisonous. His/her head is changing shape, is as

F large as Palestine, his/her hands and feet are no longer as they

A were, the bones have become thicker, have slipped down, all his/her

\* 32-19" to End of Part I (Mix 2)

## IN THE REALM OF THE CARCERAL, 1978

The twelve drawings to which Morris gave the series title *In the Realm of the Carceral* (1978, nos. 129–33) have both an internal and an external source. Internally, they descend directly from Morris's drawn and built *Labyrinths* (nos. 119–24), produced earlier in the 1970s. They also overlap with several mirror and maze projects—notably the mirror-and-timber installation for the 1978 *Structures for Behaviour* exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario, and the curved mirror environments of the same year, with which the *Carceral* drawings were exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, in March 1979. But externally, they must be seen against the backdrop of Morris's theoretical engagement with the writings of the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

It was Foucault's demonstration of the way systems of power penetrate the body of the human subject, to control and construct it, that gave a radically different cast to Morris's own earlier projects, particularly the *Labyrinths*. In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault charts the relationship between a subject and the (built) space external to him or her, not in terms of the reciprocity described by the phenomenology of perception<sup>1</sup> but in terms of the effects of a one-way subjugation that he called "bio-power."<sup>2</sup> It is through this subjugation, he argues, that the various apparatuses of state power both create members of society as "individuals" and deprive them of their uniqueness by socializing or disciplining them to fit a "norm."

Foucault's major example of the disciplinary space peculiar to modern societies is of the prison, with its founding example laid out in the eighteenth century by Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon"—a central watchtower commanding the ring of cells surrounding it—but Foucault was at pains to map other "disciplinary" spaces onto the extreme one of physical incarceration: hospital wards, classrooms, dormitories, assembly lines, in short, any spatial arrangement in which many bodies are subjected to the oversight of a central supervisory and disciplinary power. It was Foucault's point that this surveillance, while instantiating a vision external to the subject, is nonetheless a vision capable of penetrating deeply into the subject to produce, ultimately, the phenomenon of self-surveillance. For if a subject believes him- or herself to be under constant watch, even though—as in the case of the prison, and even more so in relation to closed-circuit television surveillance systems—it may not be possible to see one's own monitor, one's only choice is a constant response of self-discipline. In this sense, the panoptical system is the exercise of "clean"

power, rather than the pre-Enlightenment systems of public spectacles of punishment and torture.

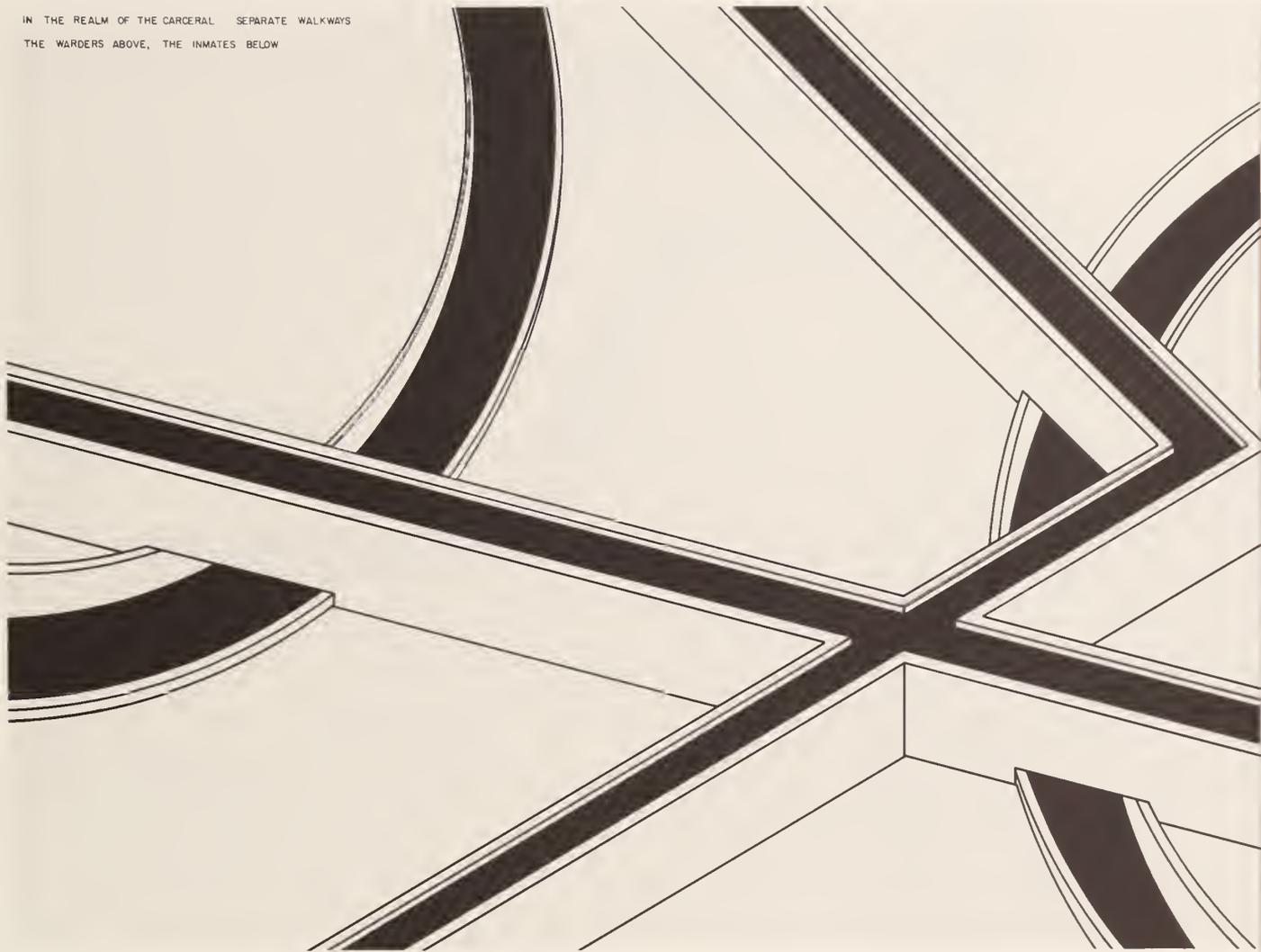
Spurred by an exhibition of the eighteenth-century Italian artist Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Carceri* etchings, which he saw in 1971 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Morris contrasted Piranesi's Baroque perspectives, with their low vantage points and towering vistas, with the panopticon's vantage of surveillance from above. His own black ink drawings, articulated through an extreme economy of means, adopt both the panoptical viewpoint and a style of execution that reproduces the look of "clean" control. In drawings such as *Gardens of Compulsory Exercise, Observation Yards, Security Walls* (no. 130); *Separate Walkways: The Warders Above, the Inmates Below* (no. 129); *Stockade* (no. 132); *Towers of Silence* (no. 133); and *The Walled Grounds of Pavades and Punishment*, the artist maps myriad architectural sites and fragments, which combine in an overall structure of imprisonment. With its suggestion of futility, repetition, and endlessness, *Inmate Work Project: Perpetual Construction and Dismantling of the Labyrinth* uses partially built and unbuilt walls to metaphorize the condition of the labyrinth itself, as Morris would later endeavor to do in a number of encaustic works of 1989 and in drawings from his 1990 *Investigations* series (nos. 149–51). *The Hot and Cold Pools of Persuasion* (no. 131), on the other hand, is edged with an erotic undertone and still tied to the displeasurable tensions of coercion.

In trading the romantic, somber eminence, the consummate detail, the chiaroscuro, and the looming ruins that Piranesi adopted from Roman architectural sources for the spare, baldly lit, axonometric plans of the *Carceral* drawings, Morris evokes technology in order to intensify the sense of depersonalization wrought by modern spaces, which purposely make available all actions of those enclosed in them. This transformation, in which the theatrical disposition of Piranesi's *Carceri*, caught between the beautiful and the terrible, gives way to a cool and luminous oppression, is strengthened by the simply inflected, though articulate, line that dominates Morris's compositions.

1. *Structures for Behaviour*, curated by Ronald Nasgaard, also included sculpture by David Rabinowitch, Richard Serra, and George Trakas.  
2. For a discussion of the intersection of Morris's work with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, see "Blind Time Drawings, 1973," pp. 241–49.

3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977); see also, Foucault, "Body Power," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

