

**Minimalist Sculpture: The Consequences of Artifice.**

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**The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own work and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**



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## Abstract.

This study, "Minimalist Sculpture: The Consequences of Artifice", was initially prompted by the wish to examine the case for a materialist approach to modern sculpture. Such an inquiry needed to address not only the substantiality of material and its process, but also the formative role of ideology on those choices of governing materials and procedures.

The crux of this study began as, and remains, an inquiry into physical presence, and, by extension, the idea that Minimalist sculpture somehow returns the viewer to the viewer. At the core of any materialist position is the certainty that experience contains an element of passivity. If nothing exists but matter and its movements and modifications, then consciousness and volition depend entirely on material agency. The hierarchy of such a scheme underpins the socio-economic and cultural level with that of the biological, and, in turn, the biological with the physical. However, perception is not a matter of automatically recording external stimuli, but requires active elaboration. A hermeneutic process, therefore, is not one of unbridled pure thought; rather, it requires the recognition of an external and constant measure that gives form to thought. Recourse to the 'given' fact of an external reference, therefore, depends upon a relationship between materiality and signification—the resultant heuristic method of perceptual hypothesis that is established remains perpetually open to questioning. C.S. Peirce is invaluable to this study in providing a theoretical framework for these considerations.

The manner in which modern sculpture was realized experienced a decisive change with the emergence of Minimalism. The dominant aesthetic of Vitalism was brought into question as never before by the materialist programme set in motion by Minimalism. The key issue of adherence to a Vitalist or Minimalist aesthetic is invaluable when clarifying the position of artists such as Tony Smith and Robert Smithson.

Earlier sculptural forms generated by Constructivism utilized aspects of industrial mimesis but did not engage with sheer physicality to the extent that Minimalism did. One reason for this major difference was the consideration accorded to scale rather than size by the Minimalists. Such a consideration of scale and the experience of spatio-temporality, understood as inextricably part of the sculptural situation, gave rise to site-specificity and its ramifications as Minimalist concerns.

Approximately the first third of this study examines Vitalism as the dominant and enduring theme and background for modern sculpture. Vitalism formed an inherited intellectual situation that was directly challenged by the materialism of the Minimalists.

In the second part of the study, Barnett Newman and Constantin Brancusi provide the two central historical precedents for the re-introduction of the precinctual into contemporary sculpture. Newman's interest in place as a spatio-temporal experience, and his extension of the artwork to include the interstice between the viewer and the artwork was an extremely important step for Minimalism. Brancusi is of interest mainly for his addressing of temporality as a sculptural concern, and the relationship of material to place.

His early use of assemblage, as a method of drawing with materials in space, facilitated not only the Minimalists but also modern sculpture at large.

A section of the study is devoted to the sculpture of Richard Serra and the idea of critical distance, something that he shares with Newman. This intellectual attitude aids Serra in his declaration of the space of sculpture as parallel to, and critical of, its context. The work of Robert Smithson is examined in the light of site-specificity and ubiety, and, in particular, his use of symbols as structural prompts. Smithson's dystopian Futurism is examined as a significant way of helping to draw the distinction between his intellectual position and that of a Vitalist.

The study concludes with a consideration of contextualization in general, and of Maya Lin's site-specific memorial to the casualties of the Vietnam War.

What has emerged from this study is that precinctual space was firmly re-established in contemporary sculptural practice by the Minimalist sculptors. I have used the term ubiety to describe the re-emphasis, and re-emergent awareness, of place as an interstitial space that was associated with the Minimalists. Ubiety is understood to be the condition of being in a particular place, and comes from the Latin 'where'. In contrast, ubiquity is the condition of being everywhere. In the light of ubiety, sculpture, particularly site-specific sculpture, is discussed and understood as a spatio-temporal event.

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## 1. Introduction.

### 1.

My second memorable encounter with Minimalist sculpture took place in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, in 1972. This account of Minimalist sculpture and the role of artifice is an attempt to clarify why that second encounter was so disquieting, and to square that experience with my earlier introduction to Minimalist sculpture. That earlier introduction had been so positive that I was prompted to leave Britain in order to study sculpture in the United States.

The Don Judd exhibition, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1970, had introduced me to Minimal art and left me with an overwhelming sense of space as the continuum for both the sculpture and the viewer. As far as I was concerned, despite contemporary comments to the contrary, Judd's "empty boxes" were not empty but significantly full. The intervallic space that was bracketed by the sculpture belonged to a larger volume of space, which continued beyond the sculpture, and bracketed it in turn. *Untitled*, 1969, from the Sonnabend collection in Paris consisted of identical modular units that spanned the height of the wall in the Whitechapel Gallery. The architecture of the gallery, and therefore the architecture of any gallery in which it was exhibited, was implicated in and as part of this work, an implication that expanded the artwork by means of the viewer's own motility. If peripheral vision invited a turn of the head, then a turn of the head led to a shift of position. The floor and the wall became planes that functioned as coordinates for the mobile human agent. The spatio-temporality of that agent located itself, in turn, as a consequence of the artwork being recognized as situational. A physical relationship was established between the inert materiality of the situated objects and the physicality of the viewer. Such a self-reflexive awareness on the part of the viewer of his active presence materialized the space between object and viewer. This relationship acknowledged the active viewer as both perceptual agent and as a compositional element in the situation. The viewer became an integrated and integral part of the material situation, and because of this was required to fill not only the physical spaces provided by the artwork but to account for those spaces intellectually.

In marked contrast, the experience of one of John McCracken's sculptures, *Red Plank*, 1966, in Ohio was flawed. The reason for the discrepancy was immediately apparent but difficult to explain. McCracken's *Red Plank* leaned against the wall as it was always intended to, but it did not stand on the floor. It was exhibited on a base or low plinth (see illustration 1 on page 179). That institutional device common to conventional sculptural presentation adversely affected my perception of the sculpture. It disrupted the continuum of space between the surface of the sculpture and me. It disturbed the expected shared volume of space and functioned as a framing device. It was almost as if *Red Plank* had been hung on the wall and converted into a painting. As a framing device, the plinth thwarted the situational aspect of the sculpture and rendered it a picture. Any such dislocation of the material immediacy of a work weakens its relationship to the relevance of its site. Commercially, the dislocated artwork may be beneficial for sales or tours, since venues then become interchangeable. However, site-

relatedness is a more complex issue than that of the work being shown to best advantage.

Sculpture may be site-adjusted, in which case it is modified in some manner to better suit its current location. It may be site-determined, in which case it is made for a particular place and no other. Finally, sculpture may be site-generated; that is to say that its configuration is a response to a particular location, which, in turn, has implications for how it might be adapted to other circumstances. Of these three options, for considering sculpture's site-relatedness, the first is utilized by Henry Moore or Eduardo Chillida when deciding how large to make a piece of sculpture for a given setting. The second may be characterized by Michael Heizer or Richard Serra's way of using landscape or architecture as a formal determinant or foil. The third option is exercised by Don Judd and Carl Andre when they deploy prefabricated units within a particular place, with the caveat that the material used for the sculpture may well be deployed elsewhere.

Relating a sculpture to its current site by means of a plinth is therefore a form of site-adjustment. However, it is an adjustment instigated for reasons of institutional space, place or site, rather than for reasons of the artwork itself. Some sculptors have seen and understood the base as integral to the sculpture. Brancusi, for example, made bases for particular pieces and regarded them as integral to the work. Indeed the bases were so appropriate that they continued the artwork, even to the point of dispensing with the surmounting object.<sup>1</sup> In this respect there is a similarity with ancient Egyptian sculptures of the goddess Maat. The base used for sculptures of Egyptian figures of deities and their thrones was distinctive insofar as its leading edge was bevelled. This visual symbol came to stand for Maat and her attributes of being the foundation of all order, and for what was fundamental. It became sufficient to employ only the figure of the empty base since Maat was taken to be intrinsic to it.<sup>2</sup> In this particular instance the base obviated the need for a surmounting representational figure by appropriating the symbolic meaning of the deity to the self-evident meaning and purpose of a base.

Michelangelo's *David*, 1501-04, was carved with the presupposition of a high base in mind. Since the work has been re-sited on a lower base the hands of the figure appear to be too large for its body. The original site required the oversized hands in order to maintain perceptual proportion at that elevation. To this extent *David* was a site-determined piece of sculpture with a particular base in mind. Since a non-specific plinth has replaced the base the intended look and effect of the sculpture have been compromised.

In the case of both Brancusi and Michelangelo the base is fundamental and foundational, while a plinth serves as a conventional platform without being integral to the work. This fundamental and foundational aspect of the function of the base is amply borne out by the conflation of meanings in the Egyptian example of Maat. Following from this the following distinctions may be made: a base is integral to the piece of sculpture; in certain circumstances

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1. Brancusi's complex relationship with the base as a formal device led to his exhibiting carved 'bases' as sculpture in 1926 in New York, and then as the *Endless Column* and the *Table of Silence* in the Tirgu Jiu ensemble, 1937-38.

2. Erik Hornung, "The Concept of Maat". *Idea into Image* (New York: Timken, 1992), pp. 131-145.



the floor may serve as the base if it is integral to the work. A plinth that is designed to be integral to the work functions effectively as a base. However, usually a plinth degrades a sculptural work because its effect is to isolate and frame that work in space. Other words associated with plinth are 'podium' and 'pedestal', both of which carry the connotation of a foot—that is, the lowest possible element in a vertical arrangement. The proximity of the base to the work requires that such a conjunction figure prominently in the work's meaning. If such a configuration of base to work is disrupted, or absent, then the support is to be understood as a plinth and by extension as a podium and pedestal.

Located on the floor as intended, McCracken's *Red Plank* later re-worked as *Gate* in 1995, acts as a site-generated unit (see illustration 2 on page 180). Its precise location within the volume of space is in response to that place and the viewer. The floor is the base because it is fundamental and essential to the work. Displacement of *Red Plank* onto a plinth makes the work site-adjusted and non-specific with reference to the floor. The specificity of the floor as base, as the ground shared by work and viewer, is cancelled and the work is consequently seriously compromised.

A recent publication written by Thomas Kellein about McCracken begins: "In mid-1960s New York, the quest for an art that signified neither painting nor sculpture, but projected an architectural quality, became central".<sup>3</sup> Kellein accurately encapsulates the salient features of Minimalism, and echoes commonly held presuppositions about the complexion of Minimal art. My encounter with *Red Plank*, as described above, highlights the problem of an artwork that "signified neither painting nor sculpture". Since the plank did not hang on the wall it was ruled out as an example of painting. Presenting it on a plinth did manage to preserve it as an example of sculpture. The idea that art is about contemplative objects was maintained by the introduction of a plinth, a plinth that served to frame the object in a very particular manner as if it were a vitrine. Simultaneously, however, the plinth problematised that other presupposition about Minimal art that runs counter to its status as painting or sculpture. Namely, whatever is understood to be the projection of "architectural quality" is necessarily and irretrievably lost when the object is framed out of its immediate situation.

Precisely what constitutes this "architectural quality", and the origin of this idea so "central" to the New York art of the mid-1960s, are two questions congruent with my variant encounters of Judd's work and McCracken's sculpture. Indeed, the variation is still more sharply felt between experiencing a compromised *Red Plank* in 1972, in Ohio, and an uncompromised *Red Plank* at the Lisson Gallery, London in 1997. In this uncompromised encounter the continuum of space was prominent, a continuum in which the viewer as a mobile agent and the sculpture as a material constant were polarised within a common volume of space. An awareness of spatial contiguity, of one's own materiality in conjunction with a place, the placement of oneself, is the root of that "architectural quality" noted by Kellein. To be apperceptive to spatial placement is to experience ubication. Ubiety is always

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3. Thomas Kellein, "Thirty Years: A Long Day. Minimal Art Revisited". *McCracken* (Basel: Kunsthalle Basel, 1995), p. 6.

a condition of local relationships, and, as such, is conducive to context as an “architectural quality”.

The precinctual nature of understanding this “architectural quality” is one that is central to this study. Judd makes the following points on the topic of site.

The installation of my work and of others is contemporary with its creation. The work is not disembodied spatially, socially, temporally, as in most museums. The space surrounding my work is crucial to it: as much thought has gone into the installation as into a piece itself.<sup>4</sup>

The art and architecture of the past that we know is that which remains. The best is that which remains where it was painted, placed or built.<sup>5</sup>

A recent exhibition of Judd’s sculpture, at the Tate Gallery in London, during the summer of 1999, disrupted the spatial continuity of the works by cordoning them off with masking tape lines. These boundary lines were placed on the floor in order, one assumes, to secure the work on display. The result was to dislocate the work spatially, socially, and temporally, thus creating the sensation of a series of vitrines containing curios or jewels. The precinctual aspect of Judd’s Minimalist sculpture was thus made abundantly clear by its violation. The spatial discontinuities imposed by the Tate Gallery’s installation policy established a series of sculptures framed by a pocket of space. As the Tate pictorialised each sculpture by effectively fracturing the continuous base provided by the floor, the spatio-temporal continuum of the gallery as precinct was overridden.

John McCracken’s *Red Plank*, 1966, is an interesting piece in the way that it interrogates the actual and the virtual in sculpture. The dimensional red board that makes up the ‘plank’ leans against the wall and stands on the floor. In so doing, it connects two physical boundary conditions of the viewer, namely the floor and the wall. It exists within the same continuous volume of space that the viewer does. If, however, the plank is displaced onto a plinth, then it is no longer located within that continuum of space, but is removed from continuity into a pictorial and virtual space that is discontinuous with that of the viewer. Its material reality is thereby subordinated to its pictorial reality. The red volume in space may well be connotative of one of the “zips” that characterise Barnett Newman’s paintings, but that connotation is now the sharply focussed denotation of the sculpture as a sign. Freestanding in unencumbered space and time, the *Red Plank*’s primary denotation is of an object amongst other objects. As such it is both situated and situational: physically linking the floor and the wall, it actualises a set of virtual possibilities. Its indexical nature as a sign then leads the viewer to contextualise the object as best he can within his own circumstances. Any indexical sign is essentially an event that signifies itself by means of a quality of its referent. Indexical signs possess an existential relationship to the world that establishes the dual aspects of metaphoric and metonymic signification.

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4. Donald Judd, “In defense of my work”, in *Complete writings: 1975-1986* (Eindhoven: van Abbemuseum, 1987), p. 9.

5. Judd, “Statement for the Chinati Foundation”, in *Complete writings: 1975-1986*, p. 111.

C.S. Peirce says of the index that it “is a reactional sign, which is such by virtue of a real connection with its object”.<sup>6</sup> McCracken’s *Red Plank* spans the floor and wall that are physically part of the architecture and of the event of viewing. Its actual physical presence is continuous with the active viewing agent’s spatio-temporality in such a way as to include the work and make it part of the contingencies of praxis.

Once the work is isolated from the spatial continuum of the viewer by means of a plinth, that viewer may only contextualise *Red Plank* as a complex symbolic sign. Since the viewer’s physical relation with the sign is disturbed, it then only remains for the viewer as a set of hypothetical possibilities that are as real as the infinitude of other virtual possibilities, however far-fetched they may be. Its material actuality is subordinated to the intellectual associations for the object as a sign. As an object amongst objects, the freestanding sculpture contains and effects both sets of possibilities. In this case, limiting or restricting physical access to McCracken’s *Red Plank* also limits, restricts, and directs the intellectual implications of the work. *Red Plank*, as situation, is effectively deselected in favour of those associations appropriate to an isolated object in a contemplative pictorial space. In this instance, praxis, as the artifice of poesis, is displaced by the artifice of theoria.<sup>7</sup>

A similar state of affairs was encountered at the Robert Ryman exhibition held at the Tate Gallery, London, in February-April 1993. Lines of masking tape were placed on the floor to act as boundaries for restricting the proximity of the viewing public to the paintings. These lines were not to be transgressed and the guards strictly enforced the prohibitions they placed on viewing Ryman’s works. The Tate Gallery had intended to place posts connected with draped ropes to prevent access to the work. Ryman, upon hearing of this, threatened to withdraw his work. The taped lines on the floor were the agreed compromise that avoided cancellation of the exhibition.

Leaving aside the issue of insurance and safety, Ryman had identified a major potential problem about how his work would be viewed at the Tate: the relationship between the work and its spatial container. Establishing a physical boundary between the viewer and the work would compromise the meaning of the work. If the idea of the work extends to the space and time of its location, then a dislocation of that nexus violates the actual work. The ‘actual’ work for Ryman would have been rendered merely ‘virtual’. Place, space, and time form the actual in an unpredictable and messy configuration. The Tate Gallery administrators needed to prevent open access and limit their

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6. C.S. Peirce, “Lecture Three”, *Pragmatism as a Principle and Method of Right Thinking* (Albany, NY: New York State University, 1997), p. 170.

7. Praxis, understood as a fusion of theory and practice, is a result of the left Hegelian scholarship, most notably contributed to by Marx. The older idea of Praxis may be seen to have three aspects: first as existential activity—pure doing as in a journey (free action); second as poesis—direct activity such as making or building (necessary action); and third as an oppositional term of theoria—directed work as in an academic pursuit (contemplation). The oppositional character of theoria is replaced in the Marxist understanding of praxis as another form of activity (the unity of practice). See in particular Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971) and Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx* (London: Verso, 1995). It is the second form of praxis (poesis) that Martin Heidegger explores in his essay “The origin of the work of art”, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper, 1975).

liability for any damage. The masking tape lines on the floor marred the work's reception, but as a compromise they were deemed more acceptable than the radical alteration of reception that roped-off sanitization would have caused.

Works of Ryman's such as *Initial*, 1989, and *Expander*, 1985, are wholly dependent on their relationship with the wall as armature. While the relationship is compositional rather than provisional, group form is the main characteristic of both manifestations; and the field provided by the wall is coextensive with the entire building. Architecture is an applied art; it cannot be virtual, it must always be actual. The temporality of architecture is the time of its space, which in turn is its utility, its time, space, and place. Ryman taps the actuality of place by situating his work on the wall. The wall is the site for the event that is the artwork, and the wall is explicitly acknowledged as such. The way that the Tate Gallery administration demarcated space splits the spatio-temporality of the work in favour of a temporality so heavily fetishized that it becomes timeless. Virtuality and rarefied intellectual labour are selected as the preferred and authorised areas of aesthetic activity, at the expense of actuality and concrete labour.

The use of masking tape lines as a compromise in the Ryman show raises an interesting parallel with how Judd's sculptures were cordoned off six years later. The suitability of the same device being applied to both bodies of work makes no allowance for the fundamental difference between painting and sculpture, unless, of course, sculpture is thought of in pictorial terms. In both cases the masking tape lines are clumsy, provisional devices that register themselves as temporary and awkward. The institutional authority of the museum openly manifests and stamps its authority between the work and the viewer. It makes clear the knowledge-power relations that exist in the museum. The institution appropriates and commodifies the artwork and inevitably displays that work as a curiosity or precious object. In Judd's terms the "crucial space surrounding the work" is thus institutionalised and rendered discontinuous. He writes:

Almost all recent art is conquered as soon as it's made, since it's first shown for sale and once sold is exhibited as foreign in the alien museums. The public has no idea of art other than that it is something portable that can be bought. There is no constructive effort; there is no cooperative effort. This situation is primitive in relation to a few earlier and better times.<sup>8</sup>

Presenting Ryman and Judd's work, the Tate Gallery uses masking tape as a vitrescent agent. However, as with a badly scratched vitrine, the palpability of the masking tape draws attention to a compromised situation. This is a situation made all the more acute by the severity of the Minimalist style.

## 2.

Minimalist sculpture, by dint of its formality, asserts itself as one of the most severe aesthetic endeavours of contemporary sculpture. The apparent severity of its basic forms provokes far-reaching questions about its

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8. Judd, "Statement for the Chinati Foundation", p. 111.

antecedents, and implications for any meaningful integration of Minimalist aesthetics into the wider category of Modernism. Although it is particularly rigorous in its formal presentation, and remarkably useful as a resource for sculpture, the term Minimalist is a complex term referring to both Minimal and Post-Minimal work. The conjunction of the two creates an expectation that it is possible to project backwards in time in order to find proto-types that evolved into the later manifestation of what is Minimalist. Recourse to putative embryonic forms may strengthen the validity of claims for aesthetic authority, and it may also clarify the resulting compound aesthetic, but it cannot establish it.

Accounts of Minimalist sculpture that treat it as a fashion or style are misleading and lead to a degree of confusion. In order to generate a simplified stylistic category of the work, Minimal sculpture is indiscriminately and confusingly juxtaposed with Post-Minimal sculpture in such accounts. This state of affairs inevitably draws upon earlier work that may be stylistically similar and adds another layer of confusion. A recent review of the work of Tony Smith and Christopher Wilmarth, established Minimalism, replete “with its hard-edged geometries”, as “a ‘movement’ based solely on visual and stylistic similarities”.<sup>9</sup> Putting aside Tony Smith’s strenuous denials of the Minimalist label, impugning the Minimalist movement by slighting its agenda as formalist is a now standard misconstruction.

Most significant is the fact that Minimal sculpture is viewed retrospectively through the filter of Post-Minimal sculpture. It is this tendency that causes the most profound layer of confusion. Post-Minimal sculpture addresses a different experience of time than does Minimal sculpture. The difference is centred on the issue of process in the work, a point that I will explore later in this study.

Also, a degree of confusion is generally apparent inasmuch as the political dimension of Minimal and Post-Minimal work has been completely unrecognised, or disregarded. The formalism encountered in Minimal and Post-Minimal sculpture is not identified as critical distance. Instead, that formalism has been identified with style and fashion, as if bereft of any political implication. Both manifestations of Minimalist sculpture engage with questions of the ideological stance entailed in art production. Related to this is that little or no recognition has been given to the lineage of American Realism and its attendant vocabulary, most notably the idea of the vernacular. These are significant issues because Post-Minimal work is, to some extent and in some way, resourced by Minimal sculpture. Minimal sculpture opens the possibility of process and context as sculptural concerns, but not to the extent later realized by the importance of time for Post-Minimal work.

Reliance upon a stylistic interpretation of Minimalist sculpture ultimately results in a discussion of formalism. The usual generalisation is that Minimalism was a rejection of Abstract Expressionism—a rejection based upon the disavowal of both the craft aspects of art production and of the primacy of psychological aesthetics.<sup>10</sup> Such an account recognizes the

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9. Mason Klein, “Tony Smith/Christopher Wilmarth”, *Artforum* (April, 1998), p. 117.

10. See Barbara Rose, “A B C Art”, pp. 274-297; Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture”, pp. 180-186; Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood”, pp. 116-147, in Gregory Battcock ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968).

refusal inherent in formalism by deflecting the critical thrust into a discussion of style and stylistic similarities. The refusal in formalism constitutes itself as critical distance by recourse to the idea of a discipline. But the idea of discipline is resistant to easy naturalisation and, therefore, to cultural absorption.

The group of American sculptors most prominently tagged with the label Minimalist includes Don Judd, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, John McCracken, Anne Truitt, Sol LeWitt, Larry Bell, Stephen Antonakos, Beverly Pepper, and Robert Morris. Later additions to that list would include Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter DeMaria, Eva Hesse, Keith Sonnier, and James Turrell.

A shared attitude of critical distance from mainstream Modernist sculpture is common to all Minimalist works. As far as I am concerned, that mainstream of Modernist sculpture distinct from Minimalist work is best characterised as Vitalist. In broad terms the difference between the two positions is a philosophical one. Whereas Vitalism is based upon holism, Minimalism is based on materialism. A materialist position maintains that nothing exists but matter and its movements and modifications. From this premiss it follows that consciousness and volition depend entirely on material agency. The hierarchical scheme that results from this understanding locates physicality as the primary level, the biological level as the secondary, and the socio-economic and cultural level as tertiary.<sup>11</sup> However, experience of the world is not simply a matter of automatically recording external stimuli, but requires elaboration on the part of an active human agent.<sup>12</sup> From this it follows that recourse to the 'given' facts of external reference in the world requires a reciprocal relationship between the referent and its significance. The heuristic method of perception that results from this relationship remains perpetually open to inquiry and modification by the human agent. However, such a process of inquiry and interpretation is not one that arises from pure thought, but is intricately bound-up in constant reference to the world. The existential relationship that is unavoidable between the world and thought gives form to thought.

The apparent 'coolness' of Minimal artworks is in marked contrast to the overt material manipulation and facture of sculptural surfaces that characterises Vitalist sculpture and, indeed, the Vitalist tradition that persists in both sculpture and painting. Examples of such overt Vitalistic manipulation of materials range from David Smith grinding stainless steel to the arrested tactility of Rodin and Rosso's clay forms. Such apparent Minimalist 'coolness' was seen to be extremely formal in distinction to the more visceral and expressive approach accompanying what I am calling Vitalist sculpture. However, the conventions of both Minimalist and Vitalist art production involve the naturalisation of artifice in order to facilitate the handling of inert material.

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11. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism* (London: Verso, 1975), p. 34.

12. Timpanaro, *On Materialism*, pp. 55-57.

## 2. Artifice and Vitalism.

### 2a. Artifice. Of the factitious and the fetish.

#### 1.

Abstract sculpture, and in particular Minimalist sculpture, provides a paradigm for the artificial. The critical terms 'factitious', 'facture', 'fetish', and 'artifice' designate what is done and what is artificial. 'Artifice' is distinguished as abstract, in that it is removed from the natural world. Artifice belongs to culture and to the intervention in nature. Artifice is identified as the province of human intervention, modification, or adaptation. The assumption here is that human beings and their products are not natural. An acceptance of the contrary view that artifice is human and therefore intrinsically natural raises the issue of degree, or remove, from naturalness. What is presented as natural therefore determines the perception of artifice. Attempts to present abstract sculpture as vital and animated are motivated by a desire to present human constructs in terms that are naturalised. Any such presentation is designed to bridge the gap that is perceived to lie between the imaginary and the real.

The evocation of a natural and fundamental force in Vitalism, validates both artistic activity and its attendant discussion. Since a vital force is fundamental to life, then it seems that, by implication, what is presented as being rooted in it is essential, real, and incontrovertible. In its most basic formulation, Vitalism is an abstract concept that is designed to explain the difference between animate and inanimate forms.

The consistent treatment of an abstraction as if it were something substantially existing allows fabrications to appear to be convincing. Naturalisation is, therefore, evidence for the presence of a process that reproduces, and also provides, the means of understanding the activity involved in the construction of appearance. The presentation of the artwork and the ideas supporting it are caused to appear to be natural, as if circumstances could not be otherwise. That which is alien is conventionalised and integrated into the prevailing condition, which is assumed to be natural.

The artwork is rendered as conventional in terms of an intellectual and hence ideological position, and meaning is extended in order to ground the artwork and diminish its artifice. At the same time art production configures ideological positions aesthetically, thus naturalising them.

The interconnections between the factitiousness of art objects seen and understood as ideological artifacts and naturalisation understood as a process of integration and perpetuation coincide over the issue of what is natural and what is artificial. Extending meaning to a factitious object makes a fetish of both the object and the principle(s) underscoring that meaning. In the case of meanings compatible with the dominant ideology, the prevailing aesthetic is further demonstrated to be the most natural and uncontentious one. The apparent naturalness of a state of affairs soothes explicit perceptions and makes of them a generalised background perception.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty establishes the primary importance for the workings of perception in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, first

translated into English in 1962. Sculptors as diverse as Alberto Giacometti and Richard Serra have acknowledged its importance to them. In the preface Merleau-Ponty writes that “perception is not a science of the world, it is not even an act, a deliberate taking up of a position; it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them. The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions”.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Smithson voices his interest in such a world as the producer of an art whose aesthetic is sharply defined from the dominant aesthetic of his day, whose explicit perceptions are at odds with the situation in which he finds himself. “I’m not really discontent. I’m just interested in exploring the apparatus I’m being threaded through, you know, and to me that’s a legitimate interest”.<sup>14</sup> The apparatus through which he, along with everyone else, is being threaded is the ideology of capitalism and the aesthetic of Modernism. In sculpture that dominant aesthetic is remarkably consistent in its adherence to Vitalist principles, which are presented as fundamental and natural.

Speaking of conceptions of fundamental order and against the dominant aesthetic, Robert Smithson says, “No, it wouldn’t be organic, because the earth isn’t organic. It’s inorganic mineral or sediment or strata”.<sup>15</sup> Smithson and his interviewer, Willoughby Sharp, take organicism to be the result of anthropomorphism and a concomitant projection of Vitalism. Describing himself as anti- Frank Lloyd Wright, Robert Smithson characterises his viewpoint as tending to the inorganic rather than to the organic.

The organic seems to be part of an idea of nature. I’m more interested in a kind of denaturalizing, or in things more in terms of artifice, rather than in any kind of naturalism. That’s why I insist on the notion of art. ... My perception tends toward an inorganic idea. The systems arise out of this and they tend to follow a kind of crystalline structure rather than a biomorphic structure. It’s just the inclination I have. It’s not based on any idea of visceral expressiveness.<sup>16</sup>

I see no reason for viewing the landscape as something natural. It could be conceived in terms of an abstract system. ... It doesn’t necessarily have to be conceived of as an environment. The natural environment to me doesn’t exist. I mean the landscape is coextensive with my mind. And each site that I select becomes in a sense an extension of the abstract faculties of my mind, and this is translated into a three-dimensional system.... Which is the work. The work is in a sense logical.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. x-xi.

14. Robert Smithson, “Conversation with Bruce Kurtz, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1972”, in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, ed. Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 200.

15. Robert Smithson interviewed by Willoughby Sharp, in “Degrees of Disorder” by Suzaan Boettger, *Art in America*, (December, 1998), p. 76.

16. Boettger, “Degrees of Disorder”, p. 75.

17. Boettger, “Degrees of Disorder”, p. 79.



Rationality and perceptualism are fused in Smithson's perception of fundamental order. By constantly trying to think dialectically Smithson arrives at an aesthetic position based upon situations rather than objects, and the inorganic rather than the organic.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.

The strength and persistence of the seemingly organic or seemingly natural tradition of Vitalism in modern sculpture, from Analytic Cubism to the present, makes the phenomenon of Minimalist sculpture appear even more rarefied on a conceptual plane than it is on a formal level. The diminution of the importance of the expressive led Minimalist artists to emphasize in their work the factitious as fabricated rather than fetishized material. Factitious and fetishized materials both remain products of artifice, but the implications or connotations of each are vastly different.

As such, Vitalism, because it is such a vivid paradigm, requires examination in order to disentangle stylistic confusion and to understand Minimalism as a counter-construction. The appearance of Tony Smith and Ronald Bladen's work in the Minimalist canon is, as I will show, a consequence of not understanding the gap between a Minimalist and a Vitalist aesthetic. Also, it seems that some seemingly Minimalist sculptors incorporate organic or Vitalistic elements into their works. Eva Hesse's work comes immediately to mind. Does the fact that Hesse used Vitalistic elements in her work declare that work to be more Vitalistic than Minimalist, Vitalism not Minimalism? Again, the dialectical area between a Vitalist and Minimalist position needs to be examined. In order to address and disentangle these strands of thought, it is necessary to establish what Vitalism implies for artistic production.

As I have tried to show, a major component of Vitalism's longevity and attraction is the perception of it as something fundamental. The basic idea is that Vitalism is essential to the human being as that vital spark essential to life and its vitality. Understanding Vitalism as the province of organic entities paves the way to establishing human reality as irredeemably Vitalist. Vitalism is understood to be primary—essential and immediate. The attempt to enliven the surface of a piece of sculpture is the attempt to imbue it with life, to animate the inert material. We may talk about 'invigorating the surface', or 'making the form dynamic'. In short, the attempt is to produce in an inanimate object an effect of vital power or the vital force of life. Vitalism is fetishistic in this regard.

In the Greek mythological story, Pygmalion (the Cypriot sculptor) needed the power of a deity (Aphrodite) to animate a statue in order to make it come to life.<sup>19</sup> In later versions of the myth the sculpture was identified as Galatea. The agalmatophiliac sculptor reverses the earlier story of the Propoetides—a cult of sexually promiscuous women who are turned to stone by and for their practices. The wording of the myth of the Propoetides suggests that their practice of commercial sex hardened them rather than literally turning them

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18. Boettger, "Degrees of Disorder", p. 80.

19. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*: Book Ten. See in particular *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. David R. Slavitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 201-203.

into stone.<sup>20</sup> Pygmalion serves as a specific example of a more generalised character in Greek culture, namely Daedalus (Daidalos) the maze maker, the artificer. The artificer, the character who is skilled in devising and making, also figures in Greek mythology as Hephaestus and in Egyptian as Ptah. Daedalus, Hephaestus and Ptah are all associated with this notion of artifice. Hephaestus was the god of fire and the forge: it was he who made the intricate metal bowl that was capable of running around on its own legs. Ptah was one of the creator gods for the Egyptians, and patron of every type of craftsmanship. It was he that, according to the Sixth Dynasty (2181-2145 BC) Memphite drama,

gave birth to the gods,  
He made the towns,  
He established the provinces,  
He placed the gods in their shrines,  
He settled their offerings,  
He established their shrines,  
He made their bodies according to their wishes,  
Thus the gods entered into their bodies  
Of every wood, every stone, every clay,  
Everything that grows upon him,  
In which they came to be.  
They were gathered to him, all the gods with their kas,  
Content, United with the lord of the Two Lands.<sup>21</sup>

Ptah made the bodies of the gods according to their wishes, which indicates that the form was culturally predetermined. Such formal predetermination may have been either emblematic or totemic representations of a particular place, since the provinces, towns, and shrines had already been established. These requirements having been met allowed the gods to take possession of their appropriate images, and become embodied. Ptah, the artificer, then became the focus for all the deities and their immortal spirits—kas. Sarah Morris writes in *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art*:

Ultimately, classical attitudes toward statuary as an imitation of life, including those works attributed to Daidalos, have their roots in ... poetic praise of art. Comparative as well as internal evidence makes these [poetic] passages critical to the evolution of the myth of artist-as-magician, common in traditions also found outside Greece.<sup>22</sup>

For the ancient Greeks sculpture was not only animated by deity and its creator, it voiced that animating force. Morris quotes a speaking statue of Hermes: "I am Hermes with a voice from Daidalos made of wood [but] I came here by walking on my own".<sup>23</sup> In antique Greek sculpture a herm is a

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20. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*: Book Ten, Slavitt, p. 201, lines 233-240.

21. Jill Kamil, *The Ancient Egyptians* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo, 1984, rev ed 1996), p 50.

22. Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 227.

23. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art*, p. 222.

squared pillar surmounted by a head of Hermes, which functions as a boundary marker. An arrangement or group of herms demarcates a particular ritual or inhabited space like a temple or city. The herm, as a speaking representation of Hermes, claims three things for Daedalus the artificer: speech; motility; and facture or factitiousness. The result of Daedalus' labour is to materialise a fetish to such an extent that the sculpture of Hermes, the presence of a herm, claims ambulatory powers. It not only declares itself, it also articulates a precinct.

In partial answer to his own question concerning the stylised symbolic decoration involved with sculpture as architectural ornament, George Hersey discusses the motifs of sacrifice. In *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* he speculates about architectural decorative orders and their longevity.

This has led me to speculate that the ancients, who had always considered it important that sacrifices be remembered and recorded ... at a certain point saw their temples as assemblages of the materials, including food, used in sacrifice. This vision—which may not have been established until the first century B.C. or so—imparted to temple ornament a sacred, indeed tabooed, nature. Every molding was determined by strict rules for size, placement, and shape. And, in the same way that nowadays we obey all sorts of incest, dietary, and other taboos long after the myths purporting to explain them have been forgotten, so in later centuries architects have continued the ritual complexities of classicism even after all consciousness of a sacrificial meaning has ebbed away. Similarly, we perpetuate the rules for the “common-practice” period (roughly from Bach through Gounod) in musical harmony; and when a trained composer breaks those rules, he knows he is doing so, and hence salutes their existence.<sup>24</sup>

A belief in the idea that some vital force can or does animate inert material has long been an established if unrecognised cultural habit, Pygmalion's thoroughly representational sculpture provides us with a figurative example; sacrificial stakes in the form of stele, obelisks, or classical columns provide us with what might be regarded as abstract examples. Pygmalion's shaping of inert material into figurative form, which is then taken to be a surrogate of something lifelike, something imbued with some vital force, is akin to the linguistic form of a trope. The figurative is used there to animate what is otherwise an unanimated form. The rootedness of this habit of perception, in regarding architectural motifs, is traced by Hersey to the beginning of European culture.

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24. George Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p 2. This discussion by Hersey is a furtherance of the work of Vincent Scully. See Scully, *The Earth, The Temple, and the Gods* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962, rev. ed. 1979).

In his book on the philosophy of ancient Egyptian art and culture, *Idea into Image*, Erik Hornung explores the idea of the Ka as a vital force that transcends the death of any human being and is its spiritual double.<sup>25</sup> Hornung explains:

The *ka* is all that enlivens. It is both a life force and the enjoyment of life—or in even more concrete terms well-being and appetite. The vital energy that flows from the *ka* experiences only a temporary interruption in death. Moreover, the new life that continually streams from the *ka* is not restricted to human bodies alone: statues too can contain a *ka*. Without the *ka* there is no life whatsoever.<sup>26</sup>

It is especially interesting that the Ka is believed capable of animating inert matter: stele, obelisks, columns, abstract forms and representational figures. A little bit of divine intervention to get the force moving was all that Pygmalion needed to animate his sculpture of Galatea. Later, in a more secularised society, a bit of aesthetic ideology would do the trick. Modern artists, American and European alike, see themselves as able to provide this vital spark. This is David Smith: “The quality of vitality I feel comes first—other orders follow”.<sup>27</sup> This feeling that Smith has for vitalized form is amplified as follows, “In contemporary work, force, power, ecstasy, structure, intuitive accident, statements of action dominate the object. Or they power the object with belligerent vitality”.<sup>28</sup>

Henry Moore is even more straightforward in his expression of Vitalism in 1960:

Sculpture, for me, must have life in it, vitality. It must have a feeling for organic form, a certain pathos and warmth. ... Purely abstract sculpture seems to me to be an activity that would be better fulfilled in another art, such as architecture. ... But sculpture is different from architecture. It creates organisms that must be complete in themselves. ... A sculpture must have its own life.<sup>29</sup>

Architecture carries a residue of the earlier European tradition of vitalized building materials, and buildings are scrupulously adorned with decorative referents that derive from ancient Greek temples. Sacrificial paraphernalia such as dentation, horns, bones, bindings, or offerings of food reinforce the connection between early architecture and organic symbolism. The interconnections between sculpture and architecture make architectural ornamentation and early sculpture difficult to disentangle.

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25. Erik Hornung, *Idea into Image: Essays on Ancient Egyptian Thought* (New York: Timken, 1992).

26. Hornung, *Idea into Image*, p. 175.

27. David Smith, *David Smith by David Smith* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1968), p. 77.

28. Smith, *David Smith by David Smith*, p. 72.

29. Henry Moore, *Henry Moore on Sculpture* (London: Macdonald, 1966), p. 58.

Columns, in particular, take on symbolic significance as a substitute for the human or animal sacrifice. As Hersey points out “the victim was the unquestioned vessel of the god”.<sup>30</sup> He argues that with the departure of the victim’s spirit a vacuum was created that was filled by the god. The ideological significance of columns as representations of vested, inalienable, and natural authority is of less interest at this point than the way they animate the authority of the god.

Hornung’s remark about the vital force being able to reside in a piece of Egyptian sculpture, or Hersey’s argument for the simultaneous identification of the shrine with both victim and the god locates the origin of Vitalism in antiquity and probably beyond. Hornung remarks, on the subject of personifying geographical locations, that “ancient cultures had a capacity, which is difficult for us to comprehend, for encountering their environment in personal form—for seeing the face of a deity in a salient or even an insignificant feature of the landscape, such as a tree or an animal”.<sup>31</sup> Autochthonous peoples do not view the landscape as insignificant in any of its details. There may be a hierarchy of significance, but the inhabitants of a particular landscape are remarkably finely attuned to the nuances of that landscape, which is understood to be charged and alive. The attribution of spiritual significance is not limited to specific features such as a tree, or a stream, but may be combinatory, as in the conjunction of the line of a hillside and a tree or a stone. Such lines might well be taken as establishing precinctual limits or the limits of the land or territory of a particular people. Since the landscape is fully animated for ancient cultures the combination of significant detail is served by a metonymic rather than a metaphoric function. In their essay *Myth and Reality* H. and H.A. Frankfurt make this point about patterns of thought in the ancient Near East:

The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an ‘It’; for ancient- and also for primitive-man it is a ‘Thou’. ... This formulation goes far beyond the usual ‘animistic’ or ‘personalistic’ interpretations. It shows up, in fact, the inadequacies of these commonly accepted theories. For a relation between ‘I’ and ‘Thou’ is absolutely *sui generis*.<sup>32</sup>

The Frankfurts distinguish that an “I-and-Thou” relationship has several significant differences from that of scientifically ordered types of relations. Most significant is that “Thou” is a “live presence,” and one that “reveals itself”.<sup>33</sup> Further, a “Thou” is always unique, while an “It” may be related and classified in terms of other objects.

Primitive man simply does not know an inanimate world.  
For this very reason he does not ‘personify’ inanimate

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30. Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*, p. 19.

31. Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, New York: Cornell, 1982), p. 74.

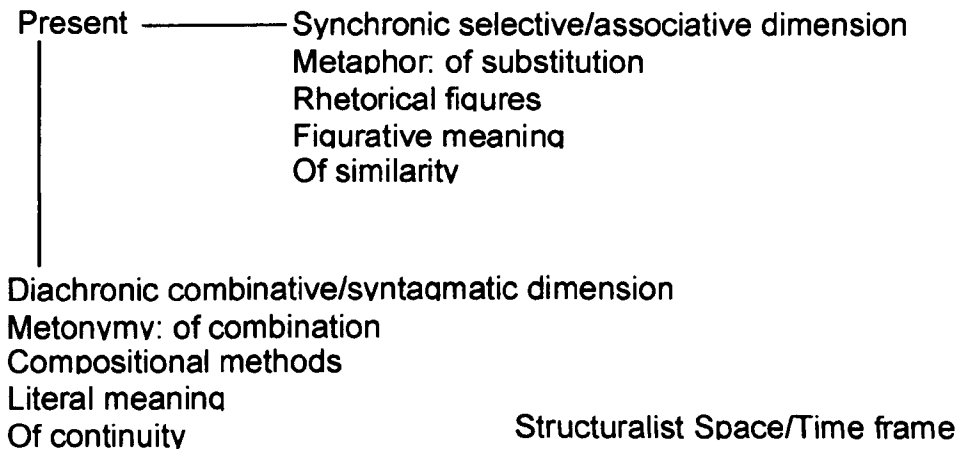
32. H. and H.A. Frankfurt, “Myth and Reality”, in *Before Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), pp. 12-13.

33. Frankfurt, “Myth and Reality”, pp. 12-13.

phenomena nor does he fill an empty world with the ghosts of the dead, as 'animism' would have us believe. ... The world appears to primitive man neither inanimate nor empty but redundant with life; and life has individuality, in man and beast and plant, and in every phenomenon which confronts man... Any phenomenon may at any time face him, not as 'It', but as 'Thou'.<sup>34</sup>

The structuralist spatio-temporal scheme proposed by Roman Jakobson consists of two axes that exist as orientated time located within a continuous and unbroken space. These two axes (see figure 1) correspond to the devices used in poetic construction, but are here extended to artistic construction in general.

Figure 1



They are also seen as formative since they are produced by the two modes of language itself. The different conceptions of time entailed by these two aspects of meaning formation are, first, the diachronic and historical, that is to say that which is formed through time; and second, the synchronic and current axis that is formed across time.

A position that espouses a fetishized use of material will necessarily be dependent upon metaphor and association. Such an approach depends upon similarity and substitution as the keys to producing a fetishized meaning. By way of contrast, contiguity and literal meaning centre attention upon composition and fabrication. The predominantly factitious use of materials depends upon metonymy and combination for meaning formation.

Any authoritative interpretation, in order to validate its authority based upon the present moment, may present either of the two faces in order to assert itself. The associative interpretation may conform to temporal improvisation in the present based on current usage, or neologisms. The unassociative, constructional approach is founded in the rigorous sequence of temporal events, and is an attempt to attribute some significance to the role of time.

34. Frankfurt, "Myth and Reality", p. 14.

In Egyptian culture, sites sacred to Osiris were associated with groves of trees. According to Cyril Aldred in his book *The Egyptians*:

Several trees were regarded as sacred, such as the perseae (*mimusops schimperi*), the unidentified ished tree of Heliopolis, and the sycamore, inhabited by a goddess, sometimes Nut but usually Hathor, who is represented as leaning out of the trunk to pour a cooling draught of water for the deceased in paradise. Individual trees growing in isolation were often venerated as sacred, their shade sought by a particular god.<sup>35</sup>

Other trees that are native to Egypt include the juniper, acacia, tamarisk, and palm. Both tamarisk and sycamore trees are associated with the Middle Kingdom funerary temple of Neb-hepet-Re Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri by IES. Edwards in his book *The Pyramids of Egypt*.<sup>36</sup> He maintains that the trees were clearly planted as an integral part of the general layout of the site. Eight of a projected twenty-eight sycamore trees, and fifty-five tamarisks were actually planted. Sandstone sculptures of the king were placed in conjunction with the sycamore trees. And, in particular, he connects a shrine/tomb within the complex with the king and Osiris.<sup>37</sup> According to the myth of Osiris a protective sycamore tree grew around his remains after they were washed ashore at the mouth of the Nile.<sup>38</sup> He also states that the overall form of the temple as a mound is redolent with Osirian implications “as a magical symbol for both creation and renewal of life”. The temple precinct therefore includes the structure that is the mound, the cultivated groves of trees, and the Nile itself. As Edwards goes on to remark, the Nile “was such an important element in the Osirian creed”. Nilotic myths celebrate the river as a god under the name of Hapi. However, by floating as a corpse downstream in the river Osiris is the dominant mythic figure connected to the Nile. In addition to the symbolic aspects, the entire Egyptian agricultural system that was centred around the Nile closely resembles an oasis pattern in which the role of trees is crucial to the eco-system.

Trees, pillars, or columns, demarcate sanctuaries as ritual spaces designating the habitation of a deity, and are littered with tokens that are intended to materialise that deity.<sup>39</sup> In particular, the Djed column or pillar symbolises a re-membering of the dead god Osiris. Such columns occur very early in Egyptian culture, and even in their earliest manifestations are already abstract figurative representations. Djed columns mark a resumption of time resulting from a hiatus due to the death and resurrection of a god—whose

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35. Cyril Aldred, *The Egyptians* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1961), p. 57.

36. IES. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (London: Penguin, 1947), p. 194.

37. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, p. 199.

38. SH. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology* (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 68.

39. Demountable wooden posts perhaps three metres high, probably “decorated with garlands and fillets at the time of the festival” were used to demarcate an inner and outer sanctum in the Corinthian space sacred to Poseidon. Earliest dated fragments are from the fourth century BC and are dedicated to Demeter. Demeter herself is frequently linked with the cult of Poseidon. Elizabeth R. Gebhard, “The evolution of a pan-Hellenic sanctuary” in *Greek Sanctuaries: New Approaches*, edited Nanno Marinatos and Robin Hägg (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 169-170.

demise, as an infinite being, must disrupt and revitalize time itself. The Osirian cult is the Egyptian cult of rebirth and endurance. As a definition of the Djed pillar Erik Hornung writes, in *The Valley of the Kings*, that it was the “Egyptian symbol showing a bundle of stalks bound together and the homonym for the words meaning ‘to be stable’, ‘enduring’. Stability was in fact the significance of the amulets shaped in this fashion”.<sup>40</sup> The image on the Djed pillar contains the flail and shepherd’s crook as connotators of pastoral existence and cyclical renewal. However, of more interest from my point of view, thinking about Vitalism and modern sculpture, is the idea that the pillar in its entirety bears the connotation of revitalism and rejuvenation.

The Djed pillar depicts an assemblage of elements equivalent to the recombination of the dead Osiris as affected by Isis—his sister/wife. The stacking of elements leads to the “vertebrae-like image, [that] symbolized the god in the celebration of his resurrection”.<sup>41</sup> On days given over to the celebration of Osiris’s continuity, hollow or hollowed-out trees used as containers for effigies of Osiris or replicas of the Djed pillar were set alight and burned.<sup>42</sup>

The addition of ropes to the Djed column converted its meaning from Osiris to Seth his brother. Seth killed Osiris and dismembered his body. He was then bound and executed as punishment for this fratricide. The ropes added to the Djed column represent the binding and execution of Seth. Nevertheless, even though the bound Djed column represents the dead Seth, it is still imbued with the vital life force. A modern echo of the equation of the sacrificial stake, or spit, and remembrance is to be found in the use of the obelisk form as a war memorial, especially those memorials associated with the First World War. Remembrance and revitalization were often extended to the existing memorials by the addition to the lists of military casualties of the dead from the Second World War.

Egyptian obelisks were sacred to the sun god and represented the rays of the sun. The pyramidion at the summit was capped with electrum, which, as an alloy of gold and silver, was intended to reflect the light and the sky. Usually erected in pairs, the eastern obelisk represented the rising sun and the god Amun, while the western one was dedicated to the setting sun and the god Atum.<sup>43</sup> The cyclical nature of the rising and setting sun establishes, at an early point, the idea of a temporal continuum bracketed by surcease and revitalization in connection with obelisks.

The idea of arresting the motility of a piece of sculpture by means of binding is also found in Greek sculpture as Socrates in the *Meno* pointed out, “unless bound, they run away and escape, but if they are fastened down, they

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40. Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity* (New York: Timken, 1990), p. 206.

41. Jane B. Sellers, *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 143.

42. Immolation has severe consequences in Egyptian culture, and the consignment of the siblings Osiris and Seth, in the form of the Djed pillar, to the flames is complex in its detail. However, the broad implications are of fratricidal death, re-memberment, condemnation, banishment, and renewal.

43. Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks Of Egypt* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1977), pp. 3-14.



remain in place".<sup>44</sup> Socrates was particularly well placed to understand the fetishized role of Greek sculpture, and especially herms, given his early background in stone carving. He would have been extremely aware of the role that mass communication—in this case as statuary, potentially serves as a vehicle for the dominant ideology to attempt to manipulate the general population. In the *Euthyphro* he says: "Your statements ... look like the work of Daedalus, founder of my line. If I had made them, and they were my positions, no doubt you would poke fun at me, and say that, being in his line, the figures I construct in words run off, as did his statues, and will not stay where they are put".<sup>45</sup> The elusiveness of language is attributed to Daedalus because of his animated figures, and Socrates affirms his own lineage as an artificer and manipulator both of stone and words.<sup>46</sup>

Bernard Frischer tells us, in *The Sculpted Word*, that Thales claims, "all things, including stones, are filled with gods". Thales' motivation for this claim, according to Frischer, is to implicitly validate the tyrannical rule of Thrasyloulos.<sup>47</sup> Of particular interest to this study is the idea that the deification of objects is broadened in order to weaken the existing aristocratic identification with sacred sites. Thales is seen to be expanding a Vitalist view of the world, but not to be challenging its central premiss, in order to ideologically ramify a particular historical moment. Vitalism as an abstract idea is thereby given even greater range, impetus, and longevity by this apparently 'democratic' manoeuvre. Thales' acknowledged position as the first major Greek philosopher indicates the pervasive and foundational character of Vitalism for both Greek and later Western culture.

Frischer later tells us that Greek statues were not only thought capable of independent movement, but also that "in wartime, cities chained down their cult statues lest any of them escape and betray the town to the enemy. Cult statues whose behavior was deemed worse were flogged". He goes on to discuss the belief that statues were capable of exacting revenge, and even of exciting passion. As an example he cites the story of "the notorious Kleisophos of Selymbria", who became so enamoured with the statue of a maiden goddess that he secreted himself in her temple in order to make love to her, a story that carries an echo of Pygmalion's agalmatophilic feelings for Galatea as a statue.<sup>48</sup>

The idea of living statues or statues imbued with a vital life force is, according to Morris, particularly associated with Athens. Athene plays a decisive role in Aeschylus's Oresteian trilogy. Orestes is in flight from the Furies for the crime of matricide.<sup>49</sup> He is advised by Apollo to leave Delphi

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44. Morris, *Daedalus and the origins of Greek Art*, p. 223.

45. Plato, *Euthyphro* in *The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 180.

46. Socrates' claim to be of the lineage of Daedalus may also refer to his father Sophroniskos who was a stone-mason or stone carver. Indra Kagis McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 2.

47. Bernard Frischer, *The Sculpted Word* (Berkeley & London: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 16-19.

48. Frischer, *The Sculpted Word*, pp. 114 -115.

49. Aeschylus, "The Eumenides". *The Oresteian Trilogy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), p. 161. The Furies are pursuing Orestes for killing a blood relation—his mother, a situation similar to the Seth Osiris fratricide that resulted in the Djed pillar.

and seek the help of Athene. This recourse to Athene reflects the rise in power of Athens as the new political centre. Athene as the deity of both the sanctuary and the effigy is evoked in order to save Orestes from the primeval power of the avenging Furies. For his own safety Orestes needs to be physically present in the shrine where Athene is materially present. In order to maximize the possibility of Athene's benevolent intervention, Aeschylus has Orestes clasp the statue of Athene in her own sanctuary. The power bestowed by her 'house' and 'holy effigy' is alone sufficient to aid Orestes in summoning Athene's presence to help in his search for justice.<sup>50</sup> The conjunction of place and likeness urge the materialization of the deity. The object in its setting contains the illusion of life, albeit a liveliness that is restrained and restricted to a particular place by symbolic bindings. Hersey explains "a cavetto molding, common in column bases, gets its name from heavy rope, and a torus ... is also a rope, one that is twisted or slung. And a column base composed of toruses and cavetti often does resemble a set of tautened ropes". He continues by explaining that scotia moldings derive their name from the Greek goddess of darkness and underworld things. The pronounced shadows that are formed by the scotia molding reinforce the association with sacrifice and restraint.<sup>51</sup>

Greek columns, seen in this light, continue the tradition of the Djed column by carrying the double message of endurance and revitalization.<sup>52</sup> The columns of the Greek temple provide a cultural transcription of the idea of human sacrifice, deification, and rebirth from Egyptian to the early Christian traditions. Columns serving as surrogate groves of trees or sacrificial stakes surround ancient Greek temples and define the precinct of the god.

## 5.

Certain aspects of Carl Andre's Minimalist sculpture are clarified by juxtaposing it with early sculpture and architecture. The titles of some of the works in the *Element* series, first proposed in 1960, draws upon Greek references such as, *Tau*, 1970, *Tau and Threshold*, 1971, *Post and Lintel*, 1970, *Pyre*, 1971. The primary unit that forms the premiss for the *Element* series is *Herm*, 1976. Significantly herm is preferred to term or terminus for the title of this sculpture. Term is the Roman form for the Greek herm, where Hermes was the messenger for the gods and as such carried the connotation of being the harbinger of death.

The poetic dimension of Andre's work adds a level of meaning to his otherwise starkly minimal *Herm*. The freestanding, sawn, block of cedar implies other dimensions of association bearing upon the primal, the natural, and even extending to purification and the reductive agency of fire. The use of herm, as a title, carries the connotation of a squared pillar that serves as a boundary marker. This distinction between Hermes the messenger of the gods and harbinger of death and the squared pillar is a crucial one for Andre. Andre needs the associational chain of boundary, precinct, block, square, and

50. Aeschylus, "The Eumenidies", p. 155.

51. Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*, p. 21.

52. The vexed question of Egyptian suzerainty of ancient Greece is left in abeyance in this study. For the argument for Egyptian influence see Martin Bernal, *Black Athena*, Vols. 1 & 2 (London: Free Association Books, Vol. 1 1987, Vol. 2 1991).

pillar to be the primary one. Although the secondary associational chain of deity, antiquity, communication, transport, and impending death, is not without relevance, his emphasis is placed on the object and not the god. Boundary markers provide a double level of meaning, by marking the geographical or topographical limit, and also the boundary between life and death—literally a terminus. These sets of meanings probably reflect Andre's familiarity with the work of Brancusi as much as they do his interest in ancient associations and implications. In particular the entire *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble of Brancusi and his *Boundary Marker* come to mind as works integrally involved with figuring both precinct and the borderlines between states. When Thomas Kellein writes about the architectural associations of Minimalist work, and particularly of John McCracken's work, those associations lend themselves just as strongly to Carl Andre's work. Andre wrote of modern sculpture:

The course of development  
Sculpture as form  
Sculpture as structure  
Sculpture as place.<sup>53</sup>

Sculpture as place equally well describes the works of McCracken and Judd. The ancient relationship of sculpture to its precise location, its precinctual nature, is reactivated by the Minimalist concern for sculpture as place. The space enclosed by the walls or other boundaries of a particular place or building, or by an imaginary line drawn around it is the definition of a precinct. The sacred nature of such spaces in antiquity is replaced in Minimalist sculpture by an ontological intensity. Andre elucidates his notion of sculpture as place as follows:

The kind of place I mean is not to be confused with an environment. It is futile for an artist to try to create an environment because you have an environment around you all the time. Any living organism has an environment. A place is an area within an environment which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous. Everything is an environment, but a place is related particularly to both the general qualities of the environment and the particular qualities of the work that has been done.<sup>54</sup>

Ubiety expresses the condition of being in respect of a place or location; it is a local relationship of where-ness. As 'ubiquity' is to be present or appear everywhere, to be omnipresent, so 'ubication' is its counter-part by the fact of being in a certain place. As the viewing agent encounters the work as a site, that same agent inevitably is subjected to ubiation. Including oneself in the situation entails apperception of the entire encounter—resulting in a self-reflexivity that stresses the materiality of every aspect of that encounter. Andre indicates the inter-related nature of ubiety when he says "I think the

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53. Quoted in "The Razed Sites of Carl Andre" by David Bourdon, in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, p. 103.

54. Quoted in *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, ed. Lucy R. Lippard (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 47.

object is just a locus, embodying some sort of transaction which is between ... the reader, the recipient, the sender, the social situation, the art, whatever".<sup>55</sup>

The material starkness of Andre's *Herm* brings the associational possibilities of the title into an abrupt combination with its physicality. The freestanding block embodies and promotes the play of meaning. When Andre uses multiple blocks of wood in the landscape as he does, for example in *Secant*, 1977, he does so by reworking *Herm* in module form. *Secant* is made of the *Herm* module laid end to end in a line of one hundred units. The line itself makes evident the contours of the land and makes conspicuous the specificity of that place. *Lever*, 1966, *Reef*, 1966, and *Fall*, 1968 all fulfill the same function, but do so in relation to architectural locations in which 'end' as terminus is architecturally specific. David Bourdon, in *The Razed Sites of Carl Andre*, as early as 1966 remarks:

Like most of Andre's work, *Lever* was designed for a specific area. Andre deliberately chose a room with two entrances, so that from one entrance the spectator had a vista of an unbroken line of bricks, while from the other entrance he confronted its terminus. The title referred ironically to the French infinitive "to raise" as well as the English word denoting a rigid bar.<sup>56</sup>

Andre locates one of *Lever's* ends in front of a doorway and the other against a vertical wall. A single line of 139 firebricks laid across the floor utilizes the architecture as an armature. *Lever* is sited within a building. *Secant* is located outdoors on undulating ground. The work as place is what is being defined; architecture and landscape happen to be the settings for the work. By their compliance with the settings as armature *Lever* and *Secant* avoid self-referentiality. The works do not simply present themselves in space, but are a measure of the place. Integrated with the location, by means of place as armature, the modularity of the work counts and duplicates itself and its placement. The title *Lever* carries the apposite meaning of being a means to an end. *Secant* meanwhile carries the meaning of a line following a curve, be it the curves of the ground or the curve of the Earth.

Without the Greek ramifications the *Tau* of the *Element* series, the uncarved block, by virtue of its associations, would be redolent with Taoist references. The most obvious reference is that from the *Tao-Te Ching*, "Genuine, like a piece of uncarved wood".<sup>57</sup> Andre's interest in oriental philosophy dates back to his work in military intelligence during the Korean War. In conversation, in Oxford during 1996, Andre specifically mentioned his abiding interest in oriental art and thought. He continued by listing Minimalist artists who had also had contact with, and an interest in, oriental thought. His list included Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, and Sol Lewitt. Most of these artists were in the Far East on military duty. In his essay for this conference on Andre's work, held in Oxford during June 1996, Paul Wood mentions Andre's interest in oriental philosophy. Wood suggests that oriental philosophy offered Andre a non-Euro centric value system with which to contrast the

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55. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object*, p. 156.

56. Bourdon, "The Razed Sites of Carl Andre", p. 103.

57. "The Natural Way of Lao Tzu" in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Translated and compiled by Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 147.

prevalent capitalist, even multi-national capitalist, ideology. Ideas of calm, harmony, and peace serve as a counter-point or antithesis to the clamour of daily culture. Wood remarks in this context, "It takes, as it were, an act of critical will to jam the flow of distractions".<sup>58</sup> This juxtaposition of oriental philosophy and Marxist orientation provides Andre a critical platform from which to confront art production within a capitalist ideological system.

The Chinese philosophical principle of the threefold yin and yang is particularly interesting in regard to both Andre's sculpture and his commitment to Marxism. The residue of Chinese philosophy that lies at the core of Hegel's dialectic and is incorporated into the Marxist dialectic accords perfectly with Andre's combination of references to Marxism and Chinese thought. The balance of two substances that gives rise to a third occurs most notably in Andre's work with the floor squares made up of sets of metallic plates, and culminates with the *Thirty-Seven Pieces of Work*, 1969. A binary system is employed that begins with six premises. Each of the six basic units is composed of six-one foot squares, three-eighths of an inch thick, made from aluminium, copper, steel, magnesium, lead and zinc. Each metal is equally dispersed systematically with all of the others to produce a series of bi-metal floor squares. The resultant 'carpet' of metallic squares is to be walked over, effectively providing a superimposition upon the floor. The floor is the base and the sculpture the superstructure. The early piece of sculpture, *8 Cuts*, 1967, involved Andre in overlaying the floor of the Ace Gallery in Los Angeles with concrete blocks. Eight 'cuts' were left in order to expose the floor beneath the work. Each of the 'cuts' describes a different configuration of a thirty-unit rectangular void. The artwork is literally superimposed on the gallery floor, and as one walks over the sculpture the reality underlying the work is glimpsed and framed by the work. The artificiality of the artwork provides an overlay that is interrupted to allow reality to obtrude. However, it is artifice, albeit in the form of a layer of concrete blocks, that literally supports the viewer and frames reality. There is an interplay here between the idea of something and nothing. What is the status of the actual floor? Is it nothing in terms of the sculpture, or an essential something that subtends the work? Following these questions, art is defined by, and defines, the quotidian in the form of the floor. Given Andre's interest in Oriental philosophy, the Taoist classic the *Tao Te Ching* devotes its chapter eleven to a discussion of non-being and utility that is wholly appropriate to his piece.

Doors and windows are cut out to make a room,  
But it is on its non-being that the utility of the room  
depends.  
Therefore turn being into advantage, and turn non-being  
into utility.<sup>59</sup>

Throughout the brief eleven lines of this chapter the phrase "But it is on its non-being that the utility of", respectively, a carriage, a clay utensil, and a room, is reiterated. The point being made is that the spaces described may only be utilized because they are realized to be empty; in their vacuity lies

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58. Paul Wood, "On Different Silences: From 'silence is assent' to 'the peace that passeth understanding'". *Carl Andre and the Sculptural Imagination*. Vol. 2 of Museum of Modern Art Papers. (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996)

59. "The Natural Way Of Lao Tzu", in Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 145.

their potential. In the case of *8 Cuts* not only is the space of the gallery turned into the artwork, but also the spaces within the artwork figure the floor of the gallery. In regard to the use of cuts and the utilization of material Andre says, "Up to a certain time I was cutting into things. Then I realized that the thing I was cutting was the cut. Rather than cut into the material, I now use the material as the cut in space".<sup>60</sup> As a self-confessed "disciple of Brancusi", Andre clarifies his transition from the Brancusi-inspired American carve-direct school to his own Minimalist version of carving.<sup>61</sup>

It is precisely this point about using the material as the cut in space that fueled the controversy over the acquisition by the Tate Gallery of his 'pile' of bricks. The stack of bricks was one of a set of eight equivalents that reversed the procedure encountered at the Ace Gallery. To isolate one of the eight cuts and exhibit it as a stand-alone sculpture provides no information whatsoever about context and place, and the resultant confusion can only be attributed to the Tate Gallery. Insisting on seeing one part of a group form as a monolithic form asserts a position in regard to contemporary sculpture, but it does so only by obfuscating and trivializing the issues surrounding works that embody a Minimalist aesthetic. Similarly, it is Eurocentrism that regards Chinese philosophy—whether the yin yang or the *I Ching*—as mystical and thereby implicates Andre as a mystic. When Andre remarks that "the object is just a locus" embodying some sort of transaction between agencies he is very close to Wing-Tsit Chan's explanation of the philosophy of change as "continuous ...for things are forever interfused and intermingled. The universe is a realm of perpetual activity".<sup>62</sup> As far as I am concerned what is encountered here is not the idiosyncratic mysticism of Carl Andre but an understanding of the dialectic and of Marx that is based on Chinese philosophy.

## 6.

During 1975 Andre completed a series of works each of which bore the title *Uncarved Blocks*. The blocks of the title were the same dimensions as those used in the *Elements* series of 1970 and 1971. The unworked, but not unprocessed, timber that Andre used provides a nexus for thoughts that centre on facture and the factitious. At the same time the titles indicate vast associative sets of possibilities. The work combines these possibilities in the moment of its being experienced. The associational component of the artwork is acknowledged but unspecified. By indicating those possibilities they themselves become material for combination. The metonymic pole of the work is reinforced by Andre's use of a reservoir of multiple metaphors. The artifice of the work is celebrated by turning fetishization itself into factitiousness. In the publication *Wood* Andre provided a poetic preface that puts his choice of material into a mytho-poetic context.<sup>63</sup>

Wood is the mother of matter. Like all  
women hacked and ravaged by men, she  
renews herself by giving, gives herself by

60. Bourdon, "The Razed Sites of Carl Andre", p. 104.

61. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art work*, p. 155.

62. Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p 263.

63. Carl Andre, *Wood* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1978).

renewing. Wood is the bride of life in death, of death in life. She is the cool and shade and peace of the forest. She is the spark and heat, ember and dream of the hearth. In death her ashes sweeten our bodies and purify our earth. In her plenty is never wasteful, passion is never wanton. She never betrays us even when we are unworthy. She greets us in the morning of our birth and embraces us in the evening of our death whether dark in the chambered earth or bright in the consuming fire. O mother of matter, may we share your peace.

Wood is established here in sacrificial, ritualistic, and primeval terms. The poetic form of the piece echoes the gnomic aphorisms of Brancusi; Andre's acknowledged interest in Brancusi is well known. His interest in early cultures is represented in the works such as the *Henge* series that were proposed in 1960. A substantial selection of his written work, *Word poems and Operas*, was included as early as 1970 in the publication *Carl Andre*.<sup>64</sup>

The body of work that comprises the *Element* series is made from various configurations of stacked blocks of timber (twelve inches by twelve inches by thirty-six inches long). In their different configurations they form: a single freestanding block, *Herm*; 1976, a four-part *Post Lintel and Threshold*; 1971, the two-part *Angle*, 1971, *Tau*, 1970, and the three-part *Lintel, Tau*, and *Right Threshold*, 1971 and the eight-, or more, part *Pyre*, 1971. These particular examples are drawn from the overall set of a much larger group all of which were proposed in the form of drawings in 1960. A decade elapsed before the pieces were actually constructed. This aspect of Andre's work illustrates his attitude to the fetishization of material that constitutes an artwork. As far as he is concerned, an intellectual proposition, once expressed, exists as an idea that may be realized later as a concretization of a drawing, or as a new version of a work re-made in contemporary material. The idea encountered here is that the work is an amalgam of thought and material in which precedence is given to the conceptualization of the material. Such a conceptualization serves as a template that, once expressed, endures, whilst the sculpture itself is a contingency, a coincidence of material events. Such material events may be experienced as blocks of wood, squares of metal, exhibitions, and the experiential component of the work itself. It is this aspect of Andre's practice that connects his work from the early Brancusi-inspired work, *First Ladder*, 1958, *Last Ladder*, 1959, to his signature metal plates, *37 Pieces of Work*, 1969. In which the metal plates are laid on the floor to form a slightly raised surface, the location of which generally requires it to be walked on. Physical involvement on the part of the gallery visitor ensures that the event of the sculpture is understood.

The early *Ladder* works are made by winding a radial-arm saw down into the wood to form a scooped out version of an *Endless Column*. The sculpture

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64. Diane Waldman, *Carl Andre* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1970), pp. 57-72.

is an unadorned event in which the process is taken to its logical conclusion. The range of combined wooden works in each case forces recognition of the sculpture as a physical event of combination. A later piece of work, *Fireworks, 1-40*, 1983, adheres to the same idea while using acrylic paint squeezed onto the floor to provide the sense of immediacy and impermanence. One's experience of the work is heavily mediated by the provisional nature of that work. Stacked bricks, or blocks of wood share the condition of being provisional with the earlier *Maple and Plastic Exercise*, 1959. The obviously machined maple base supports an equally obviously machined plastic block. The evidence of the saw blade and the drill press are presented as primary considerations, a state of affairs that is reinforced by the inclusion of the word 'exercise' in the title.

In essence Andre's aesthetic creates a sense of place that is nomadic. Writing about *African Nomadic Architecture* Labelle Prussin refers to spatially "pseudo-fixed features":

Because of frequent moves, the constancy and security inherent in a sense of place, normally accrued from a physically fixed space, are achieved [for nomads] by means of a tightly knit cognitive spatial structure. This cognitive structure is related to what have been termed "pseudo-fixed features" in space. These are physical features that can be moved, and are relatively simple to move or change, but that are perceived to be fixed and are treated as if they were.<sup>65</sup>

Andre deploys his sculpture in different places as if they were material features fixed by his initial conceptualization. The sculpture is certainly neither site-determined nor site-generated; it is, rather, site-adjusted. His works use features of the available space as nomads utilize topographical features in establishing an encampment, and thereby maintain a site-specific quality. During a conference on Andre's work, held in Oxford, he explained that *6-Metal Fugue (for Mendeleev)*, 1995, was the same work as the earlier *37 Pieces of Work*, 1969.<sup>66</sup> Members of the audience protested that the two were different works not least because the earlier piece had rounded edges while the later version had square edges. Andre explained that technical advances had supplanted the older metal-cutting guillotines for newer laser-cutting technology. The gist of his argument for the continuity of the work in two versions was that the materialization of the idea remained substantially the same. It is the temporary nature of his construction technique that raises the viewer's awareness of both site and adjustment. In creating a precinct the work is querulous of its own viability. The result of such an awareness is that the works become obviously "pseudo-fixed features" and ubiquity is asserted as a temporary state of affairs. Ultimately, as a consequence of this line of thought, all of Andre's sculpture takes on the meaning of his *Herm* piece; each piece is an intimation of transition.

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65. Labelle Prussin, *African Nomadic Architecture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1995), p. 189.

66. "Carl Andre Sculpture" conference at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, June 1996.



Since at least the fifth century BC, when the producer of the *Riace Warrior* tried to imbue his bronze with life by the use of inlaid eyes and a copper overlay, European sculptors have tried to find different ways of vitalizing the inert matter of their material. Michelangelo's *Captives* begin to emerge from the brute materiality of their condition by way of differentiated stone carving. Contrapposto compositionally formalizes and enshrines Pygmalion's desire to imbue matter with life, while avoiding pre-classical 'garish' inlays or surface treatments. The Roman copy of Myron's *Diskobolos*, original about 450 BC, inhabits the same perceptual space as Rodin's *Kiss*, 1901-04, through the employment of similar means. Both pieces evince articulated coherent stone carving that animates the whole composition. The parts are subordinated to the whole in order that the whole will convey a semblance of life. The *Diskobolos* is poised as if ready to spring into life and throw the discus; the couple in the *Kiss* trope the appearance of lingering for an instant before or after sexual activity. In both cases, the pose catches an instant that is redolent with movement, a pause troped in inert matter. The trope persuades or tries to persuade us that forms in stone are effected by energy. It is as if the sculptor energizes the inert material and the beholder causes the finished sculpture to effect that same energy.

Daedalus is supposed to have been the first artist to energize material by means of inlaying eyes or devising a dynamic pose. The confluence of ancient cultures coalesces in ancient Greek sculpture in the mythical figure of Daedalus.<sup>67</sup> Statuary not only represents deities, it also aspires to mimesis by means of repetition. Life itself is repeated, and in its repetition deity is located and naturalised. Artifice, with its twin aspects of factitious activity and fetishized material, allows mimesis to be understood as the imitation of action. Time and activity are interconnected in factitiousness as they also are in fetishization. Artifice, in the form of the various artificer gods, echoes human activity as an engagement with the necessity of fabrication. The necessity of construction, which is the amelioration of the environmental circumstance by the human agent, is the condition of artifice that is celebrated by artistic activity as something perpetual. In its perpetuity, work may be figured as immediate or timeless, but in both cases artifice is labour naturalised as temporal. Myron's *Diskobolos* is poised, Rodin's *Kiss* lingers, Michelangelo's *Captives* strain, Moore's *Two-piece Reclining Figure number 2*, 1960, rests. The works involve themselves in a hiatus. The various pauses that the works describe punctuate a continuum of time, space, and energy. Ongoing vitality is materialized by the brief gap between the changes of states.

Vitalism, however, is not restricted to figurative sculpture. Jack Burnham pointed out in his book *Beyond Modern Sculpture*:

As an idea, vitalism [sic] had no boundaries; it remained a personal declaration rather than a formal aesthetic. If at its inception it came to life in Rodin's utterances and was carried to abstraction by Gaudier-Brzeska and Brancusi, then it is important to remember that vitalism [sic] affected the work of hundreds of sculptors for the next forty years. As a contagious influence, the vitalistic

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67. Morris, "The 'Daedalic' Style". *Daidalos and the origins of Greek Art*.

[sic] mystique spread among sculptors almost religiously. As with all dogmas, its propagation depended upon the fact that it went unanalyzed and, to a great extent, undetected.<sup>68</sup>

The work of two Italian Post-Minimal sculptors, Giuseppe Penone and Giovanni Anselmo, may be understood as combining a Vitalist reference with a Minimalist morphology. Penone's *Albero Scortecciato* series, 1968-76, or *Trees of 12 metres*, 1980-82, began as blocks of wood. By patiently working back from the surface Penone revealed an early form of the tree within the block of wood. Knots lying on the surface become the machined ends of branches when traced back to the disclosed trunk. The work depends for its effect on maintaining a vestigial element of the block as a referent. Thus, the machine-formed block of wood is given back its earlier form of life. Scratching, or flaying, its bulk animates the wood in order that it may be restored to its earlier form of life. In this case the beam itself becomes a sacrifice made to reconnect the dead material with its former potential.

Following the preceding line of thought helps us understand the enigmatic sculpture of Giovanni Anselmo, especially his work *Untitled, Granite and Flesh*, 1968, which was exhibited in London as part of the exhibition *When Attitude Becomes Form*, and included in the publication *Art Povera*.<sup>69</sup> *Untitled, Granite and Flesh* consists of a vertical freestanding rectangular block of granite. A smaller, thinner, square piece of granite is held in tension against the top of one side. Tension is achieved by means of a length of twisted wire. A piece of meat is squeezed between the two pieces of granite. Scattered on the floor beneath the meat is a mound of sawdust to absorb the extruded liquid. A later version of the work substituted salad leaves for the meat. Otherwise, the work was identical in form.

Anselmo wrote of his work in *Art Povera*:

I, the world, things, life, we are situations of energy and the point is not to crystallize such situations, though maintaining them open and alive is a function of our living. ... Since every way of thinking or being has to correspond to a way of acting, my work really is the physication of the force of an action, of the energy of a situation or an event, etc., not just the experience of this on the level of annotation or of a sign or of dead nature. ... It is necessary, for example that the energy of a torsion lives with its true force; it certainly wouldn't live just by its form.<sup>70</sup>

Torsion features, as a characteristic in several of Anselmo's works, but *Untitled, Granite and Flesh* is more complex in its references. The freestanding block is reminiscent of Andre's *Herm* but clearly carries the additional connotation of sacrifice or offering. The vital juices are squeezed from the crushed matter in both versions of the work. The sculpture reminds one of altars and places of ritual sacrifice. The situational aspect of Minimalist

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68. Jack Burnham, *Beyond Modern Sculpture* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 81.

69. Germano Celant, *Art Povera* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 110.

70. Giovanni Anselmo, Celant, *Art Povera*, p. 109.

sculpture is, here, coloured by the traditional association of sculpture with offerings. Tension alone is not a sufficient understanding of this work. Rather, it is that the devitalization of the organic matter vitalizes the inorganic material of the sculpture—vitalization that depends upon traditional, even archaic, associations. The second, vegetarian, version of the work strengthens its mythical dimension by diminishing the butcher's block association.

Anselmo's work, while Minimalist in appearance, wrings out of itself a Vitalist position. Mario Merz's *Igloo*, 1969, or *Double Igloo*, 1979, evokes a similar primitive, natural order to that provided by Anselmo. However, what these European works do not do is etch themselves into a particular place. They do not ground themselves as site-generated, or as site-determined. Nor do they present themselves as site-adjusted; they are traditional sculptural objects standing within space as if placed within an invisible vitrine.

Sculpture as material vitalized by votive offering brings to mind the precinctual sculptural practices of ancient Greece and Egypt. Transference of a vital essence from one material to another, as from lettuce leaves to granite, is longstanding. Many Egyptian statues contain carved receptacles in their bases to collect water poured over them. The water collected there was then considered to be consecrated.

Martin Heidegger in his essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* observes:

The Greeks, who knew quite a bit about works of art, use the same word *techne* for craft and art and call the craftsman and the artist by the same name: *technites*. ... The word *techne* denotes rather a mode of knowing. To know means to have seen, in the widest sense of seeing, which means to apprehend what is present, as such. For Greek thought the nature of knowing consists in *aletheia*, that is, in the uncovering of beings. It supports and guides all comportment toward beings. *Techne*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* present beings as such beings *out of* concealedness and specifically *into* the unconcealedness of their appearance; *techne* never signifies the action of making.<sup>71</sup>

Heidegger understands that the artificer makes things apparent. This is not a matter of practical performance alone, but also a matter involving the fusion of thought and action. The facture evidenced by artifice is the combination of the factitious and the fetish as instances of naturalised ideology. Heidegger understands "techne" to disclose a "Thou" and decidedly not an "It".

As a residue of European thought it is unsurprising that American artists and theorists would begin to question the place of complex Classical and Eurocentric iconography in American culture. Specifically, one may think of Barnett Newman's early interest in European mythology and its subsequent

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71. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 59.

displacement by an interest in Egyptian and Native American subjects. Such a shift in emphasis indicates an attempt to rethink the symbolic in ever more fundamental terms that do not necessitate a traditional Classical European template.

## 2b. Vitalist Abstraction.

Abstract sculpture in the hands of John Chamberlain, David Smith, or Mark DiSuvero perpetuates the tradition of the vitalisation of sculpture by transference, or investment, of the sculptor's energy into inert material. In this respect the method of modern sculpture persists in its Vitalist guise. The overt continuity of representation is disrupted by abstraction, but not the underlying continuity of Vitalism. Don Judd's concern with dismissing anthropomorphism from his art is consistent with the Minimalist suspicion of Vitalism. Discussing the similarities between Mark DiSuvero's sculpture and Franz Kline's painting Judd writes:

DiSuvero uses beams as if they were brush strokes, imitating movement, as Kline did. The material never has its own movement. A beam thrusts, a piece of iron follows a gesture; together they form a naturalistic and anthropomorphic image. The space corresponds.<sup>72</sup>

The idea in the last line can be aligned with the idea that the space in Kline's painting and DiSuvero's sculpture is pictorial. Such a conception of space demarcates an atmosphere or environment conducive to energetic, Vitalistic expression.

### 1.

Lucy Lippard's 1972 essay *Tony Smith* explores the visceral expressivity of Smith's faceted metal sculpture. She finds that

Even the steel versions, into which several of the plywood mock-ups and cardboard models are finally being converted, are intentionally impure—not indecisive or corrupted, but possessed of a kind of rawness, lacking in brutality, that vitalizes the prospect of a more polished tradition. ... His technical sophistication allows him a controlled primitivism that would strike a false note in a less experienced hand.<sup>73</sup>

The "rawness", impurity, or primitive quality that Lippard identifies in Smith's sculpture is far from being clumsy or inept. It is an intended effect only achievable because of Smith's cultured or refined technical skill. This level of "technical sophistication" allows Smith the primitive quality with which to vitalize his sculpture.

The description of sculpture as energized, vitalized or animated by a primal force relies on association. Metaphoric construction uses the association of one element with another to which it is not literally applicable. Sheet steel is not "raw", it neither lacks nor possesses "brutality", and cannot "vitalize" anything. But what metaphor does do is, in Judd's words, "form a naturalistic and anthropomorphic image". The consequence of this

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72. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects", Arts Yearbook 8, 1965, in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 183.

73. Lucy R. Lippard, *Tony Smith* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p. 9.

manoeuvre, of anthropomorphism and naturalism, is to lend to artistic activity the appearance of being natural, primary, and essential.

Lippard turns our understanding of Smith's sculpture from a cultural or refined condition to a qualified but nevertheless primitive condition. To implicate the primitive and the vital invalidates any further necessity for discussion, unless intended and effected by technical refinement, since the foundations have been reached.

In his article for *Time magazine*, entitled "Vulnerable Ugliness", Robert Hughes uses the words "raw", "ugly", and "difficult" to describe the work of Eva Hesse.<sup>74</sup> Hughes sees Hesse as offering "American art ... an exit from the minimalist impasse ...". He is quick to identify her work as strongly referential to the human body. Robert Pincus-Witten also discusses Hesse's work in terms of Minimalism on one hand, and the organic on the other.<sup>75</sup> He writes in "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime":

Modular sequences or seriality allowed Hesse to fashion her own vision of anti-Cubist structure. They permitted a composition in which no element functioned preferentially to any other element—taste and sensibility being, in Hesse's case, always imbued with biomorphic inferences and the mark of straight natural force.<sup>76</sup>

Pincus-Witten suggests here that Hesse was interested in a sort of blind compositional process, one in which physical combination of material took total precedence over decisions about wholistic meaning. He quotes Hesse voicing her concern to "get to non-art, non-connotive, non-anthropomorphic, non-geometric, non-nothing, everything, but of another kind, vision, sort. From a total other reference point".<sup>77</sup> As far as Pincus-Witten is concerned this "other reference point" is the sublime and he ends his article by numbering Hesse in the company of "Newman, Still, Pollock, and Reinhardt" as artists of the sublime.<sup>78</sup>

Hesse's extreme attempt to allow factitiousness to determine as many aspects of her work as possible broadens the scope for associated meanings. Metonymic and metaphoric meanings are not exclusive positions. The dynamic between them is not that of a binary opposition—good/bad, high/low—but is an inflection involving both metaphor and metonymy with the present moment. Hesse concentrates her efforts upon fabrication. In so doing, the associative dimension of the work becomes unfocussed. This is so much the intended case that Hesse's list of aims is a series of negations, as in "non-art", and "non-geometric".

Lucy Lippard explains one method that Hesse employed in order to distance herself from the decision-making process. "She bought a huge

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74. Robert Hughes, "Vulnerable Ugliness", *Time magazine* (1<sup>st</sup> January 1973), p. 37.

75. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime" *Artforum*, (Vol. 10, November, 1971), pp. 32-44.

76. Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime", p. 42.

77. Eva Hesse, Catalogue statement for "Art in Process IV". Quoted in Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime", p. 43.

78. Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: Post-Minimalism into Sublime".

thesaurus from which she subsequently chose her titles."<sup>79</sup> Hesse would use the thesaurus to collect words around those that referred to or named her initial idea. This contributed a filter to the thought process and diminished her role as an unwitting selector of preferred idiosyncratic meanings. This was an attempt to establish some other unanticipated reference point. Lippard provides the now well-known quotation of Hesse's:

I would like the work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions.

What I want of my art I can eventually find. The work must go beyond this. It is my main concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know.

The formal principles are understandable and understood.

It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go.

As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self.

It is something, it is nothing.<sup>80</sup>

The modular sequences and seriality that Hesse was interested in and used to make her work did not involve the rigorous maintenance of identical units. Works such as *Repetition Nineteen*, in either the 1967 or 1968 version, and *Connection*, 1969, utilize repetition but not uniformity. The same task of avoiding precise repetition and uniformity was undertaken in the process of fabrication, but here chance was allowed to play a role in determining the final configuration. The material is allowed to slump, slip, or deform during fabrication. The combinatorial nature of the work thus included time as an active factor of fabrication, and as formative in terms of composition.

By downplaying the associational control of the work, Hesse connects her work with fundamental materiality. As a consequence of the organic references implied by her sculpture, human presence is inferred. In Hesse's case that inference is overt, a deduction based on clear visual evidence. Her non-anthropomorphic stance, like that of Richard Serra and Robert Smithson, carries with it a residue of Vitalism. However, in Hesse's case that Vitalism is cast into the form of vestigial biomorphism, as a concern with faintly decorative forms that represent living organisms.

## 2.

E.C. Goossen, in his essay *The Art of the Real: USA 1948-1968*, attempts to chart the emergence of Minimalism in American art. He quickly identifies the "real" as a pivotal idea.

Certainly there seems to be a growing distrust of idealism and its unfulfilled promises. The "real" of today as it is posited by this new art has nothing to do with metaphor, or symbolism, or any kind of metaphysics. It

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79. Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: New York University, 1976), p. 204.

80. Lippard, *Eva Hesse*, p. 131.

is not the ideal Hegelian essence that Hans Hofmann was invoking several decades ago in his essay, "The Search for the Real."<sup>81</sup> It does not wish to convey the notion that reality is somewhere else. Neither is it related to the *symbolic* reality Malevich thought he had discovered when, in 1913, he first isolated his black square on a white field.<sup>82</sup>

Goossen explains the realist position as one that confronts "the experiences and objects we encounter every day with an exact equivalence in art." He includes Abstract Expressionism as a realist art because of its "overriding ambition to make something so original [in terms of both form and attitude] that its reality could not be challenged." Such an elastic definition allowed Goossen to include a wide range of work in the exhibition that he curated to accompany the essay. Works by artists who are frankly Vitalist in outlook are set alongside candid Minimalists. Thus, work by Georgia O'Keeffe and Tony Smith is presented with work by Carl Andre, Agnes Martin, and John McCracken. He concludes his essay:

The new work of art is very much like a chunk of nature, a rock, a tree, a cloud, and possesses much the same hermetic "otherness." Whether this kind of confrontation with the actual can be sustained, whether it can remain vital and satisfying, it is not yet possible to tell.<sup>83</sup>

Thirty years after, the central issues still remain to be clarified. Not the least of these is to understand that the reality of the artwork is artifice made concrete, and is something to be experienced as a material equivalent to naturally occurring phenomena. The possibility of maintaining a meaningful interchange between the experience of "new" artworks and that of actuality arises from an appraisal of authenticity. Abstract Expressionism is considered authentic experience because its novelty is seen to posit self-referentiality. Self-referentiality avoids the obvious pitfall of representation and its consequent inauthenticity, but raises a different problem, namely that of isolation and alienation. Goossen recognized that the "otherness" caused by the self-referential artifice of the "new work of art" required a rethinking of realism. Significantly, he equates this "hermetic otherness" with nature. It causes, he thinks, a sense of alterity that is not a transcendental "somewhere else", but "an exact equivalence in art" for the everyday encounter with objects and for that experience. An exact equivalent of something, or some experience, involves transcription. To transcribe is not to imitate for although mimesis and transcription involve copying, a transcription is a record. As a record a transcript is an accurate or exact equivalent rather than an imitation. Goossen required of his exact artistic equivalent that it record the experience of the everyday encounter with objects.

Scientific and technological methodologies favour notation as a kind of abstractly fundamental, but precise, record. Notational forms, as encountered

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81. Hans Hofmann, *Search for the Real and Other Essays*, ed. Sara T. Weeks and Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. (1948; rpt. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), p. 40-48.

82. E.C. Goossen, *The Art of the Real: USA 1848-1968*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968), p. 7.

83. Goossen, *The Art of the Real*, p. 11.



in chemistry or physics, model themselves on mathematics in an attempt to codify the abstractions that underlie appearance. The reality of such sign systems establishes a semiotic realism that does not rely on an anthropomorphic projection for its validation. Notation in artwork is more problematic because early geometric abstraction at the hands of Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian had a symbolic element that was based in mysticism and was dependent upon anthropomorphic projection. Theosophy and colour symbolism provide the main planks for the mystical canons of these artists. Early geometric abstraction was animated by reference to another order of meaning that subtends and supports the visual appearance of the work. Learning to correctly 'read' these notational artworks was supposed to make their meaning accessible and render the works transparent. Transparency, as the aesthetic ideal, was to be achieved by codification and convention. This is the "symbolic reality" that Goossen speaks of above in reference to Malevich, or the "ideal Hegelian essence" that requires a displaced reality.

It is a short, if inevitable, step from seeking support from transcendental mysticism to the substitution of psychoanalytic analogy: the Vitalism that is revealed by automatic writing and the stream-of-consciousness aesthetic that underpins André Breton, Robert Frank, and Jackson Pollock is just another example of a "symbolic reality" in which continuity is provided by the idea that the artwork is a notational record of some other mental or physical state.<sup>84</sup> An attitude to transcription is therefore suggested that is both real (as a recording) and fundamental (due to the nature of its primary source). Insanity, insobriety, and profound insight, perhaps induced by drugs or mysticism, are reduced to the same thing, which is an alternative and valid plane of reality masked by convention. Alternative values and an alternative lifestyle are called upon to buttress the endeavour to transcend conventionality. Transcending the conventional allows glimpses of another reality that can only be recalled by notation and transcription. Goossen juxtaposes this two-part transcendental ideal that employs metaphor and symbolism with a desire for the vernacular, quotidian, experience of objects and, by implication, their situation. The formal sculptural concern at issue here is the role of the sense of scale as a direct, and immediate, experience of the spatio-temporal continuum, and, as such, is distinct from the use of size as a picture-making device. This is discussed more fully later in this study in light of the work of Barnett Newman and Richard Serra.

The exact equivalence that Goossen requires, however, is also predicated upon transparency, on the equivalence of the experience of the encounter between everyday objects on one hand and with art objects on the other. This transparency requires that the art object match the ontological status of the quotidian. He is asking that the complex relationship of nomination and ex-nomination, that exists between an object and its setting, be duplicated by the artwork. The visibility of what is nominated figures itself against the invisibility of what is ex-nominated, overlooked, discounted, or unnoticed. It is this complex relationship between the contextualized and the context that Goossen detects the "new work of art" attempting to transcribe and notate. Ex-nomination is the state of invisibility and transparency that

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84. Henri Bergson's *élan vital* is the originating vital impetus that underpins Surreal and "Beat" art forms. See his; *Creative Evolution* (New York: Holt, 1911; rpt. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), and *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

forms the contextual counter-part to figuration, visibility, and nomination. The condition of being in a definite place and within a definite set of relationships, ubiquity, he suggests, immediately raises the possibility of estrangement. In short, how certain can one be that the conventions employed by the artwork are consensual? He displays an acute awareness of the boundary between transparency and opacity. Failure, on the part of the viewer, to identify what is nominated as the artwork inevitably leads to its opacity or invisibility. The artwork, therefore, is compromised in its ontological status unless an alternative conventional consensus can be established for its ontological significance. Such a new model of aesthetic reality may supplant, or more likely ramify, those models already in existence.

The alterity that Goossen hopes will remain "vital" in the new work of art is like that encountered with natural forms, rocks, trees, and clouds, whose priority requires that they be addressed as ontological constants. His suggestion is that the new works of art also present themselves for negotiation on a similar footing; their status in, and as, actuality is in no sense equivocal. In his early attempt to think through the issues of Minimalism Goossen identified two key issues. First, there was the non-transcendental and non-symbolic nature of the works, which employed self-referentiality and the affirmation of the ontological as an aesthetic category. Secondly, and more subtly, there was the adoption of transparency as a model for mapping the aesthetic onto the quotidian, and the quotidian onto the aesthetic. Such an adoption of one of the central devices of Modernism, viz. transparency, enabled him to speak of materiality as realism within an arena dominated by abstract work.

### 3.

The essay by Clement Greenberg entitled "The New Sculpture" originally appeared in June 1949, and again later in 1961. Amendments in the later version take account of Greenberg's political shift to the right.<sup>85</sup> This material encompasses the political manoeuvres of the Second World War and its aftermath in the USA. What arises is an interesting question, or inter-related set of questions, about the conditions for Vitalism that were seen to be recognised as latent in Cubism, and particularly in Synthetic Cubism, in the centre of avant garde art as it was established in New York after the Second World War.

Buchloh notes that Greenberg said, in 1949, that sculpture had "lately undergone a transformation that seems to endow it with a greater range of expression for modern sensibility than painting now has. This transformation, or revolution, is a product of Cubism".<sup>86</sup> Later, in the 1949 article, Greenberg would list in his pantheon of new sculptors Picasso, Arp, Schwitters, Tatlin, Pevsner, and Gabo. Brancusi's exclusion from this list is significant given Greenberg's slant towards painting as a paradigm for art history. Cubist sculpture is recognised by Greenberg to be a picture-making activity carried out in three dimensions.

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85. Benjamin Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism", *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 100 - 105, and particularly footnotes #27, #30, and #34.

86. Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism", p 101.

By 1956 Greenberg appears to see the Cubist roots of modern sculpture as a problem. In his essay "David Smith" he attempts to distinguish Smith's work from "Cubist artiness," and from the biomorphism, a feature of Euro-Vitalism, that had "epidemicallly" engulfed American sculpture.<sup>87</sup> His description of biomorphism dwells very much on superficialities, without making the obvious connections to the paintings of Pollock, Gorky, Gottlieb, or Abstract Expressionism in general. He writes:

It is also significant that modernist American sculpture should have succumbed so epidemically to "biomorphism," and that then, after the fanciful and decorative improvisation of plant, bone, muscle, and other organic forms, there should have come a spinning of wires, twisting of cords, and general fashioning of cages and boxes - so that the most conspicuous result of the diffusion of the use of the welding torch among American sculptors has been a superior kind of garden statuary and a new, oversized kind of *objet d'art*.<sup>88</sup>

His summation of the biomorphic style is that it constitutes the "expressionist-cum-surrealist artiness of the Americans". 'Artiness' aside, the fact that Greenberg excluded David Smith's work from Expressionism and Surrealism flies in the face of this stylistic damnation. Greenberg announces that Smith is "the best sculptor of his generation". The bulk of Smith's work corresponds to all of Greenberg's reservations concerning the "spinning of wires" and "fashioning of cages and boxes", by far the major part of it is biomorphic sculpture. The *Cubi* and *Voltri* series of the early 1960s, his most successful attempts to make non-biomorphic works, were made within a few years of his death. Even then, they still evidence a concern with Vitalism. The Vitalist core in art connects Cubism, biomorphism and the abstract works of David Smith in an unwavering line of development. Speaking of modern sculpture with Thomas Hess in 1964, Smith said, "We come out of Cubism".<sup>89</sup>

Greenberg sees Smith exhibit his mistakes and successes. He also claims him to be a pioneer. Greenberg understands Smith's main achievement to be his apparent fearlessness in removing "the terrorizing agent", identified as Constructivism, from his work "with its machinery and machine-made look".<sup>90</sup> Smith demonstrates his "freedom from this terror" by contrasting himself with it. The terror of Constructivism accounts for the "artiness" of neo-Cubist and biomorphic sculptors alike. Both groups of artists are responding to Greenberg's asserted imperative "Sculpture must continue

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87. Clement Greenberg, "David Smith", in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-56*, Vol. 3, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp 275-279. Also included in *Art and Culture; Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956, rpt.1961).

88. Greenberg, "David Smith", in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals*, p. 276.

89. David Smith, *The Secret Letter. An interview with Thomas B. Hess, June, 1964* (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1964), fifth unnumbered page.

90. Greenberg, "David Smith", in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals*, p. 276.

to look like sculpture—like art”.<sup>91</sup> This imperative, as asserted in the 1956 version of the essay was removed from the version published in *Art and Culture* in 1961. The essay, however, retains a date of 1956 at its close in that edition, which is intended to indicate no substantial revision.<sup>92</sup>

The later version, steers one towards an understanding of Constructivist sculpture in which the works do not distinguish themselves clearly enough as art. Constructivist sculpture “with its machinery and machine-made look” appears too similar to the products of industry, and by implication, to the quotidian and vernacular. Greenberg suggests that Constructivist works run the risk of looking utilitarian or arbitrary. He appears to be struggling to find an adequate framing device with which to distinguish abstract sculpture from any other objects within the visual field. Or, alternately, he wishes to distinguish between “artiness” and aesthetic relevance. Both of these alternatives turn on the issue of nomination and ex-nomination, and that is what seems to underlie Greenberg’s unease. The self-referentiality of the abstract artwork may immediately raise the problem of “artiness” once its basis is understood to be non-consensual aesthetic conventions, which lead inexorably to isolation and estrangement. Or, it may employ references to industry and the commonplace that blur the distinction between the artwork and an ordinary object. It is in this area of concern that Greenberg wrestles with Cubism and its aftermath. In the 1956 version of his essay “artiness” is bracketed with Cubist and biomorphic art. By 1961 the focus has shifted through rewriting to “artiness” and Constructivism.

Greenberg ‘saves’ David Smith from Constructivism by identifying him with Picasso and Gonzalez and the material technicalities of their sculpture. But simultaneously, by distancing Smith from the implications of their sculpture, Greenberg also removes him from biomorphism. A heroic bourgeois individualism is suggested that not only distinguishes David Smith from the rest, but also singles out Wotruba, Marcks, Moore, Marini, and the post-war Giacometti. The young British sculptors “Butler, Chadwick, Turnbull et al” are condemned as acolytes. These “British followers of Gonzalez” are also written out of the 1961 version of “David Smith”. Greenberg’s opinions on biomorphism may be explained if he is understood to limit his purview of the biotic to the single strand of Surrealism and to make no account for the underlying thread of Vitalism.

By using the twin themes of struggle and monumentality Greenberg develops Smith as a Romantic Vitalist—but not biomorphist. The recourse to Smith’s struggle, his many failures, and the monumentality of his vision shift attention away from the work of Smith and on to Smith himself. This shift features depiction and enactment in the person of Smith as a mythic figure. These three elements, enactment, depiction and the mythic, were previously noted by Alloway as constituents of biomorphic art in the 1940s. For these devices to figure in Greenberg’s account of Smith one must conclude that Greenberg is employing biomorphic tropes without identifying them as such. Whether he was aware of these figures is unimportant, what is important is

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91. Greenberg, “David Smith”, in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Affirmations and Refusals*, p. 276.

92. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture; Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), Preface p. vii.

the power and persistence of the Vitalist paradigm that underpins his entire aesthetic. Inevitably this process of heroic mythmaking continued after Smith's early death, and was further elaborated because of it.

## 4.

The significance of David Smith's late work, and the apparent break it made with his previous work can perhaps be explained in a different way. Around 1957-59 Smith began to produce drawings that were made by means of sprayed paint, mostly executed on paper but with some examples completed on canvas. These drawings seem to provide a point of reference for both the *Cubi* and *Voltri* series. The drawings were composed by using templates laid on the paper and then sprayed over. Under-spraying was used to achieve the required colour, or colour mix, for later over-spraying. Formal continuities are evident between earlier and later motifs. The attenuated linear totemic forms, *Imaginary Glyphs*, 1952-54 (ink on paper), *Drawing*, circa 1959 (ink on paper), *Untitled*, 1959 (spray paint on paper), and *Untitled*, 1963 (spray paint on paper) all provide examples of this motif.