IN THE REALM OF THE CARCERAL SEPARATE WALKWAYS  
THE WARDERS ABOVE, THE INMATES BELOW

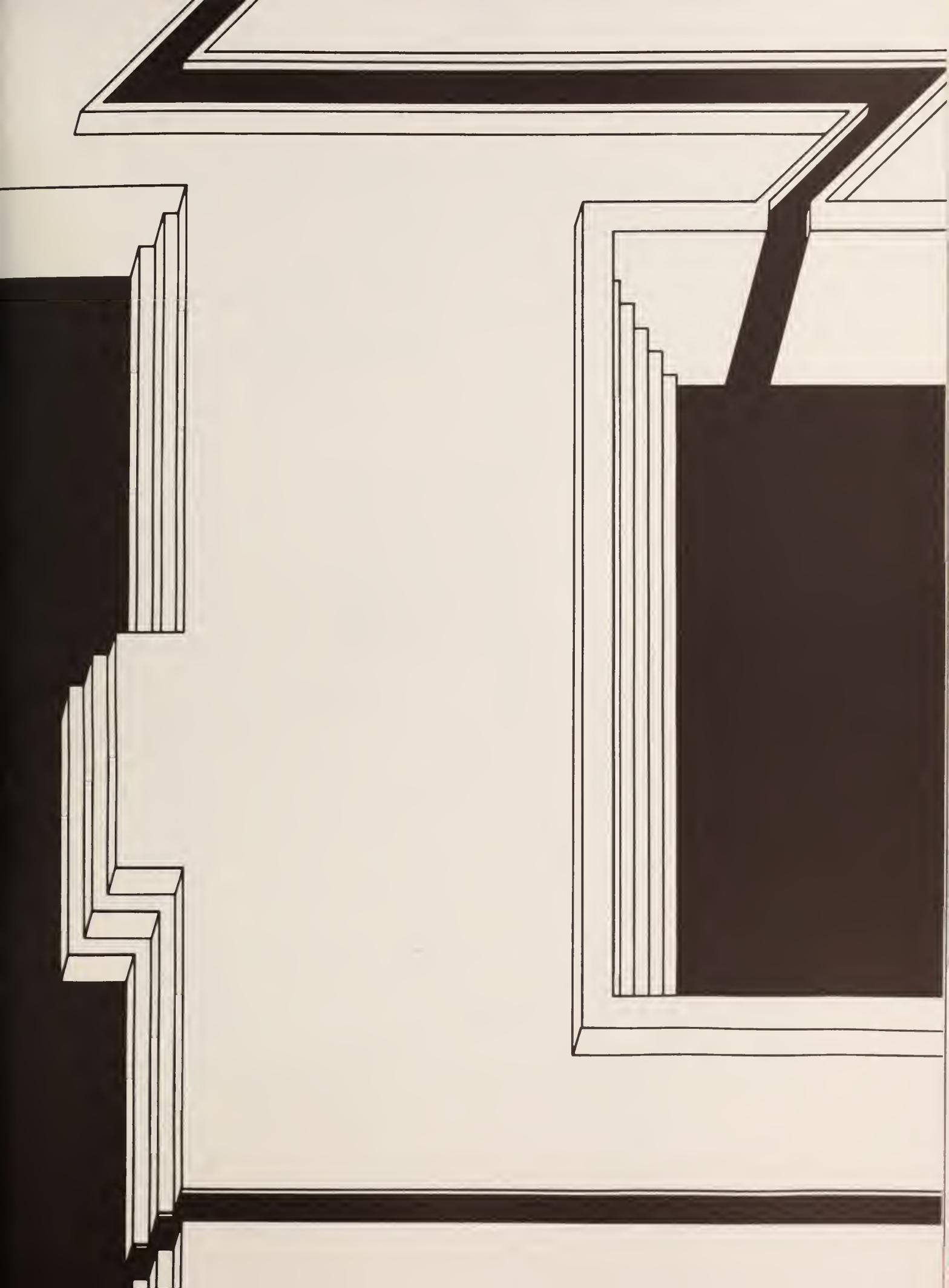


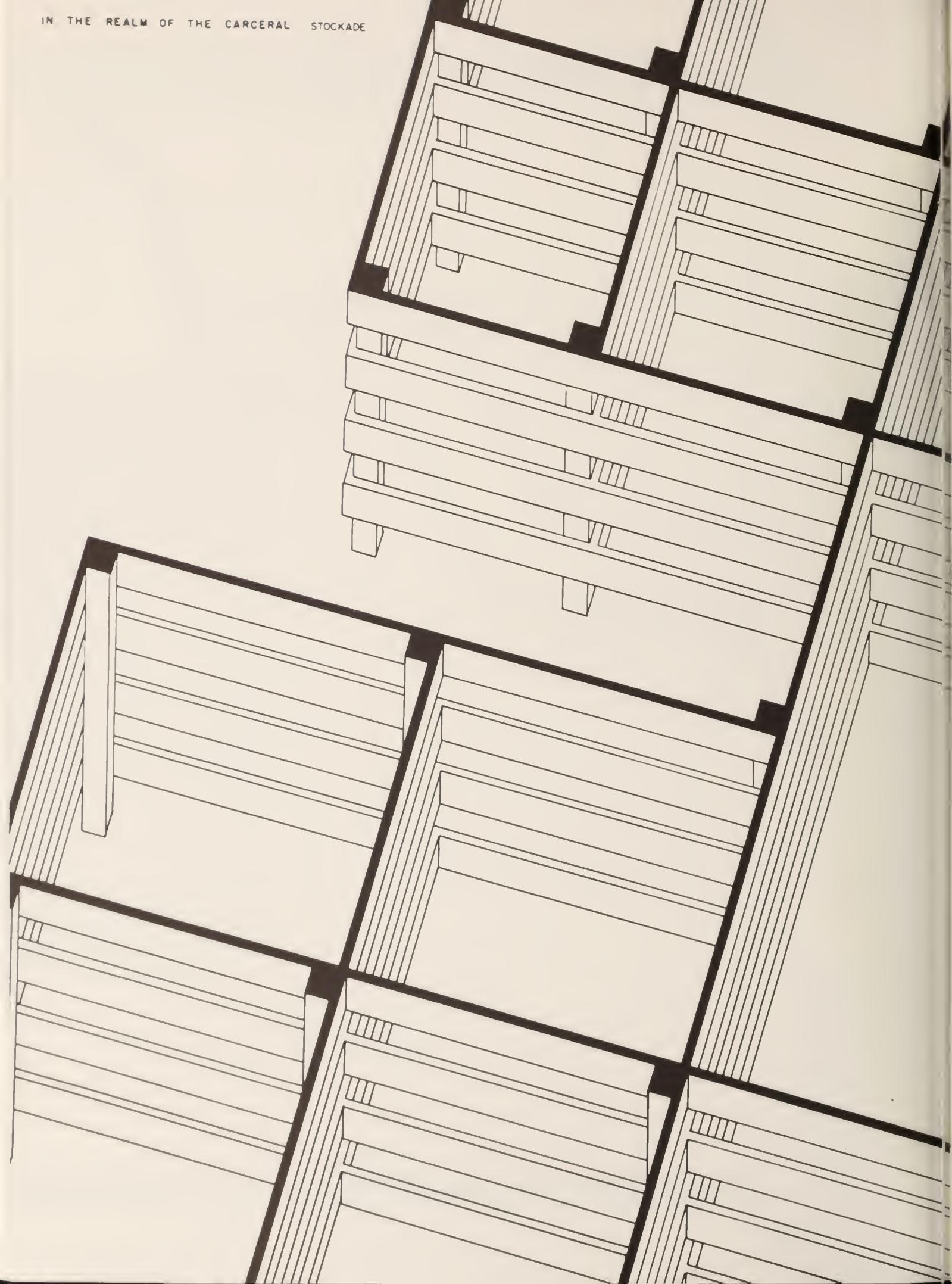
129. *Separate Walkways: The Warders Above, the Inmates Below*, 1978. Ink on paper, 33<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 44<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (84.5 x 112.1 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.



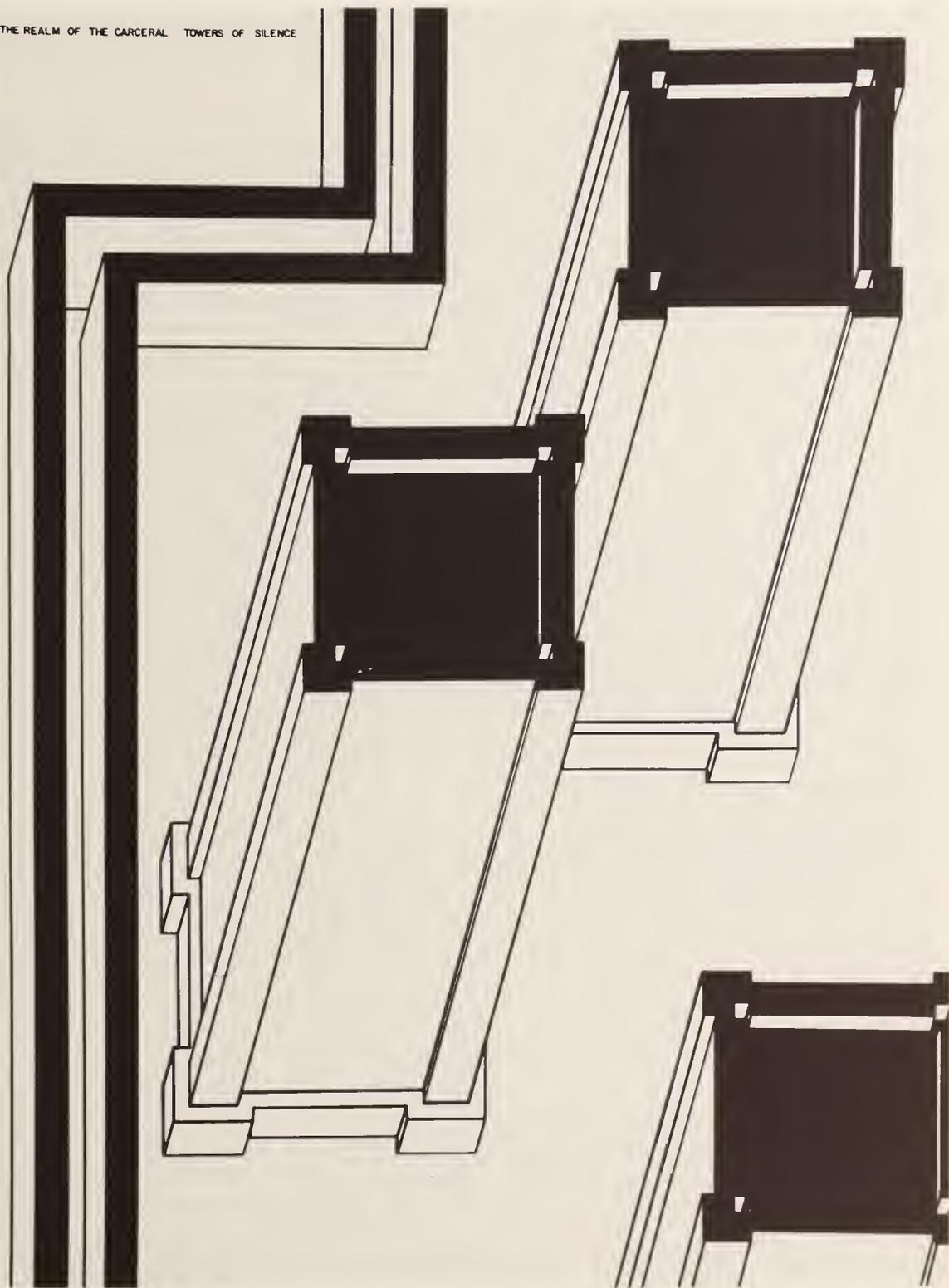
**130 Security Walls** 1978. Ink on paper, 33 1/2 x 45 inches (85.7 x 114.3 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

**facing page- 131 The Hot and Cold Pools of Persuasion**  
1978. Ink on paper, 45 x 33 1/2 inches (114.3 x 85.7 cm)  
Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York





THE REALM OF THE CARCERAL TOWERS OF SILENCE



**facing page: 132. Stockade**, 1978. Ink on paper, 45 x 33<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches (114.3 x 85.7 cm). Australian National Gallery, Canberra.

**133. Towers of Silence**, 1978. Ink on paper, 45 x 33 inches (114.3 x 85.7 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York

## MIRRORS INSTALLATIONS, 1977

In January 1977, as part of the Williams College Artist-in-Residence Program, Morris, assisted by ten students, constructed a large installation of mirrors (no. 134). At its completion, the work was set in the indoor courtyard of the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, opposite the entrance to the college library. The mazelike system of reflections underscored the mirrors' function not as "pictures" but as reflexive spatial and temporal grounds.

Four pairs of one-sided mirrors formed the corners of a vast open square, at the center of which stood a double-sided pair. As the space reflected at the work's edges seemed to multiply, so did the viewer's reflection, receding on the surrounding surfaces in a rhythmically diminishing pattern of ever-changing gestures. This landscape of mirrors mirroring mirrors generated an enveloping space that disrupted the viewer's perception by confusing or denying location. Organized around duplication and reflection, on the one hand, and mirroring as a temporal event, on the other, the installation was experienced as a complex interplay of shifting identifications, recognitions, and misrecognitions.

The mirrored surfaces had a paradoxical effect, at once opening up an endlessly replicating space and acting as a boundary to turn the eye back on itself. This second reading, which emerged with the viewer's gradual realization of the mirrors' planarity and the artificiality of this recursive image world, relates *Untitled (Williams Mirrors)* to the more enclosed mirror pieces, such as *Mirrored Cubes* (1965, no. 66) and *Pine Portal with Mirrors* (1961, no. 10).

It may also be related to the complex *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)* (1977, no. 135). In that work, an installation at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, four large rectangular mirrors in modest wooden frames were placed at the center of each of the four gallery walls. Connecting the mirrors was a diamond-shaped runner of wooden beams stretching the length and breadth of the room. Each point of the diamond, composed of two abutting timbers, met at the center of one of the mirrors, creating the illusion that the beams continued into the reflected space in a pattern of ever-replicating diamond lattices. This use of reflection to create a linear projection into virtual space was first used by Morris in an installation (no. 136) conceived in 1973 and executed in 1975 at the D'Allessandro Ferrante Gallery, Rome; in it, black steel frames were placed at angles in front of four mirrors to create the illusion that the space of the room was funneling into a single linear axis.

### following three pages:

**134. *Untitled (Williams Mirrors)***, 1977 (two views). Twelve mirrors, each 84 x 96 inches (213.4 x 243.8 cm). Installation at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass., January 1977. Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown.

**135. *Untitled (Portland Mirrors)***, 1977. Four mirrors, each 72 x 96 inches (182.9 x 243.8 cm), with 12 inch square (30.5 cm<sup>2</sup>) fir timbers of varying lengths. Installation at the Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Oregon, March 1977.











**facing page and above: 136. Untitled, 1975 (two views).**  
Mirrors and painted steel. Installation at D'Allessandro Ferrante  
Gallery, Rome, November 1975. Collection of the artist

## CURVED MIRRORS, 1978



**137. Mirror** 1969 Two stills from 16 mm black-and-white film. Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films

**facing page: 138. Untitled** 1978 Carved oak, approximately 72 inches (182.9 cm) long, and curved mirror, 71 inches (180.3 cm) high Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen, Germany

Morris's curved or parabolic mirror works are to his standard mirror pieces as his anti-form works are to the industrialized surfaces of Minimalism. The distorting and unpredictable reflections generated by the curved mirrors produce an obvious attack on the coherence of form—particularly the form of the human body, since it is the viewer's own wholeness, symmetry, and stability that is eroded by his or her capture within the parabolic visual web. The late-1960s version of anti-form was carried out in the field of real materials and repudiated the technological surfaces and processes of the Minimalist polyhedrons; its late-1970s counterpart, however, occupies the "image-world" of reflective illusion, mimicking the shine and glitter of the products of industry: the sleek flanks of car fenders, in which the curved phantom of the fashion model is captured, the phallic gleam of the rocket reflecting the military hardware surrounding it. In this sense, the more formal problems of the mirror installations, with their generation of a set of fictive geometries to be experienced in contrast to the real dimensions of the environment, begin to yield to the direct consideration of technology and its attendant social nightmares, concerns that would increasingly become the focus of Morris's work in the early 1980s.

This reorientation was conducted, however, in stages. One of the earliest of the curved mirror works (no. 138) places a benchlike form, fashioned from heavy timbers, in front of a single, large freestanding parabolic mirror that seems to fall before the rudimentary wooden form like a huge, reflective curtain. Multiplying the image of the Brancusi-like rough-hewn object by means of the mirror's internal catoptric laws, the sculpture replays Morris's earlier considerations of Brancusi's permutations of single forms and exploitation of reflective surfaces. In other examples, the reflection of architectural elements or grids becomes a kind of machine to produce—and thus hold at a critical distance—the serial progressions of form characteristic of early Minimalism.

In *Untitled (For R. K.)* (1978, no. 140), Morris's use of curved mirrors to comment on his own earlier practice takes a slightly different form. Constructed in dialogue with Rosalind Krauss's essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," the work acknowledges the text's argument that with Minimalism there had been instituted a sweeping and, indeed, a structural change in the nature of art practice, resulting in an "expanded field" of operations. This expansion beyond the isolated, autonomous sculptural object of Modernist practice involved the inclusion of the environment, either architectural or natural, within the work, as it





also opened "sculpture" to other mediums, such as photography and sound. Using a structuralist diagram (a "Klein group") in order to indicate the parameters of this "logically expanded field," the essay also describes the way a single artist circulates through this new field to employ these various practices in turn. By setting its own version of a Klein group, in the form of four geometric blocks that both state and vary the oppositions between black and white and round and square, the four connected by a large, floor-bound "X," in the middle of an environment established by three parabolic mirrors, *For R. K.* assumes this description of a newly "nomadic" artistic practice as Morriss' own.

It is with *First Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Day)* (1980, no. 111) that the curved mirrors most directly join Morriss' discourse, undertaken in his *Interform* series (pp. 288–91), of the military telos of modern technology. If the 1960s connection to anti-form had been focused on gravity's disruption of the well-built and the gestalt, here it is the weightlessness of space-age technology that the mirror is seen to capture and to recode as its own version of formlessness.

1. Morriss, *1969–1985: Mirror (no. 111)* in the Interform series, an instance of a formless and uncentered anti-form object.

2. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Originality of Art: Views from the Other Museum of Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 75–90.

**139. Untitled** 1978. Curved mirror, plastic, and copper. 99 inches (251.5 cm) high. Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.

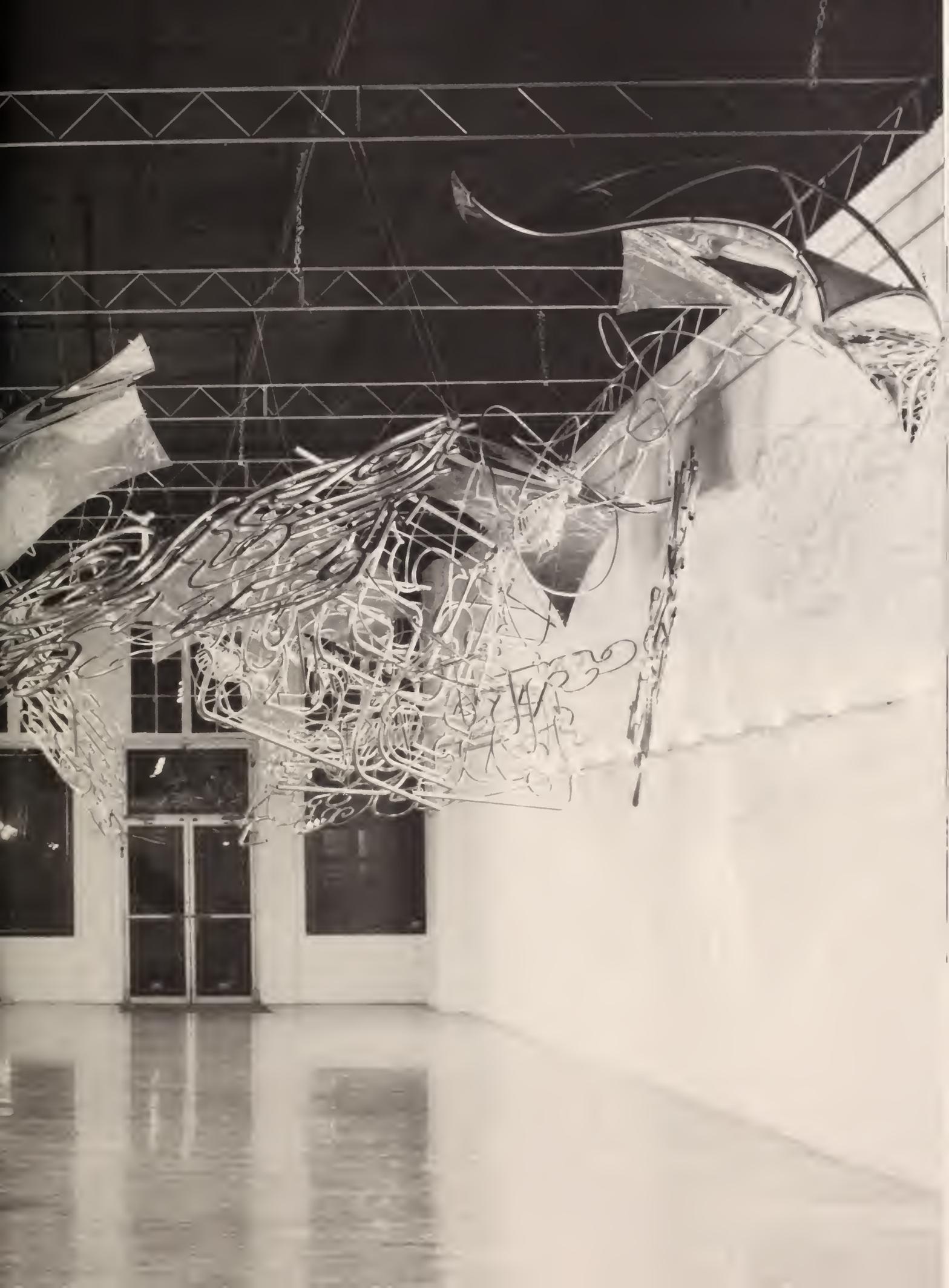
following three pages:

**140. Untitled (For R. K.)** 1978. Concrete blocks, lead strips, wood frames, and Plexiglas mirrors, 69 inches (175.3 cm) high. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Rosalind Krauss.

**141. First Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Day)**. 1980. Steel, acrylic mirrors, aluminum tubing, and silver-leafed human skeletons, 15 x 30 x 13 feet (4.57 x 9.14 x 3.96 m). Collection of the artist.









above and facing page: *First Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Day)* 1980 (two details)



## HYDROCALS, 1982-84

In January 1985, Morris displayed a group of Hydrocal bas-reliefs of body fragments at the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. *Hyperotomachia*, the title of the series, refers to the *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*, a celebrated fifteenth-century illustrated text by the Florentine architect Francesco Colonna.

Made by pressing select forms into clay, pouring white liquid plaster into the clay ground, and casting the overlaid plaster, the resulting white Hydrocals—a shallow mélange of fingers, bones, teeth, internal organs, torsos, brains, skulls, genitalia, hands, and feet—seem to emerge from some deep past redolent of Pompeian ruins and death. Indeed, it is an overriding sense of loss that unifies the Hydrocal reliefs, a trait, also distinguishing Morris's *Firestorm* drawings (pp. 288-91), that here depends on the peculiar relationship to the imprint. Instead of the emphasis on process that characterized the early *Leads* (for instance, *Hand and Toe Holds* [1961, no. 61]), the Hydrocal works of 1982 seem to incarnate the archaeological techniques of retrieval.

The following year Morris began to conceive the Hydrocals more in terms of a general "climate" of destruction than as discrete images. Accordingly, he fashioned the reliefs as ornate, richly painted, massive frames, still bearing their dismembered, corpse-like freight. The initial group of frames hold drawings Morris either made as a child or as an art student. *Fathers and Sons* (1955-1983, no. 113), for instance, contains within small rectangular openings on its front two loosely sketched figure studies from 1955, drawn after Michelangelo's *Bound Slave* (1513-16). But as the frames grew in size and complexity, such self-referential images were replaced by visions of conflagration, accompanied by legends inscribed on the frames that describe the Allied firebombings of Germany at the end of World War II.

*On the night of July 24, 1945, the R.A.F. bombed  
Hamburg with incendiaries. Temperatures reached 1000  
degrees centigrade. High winds were produced. 8 sq. miles  
were incinerated and 40,000 killed. The first deliberate  
manmade firestorm.*

*What would burn us is ignited. For a week the city glowed  
and a haze filled the sky. A place, a population, a certain  
way of life had come to an end.*

*The center was a handful of energy never understood.  
Wombuts within an emptiness stretched in to the stars where  
the heart beats for nothing.*

*Firestorm winds of hurricane force collapsed walls and  
sucked away the oxygen. Its heat melted metal roofs and  
blew showers of molten sparks which burnt holes in the  
corneas of their eyes.*

In decentering the "work" and relocating it in the condition of the frame, Morris was carrying his own critique of the Modernist notion of the autonomous art work, focused in on itself and on the means specific, or "proper," to it, into yet another field of operations. That critique, which had begun in a work like *Hearing's* (1972, no. 88) deliberate mixing of the visual and the verbal, now centered on the issue of the frame. But taking the frame as his medium brought with it two other possibilities. The first is the ornate frame's obvious relation to the Baroque and its highly developed use of the memento mori. To reinforce the stylistic conditions of Baroque imagery, Morris dragged some of the bodily elements through the plaster, producing long whirlpool-like swirls and swags. But these, in turn, exploit the second possibility, namely the frame's built-in symmetry, which seems to call for the doubling by mirror reflection of the images it carries. This doubling allowed Morris to push his treatment of the dismembered body in the direction of the uncanny. It is the uncanny's generalized climate of anxiety that thus repeats at the level of structure what the imagery proclaims at the level of content. Morris continued to explore such concerns in other large-scale works from 1985 and 1986, such as *Reign, Rain, Rem* (1985-86, no. 146) and *The Martyr* (1986, no. 145), substituting fiberglass for Hydrocal.

In addressing the nightmare that advanced, unbridled technology seems to be preparing for civilization, Morris, by substituting the frame for the image, also acknowledges the fundamentally unrepresentable nature of global catastrophe.

1. Hydrocal is the brand name of a particularly strong type of plaster of Paris.

2. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the impossibility of Modernism's claim to be able to separate the work of art "proper" from its frame or context was being recognized in many quarters. One was the contextualist position of the New Historicism. Another was the attack on Kantian aesthetics through the philosophical analysis of the *paragon* conducted by Jacques Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* (trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987], pp. 16-17).