The spray drawings are distanced from the earlier work by their lack of tactile expressiveness. All of the drawings remain studies for actual or possible sculpture, but they lose more or less any figurative references. Smith seems more aware of the abstract quality of the marks and their possible realizations as abstract sculpture. The *Voltri* series maintains the flat template-like quality of his earlier work, instanced for example by the *Sentinel* or *Zig* series. The *Cubi* series departs from Smith's earlier work by becoming volumetric. Both the *Voltri* and *Cubi* series have their origins in the spray drawings. On the subject of drawing for sculpture Smith wrote: "Sometimes they are atmospheres from which sculptural form is unconsciously selected during the labor process of producing form. Then again they may be amorphous floating direct statements in which I am the subject, and the drawing is the act."<sup>93</sup> The pencil study *Three Personages*, 1952-54, and the painted steel sculpture *Running Daughter*, 1956-60; bear all the hallmarks of Vitalist art. In both examples totemic reference is made to figurative sources and the works are thoroughly anthropomorphized. The later abstract spray drawings retain the pictorial convention of a notional sculptural base, often included in template form, occasionally painted in after spraying was complete—*Untitled*, 1963 (spray paint and gouache on paper). The framing device of the plinth and of the "atmospheres" of the drawings retains pictorial conventions, while the size of the finished sculpture reinforces the anthropomorphic element of the work.

Smith used painted rectangles on the studio floor to frame sculptures pictorially, and help compose the metal units prior to welding them into final configurations. This manipulation of the metal parts was at one with his use of templates in the spray drawings. The similarity is strengthened by Smith's purchasing of preformed metal shapes, intended for industrial or commercial use, for inclusion as part of his sculpture. Smith said of them:

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93. *David Smith by David Smith*, ed. Cleve Gray (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 104.

First of all, these things have a basic geometric form that's already 'found'. In a recent work, I made one wheel and the other three wheels I bought by ordering them from Bethlehem Steel Co. ... You might say they are 'found' objects. I found them in a catalogue and chose them because they fitted a particular need. ... I find many things, but I only choose certain ones that fit a niche in my mind, fit into a relationship I need, and that relationship is somewhat of a geometric nature.<sup>94</sup>

Smith taped cardboard shapes, whisky cartons and suchlike, to his windows in order to see the shapes against the sky, particularly the night sky. Obviously this method abstracted the cardboard shapes by 'floating' them against the infinite distance of the sky. These window constructions were then recreated as spray drawings and eventually as sculpture. This method opens Smith's work to the vexed question of distinguishing between the conception of scale and size in the finished sculpture. Smith's final works invariably deal with human size either directly or indirectly (as with the railcar works). His late sculptural work is always slightly larger than human size in order to be perceptually human sized.

Smith's continuation of a Vitalist aesthetic haunts the work in the form of a residual anthropomorphism. His work is based upon a set of pictorial conventions derived from Cubism that never address the issue of context implicit in the idea of nomination and ex-nomination. To do so would be to engage with the continuum of space and time that frames human activity and gives rise to the sense of scale. Smith works with the compositional conventions that utilize size and are heedless of questions centred upon ontological or materialist conceptions of scale. He discusses the blurred metonymic and metaphoric area in his work in *The Secret Letter* of 1964:

Don't forget, when one chooses a couple of old iron rings from a hub of a wagon, they are circles, they are suns; they all have the same radius; they all perform the same Euclidean relationship. They also have the romance of past function and new use. They have sentiment and they also have the geometry. There is no simple answer.<sup>95</sup>

The spray drawings and the consequent sculptural developments, remove the visceral expressivity from Smith's later work and introduce an abstract dimension in its place. However, the direct and literal understanding, introduced into Smith's late work by metonymic combination and compositional control, cannot displace his longstanding habituation towards metaphor. Vitalism infuses all of his work, even though biomorphism is replaced with geometric abstraction.

In Smith's use of spray paint, and inherent in the residual Vitalist aesthetic, there lies a clue to the effacement which characterised his last painted sculpture. Smith was committed to painting his sculpture since the steel forms that he used were not always available in stainless steel.

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94. Smith, *The Secret Letter*, first page.

95. Smith, *The Secret Letter*, first page.

I color them. They are steel, so they have to be protected, so if you have to protect them with a paint coat, make it color. Sometimes you deny the structure of steel. And sometimes you make it appear with all its force in whatever shape it is. No rules.<sup>96</sup>

His last works were painted in an allover drip-and-splatter technique. No photographs or examples of this work now exist. The work was effaced, or allowed to rust, it is said on the order of Greenberg, as chief executor of Smith's estate.<sup>97</sup> The splatter-and-splash technique, which may have been reminiscent of Jackson Pollock's technique, would have returned Smith's work to an aesthetic of visceral expressivity. Neither of these implications would have suited Greenberg and his pronouncements about David Smith as rugged individualist and abstract sculptor. Smith's spray drawings suggest another possible route into the painting of his last sculpture. The drawings display the occasional effects of over-spraying and splatter. This carries the implication that Smith may have found an independent set of material references for how paint might be applied to steel. Such references did not automatically presuppose Pollock's work, but did share with him its Vitalist aesthetic. Without the visual evidence there can be no certainty as to Smith's paint application on his last work.

## 5.

One of the most successful beneficiaries of the Cubist-based initiative in sculpture was David Smith. His application of colour to dimensional material eventually heightened, diversified, and intensified the planar possibilities of painted sculpture. Ultimately, it is in Smith's use of colour that he declares his allegiance to Vitalism and the pictorial. He is frank about the associative nature of colour, about its metaphoric implications.

The answer depends upon impression. The importance of what black means depends upon your conviction and your artistic projection of black; depends upon your poetic vision, your mythopoetic view, your myth of black. And to the creative mind the dream and myth of black is more the truth of black than the scientific theory or the dictionary explanation or the philosopher's account of black.<sup>98</sup>

When he employs stainless steel in his sculpture he does so in order that the sculpture may reflect the changing colours of the season and the atmosphere. The stainless steel works were fully intended to be outdoors, subjected to the weather and reflecting the light. The ambient space finally decides the matter, but it is the space of nature's operations that animates Smith's polished surfaces.

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96. Smith, *The Secret Letter*, seventh page.

97. Smith was killed in an automobile accident on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1965. The three executors of his estate were the critic Clement Greenberg, the lawyer Ira Lowe, and the artist Robert Motherwell.

98. Gray, *David Smith by David Smith*, p. 117.

He extended the Cubist devices for collage and surface texture not only by welding and brazing but also by rubbing colour into the metal. The intensity of his involvement with the materials and their manipulation led him to introduce precious metals into the work. Molten silver and gold were poured into specially drilled holes, secrets not available to any viewer. This degree of factitiousness brings together the related concepts of fetishism and artifice. Smith's admission to drilling unobtrusive holes in the metal sculpture and then pouring silver and gold into the borings has a mythic and symbolic dimension.

Hess: ... and you added some molten silver to the figure [*The Cathedral*] and she [Elaine de Kooning] quoted you as saying that the silver represented Purity. No one could possibly see this detail without help, or read it from the title.

Smith: Yes. Every once in a while, when I make a big rusty iron thing, I bore a hole in it and add some gold; just for the hell of it. I don't think anybody ever sees it. That tickles me a little.<sup>99</sup>

Hess then comments on the idea here of private meanings. However, it is Daedalus that comes back to mind at this point: "They say that Daidalos made mobile his wooden statue of Aphrodite, by pouring molten silver (quicksilver) into it".<sup>100</sup> Clearly the quicksilver is a metaphor for the soul or animating force and its action on the body. The exotic gesture of introducing pure, precious, metal into the mundane "rusty iron" similarly enlivens the artwork for Smith.

## 6.

Smith's early influences include the Cubist-inspired low-bas reliefs of his first wife Dorothy Dehner. She discussed her work as anti-volumetric, "They're front/back ... I don't make sculpture in the round".<sup>101</sup> The flatness of Dehner's, and Smith's, reliefs is a direct consequence of a picture-making attitude inherited from Cubism. Dehner never shed that attitude, while Smith struggled with it. His first fully volumetric works were the stainless steel *Cubi* series from the mid-1960s.

Smith's acolyte, Anthony Caro, exhibited resolutely Cubist work at the National Gallery, London, in the spring of 1998. His early professional artistic career followed a similar stylistic path to that of Smith. Caro began as an assistant to Henry Moore, during which time he worked in a figuratively based organic way. During his time as a lecturer at St. Martin's sculpture department he clearly expressed to me his interest in Constructivism. Recently he has begun to work in an openly Cubist manner, beginning with his *The Trojan War* series of work at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1994 and continuing with the National Gallery show four years later.

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99. Smith, *The Secret Letter*, third page.

100. Morris, *Daedalos and the origins of Greek Art*, p. 225.

101. Dorothy Dehner, Taped interview with Susan Fillin Yeh, Archives of American Art, Washington, DC.



The main difference between the two exhibitions, *Caro at the National Gallery: Sculpture from Painting*, 1998, and *The Trojan War*, 1994, was the emphasis that was placed upon paintings of the 'Grand Masters' in the exhibition held at the National Gallery. As its title suggests, this exhibition featured Caro's transcription of paintings into three dimensions. The exhibition was the first sculpture show ever to be held at the National Gallery, London, and effectively operated as both a derivation and a valorization of painting as the pre-eminent visual art.

Caro's work is extremely appropriate to a discussion of Vitalism. His loose assemblage works, in steel and terracotta, referred specifically to paintings by Van Gogh, Manet, Mantegna, Matisse, Goya, Giotto, and Rembrandt. Formally, his choice of materials and methods echoed *The Trojan Wars* series and maintained his return to figuration, with the significant departure, in the later series, being the overt use of painting as a referent. Speaking in a newspaper interview Caro said that, "sculpture's very awkward because, if you take away the figure—the object—that absolute object thing, you're stuck with either painting or architecture, I mean, sculpture doesn't really have any exact focus of its own".<sup>102</sup> Caro here reinforces the prejudice inherited from the later Greenberg that abstract sculpture is inferior to painting. He implies that, lacking a figurative reference; abstract sculpture blends with the background. This raises the issue of nomination and ex-nomination that Goossen wrestled with when writing about the emergence of Minimalism in 1968.

Goossen, it may be recalled, required that a transcript be an accurate or exact equivalent rather than an imitation. He further required of his exact artistic equivalent that it record the experience of the everyday encounter with objects, as a sort of ontological imperative. Self-referentiality and transparency formed the two strands of his ontological model for mapping the aesthetic experience onto the quotidian, and the quotidian onto the aesthetic. Caro cannot locate an independent focus for sculpture that is without a figure. Sheer sculptural materiality, for him, lacks the focus of nomination and evaporates into the ex-nomination of context and atmosphere. Painting, one infers, is always nominated as an object by its frame, and therefore inevitably distinguishes itself from its context. Architecture, meanwhile, apparently always nominates itself as a figure within a spatial continuum. Goossen's requirement for the experience of the everyday encounter with objects, by comparison, unifies and concretizes the experience of the spatial and the temporal as the focus of the artwork—and therefore of sculpture. Caro's work in both *The Trojan War* and *Sculpture from Painting* refers the viewer elsewhere. The work wishes, to reiterate Goossen's words, "to convey the notion that reality is somewhere else"—an elsewhere that may be conceived of as either Ancient Greece or the walls of the National Gallery.

The singularly appropriate nature of Caro's work, for Vitalism, centres on assemblage and depiction. *Sculpture from Painting* signifies his oscillation between the two poles of Synthetic Cubism and Vitalism that hold the mainstream of modern abstract sculpture in place. The Vitalistic concern with the picturing of an emotion has given way, in the National Gallery exhibition,

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102. Hugh Pearman, "The man who paints with steel", *The Sunday Times Culture*, 11 (8<sup>th</sup> February 1998), p. 2.

to an expressive assemblage that is a model of a picture. Later, in the same newspaper interview, Caro says, "What I had always tried to do was make something - something that looks like a table or chair or whatever—work as a container for feeling". Depiction emerges as a central concern of Caro's, depiction of emotions or things. Hugh Pearman, who interviewed Caro in association with the National Gallery exhibition, titled his article "The man who paints with steel".<sup>103</sup> Pearman's title is a very apt one. It is prescient in terms of this argument for organic construction, and playful given the context of Caro's show.

The Cubist technique of cut and paste underlies the stacking employed by Caro. In *Sculpture from Painting* Caro affirmed his interest in Synthetic Cubism as the foundation of modern sculpture. Shifting from a Moore-inspired aesthetic to one deriving from David Smith meant a change of material, not of paradigm. The mixture of Cubism with Vitalism, through the agency of Futurism, began the development of mainstream modern abstract sculpture. Umberto Boccioni's Futurist sculpture provided one initial line of development that opened the possibility of Cubo-Futurist organicism. Marcel Duchamp's and Man Ray's Orphism instigated another line of Cubo-Futurist construction, whilst symbolic organic constructivism marked the efforts of Vladimir Tatlin and Alexander Rodchenko. Constantin Brancusi and Isamu Noguchi, meanwhile, actualized a set of possibilities that incorporated Futurism within the organic residue of Art Nouveau and the anthropomorphism of the machine aesthetic. These early amalgamations of Synthetic Cubism and Futurism constitute the pedigree for a modern Vitalist aesthetic and continue to enjoy an extended life into the present, as witnessed by Caro's exhibition *Sculpture from Painting*.

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103. Pearman, "The man who paints with steel".

## 2c. Theatricality.

In his essay "Art and Objecthood", published in 1967, Michael Fried champions the sculpture of David Smith and Anthony Caro as the best of Modernist sculpture.<sup>104</sup> Their work is sharply contrasted with Minimalist, or as he calls it Literalist, work, especially the work of Don Judd. Fried's use of the label Literalist for Minimalist work is illuminating. The literal aspect of things is associated with metonymic rather than metaphoric order. Fried's opinion of Judd's attitude to art is best characterised as a formal classification in which combination and composition are the preferred devices. The binary opposite of this, Judd's imputed formal position, is that of the associative, which favours metaphor and substitution as the preferred devices.

Minimalist work is explained by Fried as work aspiring to the condition of "objecthood". He deplores any such aspiration as inherently theatrical. "Theatricality" is used as an interchangeable term for objecthood, and one that is best understood as a concentration on the 'it-ness' of objects in the world. 'It-ness' entails the entire situation that is experienced, and includes the human agent as part of the perceptual field.

In a paragraph that begins "art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre," the degeneration that Fried deplores in Literalist art seems to boil down to an increased sense of the quotidian in the work. As a result, the loss of timelessness appears to strip the artwork of its privileged insulation from the hurly-burley of commonplace objects.

I want to claim that it is by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre. In fact, I am tempted far beyond my knowledge to suggest that, faced with the need to defeat theatre, it is above all to the condition of painting and sculpture—the condition, that is, of existing in, indeed of secreting or constituting, a continuous and perpetual *present*—that the other contemporary modernist arts, most notably poetry and music, aspire.<sup>105</sup>

For Fried, duration marks non-Literalist and non-theatrical works as timeless, as works that exist in a perpetual state of becoming, that are charged with continuous possibilities for being meaningful. Literalist and theatrical works, by comparison, are mired in the temporality of the everyday. In their historical formation Literalist works, as diachronic and combinatory, require for their completion a self-reflexive beholder. As an essential element of the work, the beholder is self-conscious and alienated. For, if he has become part of the work-in-time, he has immersed his self-conscious being in material contingency and is aware of it. From this premiss arises the dichotomy that Fried presents as absorption and theatricality.

### 1.

However, it is Fried's comments on ideology that provoke the most disquiet since they provide his framework for alienation.

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104. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 116-147.

105. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 146.

The enterprise known variously as Minimal Art, ABC Art, Primary Structures, and Specific Objects is largely ideological. It seeks to declare and occupy a position—one that can be formulated in words, and in fact has been formulated by some of its leading practitioners. ... Its seriousness is vouched for by the fact that it is in relation both to modernist painting and modernist sculpture that literalist art defines or locates the position it aspires to occupy. ... Specifically, literalist art conceives of itself as neither one nor the other [painting or sculpture]; on the contrary, it is motivated by specific reservations, or worse, about both; and it aspires, perhaps not exactly, or not immediately, to displace them, but in any case to establish itself as an independent art on a footing with either.<sup>106</sup>

Even taking ideology in its broadest possible meaning, as a manner of thinking that underpins and characterizes a particular form of thought, Fried's disapproval of art that is "largely ideological" is clear. He appears to make the assumption that his position, in conjunction with that of the dominant ideology, is nonaligned, effortless, and, somehow, natural. Ideology, it appears, for him, is a matter of conviction and declaration, and belongs to the other person's flawed viewpoint.<sup>107</sup> This employment of the term ideology is loose, popular, and misleading. Ideology needs to be defined altogether more carefully if references to Marx and Brecht are to be included, as indeed they are by Fried. Peter Stevens, in "Ideology", writes:

'Ideology' covers all those aspects of social life which form and maintain each of us as a particular kind of social being, with particular practical tendencies and a specific self-awareness. It is that which forms us as people aware of ourselves as individuals with particular desires, and with an ability to make choices; in brief as particular kinds of agents of activity or subjects. 'Ideology' is thus a very general notion which involves both material practices and the ideas which are intertwined with them.<sup>108</sup>

From this it is clear that no one is exempt from the influence of ideology, and that Fried also "seeks to declare and occupy a position" by producing "Art and Objecthood". A significant component of his reservations is centred upon those artists who articulate a counter-cultural position. Literalist artists are attempting to undermine the position of Modernist painting and sculpture, in part, by being eloquent about their aesthetic, which for Fried is a counter-aesthetic.

Fried amplifies his distinction, between theatre and art when he discusses the "question of value".

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106. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p.116-117.

107. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 116.

108. Peter Stevens, "Ideology". *Paper Tigers: an introduction to the critique of social theory*, eds. Rod O'Donnell, Peter Stevens, Ian Lennie (Sydney: Department of General Philosophy, University of Sydney, 1978), p. 4.

Here as elsewhere the question of value or level is central. For example, a failure to register the enormous difference in quality between, say, the music of Carter and that of Cage or between the paintings of Louis and those of Rauschenberg means that the real distinctions—between music and theatre in the first instance and between painting and theatre in the second—are displaced by the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling.<sup>109</sup>

Bertold Brecht is specifically mentioned in this context to reinforce the theatrical as necessarily entailing conviction rather than absorption.<sup>110</sup> Significantly, the footnote in Brecht's text that draws Fried's attention is centred upon the term "ideological superstructure" and a clarification of it. Fried's response seems to suggest that conviction, theatre, and ideology are synonymous and highly suspect, whilst absorption and art are deemed to be inherently positive and, of course, natural. In the main body of the text in question Brecht writes about theatre and art as necessarily part of an ideological stance.

It is understood that the *radical transformation of the theatre* can't be the result of some artistic whim. It has simply to correspond to the whole radical transformation of the mentality of our time. ... It would be wrong too to treat these new ideas as if they were not ideas and not *mental* phenomena at all, and to try to build up the theatre against them as a kind of bastion of the mind. On the contrary it is precisely theatre, art and literature which have to form the 'ideological superstructure' for a solid, practical rearrangement of our age's way of life.<sup>111</sup>

Fried is most unhappy with the relationship of the spectator that is implied by both Brecht and Minimalist art because "it refuses to stop confronting him [the spectator], distancing him, isolating him".<sup>112</sup> Implicating the spectator within the context provided by the artwork is central to Brecht's aims. Brecht understands ideology to be all-encompassing, to be a formative agent for all thought processes. In the footnote that Fried quotes, Brecht explains, that first he wrote his plays and then, only later, discovered Marx: Marx was, "the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across". Brecht continues, unquoted by Fried, "For a man with interests like his [Marx] must of necessity be interested in my plays, not because they are so intelligent but because he is – they are something for him to think about".<sup>113</sup> The priority of Brecht the Marxist or Brecht the author that Fried raises is spurious; the issue turns on Brecht and Marx sharing an understanding of the formative and inclusive influence of an ideological superstructure. The awareness of ideology as such an inclusive and formative agency does not "stop confronting", "distancing", and "isolating" anyone who is once alerted to it.

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109. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 141.

110. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p.140.

111. Bertold Brecht, "The Epic Theatre And Its Difficulties", in *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 23.

112. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 140.

113. Brecht, "The Epic Theatre And Its Difficulties", p. 26.

Contra Fried on ideology, the Minimalist sculptor Don Judd writes:

Any art involves philosophical, social and political attitudes. It's hard to generalize about all art and the United States but essentially the best art is opposed to the main kinds of power and to many of the prevailing attitudes. I can't see how I can be outside of the society, which is a wish sometimes, so I'm within it. I don't think things would be better elsewhere. The other alternative is isolation and not working. I assume that I can resist the various institutions and uses of power and also the docility and conventionality of the country [the USA].<sup>114</sup>

Here Judd explains his reservations about the dominant power structure in which he finds himself and the attitudes that it entails. From his point of view resistance is intrinsically involved with the work that he does. The inseparable nature of art, philosophy, and social and political attitudes mean that for Judd confrontation, distantiation, and isolation are also inescapable facts of life.

In particular the formalist conventions of making plain the device, and of *ostranenie*—defamiliarization, appear to form the core of Fried's objection to his postulated condition of alienated, theatrical objecthood. In this context, Fried correctly identifies Judd's use of the term "specificity" with artifice and factitiousness.<sup>115</sup> He speaks of the Literalist artwork confronting the spectator, and of the spectator as being essential to the construction of the work.<sup>116</sup>

Apperception, as an integral element of the Minimalist work, centres attention on the viewing agent as an active cognitive entity within the perceptual event. Since Fried raises the subject of Marxism in connection with Brecht, it seems appropriate to use Marx as clarification on this point of subjective alterity and alienation. "To be sensuous, i.e. to be real, is to be an object of sense, a sensuous object, and thus to have sensuous objects outside oneself, objects of one's sense perception. To be sensuous is to suffer (to be subjected to the actions of another)."<sup>117</sup>

Fried endorses a conception of aesthetic perception that is founded upon the idea of isolated self-absorption, that is to say a position of self-possessive contemplation. Self-absorption disallows apperception as the awareness of oneself as an object amongst other objects. Self-externalizing sensuousness, on his view, disrupts contemplation and absorption, and allows for objectification to take place through a continuous assessment of self within a specific context. This very concept of turning the spectator into an active agent is the core of Brecht's idea of a Marxist theatre, poetics, and aesthetic. In his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal identifies precisely this Brechtian stance:

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114. Donald Judd, "Statement", in *Complete Writings 1959-1975*, p. 196.

115. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 142.

116. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 140.

117. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts", in *Early Writings*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 390.

Brecht's poetics is that of the enlightened vanguard: the world is revealed as subject to change, and the change starts in the theatre itself, for the spectator does not delegate power to the characters to think in his place, although he continues to delegate power to them to act in his place. The experience is revealing on the level of consciousness, but not globally on the level of the action. Dramatic action throws light upon real action. The spectacle is a preparation for action. ... The *poetics of the oppressed* is essentially the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theatre is action! ... Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!<sup>118</sup>

Boal's theatre and poetics of the oppressed carries the Brechtian project further, but no further than Fried seemed to fear. To transpose Boal's terms, the Minimalist artists think and speak for themselves. Incorporated within this artistic emancipation is the expectation that viewers of the work become active agents through the mechanism of their physical co-option. For Boal, theatre is rehearsal as opposed to the 'finished' theatre of spectacle. The audience interjects, questions the actors, and may join with the action.<sup>119</sup> Rehearsal theatre is therefore contingent, and its lack of closure opens it to construction and to literal readings resulting from historical experiences. It is profoundly a theatre of the diachronic time axis, in which the ultimate combination is that of the viewer with the protagonist.

## 2.

The reliance that Fried puts upon a stylistic interpretation of Minimalist sculpture as theatre ultimately results in a discussion of formalism and its foundations. The usual line of such stylistic generalization is that Minimalism was a formal rejection of the earlier style of Abstract Expressionism.<sup>120</sup> This rejection was based upon the dual disavowal of the craft aspects of art production and the primacy accorded to psychological aesthetics. Such a stylistic account recognizes the refusal inherent in formalism to lend itself to easy assimilation and attempts to deflect its critical implications. Formalist refusal constitutes itself as critical distance by recourse to the idea of a discipline, a discipline that is resistant to easy naturalization and cultural absorption.

If Minimalist sculpture provides a paradigm for the artificial as factitious, then a very specific aesthetic is being invoked: an aesthetic that is loaded, according to Fried, with ideological implications. When one uses the word 'aesthetic' in a particular sense, such usage is akin to using the word 'problematic' when speaking of philosophical orientations. In the introduction

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118. Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (London: Pluto Press, 1979), p. 155.

119. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, p. 142.

120. Barbara Rose, "A B C Art", pp. 274-297; Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture", pp. 180-186; Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood" pp. 116-147, in Battcock, *Minimal Art*.

to *Paper Tigers: an introduction to the critique of social theory* Rod O'Donnell, Peter Stevens, and Ian Lennie provide an explanation of the term 'problematic' in which knowledge is understood to be something that is produced:

It neither falls out of the sky, nor is it all given to us at birth. Things which are produced however, need to be produced by a certain means, and in theoretical work we call the means of production a problematic. Hence by way of definition, a problematic is a theoretical framework used for the production of knowledge. Both parts of this definition are important: it is a framework, and it is used to produce knowledge. As a framework or structure, it consists of certain specific elements such as theories and concepts which are joined together in definite ways. Because of this, a problematic, like any other structure, has certain objective properties that are independent of the particular individuals who use it. Although it takes time and effort these properties can be discovered and described.<sup>121</sup>

They continue by saying that the most important property of a problematic is that it is closed. They mean by this that it is limited in its scope and unable to deal with anything outside its parameters. Significantly, this curtailment has a function within the dominant ideology that may assist that ideology in its perpetuation. Effective intervention in the comprehension of social structures prevents change. Mystification is not an intention of individuals as much as it is a consequence of established problematics.

According to this explanation, 'problematic' may be thought of as identical to certain uses of the word 'aesthetic', as for example, when speaking of an aesthetic specific to a particular person, group, place or time, one may speak of a Feminist, or Realist aesthetic. Such a usage may even be personalized, as in Newman's, or Serra's aesthetic. What is being indicated is an orientation to the world and to production. A 'problematic', therefore, inevitably embodies an aesthetic position. Such an understanding of aesthetics is very close to the conclusion drawn by Jacques Rancière that "Aesthetics is not the fateful capture of art by philosophy. It is not the catastrophic overflow of art into politics. It is the originary knot that ties a sense of art to an idea of thought and an idea of the community".<sup>122</sup> An idea of thought and of community provides a framework that, when coupled with a sense of art, produces an appropriate response to an historical moment. Rancière considers that a closed problematic inevitably caters for an existing audience, while an experimental form "invents its people".<sup>123</sup> Effectively, the invention of new people is the invention of a new audience, one for which the perception of formal parameters is altered. This conception shifts attention from the past, as a depository of received figures of thought, onto the present, as a crucible for emergent figures of thought.

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121. O'Donnell, Stevens, Lennie, eds., *Paper Tigers: an introduction to the critique of social theory*, p. xi.

122. Jacques Rancière, "What aesthetics can mean", in *From an Aesthetic Point of View*, ed. Peter Osborne (London: Serpent's Tail, 2000), p. 33.

123. Rancière, "What aesthetics can mean", p. 32.



The aestheticization of a given ideology is so commonplace as to go almost unnoticed. Similarly, the use of 'an aesthetic' suggests that the panoramas of ideology, politics, ethics, and institutionalized thinking should be considered as governing the determination of art production. Aesthetics without this dimension of ideology is too vague to be useful.

This coupling of aesthetics and ideology raises the issue of understanding history. If one understands ideology to be the way in which a world-view masks or legitimates arbitrary power, then aesthetics cannot occupy a neutral position. It is in this sense of masking or legitimizing power that ideology has been considered to be a kind of false consciousness. It is this point that provides a springboard for Brecht and Boal to theorize theatre in the way they do. However, since ex-nomination is the condition of ideological existence, its attendant consciousness is taken to be natural. An ideological status is attributed to those positions other than that of the dominant ideology, which is to say that ideology is the unspoken assumption, the unnoticed background against which the alien is figured. This is the position that Fried adopts when accusing Literalist art and artists of being ideological. Theirs, it is asserted, is a position based upon articulate conviction.

A world-view is naturalized in order for it to become a life-world. In the process of naturalization a world-view makes itself as transparent as possible—i.e., as nearly invisible as possible—in order to simulate the naturalness of the life-world. The systematic distortions entailed in rendering that world-view transparent are the inevitable consequence of naturalization. Viewed in the light of the ideological implications of any world-view, an aesthetic carries a similar weight in terms of systematic distortion. Aesthetic considerations carry philosophical implications that require an awareness of the theoretical position adopted. Due to the nature of aesthetic production, as evidence of a closed problematic, every aesthetic is ideological. Unmasking intentionality therefore becomes a two-way process, which oscillates between an analysis of the results of aesthetic production and an appraisal of its methodology in terms of an underlying ideological framework. Making plain the device and the idea of defamiliarization, emphasize production as a line of inquiry, and the problem of masked intentionality.

### 3.

The so-called 'ordinary language' school of philosophy provides a useful tool, in the form of illocutionary speech acts, for understanding Fried's idea of "theatricality".<sup>124</sup> John Searle and J.L. Austin, in particular, develop the idea of performative utterance—the illocutionary, or speech act—to establish a basis for truth as social performance.<sup>125</sup> Austin puts it succinctly: "I explained the performance of an act ... as the performance of an 'illocutionary' act, i.e., performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something".<sup>126</sup> Understanding as a social construction becomes

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124. J.L. Austin, "Lecture VIII". *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 98-107.

125. J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances". *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 233-252.

126. Austin, "Lecture VIII". *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 99.

a backdrop against which art as indirect assertion is evaluated. Duration figures in illocutionary speech acts, since such acts are irredeemably context dependent.

In "Caro's Abstractness" of 1970 Fried writes of Anthony Caro's sculpture:

The refusal to allow the beholder to enter a given work, to step or stand inside it ... has been striking [because] the obduracy of Caro's sculptures on this score has been only one aspect, though an important one, of their anti-literal, anti-situational character; and that has been an index at once of their radical abstractness and of their deep antagonism to the theatrical in all its current forms and manifestations.<sup>127</sup>

The "anti-literal, anti-situational character" of Caro's work removes it from the encroachments and depredations of place and context, and locates the work, as if in an invisible vitrine, which is to say, in a pictorial, rather than in an actual space. Fried continues to fulminate against theatricality and objecthood.

However, what is substantially illocutionary about performative utterances is the value system supporting the speech acts. What is unsaid but constantly taken for granted is the existence of the dominant ideology and its aesthetic—the relevant problematic. The implicit understanding of social conventions by a process of ex-nomination determines what is admitted, acknowledged, or noticed. The process is implicit precisely because ex-nomination requires an active editing process of what is to be omitted, eclipsed, or unnoticed. Austin allows that speech acts may involve conventions, and invite convention as response, and in so doing he acknowledges the communal atmosphere of language. This backdrop of the social as ex-nominative carries with it assumptions about language use as truthful and proper. Similarly, the quarantine conditions that Fried wishes to impose on his isolated contemplative objects of aesthetic absorption are wholly fictive. Even as he deplores the pervasiveness of theatricality and literalism, he notes that "we are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace."<sup>128</sup> With this, the final line in "Art and Objecthood", he seems to disarm his critics by admitting to being a literalist most of the time. He even allows that Brecht may have had a well-intentioned desire towards an existential presentness.<sup>129</sup> He writes in a footnote,

But just as the exposed lighting Brecht advocates has become merely another kind of theatrical convention (one, moreover, that often plays an important role in the presentation of literalist work, as the installation view of Judd's six-cube piece in the Dwan Gallery shows), it is not clear whether the handling of time Brecht calls for is tantamount to authentic presentness, or merely to another kind of *presence*—i.e., to the presentment of

127. Michael Fried, "Caro's Abstractness", in *Anthony Caro*, ed. Richard Whelan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 107.

128. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 147.

129. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 146.

time itself as though it were some sort of literalist object.<sup>130</sup>

The entire issue of presentness, presence, and presentment, in Fried's essay, owes its currency to Clement Greenberg's essay *Recentness of Sculpture*, also from 1967.<sup>131</sup> Greenberg's essay is centred on a discussion of 'non-art' and the three-dimensional and, especially, the contentious line between art objects and any other material object. In particular Greenberg bemoans the lack of "aesthetic surprise" in Minimal art. "There is hardly any aesthetic surprise in Minimal art, only a phenomenal one of the same order as in Novelty art, which is a one-time surprise. Aesthetic surprise comes from inspiration and sensibility as well as from being abreast of the artistic times."<sup>132</sup> As far as Greenberg is concerned the phenomenal is counterpoised to the aesthetic ... and artistic. Presence seems to mean phenomenal manifestation. Presence is something that lesser artists' work "hides behind".<sup>133</sup> Understanding the artwork to be primarily a matter of phenomenal manifestation makes it the equivalent of an illocutionary speech act. How then to discern phenomenal manifestation in general from phenomenal manifestation as the artwork becomes a question of figure and ground distinction? This is a question that involves itself with material that is nominated as figure, and all else that remains ex-nominated.

John Cage pinpointed this area of interest with his piece 4' 33", which "becomes in performance the sounds of the environment".<sup>134</sup> This device of figuring the denotation of the ex-nominated itself vies with the activity of visibility, and implications for invisibility and relevance are raised. Attention needs to be paid to both the figure and the ground simultaneously in order to make sense of the situation. The ground, or field, is all that is audible—"the sounds of the environment"—while the figure is the piano and piano player, who are inactive. In order to make sense of the situation as presented by Cage, it is necessary to account for the figure and the ground. The effort to do this includes the audience as participants since they form part of the context, and the context is inextricably part of the work.

The use of ordinary materials in sculpture parallels the use of exposed lighting on a Brechtian stage, or the background and foreground dilemma found in 4' 33". The exact problem that is encountered here is that of recognition, and how the information that is recognized is to be subsequently contextualized. Fried asserts that just such a distinction, between the artwork and the visual field, is crucial to Modernist art production—"Presentness is grace". The condition of objecthood dismantles, or blurs, the boundaries between Minimalist works and their context. By drawing attention to the beholder as an active and apperceptive participant in a situation, Fried deplores the loss of absorption as a direct threat to art itself. Fried's defense of the contemplative artwork demands timelessness, and pictorialism as its paradigms. "Authentic presentment" does not include the employment of time

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130. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 147.

131. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 120.

132. Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture", O'Brian, p. 254, Battcock, p. 184.

133. Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture", O'Brian, p. 256, Battcock, pp. 185-186.

134. John Cage, "On Nam June Paik's Zen for Film (1962-64) (1968)", in *John Cage: Writer* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1993), p. 109.

as another material in the work, for that Fried declares is the duration of the experience.<sup>135</sup>

The totality of the artwork is extended by theoretical considerations for Brecht, Cage, and the Minimalists. Continuation of the process of work as artifice takes place with theoretical work extending its object into another form of materiality. Theoretical work locates art, and in so doing colours any future formulations. The tension between the work of art production and the work of cultural production is caused by and constitutes the condition of the hegemonic aesthetic. It is this theoretical aspect of the artwork that causes Greenberg to say, "Minimal art remains too much a feat of ideation, and not enough anything else. Its idea remains an idea, something deduced instead of felt and discovered. The geometrical and modular simplicity may announce and signify the artistically furthest-out, but the fact that the signals are understood for what they want to mean betrays them artistically".<sup>136</sup> It is also the reason why Fried writes that Minimal art "is largely ideological ... [and] seeks to declare and occupy a position—one that can be formulated in words".<sup>137</sup> By maintaining the artwork as a repository of inalienable value, Fried and Greenberg avoid questions regarding the hegemonic culture. Such questions, for them, are presumably outside the specific problematic in which they work. Consideration of the quotidian as an aesthetic category, in the case of Brecht, Cage, and the Minimalist's problematic, suggests that instead of maintaining a binary opposition structured around art and non-art, such a binary opposition is itself under scrutiny. Without the dimension of ideology and the ramifications of the problematic, Minimalism in particular is reduced to an idiosyncratic choice of design style. In a similar manner Fried can write of Brecht and Judd that their aesthetics are reducible to "merely another kind of ... convention".<sup>138</sup> Ultimately, the non- or mis-recognition of a critical problematic by the dominant ideology destroys its status as a paradigm, and renders it a style option, merely another set of conventions.

#### 4.

Fried, in "Art and Objecthood", describes the position of presentness as anti- or non-theatricality in terms of null time:

It is as though one's experience of the latter [Modernist painting and sculpture] has no duration—not because one in fact experiences a picture by Noland or Olitski or a sculpture by David Smith or Caro in no time at all, but because at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest ... It is this continuous and entire presentness, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, which one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness.<sup>139</sup>

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135. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 145.

136. Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture", O'Brian, p. 254, Battcock, pp. 183-184.

137. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 117.

138. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 147.

139. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", pp. 145-146.

His contention that presentness is tantamount to a perpetual state of self-creation marks his position as one of Romantic Modernism in which 'becoming' is awarded a special and pivotal status.

The chiasmic fluctuation between Being and Nothing describes the oscillation in Romantic thought, which finds the transcendental in the ordinary, and the ordinary in the transcendental.<sup>140</sup> The pivotal point in such a Romantic conception of the world and what is beyond it is found in the idea of 'becoming'. The insubstantiality of 'becoming' balances potentiality against the concrete. Immediacy forms the frozen moment of the eternal present that is poised between something and nothing. Immediacy is also that condition of perpetual 'becoming' in which consciousness, volition, and action fall into place. It is here that Fried's 'presentness' and an interest in 'presence' as an aesthetic category begin.

The logic of the Romantic dialectic lies in the adherence to an overview in which nature is the paradigm, and also establishes the ideal other. Growth is taken to be an organic component for this model of the dialectic. This model of the dialectic conceives of movement as growth, a pattern of growth that reaches its fulfillment in striking a balance between dynamic forces. The conjunction of Being and Nothing is focussed on the present as the instant of 'becoming'. This instant is immediate and true, and it is the ground from which thought arises, as well as being the concrete moment that is a consequence of abstraction and a precursor for abstraction. The concrete moment is that limited instant when determination is caused by negation. Since every synthesis is an abstraction, the progression of abstraction eventually comes to rest in the ultimate abstraction of the transcendental. This conception of the dialectic adheres to a strict bilateral geometry in which process and movement take place. The process of the Romantic dialectic leads eventually to a point of disembodied spiritual harmony, which is universal. Here one finds unity in multiplicity and a dynamic monism that is achieved through the dialectic. Since Fried concludes "Art and Objecthood" with the remark that "Presentness is grace", one concludes that art, for him, has spirituality as its ideal pinnacle.<sup>141</sup> This is in marked contrast with a Minimalist, or in Fried's terms a Literalist, conception of time.

The Literalist preoccupation with time—more precisely, with the *duration of the experience*—is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense, which, at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective.<sup>142</sup>

The 'arrow of time' is that formulation that argues for a direction to time. This direction does not allow for reversal, and such a disallowance disrupts

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140. Charles Rosen and Henri Zerner, *Romanticism and Realism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984). See particularly the chapters 1. "Romanticism: The Permanent Revolution", and 2. "Caspar David Friedrich and the Language of Landscape".

141. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 147.

142. Fried, "Art and Objecthood", p. 145.

the symmetry of equally extended space and time. The present moment in a materialist dialectic is seen as a place of construction: a place that furnishes the site for the structuring of an event as a response to the contingencies imposed by the past, the restraints of the present, and as a precondition for the contingencies of the future. The dialectic, on a materialist model, is a series of discrete events. Its constitution as an interconnected set of iterations, rather than as a reiteration, best describes the difference between the two models.

In making the dialectic materialist, time is introduced as an active agent that results in an essential asymmetry. Time, as an incorporated component, establishes a triadic logic by giving recognition to the material nature of process and change. This sensation of time, as something active and formative, is notably different from the sense of time that serves as a hiatus between the past and the future. It is precisely this hiatus that Fried identifies as the positive condition of presentness. It is the perpetual moment of burgeoning meaning that constitutes “the authentic art of our time”<sup>143</sup> by means of a “continuous and entire presentness, amounting ...to the perpetual creation of itself”.<sup>144</sup>

By embracing temporality within the model of the materialist dialectic the third term, synthesis, carries the weight of change. Synthesis, on this model, becomes a new thesis and immediately instigates a new antithesis. This chain of events once established runs on into infinity. That decisive moment of becoming, which was so crucial for the earlier model of the dialectic, has become a link in a chain of events that is constantly fluid. The organic potential for growth—becoming, gives way to a stochastic process on the materialist model, a state of affairs that is roundly deplored by Fried as endlessness.

It is inexhaustible, however, not because of any fullness—*that* is the inexhaustibility of art—but because there is nothing there to exhaust. It is endless the way a road might be: if it were circular, for example. ... Endlessness, being able to go on and on, even having to go on and on, is central both to the concept of interest and to that of objecthood. In fact, it seems to be the experience that most deeply excites literalist sensibility, and that literalist artists seek to objectify in their work—for example, by the repetition of identical units (Judd’s “one thing after another”), which carries the implication that the units in question could be multiplied *ad infinitum*. ... This awareness is further exacerbated by what might be called the *inclusiveness* of his [the beholder’s] situation, that is, by the fact, remarked earlier, that everything he observes counts as part of that situation and hence is felt to bear in some way that remains undefined on his experience of the object.<sup>145</sup>

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143. Fried, “Art and Objecthood”, p. 147.

144. Fried, “Art and Objecthood”, p. 146.

145. Fried, “Art and Objecthood”, p. 144.

The establishment of non-isotropy destabilizes space/time once and for all. There can be no re-occurrence and the possibility for a metaphysical point of balance is lost. Space is equally extensive in its bilateral symmetry; however, time is not—it is determined in its direction. As boundary conditions for human existence, time and space have an impact which, when experienced by human agents, takes the form of history. Samuel Alexander in his book *Spinoza and Time* discusses time as intrinsic:

Time is not something which happens to extended things, but [rather] there is no extended thing which is not temporal ... there is no reality but that of events, and ... Space has no reality apart from Time, and ... in truth neither has any reality in itself, but only as involved in the ultimate reality of the system of events or Space-Time.<sup>146</sup>

It is the idea of contingency included in the materialist notion of the dialectic that separates it so completely from the Romantic one. The dialectic, on the materialist model, is a series of discrete events that impact upon each other. The principal disruption that occurs is the failure of geometrical consistency. The concept of null time is a construction based upon the implications of the Romantic dialectic in contradistinction to a construction based upon a materialist dialectic. Null time corresponds to the conception of time as the expanded present. It is, at once, arrested and massively expanded time, a time that is neutralized rather than cancelled. This is the time frame of myth and all things mythical. Irving Sandler writes:

Mythmaking was attractive to the avant-garde painters [and sculptors] in New York during World War II because they believed that myths had always been invented by people to contend with the terrors of the unknown. Moreover, the primitivistic and mythic subjects they chose, which as Rothko and Gottlieb claimed were “tragic and timeless,” expressed the contemporary human condition with greater truth and relevance than the images of class struggle contrived by the Social Realists. Thus the Mythmakers emulated the Social Realists’ social commitment and urge to communicate while rejecting their messages as limited and banal.<sup>147</sup>

Fried’s lamentation over Minimalist literalness is a result of his adherence to an aesthetic based on the mythic that originated in Surrealism and became established in New York during the 1940s and 1950s.

On a model provided by the materialist dialectic there is a constant and fluid state of change rather than a particular point of germination. Infinitely finer gradations of time yield more particular events rather than a definitive point of origination. Events that are contextualized by other events, even the idea of context itself, form a referential system that Fried refers to as “inexhaustible” and “endless”.<sup>148</sup> Circularity is the nub of the charge that Fried

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146. Samuel Alexander, *Spinoza and Time* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1921), p. 17.

147. Irving Sandler, “Introduction”. *An American Sculptor: Seymour Lipton*, Lori Verderame (New York: Pennsylvania State University, 1999), p. 11.

148. Fried, “Art and Objecthood”, pp.143-144.

levels at the “Literalists” due to a lack of linear development; in other words, there is no discernibly momentous narrative. Nothing is provided with which to distinguish something from nothing (or everything else), or to discern between constant reiterations. To borrow Sandler’s phrase and apply it to Fried’s Minimalist argument, “their messages as limited and banal” cannot be invested with any significance.

Each instance of a Minimalist artwork understood as an aleatory event violates both the paradigm of atomistic individualism and Romantic organicism. Atomistic individualism maintains a position in which the individual is understood to be sovereign and self-sufficient. Romantic organicism, on the other hand, values community and ongoing tradition as the unit that transcends the individual by providing fulfillment and creativity—even though it is only possible within a community.<sup>149</sup> Fried’s position is not as radically distinct as it may first appear from that of artists such as Don Judd and Carl Andre. Judd and Andre carry a residue of Romanticism with them in the forms of, respectively, atomistic individualism and Romantic organicism. Michael Fried seems to incorporate both aspects with his commitment to an aesthetic grounded in a community of artists dedicated to heroic mythmaking. Judd, Andre, and the other Minimalist artists differ from him most markedly in their avoidance of the original grandiose aesthetic object. Both Judd and Andre pioneered an aesthetic that replaced an object-based aesthetic of ubiquity with a situational aesthetic of ubiety. Tranquility, harmony, and a sense of peace may still characterize their work, but context is all-important and necessarily entails awareness of one’s intricately involved spatio-temporality.

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149. See in particular Ernest Gellner, “Chapter 35 The truth of the matter”, in *Language and Solitude* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), pp. 181-188.



## 2d. Chance is a fine thing.

The status of chance must be taken into account when considering a materialist aesthetic position. Is the work subordinate to some fixed external principle that governs its validation, or is the process of work its own validation? Vitalism subordinates the process of the work to an end. Chance provides an element of novelty or variation within an otherwise invariant structure. Such a perceived tendency towards a greater whole leads to the conception of harmony, balance, and accord. By contrast, indeterminacy allows the process of work to be a continuous sequence of singular, and possibly unexpected, conjunctures.

### 1.

Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field*, 1977, adumbrates just such an encounter with a stochastic process. *The Lightning Field* consists of 400 stainless steel rods arranged in a grid that occupies an area one mile long by one kilometer wide at Quemado, New Mexico. The purpose of each rod is to act as a lightning conductor located in a remote geographical place already prone to high frequencies of lightning strikes. In this piece the constant possibility of an electrical discharge from the atmosphere is only cancelled when it actually happens. A balance is struck between eventuality and eventuation, between random atmospheric electrical attraction and discharge. Formally De Maria's piece is reminiscent of his much earlier work *Statue of John Cage*, 1963 (also known as *Cage*), and *Beds of Spikes*, 1966. These earlier works feature stainless steel vertical units arranged in a grid or square pattern. As early as 1966/67 Michael Benedikt remarked about De Maria's work:

[His] environment is more theatrical .... The show's centerpiece was a black ziggurat, with many dozens of tiny steps: at the very top, head-high, was a shiny vinyl chair, with chrome frame. It was like a throne. A theatrical tension entered through the fact that the feet of the chair were at the corner-tips of the base upon which it stood. ... The largest [piece] of all consisted of two long rows of chromed brick shapes. From the top of each, three chromed poles protruded, some round, some hexagonal, some high, some low, in unpredictable patterns. One walked into De Maria's show through them, as if down a long avenue of sphinxes reinterpreted.<sup>150</sup>

De Maria's sphinxes posed a riddle about the implications of meaning couched in terms of discernible patterns of material and, hence, of thought. Benedikt's use of theatre to describe the work is redolent of Fried's anti-Brechtian stance. The extreme formality of De Maria's work strikes Benedikt as enigmatic, a condition that he extends to a range of American Minimalist sculptors:

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150. Michael Benedikt, "Sculpture As Architecture: New York Letter, 1966-67", in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 68-71.

The strangeness of ... American Minimalist shows (including those of Morris and Judd) stems from the fact that the effect of the whole show tends to be more than the sum of the parts: seen *en groupe* there is an air of the mysterious, even of the environmental. ... American Minimalist work is distinguished only from the best current British sculpture [1966-67] by its dramatically environmental quality; it may eventually distinguish itself even from itself by becoming architectural.<sup>151</sup>

It is worthwhile to requote Thomas Kellein writing about John McCracken here: "In mid-1960s New York, the quest for an art that signified neither painting nor sculpture, but projected an architectural quality, became central."<sup>152</sup> The architectural quality that seems to be so identified with Minimalist sculpture is coloured by issues dealing with theatre and the environmental. Benedikt's article is dated 1966-67, and Fried's "Art and Objecthood" dates from 1967. Both writers are concerned to discuss Minimalist work in terms of location rather than as a collection of discrete and isolated sculptural objects. It is the aspect of the sculpture as an ensemble that appears to be the stumbling block for both writers. The work occupies the entirety of the visual and experiential field. In the same manner in which one enters a building or environment, the viewer is enveloped by the sculpture. The work as an installational whole seems to be theatrical insofar as it acts as a setting for the viewer. Constituted as a set the work has its temporality established to include the viewing agent. The very notion of installation or set carries the idea of an event with it—not the timed perceptual event of Fried's glimpse at perpetually nullified time, but the opposite. Time is inflected with the viewing agent's complicit understanding of the location. This is not the generalisation of an existential moment that generates a new category in perpetuity. It is, rather, the awareness of the constantly singular, contingent, and existential moment in its ramified iteration. Ubiety, the condition of being in a particular place is thus contrasted with ubiquity, as the capacity of being everywhere at the same time. Ubiquity collapses space and time into timelessness and spacelessness. Ubiety emphasizes the particularity of placement, and thereby its contingency.

De Maria writes in *Art yard*, 1963,

The whole action might last any amount of time. Maybe the machines will run out of gas. Or the people take over the machines. Or the holes might cave in. In any case I am sure there will be enough range of possibilities in the art to permit individual variation, and in time, style and acceptance.<sup>153</sup>

The idea of indeterminacy is being applied to sculpture that is constituted as an event. De Maria's *Statue of John Cage* featured a different aspect of indeterminacy in its enigmatic presence. Cage's inclusion as dedicatee of the 1963 work is thoroughly consistent with the attitude to art as an aesthetic event encountered in *Art yard* also from 1963. Both pieces make

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151. Benedikt, "Sculpture as Architecture", p. 68.

152. Kellein, "Thirty Years: A Long Day. Minimal Art Revisited", p. 6.

153. Walter De Maria, "Art yard", in Celant, *Art Povera*, p. 13.

mention of composers. *Art yard* includes La Monte Young as a nominated, if inexperienced, steam shovel operator. Young and Cage were both pioneers in the adaptation of non-European time frames to American music.