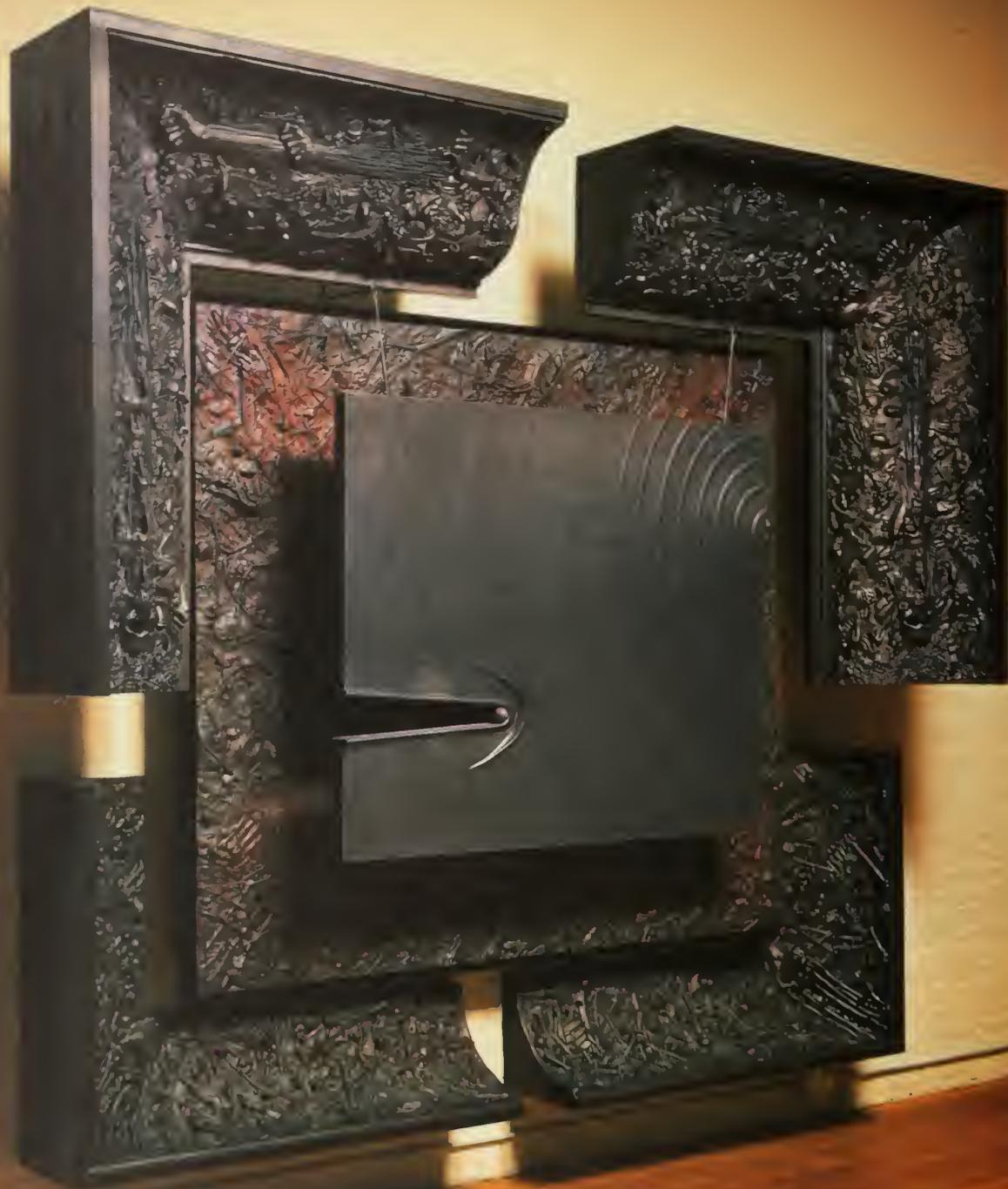
142. **Untitled**, 1982. Plaster with metal frame, 51 x 63 inches  
(129.5 x 160 cm). Courtesy Obelisk Gallery, Boston.



**143. Fathers and Sons.** 1955/1983. Painted Hydrocal and ink on paper, 33 1/4 x 51 1/4 inches (84.5 x 130.5 cm).  
Collection of the artist



**144. Untitled**, 1984. Painted Hydrocal and pastel on paper, 63 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 73 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 15 inches (161.3 x 186.7 x 38.1 cm)  
Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.



**145 The Martyr**, 1986. Acrylic, lead, and fiberglass, 106 x 128 x 27 inches (269.2 x 317.5 x 69.9 cm).  
Courtesy Taglianini Gallery, New York

**146. Reign, Rain, Rein**, 1985–86. Acrylic, lead, encaustic, and fiberglass, 91 x 116 x 29 inches (231.1 x 294.6 x 73.7 cm). The Oliver Hoffmann Collection



## FIRESTORMS, 1983

In New York during January 1983, Morris exhibited concurrently a series of Hydrocal reliefs (for example, no. 142) and a group of *Firestorm* drawings (1982, nos. 147–48) at the Sonnabend Gallery, and a series of drawings entitled *Psychomachia* at the Leo Castelli Gallery. All these works may be seen as having emerged from his earlier obsession with technology, as it had manifested itself in the *Carcerals* (1978, pp. 262–67), and with technology's link to nuclear annihilation, as in *Jornado del Muerto*, from the series *The Natural History of Los Alamos* (1981), and *Restless Sleepers Atomic Shroud* (1981), in which foreboding texts were silkscreened onto sheets and pillowcases. In the 1982 *Firestorm* and *Psychomachia* drawings, Morris grappled with the task of finding a way to represent the almost unimaginable—the devastation wrought at the end of World War II. These drawings, in particular, reflect his attempt to deal with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (*Psychomachia* is the name of a poem, written in the fifth century A.D. by Prudentius, in which the figures of good and evil debate for control of humanity.)

Made by joining sheets of paper into larger units, the *Psychomachias* and the *Firestorms* achieve mural scale, some measuring as much as eight by sixteen feet. Extending the technique used in the *Blind Time* drawings (pp. 244–49), in which the physical pressure of the hand was exerted on powdered graphite, they were made with layers of pulverized charcoal, ink washes, graphite, and various powdered black pigments that have left behind faintly visible traces of human forms in negative space. Densely built up, in some cases through rubbing as well as through the collagelike mixing of fragmentary images, they declare a relation to allegory, a form that has always been considered antithetical to Modernism. Accordingly, swirls excerpted from Leonardo's *Deluge* drawings (1515), and from other visions of natural or manmade catastrophe, such as Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818–19), were layered onto documentary images of the destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The additive structure of the drawings and the obvious repetition of certain fragmentary images suggest a level of emotional obsessiveness that the allegorical form—with its lack of closure—is better able to handle than a more organic and unified conception of the art work. Such a manner of fixation, of taking up and repeating the motion of unpleasurable tensions, may also be said to parallel Freud's formulation, in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), of a compulsion to repeat that is triggered by trauma.



147. **Untitled (Firestorm)**, 1982. Ink, charcoal, graphite, and powdered pigments on rag paper with Velcro, six panels, 114 x 100 inches (289.6 x 254 cm) overall. Private collection.



**148** *Untitled (Firestorm)*, 1982. Ink, charcoal, graphite, airbrush, and pigment on rag paper, 6 feet 6 inches x 16 feet 8 inches (1.93 x 5.08 m). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. S. I. Newhouse, Jr.



## INVESTIGATIONS, 1990

If the form of Morris's *Investigations* drawings (1990, nos. 149–51) is that of photomontage—a loosely additive assemblage of photographic images that have been culled from a wide variety of media sources—their technique is that of transfer rubbing, which Robert Rauschenberg had used in his monumental *Dante's Inferno* series of 1959–60. In this technique, the photographic source is “reproduced” by drawing, using a process in which the photographic reproduction from a newspaper or magazine is wet with lighter fluid, after which a graphic instrument is rubbed over it so that the printer's ink of the reproduction stains, or transfers itself stroke-by-stroke, to the drawing paper placed beneath it. The transfer technique absorbs the various media images into the homogeneously continuous surface of the drawing, simultaneously restoring a sense of spontaneity to the image because of the graphic quality of the individual strokes.

But in the *Investigations*, this “reproduction” (by drawing) of what had already been a reproduction (the photograph) is itself reproduced. For these works were not produced by transfer but by the meticulous copying of both their media sources and the stylistic indices of the process of transfer drawing. If the first-level imitation—that of the transfer drawing—had been to repersonalize the photographic elements, this second-order imitation—the drawn copy of a copy—has the reverse effect. It now takes on the strange coldness and dissociativeness of the simulacrum, in which so many layers of duplication come between us and the “original” that it is impossible to find our way back to that original—the simulacrum being the example of a multiple for which there is no original. In this sense, the *Investigations*, even though they are “handmade,” open up questions of a social space entirely permeated by technology, one in which the hand itself has been mechanized.

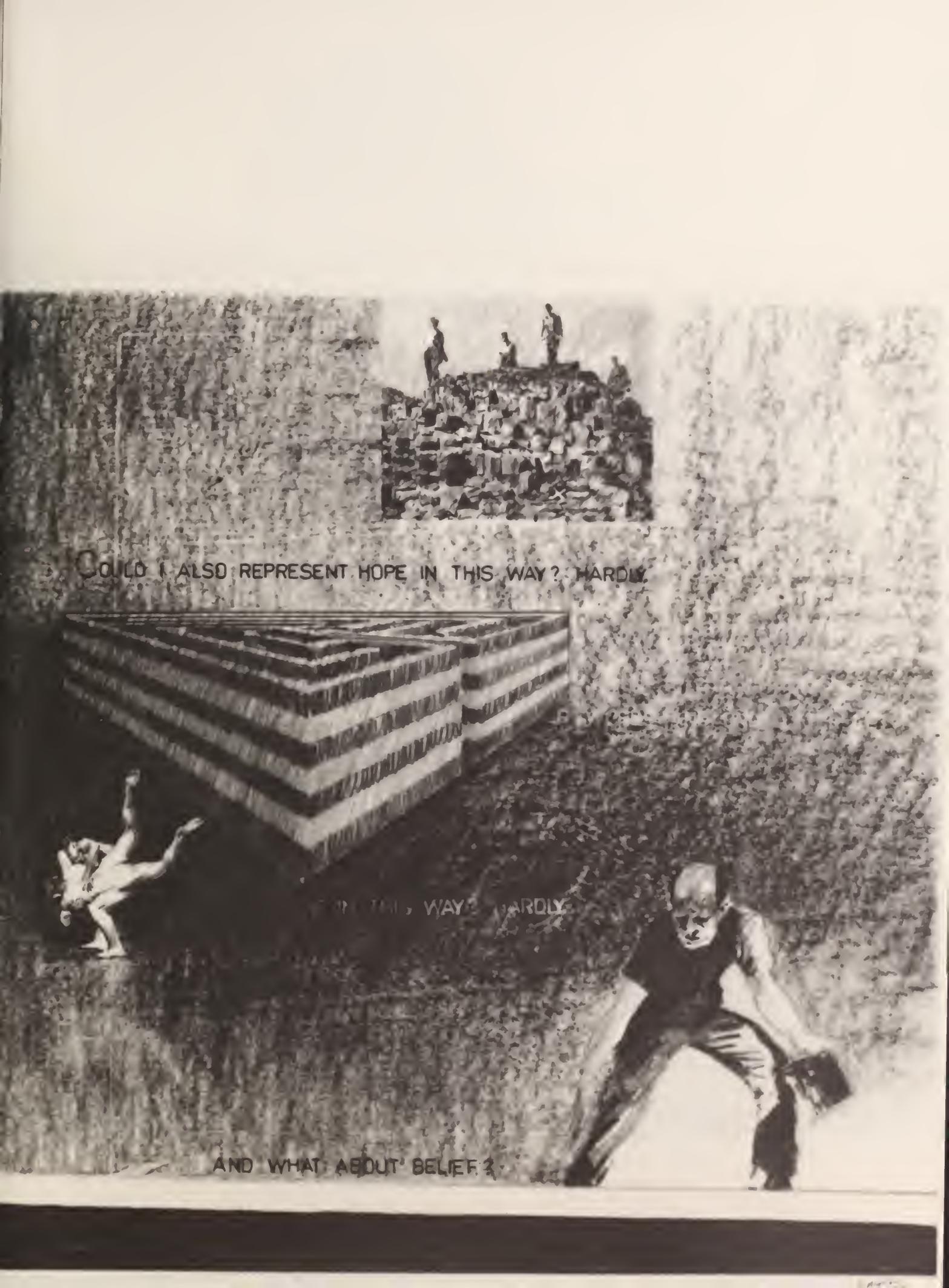
A combination of images drawn from art history (including Morris's own work) and political history, the strangely glacial techno-space of the drawings is then laced with citations from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). These textual fragments contrast a notion of meaning as the correct application of a previously given rule with Wittgenstein's idea of meaning as the exhibition of “a form of life” (for which there is no rule). And they seem to be testing the simulacral condition against something more present, something more authentic; as the Wittgenstein quotation on one *Investigation* (no. 151) puts it: “But the exclamation is so in a different sense from the report—it is forced from us—it is related to the experience as a cry is to pain.”