## 2.

Judd's specific objects are wholes, but they are that and no more. The conjunction of material, its physical abutment in space, constitutes an event in time. There is an aleatory materialism at work. As noted earlier, Judd equates openness with chance. The chance configuration that is the artwork constitutes a singular existential event. This singularity also extends to the available state of knowledge brought to bear upon it.<sup>154</sup> His use of the Fibonacci sequence is appropriate to this overall conception. The chain of events instigated at the beginning determines the progressive combination of units in the calculation.<sup>155</sup> The exponential growth of the resultant sequence flows from the calculation of the first term. The magnitude of that term determines what follows.

The phrase associated with Louis Althusser, that "history is a process without a subject", encapsulates aleatory materialism in its reference to time and process. In what has been termed "the materialism of the encounter", Althusser's philosophical position distinguishes between a process with a teleological orientation, and a process rooted in stochastic procedures.<sup>156</sup> It is in the latter that the necessity of contingency establishes stochastic processes on a foundation of aleatory materialism.

Newman's assertion of concerns and knowledge is an existential circumstance, a limited case, and one equivalent to that of any other viewer of the work. Judd remarks about the difference between Newman's earlier and later work:

Newman's openness and freedom are credible now; the earlier closed and somewhat naturalistic form is not. Ordinary abstract painting and expressionistic painting are bound in the rectangle by their composition. Their space and colour are recessed by a residual naturalism. They are still pictures. If forms run off the edges to imply a continuum, the painting is a segment of that continuum, which isn't true of Newman's paintings.<sup>157</sup>

By not implying a continuum, and by avoiding any naturalistic reference, Judd suggests that Newman's paintings are contingent and specifically what they are and where they are. Ubiety, the state of being in a particular place, summarizes Newman's post-1948 paintings exactly. Judd's interest in Newman's work is focussed on its status as a material object, which is located

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154. Donald Judd, "Barnett Newman", in *Complete Writings: 1959-1975*, p. 202.

155. The introduction of terms in a Fibonacci sequence is;  $0+1=1$ ;  $1+1=2$ ;  $1+2=3$ ;  $2+3=5$ ; yielding a sequence of: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, and on to infinity. The rapidity of numerical increase in thirteen steps demonstrates the exponential nature of this sequence.

156. Gregory Elliott, "Ghostlier demarcations: On the posthumous edition of Althusser's writings". *Radical Philosophy* 90, (July/August 1998), pp. 20-32.

157. Judd, "Barnett Newman", p. 202..

amongst other objects with a similar status. Newman's paintings end at their edges; whatever is adjacent to the painting is different but equal. The constellation of objects within a given context may include a Newman painting as one of the elements. The painting does not subsume its context into a continuum of its own making. "Newman's openness and freedom" are seen by Judd to be an accommodation of the paintings to the contingency of their setting and viewing. Temporality, as a concern of the work, introduces an element of serendipity.

Newman's early graphic work is clearly Vitalist, and raises a question about any residue of Vitalism in his later work. Such a residue combines the form of the human agent with that of the organic/primal reference. This incorporation then becomes a component within the work. This explanation makes sense of Newman's titles, which maintain a mythic dimension with existential overtones. Titles such as *Stations of the Cross*, *Concord*, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, or *Onement One* provide just a few examples. Just how Newman managed to collapse, or overlay, the space of depiction with the time of enactment will be examined elsewhere. It is sufficient at this point to say that the artwork, for Newman, is an event. The existential quality of an aesthetic event leads Newman to subordinate spatial considerations to those of the temporal. As Judd remarked, it is because of this manoeuvre that Newman's paintings avoid being pictures.

### 3.

In "Specific Objects" Judd observes that the group of painters he selected, post 1946, treat their surface as a complete, single thing, "The shapes and surface are only those that can occur plausibly within and on a rectangular plane. The parts are few and so subordinate to the unity as not to be parts in an ordinary sense. A painting is nearly an entity, one thing, and not the indefinable sum of a group of entities and references."<sup>158</sup> Here Judd is driving at the idea of singularity. The artwork is perceptually available for what it is, and concerns itself with facture and enactment. As a perceptual event the artwork is prosaic. The "near entity" that is a painting makes sense only within its boundary. After a discussion of the rectangular boundary and its divisions, Judd moves on to consider Frank Stella and his shaped paintings. He concludes that a painting is not an image because the plane of the painting and the stripes that constitute it, are a form of continuity. "The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another."<sup>159</sup> For Judd "painting and sculpture have become set forms."<sup>160</sup> His recourse is to seek the realization of entities in three-dimensional form. Self-referentiality in modern painting opens a new set of possibilities for art in general. He states: "The sense of singleness also has a duration, but it is only beginning and has a better future outside of painting."<sup>161</sup> Three-dimensional objects, Judd's "specific objects", are to be both paintings and sculpture, and, thereby, invalidate both categories. These

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158. Judd, "Specific Objects", *Complete Writings: 1959-1975*, p. 182.

159. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 184.

160. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 184.

161. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 182.

objects are to be both affirmed as artworks and as lacking in reference. Without reference they will be specific only to themselves and their situation.

The utilization of industrial materials and processes has no overlay of aesthetic meaning for Judd. "Materials vary greatly and are simply materials—formica (sic), aluminum, cold-rolled steel, Plexiglas, red and common brass, and so forth. They are specific. If they are used directly, they are more specific. Also, they are usually aggressive. There is objectivity to the obdurate identity of a material."<sup>162</sup> The attribution of aggression to industrial materials is also evidence of anthropomorphism, which only makes sense against a background that favours traditional art materials as correct or neutral. The suggestion is that, devoid of any other industrial reference, the deployment of industrial material in an art context is hostile. This linking of the significance of industrial material to the art context is already to presuppose alienation, disjunction, and isolation as the outcome. Judd's expectation for his "specific objects" is to 'decontaminate' the art context by employment of real objects and processes. A process of inoculation is instigated that introduces a contaminant in order to result in a more robust state of affairs. Such an intervention assumes that what is real, direct, and prosaic is healthy. His introduction of the hybrid form of the "three-dimensional entity" is a similar manoeuvre. This new form is neither painting nor sculpture, and its rude state of health corresponds to avoiding the weaknesses entailed by stereotyping. The isolated artwork appears to function, for Judd, rather like a self-contained cell. Materialism, in this way, may also adopt the cloak of the organic although not pictorially. Thus, while it is possible to overlay Judd's ideas with an organic metaphor, his ideas are resistant to transcendental readings. What is prosaic is simply as it is. Vernacular materials and vernacular vocabularies yield the quotidian, and perception is the common denominator of artworks. The organic that is part of the human condition does not need conflation with Vitalism. Vitalism demands an understanding that transcends the materiality of presentation. Returning to Oldenburg, Judd writes:

Oldenburg needs three dimensions in order to simulate and enlarge a real object and to equate it and an emotive form. If a hamburger were painted it would retain something of the traditional anthropomorphism. George Brecht and Robert Morris use real objects and depend on the viewer's knowledge of these objects.<sup>163</sup>

It is with regard to anthropomorphism that Judd differs from Newman. Barnett Newman approaches anthropomorphism from a consideration of the question of titles for his paintings:

I realized that the issue was an important one for me, because the title could act as a metaphor to identify the emotional content or the emotional complex that I was in when I was doing the painting, since I was not painting anything that I was looking at and since in relation to the painting there was nothing really to scrutinize. But there was the painting itself, which had its subject matter, had its content that had an effect on me and therefore I

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162. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 187.

163. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 189.

hoped would have an effect on anybody else who saw the painting—that I hoped in some way characterized the emotional content at least that I had when I worked at it. ... I think I try in my titles anyway to evoke the meaning that the painting had when I was painting it.<sup>164</sup>

An avenue is opened for the work of Carl Andre and Richard Serra, amongst others, by means of the removal of overt anthropomorphism from the material of the artwork. The approach to this avenue of development was opened in modern sculpture by the work of Barnett Newman and Constantin Brancusi. Both artists allow for the idea of the precinctual to be incorporated into their work. The ambulatory viewing agent, in each case, is involved in exploring and experiencing the artwork as a site. Such a topographic relationship of the work and its site raises questions that are not epistemological in nature, but are ontological and ethical in their orientation.

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164. Barnett Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), p. 305.

### 3. Precursors to Minimalism.

#### 3a. The sensation of time.

##### 1.

Barnett Newman's position is seminal to those sculptors known as Minimalists, particularly Don Judd, John McCracken, and Richard Serra. The understanding that Newman brings to bear upon the idea of presence, a key idea for the Abstract Expressionists, expands into an understanding of site and scale. Place becomes, for Newman, the site where presence makes scale evident. He uses nonisotropy, or the groundedness of perception, to centre awareness on the concrete state of affairs involved in physical presence.<sup>165</sup> This concrete state of affairs is perhaps most succinctly summed up as a commitment to presence as adjacency. His paintings exist in a way that extends to and includes the viewer within their space and time. Such an inclusion is intended to effect a different level of involvement for the viewer, one that disrupts the condition of distant contemplation of an object. Distantiation relies upon a polarization of viewer and object, which results in the space and time of the viewer enveloping the space and time of the object. With the contemplative art object one encounters spatio-temporal conditions best described as virtual. The spatio-temporality, in which the viewer exists, by contrast, is one of fully extended dimensionality. This condition is extrinsic to the closed virtuality of the contemplative object. Such a position of exteriority, of being extrinsic, is in marked contrast to the intrinsic nature of the viewer's own spatio-temporality.

When experienced close-to, the large canvases of Newman that contain the 'zips', those vertical lines running the height of the painting, cease being seen as compositional wholes.<sup>166</sup> Rather, they function as figure/ground relationships in which the viewer is a participant whose presence introduces a third element into the situation. Introduction of a viewer/participant as a third element shifts the focus away from the canvas as pictorial presence onto physical presence. This shift is necessary, since physical presence then becomes intrinsic to the work, and so directs attention to the experience of the spatio-temporal continuum encountered. To encounter place in this way is to experience the conjunction of space/time/energy as an event. Photographic records showing Newman's 1951 installation, at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, of the sculpture *Here 1* with his painting *The Wild* in the background attest to just such a set of circumstances.<sup>167</sup> The intrinsic aspect of the viewer's presence as a third element to that of the two works is obvious.

A tripartite relationship requires a sense of orientation within space that acknowledges interspace. Interspace and interstice recognize the gap between things as something positive, as a material space. Tripartite

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165. Yves-Alain Bois, "Perceiving Newman", in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1990), p. 187-214.

166. Vir Heroicus Sublimis, 1950-51, 95 3/8in x 17ft 9 1/4in, and Cathedra, 1951, 96in x 17ft 9in.

167. Armin Zweite, *Barnett Newman: Paintings, Sculptures, Works on Paper* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, rev. ed. 1999), p. 223, fig. 80, and Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971).

relationships also require that the centrality of focussed vision give way to peripheral vision in order to gauge and contextualize the situation. The effects of both kinaesthesia and apperception require explanation when negotiating and recounting the experience of the work. It is this aspect of Newman's paintings that centres attention on the issue of scale.

In his article "Barnett Newman", from 1970, Don Judd writes:

It's important that Newman's paintings are large, but it's even more important that they are large scaled. His first painting with a stripe, a small one, is large scaled. The single stripe allowed this and the scale allowed the prominence and assertion of the stripe and the two areas. This scale is one of the most important developments in ... twentieth-century art.... All of the best American art, to this moment, has this scale. The form and qualities of the work couldn't exist otherwise. The major division in contemporary art is between that involving the smaller, older scale.<sup>168</sup>

Judd sees Jackson Pollock as one of the first artists to have been involved with the problem of scale. He identifies this problem as the central issue, and hallmark, of contemporary American painting worth notice. For Judd, "The large scale is involved with several important qualities, each of which forces the existence of the others."<sup>169</sup> Openness is by far the most important quality identified by Judd in Newman's work. As discussed earlier, this idea of openness entails specificity and chance. Therefore the large scale entails openness, which in turn requires receptivity to contingency. The particular is subject to the vagaries of happenstance, precisely because it is provisional. As far as Judd is concerned human agency is the realm of openness and artifice, both of which condition the phenomenon of scale. The presence of the human agent is then one source, or vector, within a network of aleatory sequences. The sum of this continuous open-ended conjunction is an event that is a specific place.

## 2.

It is curious that Newman dealt so well with scale in respect of painting and its situation, since his sculpture deals with the same concept awkwardly. His *Broken Obelisk*, 1963-67, locks itself into the virtuality of pictorial space. However, *Zim Zum*, 1969, *Here 1*, circa 1950, and the *Project for the Synagogue*, 1963, all involve some sense of place. Newman elaborates a sense of place in his writing, anecdotally in his ramble through New York, and eloquently in his encounter with the *Ohio Serpent Mound*.<sup>170</sup> For Newman presence and place appear to resolve themselves in the importance of time: "The concern with space bores me. I insist on my experience of sensations in time - not the sense of time but the physical sensation of time."<sup>171</sup> This

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168. Judd, "Barnett Newman", pp. 201-202.

169. Judd, "Barnett Newman", p. 202.

170. Barnett Newman, "New York (1943 or 1944)", and "Ohio, 1949". *Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 30-34, & pp. 174-175.

171. Newman, "Ohio, 1949", p. 175.



physical sensation of time is intrinsic to the situation. It is continuous with that situation or place, and it is antithetical to any closure. Richard Shiff has convincingly established this point in his recent lecture "Newman's Time".<sup>172</sup> The demarcation of any pictorial space in contemplative space/time excludes itself here on the grounds that it lacks immediacy. Newman's innovation includes the physicality of the viewer within the work itself.

I don't manipulate or play with space. I declare it. It is by my declaration that my paintings become full. All of my paintings have a top and a bottom. They are never divided; nor are they confined or constricted; nor do they jump out of their size. Since childhood I have always been aware of space as a space-dome. ... For me space is where I can feel all four horizons, not just the horizon in front of me and in back of me because then the experience of space exists only as volume. ... Anyone standing in front of my paintings must feel the vertical domelike vaults encompass him to awaken an awareness of his being alive in the sensation of complete space. This is the opposite of creating an environment. The environment is separate from the painting. ... The room space is empty and chaotic, but the sense of space created by my painting should make one feel, I hope, full and alive in a spatial dome of 180 degrees going in all four directions.<sup>173</sup>

The subject of Newman's essay "Ohio" is the *Great Serpent Mound*, a product of the Ohio Valley peoples, who were a combination of the Adena and Hopewell cultures. The first Moundbuilders sailed to present-day Louisiana from Mexico, and the oldest mounds in North America are to be found at Poverty Point in Louisiana. From there the migrants penetrated the continent upstream towards Canada, settling the Mississippi and Ohio valleys. The first Moundbuilding epoch was based in the lower Mississippi valley, and was the Poverty Point culture 1500-700 BC. The second epoch was that of the Adena-Hopewell, based in the Ohio River valley. The Adena culture is dated circa 500 BC-AD 100, and the Hopewell culture circa 200 BC-AD 400. The third and final Mound-building epoch was that of the Mississippian period of AD 700-1731.<sup>174</sup> The earliest builders in the Ohio valley were the Adena people who merged with the later Hopewell influx from the west. This cultural mixture later became the nucleus for the Iroquois peoples.

The *Great Serpent Mound* is one of those enigmatic effigy mounds built by the Adena-Hopewell people. The mound did not stand in isolation but is located within a complex of sites that straddle not only the adjacent Brush River, but also the greater area of southern Ohio. The Serpent, if fully extended, would be 1,300 feet long. Its overall height and width have been diminished by the depredations of weathering and ploughing by the European

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172. Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time". A public lecture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2002, part of the symposium: "Reconsidering Barnett Newman".

173. Barnett Newman, "'Frontiers of Space' Interview with Dorothy Gees Seckler", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 249-250.

174. Lynda Norene Shaffer, *Native Americans Before 1492: The Moundbuilding Centers of the Eastern Woodlands* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), p. 6.

settlers.<sup>175</sup> The ploughing and later refurbishment of the site has added an extra dimension of confusion to accurately dating the *Serpent Mound*. Recent scholarship has rejected the previous dating of the mound, AD 1070  $\pm$  70, which would place it within the Mississippian culture of the Fort Ancient peoples. This rejection is based on the supposition that later archeological material from the same site was deposited on the earthwork during European renovations in the late 1880s. Radiocarbon dating was therefore confused by inclusions from a more recent stratum of occupation at the same site by Fort Ancient people. It is the opinion of William F. Romain that the mound is Hopewell in its origin. He bases this opinion on three factors, formal considerations, utilization of a culturally specific unit of measurement, and structural inclusion of lunar alignments that seem exclusive to the Hopewell.<sup>176</sup> Therefore, placing construction of the *Serpent Mound* at around AD 100, mid-Hopewellian, seems the best current estimate, since this allows a sufficient amount of time for the mound to accumulate enough deposited soil, based on annual rituals of renewal, to attain its probable unploughed dimensions. Conventional dating of the *Great Serpent Mound* to circa 600 BC, mid-Adena, reflects the belief that the mound is purely a product of the Adena culture.

The Adena-Hopewell sites conform to the general pattern of Pre-Columbian Native American cities, in that they served more as a locus of activity than as a place to live. A central system of stylized mounds establishes a precinct for activities that celebrate the culture and the site through a notion of ubiquity and are supported by a network of satellite settlements. It is usually the case with the Adena-Hopewell mounds that they have astronomical significance based on the placement of earthen banks that provide sight lines in the landscape. Undulations in the 'body' of the *Serpent Mound* supply just such a set of referents for lunar cycles, while the orientation of the entire figure allows the snake to 'swallow' the sun at the summer solstice.<sup>177</sup> The Newark earthworks in particular comprise one of the largest earthworks in the world and function as a fixed astronomical instrument. The two largest features of the site, the interconnected circle and octagon, cover some seventy acres of ground. A viewing mound, sited on the perimeter of the circle at the extreme end of the axis of the combined figures, determines a network of gaps and mounds located at each corner of the octagon. These sighting lines align themselves with major lunar and planetary motions, and the supposition is that the sightings served symbolic functions within the culture. The early significance of the mound building probably has to do with taking earth that has been underground and laying it onto the surface; hence mound formation is a consequence of a broadly accepted cultural idea of an uncovering, which is also a covering of the previous layer. This probably has ritual significance in terms of agriculture, cyclical and astrological meaning, mortality, and the reinforcement of the idea

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175. When first measured in 1846 the mound was 5 feet high and 30 feet wide, currently it is 4 feet high and 20 feet wide. Shaffer, *Native Americans Before 1492*, p. 40.

176. William F. Romain, *Mysteries of the Hopewell* (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron, 2000), pp. 233-253. Romain has isolated the basic Hopewellian unit of measurement as 2.106 feet, and lesser multiples of the overall 1,053 foot unit. *Mysteries of the Hopewell*, pp. 80-100.

177. An alignment that deals with the solstice requires that the mound be orientated towards true north, and, consequently demands reference to supporting astronomical information. Romain, *Mysteries of the Hopewell*, pp. 233-253.

of a particular place as this place and no other place. An integrated system of ideas was formed that fuses spatial and temporal location into an acute perception of ubiety.

Newman was sufficiently interested in Native American art to write essays and mount two exhibitions for Betty Parsons of that work. The first show, *Pre-Columbian Stone Sculpture*, 1944, merited two essays, whilst a single essay accompanied the second, *Northwest Coast Indian Painting*, 1946. Newman uses these essays to unpack several of his ideas, particularly abstraction. "There is an answer in these works to all those who assume that modern abstract art is the esoteric exercise of a snobbish elite, for among these peoples, abstract art was the normal, well-understood, dominant tradition."<sup>178</sup> It is certainly the case that Newman saw an interest in Pre-Columbian cultures as politically timely, since it provided him with a platform from which he could espouse a non-European aesthetic. The later essay "Ohio", 1949, by Newman, is at once an extension of his earlier essays and evidence of a more forceful attitude.

Standing before the Miamisburg [Serpent] mound, or walking inside the Fort Ancient and Newark earthworks, surrounded by these simple walls made of mud, one is confounded by a multiplicity of sensations: that here are the greatest works of art on the American continent, before which the Mexican and Northwest Coast totem poles are hysterical, overemphasized monsters; that here in the seductive Ohio Valley are perhaps the greatest art monuments in the world, for somehow the Egyptian pyramid by comparison is nothing but an ornament... Here is the self-evident nature of the artistic act, its utter simplicity. ... It is something that must be experienced there on the spot: The feeling [is] that here is the space; that these simple low mud walls make the space. ... Suddenly one realizes that the sensation is not one of space or [of] an object in space. It has nothing to do with space and its manipulations. The sensation is the sensation of time.<sup>179</sup>

Writing about the ancient mound-building cultures of North America, Roger Kennedy says:

Ancient American architecture—geometrics of earth in Ohio, platforms of stone in Mexico, of earth in Missouri, or of adobe in Arizona—does not separate humans from nature by enclosing them within walls, roof, and floor. It directs them up ramps and down, beside and over pyramids and cones, and between embankments or walls of stone—but almost never sends them within. It is only a little too simple to say that American monumental architecture is an exterior art. In Mexico, Yucatan, Illinois, Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, or Alabama,

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178. Barnett Newman, "Northwest Coast Indian Painting", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 106.

179. Newman, "Ohio", pp. 174-75.

people were conducted by architecture itself across flattened spaces bounded by masses. The programming was to move around, through, and upon. One almost never entered a doorway. Doorways were unimportant.<sup>180</sup>

The contrast that Newman makes between the space contained within a room and that of a spatial dome is close to the meaning of the chapter heading "Among Not In" used by Kennedy for the extract quoted above. Kennedy describes a precinct in which an awareness of interstitial space is crucial to an understanding of place. Ubiety is governed in such a case by an awareness of the precinctual. Kennedy goes on to say:

When we think of Chillicothe as the Delphi of American antiquity, ... the further thought arises that its climate is not much more severe than that of Thrace, and that before the Romans made interior space so important, many of the sacred places of the Greeks were in the open air. The word they used for outdoor areas reserved for liturgy — *temenos* — serves as well for spaces bounded by the earthen octagons, squares, and circles at Newark and Chillicothe.<sup>181</sup>

*Temenos* means literally "the place of the god" (or of a deified hero or a demigod). It is the Greek word for the holy of holies within a temple, and, by extension, the whole temple, or a sacred site such as a grove. The *Serpent Mound* in Ohio does not constitute an earthen enclosure, neither a truncated pyramid or cone, nor a raised platform. It is, however, an extension of such structures, which, lacking the connotation of a charnel house, may be wholly celebratory. Kennedy writes of effigy mounds:

A religion that brings a believer to a heightened receptivity to the unconscious, and places that person in a rapt relationship to birds and to water animals, such as frogs and beaver, is a religion that might also create an architecture of animal forms. And so it did: "effigy mounds," shaped like the opossum ... at Granville, Ohio, the famous *Serpent Mound* in Peebles, Ohio, and vultures and eagles in Iowa and Wisconsin.<sup>182</sup>

Thomas Hess recounts that Newman later spoke of his experience of the *Serpent Mound* in an interview.

Looking at the site you feel, Here I am, here ... and out beyond there [beyond the limits of the site] there is chaos, nature, rivers, landscapes.... But here you get a sense of your own presence.... I became involved with the idea of making the viewer present: the idea that 'Man Is Present.'<sup>183</sup>

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180. Roger G. Kennedy, *Hidden Cities*. (New York: Penguin, 1996) p. 246.

181. Kennedy, *Hidden Cities*, p. 247.

182. Kennedy, *Hidden Cities*, p. 262.

183. Thomas B. Hess, *Barnett Newman*, quoted in Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 174.

Even though the use of the word 'presence' is redolent with the argot of Abstract Expressionism, the word certainly suggests "a heightened receptivity" and "a rapt relationship" with a particular place. Such a notion of place is later amplified by Newman in his note "Recent American Synagogue Architecture" that almost serves as a definition of *temenos*.

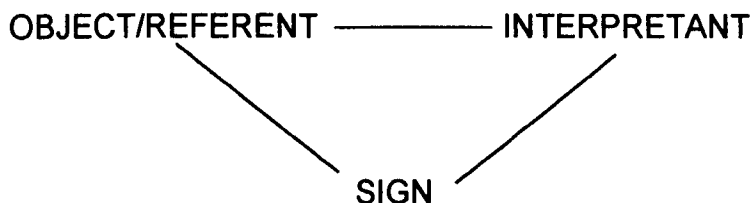
The synagogue is more than just a house of prayer. It is a place, *Makom*, where each man can be called up to stand before the Torah to read his portion. ... My purpose is to create a place, not an environment, to deny the contemplation of the objects of ritual for the sake of that ultimate courtesy where each person, man or woman, can experience the vision and feel the exaltation of "His trailing robes filling the Temple."<sup>184</sup>

Newman uses the 'zip' to do more than simply connect the top and bottom edges of his paintings. The 'zip' energizes the spatio-temporal coordinates of the spectator by extending the work into their behavioural field. This extension shifts the emphasis from symbolism or iconicity into the realm of an existential trace. Newman's recognition of orientated vision helps to establish a dividing line in modern sculpture between works that rely upon symbolic/iconic devices, and those that rely upon devices that are indexical/iconic.

### 3.

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) introduces the triad of icon, index, and symbol in his writings on semiotics. He establishes this triad as a set of relationships between a sign, its interpretant, and its referent. Peirce explains what he means by a sign this way: "A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign."<sup>185</sup> It is clear from this that the interpretant is very important to Peirce. He explains this very clearly, "My Interpretant ... is supposed by me to be something essentially attaching to anything that acts as a Sign. Now natural Signs and symptoms have no utterer; and consequently have no Meaning, if Meaning be defined as the intention of the utterer".<sup>186</sup> The sign is located in a tripartite relationship with interpretant and referent (see figure 2).

Figure 2



184. Barnett Newman, "Recent American Synagogue Architecture". *Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 181-182.

185. CS. Peirce, "1. What is a Sign? Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs. 1897", in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. by Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 99.

186. CS. Peirce, "Letters to Lady Welby, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1909", in *Charles S. Peirce: Selected Writings*, ed. Philip P. Wiener, (New York: Dover, 1958), p. 414.

These elements form the core of Peirce's semiotic system, and each element may be isolated in order to enable examination of the other two. Each of the three elements, Object or Referent, Sign, and Interpretant, is in turn divided into three more elements. Triadicity is very important in Peirce's system since the categories of firstness, secondness and thirdness carry the implication of ascending orders of complexity. However, these need not be considered in their generality here.

Peirce has the following to say on the subject of a sign's relation to its referent and interpretant: "Nor ought he [the Logician] to confine himself to the relations of signs to their Objects since it had always been considered the business of the logician and of nobody else to study Definition. Now a definition does not reveal the Object of a Sign, its Denotation, but only analyzes its Signification [Connotation], and that is a question not of the sign's relation to its Object but of its relation to its Interpretant."<sup>187</sup> In this extract Peirce establishes the following semiotic chain for the construction of meaning.

#### OBJECT- (DENOTATION) - SIGN - (CONNOTATION) - INTERPRETANT

Peirce takes a position on perception that is inductive. At its most simple induction relies on observation to provide the data for later theorization and verification. Aesthetically induction is exemplified by John Constable's studies of clouds and trees that were accurately drawn from observation and caused a break with existing conventions of rendering skies and trees. Deduction, by comparison, takes the form of a conceptual projection of ideas onto the world for observational verification.<sup>188</sup> Probably the best-known example of deductivism is René Descartes's statement: "I think therefore I am". Peirce adds a third term to these two, namely, abduction. Abduction, stated at its baldest, is an educated guess.<sup>189</sup> As such, it allows for an assessment of probability and novelty. This interpretative element is the chief distinction between the hermeneutic semiotics of Peirce and the code semiotics of Saussure.<sup>190</sup>

Apprehension of the sensuous, which forms the object/referent for Peirce, is a matter of immediacy. The organization of basic material perceptions, which constitute the sign, is a second step. However, he says that "the object of a sign can be nothing but what that sign represents it to be".<sup>191</sup> The object therefore consists of two aspects: its brute independent materiality, and its interpretative potential. The subsequent terms of his triadic semiosis—sign and interpretant—both deal with the manner by which the relationship between object and sign is construed. The question of perception is interesting in Peirce because it incorporates the possibility of surprise,

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187. Peirce, "Letters to Lady Welby, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1909", in Wiener, p. 421.

188. AF. Chalmers, *What is this thing called Science?* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976), pp. 2-7.

189. CS. Peirce, "On the Logic of Drawing History from Ancient Documents", pp. 106-107, "Nomenclature and Divisions of Triadic Relations", p. 299, and "Pragmatism as the Logic of Abduction", pp. 226-241, in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings, Volume 2 (1893-1913)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998),

190. Susan Petrilli, "On the semiotics of interpretation", in Gérard Deledalle, *Charles S. Peirce: An Intellectual Biography* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. xi-xxvii.

191. Peirce, "Excerpts from Letters to Lady Welby", in *The Essential Peirce, Vol. 2*, p. 477.

which is the dynamic aspect of materiality that is so important to innovation and novelty. Adherence to an idea of independent materiality causes Peirce to describe himself as various sorts of realist, all of which qualify realism in line with his conditional understanding of the object as something that is simultaneously independent of, and mediated by, the mind.

When considering the relationship of the sign to its referent it is essential to account for the interpretant since any sign is intentional. Peirce considers the interpretant to also be a sign, and he argues that signs remain perpetually open to interpretation. Indeed, without the interpretant there can be no denotation or connotation, a position that Peirce describes as a “natural sign” or “symptom”. Peirce says the following about the object of a sign: “The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.”<sup>192</sup> Representamen and sign are used interchangeably in this extract. Ground is understood to be the relationship of the sign to that sign’s object, and may take the form of an icon, an index, or a symbol. If the ground of the sign is some idea of its object, or referent, then the interpretant is absolutely essential in order for the activities of denotation and connotation to take place.

This produces the formulation below (see figure 3) in which the sign in its relationship with the referent entails the interpretant. Such entailment is a consequence of the fact that the sign signifies, which is to say that it denotes and connotes. The interpretant, in this formulation of ground, sign, and interpretant, depends upon the relationship between ground and sign.

The object exists independently of anything else—including the interpretant. The sign is relational, or reactive to something else, and the interpretant is a mediator that brings the object and the sign into a relation.<sup>193</sup> The interpretant cannot know the object other than through the agency of a sign, and so whilst the interpretant has knowledge of the sign, that knowledge also reveals information about the relationship between the sign and its object.

It needs to be borne in mind that the interpretant is also a sign, a sign that is perpetually unclosed. The elements of the relationship of a sign to its ground are distinguished as: 1, icon; 2, index; and 3, symbol. Each sign is a compound of all three terms, and characterizes a tendency towards one of them. The numerical order recognizes an ascending order of complexity in the relation of the sign to its object. Peirce’s semiotic system is secondary, in this study, to his coinage of the idea of an indexical sign relationship.

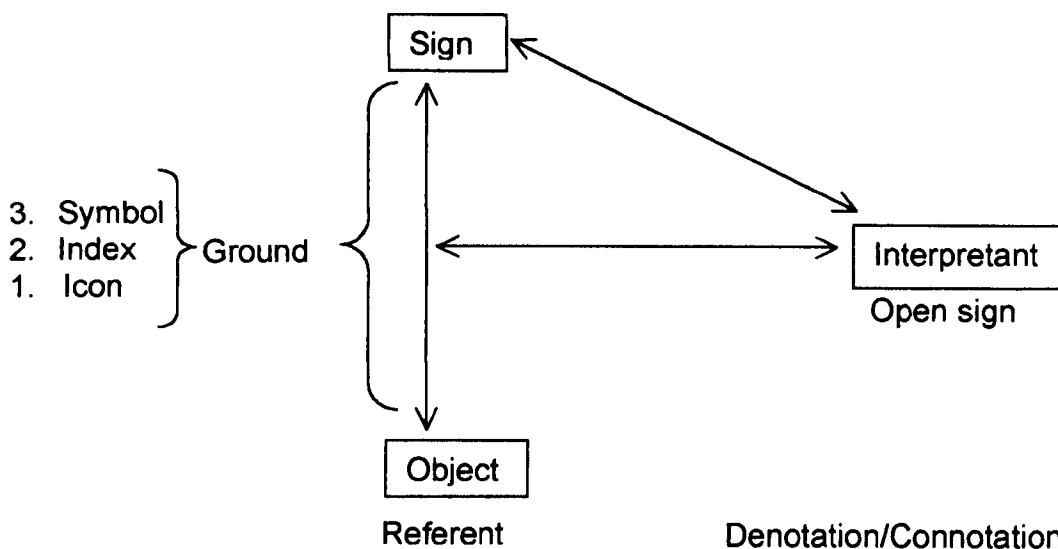
Indexicality is intrinsic to space and time since it functions primarily as an event. Smoke is an index of fire. A weather vane is an index of wind direction. Knocking on a door constitutes an indexical sign.

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192. CS. Peirce, “1. What is a Sign?” in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 99.

193. CS. Peirce, “The Architecture of Theories”, in *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings Volume 1 (1867-1893)* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1992, p. 296. This section of Peirce’s writing deals with the conceptions of First, Second, and Third. I have applied the appropriate terms to those parts of Figure 3 in order to give a greater degree of clarity. The general characteristics of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness may equally well be applied to the triad Icon, Index, and Symbol, as well as to the triad of Object, Sign, and Interpretant.

Figure 3



The existential relationship between a sign and its referent makes that relationship indexical. Peirce puts it this way:

An *index* is a representamen which fulfils the function of a representamen by virtue of a character which it could not have if its object did not exist but which it will continue to have just the same whether it be interpreted as a representamen or not. For instance, an old-fashioned hygrometer is an *index*. For it is so contrived as to have a physical reaction with dryness and moisture in the air, so that the little man will come out if it is wet, and this would happen just the same if the use of the instrument should be entirely forgotten, so that it ceases actually to convey any information.<sup>194</sup>

Peirce goes on to elaborate that because the index has an existential relation to the world it “is a reactional sign, which is such by virtue of a real connection with its object”. An index, whatever its status, or usefulness as a sign, is always factual since it involves “a quality of the object [referent]”. An<sup>195</sup> unassociated proper name or pointing finger continues to be a sign formed in relation to something else in the world. The *Bunker Hill Monument* is considered by Peirce to be the sparsest of indices because its unmoving occupation of its site is self-nominative.<sup>196</sup>

#### 4.

Barnett Newman’s seminal painting *Onement One*, 1948, operates in precisely the same way as the sparsest indexical sign. It nominates itself as a particular place, and as no other. It represents itself as self-referential. *Onement One* is a determinate set of circumstances, in a determinant place.

194. CS. Peirce, “Lecture 3”, in *Pragmatism as a Principle and Method of Right Thinking*, ed. by Patricia Ann Turrissi (New York: State University of New York, 1997), p. 170.

195. Peirce, “Lecture 3”, p.170.

196. Peirce, “Lecture 3”, p.171.



The precursors for this and his later paintings are to be found in Newman's drawings. As early as 1946, in *Untitled* and *Untitled (The Cry)*, he is brushing ink over masking tape in anticipation of the drawing *Untitled (Onement I)* from 1947. Following this were the two oil-on-paper versions from 1948. Eventually his sequence of ink drawings led to the series of paintings *The Stations of the Cross*, 1958-66.

As a reactional sign the line provided by the stripped-out masking tape reveals the untouched ground of the drawings. The application of the ink makes both itself and the masked-out line obvious as intentional interruptions. This arrangement raises the question what is the figure, and what is the ground? Speaking of his 'zips' as a field between other fields, Newman says that they are "a field that brings life to the other fields, just as the other fields bring life to this so-called line".<sup>197</sup> Dealing with the literalness of composition as a process, as an existential event, enabled Newman to continue and develop his first painted 'zip' in *Onement One*. His method of integrating and demarcating the line from its ground was by hand painting his 'zip' and his ground. He also maintains the distinction by using cadmium red light for the 'zip', and cadmium red dark for the ground. The placement of one material in respect to another integrates and demarcates the event of the work as process. Painting the light cadmium red onto masking tape heightens the provisional nature of this process. The painted masking tape when applied to the canvas provides the 'zip.' The metonymic arrangement is one of juxtaposed qualities of a colour, rather than the symbolic use of colour. Newman insisted that he not be thought of as a colourist painter:

For example, drawing is central to my whole concept. I don't mean making *drawings*, although I have always done a lot of them. I mean the drawing that exists in my painting. Yet no writer on art has ever confronted that issue. I am always referred to in relation to my color. Yet I know that if I have made a contribution, it is primarily in my drawing. ... My drawing declares the space. Instead of working with the remnants of space, I work with the whole space.<sup>198</sup>

A painting or drawing, which is considered as an indexical sign, entails interpretation by means of its referent. Newman's distinction between 'sense of time' and 'sensation of time' raises a significant issue. Is the reference to experience, and sensation, an invocation of immediacy and to the lived moment as a priority? This question is redolent with overtones of Romanticism and the centrality of presence. The issue also entails implications involving the existential aspect of time and sign production in art. Newman's position changes in its application to his work. Beginning with the biomorphic illustrations of his surreal period, he shifts to biological incorporation in his later work.

Although remaining Romantic and biomorphic in outlook, the incorporation of the human agent adds another dimension to his work. This inclusion of human agency, as a biological component, introduces the

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197. Barnett Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 256.

198. Newman, "Frontiers of Space", p. 251.

existential qualities of indexicality into his work. Newman's non-biomorphic drawing forms a reactional sign system. Any index indicates cause and effect, as in symptoms, clues, or traces, and is contiguous with its referent. "One thing that I am involved in about painting is that the painting should give man a sense of place: that he knows he's there, so he's aware of himself. In that sense he relates to me when I made the painting because in that sense I was there."<sup>199</sup>

Newman asserts the commonality of scale as indexical by means of identity and difference: "I think you can only feel others if you have some sense of your own being."<sup>200</sup> By asserting this commonality he posits the viewer as a self-reflexive interpretant, and the resultant self-awareness arises from a process of apperception. All such viewers will, Newman hopes, as he did before them, implicate themselves in the artwork and discover the symbiosis of semiotic interpretation: "I hope that my painting has the impact of giving someone, as it did me, the feeling of his own totality, of his own separateness, of his own individuality, and at the same time of his connection to others, who are also separate."<sup>201</sup> Peirce writes: "Now a common noun [such] as 'man', standing alone, is certainly an index, but not of the object it denotes. It is an index of the mental object which it calls up. It is the index of an icon; for it denotes whatever there may be which is like that image."<sup>202</sup> Whatever there may be generalizes the particular and allows difference and similarity to constitute identity by means of observation and denotation. "The demonstrative pronouns, 'this' and 'that', are indices. For they call upon the hearer to use his powers of observation, and so establish a real connection between his mind and the object ... without which its meaning is not understood."<sup>203</sup> Peirce explains that indices assert nothing, and are linguistically imperative or exclamatory. He supplies us with two examples: "See there!" or "Look out!"<sup>204</sup> These two may easily be augmented with 'Here' the title of Newman's series of sculptures.

## 5.

The two aspects of the indexical sign correspond to the two poles of the structuralist space/time frame. The sign creates meaning in the present by being a substitute for a particular object (the synchronic/symbolic), and represents itself as a quality of its object (the diachronic/iconic); this latter Peirce calls an involved icon. Meaning attribution is the business of the interpretant and takes place in the present; consequently all signs are perpetually open to interpretation. The index is a compound entity, consisting of synchronic (symbolic) and diachronic (iconic) elements. Indexicality is not a discrete state of affairs but, following the lead of Peirce, is more a matter of being weighted in a certain direction.

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199. Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester", p. 257.

200. Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester", p. 258.

201. Newman, "Interview with David Sylvester", pp. 257-258.

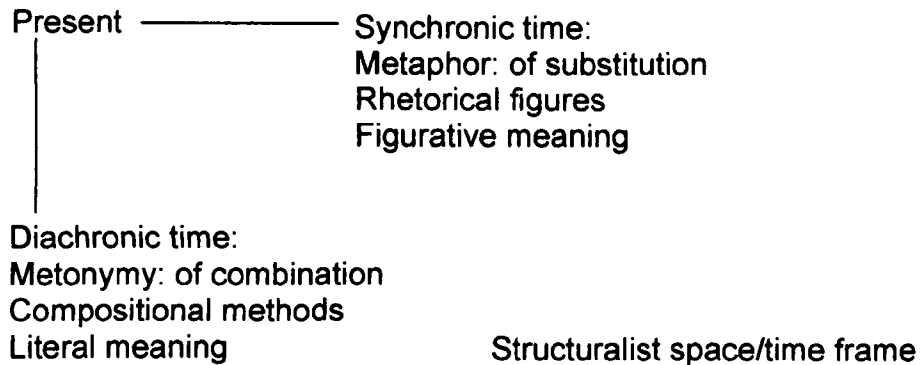
202. CS. Peirce, "Of Reasoning in General", in *The Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings Volume 2 (1893-1913)*, pp. 17-18.

203. Peirce, "Of Reasoning in General", p. 14.

204. Peirce, "Of Reasoning in General", p. 16.

The synchronic time axis is immediate and exists in the present; it cuts across time, while the diachronic axis exists through time and is tempered by history. In figure 4 the structuralist space/time frame only describes the tendencies or poles of the present, and not its exclusive positions.

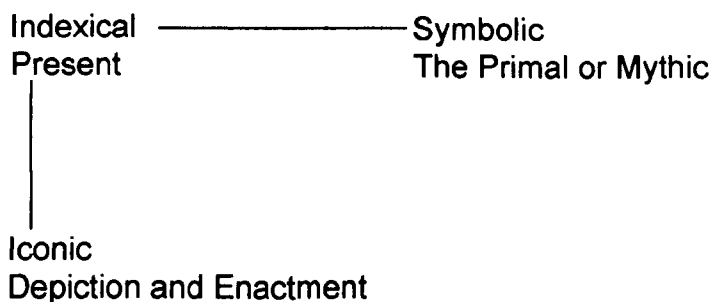
Figure 4



Newman's interest at first glance appears to align itself with the synchronic time axis. Such an alignment allows him to utilize metaphor and the strategy of substitution, to let paint on canvas stand for the spiritual or the mythic. A substitution of terms therefore addresses alterity as exclusive. A closed space for figuration defines itself in which fixed exchange takes place. Adjacency on the other hand allows for a transposition to take place. Abutment and combination deal with alterity as commonplace and provisional, and identity is defined not as isolated self-reference, but as the result of provisional differences.

In both orientations Newman's concern with otherness is evident. The apparent break between his earlier surreal work and later formalist work corresponds to a shift in emphasis from the synchronic towards the diachronic axis. The combinatory nature of the diachronic axis allows Newman to incorporate elements of his earlier work within his new orientation. Newman's fondness for mythic or primal titles evidences one kind of such a transferral.

Figure 5



However, the rootedness of Newman's later works in painting and sculpture lies in physical presence. He shares this aspect of his work with the Abstract Expressionists. The extrapolation of physical presence from the biomorphic engagement with (1) the primal, and (2a) depiction, and (2b) enactment, was a unifying issue for them all. Newman's amalgam of synchronic and diachronic time locates the presence of the present as indexical. The existential quality of the index possesses immediacy that iconic combination or symbolic substitution lack (see figure 5).

Application of Peirce's terminology, in figure 5, characterizes the iconic aspect of the index as an involved icon. An involved icon represents its object by means of a property of that object. The symbolic axis by comparison addresses indexicality by substitution of a particular object by another.

## 6.

In his article "The Sublime Is Now", 1948, Newman discussed the place of beauty and sublimity in Western art. He concludes that European art:

Without a sublime content ... became enmeshed in a struggle over the nature of beauty: whether beauty was in nature or could be found without nature. ... I believe that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer, by completely denying that art has any concern with the problem of beauty and where to find it. The question that now arises is how, if we are living in a time without a legend or mythos that can be called sublime, if we refuse to admit any exaltation in pure relations, if we refuse to live in the abstract, how can we be creating a sublime art?<sup>205</sup>

He continues: "We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions." Going on to dismiss "outmoded legend" and other "props", he asserts in their place self-evidence. Association, memory, nostalgia, legend, and myth are all ruled out, and he concludes the piece this way: "Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or 'life', we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings. The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history".<sup>206</sup> Newman's assertions in this extract lead to the conclusion that his orientation is towards the amalgamation of diachronic and synchronic time axes. Such an amalgamation forms an indexical sign in the present, and leans towards the diachronic pole for existential urgency. The Peircean indexical sign requires knocking on the door or smoke from the fire. Newman favours the use of the synchronic pole for his overall subject matter, and symbolic relevance.

This orientation coincides with that of Richard Serra whose favoured method is also that of the indexical sign. This orientation features combination and the prosaic as its main devices, with composition as its ordering principle. Metonymy forms poetry and formal configuration, where construction makes itself evident through the agency of artifice. Adjacency here involves physical interaction and the literal construction of meaning.

The titles of Serra's work, like those of Newman's, often seem arbitrary or whimsical. Although they are not metaphysical in the way that Newman's are, they function in a symbolic or figurative way, as with *Running Arcs, for John Cage*, 1992, where the title is commemorative. The titles of his drawings may be strident, *The American Flag Is Not an Object of Worship*,

205. Barnett Newman, "The Sublime Is Now", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 173.

206. Newman, "The Sublime Is Now", p. 173.

1989, personalized, *Black Widow (for Nancy Holt)*, 1974, or a current observation *Two For Rushdie*, 1992. In such examples the work itself is combined with a rhetorical device to lend another level of existential immediacy to its situation.

The role of alterity as adjacency is interesting to consider here. Alterity is a feature of the synchronic aspect of the indexical that deals with metaphoric substitution. Thus alterity becomes the space of interpretation for the literal and metonymic, and is the area of the interpretant's relation to the object of the sign. Proximity is not a feature of the metaphoric axis, but it is a feature of the metonymic. Adjacency then becomes an integral compositional device of and for works concerned primarily with indexicality.

Interpretation, as the business of the interpretant, is entailed by the concrete relationship of the indexical sign with its object/referent (see figure 3). This concrete relationship is essentially one of adjacency. Indexical signs function as such whether or not they continue to be meaningful due to a real connection with their object. Indexical signs endure in space and time since their constitution includes spatio-temporality.

Alloway's earlier discussion of the biomorphic presents Newman's overarching interest in the primal or mythic. Alloway's second point delineates two aspects of biomorphic art as (1) depiction of beings and places, and (2) the enactment of the work itself. Newman's surreal works begin with the depiction of primal beings and places, and continue fitfully until *Euclidean Abyss #3*, 1946-47. As early as 1945 Newman experimented with the 'zip' form in several untitled drawings that combined biomorphic and formal motifs in a single work. Clearly Newman gravitated towards enactment and away from depiction, culminating in *Onement One*, 1948. By extending enactment to the work as site, and the viewer as ambulatory agent, Newman made the artwork an event. Enactment takes upon itself a new set of implications for art. Chief among those implications is scale and its ramifications. Spatio-temporal awareness comprises the core set of sensations for the perception of scale.

## 7.

Awareness of spatio-temporality, as material for the event that is the artwork, forms a foundation for Minimalist sculpture. In various guises time/space and energy make themselves manifest. Minimal sculpture requires an understanding of the temporality of the viewer and of the artwork as events in space. Such events in space particularize a site as a place and create an awareness of scale.

Donald Judd, and John McCracken's work, provides us with good examples of sites as events. Both artists are indebted to Newman. The leaning planks of McCracken serve as 'zips' made concrete, and the viewer/participant is intrinsic to the interspace of the situation. Judd's debt to Newman is acknowledged not least by his use of cadmium red in several of his early works, but also his use of interstices between modules and within individual pieces understood as events.

It is the central issue of context that particularly links Minimal sculpture with the immediate physical sensation of time. The spatio-temporal conditions

of the viewer and of the viewed coincide during the physical sensations of viewing. The work of Carl Andre, John McCracken, and Donald Judd, contextualizes the event of viewing in order to deliberately include place and viewer.

Newman applies the idea of juxtaposition to the painting as a physical object that exists as a boundary of the viewer's world. This incorporation of the interstice between the viewer and viewed has two strong implications. One is that the mobile viewer extends the work intrinsically, instead of as a limited virtual, or pictorial, space encountered extrinsically. The second implication is that the volume of space bounded by the specific instance of the painted surface reinforces the place as the site of an event. Newman's large painting, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51, addresses the wall surface as armature and serves as a surface boundary to the viewer's immediate space. Adjacency and contiguity become the primary gauging devices in this interstitial space. Newman remarks upon the idea of interspace: "Is space where the orifices are in the faces of people talking to each other, or is it not between the glance of their eyes as they respond to each other?"<sup>207</sup>

The physicality of the work as painting evokes a physical sensation of time. Newman's concern is that the painting's surface remains an active site through its conjunction with the potentiality for dimension provided by human agency. As an indexical sign, the painting retains the immediacy of the sensation of time, a sensation that is maintained and heightened by the physical adjacency of the interpretant. Adjacency, in this sense, fulfils and extends the function that juxtaposition serves in a painting's composition. The presence of the human interpretant extends the compositional and metonymic aspect of the artwork in the form of scale.

Post-Minimal sculpture manifests an involvement with time as material, and as materially part of the artwork, by means of process. Processes of working are concretized by Eva Hesse, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson in their sculpture. Materials are selected that foreground haptic qualities of an intimate kind, latex or fibreglass in the case of Hesse, or mediated by machines in the case of Smithson, or both by Serra. Such processes are in addition to the process of perception embedded in the work of Newman and the Minimal sculptors.

## 8.

In the twentieth century any understanding of time entails the consideration of space and energy. Using time/space/energy as an indissoluble triangulation locates and articulates material concerns such as place and event. Just as Newman wishes to insist on the physical sensation of time, that idea entails the physical sensation of space. The sense of this attitude is explained by the tripartite relationship of space/time/energy describing that event which is a place. Energy, when juxtaposed with either time or space imparts physical sensation to the relationship and makes a place. Henri Lefebvre calls attention very succinctly to the reciprocity of the tripartite material referents energy, space, and time:

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207. Newman, "The Sublime Is Now", pp. 249-250.

When we evoke 'energy', we must immediately note that energy has to be deployed within a space. When we evoke 'space', we must immediately indicate what occupies that space and how it does so: the deployment of energy in relation to 'points' and within a time frame. When we evoke 'time', we must immediately say what it is that moves or changes therein. Space considered in isolation is an empty abstraction; likewise energy and time. Although in one sense this 'substance' is hard to conceive of, most of all at the cosmic level, it is also true to say that evidence of its existence stares us in the face: our sense and our thoughts apprehend nothing else.<sup>208</sup>

Lefebvre calls this tripartite relationship of energy, space, and time "the substance of the world", a world that he understands to encompass human consciousness.<sup>209</sup> When Newman insists on the physical sensation of time, in contradistinction to the sense of time, he is recognizing place as an event. His recourse is to the bundle of tripartite material referents energy, space, and time.