### following three pages:

**149. Investigations**, 1990 Graphite on vellum, 18 x 18 inches (45.7 x 45.7 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

**150. Investigations**, 1990 Graphite on vellum, 18 x 18 inches (45.7 x 45.7 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

**151. Investigations**, 1990 Graphite on vellum, 18 x 18 inches (45.7 x 45.7 cm). Courtesy Sonnabend Gallery, New York.



COULD I ALSO REPRESENT HOPE IN THIS WAY? HARDLY.

IN THIS WAY? HARDLY.

AND WHAT ABOUT BELIEF?



DOESN'T A PRESUPPOSITION IMPLY A DOUBT? AND DOUBT MAY BE ENTIRELY LACKING. DOUBTING HAS AN END.





A CHILD HAS MUCH TO LEARN BEFORE IT CAN  
PRETEND. A DEAD MAN CANNOT BE A HYPOCRISIT.  
NEITHER CAN HE BE SINCERE.

THE FACE OF SOMETHING DEAD

## BLIND TIME IV (DRAWING WITH DAVIDSON), 1991

The 1991 set of *Blind Time* drawings departs in many ways from earlier ones (for example, pp. 244–49). In the *Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)* drawings (nos. 152–56), recognizable imagery is frequently employed, such as the two black crosses with plumes of “smoke” (no. 154) that represent Joseph Beuys’s famous plane crash, or the clusters of dark fingerprints (no. 156) that form a “picture” of Cézanne’s paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire as “remembered” by Morris, working, as always in this series, with his eyes shut. Also, the texts inscribed by Morris on the drawings are expanded in two directions. First, in addition to the straightforward description of the physical task he set himself (such as bifurcating the page diagonally), an account of the intention behind the task (such as the way the configuration might project a specific memory and the emotions associated with it) is often added. Second, in each case, a quotation from a text by the philosopher Donald Davidson is juxtaposed to Morris’s own words (see pp. 297–301), each quotation throwing doubt on the possibility that Morris’s comments might serve as necessary or sufficient reasons for “why” he made a given drawing.

Insofar as Davidson’s philosophical position is characterized by “my rejection of subjectivist theories of epistemology and meaning, and my conviction that thought itself is essentially social,”<sup>1</sup> it is obvious why Morris would identify with this position. His own rejection of subjectivist theories goes back, for example, to the *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961, no. 11). Circling around the problem of what it means to give a reason for performing an act, Davidson shows the insufficiency of most accounts of intention:

*For suppose, contrary to the legend, that Oedipus, for some dark oedipal reason, was hurrying along the road intent on killing his father, and finding a surly old man blocking his way, killed him so he could (as he thought) get on with the main job. Then not only did Oedipus want to kill his father and actually kill him, but his desire caused him to kill his father. Yet we could not say that in killing the old man he intentionally killed his father, nor that his reason in killing the old man was to kill his father.*

Such skepticism tends to bracket each physical event, of which a given *Blind Time IV* drawing is the precipitate, from the background of its purported meaning—the intention behind it, the other thing for which it stands as a metaphor, and so on. The result of that drawing by drawing we enter into this position of doubt, as we ask ourselves questions about how an emotion (such as Morris’s embarrassment and shame at

wanting to touch Cézanne’s cloak at Aix) could ever be thought to enter a drawing, or how a metaphor (such as letting a smoky cross stand for Beuys’s plane) could be imagined to work in any way different from a lie, since both are deviations from the literal truth.

Beyond the doubt this encourages with regard to the purported background of psychological intentions or reasons, skepticism also spills into the nonemotive, purely “objective” accounts of the tasks. Morris’s statement, “The intention is to join the angles [of two lines] at their apexes in the center of the page,” no longer has the “objective” authority its documentary quality might imply. As doubt spreads even to the accounts of the tasks as sufficient “reasons” for why the drawings look the way they do, a retroactive skepticism begins to infect all the earlier *Blind Time* drawings in which Morris had felt authorized to be the supplier of the basic facts of what could be called the “task event.”

In his 1993 essay “Writing with Davidson,” Morris discussed the way the deeper meditation on giving “reasons,” undertaken in *Blind Time IV*, raised the global problem for him of the intention behind the *Blind Time* drawings as a whole, namely, the decision to work with his eyes shut. Giving a range of reasons, like the one he originally offered, of wanting to find a new way of making a line, or what he now saw as the interest he had in attacking the “primacy of the visual,” or a connection he has always felt to Samuel Beckett’s characters with their “sightless repetitions,” or the possibility that he was yielding to an obsessive need to enact the oedipal blinding and fear of castration as a superstitious form of defense, Morris dryly added: “Such reasons sound too much like rationalizations put forward after the fact.” In this he sides absolutely with Davidson’s account of the impossibility of reasons ever coming to an end:

*A person may have certain motives for an act, and yet perform it either by accident or for quite different reasons. So reasons explain an action only if the reasons are efficacious in the situation. And even this is not enough, a man’s motives for acting in a certain way may cause him to act in that way without it’s being the case that those were his reasons for performing the act.<sup>2</sup>*

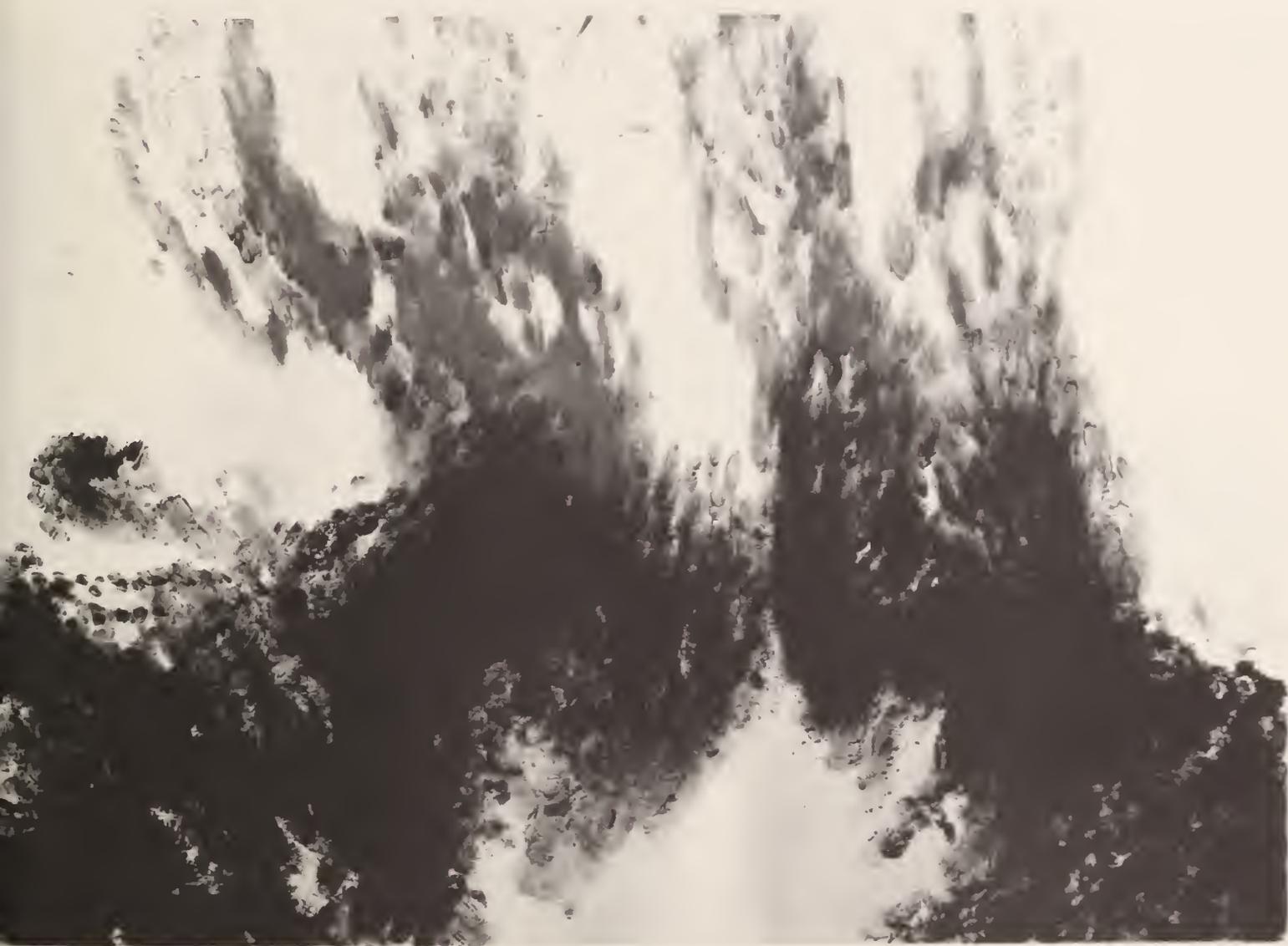
<sup>1</sup> Donald Davidson, “The Third Man,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (summer 1993), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Morris, “Writing with Davidson: Some Afterthoughts After Doing *Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)*,” *Critical Inquiry* 19 (summer 1993), pp. 61–71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 619–20.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, p. 233.



152. **Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**, 1991. Graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.5 x 127 cm). Collection of the artist

Working blindfolded while estimating the lapsed time, the hands begin in the lower right corner and hammer upward with the sides of the fists, rotating inward as the estimated horizontal center line is approached while simultaneously modulating from striking to rubbing, wet to dry, and hard to soft pressure as the upper margin is sensed. Then beginning at the lower left corner the attempt is made to repeat the process exactly, although in mirror fashion. Time estimation error: -2' 44

"'Jones bought a leopard, and Smith bought the same thing' does not normally entail that there is a leopard both Jones and Smith bought. Analogously, 'Jones bought his wife a leopard and Smith did the same thing' need not entail that there is a single action both performed. Smith and Jones did similar things. The character of the similarity is suggested, if not made explicit, by the context (did Smith buy his wife the same leopard that Jones bought his wife, or did Smith buy Jones's wife a leopard, etc.?). Recurrence may be no more than similar, but distinct events following one another."—Donald Davidson



153. **Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**. 1991. Graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.5 x 127 cm). Collection of the artist

Working blindfolded and estimating the lapsed time I attempt to rub out a right angle bounding the upper left quadrant. Then I attempt this for the lower right. The intention is to join the angles at their apexes in the center of the page. Time estimation error = 1.57

"A person may have certain motives for an act, and yet perform it either by accident or for quite different reasons. So reasons explain an action only if the reasons are efficacious in the situation. And even this is not enough, a man's motives for acting in a certain way may cause him to act in that way without it's being the case that those were his reasons for performing the act."—Donald Davidson



154. **Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**, 1991. Graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.5 x 127 cm). Collection of the artist

First two crosses are laid out on the page in the upper section. Then working blindfolded and estimating the lapsed time, the hands attempt to enlarge the cross on the left. The same thing is tried again on the right. Time estimation error: +20"

Let the large cross on the left stand for the Stuka that crashed in a snowstorm somewhere in the wastes of the Russian steppe in 1943, and from which the pilot, Joseph Beuys, was pulled by Tartar tribesmen who wrapped the unconscious airman in felt and butter, preserving his warmth for the 12 coma-like days he lay near death in a frozen yurt. Let the large cross on the right stand for the Stuka listed in the Luftwaffe archives which notes a crash in 1944 a few miles from an airfield at the Russian front,

and records that a corporal Joseph Beuys, tail gunner and radio operator was brought to hospital by Russian workers a half hour after the accident.

"What makes the difference between a lie and a metaphor is not a difference in the words used or what they mean (in any strict sense of meaning) but in how the words are used. Using a sentence to tell a lie and using it to make a metaphor are, of course totally different uses, so different that they do not interfere with one another, as say, acting and lying do. In lying, one must make an assertion so as to represent oneself as believing what one does not, in acting assertion is excluded. Metaphor is careless of the difference"—Donald Davidson



155 **Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**, 1991 (graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.5 x 127 cm) Collection of the artist

*Working blindfolded and estimating the lapsed time, I work from the lower right first hammering with the side of the fists and then gradually rotating the hand. I move upward along the intended diagonal with this rotation (and other phase changes from wet to dry medium, striking to rubbing, etc.) intending to work within a constant width and along an accurate diagonal (time estimation error = 1.)*

*If the drawing stand as a metaphor, whatever other images can be read about the how, why, failed intentions and descriptions of dropped hammer, of mind, can all stand for one another.*

"Perhaps you have come to realize that the drawing can be seen as a duck or as a rabbit. But one could come to know this without ever seeing the drawing as a duck or as a rabbit. Seeing as is not seeing that. Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight. Since in most cases what the metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, recognition of some truth or fact, the attempt to give literal expression to the content of the metaphor is simply misguided. The theorist who tries to explain a metaphor by appealing to a hidden message, like the critic who attempts to state the message, is then fundamentally confused."  
—Donald Davidson



156. **Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)**, 1991. Graphite on paper, 38 x 50 inches (96.2 x 127 cm). Collection of the artist

Working blindfolded, estimating the lapsed time, and summoning up the memory of the first Cézanne I ever knew—Mont Sainte-Victoire seen from Les Lauves, 1902–06, in The Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Missouri—I touch the page as though I were touching the Cézanne. In 1988 I went to Cézanne’s Lauves studio at Aix in order to touch his cloak. I stood there with my fingers against the cloth for as long as I could bear the desire, the embarrassment and the dread of being discovered. I could hear the traffic outside and was filled with a nostalgia for the silences Cézanne sought out. Time estimation error: -52’

“Why would anyone ever perform an action when he thought that everything considered, another action would be better? If this is a request for a psychological explanation, then the answers will no doubt refer to the interesting phenomena familiar from most discussions of incontinence: self deception, overpowering desires, lack of imagination, and the rest. But if the question is read, what is the agent’s reason for doing a when he believes it would be better, all things considered, to do another thing, then the answer must be: for this, the agent has no reason.”  
—David (sic) Davidson



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AND  
EXHIBITION  
HISTORY**

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- . "Minimalism and Critical Response." *Artforum* (New York) 15, no. 9 (May 1977), pp. 26–31.
- . "Sculptors Mass in Toronto." *Art in America* (New York) 66, no. 5 (September–October 1978), pp. 15–16.
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- Wright, Martha McWilliams. "Washington." *Art International* (Lugano) 22, no. 1 (January 1978), pp. 61–63.

## SELECT EXHIBITION HISTORY

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1957

San Francisco, Difexi Gallery, August 31–October 1.

1958

San Francisco, Difexi Gallery, October 5–October 31.

1963

New York, Green Gallery, October 15–November 5.

1964

Düsseldorf, Galerie Schmela, October 26–November 21.

New York, Green Gallery, December 16–January 9, 1965.

1965

New York, Green Gallery, March 10–April 3.

1966

Los Angeles, Dwan Gallery, March 15–April 1.

1967

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, March 4–28.

1968

Eindhoven, The Netherlands, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, *Robert Morris*, February 16–March 31. Exhibition catalogue.

Paris, Galerie Heana Sonnabend, *Robert Morris*, February 20–March 16. Brochure.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, April 20–May 11.

Paris, Galerie Heana Sonnabend, *Feutres*, fall.

1969

Turin, Galleria Gran Enzo Sperone, March.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, March 1–22.

New York, Leo Castelli Warehouse, *A Continuous Project Altered Daily*, March 1–22. Brochure.

Los Angeles, Irving Blum Gallery, May.

Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Robert Morris*, November 24–December 28. Traveled to Detroit, The Detroit Institute of Arts, January 8–February 8, 1970. Exhibition catalogue.

1970

Los Angeles, Irving Blum Gallery, *Robert Morris: Drawings and Lithographs*, opened January 27.

New York, Castelli Graphics, *Robert Morris: Earthwork Projects*, February 7–28.

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Robert Morris*, April 9–May 31. Exhibition catalogue.

1971

London, Tate Gallery, April 28–June 6. Exhibition catalogue.

Paris, Galerie Heana Sonnabend.

1972

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris: Hearing*, April 18–May 6.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris: Projects*, April 22–May 13.

Bellingham, Wash., Western Gallery, Western Washington State College, *Robert Morris: Projects on Paper*, October 24–November 16.

Washington, D.C., Max Protetch Gallery, *Ten Years of Robert Morris*, November.

1973

Paris, Galerie Heana Sonnabend, *Robert Morris: Felt Pieces*, opened January 23.

Düsseldorf, Galerie Konrad Fischer, *Robert Morris*, February 17–March 16.

Genoa, Galleria Forma, March.

Vancouver, Ace Gallery Canada, May 8–26.

Venice, Calif., Ace Gallery, June 9–July 14.

Naples, Lucio Amelio Modern Art Agency, *Robert Morris: 1 Felt Piece, 10 Drawings, 2 Films*, opened November 14.

Washington, D.C., Max Protetch Gallery.

1974

Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *Robert Morris/Projects*, March 23–April 27. Exhibition catalogue.

Saint-Etienne, France, Musée d'Art et d'Industrie, *Robert Morris*, April–May. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery and Sonnabend Gallery, *Labyrinths—Voice—Blind Time*, April 6–27.

Munich, Galerie Art in Progress, September 5–October 9.

Grand Rapids, Mich., Belknap Park, *Grand Rapids Project*, permanent earthwork, from October.

Milan, Alessandra Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris*, October–November.

- 1975  
Rome, Galleria D'Alessandro-Ferranti, November.
- 1976  
New York, Leo Castelli Gallery and Sonnabend Gallery, April 17–May 6.  
New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris: Black and White Felts*, October 9–30.  
Columbus, Ohio, Sullivant Hall Gallery, Ohio State University, *Robert Morris*, November.
- 1977  
Humblebaek, Denmark, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, January 15–February 13.  
Williamstown, Mass., Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, *Morris Mirrors*, January 22–February 26.  
Los Angeles, James Corcoran Gallery, March 6–April 9.  
Portland, Oreg., Portland Center for the Visual Arts, *Robert Morris*, March 11–April 19.  
Oostelijk, Flevoland, The Netherlands, *Reconstruction and Permanent Installation of "Observatory,"* from April.  
Düsseldorf, Galerie Art in Progress, *Robert Morris: Blind Time II*, April 22–June 2.  
Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Het Observatorium van Robert Morris in Oostelijk Flevoland*, April 23–May 30. Exhibition catalogue.  
Paris, Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, *Robert Morris: Felt Pieces*, May.
- 1978  
Swarthmore, Pa., Florence Wilcox Art Gallery, Swarthmore College, *Robert Morris: Blind Time II Drawings*, February 2–March 5.  
Glenside, Pa., Beaver College, *Robert Morris*, March 8–18.  
Ferrara, Comune di Ferrara, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Parco Massari, *Robert Morris*, May 28–August 26. Exhibition catalogue.
- 1979  
New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Six Mirror Works*, March 3–24. Exhibition catalogue, *Robert Morris: Mirror Works 1961–78*.  
New York, Sonnabend Gallery, *Robert Morris: In the Realm of the Carceral*, March 3–24.  
Dayton, Ohio, Wright State University, *Robert Morris: Mirror Works and Drawings*, September 13–October 4.  
1980  
Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Robert Morris*, April 30–June 15. Exhibition catalogue.  
Seattle, Richard Hines Gallery, *Robert Morris*, September 16–October 31.  
London, Waddington Galleries II, *Robert Morris*, October–November.  
New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris: First Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Night) and Second Study for a View from a Corner of Orion (Day)*, October 25–November 15.
- 1981  
Houston, Contemporary Arts Museum, *Robert Morris: Selected Works 1970–1980*, December 12–February 14, 1982. Exhibition catalogue.
- 1982  
New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Psychomachia: Drawings*, January 8–29.  
New York, Sonnabend Gallery, *Hypnerotomachia: Reliefs and Firestorms: Drawings*, January 8–29.  
Champaign, Ill., Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana, *Psychomachia Drawings*, February 27–March 27.
- Williamstown, Mass., Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williams College Museum of Art, *The Drawings of Robert Morris*, May 1–June 27. Exhibition catalogue. Traveled to Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art, July 6–August 29; Seattle, Seattle Art Museum, November 27–January 15, 1983; Austin, Tex., Laguna Gloria Art Museum, April 1–May 8, 1983; Grand Rapids, Mich., Grand Rapids Art Museum, May 29–July 10, 1983; Otterlo, The Netherlands, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, *Robert Morris: Tekeningen 1956–1983*, September 10–October 23, 1983; Milan, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, *I disegni di Robert Morris/The Drawings of Robert Morris*, 1984; Malmö, Sweden, Malmö Konsthall, January 28–April 3, 1984.  
Paris, Galerie Daniel Templon, *Robert Morris: Recent Works*, May 4–June 2.

1984

Malmö, Sweden, Galerie Nordenhake, *Robert Morris: Recent Felt Pieces*, April.

Malmö, Sweden, Malmö Konsthall, *Robert Morris: Genom tiderna med honom/Genom tiderna utan henne: Through the Times with Him Through the Times without Her*, July–August. Exhibition catalogue.

Portland, Oreg., Portland Center for the Visual Arts, *Robert Morris: Drawings, Firestorm and Psychomachia*, December 11–January 20, 1985.

1985

New York, Sonnabend Gallery, *Robert Morris*, January 5–26.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris: Works from 1967–1984*, January 12–February 9.

1986

Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Robert Morris: Works of the Eighties*, February 14–April 13. Traveled to Newport Beach, Calif., Newport Harbor Art Museum, May 2–June 30. Exhibition catalogue.

1987

Kansas City, Mo., Charlotte Crosby Kemper Gallery, Kansas City Art Institute, *Robert Morris: Drawings and Paintings*, January 17–February 15.

1988

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris*, January 9–31.

New York, Sonnabend Gallery, *Robert Morris*, January 9–31.

Paris, Galerie Daniel Templon, *Robert Morris: Oeuvres récentes*, October 15–November 16.

Paris, Galerie Daniel Templon, *Robert Morris: The I-Beam Piece*, October 15–November 16.

1989

Los Angeles, Margo Leavin Gallery, *Robert Morris: Selected Work 1961–1988*, January 7–February 11. Brochure.

New York, Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, *Robert Morris: The Felt Works*, May 23–July 14. Exhibition catalogue.

1990

London, Runkel-Hue-Williams, *Robert Morris Sculptures 1962–1984*, January 25–March 10. Traveled to New York, Lang and O'Hara Gallery, May 2–June 2. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Robert Morris*, April 7–28.

Paris, JGM Galerie, *Robert Morris: Feutres et dessins, 1964–1984*, October 11–November 3.

Washington, D.C., Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Inability to Endure or Deny the World: Representation and Text in the Work of Robert Morris*, December 8–February 17, 1991. Exhibition catalogue.

1991

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, 65 Thompson Street, and Sonnabend Gallery, *Robert Morris*, March 9–April 6. Brochure.

Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, *Perspectives on the Permanent Collection: Robert Morris*, April 23–June 2. Brochure.

Los Angeles, Margo Leavin Gallery, *Robert Morris: The I-Beam Suite*, April 27–June 22.

1992

Montreal, Galerie Samuel Lallouz, *Robert Morris: Dessins/Drawings*, January–February.

New York, Sonnabend Gallery, *Robert Morris*, May 9–June 30.

Allentown, Pa., Frank Martin Gallery, Muhlenberg College, *Robert Morris: Blind Time Drawings with Davidson*.

1993

London, Tate Gallery, *The Films of Robert Morris*, March–April.

Taura, Japan, Akira Ikeda Gallery, *Robert Morris*, August 7–October 30.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Blind Time IV: Drawing with Davidson*, September 25–October 23.

New York, 65 Thompson Street, *Four Corners: I Beam Pieces*, September 25–October 23.

#### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1959

San Francisco, San Francisco Museum of Art, *Seventy-eighth Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association*, April 2–May 3. Exhibition catalogue.

1962

New York, Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery, December 5–30.

1963

New York, Green Gallery, *New Work Part I*, January 8–February 2.

New York, Green Gallery, *New Work II*, January 29–February 16.