The interest displayed in 'process' by Post-Minimal sculptors, is precisely an interest in the material implications of energy, space, and time, particularly when they are applied to producing and experiencing an artwork. The artwork is even conceived as a situation, as a conjunction of material forces dealing with the production and the result. Sculpture expands in scope with this schema until it occupies a visual field, a field of activity or even a 'force field'. This is made apparent in the form of an installation, or a commitment to site-specificity. In such a 'field' the space includes the viewer as an active and necessary participant in the production of the sense and physical reality of the artwork. Barnett Newman had already, by 1948, established in his paintings this phenomenal presence regarded as integral to the artwork.

The major shift in emphasis encountered in this scheme is the ambulatory nature of the participant. The artwork is no longer construed to be a contemplative object subjected to an extrinsic viewer. Such an extrinsic viewpoint may be stationary or it may orbit the work. In either case, the viewpoint is not incorporated within the work's construction as an event or place.

The active incorporation of the viewpoint, as intrinsic to the work, displaces central focussed vision in favour of peripheral vision. This perceptual shift then raises questions with regard to the determination of figure/ground relationships made by an ambulatory agent involving a process of scaling. The scaling process demands perceptual constants against which estimates may take place, and necessitates the appraisal of distance.<sup>210</sup>

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208. Henri Lefebvre, "Plan of the Present Work", *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 12.

209. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 12.

210. RL. Gregory, "Eyes in space, Hazards of space", in *Eye and Brain* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p 234.

Also Gregory, "Scaling the universe", in *the intelligent eye* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 234.

Distantiation, as constant scaling, establishes and locates the viewing agent in space/time. Richard Serra elucidates this as follows: "In Newman's paintings space and mass, which are formed between the vertical divisions, are experienced as you walk or scan the field. It is an experience that unfolds in time. Newman differentiates between the sense of time, that is, the passage of literal time, and the sensation of time, which is a physical experience of a given context."<sup>211</sup> Serra is elaborating an attitude to perception that is active or, more specifically, interactive. As a student at Yale University Serra worked as an editor on Josef Albers' *Interaction of Color*.<sup>212</sup>

In Albers's book the relativization of colour perception is explored in detail. Albers's working premiss appears to be that the discrepancy encountered between physical facts and mental effects – relativity – "is caused by a variance of measure, by lack or avoidance of standard rules, or by changing viewpoints. As a result, 1 phenomenon has varying views, readings, and different meanings".<sup>213</sup> This attitude to perception as relative permeates *Interaction of Color* and is continued in Albers's series of paintings *Homage to the Square*. Albers distinguishes between "actual facts" and "factual facts" as his binary polarities. "Factual facts" correspond to data, or data-like units of knowledge. "Actual facts" are physical and therefore subject to time. "Factual facts" as data are fixed and incontrovertible. In this scheme, time intrudes at two points: in the physical "actual facts" and in interaction itself. Both points deal with the same thing: active perception. This active perception also corresponds to what Newman calls "the physical *sensation* of time". When considering size, Albers uses the same binary conceptual framework to structure his thinking. "But 'actual size' usually means something fixed, something remaining permanent, standing still. Therefore, 'factual size' would be more truthful because 'actual' is related to 'action.' It is something not fixed, but changing with time."<sup>214</sup>

When Newman remarks that his paintings do not "jump out of their size" he is suggesting that their perceptual dimensions do not shift. His conception of active perception is equated with human scale:

In the end, size doesn't count. Whether the easel painting is small or large, it's not the issue. Size doesn't count. It's scale that counts. It's human scale that counts, and the only way you can achieve human scale is by content.<sup>215</sup>

Content is what establishes scale, and human scale is the yardstick for value. Content, as Peirce has already established, is the ever-important function of the interpretant in sign production. Albers's distinction between "factual" and "actual" is useful here. The practical effect of scale is to activate awareness of the human continuum. Content and action animate "actual size" for Albers and scale for Newman. Put in Lefebvre's terms, space and time are "energized" by content and change. The interlinking of the field with the

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211. Richard Serra, "Interview with Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", in *Writings Interviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 280.

212. Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

213. Albers, "On teaching color—some color terms", in *Interaction of Color*, p. 72.

214. Albers, "On teaching color—some color terms", p. 73.

215. Newman, "Interview with Emile de Antonio", p. 307.



physical via the vertical 'zip' establishes a spatial continuum for Newman. The resultant orientation to verticality in the dome of space is a precondition of a fully dimensional space-time continuum. The 'zip' in this instance serves to activate and practically effect the context by establishment of scale as a direct consequence of its indexical nature.

## 9.

Self-referentiality becomes a paradigm that Judd first identifies in the painting of Pollock, Rothko, Still, Newman, Reinhardt, and Noland.<sup>216</sup> Newman, in particular, is later singled out as the most significant painter in the USA.<sup>217</sup> In "Barnett Newman", written the same year as *Specific Objects*, 1964, but not published until 1970, Judd writes of Newman's paintings: "They are whole and aren't part of another whole. There is no implication that the parts extend beyond the edges, just as there is none that they occur within the edges. Everything is specifically where it is."<sup>218</sup> The relationship of parts to the whole is clearly paramount in Judd's assessment of Newman's paintings. Specificity is again the key term. The paintings imply no narrative, nothing extends nor implies extension. There are no internal parts to provide any trajectory for a narrative. Everything is where it is. It is not, however, just where it is, it is "specifically where it is". It is particular, and distinctly formulated. Judd goes on to write that "the openness of Newman's work is concomitant with chance and one person's knowledge; the work doesn't suggest a great scheme of knowledge; it doesn't claim more than anyone can know; it doesn't imply a social order. Newman is asserting his concerns and knowledge".<sup>219</sup> Chance is part of Judd's conception of specificity. The configuration of the painting—as well as the proximity of the viewer—is simply as it is. There is no hierarchical significance, in Judd's view, in the composition or the implications of the paintings. It is in this regard that the work is open.

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216. Judd, "Specific Objects", p. 182.

217. Judd, "Barnett Newman", pp. 200-202.

218. Judd, "Barnett Newman", p. 202.

219. Judd, "Barnett Newman", p. 202.

### 3b. Reference.

#### 1.

The extreme Vitalism of Barnett Newman's paintings incorporates the physicality of the viewer. Without the close proximity of a viewing agent the emptiness of the paintings is total. The subordination of spatial concerns to temporality lends intimacy to Newman's paintings. The conjunction of work and viewer takes place in an environment of negotiated boundaries. The painting is itself and not a depiction, and the viewer similarly remains uncompromised. Negotiation takes place over the interstice between viewed and viewer.

However, this is not the case with regard to Newman's sculpture. Newman's sculpture, in contrast to his paintings, has a symbolic relationship with the viewer. Newman struggles to locate his sculpture within the space and time of the viewer. The very isolation that renders his paintings as objects in the world, only serves to estrange his sculptures as they become locked into the pictorial space of the symbol. A photograph taken in 1951 of *Here 1*, 1950, in its original plaster form points to this dilemma. The two verticals are seen exhibited on an upturned wooden milk crate. Writing of this piece Harold Rosenberg says:

*Here 1* consists of a vertical two-by-four, covered with rough plaster, and a raw, unpainted one-by-two, both stuck into mounds of plaster as shapeless as mud pies and mounted on a beat-up wooden box of the kind found outside a grocery store. The unadorned everydayness of *Here 1*, which almost ten years before the advent of Pop made use of materials considered out of place in an art gallery, reaffirmed the actuality of Newman's bands and rectangles (the sides of the boards and the box) and the overriding importance of placement.<sup>220</sup>

The openness that so interested Judd in the work of Newman is here characterized as "unadorned everydayness". The vernacular nature of the materials echoes Rosenberg's manner of speaking of them as "mud pies" or "beat-up wooden box". *Here 1* was later cast in bronze without the "beat-up wooden box", and its title amended to *Here 1 (To Marcia)*, 1962. Rosenberg goes on to remark about the later bronze, "The cast seems to me to be less 'here' than the wood and plaster original". The permanence that bronze allowed Newman stifled the immediacy of the original. The timber armature overlaid with plaster and the wooden box cum base is unique amongst Newman's sculpture.

Rosenberg's description of *Here 1* being stuck into "mounds of plaster" is particularly redolent given Newman's interest in the Ohio Moundbuilders. Newman seems to have paid far more attention to the issue of bases than any other sculptural concern. The milk crate was replaced with a finely made wooden surrogate, and the plaster mounds were formalized in later works into truncated steel pyramids. Most disconcerting of all are the hidden sub-bases in both versions of *Here 2*, 1965, and *Here 3*, 1965-66, that cause these

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220. Harold Rosenberg, *Barnett Newman: Broken Obelisk and Other Sculptures* (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1971), pp. 13-14.

works to appear to be hovering slightly above the ground. The effect of this on the viewer is to seriously compromise the sense of being specifically here, and of being grounded, rather than inferring a heightened sense of verticality. Both versions of *Here 2* involve three vertical elements located on truncated pyramids, which are in turn located on a 'floating' steel base plate. The edges of these plates have been flame cut in a heavily stylized manner. The second version was intended to replicate the first as closely as possible, although exact duplication was impossible. One version of *Here 2*, now in a Swiss collection, stands approximately twelve feet high, while the other one, currently in a Canadian collection, is some ten inches shorter. Given Newman's interest in serendipity this lack of uniformity, both in base contour and in height, is less disconcerting than is the illusionism involved with the 'hovering' bases and the stylized facture of the flame cut edges.

Serendipity was something that Newman used in order for his work to retain some element of elusive temporality. He deliberately allowed paint to bleed under and into the boundaries of his masking taped 'zips' in both his paintings and drawings. This was so much the case that it is expected rather than unusual. He clearly tolerated adhesive residues within the painted 'zips' that resulted from his incomplete stripping away of the masking tape.<sup>221</sup> Such residual traces serve to incorporate the processes of working time and preserve the work as the site of an event, or series of events. In a similar way, he was not uncomfortable with paint splatter and drips on the raw canvas evident in his *Stations of the Cross* series.

*Broken Obelisk*, 1963-69, may be seen as a resolution of Newman's continuous rethinking of the sculptural base made evident throughout his *Here* series. The apex of the steel pyramidal base is brought into the barest possible contact with the apex of an inverted steel obelisk. The inversion of the obelisk maximizes the central importance of the point of contact between the two apices. By using the graphic convention of a break, here applied to the column of the obelisk, Newman suggests an indefinitely continued upward verticality for the work. In this, the point of contact is analogous to the Michelangelo depiction of God reaching out to touch Adam's finger, *The Creation of Adam*, 1511, in which, infinite force and energy, the spark of life, is transferred by God to the supine and brute materiality of Adam. The nodal point is the focus of contact between the unlimited resource of the earthbound energy and the vitalization of inert materiality.

In *Broken Obelisk* the vitalization of the work is perceived to be downward and not upwards due to the broken column. The resultant point of contact depicts a state of rest, a balance between the groundedness of the pyramid and the weight of the broken volume of vertical mass. The implications raised by the broken column are twofold. First, is this a depiction of stasis due to the incomplete nature of the vertical mass, wherein a state of equilibrium is attained, since there is just enough mass to prevent it from toppling over? And, second, does the detailing of the broken condition of the vertical mass imply continuity and, therefore, an inevitable state of stasis? In both cases the result is the same, stasis, derived from the Greek meaning

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221. Suzanne Penn, "Intuition and Incidents: The Paintings of Barnett Newman", a public lecture at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2002 as part of the symposium "Reconsidering Barnett Newman".

standing or stoppage. To stand or to stop is to be definitively in one place and not in transit. Not only does *Broken Obelisk* conclude Newman's concern with the base in sculpture, it also closes his considerations of the *Here* series and the here and now.

*Broken Obelisk* exists as a limited edition of three pieces. In these pieces Newman again disguises the relationship of the material to the ground it stands on. He resorts again to the hidden sub-frame, and in the case of the Houston version, isolates the work further by surrounding it with water. This particular development causes the work to appear to be 'hovering' or 'floating' even more decisively, and inevitably places the work more firmly within the pictorial space of an implied vitrine.

## 2.

The later versions of *Here*, fabricated in steel, *Lace Curtain for Mayor Daley*, 1968, and *Broken Obelisk* all exist in pictorial space and function symbolically. It is not until Newman undertakes his last piece of sculpture that he manages to reintegrate the time and space of the viewer with that of the work.

The last work exists in two versions, *Zim Zum 1*, 1969, and *Zim Zum 2*, 1969-85. *Zim Zum 1* stands some eight feet high; this is the version in San Francisco, while the second version measures twelve feet high, and is currently in a collection in Düsseldorf. The smaller version was fabricated to facilitate shipping for an exhibition in Tokyo, and it is clear that without the impetus of the Japanese exhibition *Zim Zum 1* would never have been made. The maximum dimensions and weight of the piece were stipulated from the outset.<sup>222</sup> *Zim Zum 1* was originally made in four steel sections fastened together to make a pair of screens. The two screens were later made permanent by welding after Newman's death. Lippincott Steel completed the initial fabrication of the four units by mid-1969.

Newman's wife, Annalee Newman, authorized the construction of version two of *Zim Zum* a considerable time after Newman's death in 1970. The construction of the second version was executed in strict accordance with the existing plans made by Newman and Lippincott Steel during 1969. *Zim Zum 2* was finally finished in 1985 and first exhibited in 1992 (see illustration 3 on page 181). Noticeable differences between the two versions are not limited strictly to their dimensions, but arise from them. The smaller first version required the addition of small metal plates, as lugs, along the baselines to provide stability and security. The effect of these lugs is literally to visually 'anchor' the work to the ground. The second version is inherently more stable because of its larger dimensions and, therefore, presents the viewer with nothing to contradict a strong sense of verticality. However, each of these aspects makes both works discrete and particular without compromising them.

In the *Zim Zum* works Newman employs a different formal approach from that taken in his other sculpture. Drawing upon his 1963 synagogue proposal, which features "Tzim-Tzum" (sic) and folded vertical screens, *Zim*

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222. Armin Zwite, *Barnett Newman* (Ostfildern-Ruit/Germany: Hatje Cantz, 1999), p. 305.

*Zum* is a logical development. The non-pictorial use of steel to intensify the space encountered in the location is a significant departure for Newman. Each of the folded walls that describe *Zim Zum* stands directly on the floor and is an intrinsic part of the viewer's space. Such an intensification of space effects the sensation of time by the proximity and channeling of the ambulatory agent. It is as a condensed piece of architecture that *Zim Zum* functions as a place, rather than as the depiction of a place. By functioning as a place, *Zim Zum* provides the condition of being in a definite place—ubiety—that the title of the earlier piece *Here* indicates. In demarcating such a space, a restricted precinct is established, literally an interstice, into which a single figure can intrude. *Zim Zum* establishes a limited space of, and for, a passage. In this way, the iconic/symbolic emphasis of so much of Newman's sculpture is replaced by the indexical/symbolic aspect of signification. Instead of picturing a symbol for a viewer, he requires that the passing agent physically complete the symbol. Newman's definition of Makom comes to mind: "It is a place ... where each man can be called up to stand before the Torah to read his portion."<sup>223</sup>

The title *Zim Zum* is the anglicized form of the Kabbalistic term Tsim Tsum, and the one preferred by Newman. *Zim Zum* is generally understood to carry the meaning of contraction and of becoming minimal. These associations are prompted by consideration of the Kabbalistic question, how does the infinite being create a finite reality? The solution to that question involves the idea that God must assume the form of a lesser level of Deity in order to create the finite universe.<sup>224</sup> According to Armin Zwite the term originated with "Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534-72), a Jewish mystic who, in coming to terms with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, developed a myth to give meaning to the exile of the Jews".<sup>225</sup> Tsim Tsum is that particular part of his doctrine that refers to the withdrawal of God from the Sephardic Jews.

Clearly, both senses of Tsim Tsum deal with the idea of a space that is opened by contraction. The more general sense allows for the space of creation to come into existence after God's contraction, while in Luria's sense, it was intended to give social and spiritual solace during enforced exile. Such a withdrawal and the concomitant opening of a gulf, or void, are symbolized in Newman's *Zim Zum* as the contraction of the folded walls and the space created between them. The austerity and fixity of the concertina steel walls are a stark counter-point to the spatio-temporal potential of the human agent passing, in close proximity, by the sculpture.

In 1967 Newman participated in an international congress on religion, architecture, and the visual arts, held in New York and Montreal. In a response to deliberations over sacred and secular places he said:

What matters to a true artist is that he distinguishes between a place and no place at all, and the greater the work of art the greater will be this feeling. And this feeling is the fundamental spiritual dimension. If this doesn't happen, nothing else can happen. ... The Jewish

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223. Newman, "Recent American Synagogue Architecture", p. 181.

224. Rabbi Mordecai Schreiber, of Schreiber Translations and Publishing, Washington DC, provided this explanation in a telephone conversation in April 2002.

225. Zwite, *Barnett Newman*, p. 316.

medieval notion of Makom is where God is. No matter what is said against the vocabulary of the present day aesthete or the present day theologian, it's only after man knows where he is that he can ask himself "who am I"? and "where am I going"? And I think some places are more sacred than others, and that depends, ... on the quality of the work of art, on its uniqueness, on its rigor.<sup>226</sup>

The overt materiality of *Zim Zum* creates an unequivocal place, one in which a singular passage is all that is figured. A visitor may traverse the passage in either direction, reverse, stop, or even decline to enter. After finding oneself in a particular place, namely, confronted by *Zim Zum*, the question is posed, where are you going? However, in all cases the gap that is opened by *Zim Zum* acts to intensify the awareness of passage as an activity and place for expending energy: an expenditure that is rendered as bracketed temporality, fleeting and insubstantial, and channelled by the substantial materiality of *Zim Zum*.

### 3.

The sense of intimacy, self-reference, or intensity, that is experienced by one's involvement with *Zim Zum*, gives rise to an awareness of place as significant and particular. In his book *Non-Places*, Marc Augé writes:

Clearly the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. ... Non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality. ... The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts.<sup>227</sup>

For Augé, non-places are spaces of personal anonymity, which are orchestrated by linguistic and symbolic signs that directly mediate public authority. Non-places, such as highways, airport transit lounges, or supermarkets, use overt signs to direct the visitor's understanding of space towards an awareness of being transitional, of being in transit. Such signs are intended to direct and facilitate movement. They function mainly in terms of synchronic time, and the diachronic axis of historical time cannot function effectively in a non-place.

Commenting on the installation *Zim Zum 2*, at the Tate Gallery in London during 1992, Richard Serra says: "The two folding screens do not

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226. Barnett Newman, "Response to the Reverend Thomas F. Matthews", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 289.

227. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 94.

collect the space on the outside, and on the inside, they create a one-directional path with a beginning and an end, like a corridor".<sup>228</sup> Serra's encounter with Newman's sculpture is clearly neither intimate nor significant: "As a sculpture it does not resonate."<sup>229</sup> Although *Zim Zum* takes the form of a corridor, or passageway, it exists as an experiential and socially intimate place. In Augé's terms it is understood to be a viable "anthropological" place rather than a non-place. The passageway in *Zim Zum* does not facilitate transit, its function is not to address speed or utility. *Zim Zum* is the journey; its theme is time, the time of duration and expedition rather than expediency and celerity.

In *The Production of Space* Henri Lefebvre distinguishes between abstract, absolute, and natural space. Abstract space replaced the earlier form, of modified absolute space, due to the abstraction of social labour inherent in the process of production: "becoming independent of that process [of socially necessary reproduction], labour fell prey to abstraction".<sup>230</sup> He continues, abstract space functions "as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships". Abstract space is negatively characterized by the disappearance of trees, the recession of nature, and the large empty spaces of the state, the military, plazas, and commercial centres. Augé's non-places, therefore, constitute a contemporary sub-division of abstract space. Lefebvre considers that the main functions of abstract space are to obscure absolute and natural space, and promote technology, applied sciences, and knowledge bound to power. He understands abstract space to be essentially a space of power and authority.

According to Lefebvre absolute space emerged from natural space, and was later transformed into historical space:

Social space, which is at first biomorphic and anthropological, tends to transcend this immediacy. Nothing disappears completely, however; nor can what subsists be defined solely in terms of traces, memories or relics. In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows. The preconditions of social space have their own particular way of enduring and remaining actual within that space. Thus primary nature may persist, albeit in a completely acquired and false way, within 'second nature'—witness urban reality.<sup>231</sup>

He goes on to amplify the particular character of absolute space and its connection to natural space:

The cradle of absolute space—its origin, ... is a fragment of agro-pastoral [natural] space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. A moment comes when, through the actions of masters or conquerors, a part of this space is assigned a new role, and henceforward appears as

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228. Richard Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", *Writings Interviews*, p. 279.

229. Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", p. 279.

230. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 49.

231. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 229.

transcendent, as sacred (i.e. inhabited by divine forces), as magical and cosmic. The paradox here, however, is that it continues to be perceived as part of nature.<sup>232</sup>

He continues by saying that the perception of absolute space, as a continuation of the natural, belies the political fact of its demarcation. The seemingly “organic coherence” of the nucleus of absolute space, is seen as “the centre of time because it is the centre of space”.<sup>233</sup> Lefebvre concludes that the paradox of absolute space is its condition as a mental space charged with semiotic significance, and its establishment for the pursuit of “self-transcendence (by means of gesture, voice, dance, music, etc.)”.<sup>234</sup> He poses the rhetorical question: “Might not this space, extracted from nature yet endowed with properties just as natural as those of sculptures hewn from wood and stone, be also the space of art?”<sup>235</sup> It is such an understanding of absolute space that Newman taps into with *Zim Zum*. In that work he opens a space, and therefore the time of a place, for self-reflection and even self-transcendence. Newman deals with representational space and time in *Zim Zum*, whereas his earlier sculpture dealt with representations of space and time.

Augé also indicates another salient feature that ‘viable’ places share with Newman’s last sculpture, namely its, albeit residual, Vitalism. A place is a particular location that is understood to be one that foregrounds a shared sense of fundamentality, deriving from sensuousness and temporality. The title *Zim Zum* does not mediate the viewer’s understanding of it as a place, but, at the most, compounds it as an historical sign.

#### 4.

The *Zim Zum* works are the closest sculptural expression of Newman’s earlier concern for place and temporality. *Zim Zum* establishes a precinct that is inclusive of the viewer and deals with interstitial space, concerns that Newman identified in works such as *Onement One* and *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*. However, it is in Newman’s series of masking tape and ink drawings from the mid-1960s that one can see formal precedents for the last pieces of sculpture. The application of ink to paper and the later removal of the tape open ‘spaces’ on the page that question the relationship between figure and ground; absence is brought into contrast with presence. It is, therefore, clearly possible to see in *Zim Zum* a reconsideration of the devices employed in so many of the ink drawings. But, in this case the emphasis is placed on the actual materiality of steel and its interplay with the void in the form of volumetric space. Richard Serra makes the following comments on the interplay between materiality and space as a perceptual void in Newman’s sculpture.

My problem with [*Zim Zum*] is that it functions more like architecture in that it doesn’t hold the volume of the space between the vertical elements. ... Not that I don’t

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232. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 234.

233. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 234.

234. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 251.

235. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 251-252.



think that Newman's a great sculptor, it just wasn't his concern. And it may be that his concerns were more visual, less to do with how you feel in the space than how you perceive space.<sup>236</sup>

Newman's concerns were with temporality and the particularities of being in a determinate place. Space did not provide Newman with a sculptural property as it does for Serra; rather, it functioned as a compositional element. Serra's difficulty appears to be involved with the formality of Newman's sculpture:

The problem with Newman's sculpture is that it lacks complexity. The *Broken Obelisk* is not an interesting sculpture. I see it as nothing more than an ironic image, a play on iconography. *Zim Zum* might be an interesting architectural idea, but as sculpture it does not resonate. ... The zigzag walls do not hold a volume, nor do they define a mass. Space just floats through.<sup>237</sup>

Serra astutely recognizes that *Zim Zum* deals with the semiotic combination of icon, index, and symbol in a different way than Newman's earlier sculpture does.

Some of Newman's sculptures, especially the *Here* pieces, read as surrogates for his paintings. He seems to have literalized the zip with a thin vertical steel plate hoping that it would divide the space as the zips had divided the plane in his paintings. The fact of the matter is that the steel plates just stand there like objects. I think when Newman saw *Strike* he realized that it was possible to cut space with sculpture as he had done in painting but was unable to do in the *Here* group.<sup>238</sup>

Serra's sculpture *Strike: To Roberta and Rudy* was exhibited at Castelli Warehouse in New York from 16<sup>th</sup> December 1969, until 10<sup>th</sup> January 1970 (see illustration 5 on page 183). Newman died of a heart attack on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1970. Therefore, the meeting between Newman and Serra must fall into that interval between December and January. Serra reports that Newman came to see *Strike* several times, although he mistakes the year 1970 for 1971.<sup>239</sup> *Strike* is described by Serra as "a freestanding steel plate, one inch thick, eight feet high, twenty-four feet long, placed into and held upright by the corner of the room. It cuts the corner into two juxtaposed volumes".<sup>240</sup> Elsewhere, he notes that *Strike* "can be perceived as line—plane—line as you walk around the single sheet of steel".<sup>241</sup>

In the autumn of 1969 Serra discussed Eisenstein's film *Strike, 1924*, with Annette Michelson. He comments, "probably in Vertov and Eisenstein there is a point of view which can never really coincide with the reality of the

236. Richard Serra, "Interview by Patricia Bickers". *Writings Interviews*, p. 265.

237. Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", p. 279.

238. Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", pp. 279-280.

239. Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", pp. 279.

240. Serra, "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", pp. 279.

241. Richard Serra, "About Drawing". *Writings Interviews*, p. 55.

situation. They're taking a point of view about a particular subject to serve other ends". He concludes with a question about the making of artworks: "To what degree are we involved with making propaganda? And how conscious are we of it?"<sup>242</sup> Within a month or two he is exhibiting his sculpture *Strike* in New York. His use of sheet steel raised questions about several matters, not the least of which involved art and ideology.

Serra's installation of *Strike* would have been of particular interest to Newman given his awareness of the possibilities opened by the indexical use of material earlier in 1969, and the shift away from his earlier sculptural work. *Zim Zum* follows Newman's 'zip' paintings by declaring a precinctual space between the viewer and the viewed. In Lefebvre's terms Newman opens an absolute space within an already existing institutionalized abstract space. The institutionalized space is understood to belong to both the gallery and the pre-existing conventions of viewing paintings. It is this declaration of a location, which is the opening of a spatio-temporal place keyed to the viewer's sense of scale, within an existing situation that paves the way for the later Minimalist sculptors.

## 5.

In her article "Blow Up—The Problem of Scale in Sculpture" Barbara Rose says of the *Broken Obelisk* that it "is surely one of the great sculptures of the decade".<sup>243</sup> This assessment is based upon her understanding that scale is size-dependent, and in particular, her understanding that the size of the human body provides a constant reference. Throughout her article "monumental" sculpture implies the oversized rather than a monument. Her argument throughout the article is with the gratuitous enlargement of sculpture. Rose writes: "Some of the best large-scale sculpture being made today ... requires not that the viewer feel dominated by the work, but that he move around it in order to perceive the sum of its changing relationships".<sup>244</sup> Her commitment remains one based on a pictorial relationship with the sculpture. However, what she recognizes is that the sum of the changing relationships is perception. The temporality of perception opens a new set of considerations for sculpture in which actuality is time laden. In the same way that discourse is context dependent, so perception itself is context dependent. This context dependency, or site-specificity, bases itself on the temporality of perception and resolves itself as scale. More properly it resolves itself as scaling, a process of constant and unending evaluation. This proposes a dialectical model of aleatory materialism, in which ecology is paramount since it entails context dependency.

Rose touches upon the same problem that Rosenberg mentions as "unadorned everydayness" in relation to one of Newman's works. An upturned orange crate locates the sculpture of Newman in a place that is continuous with the vernacular. The continuity of experience heightens the condition of being in a particular place. Ubiety is ecological, in the sense of being site-specific.

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242. Richard Serra, "The Films of Richard Serra". *Writings Interviews*, p. 93.

243. Barbara Rose, "Blow Up - The Problem of Scale in Sculpture", *Art In America*, (July-August, 1968), pp. 80-91.

244. Rose, "Blow Up", p. 91.

The quotation above, by Barbara Rose, perfectly describes the sensation of viewing sculpture made by Tony Smith. Even Smith's celebrated works *Black Box*, and *Die*, both 1962, are only extreme examples of his ramified geometric forms. *Spitball*, 1961, and *Marriage*, also from 1961, demand and even include the ambulatory viewer. Rose and Smith share a pictorial attitude towards viewing sculpture. Smith insisted that his sculpture be aligned with the architecture encountered on site. Smith's work is neither site-specific, nor site-generated, but is more aptly described as site-adjusted. Not only are the axes of the site to be taken into consideration, but also the nature of the spaces presented by the site.

The geometrical character of these earlier sculptures seemed most compatible in landscaped areas, on lawns, against trees, in situations where their large, simple and clear planes were seen in contrast to the open spaces, or the smaller grain and irregular patterns of nature. But in my hand the crystal lattices tended to produce linear forms which emphasized silhouettes and openings when they were placed in more urban environments. What was plastic in suburbia became graphic in the city.<sup>245</sup>

Tony Smith made sculpture for the last twenty years of his life. His first titled piece was *Throne*, 1956-57. His development as a sculptor was given impetus by a recuperation period after an automobile accident in 1961.<sup>246</sup> The first public exhibition of his work took place in 1964, when he was fifty-one years old. In that exhibition, *Black, White, and Grey*, Smith was included with younger artists such as Ann Truitt, Agnes Martin, Robert Morris, and Frank Stella. His inclusion with Minimalist artists did not cause him to identify with Minimalism.

I don't believe that any of the people who have developed minimal art take ... my work into account whatever. I think it is probably that by chance, I did a few pieces which were thought of as being minimal, whereas my intention may have been entirely personal. I certainly had no programmatic intentions in making such things as *Black Box* and *Die* whatever.<sup>247</sup>

Smith goes on to explain that these works originated from some boxes that he brought back from Germany, in May 1955, and was unwilling to discard. Even though he replaced the boxes with steel, he did not consider them to be sculpture. "I just thought of them being there, which is how the word 'presence' came into existence. I didn't think of them as 'presences' in any melodramatic sense, but rather that I used that word simply in the context that they were there, that they were present."<sup>248</sup>

*Black Box* and *Die*, both from 1962 and both painted steel, are the two works most responsible for the confusion over Smith's relation to minimalism. Both pieces locate themselves as radically other, and rely upon an almost

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245. Robert Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, 1998), p. 190.

246. Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor*, p. 185.

247. Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor*, p. 190.

248. Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor*, p. 190.

stream-of-consciousness process of free association to form their meaning. As Smith says about *Die*, "It has too many references to be coped with coherently. ... Six feet has a suggestion of being cooked. Six-foot box. Six foot under."<sup>249</sup> When speaking of his interests Smith says, "I'm interested in the inscrutability and the mysteriousness of the thing."<sup>250</sup>

Unsurprisingly this attitude of Smith's is close to that of Barnett Newman's extreme Vitalism. The biotechnical aspect of Smith's background is evident not least in his acknowledgement of Frank Lloyd Wright as his "great master".<sup>251</sup> When speaking of his own work Smith says, "I think of them as seeds or germs that could spread growth or disease. The pieces seem inert or dormant in nature – and that is why I like them there, but they may appear aggressive, or in hostile territory, when seen among other artifacts."<sup>252</sup> He refers to his sculpture as "black and probably malignant". In so doing he echoes, wittingly or unwittingly, Frank Lloyd Wright's metaphors about the city being a diseased organism. Smith goes on to elaborate that due to their unsocial nature, his sculpture can only be assimilated in socially neglected spaces. He lists a few such locations as excavations, waste ground, danger spots, unguarded roofs, and sites of incompleteness. As in Smith's painting the suggestion is that the figure and the ground of his site-adjusted sculpture interchange, and that the boundary between art and nature is nonexistent.

Writing in 1996 about Smith's drawings, Klaus Kertess observes that, "Smith's organic hypothesizing embodies an open belief in and search for a kind of ordering that has become increasingly elusive or impossible for a younger generation to believe in, let alone find".<sup>253</sup> Kertess concludes his essay by remarking that Smith's aesthetic belongs to a Modernist time of complex simplicity, which has been earlier identified with Abstract Expressionism.

Minimalist sculpture consistently addresses the question of reference and the work of art. How is transparency onto the larger world obtained for the constitution of any artwork? For Minimalist sculpture the apparent formality of the work pinpoints the issue of reference. It is the formality of the work that provides a key to the system of reference employed by Minimalism. The resolute 'otherness' of Minimalist work suggests that alterity provides a point of entry for understanding the work.

The material reality of the sculptural object requires some account that incorporates the space-time of that object's existence. This is because sculpture is an artificial state of affairs that obtrudes into the space-time of our own existence, and does not merely run parallel to it. Frank Stella put it succinctly when he observed that sculpture is what you trip over when backing up to look at a painting.<sup>254</sup>

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249. Jean-Pierre Criqui, "For T.S." *Tony Smith* (Humlebaek, Denmark: Louisiana Museum for Moderne Kunst, 1995).

250. Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking With Tony Smith", in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, pp. 384-385.

251. Tony Smith, "-from my great master F.L.W.", in Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor*, p. 188.

252. Storr, *Tony Smith: Architect: Painter: Sculptor*, p. 190.

253. Klaus Kertess, "Paging Form", in *Tony Smith: A Drawing Retrospective* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 1996), p. 13.

254. A celebrated remark first reported by Carl Andre who shared a studio with Stella.

Minimalist sculpture, as exemplified by the works of Don Judd, Carl Andre, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson locates itself within the actual space and time of the viewer. These artists share a common debt to Barnett Newman for his pioneering work in the area of temporal continuity.

Artworks that observe a boundary between the actual and the virtual, do so by means of framing devices. The base, plinth, or podium serves this end by removing the sculpture to an abstract space. The spatialization of the aesthetic realm into virtuality is no less real than the actual. The virtual provides a myriad set of possibilities, physical and conceptual, that are concretized by the viewer as a limited, specific instance into the actual.

The bases of Brancusi's sculpture provide us with interesting examples of this boundary/non-boundary aspect of sculptural objects. If the bases are extensions of the sculpture, then the resultant compound sculpture stands in the physical field of the viewer and is co-extensive with the viewer's space and time. If on the other hand, the bases are plinths that remove the sculpture into another spatial order that is timeless, or at least time differentiated, then the implications of the work are totally different. The implications are different because the actual space and time of the viewer are literally shared with that of the artwork. The viewer and the artwork share physical materiality and immediacy. Such an equality of material presences may thus be termed democratization. The "gift of pure joy" bestowed upon the viewer by Brancusi may or may not include democratization according to one's viewpoint on the status of the bases.

Democratization, as the freedom of the agent, is intrinsically involved in the contingency of the actual. The totalizing effect of the virtual maintains a condition of timelessness and eternity that is reminiscent of Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy. Negation, for Spinoza, was the actual. By limiting possibilities the actual 'cancelled' the infinite. Duration thereby becomes the human condition, and the actualization of infinite virtuality. Time for Spinoza was measurement and therefore could not be primary, since it must be a measure of some preceding thing.

The human agent, understood as a network of physical processes, is locked into an entropic process. The 'arrow of time' determines the human agent as an entropic system and refers to the asymmetrical nature of time itself. The following example is intended to illustrate the asymmetrical process of the 'arrow of time'. Imagine a closed room. Placed within that room is an unstopped bottle of perfume. The molecules within the bottle collide with one another, until having escaped the bottle, they are evenly distributed throughout the room. The chances of those molecules colliding with each other and ending up back in the bottle are negligible. If the room is understood as a finite system then the implications for an infinite system are all the more complex. However, the argument about the universe providing a finite or an infinite system does not matter for the purpose of this example.

Marx's construction of the dialectic focusses precisely on the issue of contingency. The meeting point of unlimited and unforeseen sets of possibilities with the constraints of the moment is the core of dialectical movement. His model is embroiled in temporality with no prospect of respite. Selection for Marx, as for Darwin, offers novelty and freedom in influencing

the future. History, like memory, is the human condition, and its currency makes it constantly formative. In thinking this way Marx has inverted the dialectic of Hegel, inherited from Spinoza, and denied it a goal. Marx's dialectic is congruent with the 'arrow of time'. History, on this reading, is indeed a "process without a subject", in Althusser's formula.

Actuality combines concrete instances from the virtual infinitude of possibilities. This is a process of simultaneous abstraction and concretization, one in which chance predominates. Althusser's aleatory materialism falls into line with selection, and echoes Darwinian contingency.

Judd's *Specific Objects* essay sets out this state of affairs by denying to sculpture and painting any position of privilege. Concrete objects standing in open space are immediate and actual. There is no spatial remove to virtuality. Chance is inscribed at the centre of his early works. Both *Untitled* 1962, and 1963, are constructed around lengths of pipe found in the streets of New York. The resulting structures that locate and present the lengths of pipe are painted cadmium red. The right-angled section of pipe is presented in a corner structure, while the straight length of pipe is located amongst a set of horizontal elements arranged diagonally. The unique character of the found object determines the formal configuration of the finished object. Happenstance, in the form of the primary material unit, is amplified and contrasted with the systematic utilization of the supporting material as armature. As one would expect from Judd—what you see is what you get. Actuality is the condition of the work. One assumes that this particular set of circumstances surrounding a right-angled pipe and cadmium red paint could easily be otherwise. But any other situation will remain a situation that is equally concrete and equally contingent.

### 3c. Alterity.

#### 1.

The overall output of Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), is most easily understood within the framework of Futurism. Although difficult to categorize formally, Brancusi's decisive break with Rodin took place against an artistic background of Cubo-Futurism and emergent Dadaism. The group of embryonic Dadaists in Paris was the French Futurists—the Orphists, whose development began with Cubo-Futurism. Active personal contact was maintained with this group of artists by Brancusi. He counted Duchamp and Leger as personal friends, whilst Man Ray taught him photography, and helped establish Brancusi's darkroom.

Futurism, as a sub-genre of the marvellous, displays the tell tale device of a rupture in present time. Recourse is made to the future, the past, or some combination of both to naturalize this hiatus in terms of the present. However, as Tzvetan Todorov points out in his book *The Fantastic*, fantasy as a genre requires a solid sense of the real from which to configure itself.

Todorov elaborates a position in which the fantastic is a boundary condition of two genres, the uncanny and the marvellous (see figure 6)

Let us take a closer look, then, at these two neighbors. We find that in each case, a transitory sub-genre appears: between the fantastic and the uncanny on the one hand, between the fantastic and the marvellous on the other. These sub-genres include works that sustain the hesitation characteristic of the true fantastic for a long period, but that ultimately end in the marvellous or in the uncanny. We may represent these sub-divisions with the help of the following diagram:



Figure 6

The fantastic in its pure state is represented here by the median line separating the fantastic-uncanny from the fantastic-marvellous. This line corresponds perfectly to the nature of the fantastic, a frontier between two adjacent realms.<sup>255</sup>

Todorov is clear that it is "the category of the real which has furnished a basis for our definition of the fantastic".<sup>256</sup> Futurism as a sub-genre of the marvellous, or the fantastic-marvellous to be specific, also carries that same requirement for reality. Artifice must in this case first naturalize itself in order to then configure itself as different or incongruous. On this point of naturalization Brancusi writes:

255. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To A Literary Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1975) p. 44.

256. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 167.

If art must enter into communion with nature to express its principle it must also follow the example of its action. Matter must continue its natural life when modified by the hand of the sculptor. The plastic role that it naturally fulfils must be discovered and preserved. To give matter another role than the one nature intended it to have is to kill it. ... Sculpture is a human expression of nature's actions. The artist should know how to dig out the being that is within matter, and be the tool that brings out its cosmic essence into an actual visible existence.<sup>257</sup>

Brancusi asserts that "sculpture is a human expression of nature's actions," and thereby naturalizes artifice. However, in order to allow for the apparent incongruity, or difference, from natural appearance he makes a distinction between the natural and the real. "What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things. Starting from this truth it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface."<sup>258</sup> This distinction between essential truth and surface appearance is part of Brancusi's Platonic understanding of the world, and will be examined later. It is sufficient here to note how this distinction allows him simultaneous recourse to abstract invention, artifice, and a claim for naturalization. The crucial factor that is a hallmark of the fantastic, namely, hesitation, is provided in his work by the status of the sculptural base.

The marvellous, by comparison, operates at a remote level, and presents itself as sheer spectacle. Todorov suggests that unlike the temporal dilemma caused by the fantastic, which is whether to affirm or deny the continuum which is presented, affirmation or denial is suspended in the case of the marvellous. "The fantastic confronts us with a dilemma: to believe or not to believe? The marvellous achieves this impossible union, proposing that the reader believe without really believing."<sup>259</sup> He has elaborated earlier on how this is to be achieved. Ambiguity, he tells us, is engineered by means of three conditions within the work:

An obligation is placed upon the reader to consider the world of the characters as a living world, and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation. ... Hesitation may be a theme of the work, and thus entrusted to a character or representation. ... Allegorical and poetic interpretations of the work must be excluded.<sup>260</sup>

Of these, the first and third conditions are essential, whilst the second is optional but common.

The fantastic as a genre exists because of the tension between belief and disbelief framed within a consistent spatio-temporality. Todorov observes that, "Without these locutions, we should be plunged into the world of the marvellous, with no reference to everyday reality. By means of them, we are

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257. Edith Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 1987), p. 12.

258. Eric Shanes, *Brancusi*, (New York: Abbeville, 1989), p. 105.

259. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, pp. 83-84.

260. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 33.



kept in both worlds at once".<sup>261</sup> The very concept of the fantastic involves this point. Todorov writes: "The concept of the fantastic is therefore to be defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary".<sup>262</sup> The suspension of belief and disbelief requires a dual awareness of spatio-temporality. It is precisely this requirement that maintains a vestigial element of the fantastic and allows for the construction of the fantastic-marvellous. Todorov establishes his working definition for truth as artifice; art is real and unreal at the same time, and this condition is governed by our perception of the world.

## 2.

A degree of confusion has existed about how to categorize the work of Constantin Brancusi. Art Nouveau, Dadaist, and Futurist labels have been applied to his work. Primitivism has most often provided the pivotal argument in his categorization. The primitive Romanian peasant with an interest in African carving seems to establish his position as a living fable. In each of these cases the centrality of the fantastic is naturalized, in different ways, to establish each aesthetic as the fantastic-marvellous.

The very notion of an 'avant-garde' is itself a Futurist construction understood as an advanced, and therefore removed, response to the common opinion. Dadaism constitutes an avowal of the specificity of the artwork as 'text' in contrast to the generalized 'text' of perceived public opinion. It is in the gesture towards the referent that Dadaism displays itself as Futurist in the sense of the fantastic-marvellous. The purely fantastic-marvellous phenomenon of Duchamp as *Rose Sélavy*, in Man Ray's photograph of 1921, or Schwitters's *Merzbau*, circa 1923-36, as fabulous spaces and times, naturalize the fantastic visually. Dadaist events and performances established the participants as modern primitives subverting the conventions of the referent. Constant recourse to that referent of common opinion helps to establish it as the base measure, and underscores a dependency upon it.

Common opinion becomes that which provides a reality against which to configure the fantastic-marvellous as a counter spatio-temporal order. In this context Brancusi's night-time forays to remove the wrappings placed over Jacob Epstein's *Tomb of Oscar Wilde*, 1912, become aesthetic performances. His own application of face paint renders the entire sequence one of masking and unmasking in the face of common opinion.

Antonio Gramsci clearly identifies the referent of Cubo-Futurist Dada activity as the hegemonic culture. When writing about Futurism in his essay "Marinetti the Revolutionary", 1921, Gramsci says:

Bourgeois careerism will be shattered and there will be a poetry, a novel, a theatre, a moral code, a language, a painting and a music peculiar to proletarian civilization, the flowering and ornament of proletarian social

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261. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 38.

262. Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 25.

organization. What remains to be done? Nothing other than to destroy the present form of civilization.<sup>263</sup>

He goes on to explain that destruction in this instance is not the same thing as it would be in the economic sphere,

It means to destroy spiritual hierarchies, prejudices, idols and ossified traditions. It means not to be afraid of innovations and audacities, not to be afraid of monsters, not to believe that the world will collapse if a worker makes grammatical mistakes, if a poem limps, if a picture resembles a hoarding or if young men sneer at academic and feeble-minded senility. The Futurists have carried out this task in the field of bourgeois culture.<sup>264</sup>

Innovations, audacities, and the monstrous were certainly aspects attributed to Brancusi's work. While his work did not resemble a hoarding it did, according to the United States Customs, resemble more of an industrial product than it did an art object. Edward Steichen's ownership of a *Bird in Space* necessitated a court case with US Customs to establish the work's artistic credentials.<sup>265</sup>

Futurism calls for a dual spatio-temporal dimension. The impossible future, or equally impossible past, presented as the fantastic-marvellous present, which runs in tandem with the viewer's own sense of time and place. Primitivism presents itself as a utopian or dystopian response to the referent of the existing spatio-temporal technological continuum. Although writing of the Italian Futurists, Gramsci could easily be speaking of Cubo-Futurist Dadaists in general, when he said:

They have grasped sharply and clearly that our age, the age of big industry, of the large proletarian city and of intense and tumultuous life, was in need of new forms of art, philosophy, behaviour and language. This sharply revolutionary and absolutely Marxist idea came to them when the Socialists were not even vaguely interested in such a question.<sup>266</sup>

Gramsci saw in Futurism "the possibility of a proletarian culture created by the workers themselves".<sup>267</sup> Futurism presented, to Gramsci, the spectacle of revolutionary culture, something, to which the working class may aspire. The key concept in this revolutionary culture was the possibility of destruction; a possibility that allowed for a radical or dialectical stance towards the

263. Antonio Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", in *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985), pp. 50-51.

264. Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", p. 51.

265. In October 1926 US Customs refused to classify the work as art when Steichen returned with it to New York from Paris. Following a failed appeal in January-February 1927, Brancusi and Steichen instigated legal proceedings. On 21<sup>st</sup> October 1927, the court case officially began. Jacob Epstein, amongst others, testified on Brancusi's behalf. On 26<sup>th</sup> November 1928, Brancusi won the customs trial. This was particularly important to Brancusi since US patrons formed the mainstay of his support, and the positive conclusion of his case brought exemption from US importation duty for his work.

266. Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", p. 51.

267. Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", p. 51.

constraints imposed by tradition. The primitivism that he espoused is in contrast to established cultural domination, whether Academic or folkloric. In "Socialism and Culture" he writes: "Above all, man is mind, i.e. he is a product of history, not nature".<sup>268</sup> His Primitivism is that necessitated by new undertakings, for which a broad mind is essential. He states that "a critique implies culture" since it clearly implies self-consciousness.<sup>269</sup> "Consciousness of a self which is opposed to others, which is differentiated", but to attain this requires in turn that "we also know others, their history".<sup>270</sup> The aim is to understand oneself better by reciprocal contact with others. Alterity becomes the heart of Gramsci's interpersonal dialectic. Foreign spaces and times are the source of identity and the genesis of change. He is not oblivious of the fact that the tools available for use reflect outmoded concepts and need to be employed until such time as new tools and concepts emerge. He quotes with approval Lenin: "For a certain time the workers' state cannot be other than a bourgeois state without the bourgeoisie".<sup>271</sup>

Later thoughts regarding Futurism indicate that he has qualified his enthusiasm in the light of the consequences of the First World War and incipient fascism. As late as 1935 in his *Prison Notebooks* he notes that Futurism needs to be "understood in a wide sense, as opposition to traditional classicism; as a form of contemporary romanticism".<sup>272</sup>

### 3.

The Harlem Renaissance of 1920s New York epitomizes the tendency to strike a utopian or dystopian stance by means of Primitivism. Parisian offshoots of the Black New York avant-garde figure in Brancusi's studio. Josephine Baker, as the likely impetus for his sculptures around the theme of the *White Negress*, 1923, or Nancy Cunard's portrait, 1925-27, provide foci for specific works. Both women presented themselves as the fantastic-marvellous in their own ways. Baker's stage and film work established her notoriety in Paris while working there, whilst Cunard ended up institutionalized by her family due to her identification with Black culture.

Negritude was long associated with Brancusi and his work as a way of explaining the fantastic element within his work, in addition to his commitment to direct carving. While it is likely that this opinion of his work is ill founded, it is significant that some resort to alterity seemed to be required at the time in order to fully account for his work.<sup>273</sup>

The hesitation encountered between the real and the fantastic eventually resolves itself, in Todorov's terms, into the marvellous. Naturalization of the fantastic-marvellous is achieved by positing a parallel space and time. Brancusi uses the idea of essence to establish this gulf between reality and the marvellous.

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268. Antonio Gramsci, "Socialism and Culture", in *Selections from Political Writings: 1910-1920*, p. 11.

269. Gramsci, "Socialism and Culture", p. 12.

270. Gramsci, "Socialism and Culture", p. 13.

271. Gramsci, "Marinetti the Revolutionary", p. 50.

272. Antonio Gramsci, "Notes on Italian History", *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, p. 93.

273. Edith Balas, "The Myth of African Negro Art in Brancusi's Sculpture", *Revue Roumaine D'Histoire De L'Art* (1977, 14), pp.107-125.

If one has reproduced nature realistically it is not creation. An artist must create. A reproduction of a horse in marble or bronze is a corpse of a horse. There is something more to a horse than the mere corpse, there is the essence—or what do you call it?—the spirit, perhaps.<sup>274</sup>

Brancusi's series of *Birds in Space*, *Maistras*, *Cocks*, *Fish*, and even portrait heads, inhabit just such a fantastic zone. An entire piece of sculpture, as an assemblage, ascends to this fabulous realm that surmounts the mundane. How the work ascends is of interest here. Brancusi gave a great deal of consideration to the bases which support the work. The status of the bases has proven to be a vexed one: are they sculpture by extension, or are they additions, a mere means to an end?<sup>275</sup> Certainly as bridges between the real and the fantastic their role is crucial. Brancusi himself remarked that, "everything must start from the ground".<sup>276</sup>

Brancusi's Futurist works are located ultimately within the realm of the marvellous, that is to say fully visible but at some remove from the observer. Since the fantastic-marvellous eventually resolves itself into its dominant mode, the apparent nexus weakens over a period of time. A sort of parallel universe obtains that is populated by fantastic entities, whose existence is bridged to our own by means of the conglomerate sculptural bases.