- New York, Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery, *Boxing Match*, February 27–March 24.
- Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, *Mixed Media and Pop Art*, November 19–December 15. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Thibaut Gallery, *Hard Center*, December 3–28. Brochure.
- New York, Cordier and Ekstrom, *Sight and Sound*.  
1964  
New York, Cordier and Ekstrom, *For Eyes and Ears*, January 3–25.
- Hartford, Conn., Wadsworth Atheneum, *Black, White, and Grey*, January 9–February 9. Brochure.
- Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *The Atmosphere of '64*, April 17–June 1. Exhibition catalogue.
- Northampton, Mass., Smith College Museum of Art, *Sight/Sound*, November 19–December 16. Brochure.
- Los Angeles, Dwan Gallery, *Boxes*.  
1965  
New York, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, *Shape and Structure 1965*, January 5–23.
- New York, Pace Gallery, *Beyond Realism*, May 4–29. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Green Gallery, *Flavin, Judd, Morris, Williams*, May 26–June 12.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Young America, 1965: Thirty American Artists under Thirty-five*, June 23–August 29.
- 1966  
Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *The "Other" Tradition*, January 27–March 7. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Contemporary American Sculpture. Selection 1*, April 5–May 15. Traveled to Syracuse, Everson Museum of Art, December 13, 1967–January 21, 1968; Albany, Albany Institute of History and Art, February 14–March 17, 1968. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, The Jewish Museum, *Primary Structures*, April 27–June 12. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Finch College Art Museum, *Art in Process: The Visual Development of a Structure*, May 11–June 30. Exhibition catalogue.
- Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *68th American Exhibition*, August 19–October 16. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Dwan Gallery, *10*, October 4–29.
- Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *Eight Sculptors: The Ambiguous Image*, October 22–December 4. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Annual Exhibition 1966: Contemporary Sculpture and Prints*, December 16–February 5, 1967. Exhibition catalogue.
- 1967  
Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, April 28–June 25. Traveled to Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, September 15–October 29. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Dwan Gallery, *Language to Be Looked at and/or Things to Be Read*, June.
- New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Guggenheim International Exhibition 1967: Sculpture from Twenty Nations*, October 20–February 4, 1968. Traveled to Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, February 24–March 27, 1968; Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, April 26–June 9, 1968; Montreal, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, June 20–August 18, 1968. Exhibition catalogue.
- Eindhoven, The Netherlands, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, *Kompas 3: Schilderkunst na 1945 uit New York/Paintings after 1945 in New York*, November 9–December 17. Exhibition catalogue.
- 1968  
Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, *Plus by Minus: Today's Half-Century*, March 3–April 14. Exhibition catalogue.
- The Hague, Haags Gemeentemuseum, *Minimal Art*, March 23–May 26. Exhibition catalogue and brochure.
- Kassel, Germany, Documenta 4, June 27–October 6. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *The Art of the Real: USA 1948–1968*, July 3–September 8. Exhibition catalogue. Traveled to Paris, Grand Palais, *L'Art du réel USA 1948–1968*, November 14–December 23; Zurich, Kunsthaus Zürich, *Der Raum in der amerikanischen Kunst 1948–1968*, January 19–February 23, 1969 (exhibition catalogue); London, Tate Gallery, *The Art of the Real: An Aspect of American Painting and Sculpture 1948–1968*, April 22–June 1, 1969 (exhibition catalogue).

New York, Dwan Gallery, *Earthworks*, October

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1968  
*Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture*,  
December 17–February 9, 1969. Exhibition catalogue  
1969

Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art,  
University of Pennsylvania, *Plastics and the New Art*,  
January 15–February 25. Traveled to San Antonio,  
Tex., Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, March 16–  
April 15. Exhibition catalogue.

Dusseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle und Kunstverein  
für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, *Minimal Art*,  
January 17–February 23. Exhibition catalogue.

Vancouver, Vancouver Art Gallery, *New York 13*,  
January 21–February 16. Traveled to Regina, Norman  
Mackenzie Art Gallery, March 10–April 21; Montreal,  
Musée d'Art Contemporain, June 3–July 5. Exhibition  
catalogue

Ithaca, N.Y., Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art,  
Cornell University, *Earth Art*, February 11–March 16.  
Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Finch College Museum of Art, *Drawing:  
Some Recent Trends*, March. Exhibition catalogue.

Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, *Op Losse Schroeven  
(Square Pegs in Round Holes)*, March 15–April 27.  
Exhibition catalogue

Minneapolis, University Gallery, University of  
Minnesota, *The Artist and the Factory: Drawings and  
Models*, March 19–April 16. Exhibition catalogue.

Bern, Kunsthalle Bern, *Live in Your Head: When  
Attitudes Become Form*, March 22–April 27. Exhibition  
catalogue

University Park, Pa., Hetzel Union Building Gallery,  
Pennsylvania State University, *Andre, Flavin, Judd,  
LeWitt, Morris*, April 6–May 20. Exhibition catalogue

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art,  
*Contemporary American Sculpture: Selection 2*,  
April 15–May 5. Exhibition catalogue

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art,  
*Anti-Illusion Procedures: Materials*, May 19–July 6.  
Exhibition catalogue

Minneapolis, Dayton's, *La Sculpture: The Industrial  
Life*, May 29–June 21. Organized by the Walker Art  
Center, Minneapolis. Exhibition catalogue

New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Selected  
Sculpture and Works on Paper*, July 8–September 11.  
Exhibition catalogue

London, Hayward Gallery, *Pop Art*, July 9–  
September 3. Organized by the Arts Council of Great  
Britain. Exhibition catalogue.

Seattle, Seattle Art Museum, 557.087, September 5–  
October 5. Traveled to Vancouver, Vancouver Art  
Gallery, January 13–February 8, 1970, as 955.000.  
Exhibition catalogue.

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *New  
York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970*, October 18–  
February 1, 1970. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Art by  
Telephone*, November 1–December 14. Exhibition  
catalogue.

New York, Finch College Museum of Art, *Art in  
Process IV*, December 11–January 26, 1970. Exhibition  
catalogue.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *Spaces*,  
December 30–March 1, 1970. Exhibition catalogue.

Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, C.A.A.M., University of  
Puerto Rico, *FRARMRROREEROFIBSEATERLR  
(Robert Morris—Rafael Ferrer)*.

1970

Hempstead, N.Y., Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra  
University, *Hanging Leaning*, February 2–27.  
Exhibition catalogue.

Cologne, Galerie Rieke, *Zeichnungen amerikanischer  
Künstler*, May–September. Exhibition catalogue.

Princeton, N.J., The Art Museum, Princeton  
University, *American Art since 1960*, May 6–27.  
Exhibition catalogue.

New York, The Jewish Museum, *Using Walls (Indoors)*,  
May 13–June 21. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Dwan Gallery, *Language*, June.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *Information*,  
July 2–September 20. Exhibition catalogue.

Nuremberg, Kunsthalle Nürnberg am Marienort,  
*Das Ding als Objekt*, July 10–August 30. Exhibition  
catalogue.

Cincinnati, Contemporary Arts Center, *Monumental  
American Art*, September 13–  
November 30. Exhibition catalogue, *Monumental Art*.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Benefit Exhibition for  
Referendum '70*, September 19–26.

Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *Against Order: Chance and Art*, November 14–December 22. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *1970 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Sculpture*, December 12–February 7, 1971. Exhibition catalogue.

1971

New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Guggenheim International Exhibition, 1971*, February 12–April 11. Exhibition catalogue.

Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art: 1967–1971*, May 10–August 29. Exhibition catalogue.

Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, *Works for New Spaces*, May 18–July 25. Exhibition catalogue.

Paramus, N.J., Van Saun Park, *Sculpture in the Park*, June 13–September 26. Exhibition catalogue published by the North Jersey Cultural Council, Hackensack, N.J.

Arnhem, The Netherlands, Park Sonsbeek, *Sonsbeek 71*, June 19–August 15. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Works on Film*, September 25–October 9.

Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, *Prospect 71 Projection*, October 8–17. Traveled to Humlebaek, Denmark, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 1972. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Six Sculptors: Extended Structure*, October 24–December 12. Exhibition catalogue, *Six Sculptors*.

1972

North Haven, Lippincott Inc., *Large Scale Sculpture*, June–October.

Spoleto, Italy, The Spoleto Festival, June 23–July 9.

Dublin, Royal Dublin Society, *ROSC 1971*, July 10–August 15.

Otterlo, The Netherlands, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, *Diagrams and Drawings*, August 12–September 25. Exhibition catalogue.

1973

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *1973 Bi-Annual Exhibition*, January 10–March 18. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, New York Cultural Center, *Soft as Art*, March 20–May 6. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *American Drawings, 1963–1973*, May 25–July 22. Exhibition catalogue.

Grand Rapids, Mich., Grand Rapids Art Museum, *Sculpture Off the Pedestal*, September 8–December 3. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, *Videotapes*, September 28–October 27. Traveled to Santa Clara, Calif., De Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, as *Videotapes: Six from Castelli*, March 12–April 28, 1974. Brochure.

1974

Princeton, N.J., The Art Museum, Princeton University, *Line as Language: Six Artists Draw*, February 23–March 31. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Idea and Image in Recent Art*, March 23–May 5. Exhibition catalogue.

Cologne, Kölnischer Kunstverein, *Kunst-Über Kunst*, April 11–May 26. Exhibition catalogue.

Cambridge, Mass., Hayden Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Interventions in Landscapes*, April 12–May 11.

Greensboro, N.C., Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, *1974 Art on Paper*, November 17–December 15. Exhibition catalogue.

Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, *Surrealität-Bildrealität 1924–1974*, December 8–February 2. Traveled to Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden. Exhibition catalogue.

1975

Chapel Hill, N.C., William Hayes Ackland Memorial Art Center, University of North Carolina, *Light/Sculpture*, January 19–February 16. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Bodyworks*, March 8–April 27. Exhibition catalogue.

New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, *Richard Brown Baker Collects! A Selection of Contemporary Art from the Richard Brown Baker Collection*, April 24–June 22. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Menace*, May 3–June 22. Brochure.

Otterlo, The Netherlands, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, *Funkties van Tekenen/Functions of Drawing*, May 25–August 4. Exhibition catalogue.

- Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, *Sculpture. American Directions. 1945-1975*, October 5–November 30. Exhibition catalogue
- Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *Painting, Drawing and Sculpture of the '60s and the '70s from the Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection*, October 7–November 18. Traveled to Cincinnati, Contemporary Arts Center, December 17–February 15, 1976. Exhibition catalogue.
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia College of Art, *Labyrinth*, October 16–November 22. Exhibition catalogue.
- Atlanta, High Museum of Art, *The New Image*, October 18–June 27. Exhibition catalogue.
- Worcester, Mass., Worcester Art Museum, *American Art since 1945 from the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, October 20–November 30; Toledo, Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art, January 10–February 22, 1976; Denver, Denver Art Museum, March 22–May 2, 1976; San Diego, Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, May 31–July 11, 1976; Dallas, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, August 19–October 3, 1976; Omaha, Nebr., Joslyn Art Museum, October 25–December 5, 1976; Greenville, S.C., Greenville County Museum, January 8–February 20, 1977; Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, March 14–April 17. Organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Exhibition catalogue
- 1976
- Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Seventy-second American Exhibition*, March 13–May 9. Exhibition catalogue
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *200 Years of American Sculpture*, March 16–September 26. Exhibition catalogue
- 1977
- Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, *Drawings of the 70's*, March 9–May 1. Brochure
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia College of Art, *Time*, April 24–May 21. Exhibition catalogue
- Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Words at Liberty*, May 7–July 3. Exhibition catalogue.
- Cleveland, New Gallery of Contemporary Art, *The City Project 1977: Four Urban Environmental Sculptures*, May 11–June 18. Exhibition catalogue.
- Kassel, Germany, Documenta VI, June 24–October 2. Exhibition catalogue
- Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, *A View of a Decade*, September 10–November 10. Exhibition catalogue.
- Cincinnati, Contemporary Arts Center, *Environmental Sculpture. Proposals for Sawyer Point*, October 8–November 27. Exhibition catalogue and brochure.
- Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, *Probing the Earth: Contemporary Land Projects*, October 27–January 2, 1978. Traveled to La Jolla, Calif., La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, January 27–February 26, 1978; Seattle, Seattle Art Museum, March 23–May 21, 1978. Exhibition catalogue.
- 1978
- Long Island City, N.Y., P. S. 1, Institute of Art and Urban Resources, *Hermetic Aspects of Contemporary Art*, January 15–February 25.
- New York, Marian Goodman Gallery, *Objects!*, February 25–April 1.
- Bordeaux, Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains, *Sculpture Nature*, May 5–July 3.
- Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, *Structures for Behavior: New Sculptures by Robert Morris, David Rabinowitch, Richard Serra and George Trakas*, May 13–July 9. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Art about Art*, July 19–September 24. Traveled to Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, October 15–November 26; Los Angeles, Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery, University of California, December 17–February 11, 1979; Portland, Oreg., Portland Art Museum, March 6–April 15, 1979. Exhibition catalogue.
- Boston, Thomas Segal Gallery, *Salute to Merce Cunningham, John Cage and Collaborators*, February 8–March 4.
- 1979
- Bochum, Germany, Museum Bochum, *Words Words*, January 27–March 11. Traveled to Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, March–May.
- Chapel Hill, N.C., William Hayes Ackland Memorial Art Center, University of North Carolina, *Drawings about Drawings Today*, January 28–March 11. Exhibition catalogue.
- Amherst, Mass., Hampshire College Gallery, *Images of the Self*, February 19–March 14. Exhibition catalogue.
- Boston, Institute of Contemporary Art, *The Reductive Object. A Survey of the Minimalist Aesthetic in the 1960s*, March 7–April 29.