Of the three conditions listed above by Todorov, the second one, hesitation, as a possible theme of the work entrusted to a character or representation, is the condition of the bases. This hesitation is recognized by William Carlos Williams in his essay on Brancusi.

His pedestals separate him from a hostile world, isolating his subject from the inessential, keeping it "sterile" in the surgical sense, making it something to be considered separately. There is a good story about this trait in the artist, how furious he was at a patron, an exhibitor of his, Brancusi's work, fortunately for us, a Brazilian, who had placed a piece sans pedestal for the public to view.<sup>277</sup>

Although Williams recognizes the importance of the bases, on this argument, he inverts the significance of them. His conception of sterility and the hostile world, causes him to read the manifestation of hesitation as an unbridgeable gulf. Based upon Todorov's conception of the fantastic, a counter-reading of the bases is that they provide a bridge with the present time of the viewer. However, a bridge is presented that, lacking the currency

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274. Constantin Brancusi, quoted by Flora Merrill, "Brancusi, the Sculptor of the Spirit, Would Build 'Infinite Column' in Park", *New York World*, (3rd October 1926), p. 4E. This information is included in Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 106.

275. 1. Edith Balas, "Object-Sculpture, Base and Assemblage in the Art of Constantin Brancusi". *Art Journal* (1978, Vol. 38, pt. 1), pp. 36-46.

2. Anna C. Chave, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993).

276. R.V. Gindertael, "Brancusi l'inaccessible", *Cimaise* (Paris), (no.3, Jan. Feb., 1956). Quoted by Barbu Brezianu in *Brancusi in Romania* (Bucuresti, Republicii Socialiste România: Editura Academiei, 1976).

277. William Carlos Williams, "Brancusi", *The Arts* (1955, Vol. 30), pp. 21-25.

of perceived hesitation, may collapse into an unbridgeable gulf of the marvellous.

Often, the conglomeration that constitutes the entire sculptural construction is material as well as formal. Wood is interspersed with stone and even polished metal. Usually the bulk of the materials were reclaimed from demolition sites. Each ensemble in its totality belongs properly to that category of sculpture known as 'assemblage'.

In distinction to both carving (reduction) and modelling (addition), as the traditional sculptural methods, assemblage is a modern methodological addition to the canon. This approach appropriately employs a different method, namely that of accretion or agglomeration. The significant difference is that assemblage combines discrete units. In so doing the sculpture presents itself as a combination of discrete times unified by the overall configuration. Whether traced back to Cubist art, or an interest in ethnographic work, its advent is roughly around the same date. Even the sculptures that Brancusi carved from a single piece of wood are compositional episodes, and advance an assemblage methodology.

#### 4.

Futurism, understood as the fantastic-marvellous, provided Brancusi with a means of modifying the rules of art production. The abstract was to be constructed as an alternative to the reality of the representational. However, Brancusi is more subtle than to present a bald binary opposition. His claim is that abstraction is also real, is a natural consequence of thought: "Simplicity is not an end in art, but one arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself, in approaching the real sense of things. Simplicity is at bottom complexity and one must be nourished on its essence to understand its significance."<sup>278</sup> Another entry from the same exhibition catalogue of 1926 reads: "What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things. Starting from this truth it is impossible for anyone to express anything essentially real by imitating its exterior surface."<sup>279</sup> In this Brancusi displays his familiarity with Platonic philosophy.<sup>280</sup> The disavowal of external form is made in favour of the more vital essence.<sup>281</sup> For the Platonists materiality is negation. The very specificity of material, its contingency, cancels essential spiritual potential, thereby rendering materiality as negation. Even in the situation where Brancusi speaks about material possibilities he employs key Platonic concepts such as determinism and transcendentalism. He is quoted as saying:

You cannot make what you want to make, but what the material permits you to make. You cannot make out of marble what you would make out of wood, or out of wood

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278. Constantin Brancusi, "Catalog of Brancusi exhibition" (Brummer Gallery, New York, 1926), in Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 105.

279. Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 105.

280. Brancusi's collection of Plato's writing consisted of *Ion*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, *Phaedrus*, and *The Symposium*

281. Other philosophical works found in Brancusi's library were Henri Poincaré, and the Vitalist Henri Bergson.

what you would make out of stone. ... Each material has its own life, and one cannot without punishment destroy a living material to make a dumb senseless thing. That is, we must not try to make materials speak our language, we must go with them to the point where others will understand their language.<sup>282</sup>

One of his last groups of works the *Cock* series, circa 1941-45, shares a subtle Platonic reference with his photograph of the *Child of the World*, 1917. At the end of the *Phaedo*, in *The Collected Dialogues*, Plato has Socrates speak his last words as "Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don't forget".<sup>283</sup> Socrates has taken the hemlock and is nearly dead. He is suggesting here that, since Asclepius is the deity of healing, death is the cure for life. Brancusi's array of *Cock* sculptures on this reading are his own offering, not in the Greek sense of a thank-offering for a cure, but as in Socrates' wry comment on the inevitability of death.

The *Child of the World* ensemble may be understood in a similar way, and the piece now known as the *Little French Girl*, or the *First Step* was earlier known as *Plato*. The conjunction of *Plato* and the *Endless Column* with a *Cup* placed on top of it is redolent with Socratic implication. The *Endless Column* understood as a surrogate death pole, the *Cup* as a cup of hemlock that surmounts it, and *Plato* as a witness all combine to provide a specific sculptural set of references to the death of Socrates. A second photograph, also of a now-dispersed sculptural ensemble, shows *Socrates*, 1921-22, with *Cup*, 1920, balanced on top of it. In this group the reference is also to the death of Socrates, but this time without the figure of *Plato*.<sup>284</sup> This second later group is a more direct reference, but lacks the connotation of an observer, or commentator, viz. *Plato*. On this reading *Plato* is the child of the title *Child of the World*. The *Child of the World* group predates the carving of *Socrates*, 1917 and 1921-22 respectively, and was offered for sale as a group in 1917. Speaking of *Socrates*, probably in the early 1920s, Brancusi said:

Nothing escapes the great thinker. He knows all, he sees all, he hears all. His eyes are in his ears, his ears in his eyes. Not far from him, like a simple and docile child, *Plato* seems to be soaking up his master's wisdom.<sup>285</sup>

Brancusi goes a long way, in this quotation, to explain both the title of this group, and the conflation of the series of works the *First Step*, 1-3, with *Plato*. His suggestion seems to be that the first step for the philosopher is to observe and account for events in the world, and to offer witness for them.

Birds dominate the totemic animals included in Brancusi's marvellous menagerie. And while it is true for Brancusi that "everything must start from

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282. Dorothy Dudley, "Brancusi", *Dial* 82 (February 1927): p. 124, in Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 106.

283. Plato, "Phaedo", in *The Collected Dialogues*, Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 98.

284. Edith Balas, "Object-Sculpture, Base and Assemblage in the Art of Constantin Brancusi", p. 43.

285. F. Teja Bach, M. Rowell, and A. Temkin, *Constantin Brancusi/1876-1957* (Cambridge: The MIT Press and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995), p. 186.

the ground” birds ascend into another state. Plato, speaking through Socrates, says:

So now let us suppose that every mind contains a kind of aviary stocked with birds of every sort, some in flocks apart from the rest, some in small groups, and some solitary, flying in any direction among them all. ... When we are babies we must suppose this receptacle empty, and take the birds to stand for pieces of knowledge. Whenever a person acquires any piece of knowledge and shuts it up in his enclosure, we must say he has learned or discovered the thing of which this is the knowledge, and that is what ‘knowing’ means.<sup>286</sup>

Mythology is rife with avian symbolism, usually connected with the bird as an intercessionary: the bird as a harbinger of death, or as the spirit ascending to heaven was a commonplace in Rumanian folk art. The depiction of the Holy Spirit as a dove ascending to heaven is a familiar motif in Western art. A particularly striking photograph of Oltenian nineteenth century death poles is included in Edith Balas *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk traditions*.<sup>287</sup> The photograph shows one of the two central wooden poles, in a group of four, surmounted with a carved bird. The main stems of the poles are carved in a more ornate manner than the otherwise similar *Endless Column*. Fixed in position over the death pole, the bird suggests a Platonic understanding that its release from the cage of the mind accompanies death. Avian symbols of the Holy Spirit, in the Christian tradition, are also called to mind in this context. The various versions of the *Bird in Space* assume a new significance in this light, a significance that is doubled with the usually Futurist associations of speed, light, and freedom.

The fact that much of Brancusi’s combinatory work now only exists in photographic form—the *First Step*, 1-3, and *Plato* for example – overlays another condition of temporality and abstraction to the work, namely that Brancusi was an enthusiastic photographer.<sup>288</sup> He was prompted to begin photographing his own work because of his dissatisfaction with other people’s efforts. It is clear that Brancusi used photography to record studio-based configurations that document provisional, and probably spontaneous, possible assemblages. Given Brancusi’s Futurist credentials, photography as modern technology falls perfectly in line with his concerns. The archive of his photographs is held by the Musée National d’Art Moderne in Paris.

## 5.

The Platonic dialectic comes to contemplation as its point of balance and embodies universal wisdom as a consequence. The more self-contained and self-referential the content of the dialectic becomes, the more it resembles a formal cause. A formal cause is understood to be an underlying substance

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286. Plato, “Theaetetus”, in *The Collected Dialogues* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 904.

287. Edith Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions*, illustration 108.

288. Marielle Tabart and Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, *BRANCUSI photographer* (New York: Agrinde Publications, 1979), plate 9.

giving rise indefinitely to all things. In this process a sequence of abstraction or degeneration is necessary in the movement from substance to thing. The disavowal of external form is made in favour of the more vital essence.

In his book *Symmetry*, which traces the evolution of the idea of symmetry, Hermann Weyl moves from the perfect figures of the Pythagoreans, via Aristotle's spherical celestial bodies, to the Platonic ideal underlying appearances. The constant theme is that of ascendancy. Weyl's examples follow a Platonic pattern, in that a principle is established, which is then given substance in a concrete example. The next step is to generality, but a generality that subsumes or subordinates what preceded it. Such a logical pattern ultimately rests on the classical idea of a point of balance. Symmetry not only carries the connotation of balance and harmonious perfection, but also of concord between parts and the whole. Weyl sums this attitude up as "the mean toward which the virtuous should strive in their actions according to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and which Galen in *De temperamentis* describes as that state of mind which is equally removed from both extremes".<sup>289</sup> He continues that the idea of balance is a link to the second sense of symmetry, particularly in modern usage, namely bilateral symmetry. This is, he writes, "the symmetry of left and right, which is so conspicuous in the structure of the higher animals, especially the human body". Of particular interest is the following sentence in the same sequence: "Now this bilateral symmetry is a strictly geometric and, in contrast to the vague notion of symmetry discussed before, an absolutely precise concept." Plato has Socrates say the following in the *Philebus*:

The beauty of figures which I am now trying to indicate is not what most people would understand as such, not the beauty of a living creature or a picture; what I mean, what the argument points to, is something straight, or round, and the surfaces and solids which a lathe, or a carpenter's rule and square, produces from the straight and the round. I wonder if you understand. Things like that, I maintain, are beautiful not, like most things, in a relative sense; they are always beautiful in their very nature, and they carry pleasures peculiar to themselves which are quite unlike the pleasures of scratching. And there are colors too which have this characteristic.<sup>290</sup>

This helps explain one of Brancusi's gnomic utterances that "Beauty is absolute balance".<sup>291</sup>

For Brancusi and the Platonists materiality is negation. Reality for Brancusi is what is essential and beyond the exterior surface. This reality is general, abstract, and most important, removed from mundane appearance. "What is real is not the external form, but the essence of things". Such removal alludes to another spatio-temporal order that is separate from reality. This is fundamental to Futurism as the category of the fantastic-marvellous.

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289. Hermann Weyl, "Bilateral Symmetry", in *Symmetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. 3-4.

290. Plato, "Philebus", in *The Collected Dialogues*, pp. 1132-33.

291. Constantin Brancusi, "Catalog of Brancusi exhibition", in *Shanes Brancusi*, p. 105.



The neo-Platonist Baruch Spinoza argues that what is primary is without classification. This lack of classification is essential, in that what is primary precedes all classes. Also, that which is primary is literally essential and prior to existence.<sup>292</sup> In the letter to Jarig Jelles Spinoza says:

As regards this, that figure is a negation, and not something positive, it is clearly evident that the totality of matter, considered without limitation, can have no figure and that figure has a place only in finite and limited bodies. For he who says that he apprehends a figure wants to express thereby nothing else than that he is apprehending a limited thing, and how it is limited. The limitation, therefore, does not belong to the thing in virtue of its being, but, on the contrary, it is its not-being. Since, then, figure is nothing but limitation and limitation is negation, therefore, as has been said, it can be nothing but negation.<sup>293</sup>

Physical manifestation is understood, on Spinoza's Neo-Platonic model, as a negation, a negation that provides a limited figure locked into an essential binary opposition with non-being or nothing on one side, and with infinite substance on the other. Beginning with Spinoza's Platonic idea that figure is negation through limitation, time and measure may be understood as limited cases of the infinite. Their limitation is due to the constraints that imagination necessarily places upon the infinite in order to conceptualize it. The trajectory that is being traced from the infinite to the figure is one of increased limitation. Spinoza is careful to insist that even as imagination and extension are limited, they remain infinite. As aspects of the infinite and eternal substance, their status as aspects does not diminish the infinitude that they embody. To be concerned with the infinite and its very infinitude is to be concerned with the static. For Spinoza the static nature of the infinite finds form within the notion of duration. He writes that duration "flows from eternal things".<sup>294</sup> The infinite is therefore eternal, and time a conceptual device with which to measure it.

Brancusi remarks, in a similar vein, "Look at the sculptures until you see them. Those closest to God have seen them."<sup>295</sup> The sculpture, as an event, approximates the infinite, understood as deity. The very specificity of material, its contingency, cancels essential spiritual potential, thereby rendering materiality as negation. Hence, materials need to be more than a physical presence for Brancusi. A note made in his student sketchbook at the School of Fine Arts in Bucharest (1898-1902) reads, "Art is no mere chance."<sup>296</sup> At this early stage Brancusi is affirming a pro-determinist aesthetic position. Similarly, Brancusi voices his reliance upon the validation

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292. Baruch Spinoza, "Letter L, to Jarig Jelles, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1674", in *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, ed. by A. Wolf (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1928), p. 269.

293. Spinoza, "Letter L, to Jarig Jelles", p. 270.

294. Spinoza, "Letter L, to Jarig Jelles", p. 118.

295. Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 107.

296. Shanes, *Brancusi*, note 14, p. 101.

of symmetry as essential in Platonic thought when he says, "Beauty is absolute balance."<sup>297</sup>

## 6.

Brancusi's bases subsume the Futurist sculpture that they support within their own category of assemblage. Bronze casts, or carved elements, become part of the larger sculptural logic. Sawing and carving are evident in the units that make up the bases. In the cases of *Magic Bird*, 1910-12, or *Maiastra*, 1912, incised carving is included within the supporting base. In such cases where the sculptural whole is made from a piece of coherent material, *King of Kings*, circa 1938, or *Socrates*, 1921-22, the wood is carved to provide compositional components. The different passages within the whole constitute a compositional assemblage.

In these examples the fluidity of interchanges between base and sculpture literally dissolves the two distinctions. In works which are more figurative, and carved from a single piece, *Caryatid*, 1914 (reworked 1926), and 1943-48, or the complex of works known variously as *Little French Girl*, (also known as *Child*) 1914-18, *Plato*, 1919-20, and the *First Step*, versions 1-3, 1914-1920, the treatment of the material is also episodic or modular. In the *Caryatid* pieces, the carved figure carries a simple block, or abbreviated entablature.

Occasionally Brancusi's 'bases' are presented as sculpture proper, the three untitled pieces 1921-22, and, as in the case of the *Endless Column*, 1918 and 1937, and the *Table of Silence*, 1938, the base is the sculpture. Brancusi in conversation with Malvina Hoffman said:

Nature creates plants that grow up straight and strong from the ground; here is my Column, it is in the beautiful garden of my friend in Romania. Its forms are the same from the ground to the top, it has no need of pedestal or base to support it, the wind will not destroy it, and it stands there solid and vigorous on its own feet, unmovable.<sup>298</sup>

Both the *Endless Column* and the *Table of Silence* are examples of work that provides a bridge between the world and the consequences of mortality. Even though the work takes as its subject what is beyond experience, the metaphoric reference is secondary to a literal understanding of the configurations. The compositional whole is constituted in each case by a combination of elements, bearing a literal meaning. Understood as bases without sculpture the *Endless Column* and the *Table of Silence* signify absence.

The *Table of Silence*, which is located closest to the site of the battle, is composed of twelve carved stone seats/bases, which are arranged as satellites around the central circular stone table/base. The work also carries additional references; to the funerary furniture found in older European

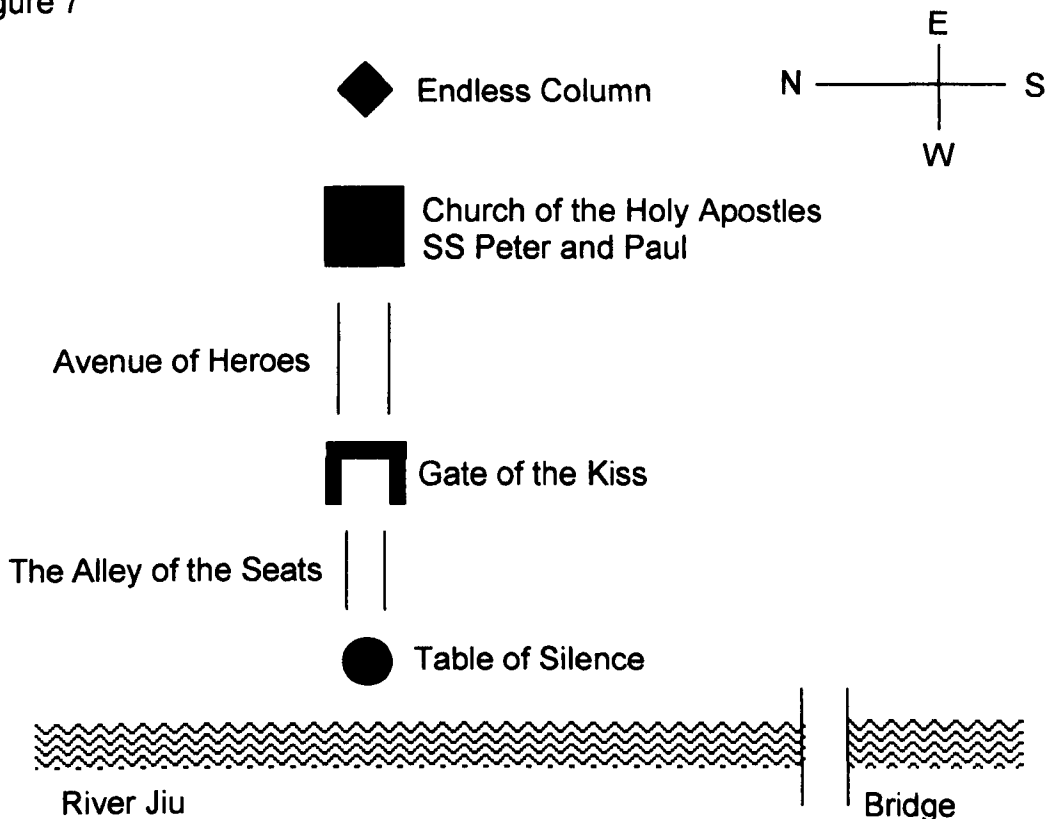
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297. Brancusi, "Catalog of Brancusi exhibition", in Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 105.

298. Malvina Hoffman, "Sculpture Inside and Out" (New York: Norton, 1939), in Brezianu, *Brancusi in Romania*.

cemeteries,<sup>299</sup> to the large circular multi-purpose table in Brancusi's studio/apartment in Paris, and to domestic peasant furniture in Rumania, the *masa joasa* or circular table.<sup>300</sup> Such a complex set of denotations direct understanding of the work towards absence, displacement, or loss, which in turn leads to the more ramified connotations of absence as death. This strong reference to the diachronic axis, rather than synchronic, is confirmed at a meta-level when considering the *Tirgu Jiu* complex as a whole (see figure 7).<sup>301</sup>

Figure 7



Plan of sculpture at Tirgu Jiu.

The ensemble was commissioned in commemoration of those citizens of Tirgu Jiu who defended the bridge from the German army on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1914. The area defended lay between the bridge and the *Table of Silence*. Milita Pătrascu passed on the commission to Brancusi in 1934-35. She was familiar with Brancusi, having worked with him in 1919-23, and knew of his earlier unrealized plan for a memorial fountain in Romania. Given the importance to the entire event of the bridge and the river it makes sense to see this as a diagrammatic ground or base for the ensemble.

299. Carl Benedicks, *Space and Time*. (London: Methuen & Co., 1924)

300. Edith Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions*, illustration 54.

301. Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 86, fig. 95. William Tucker describes a second *Table of Silence* that is sited beyond the *Endless Column* by some two hundred yards. This version stands without any accompanying stools. However, this is the only reference that I have so far found to this work, other than references to a 'table' that was abandoned at the time of construction for being too small. William Tucker, *The Language of Sculpture*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 129.

The three principle sculptural sites are lined up, and incorporated within the complex is the Church of the Holy Apostles SS Peter and Paul. The church, which was incorporated is dated 1927 and rebuilt in 1937, stands on the site of an older church, dated 1747. Moving away from the River Jiu are sited, in sequence, the *Table of Silence*, *Gate of the Kiss*, Church of the Holy Apostles, and the *Endless Column*. Linking the *Gate of the Kiss* and Church of the Holy Apostles is the *Avenue of Heroes*. Placed at intervals along the way between the *Table of Silence* and the *Gate of the Kiss* are stone seats which accompany the ensemble and constitute the *Alley of the Seats*.

Mortality as a theme is explored in the *Gate of the Kiss*, 1937-38, and is absolutely central to the entire Tirgu Jiu complex. In this piece a square opening is framed by the repeated motif of the *Kiss*, 1907-48, on the rectangular posts and lintel. The rounded and evocative motifs on the lower posts conflate the eye-to-eye configuration on the lintel with that of the egg, the entrance to the cervix, or to the tip of the penis. The empty space of the gateway's opening serves as a passageway, focus, and armature, for the surrounding work. The surrounding work, in turn, only serves to frame this central void, the passageway through the *Gate of the Kiss*, or kisses, to the other side. Literal allusions to sexuality, or generalized physicality are secondary to the sensuality of the *Gate of the Kiss* and stone, and to the surrounding and penetrating central void.

Brancusi's first version of the *Kiss*, 1907-08, was already associated with his funerary group in Dumbrava Cemetery, Buzău, Romania, circa 1907. The 1909 version of the *Kiss* was carved for the grave of Tatiana Rashewskaia, and later installed in Montparnasse Cemetery. As with most of Brancusi's sculpture, each motif exists in different forms in different pieces of work, the motif provided him with a referential constant for formal variety and innovation. The first stone version of the *Kiss* was predated by at least one plaster version.

In regard to his *Boundary Marker*, 1945, Brancusi spoke of this work as a proposal for a marker that was to be placed at national frontiers. Whilst acting as a commemorative stele for the dead, it could double as an indicator of international harmony. The work is a stack of three carved stone blocks (see illustration 4 on page 182). Each block refers back to his earlier grave marker the *Kiss* from 1909, and the *Gate of the Kiss*, which was completed as a war memorial in 1938. By the time of the *Boundary Marker* the motif marks not only the dead as individual, nor even the collective dead of the Second World War, but a more abstract boundary between the present and the future. The 'kiss' in these works is totally unlike the representational work of the same name by Rodin, replete with sexual innuendo. Brancusi presents a heavily stylized drawing, incised into the surfaces of the block of stone—an elemental work, an extreme scratch, which presents the contact of hand and stone as the boundary. The boundary referenced is between life and death, the boundary depicted is between people, the kiss, the touch, and the boundary indexed is between the inert and the active.

The repetition of the kiss motif in Brancusi's overall body of work and specifically in the *Boundary Marker* is a compositional device. Since the allusion is to the boundary between life and death, the work manages to resolve itself by means of the actual marker. *Boundary Marker* is a terminus ending one state and beginning another. His proposal features both the

termini of life and death, and that geographical one of national frontiers. The balance struck in this work between icon, index, and symbol is very fine. As a stele the piece has strong symbolic and iconic connotations. These connotations in turn allow the work to function indexically as a sign of termination. As with the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble the iconographic elements indicate life, and the symbolic connotations are centred upon death. In its materiality the work focusses on indices of termination. Vernacular markers of funerary furnishings are interwoven with the quotidian as tables, *Table of Silence*, gates, *Gate of the Kiss*, and ladders, the *Endless Column*.

The duality of the indexical relation of a sign to its object provides a bridge between metonym and metaphor. The terminus itself indicates change of state, and is an index of transition. The insistence of the motif, on the singular and the multiple, reinforces the notion of boundary as a complex and dynamic entity. Further, the activity of cutting (carving stone) concentrates attention on the conjunction of edge to surface relationships. Incised lines foreground figure and surface, while the faces of the cut blocks foreground the edges between surfaces. The attendant compounding of the relationships between boundaries and edges is reiterated and ramified by the stacking of the blocks.

Death for Brancusi provided a theme that was both the inevitable future and the ultimate abstraction. The position that he adopts may be described as metaphysical Futurism, a position that displays the fantastic-marvellous as its aesthetic, necessitated by dealing with spatio-temporal boundaries as inevitable and prosaic. This mundane reality provides the background against which Brancusi can abstract his fantastic-marvellous realm of essential, and therefore timeless, work. Slipping into a Platonic essentialism, Brancusi constructs his Futurism as a spiritual utopia.

## 7.

Thinking of his work as assemblage—as drawing with materials, helps us understand the use Brancusi made of photography. Constantly stacking, and juxtaposing elements with and against each other, photography provided him with a method of notation. The photographs become like pages from a notebook, with the provisional groupings of sculptural elements functioning as three-dimensional drawings. This is certainly the case in the earlier example of the *Child of the World* group from 1917. The process is one of drawing in space with fully dimensional material. Understood in this way, sculpture as a process of drawing with materials in material space, makes the importance of Brancusi's innovation to American sculptors like Carl Andre and Richard Serra more comprehensible.

Andre is on record as saying, at a symposium moderated by Lucy Lippard, "I'm a disciple of Brancusi and I don't know what I'm doing here [at the symposium]".<sup>302</sup> In an interview, with Friedrich Teja Bach, Serra says:

What interested me was that the plane, mass, and volume of pieces such as the *Endless Column*, the *Cocks*, and *Caryatids* were delineated and completed on

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302. Lippard, *Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, p. 155.

the edge. Drawing was a prime consideration. The pieces were drawn well, and I wanted to draw from them in order to understand them. I worked in Paris in 1964-65 on a traveling fellowship from Yale University. I drew every day for four months in Brancusi's studio in the Musée d'Art Moderne.<sup>303</sup>

Brancusi's early acceptance by American sculptors, such as John Flannagan (1895-1942), is much more clearly connected to the craft implications of modern sculpture. The core of Flannagan's sculptural work consists of carved stone boulders, collected from riverbeds in his immediate vicinity. Dore Ashton writes about Flannagan that he expressed:

a strong feeling for what he called "the eternal nature of the stone itself," and frequently carved greatly simplified animals in which he preserved the general texture and shape of the ordinary stones he found in the countryside. His aim, he wrote in a letter, was "to produce sculpture as direct and swift in feeling as drawing—sculpture with such ease, freedom, and simplicity that it hardly seems carved but rather to have endured so always. This accounts for my preference for field stone: its very rudeness seems to me more in harmony with simple direct statement. ... I would like my sculpture to appear as rocks, left quite untouched and natural".<sup>304</sup>

Flannagan began working in the 1930s and his sculpture is emphatically Vitalist and direct. This is in complete accord with the then burgeoning tradition of carve-direct sculpture emerging in Europe and America. Early reception of the work of Brancusi in Western art circles and Eastern European art circles agreed on the importance of craft. However, in Eastern Europe Brancusi was seen to be a peasant artificer, while in Western circles he was seen to be an avant-garde Futurist/Primitive sculptor.<sup>305</sup>

The more subtle implications of Brancusi's work for the Minimalist sculptors stem from other aspects of his work. Drawing with materials describes the general attitude of three-dimensional assemblage encountered in his work. The interaction of sculpture and the architectural as precinct comprise another strand of his innovation, most notably in the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble and the proposed temple for the Maharajah of Indore.<sup>306</sup> The final aspect of his innovation to sculptural practice was his attitude towards space as a medium and material.

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303. Richard Serra, "Interview by Friedrich Teja Bach", in *Writings Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 27.

304. Dore Ashton, *Modern American Sculpture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1968), pp. 15-16. She cites her source for Flannagan's letter as Albert TenEyck Gardner, *American Sculpture: A Catalogue of the Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Graphic Society, Greenwich, 1965).

305. Edith Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions*, pp. 11-25.

306. Brancusi traveled to India in 1937 to discuss this never to be realized project. This journey interrupted his attendance at the Tirgu Jiu work site. The two completed, *Bird in Space* sculptures, 1931-36, in black marble and white marble held by the Australian National Gallery, Canberra, are all that concretely remains of this project.

Brancusi's constant reference throughout the *Tirgu Jiu* complex is that emptiness, space itself, is the possibility for sculpture and abstract otherness. Space is provided with a base in the *Table of Silence*, it is framed by the *Gate of the Kiss*, and is bridged and measured by the modular *Endless Column*. In essence, Brancusi makes space a sculptural material, to be used in conjunction with stone and cast iron. In his short preface to the book *Richard Serra: Sculpture 1985-1998*, Serra writes the following, which could almost as well apply to Brancusi's work at Tirgu Jiu.

I consider space to be a material. The articulation of space has come to take precedence over other concerns. I attempt to use sculptural form to make space distinct. This requires that I bring the practices and procedures of the industrial process into whatever the context may be. I admit, the work is disruptive. However, I want to direct the consciousness of the viewer to the reality of the conditions: private, public, political, formal, ideological, economic, psychological, commercial, sociological, institutional ... or any of those combined. Part and parcel of making space distinct is to ground the spectator in the reality of the context. For me, the emphasis is on the work's ability to achieve this in sculptural terms. My response to a context is to use sculptural means that both reveal and are relevant to the connotative specifics of the context. Thought often arises from the physical conditions of a given context; in effect, places engender thoughts. Thoughts and ideas that derive from the experience of a specific context are different from abstract concepts that don't derive from the experience of the particularities of a place; you have to make connections while evaluating your experience within the specifics of the context: thinking on your feet, so to speak.<sup>307</sup>

Eventually the 'otherness' of Brancusi's Futuristic Primitivism leads him to establish the base as something entirely other than a mere plinth. Positioned as a halfway condition, between the fantastic other and the here and now, the base assumes an immediate reality as the possibility for sculpture. It becomes the concrete manifestation of the interchange between what is real and what is imaginary. In this guise, the base, as the fundamental support, attains the status of both site and sculpture. This simultaneous status expands the notion of sculpture to cover the self-reflexive idea of sculpture's own possibility. The work effectively becomes its own reference, and serves as an index of sculptural possibility. Again to quote Peirce on the character of the indexical sign: "Here is a reactional sign, which is such by virtue of a real connection with its object."<sup>308</sup> The situation with regard to the 'empty' base is similar to that encountered in Egyptian sculpture, where a low flat base with a bevelled front edge was identified with the

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307. Richard Serra, Preface to "The Plates with Notes by the Artist", *Richard Serra: Sculpture 1985-1998* (Los Angeles and Göttingen: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Steidl, 1999), p. 33.

308. Peirce, "Lecture Three", p. 170.

foundational deity Maat. With or without indented footprints—to locate the missing effigy—Maat was invoked as a foundation, as an underlying cosmic principle of truth and order. Maat was, in fact, a base upon which to build, or an abstract principal worthy of attention on its own merits. The empty bevelled base serves as a site that is filled with all of the potential meanings associated with the complex deity.

## 8.

The *Endless Column* and *Table of Silence* are sites in themselves, as well as sites within the extended site provided by the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble. The two sites as sculpture bracket the entire extent of the work, and establish a network of precincts within the greater precinct of *Tirgu Jiu*. This aspect of the *Tirgu Jiu* complex as an extended precinct is consistently unnoticed. As recently as April 2001, in a newspaper article in the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble was described as “three great sculptures depicting the pilgrimage of life: the *Table of Silence* symbolizing divinity and communion; the *Gate of the Kiss*, embodying love and sexual initiation, and the *Endless Column*, a paean to Herculean triumph and an axis for the universe.”<sup>309</sup> The article, by Donald G. McNeil Jr., not only fragments the whole complex by the description of atomized, although related, parts; it also chronicles a disastrous restoration project based on local political opportunism coupled with a complete misreading of the work as a unity. We are told that “a plan to move the circa-1926 church that split the esplanade was never effected”, an outcome that is attributed to ineptitude rather than being recognized as something fortuitous for the survival of the ensemble. No mention is made of the *Alley of the Seats*, or even of the seats themselves.

The damage inflicted on the *Endless Column* and the *Gate of the Kiss*, according to this article, indicates that the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble is not only currently marred but confronts a curtailed existence. One critic estimates the life expectancy for the newly resurfaced finish on the *Endless Column* to be only forty years. The issue of resurfacing the *Endless Column* is also under debate as to its authenticity and appropriateness. The irony of the restoration work being occasioned as a celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brancusi's birth will not be lost on future observers of the debacle. Restoration work was required as a result of a botched Stalinist era demolition attempt, an attempt that resulted in an accumulation of forty gallons of rusty rainwater within the casing of the column, which had corroded the interior steel core. How effective the repairs have been will be determined in the future. Apparently conflicting claims about the repairs centre on whether the collapse of the column has merely been postponed or has been prevented.<sup>310</sup>

Ubiation, the action of occupying a place, is the necessary mode of understanding the *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble as an interconnected network of sites within accessible architectural space. All of the sites, except the Church of the Holy Apostles SS Peter and Paul, which constitute the ensemble, are necessarily site-adjusted. The sole exception of the Church of the Holy

309. Donald G. McNeil Jr., “Brancusi's Column: The Heights of Pique”, *International Herald Tribune*, Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2001.

310. Lois de Menil and Bonnie Burnham both claim the work to be sound in “Letters to the Editor”, *International Herald Tribune*, Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2001.



Apostles presents an already established temenos that was incorporated within the group, and as a Christian church reinforces the east-west alignment of the route. Even though the entire site is an extended one, it accords with those features of precincts discussed earlier. Since all the work existed in earlier versions in Brancusi's studio, the ensemble versions of the sculpture/sites reference the possibility of their own origination. They stand not as empty signifiers but as signifiers of emptiness, of what is possible, a proposition that entails both origination and mortality.

The *Table of Silence* is itself a hierarchical group of twelve small bases and one large central one. The arrangement is not only redolent with funereal overtones, but when considered in conjunction with the Church of the Holy Apostles becomes specifically Christian in reference. This conglomerate of bases supports the axis of works through Tirgu Jiu, if one takes the River Jiu as a baseline.<sup>311</sup> The precinct is therefore based upon a strong and unavoidable Christian reference. An additional thirteen square bases/seats line the path between the *Table of Silence* and *Gate of the Kiss*. The open gateway that is framed by the *Gate of the Kiss* allows passage via the church to the *Endless Column*.

As remarked upon earlier, the *Endless Column* served as a base to support the *Cup* in the studio ensemble photographed as the *Child of the World*, 1917. When the *Endless Column* was completed in 1938, the local community in Tirgu Jiu was sure that it was a base awaiting a statue.<sup>312</sup> It was seen to be the site of an absent sculpture. In the perpetual absence of the decorative finial, the *Endless Column* endlessly supports empty space. The regularity of its modular construction begins and ends in two half-modules.<sup>313</sup> The flat face of one is flush with the ground, while the second supports nothing; it is in contact with the void of the sky. As a modular structure, the *Endless Column* functions like a measuring device a little under thirty metres high. As a measuring rod the ends are the crucial elements since they gauge the distance. The rest of the structure bridges the space between the ends, and its regularity provides a scale for comparison.

Edith Balas points out that Brancusi's concern for 'bases' was related to his disregard for the boundary between art and life.<sup>314</sup> The depth of this

311. This orientation of the extended work at Tirgu Jiu is confirmed by Stefan Georgescu-Gorjan in "The Genesis of the 'Column Without End'", *Revue Roumaine D'Histoire de L'Art*, (1964, 1 & 2), pp. 279-293. In which he describes walking the entire site in this particular sequence.

312. Georgescu-Gorjan, "The Genesis of the 'Column Without End'", p. 292.

313. Each module within the column is in the proportion of 1: 2: 4, where 1 is the width of the base and top, 2 is the maximum width, and 4 is the overall height of the module. The proportion of modules to the overall column in Tirgu Jiu is  $1/2 + 15 + 1/2$ . Georgescu-Gorjan gives the approximate overall height as 29.35 metres resulting from:

base semi-module	1.45 metres
15 modules of 1.80 metres each	27.00 metres
top semi-module	0.90 metres
Total:	29.35 metres.

The wooden columns in Paris retain the same module proportion of 1: 2: 4, but the overall proportion varies from  $1/2 + 3 + 1/2$ ,  $1/2 + 6 + 1/2$ , and  $1/2 + 9 + 1/2$ .

314. Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions*, pp. 14-17.

interest closely allies him with his friend Marcel Duchamp, and Duchamp's series of *Ready-mades*. Many of Brancusi's bases served interchangeably as stools, tables, or sculpture. During his 1926 exhibition at the Brummer Gallery in New York, Brancusi included six 'bases' as independent pieces of work, one of which assumed sufficient importance for Brancusi to give it a title—*Watchdog*, 1919. The remaining five were simply given catalogue numbers as independent pieces of work. In conversation with Petru Comarnescu Brancusi spoke of the base as a point of origination, "the theory of the luminous, living pedestal as a starting point of the sculpture—sculpture which is conceived from the floor or earth upward".<sup>315</sup> Thinking of the ground in terms of the "starting point of the sculpture" is always to presuppose that site is the notional possibility for a piece of sculpture. He also remarked about the base, that, "the pedestal should be part of the sculpture, otherwise I must do without it completely".<sup>316</sup> Such a long-standing involvement with the status of the base inevitably entails consideration of the groundedness of Brancusi's work. As otherworldly as the polished and carved sculptural superstructure may be, the bases/stools/sculpture corpus emphasizes a fluid interaction between art and life, an interaction that reaches its apogee with the precinctual work *Tirgu Jiu*. Further, the stacking of elements in his studio work that lends itself to an attitude of assemblage, may be discerned in the 'stacked' layout of the *Tirgu Jiu* complex, with the river serving as its foundation, and the church serving as an incorporated found object.

Brancusi's affirmation of tactility in the process of making sculpture firmly establishes his commitment to the factitious. This commitment, seen in conjunction with his preferred working method of assemblage, indicates an involvement with the diachronic paradigm discussed earlier. The paradigm is one that privileges the combinative/syntagmatic dimension of metonymy, and is exemplified by recourse to compositional methods, literal meaning, and contiguity. Edith Balas remarks that

Brancusi made his environment sculpture and his sculpture environment. Every work he created not only had artistic value in and of itself, but was considered by him an integral part of his studio environment. Similarly, every part of his environment had artistic value and could be presented to the world as sculpture. For this reason he disliked unexpected visits to his studio and preferred to receive callers only at certain times, when the light was favorable.<sup>317</sup>

Brancusi lived in his studio. Using his forge for cooking, and his bases for seats, and seats as bases, there was complete fluidity between his life and art. The precinctual aspect of his work, his studio, *Tirgu Jiu*, the temple at Indore, all seem to stem from this interchange between sculpture and environment. By focussing on the grand theme of mortality, or indeed, on the fantastic other, Brancusi naturalized these subjects through the materiality of his sculpture. Ultimately this process of materialization grounded his work in

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315. Balas, "Object-Sculpture, Base and Assemblage in the Art of Constantin Brancusi", p. 44.

316. Barbu Brezianu, "The Beginnings of Brancusi", *Art Journal* (Vol. 25, part 1, 1966), p. 23.

317. Balas, *Brancusi and Rumanian Folk Traditions*, p. 15.

a heightened sense of place. The precinct requires active human agents to complete it, and not to simply view the work. The *Child of the World* has *Plato* as a witness who completes the event. The world for Brancusi is immediate and simple, but retains a space for wonderment. "When we are no longer children, we are already dead," is one of his most famous aphorisms. His attitude to simplicity is akin to the idea of Socratic ignorance: "Simplicity is not an end in art, but one arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself, in approaching the real sense of things. Simplicity is at bottom complexity and one must be nourished on its essence to understand its significance."<sup>318</sup> The aim is to understand what one already knows, rather than to acquire ever more knowledge.

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318. Shanes, *Brancusi*, p. 105.

#### 4. Critical distance.

##### 1.

Later Post-Minimal utilization of context, in site-specific work or installations, relies upon an implicit understanding of scale. In tracing back the origin of site-specificity and installation work, as a preference for the spatial continuum rather than for virtual space, one must take account of both Brancusi and Newman. Both artists rely upon an understanding of scale and physicality, an understanding that is physical in both its effects and its referents. Richard Serra has this to say on the issue of scale and the concrete in Newman's painting:

I think a lot of it comes down to the issue of scale. Newman used the device of the zip to create a bilateral symmetry in his paintings, which meant that he could open the field to tremendous horizontal and vertical scale. Scale is independent of size. Size is a function of measure whereas scale is a question of experience as is mass, place, and presence in Newman's paintings.<sup>319</sup>

The establishment of adjacency as an element of the artwork, although of long standing in sculpture, was never fully understood as being an engagement with scale. Perspective utilizes an assumption of the notion of adjacency in the same way that viewing a sculpture by Michelangelo does. The perspectival field is laid out wholly in relation to a station point in the form of an extrinsic viewer. The attempt to naturalize the virtual space of the image relies upon the experience of space already pre-established by the viewer. Seeing and understanding perspective requires a willingness to engage with the virtual space of the image through a similar process of scaling to that involved in experiencing the real continuum of space. Scaling involves the viewer in an assessment of distance and proportion. Serra has the following to say on the subject of interspace or the continuum of shared space:

Changing the content of perception by having viewer and sculpture coexist in the same behavioral space implies movement, time, anticipation, etc. This wasn't started with David Smith or Robert Morris. This concept was developed by Brancusi in *Tirgu Jiu* and has continued throughout the twentieth century.<sup>320</sup>

Distantiation involves the tripartite relations of space, time, and energy, where distance depends on the interaction of the three terms. Richard Serra's *Weight and Measure*, 1992, provides an example of different uses of distantiation.<sup>321</sup> In this example, the floor of the Tate Gallery needed to be reinforced in order to support the weight of the two densely forged blocks of steel. These blocks were cut from one large block that was forged to be as dense as possible. On the subject of forging *Weight and Measure* Serra said: "I decided to use forged elements because I wanted density of mass and weight to be contained within the form. Forging is the most compacted way of

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319. Richard Serra. "Interview by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 280.

320. Richard Serra, "Interview by Peter Eisenman", in *Writings Interviews*, p.146.

321. Richard Serra, *Weight and Measure 1992* (London: Tate Gallery, 1992).

shaping steel. More molecules are pressed into the same space than in casting."<sup>322</sup>

The two blocks were then intricately and laboriously installed within the Duveen Galleries. The smaller block was placed in the south gallery, the larger one in the north gallery, and the central Sackler octagonal gallery was left empty. The two rectangular blocks were laid horizontally across the central axis of the galleries, and were approximately 140 feet apart (see illustration 6 on page 184). The smaller of the two weighed approximately 35 tons, and the larger was approximately 39 tons.<sup>323</sup> The difference in weight was solely due to the eight-and-one-quarter-inch discrepancy in height between the two blocks. Serra writes:

Weight is a value for me, not that it is any more compelling than lightness, but I simply know more about weight than lightness and therefore I have more to say about it. ... I have more to say about the perpetual and meticulous adjustments of weight, more to say about the pleasure derived from the exactitude of the laws of gravity. I have more to say about the processing of the weight of steel, more to say about the forge, the rolling mill, the open hearth. ... We are all restrained and condemned by the weight of gravity.<sup>324</sup>

In order to fully grasp the meaning of *Weight and Measure* one has to be aware of what was involved in transporting it from where it was made, in Hattingen, Germany, to where it was exhibited, at the Tate Gallery in London. The catalogue accompanying the exhibition included photographic documentation of the expenditure of effort involved in the installation and transportation of the blocks from the German foundry. These photographs serve to emphasize how integral labour and distance were to *Weight and Measure*. The publication, eight years later, of a more complete set of these photographs uses a sub-title to emphasize the geographical displacement: *Weight and Measure, Henrichshütte Hattingen, Tate Gallery London*.<sup>325</sup> However, even without access to knowledge about the transportation and installation of these dense blocks of steel, sense may still be made of the work.

The relationships that the sculpture determines with regard to the spatial container provided by the Tate Gallery and to the actual volume of space within the gallery are two interconnected sets of concerns. The relationship formed by the two blocks through the space and with the space is paramount. These polarities, of solid and void, weight and measure, institutional permanence and sculptural event, are augmented by another aspect of polarity, namely, the one that is established between transient viewers and

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322. Richard Serra, "Weight and Measure". Stephan Erfurt, Richard Serra, David Sylvester, *Weight and Measure: Henrichshütte Hattingen/Tate Gallery London* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2000), p. 4.

323. Specific details and measurements are taken from *Richard Serra: Weight and Measure 1992*. Simon Wilson (London: Tate Gallery, 1992).

324. Richard Serra "Weight", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 184.

325. Stephan Erfurt, Richard Serra, David Sylvester, *Weight and Measure: Henrichshütte Hattingen/Tate Gallery London* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 2000).

the static reference points provided by the sculpture. The work functions on several different levels of awareness at the same time. The sensation of time entailed by the sculpture provides the viewer with a set of perceptual references in which distantiation is a feature. Distantiation is opened for consideration at every level of the work, not least between the work and the institutionalized space that houses it. These sets of polarities establish distance as space and time in terms of energy: an energy that was expended in making the work, in the spectator being ambulatory, in perceiving; and it opens to scrutiny the spaces of the environment (the sculpture, the physical, the institutional, the architectural, the conceptual.) Interstice and interspace feature prominently in scrutinizing the fully dimensional situation. Critical distance from the work to the viewer is established as multi-faceted and inclusive of the viewer. This procedure of distantiation is characterized by, on the one hand, removal or abstraction, and, on the other hand, by adjacency. It is a critical distance that locates boundaries and contexts and is itself formed by boundaries and contexts. Distantiation functions in this regard in a similar way to scale. Serra makes these observations on the specificity of scale:

I don't think it's related to the intrinsic being of sculpture. I think it's related to site and context. Whether something is large or small has nothing to do with scale. Large or small has to do with size. Scale deals not only with the interrelationship of the parts of a sculpture but also, more importantly, with the sculpture's relationship to its context. The context always has its boundary, and it is in relation to that boundary that scale becomes the issue.<sup>326</sup>

While the forged blocks themselves were located at opposite ends of the galleries, the blocks differed in height by approximately an average adult's head height. The larger block was placed at the far end of the Duveen complex in order to perceptually 'correct' the sensation of perspective. When one enters the Tate the two blocks appear to be the same dimensions. However, by the time the viewer is adjacent to the larger and more distant block the discrepancy in height is striking. The dimensions of the two blocks were 60 and 68 inches high by 108 1/2 inches wide, by 41 inches deep. The height of about 5 feet was selected for its relationship to the human body. Serra was concerned with this installation to "make the volume of the space tangible, so that it is understood immediately, physically by your body".<sup>327</sup> The more precise measurement of 108 1/2 inches is derived from the gap between the bases of the columns in the gallery.

The scale of the transportation operation and the scale of the gallery visitors were thereby juxtaposed making the ambulatory the central implication of the work. The location in space and time of two fixed blocks in the Duveen Galleries, became the precondition for the viewer's own mobility in space and time. In this way, the work's spatio-temporal condition was focussed on as a continuum. Distance was established from the outset by means of sets of polarities between the blocks themselves, the blocks and the

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326. Serra, "Interview by Peter Eisenman", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 145.

327. Serra, "Interview: Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 273.

volume of space, the work and the viewer, the work and the institution, and the destination and the origin of the steel. After the exhibition ended on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1993, the two blocks were returned to the Ruhr district and stored in Bochum.

The implications of this work encompassed the international traffic of artworks and the central importance of the viewer to the work of art, a set of implications that, in turn, implied a political point of view that turned upon the idea of destination and distance. Destination is to be understood as the sense of end, place or terminus: the negotiation of a fixed point towards which energy is directed in order to bridge the intervening distance.

## 2.

Peter Blake in his lecture "*A Drawing Lesson*" made the following observations about *Weight and Measure*:

In sculpture for instance, I don't think weight is a valid factor. A good example of that is the Richard Serra sculpture 'Weight and Measure' 1992 created for the Duveen Sculpture Galleries in the Tate. They were nice objects but they weren't gigantic. Their point wasn't gigantism, they were quite small boxes, about eye height, and as two boxes in that space, the space looked very beautiful. But what happened was a kind of fascism of weight, where the whole point of them was that they weighed so much that it cost a lot of money to transport them to the Gallery. I don't know, but I imagine what Richard Serra said was, 'Yes, you can have these objects but they are very heavy and to get them in it's going to cost you thousands of pounds. You'll probably have to reinforce the floor.' Then you get a kind of fascism, and all that was about was weight, and I don't think that should be an element.<sup>328</sup>

As far as Blake was concerned, *Weight and Measure's* "nice boxes" served to make the space look "beautiful". Regardless of his opinions about weight being proper to sculpture, what is significant is his readiness to attribute "fascist" overtones to the work and its installation. The imaginary conversation between Serra and the Tate is cast in terms of a debased heroic artist, in which money is the governing factor, and Serra's intentions are figured as opportunistic, the imputed intention of the artist being to use weight to disrupt the gallery in an expensive way. It may be the case that Blake is using "fascism" in a casual manner to connote the authoritarian. In any case, the idea is one of domination or force in conjunction with the work. What Blake fails to do is ask the question "how and why is the work where it is?" That the "nice boxes" make the space look "beautiful" seems to be a willful misreading of the site-specific work.

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328. Peter Blake, "A Drawing Lesson", in *Issues in Art and Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum* (London: Wimbledon School of Art in association with Tate Gallery, 1996), p. 67.

Blake relates to *Weight and Measure* as symbolic and fails to take account of it as indexical. Even the choice of title for the work alludes to or relays an indexical rather than symbolic interpretation. As an artful (and arch) *reductio ad absurdum* we may conclude that Blake finds the work and its space neither “nice” nor “beautiful”. That, or he assumes that how he sees and understands *Weight and Measure* accords with how Serra sees and understands it, and his remarks attempt a refutation.

Further, in applying a craft-based approach to the work, in the form of how rather than why it functions in the space, Blake skirts the central issues based upon choices concerned with industrial materials, labour, time, context, and distantiation. Blake seems to grasp the central importance of portability, but misreads the work in favour of a debased craft aesthetic. The dependence of scale on context and the tension created between the work and its context seem to provide the unspoken nub of assumptions behind Blake’s remarks. The matter of *Weight and Measure*, anchored and relayed in and by its title, is material, time, context, and critical distance. The site-specific nature of the work seems to elude Blake in at least one important way, namely that the place entailed by site-specificity is an event. This is an event in which the energy of the work cannot be disassociated from the time and the space of the work as a place.

Blake’s antipathy to the work must be due, at least in part, to his refusal to recognize the formal category of weight as valid. His refusal is perceptive in that it touches on Serra’s critical distance from, or formal refusal of, easy acculturation. The declaration of the time of the artwork establishes its conformity with current time and to sensation of the present moment.

### 3.

Serra thinks in terms of the juncture and disjuncture between sculpture and place. In the “Yale lecture” he says:

The specificity of site-oriented works means that they are conceived for, dependent on and inseparable from their location. Scale, size, and placement of sculptural elements result from an analysis of the particular environmental components of a given context. The preliminary analysis of a given site takes into consideration not only formal but social and political characteristics of the site. Site-specific works invariably manifest a value judgement about the larger social and political context of which they are part. Based on the interdependence of work and site, site-specific works address the content and context of their site critically. Site-specific solutions demonstrate the possibility of seeing the simultaneity of newly developed relationships between sculpture and context. A new behavioral and perceptual orientation to a site demands a new critical adjustment to one’s experience of the place. Site-specific works primarily engender a dialogue with their surroundings. Site-specific works emphasize the



comparison between two separate languages (their own language and the language of their surroundings).<sup>329</sup>

Further on in the "Yale lecture" he quotes Bertrand Russell on the need for a meta-language with which to discuss the structure of whatever language is providing the immediate environment. For Russell, this then raises the necessity of another meta-language with which to examine the new linguistic structure.<sup>330</sup> As far as Russell is concerned, recourse to meta-lingual positions results in serial regression. With Serra, however, this regression is avoided by the introduction of the idea of a critical moment as juncture. Distantiation, instead of ever receding as meta-meta-lingual, is recognized as critical distance. As far as Serra is concerned artwork involves consideration of the encounter with the dominant ideology in any given context.

Art is always ideological, whether it carries an overt political message or is art for art's sake and based on an attitude of indifference. Art always, either explicitly or implicitly, manifests a value judgement about the larger sociological context of which it is a part. Art supports or neglects, embraces or rejects class interests. Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* is no more ideological than a black painting by Ad Reinhardt. Ideological expression does not limit itself to an affirmation of power or political bias. To answer your question about the ideological content of my work, there is no difference in the degree of ideological content in my urban and landscape pieces.<sup>331</sup>

Establishing a critical distance in and for the artwork allows Serra to engage in a dialectical relationship with the dominant ideology. His proposition is different from that of Russell who sought the ultimate vantage point that would allow him an ideal position from which to operate with impunity. Serra proposes sculpture as a parallel activity to philosophy with which to counter the ideology found to be in place. The origins for this sculptural activity are to be found in the vernacular, wherein the selection of vernacular forms within a context of nuance declares an ideological position. This explains why plain speaking is a device used by the spectrum of political positions to naturalize their stance. Engagement with elements of social construction demands forms of response as considered as those found in to be already in place. If all art is ideological, any apolitical position must support the status quo. On this argument, affirmation of an overt political bias is no more political than an understated formal response. If all forms of art are equally ideological, then the selection and inflection of the chosen formal elements become crucial to the artwork and its reception.

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329. Richard Serra, "The Yale Lecture". *Kunst & Museumjournal* Vol.1, no. 6 (Amsterdam, 1990). Also to be found in *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 1125.

330. "Every language has a structure about which one can say nothing in that language. There must be another language, dealing with the structure of the first and processing a new structure about which one cannot say anything except in a third language - and so forth." Bertrand Russell, quoted in Serra, "The Yale Lecture".

331. Serra, "Interview by Peter Eisenman", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 154.

This is pre-eminently the case with ramified and reified examples of time, energy, and space. The sense of purposive rational action and interaction at the institutional level is a continuous aspect of Serra's practice. By adopting an attitude that is dialectical in relation to established authority, Serra provides vernacular forms with inflection. Sheet metal does this for *Strike*, 1969-1970, *Fulcrum*, 1987, and the *Prop* series, 1968. The *Prisoner's Dilemma* uses video, and the *Skullcracker* series, 1969, uses hot rolled steel as its raw material. Time, realized as the process of transformation, is evident in the *Skullcracker* series, the *Base-Plate-Measure* series, 1970, the *Prop* series, and the *Casting* works. Seriality, itself, is an indicator of the importance of time, with no one configuration being privileged.

## 4.

Louis Althusser's definition of practice as being that process of the transformation of material that is determined by human labour is particularly apposite to Serra's work. Althusser expresses it this way:

By *practice* in general I shall mean any process of *transformation* of a determinate given raw material into a determinate *product*, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of 'production'). In any practice thus conceived, the *determinant* moment (or element) is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means.<sup>332</sup>

The moment of the labour of transformation, in which ordinary material is inflected with meaning through work, is in itself momentous. The event, though momentous, is also ordinary. Each work is a work. The culmination of labour leads on to the next sequence of events. This is graphically borne out in the publication *Richard Serra Weight and Measure 1992*, which accompanied the exhibition at the Tate.

Photographs taken in the steel mill in Germany, where the work was produced, bracket the introductory interview with Serra by Nicholas Serota and David Sylvester. Seven black-and-white photographs are inserted into the text of the interview. These photographs, one image of which is repeated although cropped, are called "Work in progress on *Weight and Measure* at the steel mill VSG-Henrichshütte, Hattingen, Germany, 1992", and were the work of Stefan Erfurt.<sup>333</sup> The series of images forms a photo-essay that is a counter-part to the text of the interview. Two of the photographs serve to bracket the text and the remaining five accompany it. All seven images, in effect, act to frame the interview with references to the materiality of manufacture. Photographically, the process of work as the presence of physical labour is interwoven with the process of work as intellectual labour.

332. Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic", in *For Marx* (London: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 166-167.

333. Serra, *Weight and Measure*, p. 6, photography credits p. 111.

The publication as a whole begins with a frontispiece photograph of Serra partially obscured by a sheet of inclined steel. Serra also figures in the last photograph of the publication wearing a hard-hat, framed and dwarfed by a block of forged metal.<sup>334</sup> This last image falls towards the very end of the book and completes not only Erfurt's series, but also the entire sequence of photographs in the publication. The photographic location of Serra in the foundry is final and definitive. The preceding fifty-six black-and-white photographs present a chronological survey of his "Site-Specific Indoor Installations: Sculpture" from 1967 until 1992.<sup>335</sup> The last seven images in this sequence document the arrival and installation of *Weight and Measure* in the Tate Gallery.<sup>336</sup> Concluding the publication with a photograph of Serra in the foundry refers one back to the interview at the beginning of the book. More important, the concluding photograph places Serra in the process of fabrication. The implication is that the constructions of the sculpture and of the book are equivalent.

The 2000 publication of *Weight and Measure: Henrichshütte Hattingen: Tate Gallery London* extends the earlier sequence of photographs from eight to forty-seven, and maintains the continuity of black-and-white documentation.<sup>337</sup> This expanded photo-essay falls naturally into several sections: four images show the delivery of the raw material, seventeen deal with the forging, eleven record the stages of transportation, eleven more chronicle the installation, and four document the completed sculpture. Erfurt places the image of Serra, which concludes the 1992 publication, at the end of the foundry sequence in the 2000 publication. Photographs of Serra occur at two points in the expanded photo-essay: three occur in the foundry section, and four in the installation sequence. In both cases Serra's photographs are located at the end of the sections, and carry the implications of strategic intervention, oversight, and endorsement. Thus, critical intervention at key points in the manufacturing process affirms the individual's place in the labour process as decisive. Even if one were to discount the seven photographs of Serra the preponderance of photographs deal with the processes of industry, and suggest that Serra's sculpture is inextricably a part of material production and heavy industry. Instead of ending the book with a picture of Serra, this time the sequence concludes with four images of his completed sculpture in the otherwise empty galleries. The work is presented as the residue of the energy expended on and around it, but guided throughout its formation by a thought process grounded in material practices. However, the overriding implication of the final four photographs is that the work references itself as an indexical sign.

The practice represented in and by these photographic sequences almost illustrates what Althusser says about the engagement of technical methods with means to some end. Raw material and product are overridden in importance in favour of the determinate human labour of transformation as an event. This device celebrates the ordinariness of both material and labour in order to open a critical space based upon the practical. Distantiation

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334. Serra, *Weight and Measure*, p. 102.

335. Serra, *Weight and Measure*, pp. 26-101.

336. Serra, *Weight and Measure*, p. 84.

337. Erfurt, Serra, Sylvester, *Weight and Measure: Henrichshütte Hattingen/Tate Gallery London*.

intrudes itself upon the viewer as an awareness of the mundane specificity of production. "Practical-critical" activity as distinguished by Marx in his first thesis of *the Theses on Feuerbach* discusses precisely this point.

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active side* was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. Hence, in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-judaical manifestation. Hence he does not grasp the significance of 'revolutionary', of 'practical-critical', activity.<sup>338</sup>

Marx asserts that the production of subjectivity is objective, a state of affairs that leads to the creation of the human agent as perpetrator of "practical-critical" activity".<sup>339</sup> Subjectivity is produced, and as a practice is objective. This is the core of a materialist practice: thought is part of the world and is consequently objective. Contemplative materialism is limited to bourgeois individualism in which the production of the subject as agent is debarred.<sup>340</sup>

## 5.

The magnitude of the scope of the juncture/disjuncture undertaken by Serra gives another level of meaning to scale and context. Subtleties in manipulation of space and time literally build the background of daily life. Interaction with that background means noticing what would otherwise have remained unnoticed and engages with what forms the prosaic. Serra introduces the problem of distantiation for art production:

We cannot repeal the industrial revolution, which is the cause of the urban glut. We can only work with the junk pile. ... I would rather have the actual experience of the work at urban scale. I made a definite decision when there was a possibility of working in an isolated site by saying, "No, I would rather be more vulnerable and deal with the reality of my living situation, which is urban." Works in remote landscapes involve a contradiction that I have never been able to resolve.<sup>341</sup>

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338. Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach". Appendix A. Concerning Feuerbach, in *Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 421.

339. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", no. 1, pp. 422-423.

340. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach", nos. 3 and 9, p. 423.

341. Richard Serra, "Answers to Zone Questionnaire", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 175.

Working in remote landscapes is, indeed, a feature of the work of several Post-Minimalist sculptors. The status of Richard Serra's site-specific work *Afangar*, 1990, located on Videy Island close to Reykjavik, Iceland, becomes of interest here. It is necessary to walk the entire island in order to see the nine pairs of standing stones that compose *Afangar*. The height of each pair of stones, either three metres or four metres, is determined by elevation. Sites were selected along the periphery of the island at elevations of ten and nine metres. The shorter pairs of stones were located at the higher elevation, and the taller ones at the lower elevation, an arrangement that allowed for an invisible level plane to connect the tops of all the stones. The island itself rises to an elevation of eighteen metres. Serra's own notes on the piece bear out the artwork's integration with the site:

Because of the variance in topography, the stones in a set are sometimes closer together, sometimes farther apart; they can be read as portals and passageways as well as demarcations in the open field. The rise and fall of Videy Island and the surrounding landscape is seen against the fixed measure of the standing stones. Orientation and layout of the pairs of stones are both axial as the stones encircle the centre of the island and linear in as much as there is a sequence and directionality from one pair to the next.<sup>342</sup>

Apart from the nine pairs of standing stones, the work took the form of a book of photographs, and an exhibition of drawings and prints, which was accompanied by another publication.<sup>343</sup>

When reading the interview associated with the *Afangar* publication, the first point established by Serra is that the Sculptors' Union and the National Gallery of Iceland invited him to complete a piece of work either for the city of Reykjavik or the Museum.<sup>344</sup> But when he took it upon himself to propose a work sited on a national historic monument, both the city and the national government of Iceland agreed to Serra's project, and to providing joint funding and maintenance.

Using basalt from a nearby quarry allowed for a continuity of material without disruption of place. The basalt used in *Afangar* is analogous to the use of steel on urban construction sites. In both cases the skeletal structure provided by the chosen material is an appropriate armature for that site. Serra himself has disavowed any difference in ideological content between his landscape and urban pieces.

Serra evinces a commitment to the specificity and material of that place. The following excerpt is taken from a conversation between Philip Glass and

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342. Richard Serra, *Sculpture 1985-1998* (Los Angeles and Göttingen: The Museum of Contemporary Art and Steidl Verlag, 1998), p. 103.

343. a. Richard Serra/Dirk Reinartz, *Afangar* (Zurich and New York: Steidl Parkett, 1991).

b. Richard Serra, *Drawings and Etchings from Iceland* (New York: Matthew Marks Gallery, 1992).

344. Richard Serra, "Interview by Mark Rosenthal", in *Writings Interviews*, pp. 247-250. Also to be found in the Matthew Marks Gallery publication *Richard Serra Drawings and Etchings from Iceland*.

Richard Serra regarding the work of Richard Long on view in the Guggenheim, October/November 1986:

Serra: I think there is a big difference between what he [Long] does outside and what he does inside. And what he does outside in relation to the context makes some sense and when he brings it inside and artificially imposes it, it looks a little heavy handed.<sup>345</sup>

Serra's sensitivity to the issue of context causes him to distinguish here between that aspect of Richard Long's work that involves the photo-documentation of distant sites, and that other strand of installation-based work, which involves the presence of material. Richard Serra's photo-book of the *Afangar* work is designed as a photo-essay interspersed with drawings. The question is what, if anything, does Serra's work reify? What relations, if any, are implicated in still photography of his work taken from a distant place? How do these questions connect with the larger body of his work? The most obvious connection between works as different as *Strike*, 1969-71, *Weight and Measure*, 1992, *Fulcrum*, 1987, and *Afangar*, 1989-90, is the celebration of site as an event. The demarcation of these works as sites is achieved by the viewer becoming an ambulatory agent: motility establishes the extent of the sculpture as an event and effectively describes the work as a precinct, a precinct that celebrates its ubiety. The condition of being in a definite place serves very well as a definition of site-specific sculpture, and forges an abiding link with the work of Barnett Newman. A wry interpretation of *Weight and Measure* construes the two forged blocks as dense altars to high art established within the privileged sanctum of the Tate Gallery, where they function as a double temenos within a temenos.

## 6.

An antithesis to the dominant presence of authority is implicit in the work of Serra. The resolution of such a critical process lies in the consciousness of the viewer, a consciousness that evolves and unfolds in time. For Antonio Negri the dialectic offers the only method for negotiating the present moment.

Nowadays it is not even market forces which dominate society, but the forces generated by the evolution of the capitalist power nexus. Given these strict limits to democracy, the only question we can realistically be allowed to ask, given the way things stand, is the following: are there any alternatives to the way this power of capital could be exercised, alternatives that could be instituted in the name of liberty? But even such hypothetical and extremely ill-defined alternatives would be open to the same objections. It is never possible to specify how alternatives to capitalism would work in practice and the discussion of them never moves beyond the realm of sophistry. The only true answer lies in

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345. Philip Glass, Richard Serra, Kurt Munkacsi, *Pink Noise* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, 1987), 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1986, p. 12.

criticism, struggle, the radical alternative: it is only in movement that the nature of the motion reveals itself.<sup>346</sup>

Vague plans for utopian societies are flawed by not being concrete enough. Only the concrete example of practical critical activity is adequate. I assume that Negri's attitude is intuitively shared by Serra whose commitment to critical practice is based on a similar commitment to the dialectic.

It may be that in building a sculpture a block and a half from the White House and within the confines of L'Enfant's plan, it would necessarily be co-opted by the ideological connotations of the place. But I didn't see that at the time. I hoped to be able to prevail, to build something that would subvert the context.<sup>347</sup>

The *Afangar* piece does not set out to subvert the context. The photographs in the book explore the context of the sculpture and the sculpture as context, armature, and frame. In this respect *Afangar* is not unlike Serra's other photo-book *Maillart Extended* in which a site-specific sculpture is interwoven with a Maillart bridge. The first photograph in the *Afangar* book is an aerial view that contextualizes what follows. The use of black and white photography prevents any easy naturalization. The inclusion of detailed photographs and Serra's drawings holds the activity of documentation firmly in mind and constantly foregrounds artifice, artifice that is employed with regard to context. The photographs record a ground framed by the figure of paired standing stones. These vertical elements, seen and understood as figures, are framed within a larger ground, which, in turn, is framed by the black-and-white photographs. Do the photographs provide the ground for the drawings and prints? Or do the drawings and prints imply the artifice of the sculpture?

A balance between the photographs, drawings, and prints in the book is obtained by considerations of figure and ground. The relationship between figure and ground in the sculpture is echoed in the book. Overall the balance of the figure and its ground is found in artifice defined in terms of perception. As Newman's 'zips' turn the coloured field into colour as mass, and demand peripheral vision, so the verticals that make *Afangar* activate the peripheries. Newman's ink drawings involve a similar interchange where the application of ink and removal of the masking tape are evidenced by bleeding edges, and they raise questions about the perception of figure and ground. In the *Afangar* piece, the peripheries become so hard to distinguish that the work of art and the island become one. The materiality of the work, basalt stones, is raised to the centre of attention, and frames views of the location. The stones are of the place and describe it. They denote an existential metaphor. They also function as a multiple reference and collective sign for the island and active perception. In the *Afangar* book no one photograph allows for a contemplative overview, the pages provide a context. The time occupied by experience of the book is its own time, a sensation and not a sense.

The word "Afangar" on the title page of the book is followed by a short poem:

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346. Antonio Negri, "Is there a Marxist doctrine of the state? A reply", in Norberto Bobbio *Which Socialism?* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), pp. 126-127.

347. Richard Serra, "Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture, Interview by Douglas Crimp", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 139.

stations, stops on the road  
to stop and look: forward and back  
to take it all in

The poem establishes the meaning of the Icelandic word, and sets the tone of distance for the entire book. In it many of Serra's concerns fall together: essentially time to stop and look, to look and move back and forth, and to take in the time of the place and space.

Time and process are indicated early in the introduction to *Afangar* by means of phrases such as the "selection of basalt connects the sculptural elements to the geological time of the island". Space is introduced because the "layout is also linear in that a sequence and directionality is set up from one pair to the next". Energy occurs earlier in "Skulptural elements are placed on Vestury in such a way as to direct the viewer to walk around the entire island".<sup>348</sup> Time is also implicated in the poem as Serra says, "the Icelandic word 'afangar', which happens to be the title of one of the most cherished Icelandic poems", gives both the book and the sculpture historical resonance. Serra's work involving Videy Island is imbued with aspects of time, space, and energy.<sup>349</sup> The ambulatory nature of the sculptural installation is but one manifestation of distance, and distantiation is the condition for the entire ensemble of work. It is this distance-distantiation that prevents the photo-work becoming an exotic trophy of a distant other.

## 7.

In Serra's work distantiation maintains itself as a formal refusal of popular culture. The choice of vernacular material belies an easy entry into the work. To this extent the work maintains a critical distance, and, if not overview, an engagement with cultural production. No longer is an avant-garde position tenable in relation to cultural hegemony, due to cooption of aspects of the counter-culture. Mainstream counter-culture best describes an apparently nonsensical situation, engineered by the cultural logic of the dominant ideology. Risking the charge of elitism is a consequence of the aloofness that critical distantiation allows. Critical distantiation is not a result of the isolation inherent in bourgeois individualism, but is an activity or analytic practice of choice.

Serra noticeably extends the sense of distantiation that Barnett Newman employed in his work. Both artists manage to maintain an extreme formalism in their work that serves as the crux for understanding distantiation as critical distance. A recent review of Newman's work in *The New Yorker*, finds Peter Schjeldahl speaking of the artist's "drastic simplicity", and describing *The Stations of the Cross* as

a major failure made up of minor successes, a work that simply cannot overcome the absurdity of equating Christ's ordeal with Newman's sense of himself as a man on a mission. ... The most stunning aspect of the "Stations" is the signature that he imposed on most of

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348. Adalsteinn Ingólfsson, "Iceland. Videy Island: Standing Stones: Nine locations - two elevations", in Serra and Reinartz, *Afangar*.

349. Richard Serra, "Interview by Mark Rosenthal", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 248.



the pristinely abstract canvases. [Schjeldahl found himself] riveted by those trumpeting flourishes. In the end, Newman's art is all about how he wished to be taken: an artist bestriding history and communicating by house phone with the Almighty.<sup>350</sup>

The reviewer acknowledges Newman's importance as a painter, but is unable to equate formalism with critical distance. While experiencing *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* as an intense perceptual experience, Schjeldahl fails to connect that experience with distantiating, motility, and adjacency. The reviewer repeatedly naturalizes Newman's work in terms of its producer. He refers to Newman's process of working as being God-like in its creation of light, with the significant difference that Newman repeats his act of creation. The imputation of self-aggrandizement in general, and in particular over the topic of Newman's signature, is to miss the importance of the historical moment. Newman destroyed most of his work that was completed prior to 1945. The body of work that proceeds from that time is part of the cultural adjustment that was being made to the implications of the holocaust, which was understood by Newman to include the atomic bomb attacks on Japan.<sup>351</sup> Insertion of his signature onto "the pristinely abstract canvases" is, therefore, given a far different meaning in the context of Jewish intellectual activities post 1945. Newman's artistic post-war redefinition establishes himself as an eponymous post-holocaust witness. One for whom critical distance is an inevitable and irrefragable circumstance of his practice. Such an awareness, of critical distance, adds additional weight to Newman's remark about first asking who you are, in order to then ask where are you going.<sup>352</sup>

Critical practice demands for itself critical distance. Extended meaning is the device that critical practice employs to insert itself into aesthetic production. Effectively distantiating is cancelled by the construction of an extended meaning. Such a cancellation is achieved by means of naturalization, which conventionalizes the alien by adapting it to the dominant culture. The theoretical destruction of an ideological construct is enabled through critical practice. Reformulating the elements of theoretical destruction leads to critical practice falling foul of the same mechanism as an ideological construct itself. Deyan Sudjic writing for *The Guardian* has this to say about Richard Serra's *Weight and Measure* at the Tate.

Look at Richard Serra: the scale and mass of his work is all but indistinguishable from architecture. His relationship to his work is almost identical to that of an architect who conceives and supervises, but who does not actually manipulate. It was not Serra who ran the forge which hammered 72 tons of steel to form Weight and Measure, his current installation at the Tate, just as

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350. Peter Schjeldahl, "Lord Barney: Barnett Newman's majestic abstractions", *The New Yorker* (15<sup>th</sup> April 2002), pp. 82-84.

351. Richard Shiff, "Newman's Time", and Mark Godfrey, "The Stations of the Cross, Memory and the Holocaust". Public lectures at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2002, part of the symposium: "Reconsidering Barnett Newman".

352. Barnett Newman, "Response to the Reverend Thomas F. Matthews", in *Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 289.

it is not Norman Foster who actually installed the glazing on one of 'his' buildings.<sup>353</sup>

Continuing in the same vein Sudjic concludes that Serra's "confrontation with architecture" is one that "he has lost". Seeking authority in the consensual form of "any architect" we are told that Serra's work is too small to assert a physical presence "on the classical interiors of the Tate". The article concludes by hoping that "the balance of power between art and architecture may yet shift again in a creative way". "Creative way" is to be understood as the reinvestment of authority in the architectural establishment, which understands "architecture as a matter of rational analysis of a shopping list of user requirements and its translation into physical form". Hard nosed utility and not "the luxury of shapemaking abstraction and metaphysics which they see artists exploring" is the paradigm for "a creative way".

Tom Lubbock in the *Independent on Sunday* takes a different tack.<sup>354</sup> "In a way it is work designed for the conceiving, surveying eye of the artist alone." This claim does not invoke the consensus of cultural relativism; it calls upon elitist subjectivity. The common sense fiscal model of alienation or distantiation is called upon. The simplicity of the work is impugned and the unknown costs of artist's fee, German forging, and "transport and installation must amount to something hefty". Conjecture continues on the financial aspects of reinforcing the floors, and what to do with the blocks after the exhibition ends. An attitude of common sense and long-suffering is exuded on the part of Lubbock. Why the Tate is involved at all in this pointless elitist exercise is averred to be sensationalism.

Though it's unlikely that these blocks will become a focus of outrage on the scale of *Those Bricks*, they won't draw much love either. Much money, much work, few fans: it all amounts to an act of curatorial bravado. For the Tate, this is probably one of the attractions of the project.<sup>355</sup>

Lubbock moves on to deal, in a similar vein, with the drawing show that Serra had mounted at the Serpentine Gallery. What both writers attempt to do is make the work alien. Responding in such a manner creates a critical distance which each writer places between the work and the world. The work is refused extended meaning on the grounds of its violation of common sense, and by its exclusion from the consensual imprimatur of the architectural fraternity. Neither Lubbock nor Sudjic recognize distantiation as part of Serra's practice-critical practice. Distantiation is recognized, however, as dialectically produced criticism and returned by each writer. The critical nature of the formalist refusal is refused. Naturalization is not about to be extended to work that is critically opposed to the naturalization of meaning within the dominant ideology. Hegemonic culture proposes itself, by means of ex-nomination, as neither hegemonic nor ideological. On the contrary, hegemonic culture appears to demonstrate a natural consensus of common sense, geared to shopping lists and financial prudence.

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353. Deyan Sudjic, "Shaping up for a war of works". *The Guardian*, (8th October, 1992), p. 27.

354. Tom Lubbock, "Big things in awkward holes". *Independent on Sunday*, (Arts, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1992).

355. Tom Lubbock, "Big things in awkward holes".

Both writers are also drawing upon the paradigm of production in different ways. Sudjic makes a case for the artist as a de-skilled producer in a world of skilled production. Lubbock makes a case for the labour theory of value in which an untrammelled calculation of labour as value takes place.

As Toni Negri says, "it is only in movement that the nature of the motion reveals itself".<sup>356</sup> The nature of movement with regard to *Weight and Measure* was neither weighty nor measured, but exclusive. Withdrawal of legitimation or denial of legitimation constitutes deprivation of meaning. Such a refusal of critical distance is paradoxical confirmation of the residue of a viable counter-culture, albeit the formal wing. The counter-factual stance of critical realism or dialectical thinking renders incommensurate the claims of natural sense. Counter-sense makes naturalization abstract and, itself, sensuous.

## 8.

The forerunner to *Weight and Measure* is the 1977 piece of sculpture *Berlin Block for Charlie Chaplin*. This seventy-ton forged steel cube is located in the National Galerie of Berlin. This single cube is inclined towards the horizontal by two and three-quarter inches. It is supported from below with a concrete and steel pylon, as *Weight and Measure* was in London. The degree of exactitude obtained in the forge managed a rounded edge of only five millimetres, very similar to the edges in the two London blocks. On the subject of *Berlin Block for Charlie Chaplin* Serra says:

I think that if a work is substantial, in terms of its context, then it does not embellish, decorate, or point to specific buildings, nor does it add on to a syntax that already exists. I think that sculpture, if it has any potential at all, has the potential to create its own place and space, and to work in contradiction to the spaces and places where it is created in this sense. I am interested in work where the artist is a maker of "anti-environment" which takes its own place or makes its own situation, or divides or declares its own area. There seems to be in this country right now, especially in sculpture, a tendency to make work which attends to architecture. I am not interested in work which is structurally ambiguous, or in sculpture which satisfies urban design principles.<sup>357</sup>

Serra remarks earlier in the same piece that the National Gallery in Berlin was designed by Mies van der Rohe, and constitutes the first important steel and glass structure.<sup>358</sup> His intention was to disrupt perceptually the van der Rohe building, to "find a way of holding in place the gravitational load, a force, a mass, contrary to the centre of the architecture, so that it would contradict the architecture".<sup>359</sup> The counter provided by Richard Serra is not a counter-balance that adds to the architectural ensemble, but a counter-sense or fact that provides an event to destabilize that authority encountered as

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356. Negri, "Is there a Marxist doctrine of the state? A reply", pp. 126-127.

357. Richard Serra, "Rigging", in *Writings Interviews*, p. 100.

358. Serra, "Rigging", p. 99.

359. Serra, "Rigging", p. 99.

architecture. The critical distance that is insisted upon in the work of Serra constitutes itself as practical-critical activity that “divides or declares its own area.”<sup>360</sup> Eschewal of drama and narration in the formality of Serra’s work underplays, and underpins any possible co-option of his counter-factual insertions into the spatio-temporal status ante. The identification of a perceptual disruption within a given location creates and maintains a new space and time inside the experiential field. A spatio-temporal refusal is posited in the encounter between institutional edifice, work, and viewer. Richard Serra attempts to counter any seamless incorporation, co-option or institutionalization of his work by maintaining a formal critical distance between the forces and the relations of production. Production of coherent social space is contested in order to raise the issue of perceptions lulled by ideological authority. In this way sculptural precincts are established within the ubiquitous precinct of ideological authority that asserts awareness of ubiety as a platform for a critical appraisal of that ideological ubiquity.

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360. Serra, “Rigging”, p. 100.

## 5. Resolute Abstraction.

It is within the context of time and time orientation that the work of Robert Smithson and Constantin Brancusi is best understood. Both artists engage themselves with notions of time at a distant or meta-level. Smithson's interest in geological time is attested to in his *Non-Site (Palisades Edgewater, New Jersey)*, 1968; the hypothetical continents of Lemuria, Gondwanaland and Atlantis, 1969, provide an obvious reference; *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969, as a contemporary equivalent to the California tar pits is another; and *The Spiral Jetty*, 1970, and *Broken Circle-Spiral Hill*, 1971, will be clarified later in this study. It is particularly this last that bears comparison with Brancusi's *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble in Romania. *Tirgu Jiu* is the earliest example in modern sculpture of site-specific work, albeit as an example of site-generation and site-adjustment. In a similar manner, Smithson's *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* is site-generated and site-adjusted. The works share a relationship with a particular place that is alert to the location without being wholly dependent upon it for their configured reference. Nothing in the site determines why the works look as they do; there is no direct formative referent from which to attribute quotation, although, in both cases an element at the site, a church and a boulder, are incorporated rather as if they were found objects. In this the works are site-generated rather than site-determined. Also, the dimensions of the works were decided by an estimation of what was possible in terms of size, given the configuration and location of the particular site. The works in question are also site-adjusted, in that both artists rely on a reservoir of pre-established forms.

Site-specificity, however, runs the risk of achieving nothing but a puerile and crude contextualism; a situation summed up neatly by Ade Louise Huxtable when speaking of contemporary architecture: "This is the trap and fallacy of 'contextualism' into which so many architects jump or fall—the masquerade of matched materials, the cosmetic cover-up of architectural maquillage."<sup>361</sup> Huxtable might just as easily be speaking of site-specific sculpture, as of new architecture, with regard to matching of materials to a precise location. The sculptural maquillage may be anecdotal as with Christian Boltanski's, *The Lost Workers Archive*, 1999, Dean Clough, Halifax—an archive devoted to mill workers sited in a revamped industrial mill. Alternately, contextualism may simply take a predictable material form; as with Ernesto Neto's, *Densities and Holes of Earthworms*, 1999, Tate Gallery, Liverpool, and his use of spices in a gallery that was once a spice warehouse. In both of these examples, the materials match the setting in such a pedantic way that the works can only be site-determined. Matching the work to the site may be an artistic or curatorial decision, but the form of site-specificity remains the same, namely site-determination.

Site-adjusted sculpture, on the other hand, covers a gamut of possibilities, extending from enlarging, or decreasing, the size of an existing work to fit a particular place, to spontaneously adapting a reservoir of materials to suit a particular setting. While Barry LeVa's *Accumulated Vision*, Corcoran Gallery, Washington DC, 1977, accords with the latter, Henry

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361. Ada Louise Huxtable, "The New Architecture", (*New York Review of Books*. 6<sup>th</sup> April 1995), p. 20.

Moore's *King and Queen*, 1952-53, Glenkiln Farm, Dumfries, is an example of studio-adjusted work.

## 1.

Smithson and Brancusi engage with particular places. As a consequence of this the works that are produced are not dictated by either the location or the studio. A formal repertoire is brought into conjunction with a particular place, and the result is a site-generated artwork—as site-specific as any other work. Again, speaking of architecture, but in terms applicable to sculpture, Huxtable writes:

What counts more than style is whether architecture improves our experience of the built world; whether it makes us wonder why we never noticed places in quite this way before. ... The test, finally, is the manner in which ideas, vocabulary, and structure are employed, how far these instruments of exploration carry architecture into new uses and sensory satisfactions, how well they move building beyond current limits. What matters is whether this work serves and satisfies us, in the personal and societal sense, and ultimately, how this process engages and reveals necessity and beauty in the visual language of our time.<sup>362</sup>

Both Smithson's and Brancusi's site-specific works deal with time of historical proportions. The "visual language" that they both favour is Futurism. The Futurist aspect that belongs to both Brancusi's and Smithson's work, is at heart romantic. However, within the Futurist aesthetic Brancusi's and Smithson's orientations are totally opposite to each other. The position of Brancusi is coloured by his historical moment: a moment in which Romantic Modernism looked forward to a utopian time of liberation based upon the products of human artifice. The adoption of a mytho-poetic background for thought provided for him a foundation with which to address, and celebrate, the contemporary. However, using 1968 as a nodal pivotal date, Modernism ceased to be optimistic about the future, and Futurism took on a darkly romantic form of Modernism. Agnes Heller says of 1968 that there was a change in historical attitude, away from the idea of Modernism as a transitory period: "Modernity is seen in a different light, because in '68 for the first time people involved in the revolts did not want to transcend the existing social order but to establish a better life *within* the existing social order."<sup>363</sup> She continues:

The technological imagination still regards the present and the world as a machine which can be set right. I am very critical of this. I'm also critical of the historical imagination. Look at the modern world: the overarching imagination is the technological imagination, but you can

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362. Huxtable, "The New Architecture", p. 21.

363. Agnes Heller, "Post-Marxism and the ethics of modernity. Interview with Simon Tormey", *Radical Philosophy*, 94 (March/April 1999), p. 35.

regard the ecologist movement as a Doomsday scenario which is entirely romantic.<sup>364</sup>

This gothic romantic colouration resulted from a perception that the future was dystopian, and that the project of Modernism was invalidated at the moment it lost its impetus. Such a dystopian view of the future underpins Smithson's aesthetic. This enlarged notion of Romanticism is well explained by Michael Löwy when writing about Situationism, and Guy Debord in particular.

When I speak of romanticism, I do not mean—or not simply—a nineteenth-century literary school, but something much greater and much more profound: the great tradition that protests against modern capitalist-industrial society in the name of the values of the past. It begins in the mid-eighteenth century with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, runs through German *Frühromantik*, symbolism and surrealism and is still with us. This is, as Marx himself noted, a critique that follows capitalism like its shadow from the day it was born to the day it dies ... Like a structure of feeling or a world-view, romanticism runs through every domain of culture: literature, poetry, the arts, philosophy, historiography, theology and politics. Torn between its nostalgia for the past and its dreams of the future, it denounces the devastation wrought by bourgeois modernity: the disenchantment of the world, mechanization, reification, quantification and the dissolution of human communities. Despite the constant reference to a lost past, romanticism is not necessarily retrograde; in the course of its long history, it has taken both reactionary and revolutionary forms.<sup>365</sup>

It is the element of Gothic Romanticism that helps to frame Smithson's drawings within his oeuvre: *It's King Kong the Monster*, 1961-63; *Blind in the Valley of the Suicides*, 1962; *Museum of the Void*, 1967; his poems: "From the Walls of Dis"; "From the Temptations"; and collages: *Untitled (Photostat)*, 1966; *King Kong Meets the Gem of Egypt*, 1972; and *Untitled (Big Fish)*, 1961-63. Löwy writes later in the same piece, that "whilst conservative romantics dream of a religious restoration, Gothic Romantics from Charles Maturin to Baudelaire and to Lautréamont have, for their part, no qualms about taking the side of Faust's Mephistopheles, of the spirit that always denies".<sup>366</sup> He continues that servants of a negative dialectic have a fervent wish to be divisive and critical.

Writing of Debord's film *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*, he focusses upon the film being entirely constructed of montage images.<sup>367</sup>

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364. Heller, "Post-Marxism and the ethics of modernity", p. 36.

365. Michael Löwy, "Consumed by night's fire: The dark romanticism of Guy Debord". *Radical Philosophy*, 87 (January/February 1998), p. 32.

366. Löwy, "Consumed by night's fire: The dark romanticism of Guy Debord", p. 33.

367. Löwy informs us that the title *In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni*—"We wander in darkness and we are consumed by fire", is a Latin palindrome and further that the imagery sums up the mood of a generation, and is inspired by the subversive tradition of Gothic

Slicing the images from their original context and combining them into a new one parallels Smithson's technique, as evidenced in the *Non-Sites*, sculpture and collaged maps, and his photo-documentation of *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, *Monuments of Passaic* itself, 1967, *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage,"* Bayonne, New Jersey, and *Nonsite (Slag)*, Oberhausen, Germany, 1968. In fact, understanding Smithson's work in terms of collage or filmic montage explains his use of mirrors as devices for fracturing the image and reintegrating it with other images external to itself. For examples think of *Yucatan Mirror Displacements*, 1969, *Cayuga Salt Mine Project*, 1968-69, *Slant Piece*, 1969, and *Gravel Mirror with Cracks and Dust*, 1968. An extreme form of this photo-montage kaleidoscope is the *Photo-Markers* piece of 1968, in which square format black-and-white photographs are photographed in square format colour taken within a new location. In all of these works the montage technique functions less as a 'dynamic' Cubist collage, and much more as an abutment of obdurate facts. In Huxtable's terms "this work serves and satisfies us, in the personal and societal sense, and ultimately ... this process engages and reveals necessity and beauty in the visual language of our time" —a language that in Smithson's hand fully engages with entropy as an aesthetic category.

Smithson's Futurist orientation is not towards a fantastic utopian time to come, a mytho-poetic time of unity and wholeness. Rather, it is ominously foreshadowed by strip-mining accidents, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Ohio, 1970, ecological quagmires, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969, or mytho-poetic disasters, *Map of Glass (Atlantis)*, 1969. The ominous preconditions for the future, whether geological confluence, *Map of Glass*, political expediency, *Partially Buried Woodshed*, or ecological immediacy, *Asphalt Rundown*, initiate entropic chains of events with profoundly dystopic consequences for the future. The pressure of "necessity" that forms Huxtable's "beauty" is evidenced by Smithson's work. Even the past cannot provide a utopia, since it was simply a time that contained a less ramified dystopia, one in which the process of entropy had already, and necessarily, started on its inevitable course.

In his short essay "Art and Dialectics", 1971, Smithson discusses the location of meaning as a web of inter-relationships, rather than as the definition of isolated objects.

Dialectical language offers no such [definitive] esthetic meanings, nothing is isolated from the whole—the prison is still a prison in the physical world. No particular meaning can remain absolute or ideal for very long. Dialectics is not only the ideational formula of thesis—antithesis—synthesis forever sealed in the mind, but an on-going development.

Dialectics could be viewed as the relationship between the shell and the ocean. Art critics and artists have for a



long time considered the shell without the context of the ocean.<sup>368</sup>

Specific pieces of Smithson's work that immediately spring to mind, in light of his reference to sea shells, are *Mirror and Shell*, 1969, and *The Hypothetical Continent in Shells: Lemuria*, 1969. In the first piece a double-sided square mirror is held in the vertical plane by a mound of sea-shells heaped around it. The work was constructed in Smithson's studio in New York City. *The Hypothetical Continent* was made in situ on Sanibel Island, Florida. Sanibel Island is considered to be part of the prehistoric land bridge between Florida and Yucatan. By constructing his model of Lemuria on Sanibel Island, Smithson was bringing into conjunction two different references to prehistoric and mythic time. The hypothetical, 'lost' continent of Lemuria overlay present-day Madagascar, and the bulk of it is presumed to lie beneath the Indian Ocean. However, it is *Mirror and Shell* that is the most evocative piece, since the shells are so removed from the sea. They are literally abstracted from one suggestive context and repositioned in another by dint of the reflective properties of the double-sided mirror. The mirror reflects its location without recourse to mimesis since the reflections are not qualities of representation, but, rather, they are properties of the mirror that form an indexical relationship with the world. Simultaneously, the space within the room is opened to view and included within the work. Each work celebrates the precinctual as essential to its existence, the changing volume of space reflected in the mirror by the ambulatory viewer, and the geological appropriateness of Sanibel Island to the 'map' of Lemuria. In these works particular places are celebrated in particular ways.

## 2.

The Gothic Romanticism of Smithson's work is clearly evident in his poem "From the City", where, in part two he writes:

A sorry sight  
 Upon the dark night;  
 While a dog barked at the moon.  
 No prayers tonight.  
 No prayers tonight.  
 We have better things to do.  
 Joining with the myth of the machine  
 the rebel  
 Expects to be damned  
 By rust;  
 To be saved  
 Is passé.  
 We shall fly to Rome  
 In an airplane; (sic)  
 Flying,  
 Flying.  
 Under Golgatha

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368. Robert Smithson, "Art and Dialectics", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Jack Flam ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 370-71.

O  
 Happy chance.  
 Amen <sup>369</sup>

Golgotha is identified as the place of the skull, as Calvary, and is generally taken to mean a burial place and a place of agony or sacrifice. Smithson suggests that to be suffering and under pain of death is a happy chance—a fortuitous happenstance. Whether or not the aircraft is identified with Golgotha, or Golgotha is an overarching general condition from which salvation is passé, does not really matter. Joining with the myth of the machine is a better thing to do than praying. This rebellious act automatically entails corrosive damnation as happy chance. The myth of the machine doubles as a holy grail and a poisoned chalice. Already in this formulation we encounter Smithson's interest in entropy, a state or condition in which energy can only be realized as it is released from some earlier pre-existing form. Any such secondary realization inevitably involves the destruction or decay of the primary form.

As Löwy comments about Debord, "It may be a truism, but these days it has to be pointed out with some force: Guy Debord was a Marxist. A profoundly heretical Marxist, no doubt, but also a profoundly innovative one. He was open to libertarian insights, but he still claimed to be a Marxist".<sup>370</sup> One can easily substitute Robert Smithson's name for that of Debord, and not significantly alter the sense of the comment. He stands, like Debord, in a tradition of oppositional Romanticism that includes such luminaries as William Blake, William Morris, and André Breton. This tradition is marked by a dystopian rather than utopian outlook. The dark satanic mills of Blake, or the anti-machine aesthetic of Morris, play along perfectly with Smithson's aesthetic of entropy that is based upon the second law of thermodynamics—the heat-death of the universe.

Probably *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, is Smithson's most widely known work (see illustration 7 on page 185). This piece was constructed at Rozel Point on the Great Salt Lake in Utah. It occupies a ten-acre site and consists of a coiled causeway 1,500 feet long by 15 feet wide that spirals into the salt lake. The physical construction required 6,650 tons of material at an initial cost of \$9,000, the money was provided by his dealer Virginia Dwan. A further \$9,000 was supplied by Douglas Christmas to cover the expense of making a film of the work. The budget reflects the dual nature of the project, a distinctly palpable manifestation in the landscape and another manifestation as a film in which documentary and mythopoetic elements are juxtaposed. A good example of this intermingling of images is the film's evocation of dinosaurs that is achieved by filming dump trucks, bulldozers, and backhoes during the actual construction of the causeway.

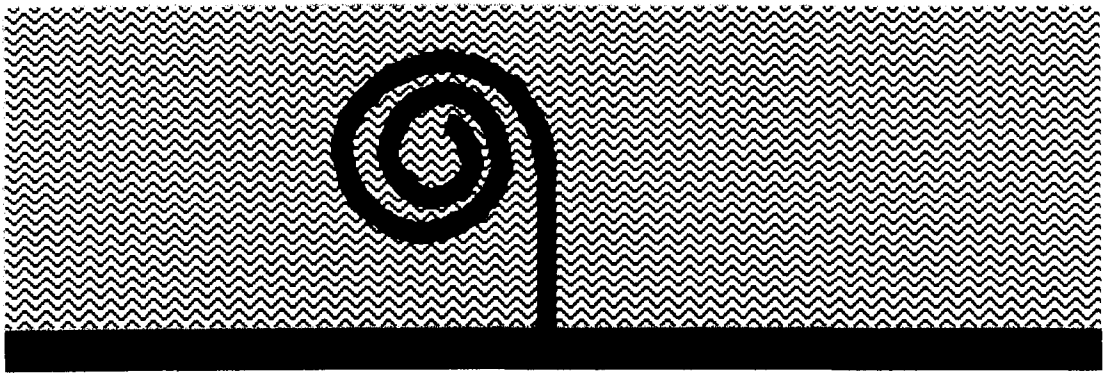
The most significant thing about the *Spiral Jetty*, within the context of Gothic Romanticism, is that it describes a left-handed spiral. This construal makes sense if one takes the shore of the lake to be the baseline (see figure 8). The significance of a left-handed spiral is that it carries the weight of a negative meaning.

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369. Robert Smithson, "From the City", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 317.

370. Löwy, "Consumed by night's fire: The dark romanticism of Guy Debord", p. 31.

Figure 8



Shoreline

Plan view of Smithson's Spiral Jetty, Great Salt Lake, Utah, 1970.

In conversation Smithson recommended J.E. Cirlot's book *A Dictionary of Symbols* as a source for formal references. On the subject of spirals Cirlot writes: "Going right back to the most ancient traditions, we find the distinction being made between the creative spiral (rising in a clockwise direction, and attributed to Pallas Athene) and the destructive spiral like a whirlwind (which twirls round to the left, and is an attribute of Poseidon)".<sup>371</sup> Pallas Athene is the goddess of defensive warfare and Poseidon stood as a symbol for nature's violence, hence his particular identification with the sea. Athene symbolized law and measure, but was capable of undermining those attributes with deceit and trickery. The binary nature of their attributes—female and male, law and disorder, is reflected in Cirlot's summary of the symbolization of right- and left-handed spirals respectively. Also, it is significant that both deities are closely identified with the old deity of the earth.<sup>372</sup>

The attraction of this confluence of symbolic references for Smithson is easily appreciated, for it provides a connotation of archaic time, mythic connections to earth and water, and the entropic dimension of destruction and disorder. Cirlot's dictionary defines the spiral as "A schematic image of the evolution of the universe".<sup>373</sup> By selecting the left-handed configuration of the spiral, Smithson implies that the evolution of the universe is one of constant decline. To construct the intellectually weighted symbol for Poseidon obtruding into Poseidon's signature material—water, makes the *Spiral Jetty* very specific.

Although the lake had submerged the *Spiral Jetty* in 1972 due to climatic change, the work has recently re-surfaced as a consequence of a prolonged drought. In the spirit of entropy this sequence of events is entirely consistent with the work's premiss. Speaking to Gregoire Muller about another work, Smithson says:

371. JE. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 291.

372. Vincent Scully, "Chapter 9: Poseidon and Athena", *The Earth the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1962, rev. ed. 1979), pp. 155-185.

373. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 290.

If the work has sufficient physicality, any kind of natural change would tend to enhance the work. Geology has its own kind of entropy, that has to do with sediment mixtures. Sediment plays a part in my work. Unlike Buckminster Fuller, I'm interested in collaborating with entropy.<sup>374</sup>

Smithson indicated that it was his intention to re-work *Spiral Jetty* in order to keep the causeway above the waterline, if the depth of the lake increased. The submersion of *Spiral Jetty* has accorded Smithson's film additional importance as a record in a fluctuating situation. Originally the film was integral to the whole project, with provision being made for a small subterranean cinema on the nearby shore. The underground chamber was to be accessed by a spiral staircase within a mound of rocks and rubble. Smithson's photo-essay of the *Spiral Jetty* was intended to be permanently displayed in the chamber. This recursive device of installing the documentary evidence of the sculptural event within that expanded event echoes the *Partially Buried Woodshed*, Kent State University, Ohio, 1970.

### 3.

Apart from *Spiral Jetty* the most notable other work by Smithson that employs a spiral motif is the *Broken Circle and Spiral Hill* in Emmen, Holland, 1971. This work consists of three determining elements. First, is the broken circle, comprised of two crescents. One crescent is formed of earth and obtrudes into the surrounding water, rather like a curved jetty. The other crescent is in the form of a narrow curving canal dug into the surrounding earth (see illustration on page 186).