Ridgefield, Conn., Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, *The Minimal Tradition*, April 29–September 2. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *Contemporary Sculpture from the Collection*, New York, May 18–August 7. Exhibition catalogue.

Seattle, Seattle Art Museum, *Earthworks: Land Reclamation as Sculpture*, August 17–September 30. Traveled to San Jose, San Jose Museum of Art, December 8–January 18, 1981; Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, February 1–March 15, 1981; La Jolla, Calif., La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, March 30–May 10, 1981; Phoenix, Phoenix Art Museum, May 25–August 6, 1981; Amarillo, Tex., Amarillo Art Center, September 2–October 18, 1981; Tyler, Tex., Tyler Museum of Art, November 7, 1981–January 3, 1982; Manitoba, Winnipeg Art Gallery, January 18–February 28, 1982; Iowa City, University of Iowa Museum of Art, March 15–April 25, 1982; Brookings, S.Dak., South Dakota Memorial Arts Center, May 10–June 20, 1982; Springfield, Mo., Springfield Art Museum, July 5–August 29, 1982; Normal, Ill., Center for the Visual Arts Gallery, Illinois State University, September 12–October 24, 1982; Louisville, Ky., J. B. Speed Art Museum, November 8–December 19, 1982; Toledo, Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art, January 3–February 20, 1983. Exhibition catalogue.

Yonkers, N.Y., The Hudson River Museum, *Supershow*, October 20–December 9; St. Paul, Minn., Landmark Center, January 26–March 9, 1980; Mesa, Ariz., The Center for Fine Arts, April 12–June 4, 1980; Cleveland, The New Gallery, October 3–31, 1980. Organized by Independent Curators Incorporated, New York. Exhibition catalogue.

1980

Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, *Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris: Sculpture minimal*, January 16–March 2. Exhibition catalogue.

Berlin, Akademie der Künste, *Für Augen und Ohren*, January 20–March 2. Exhibition catalogue.

Oberlin, Ohio, Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, *From Reinhardt to Christo*, February 20–March 19.

Purchase, N.Y., Neuberger Museum, State University of New York, *Hidden Desires*, March 9–June 15.

Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *Urban Encounters: Art, Architecture, Audience*, March 19–August 30.

Amherst, Mass., University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, *Sculpture on the Wall: Relief Sculpture of the Seventies*, March 29–May 4. Exhibition catalogue.

Venice, United States Pavilion, Biennale of Venice, June 1–September 30. Traveled to Copenhagen, Kunstforeningen Museum, October 20–November 20; Oslo, Henie Onstad Museum, December 6–9, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, January 23–March 15, 1981; Lisbon, Gulbenkian Museum, April 10–May 29, 1981.

Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, *Across the Nation: Fine Art for Federal Buildings, 1972–1979*, June 4–September 1. Traveled to Chattanooga, Tenn., Hunter Museum of Art, January 11–March 1, 1981. Exhibition catalogue.

Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (ARC), *Écouter par les yeux: Objets et environnements sonores*, June 18–August 24. Exhibition catalogue.

Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Stadthalle Düsseldorf, *Minimal + Conceptual Art aus der Sammlung Panza*, September–November. Exhibition catalogue. Traveled to Basel, Museum für Gegenwartkunst, November 8–June 28, 1981.

Brooklyn, The Brooklyn Museum, *American Drawing In Black and White: 1970–1980*, November 22–January 18, 1981. Brochure.

1981

Madrid, Fundación Juan March, *Minimal Art*, January–March. Exhibition catalogue.

Ridgefield, Conn., Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, *New Dimensions in Drawing*, May 2–September 6. Exhibition catalogue.

Stamford, Conn., Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County Branch, *A Tradition Established 1940–70*, September 4–October 14. Exhibition catalogue.

Amherst, Mass., University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, *Selections from the Chase Manhattan Bank Art Collection*, September 19–December 20; Burlington, Vt., Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont at Burlington, January 22–March 21, 1982; Providence, R.I., David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, October 16–November 11, 1982.

Purchase, N.Y., Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase, *Soundings*, September 20–December 23. Exhibition catalogue and brochure.

- Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, *Metaphor: New Projects by Contemporary Sculptors*, December 17–February 28, 1982. Exhibition catalogue.
- Bennington, Vt., Bennington College, *Judson Dance Theater 1962–1966*. Exhibition catalogue.
- Cologne, Museen der Stadt Köln, *Westkunst: Zeitgenössische Kunst seit 1939*. Exhibition catalogue. 1982
- Bordeaux, Centre d'Arts Plastiques Contemporains, *Anti-form et Arte Povera. Sculptures 1966–69*, March.
- Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, *The Rebounding Surface: A Study of Reflection in Contemporary Art*, August 15–September 24.
- Ridgefield, Conn., Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, *Post Minimalism*, September 19–December 19. Exhibition catalogue.
- Berlin, Martin Gropius Bau, *Zeitgeist*, October 16–January 16, 1983
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch, Federal Reserve Plaza, *Minimalism x 4*, November 17–December 31. Exhibition catalogue. 1983
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, *Twentieth-Century Sculpture: Process and Presence*, April 8–May 11. Exhibition catalogue.
- Cambridge, Mass., Hayden Corridor Gallery, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, *Beyond the Monument*, October 8–November 13. Brochure.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Minimalism to Expressionism: Painting and Sculpture since 1965 from the Permanent Collection*, June 2–December 14. Brochure
- Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, *Dreams and Nightmares: Utopian Visions in Modern Art*, December 8–February 12, 1984. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, New Museum of Contemporary Art, *The End of the World: Contemporary Visions of the Apocalypse*, December 10–January 22, 1984. Exhibition catalogue. 1984
- Middletown, Conn., Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Center for the Arts, Wesleyan University, *Large Drawings*, January 26–March 9. Exhibition catalogue.
- Amherst, Mass., University Gallery, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, *The Shadow of the Bomb*, April 1–June 10. Traveled to South Hadley, Mass., Mount Holyoke College Art Museum. Exhibition catalogue.
- Montreal, Musée d'Art Contemporain, *Via New York*, May 8–June 24. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Hunter College Art Gallery, *Endgame: Strategies of Postmodernist Performance*, May 16–June 20. Exhibition catalogue.
- Toledo, Ohio, Toledo Museum of Art, *Citywide Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition*, July 15–October 14. Exhibition catalogue.
- Dublin, The Guinness Hop Store, *ROSC '84: The Poetry of Vision*, August 24–November 17. Exhibition catalogue.
- Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, *A Different Climate: Aspects of Beauty in Contemporary Art*, August 25–October 5. Exhibition catalogue.
- Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Bard College, *Land Marks: New Site Proposals by Twenty-two Original Pioneers of Environmental Art*, September 16–October 28. Exhibition catalogue.
- New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958–1964*, September 20–December 2. Exhibition catalogue.
- Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, *Content: A Contemporary Focus 1974–1984*, October 4–January 6, 1985. Exhibition catalogue. 1985
- Bordeaux, Musée d'Art Contemporain (CAPC), *Art Minimal 1*, February 2–April 21. Exhibition catalogue.
- Yonkers, N.Y., The Hudson River Museum, *A New Beginning 1968–1978*, February 3–May 5. Exhibition catalogue.
- Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *The Artist as Social Designer: Aspects of Public Urban Art Today*, February 7–March 17. Brochure.
- Seattle, Seattle Art Museum, *States of War: New European and American Paintings*, April 18–June 23. Exhibition catalogue.
- Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, *Cinquante ans de dessins américains 1930–1980*, May 3–July 13. Organized by the Menil Foundation, Inc., Houston. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *Made in India: Fall 1985*, October 16–Jan. 31, 1986. Exhibition catalogue.

1986

Washington, D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, *Directions 1986*, February 6–March 30. Exhibition catalogue.

Mexico City, Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, Fundación Cultural Televisa, A.C., *Memento Mori*, November–January 1987. Exhibition catalogue.

Los Angeles, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945–1986*, December 10–January 10, 1988. Exhibition catalogue.

1987

Philadelphia, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, *1967: At the Crossroads*, March 13–April 26. Exhibition catalogue.

Chicago, Chicago International Art Fair, *A Tribute to John Cage*, May 7–12. Organized by the Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati. Exhibition catalogue, *Prepared Box for John Cage*.

Kassel, Germany, Documenta 8, June 12–September 20. Exhibition catalogue.

1988

Cologne, Museum Ludwig, *Übrigens Sterben immer die Anderen–1950*, January 15–March 6. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, *Committed to Print: Social and Political Themes in Recent American Printed Art*, January 31–April 19. Traveled to Dayton, Ohio, University Art Galleries, Wright State University, October 30–December 15; Chicago, Peace Museum, March 3–May 31, 1989; Calgary, Alberta, Glenbow Museum, September 23–November 19, 1989; Albany, New York State Museum, December 16, 1989–February 11, 1990; Lawrence, Kans., Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, March 25–May 6, 1990; Newport Beach, Calif., Newport Harbor Art Museum, July 20–September 30, 1990. Exhibition catalogue.

New York, Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, *Representing Vietnam 1965–1973: The Antiwar Movement in America*, February 9–March 25. Exhibition catalogue.

Bordeaux, Musée d'Art Contemporain (CAPC), *Art Conceptuel 1*, October 7–November 27. Exhibition catalogue.

1989

Liverpool, Tate Gallery, *Minimalism*, March 21–Feb. 18, 1990. Exhibition catalogue.

1990

Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, *Un Cboix d'art minimal dans la Collection Panza*, July 12–November 4. Exhibition catalogue.

Bordeaux, Musée d'Art Contemporain (CAPC), *Feux Pales*, December 7–March 3, 1991.

1991

New York, John Weber Gallery, *The Political Arm*, February 1–28. Traveled to St. Louis, Washington University Gallery of Art. Exhibition catalogue.

Ridgefield, Conn., Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, *The Art of Advocacy*, May 18–September 22. Exhibition catalogue.

Indianapolis, Indianapolis Museum of Art, *Power: Its Myths and Mores in American Art 1961–1991*, September 5–November 3. Traveled to Akron, Ohio, Akron Art Museum, January 18–March 22, 1992; Richmond, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, May 11–July 12, 1992. Exhibition catalogue.

1992

Catonsville, Md., Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, *Environmental Terror*, January 30–March 14. Traveled to Frostburg, Md., Stephanie Ann Roper Gallery, Frostburg State University, March 27–April 15; Richmond, 1708 East Main Street Gallery, May 1–30. Exhibition catalogue.

West Nyack, N.Y., Rockland Center for the Arts, *Troubled Waters: American Social and Political Art: A View of Two Eras: 1930–42 and 1980–92*, October 18–January 10, 1993. Brochure.

1993

London, Hayward Gallery, *Gravity and Grace: The Changing Condition of Sculpture 1965–1975*, January 21–March 14. Exhibition catalogue.

Venice, Italian Pavilion, 45th Biennale of Venice, *Points of Art*, June 13–October 10.

New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*, June 23–August 29. Exhibition catalogue.













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