The second element is a large boulder lying roughly at the centre of the circumference described by the double crescent. The boulder is a borrow-stone that was deposited by the retreating ice sheet in the last ice age. After being carried for a considerable distance and time, the boulder marks a terminal moraine in the history of the ice sheet. The rounded appearance of the boulder is a direct consequence of its being abraded by the ice. The stone's position at the site forced Smithson to deal with its sheer presence. Initially, Smithson found the stone an obstacle to his site-adjusted work. His first inclination was to remove or bury the glacial deposit. However, this particular specimen is one of the largest in the Netherlands, and moving it all presented massive difficulties. At the time Smithson said of his problem with the glacial boulder:

I returned to New York without solving the riddle of the accidental centre. Once in New York, after studying photographs of *Broken Circle*, I was haunted by the shadowy lump in the middle of my work. Like the eye of a hurricane it seemed to suggest all kinds of misfortunes. It became a dark spot of exasperation, a geological gangrene on the sandy expanse. ... When I return to Holland, I might bury the boulder in the centre, or move it

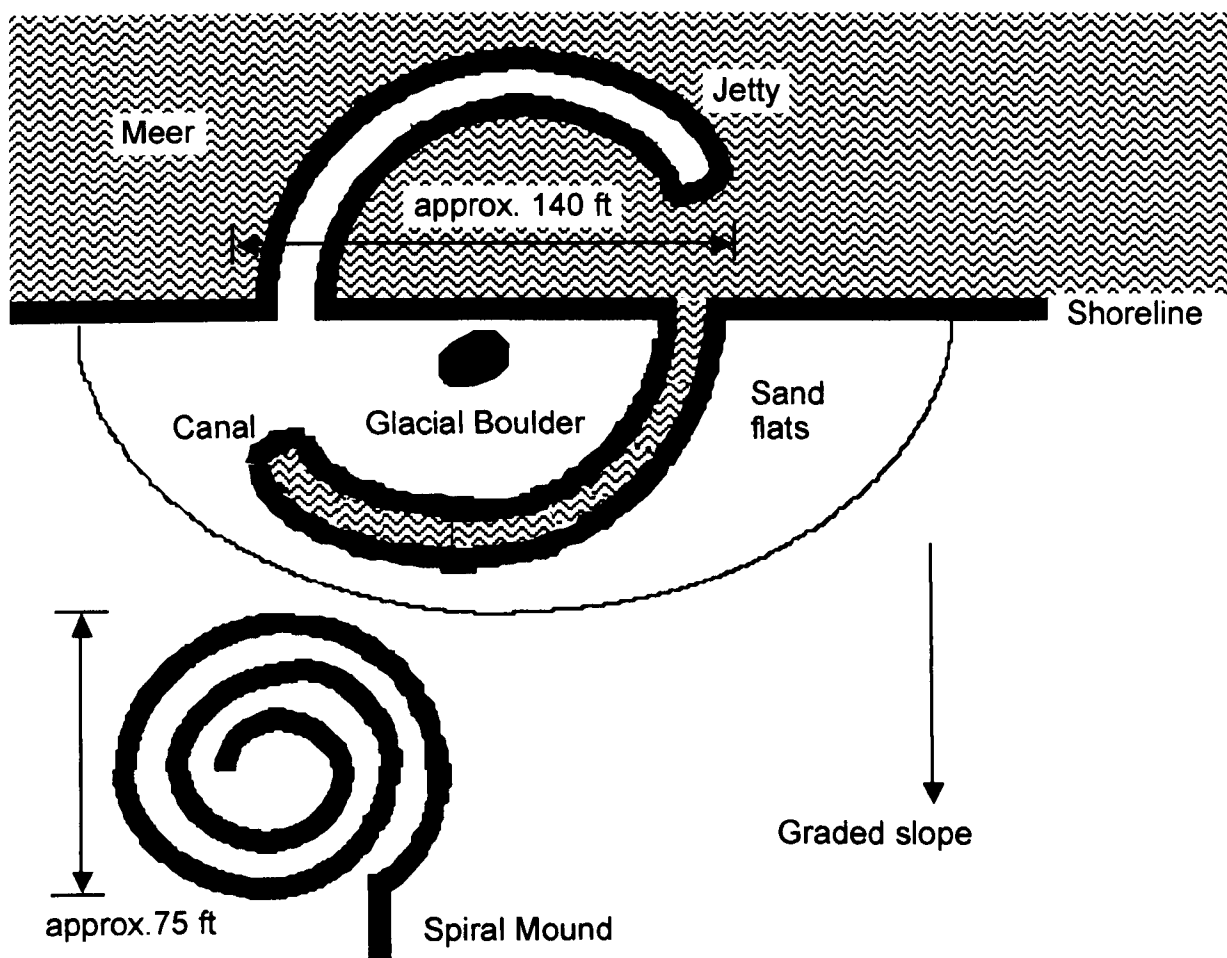
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374. Robert Smithson, "...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master", *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, Nancy Holt ed. (New York: New York University, 1979), p. 181.

outside of the circumference, or just leave it there—as a kind of glacial “heart of Darkness”—a warning from the Ice Age. At any rate, it is a stimulating predicament.<sup>375</sup>

The third option became the final, unsurprising choice given Smithson’s earlier comments about this accidentally placed central marker, which he saw as “an entropological manifestation”, and one that relates strongly to what is outside, or beyond, the piece itself (see figure 9).<sup>376</sup>

Figure 9



Plan view of Broken Circle and Spiral Hill, Emmen, Holland, 1971.

The third and final element is the mound of earth, covered in black topsoil with the spiral pathway picked out in white sand. As with the *Spiral Jetty* the spiral track to the top of the earth mound is counter-clockwise. Smithson chose to have the hill covered in black topsoil and white sand to enhance the existing colors of the site. He described the water of the Meer as green, the sand flats as yellow and white, and the graded loam as brown. Out-washed sand and gravel is a feature of terminal moraines, while the rich loam is a feature of the Dutch polders. *Spiral Hill* combines both of the visible elements from the earlier *Spiral Jetty*, namely the spiral causeway and the mound that surmounted the subterranean cinema.

375. Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master”, p. 182.

376. Smithson, “...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master”, p. 182.

Returning to Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols* as a means of disentangling the meanings of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* is very instructive. Taking the three elements of *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* in turn yields: 1, circumference-crescents; 2, centre-boulder; and 3, left-handed spiral-mound. I have restricted Cirlot's references to only those aspects that seem to bear directly upon Smithson's specific selection of forms.

### 1: Circumference-crescents.

Cirlot identifies a double meaning for a crescent: first, change of form or phenomena together with the connotation of the aquatic, second, a symbolic image of paradise.<sup>377</sup> This second reading is especially associated with crescents in the company of a star, as on, for example, certain Islamic flags. Circumference, meanwhile, carries the symbolic weight

of adequate limitation, of the manifest world, of the precise and the regular ... as well as of the inner unity of all matter and all universal harmony. ... Enclosed beings, objects or figures within the circumference has a double meaning: from within, it implies limitation and definition; from without, it is seen to represent the defence of the physical and psychic contents themselves against perils of the soul threatening it from without, these dangers being ... tantamount to chaos, but more particularly to illimitation and disintegration. Circumferential movement ... is a representation of time.<sup>378</sup>

By virtue of Smithson's choice of a 'broken circle' the obvious implication is that the defence against chaos and disintegration has been breached. Such a breach renders the circumference as two concentric crescents, the further implications of which signify change and time—in the form of circumferential movement. The symbolism of the circle, according to Cirlot, is mostly connected to the sun and the number ten, neither of which has any bearing in this discussion. He does, however, begin his discussion of the circle by saying "At times it [the circle] is synonymous with the circumference, just as the circumference is often equated with circular movement".<sup>379</sup>

### 2: Centre-boulder.

The symbolism of the centre is, for Cirlot, very rich and profound. It carries the symbolic weight of timelessness, unity, interiority, and spacelessness. He writes:

In all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial 'paradisaal state' and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe ... This centre is in effect Aristotle's 'unmoved mover' ... it expresses the dimension of the 'infinite depth' of space, that is, the seed of the eternal cycle of the flux and flow

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377. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 63.

378. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 46.

379. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 44.

of forms and beings, as well as the dimensions of space itself.<sup>380</sup>

Given the sheer physical and intractable mass of the glacial boulder that forms the centre of the *Broken Circle*, “unmoved mover” is a perfect description of it. Also, if the glacial deposit connotes a primordial state of paradise, a reading reinforced by two bracketing crescents, that meaning, as a “supreme principle”, is one of chaotic and fortuitous displacement. According to the boulder the status of primordial seed reinforces its importance to the meaning of the entire ensemble. Its status is curiously similar to that of the Church of the Holy Apostles Saints Peter and Paul in Brancusi’s *Tirgu-Jiu* ensemble. The inclusion of the church, as a sort of found object, incorporates an incontrovertible spiritual dimension to the work as a whole, as a sort of temenos. Inclusion of the glacial borrow-stone, as another found object, in Smithson’s ensemble puts geological time and stochastic process at the absolute centre of the work, as another sort of temenos.

Under the heading *Omphalos*, a white stone which was sited at Delphi and considered to be the centre of the earth, Cirlot affirms this as a symbol

of the cosmic ‘Centre’ where intercommunication between the three worlds of man, of the dead, and of the gods, is effected. ... By locating it in one particular spot, man made of it a sacred zone around the ‘centre of the world’. The material image of the *Omphalos* (the ‘navel’ in Greek) was known as the Bethel, which was made of stone and shaped like a pilaster. ... Another image of the omphalos may have been the ovoid stone as it sometimes appears in Greek designs encircled by a snake or serpent.<sup>381</sup>

The relationship between Smithson’s glacial boulder and the encircling crescents is strikingly akin to the omphalos and the Ouroboros. The Ouroboros is generally

depicted as a dragon, snake or serpent biting its own tail. In the broadest sense, it is symbolic of time and of the continuity of life. ... The Ouroboros biting its own tail is symbolic of self-fecundation, or the primitive idea of a self-sufficient Nature—a Nature, that is, which ... continually returns, within a cyclic pattern, to its own beginning. There is a Venetian manuscript on alchemy which depicts the Ouroboros with its body half-black (symbolizing earth and night) and half-white (denoting heaven and light).<sup>382</sup>

This train of thought suggests that Smithson is implying, by means of an incomplete circle, that life is discontinuous—discontinuous to such a point that there is no cyclic return “to its own beginning”.

One other entry in Cirlot that is of specific interest here to the general idea of precinct and installations of sculpture is the definition of precinct.

380. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 39.

381. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 232.

382. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 235.

All images to do with the precinct—an enclosure, a walled garden, a city, a square, a castle, a *patio*—correspond to the idea of the *temenos*, or a sacred and circumscribed space which is guarded and defended because it constitutes a spiritual entity. Such images as this may also symbolize the life of the individual and in particular the inner life of his thoughts.<sup>383</sup>

The construction of the double arcs that form the jetty and the canal effectively form a compound that encloses the glacial borrow-stone. By establishing a *temenos* in this context Smithson puts geological time and serendipity at the centre of the complex. The placement of a charnel house, as a central *temenos*, in the complexes built by the Ohio mound builders only enshrines a different reference to time, one that is biologically determined and, therefore, includes the happenstance of mortality. Smithson is clear on the point that it is the material totality that he is focussed on: "It gives me an opportunity to work with water, land, air, and fire (solar light) as a whole interconnected phenomenon".<sup>384</sup> That alchemical reference—earth, air, fire, and water—establishes another layer of significance for the Emmen installation. It is the placement nearby of the spiral-mound that allows a vantage point from which to view this precinct and *temenos* that are the *Broken Circle*.

### 3: Left-handed spiral-mound.

The significance of the counter-clockwise spiral has been discussed already in relation to the *Spiral Jetty*. Suffice it to say that it carries the charge of destruction and degeneration together with natural violence. On the subject of a mound of earth, Cirlot's dictionary tells us "it symbolizes the intermediate stages of matter, and is related to the symbols of primordial waters and of slime".<sup>385</sup> The configuration of the symbol, an incomplete rectangle, does not conform to Smithson's iconography in any way other than of an incomplete figure—the *Broken Circle*. There is no entry for hill, but there is a lengthy entry for mountain. The complex of meanings seems to revolve around loftiness, verticality, mass, and centrality. However, taking the ascending spiral of Smithson's piece to be a pathway from the base to the peak and back again leads to a different set of associations. Certainly Smithson used *Spiral Jetty* as a track when he had himself filmed running along it. Also, the surface of the spiral track is picked out with white sand, in marked contrast to the black topsoil used to cover the mound. On the subject of peaks and mountains Cirlot writes:

The mystic sense of the peak also comes from the fact that it is the point of contact between heaven and earth, or the center through which the world-axis passes. ... This polar mountain is also to be found in other symbolic traditions, always bearing the same symbolism of the world-axis. ... It is also called the 'white mountain', in which case it embraces both the basic mountain-

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383. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 251.

384. Smithson, "... The Earth, Subject to cataclysms, is a Cruel Master", pp. 183-185.

385. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 208.



symbolism with all the implications outlined above and that of the colour white (intelligence and purity).<sup>386</sup>

Black and white have already been established as binary opposites in the coloration of the Ouroboros, where they stand for earth and night, and heaven and light respectively. Within the context of Smithson's Cirlot-inspired iconography, black and white may also now connote the Ourborous in conjunction with the negative attributes of the left handed—sinister, spiral. Certainly Smithson's choice of black and white for *Spiral Hill* was deliberate and requires consideration. Cirlot's dictionary informs us that,

The conception of black and white as diametrically opposed symbols of the positive and the negative ... is very common. ... Black, in fairly generalized terms, seems to represent the initial, germinal stage of all processes, as it does in alchemy. ... The profoundest meaning of black is occultation and germination in darkness. ... Black also sometimes comes to symbolize time, in contrast to white which represents timelessness and ecstasy ... in the normal symbolic pattern, white will be placed above black.<sup>387</sup>

*Spiral Hill* provides a coign of vantage from which *Broken Circle* may be viewed. To ascend the hill one needs to follow the white pathway (see illustration 9 on page 187). Given Smithson's sense of humour and knowledge of American popular culture, one could be excused for thinking of following the yellow brick road. In alchemical symbolism white is a degenerate form of yellow (gold). The pathway and the hill now have the connotation of the Ouroboros, albeit an imperfect Ouroboros, an Ouroboros that is more entropic than it is self-generating. Having gained access to the peak one looks down on a model that depicts entropic time. When asked about the overview provided by *Spiral Hill*, and the resultant pictorialization of *Broken Circle*, Smithson replied, "I don't see it as an object. What you have there are really many different scale changes. Speaking in terms of cinema, you have close, medium and long views. Scale becomes a matter of interchangeable distances".<sup>388</sup> Part of the scale changes that he is alluding to, it seems, are those of close experiential time, medium geological time, and long cosmic time. He continues:

When one is standing on the top of the *Spiral Hill*, there is a link-up of two centers, the top center [peak] is absent while the bottom center [boulder] is present—but only from that position. Neither eccentrically nor concentrically is it possible to escape the dilemma, just as the Earth cannot escape the Sun.<sup>389</sup>

The primal meanings indicated by Smithson's use of water and earth, and carried further by symbolic spirals and other loaded geometric forms, combine to describe a sort of cosmic plan. The status of the entire site therefore becomes a precinct, rather as the shrine at Delphi was to the

386. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 210.

387. Cirlot, *A dictionary of Symbols*, p. 55.

388. Smithson, "...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master", p. 179.

389. Smithson, "...The Earth, Subject to Cataclysms, is a Cruel Master", p. 182.

omphalos. All of the parts of the ensemble at Emmen indicate each other, but only reflect different aspects of the overall concern. The limited precinct that forms *Broken Circle* is a subspace of the entire complex *Broken Circle/Spiral Hill* that constitutes the large precinct. The overall concern, which is one of a darkly Gothic Romanticism, sees the only possible future temporal outcome already discernible in the distant past. He puts it thus: “[Nature]’s already destroyed. It’s a slow process of destruction. The world is slowly destroying itself. The catastrophe comes suddenly, but slowly.”<sup>390</sup>

## 4.

The levels of complexity in Smithson’s work, for example his use of symbols and references to different time scales, indicate an interest in the work as artifice. In an interview in 1970 he said:

I developed a dialectic between the mind-matter aspects of nature. My view became dualistic, moving back and forth between the two areas. It’s not involved with nature, in the classical sense. There’s no anthropomorphic reference to environment. But I do have a strong tendency towards the inorganic than to the organic. The organic is closer to the idea of nature: I’m more interested in denaturalization or in artifice than I am in any kind of naturalism.<sup>391</sup>

He explores the frankly artificial nature of art work in his essays on the aesthetics of mannerism.<sup>392</sup> John Shearman, in his book *Mannerism*, writes: “The love of complexity rather than economy was another characteristic of the [Mannerist] period. ... And finally we have to accept the validity of the caprice, the bizarre fantasy, or, as we sometimes call it, the conceit,” notions that can be readily applied to Smithson’s work.<sup>393</sup> The aesthetic model that Smithson is keen to explore

is closer to the pictorial principles of V.V. Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht. The critics who are committed to expressive naturalism always attack pictorialism because they fail to understand what Brecht termed “alienation effect.” Many of Brecht’s ideas for the a-effect were derived from the narrative pictures of Brueghel the Elder, the *pictorial* origin of the a-effect is opposed to the sensory character of the picture as a ‘painting’. Far from being non-illusionistic, Brecht calls attention to the

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390. Robert Smithson, “Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson”, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 250.

391. Smithson, “Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson”, p. 250.

392. Robert Smithson, “Abstract mannerism” (1966-67), p. 339, “What Really Spoils Michelangelo’s Sculpture” (1966-67), pp. 346-348, “From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as reflected in the Cinema” (1967), 349-353, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*.

393. John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 22.

physical elements of illusion; thus illusion exists on an equal level with reality.<sup>394</sup>

Smithson's espousal of a Brechtian position provides a further gloss on the Fried essay discussed earlier.<sup>395</sup> Brecht writes of the a-effect:

It was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed. By this is meant the following:

The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound by the alleged 'eternally human'. Its story is arranged in such a way as to create 'universal' situations that allow man with a capital M to express himself: man of every period and every colour. All its incidents are just one enormous cue, and this cue is followed by the 'eternal' response: the inevitable, usual, natural, purely human response.<sup>396</sup>

Fried's championing of the meditative artwork, as the perpetual present moment of absorption, corresponds to Brecht's point about bourgeois theatre and its objects –primary amongst which is the naturalization of the ideological status quo as an absolute verity. Equally, Smithson's interest in the reality of the illusion historicizes the moment: "To put it pictorially, when the painting is valued over and against the picture you can be sure philistines have taken over."<sup>397</sup> Not unexpectedly, naturalism and honesty are suspect terms for Smithson, as indeed they are for Brecht, since they carry the baggage of ideological complicity. Smithson writes that "some artists never question the 'creative process': they consider it to be quite natural. Yet, no matter how naturally creative the artist is, no matter how much he relies on 'smart instincts', little bits of self-consciousness creep into his art".<sup>398</sup>

Claims for ideological ubiquity serve both Brecht and Smithson as warnings of ideological complicity, and the a-effect provides an antidote in the form of the specific and local manifestations of ubiety. Specificity in the form of local configuration, whether theatrical for Brecht or symbols adapted to a particular geography for Smithson, provides an arrested notion of place. Place and the celebration of ubiety provide a momentary respite from the relentless drive towards the ubiquity of space and place presented by modern capitalist culture. Brecht and Smithson are opposed to naturalism since what is being naturalized is always an aspect of the dominant ideology. Mannerism is less, as far as Smithson is concerned, an advocating of mannerism than an attempt to counteract naturalism. We are told by Shearman that,

[Mannerism] was ... the confident assertion of the artist's right, which he seemed to have regained in the High Renaissance, to make something that was first and last a work of art; and ... there were enough related aesthetic convictions asserted with confidence in Mannerism's own cultural context to suggest to us that what was done

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394. Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman ...", p. 349.

395. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", pp. 116-147.

396. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 96-97.

397. Smithson, "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman ...", p. 352.

398. Smithson, "Abstract Mannerism", p. 339.

was thought to be absolutely the right thing to do. ... Mannerism is a style of excess, since its underlying convictions are almost all extreme degrees of those that in moderate degrees are common in other periods; as such it could only flourish in an atmosphere of self-assurance. And one reason for this assurance was the conviction that artists were—so far from being in reaction against anything—in the main stream of advancing perfection that was apparent, in retrospect, in the Renaissance.<sup>399</sup>

Smithson's essay celebrates the artificial nature of art in order to declare a position for non-naturalism; his choice of Mannerism leads to a degree of confusion between non- and un-naturalism. The backdrop for Smithson's attitude to Mannerism, and his extreme convictions, is based on his engagement with the cultural context and its ideological overload. Shearman suggests that the Mannerism of Michelangelo and Raphael was more than merely excess and, in fact indicates another plane of experience that lies beyond the immediate, the manipulated, and the formal.

We know from his [Michelangelo's] poetry ... that beauty of form was for him a manifestation of Divine Grace that moved him most when he found it in the human body. This idea was metaphysically based, and related to current Christianized Neoplatonism. It was also, however, another aspect of the notion of the artist as another god, his work another nature; for Michelangelo believed that the Divine was most clearly revealed in what was most perfectly created, and this is probably the principal reason why his art was devoted to the human form so exclusively, save for the abstract forms of architecture.<sup>400</sup>

In "Abstract Mannerism" Smithson indicates that Greenberg's attitude to abstract painting is akin to that of commentators on Mannerism. This essay generally establishes a position in which Mannerism is seen as a negative term that connotes brash excess and superficiality. "What really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture", 1966-67, is a bridging essay between the earlier "Abstract Mannerism", 1966-67, and the later "From Ivan The Terrible To Roger Corman Or Paradoxes Of Conduct In Mannerism as Reflected In The Cinema", 1967. Smithson's essay on Michelangelo claims Mannerist excess for the Florentine in terms of his "grotesque sense of humour".<sup>401</sup> The origin for this dark sense of humour is located in melancholia. "The infirmity of his melancholia seems infinite and unending" Smithson tells us. The Gothic element of Michelangelo's aesthetic caused the development of his work to veer away from the High Renaissance ideal of "man the measure of all things", as exemplified by his *David*, 1501-4, to his later *Slaves*, or *Captives*, 1520-23, which are Gothic in their sense of man attempting to attain perfectibility through his own efforts. I am indebted to Henry Moore for his

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399. Shearman, *Mannerism*, p. 171.

400. Shearman. *Mannerism*, pp. 55-56.

401. Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture", pp. 346-348.

exposition of the Gothic element in Michelangelo's *Slaves* as being that of a struggle with the hindrances of their material condition in order to free themselves. The varieties of surface resolution left evident in the stone carving also indicate differing states of emergence from gross materiality. Such an account comprehensively addresses the entire work, and indeed body of "unfinished" works, as being fully intentional and not the unfinished work of an elderly and infirm sculptor.<sup>402</sup>

On the subject of Michelangelo's last sculpture, the *Rondanini Pieta*, 1555-64, Moore says, "The top part is Gothic and the lower part is sort of Renaissance".<sup>403</sup> The *Rondanini Pieta* is a touchstone in this debate over the status of certain pieces of work, whether they are to be considered significant works or incomplete studies. Howard Hibbard maintains that "this final statue is the result of old-age debility, and although it is strangely moving, its interest is chiefly autobiographical. Unlike Michelangelo's other unfinished works, this is hardly even a potential work of art".<sup>404</sup> By comparison, Moore states,

For me Michelangelo's greatest work is one that was in his studio partly finished, partly unfinished, when he died –The Rondanini Pieta. I don't know of any other single work of art by anyone that is more poignant, more moving. It isn't the most powerful of Michelangelo's works—it's a mixture, in fact, of two styles [the Gothic and the Renaissance].<sup>405</sup>

Shearman's position would lead me to believe that the Mannerist aesthetic in Michelangelo's later work is a consequence of that style's incorporation of antiquity as both an authority and exotic reference, and that Michelangelo used the Gothic as just such a reference to antiquity. The late series of *Crucifixion* drawings, 1550-60, by Michelangelo, display a dark sense of fated mortality that is Gothic in its orientation. While Shearman would cite the eerie quality of these late drawings as indicative of transcendence and therefore imbued with Mannerist subtlety, the sense of inevitable mortality and unswerving fate is in perfect accord with Smithson's taste for Gothic Romanticism. Such a sense of fated misfortune is also displayed in *The Prison* series, circa 1761, of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, which were much admired by Smithson.<sup>406</sup> The drawing of Smithson's titled *Entropic Landscape*, 1970, maintains a similarly dystopian view of the landscape to that found in both the *Prison* series and the Roman ruins drawn by Piranesi. The Egyptomania that is evident in Piranesi's designs for fireplaces and other interior decoration serves to illustrate another aspect of his hankering for temporal displacement to some remote Arcadian time. It is the remoteness of the time displacement and its historical links that makes the connection to Smithson's dystopian Futurism. For, like Piranesi, Smithson sees in ruins what was once the case. The crumbling architectural order of Rome is echoed for Smithson in the entropic decline of the natural order.

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402. Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo* (London: Penguin, 2nd ed. 1985).

403. Henry Moore, "Michelangelo", *Henry Moore on Sculpture*, Philip James ed. (London: Macdonald, 1966), p. 180.

404. Hibbard, *Michelangelo*, pp. 288-89.

405. Moore, "Michelangelo", p.180.

406. Robert Hobbs, *Robert Smithson: Sculpture*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 210.

Gothic art asserts an organic model for understanding the world. Christ is posited as the model for the organized church, a model in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The idea of unity, understood as something constitutive, served to bind together the network of religious centres and establish Rome and the Papacy as its notional centre.<sup>407</sup> This Vitalist notion animates the artwork of the Gothic period and explains why it proved so attractive for Michelangelo that he adopted it as his Mannerist style. The natural unity that combines body and soul as one man, and that man's capability for improvement through his own efforts, provided Michelangelo with a philosophical model. Smithson's Gothic interest by comparison is centred on physical degeneration coupled with a sense of inevitability. Michelangelo and Smithson do share, however, a view of the human condition that is based on pathos.

The gist of Smithson's interest in Mannerism is that it provides an oppositional stance with which to counter naturalism. Within the framework that Mannerism allows, Gothic art provides him with an archaic-art historical precedent that enables him to valorize and validate the fantastic as dystopian. His adherence to the idea of oppositional aesthetics and the catastrophic places him within the lineage of Gothic Romanticism, alongside such figures as William Blake and Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

## 5.

The Michelangelo essay is pivotal in showing the shift in Smithson's attitude on Mannerism away from understanding the term to be derogatory to something that is more positive for him. Mannerism becomes identified with Brecht, Meyerhold, and the Russian Formalist idea of a cluster of devices.<sup>408</sup> It is in the championing of Mannerism as non-"expressive naturalism" that Smithson continues to take issue with the aesthetic position of Fried and Greenberg, and its attendant ideological ramifications.<sup>409</sup> Smithson's Mannerism is a restricted sense of style and stylishness, one that is restricted in the main to validating an art form that is anti-naturalist. The repertoire of forms that Smithson developed—spirals, arcs, circles, mounds—and their materiality—water, earth, mirrors, glass, asphalt, glue, colour, and light—provides him with clusters of forms that are capable of symbolic interpretation and a flexible application to the landscape. In this lies a formal similarity between Smithson and Michelangelo's Gothic aesthetic. The principal of unity as constitutive leads to a sense of form that is hierarchical. In such a sense, form is grouped compositionally and arranged to facilitate a particular reading, thereby necessitating that the parts be fixed in a definite relationship. Michelangelo's *Slaves* are only understood to be captive and enslaved because of their relationship to the mass of stone with which they are simultaneously contrasted and identified. The various degrees of surface finish indicated by the chisel marks amplify the extent of the effort expended on describing their condition. Confusion over the status of the works being finished or unfinished is raised because the works are precisely about an

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407. George Henderson, *Gothic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 43-57.

408. Smithson, "From Ivan The Terrible To Roger Corman...", p. 350.

409. Smithson, "From Ivan The Terrible To Roger Corman...", p. 350.

unending process of amelioration that is parallel to the activity of stone carving.

*Spiral Jetty* began a series of projects for Smithson that also utilized hierarchical forms. Site-specific work was to be located in the landscape according to the possibilities afforded by that particular landscape. A ready-made repertoire of forms provided him with templates to apply to that particular location. Each of the formal templates was already invested with layers of symbolic meaning, and its final assembly depended on a somewhat capricious, if informed, interpretation of that place. These works are to be understood in a particular way that is guided by the layout of the elements in relation to the site. Physical presence is not absolutely essential to understand these pieces, unlike Newman's 'zip' paintings, *Zim Zum* or Serra's sculpture. Apperception and self-reflexivity are not required to establish the locations of Smithson's work as precincts. As we have seen, Smithson's works after *Spiral Jetty* are more akin to Brancusi's *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble. As the individual works of Brancusi were site-adjusted to suit *Tirgu Jiu*, so the template-like elements of Smithson's work are adjusted and deployed in ways appropriate to his project. The works describe a precinct and ubiquity is called upon to explain the presence of the precinct in that particular configuration of work, place, and site.

The principal contrast between Brancusi and Smithson, as precinctual architects, is that the former maintains an outlook compatible with that of a utopian Futurist whilst the latter is that of a dystopian Futurist. The empty present moment is a dialectical prerequisite for the dystopian Futurist, in which the fantastic marvellous figures itself against the real, and where that reality is understood to be marred. Smithson's notion of the dialectic involves oscillation between two essentially different things, the certainty of entropic origination and the uncertainty of entropic culmination. Such a dialectic of chiasmic fluctuation posits the tertiary term, synthesis, as a measure of duration. Smithson describes just such a state while writing about corner windows, "The meaning of the window makes one aware of absolute inertia or the perfect instant, when time oscillates in a circumscribed place".<sup>410</sup> Or, again, "Reaction follows action, til finally the artist gets 'tired' and settles for monumental inaction".<sup>411</sup> He gives a perfect example of his preferred timeframe when he says "You know, one pebble moving one foot in two million years is enough action to keep me really excited".<sup>412</sup> Slowness is different from Fried's timelessness, in that perception is recognized to be the observation of myriad details noticed as constituting the events under scrutiny. Similarly, in "Entropy and the New Monuments", 1966, he writes: "time as decay or biological evolution is eliminated. ... This displacement allows the eye to see time as an infinity of surfaces or structures, or both combined".<sup>413</sup> "As action decreases, the clarity of such surface-structures

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410. Robert Smithson, "Ultramodern", 1967, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 64.

411. Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments", 1966, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p.12.

412. Smithson, "Discussions with Heizer, Oppenheim, Smithson", p. 251.

413. Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments", p.11.

increases. This is evident in art when all representations of action pass into oblivion. At this stage, lethargy is elevated to the most glorious magnitude".<sup>414</sup>

This state of perceptual limbo corresponds with Smithson's often-repeated interest in Anton Ehrenzweig's term "dedifferentiation". Although somewhat vague, the term dedifferentiation was used by Smithson to explain his attitude to art on several occasions. In "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", 1968, Smithson describes dedifferentiation as involving "a suspended question regarding 'limitlessness'".<sup>415</sup> The lack of limitation, according to Smithson, lies in the mind of the artist at the point when that artist is "making contact with matter". The problem that Smithson seems to be grappling with here is the complex one of mind and matter, and in particular, scale and size. Writing about *Spiral Jetty* he explains:

The scale of the Spiral Jetty tends to fluctuate depending on where the viewer happens to be. Size determines an object, but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on one's capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception. When one refuses to release scale from size, one is left with an object or language that *appears* to be certain. For me scale operates by uncertainty. To be in the scale of the Spiral Jetty is to be out of it. On eye level, the tail [that is formed by the causeway] leads one into an undifferentiated state of matter.<sup>416</sup>

Undifferentiation appears to be, according to Smithson's sense of perception, a background and low-level condition for vision. Being immersed in the detail of materiality is to be oblivious of the bigger picture, scale, which is a result of the process of dedifferentiation, and is prone to uncertainty.

Ehrenzweig distinguishes between undifferentiated and dedifferentiated as follows: "I will speak of *undifferentiated* when referring to the static structure of unconscious image making, of *dedifferentiation* when describing the dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery."<sup>417</sup> Undifferentiation, therefore, corresponds to the condition in which conventions regulate recognition of things and categories. Ehrenzweig identifies this as being engaged with "the static structure of unconscious image making"; by contrast, dedifferentiation is to be immersed in the perception of materiality, which he explains as a dynamic process of scattering and repressing surface imagery. Leaving aside the vexed psychoanalytic terms that permeate Ehrenzweig's work, a "dynamic process" that "scatters and represses surface imagery" is understood by Smithson to connote a suspension of questions regarding "limitlessness". Later in the

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414. Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments", p. 14.

415. Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", 1968, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 103.

416. Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 147.

417. Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), p. 19.



same essay Smithson says: "All boundaries and distinctions lost their meaning ... and collapsed all notions of gestalt unity. The present fell forward and backward into a tumult of 'de-differentiation', to use ... Ehrenzweig's word for entropy".<sup>418</sup> From this it is clear that he saw entropy and dedifferentiation as substantially the same thing. He continues,

Yet, if art is art it must have limits. ... I have developed the Non-Site, which in a physical way contains the disruption of the site. The container is in a sense a fragment itself, something that could be called a three-dimensional map. Without appeal to "gestalts" or "anti-form," it actually exists as a fragment of a greater fragmentation. ... There are no mysteries in these vestiges, no traces of an end or a beginning.<sup>419</sup>

With no vestige of an end or a beginning, and furthermore, as a disruption that is only a part of a larger part, Smithson's notion of a "non-site" and of dedifferentiation fall together with a conception of the dialectic as one of constant oscillation. The synthesis that is posited is part of a larger process of fragmentation, and is something that describes the limits of its own limitlessness. There is no Romantic transcendence implied here, rather an infinite series of approximations, which attempt to address an inexact periphery and an imprecise centre. When speaking about *Spiral Jetty* Smithson remarked, "A process can spread out and dissipate itself and become very ephemeral, very caught up in durational time. My intention is to arrest a moment in that peripheral circumference area, and relate it to a central point."<sup>420</sup> Smithson quoted Pascal's statement that "nature is an infinite sphere, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" on several occasions.<sup>421</sup> Elsewhere, Smithson addresses these questions in the following way:

*Undifferentiated* would mean that it's sort of total stasis. Dedifferentiation ... is not like differentiation in terms of pure concept or ideal postulates or tautologies, or anything like that. Dedifferentiation is when you have these sort of overlapping things, when the dialectic gets a little ... unusual, let's say. ... The only thing that interests me is the speculative aspect, trying to arrive at this. I think that's the strength of all of the thinkers—Freud, Marx were essentially dialectically thinking, and Hegel. It comes out of Pascal. ... He was always troubled by these actual scale problems, and then the whole idea of probability springs out of that.<sup>422</sup>

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418. Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", p. 110.

419. Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", p. 111.

420. Robert Smithson, "Interview with Robert Smithson", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 236.

421. Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the vicinity of Art", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 78.

422. Robert Smithson, "Four conversations between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson, 1969-1970", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 207.

Scale, as we have seen, depends on uncertainty for Smithson, and in particular, on the awareness of one's dependence on apperception in order to be conscious of the actualities of perception. Scaling, in his scheme, is a constant conscious process of converting perceptual data into knowledge. It is proposed as a process that is wholly dedicated to abstraction as its guiding principle. Probability emerges from the struggle to provide speculative, and therefore uncertain and conditional, understanding, an understanding that "depends on one's capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception. When one refuses to release scale from size, one is left with an object or language that *appears* to be certain." Certainty is therefore understood to be a direct consequence of limitation and restriction.

## 6.

The issues of limitation, boundary definition, scale, centre and periphery meet in those works that Smithson designated as Non-Sites. However, it was Tony Smith who first voiced an interest in extended man-made environments. His most often quoted remarks on this subject are to be found in a record of conversations with Samuel Wagstaff, Jr. dating from around 1967.<sup>423</sup>

I view art as something vast. I think highway systems fall down because they are not art. Art today is an art of postage stamps. ... We now have stylization.

I think of art in a public context and not in terms of mobility of works of art. Art is just there. I'm temperamentally more inclined to mural painting. ... I like the way a huge area holds onto a surface in the same way a state does on a map.<sup>424</sup>

He continues by saying that he is interested in "the inscrutability and the mysteriousness of the thing", and that a large form possesses "generosity, [and] is calm and reassuring" while "it continues to nourish us". His position is unequivocally that of a Vitalist. The imputation of human feeling to inanimate material, as we have already seen, is a clear indication of a Vitalist aesthetic.

Smith's penchant for anthropomorphism and his indebtedness to Frank Lloyd Wright have already been discussed. However, when he is speaking of scale his remarks are capable of a much wider application. Smith was originally an architect, and as such his awareness of the built environment seems to be keenly attuned to the implications of civil engineering. In particular it appears that civil engineering, as neither architecture nor sculpture, provides a sort of pure paradigm for site-specificity. Construction of a road, a dam, or a bridge for example entails three aspects of site-specificity, namely, site- generation, adjustment, and determination. Such considerations do not impinge on formal aesthetic concerns with space and light or craftsmanship. Smith says: "Architecture has to do with space and light, not with form; that's sculpture. Craftsmanship and art are much closer than artists seem to be willing to admit, but the question is, where does the distinction

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423. "Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr.", in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 1968, pp. 381-386.

424. "Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr.", p. 384.

seem to take place?"<sup>425</sup> "I'm not aware of how light and shadow fall on my pieces. I'm just aware of basic form. I'm interested in the thing, not in the effects—pyramids are only geometry, not an effect."<sup>426</sup>

The distinction raised by Tony Smith that is most telling involves artificial landscape and art. The conversations with Wagstaff touch precisely on the issue of civil engineering sites and their status as artificial landscapes—landscapes that cannot be viewed as spontaneously occurring natural places, but which, nevertheless, present the viewer with an experience of scale that dwarfs them.

When I was teaching at Cooper Union in the first year or two of the fifties, someone told me how I could get onto the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike ... It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights. This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.

The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it. Later I discovered some abandoned airstrips in Europe—abandoned works, Surrealist landscapes, something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscape without cultural precedent began to dawn on me. There is a drill ground in Nuremberg, large enough to accommodate two million men.<sup>427</sup>

In a subsection of his essay "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", 1968, titled "Primary Envelopment", Smithson discusses this particular conversation between Smith and Wagstaff as an example of dedifferentiation. He writes: "The artist who is physically engulfed tries to give evidence of this experience through a limited (mapped) revision of the original unbounded state."<sup>428</sup> Clearly, for Smithson, dedifferentiation implies immersion in the entirety of detail and materiality encountered in a given situation. This is not a phenomenological state of affairs since precedence is not given to the thinking mind. The intuition of scale proposed by Smith, and recognized by Smithson, is fundamental to perception and touches on one's

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425. "Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr.", p. 384.

426. "Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr.", p. 385.

427. "Talking with Tony Smith by Samuel Wagstaff, Jr.", p. 386.

428. Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects", p. 104.

apprehension of reality. "It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art. The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized." Smith is suggesting that language, as an enduring convention, is capable of mediating his experience but cannot convey the magnitude or fundamentality of his intensely experienced temporality. In this, Smith is remarkably close to Jean-Paul Sartre's celebrated insight:

Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the feeble landmarks which men have traced on their surface. ... And then I had this revelation ... there it was, as clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost its harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, ... their individuality, was only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder—naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness.

All those objects ... how can I explain? They embarrassed me; I would have liked them to exist less strongly, in a drier, more abstract way, with more reserve. ... I realized that there was no half-way house between non-existence and this rapturous abundance. If you existed, you had to *exist to that extent*, to the point of mildew, blisters, obscenity. In another world, circles and melodies kept their pure and rigid lines. But existence is a curve. ... We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason for being there, any of us, each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to the others. *Superfluous*: that was the only connexion I could establish.

I was superfluous for all time.<sup>429</sup>

Sartre recounts an acutely described episode in which the set of conventions that comprise language fail to mediate the experience of materiality. His character, Roquentin, experiences materiality as chaotic, disorderly, and as being both degenerate and degenerating. The position from which he has become divorced offers order, purity, and above all certainty. Superfluousness is the only sense that Roquentin can make of his situation as an existent amidst other existents. In *The Shape of the Future and Memory*, 1966, Smithson writes:

Only when art is fragmented, discontinuous and incomplete can we know about that vacant eternity that excludes objects and determined meanings. ... Unity is a natural idea, that belongs more to life (also called reality) and not to the terrible dualities of great art. Unity has its origins in chaos, while duality has its origins in the cosmic. And every cosmic system is a false one, that at

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429. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 182-185.

times slips into the chaos of nature. This falseness must be protected from the murky waters of life's truth. Nothing is more corruptible than truth.<sup>430</sup>

Smithson, as we have seen, explains the experience of being perceptually enveloped in materiality by using Ehrenzweig's distinction between undifferentiated and dedifferentiated. Sartre concludes that, in the realm of immersion in materiality—of dedifferentiation, superfluity becomes the only certainty. Elsewhere, in writing about Giacometti, he says:

But space ... is still superfluity. ... This *superfluity* is the pure and simple coexistence of juxtaposed elements. Most sculptors have allowed themselves to be deceived; they have confused the proliferation of space with generosity, they have put too much into their works, they have been captivated by the plump contour of a marble bosom, they have unfolded, stuffed and distended the human gesture.<sup>431</sup>

He then goes on to draw a distinction between real and unreal space. Real space is susceptible to mensuration, while unreal space is absolutely unvitiated.

Sculptors failed to recognize these elementary truths because they were working in a three-dimensional space on a real block of marble and, although the product of their art was an imaginary man, they thought that they were working with real dimensions. The confusion of real and unreal space had curious results. In the first place, instead of reproducing what they saw—that is, a model ten steps away—they reproduced in clay what was—that is, the model itself. Since they wanted their statue to give to the spectator standing ten steps away the impression that the model had given them, it seemed logical to make a figure that would be for him what the model had been for them; and that was possible only if the marble was *here* just as the model had been *out there*.<sup>432</sup>

The difference between “here” and “out there” is, in sum, the difference between undifferentiated and dedifferentiated perception. “Here” is to be immersed in the minutia of details and sensations; “out there” is to convert that data into conventional knowledge and information. Roquentin's dedifferentiated awareness of minutia causes him to identify himself with that minutia and declare himself to be superfluous. Just as superfluous, in fact, as everything else. He is unable to subordinate the “real space” of mensuration and divisibility to the “unreal space” of conventions. The classical sculptor, according to Sartre:

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430. Robert Smithson, “The Shape of the Future and Memory”. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 333.

431. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Essays in Aesthetics*. (London: Peter Owen, 1963), p. 97.

432. Sartre, *Essays in Aesthetics*, p. 98.

... in his search for truth encounters convention. And since the net result is to shift to the visitor the responsibility for breathing life into his inert images, his quest for the absolute finally makes his work depend on the relativity of the angles from which it is viewed. As for the spectator, he takes the imaginary for the real and the real for the imaginary; he searches for indivisibility and everywhere finds divisibility.<sup>433</sup>

Scale allows distance and organization to be overlaid on the plethora of minutia that comprises dedifferentiated data. Smithson is addressing just such a question of a perceptual vantage point when he says, "size determines an object, but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon".<sup>434</sup> Sartre uses the terms "here" and "out there" to distinguish similar perceptual vantage points. For Smithson the artwork that is "fragmented, discontinuous and incomplete" can attempt to evade the conventions of scale and provide knowledge of "that vacant eternity that excludes objects and determined meanings". That vacant eternity of Smithson's is constituted as "here" for Sartre, and as "something that had nothing to do with any function, created worlds without tradition. Artificial landscape without cultural precedent".

It was just such a culturally unprecedented artificial landscape that so riveted Tony Smith's attention to the immediacy of the turnpike, and caused him to view art as "something vast". His perception was problematized by a size continuum almost beyond his comprehension; an experience of size so vast that everything became minute, and of surfaces so large that they became almost incomprehensible. And in that incomprehension the influx of detailed data only differed from minutia in its shift in size. "Art today is an art of postage stamps. ... I think of art [ideally] in a public context and not in terms of mobility of works of art. Art is just there. ... I like the way a huge area holds onto a surface in the same way a state does on a map." Smith hankers for a direct experience of sense data that is provided by "art that is just there", and rejects art that conventionalizes experience by turning it into the equivalent of "postage stamps".

The content that is accessed via dedifferentiation by these three speculative Romantics, Smith, Smithson and Sartre, consists of uncritically received empirical data. Empirical data is absorbed from the existing, and material, sub-conventional state of awareness of the world's materiality; a sub-conventional perceptual level that yields data that is then aestheticized, materialized, and through the agency of art turned into a form of knowledge.

One of the most salient features of phenomenology that was appropriated by existentialism was the "phenomenological reduction", or the *epoché* of Edmund Husserl. All that was understood, or normally assumed, about the objects of perception was to be laid aside in order to describe them as pure phenomena. This reduction was intended to avoid the conventions of thought, both linguistic and perceptual, that mediate the chaos of contingent indescribable data provided by our senses. For Husserl the original intention was to avoid—or reduce—any judgment prejudicial to an impartial

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433. Sartre, *Essays in Aesthetics*, p. 99.

434. Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty", p. 147.

assessment of the existence of an object. This then became a much broader concern, in his later work, with the entire field of presuppositions that may prevent or direct immediate awareness of perceptual data.<sup>435</sup> Husserl's overall aim in this was Cartesian, to demonstrate the dependency of the objective world on the perceiving and thinking human agent, that is as a transcendental subjectivity. He did, however, maintain that the reduction was not identical to Cartesian doubt, and was instead an instructive procedure. Ehrenzweig's attempt to frame an equivalent to the *epoché* in Freudian terms leads him to the idea of dedifferentiation. Sartre's "phenomenological reduction", through the agency of Roquentin, and Smith's perception without "cultural precedent" fall together as Existentialist-derived manoeuvres that are intended to subvert conventions of cognition. Smithson straightforwardly adopts the tactic of dedifferentiation for the same purpose. Transcendental subjectivity is also, one suspects unwittingly, transferred in the process. Certainly Sartre, Smith, and Smithson carry a residue of Romanticism and Idealism forward in their work.

## 7.

It is on this existentially derived framework of dedifferentiated materiality that Smithson builds his series of Non-Sites. He defines these works as three-dimensional drawings:

By drawing a diagram, a ground plan of a house, a street plan to the location of a site, or a topographic map, one draws a "logical two dimensional picture." A "logical picture" differs from a natural or realistic picture in that it rarely looks like the thing it stands for. It is a two dimensional *analogy* or *metaphor*—A is Z. ... *The Non-Site* (an indoor earthwork) is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site. ... It is by this three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it—thus *The Non-Site*. To understand this language of sites is to appreciate the metaphor between the syntactical construct and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three-dimensional picture which doesn't look like a picture.<sup>436</sup>

Understood as signs, these "logical pictures" exist in the Peircean matrix of icon, index and symbol. "Logical pictures" are "abstract" and yet "represent an actual site". As noted earlier Peirce explains that the existential relationship between a sign and its object makes that relationship indexical. The key property of a sign is that it is relational; it thereby brings things into conjunction. For this reason the interpretant is a sign, one that causes a relationship of meaning between itself, the sign, and the relationship of the

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435. Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1970), pp. 23-36. David Bell, *Husserl*. (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 161-197. Leszek Kolakowski, *Husserl and the Search for Certitude*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), pp. 37-57. Christopher Macann, *Four Phenomenological Philosophers*. (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 19-39.

436. Robert Smithson, "A Provisional Theory of Non-Sites", 1968, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, p. 364.

sign to its object. Since this relationship is an unending process of meaning production, the interpretant, understood as a sign, is perpetually open to new formations. An indexical sign, for Peirce, conveys definite information by means of its two parts, one of which indicates the object meant, while the other represents the sign by using one of its qualities. "An index is a [sign] which fulfils the function of a [sign] by virtue of a character which it could not have if its object did not exist but which it will continue to have just the same whether it be interpreted as a [sign] or not".<sup>437</sup>

Certainly the examples of raw materiality included in the Non-Sites will continue to exist whether or not the meaning of the works endures. The bipolar indexicality of the Non-Sites as signs ensures that their material continuity will insistently maintain them as a state of quandary. They refer beyond themselves by calling attention to themselves. In this they are similar to Giacometti's sculpture *Man Pointing*, 1947, which beckons with one hand and points away with the other. *Man Pointing* and the Non-Sites serve as points of interchange, in which the centripetal artwork becomes a centrifugal reference.

The existential quality of indexicality is intrinsic to space and time since it functions primarily as an event due to the "involved icon". It is worth re-emphasizing here that no sign is wholly indexical. Every sign is a complex of icon, index, and symbol in which one of the triadic terms may preponderate and thus bestow a certain character on that sign. The remaining elements of the triad remain and are only subordinated within the relationship and are not cancelled or banished. Even in his studies of formal logic Peirce does not allow negation. He employs a logic that utilizes implicators alone since negation itself is conditional, as indeed truth is also conditional in this scheme of things. "I have maintained since 1867 that there is but one primary and fundamental logical relation, that of illation, expressed by ergo".<sup>438</sup> Here illation is understood to mean material implication. Peirce defines it elsewhere as "a process of inference".<sup>439</sup> He continues, "A proposition, for me, is but an argumentation divested of the assertoriness of its premiss and conclusion. This makes every proposition a conditional proposition at bottom". The notion of consequence, and continuity, that is entailed by implication is not the prolongation of the present, but rather an acknowledgement of the serial agency of time itself in interpretation.

Smithson's Non-Sites do not involve the idea of negation. The Non-Site functions as Smithson's dialectic functions; it hovers between two poles. Those two poles are that of its referent, whether singular or plural, geographical, geological, or temporal, and that of its immediate physical spatio-temporal configuration as an artwork. The Non-Site is a substitute location, a three-dimensional picture that is an abstraction of another place or places (see illustration 10 on page 188). The actual piece of work as a material event, as a "logical picture", implicates other locations that are at some spatio-temporal remove. Physical removal is the device that Smithson uses to abstract the raw material of his sculpture from the actual distant site,

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437. Peirce, "Lecture 3". *Pragmatism as a Principle*, p. 170.

438. CS. Peirce, "The Regenerated Logic". *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, Volume 3: Exact Logic*. Ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 279, paragraph 440.

439. Peirce, "Of reasoning in General", p. 12.



an undertaking that echoes mining. Simultaneously, the immediate location of the “three dimensional picture which doesn’t look like a picture” is also an abstraction, one that is achieved by means of removing a picture from the conventional ways of picture making.

Jean Genet makes a similar point, regarding an indeterminate present moment, in his celebrated essay on Alberto Giacometti: “Their beauty – the beauty of Giacometti’s sculptures resides I believe in the incessant, uninterrupted alternation between the furthest distance and the closest familiarity: this coming and going never ends, and it is in this sense that they can be said to be in movement.”<sup>440</sup> In this same piece Genet describes Giacometti’s method of working as one in which the present moment is blurred by the oscillation between the past and the future. It seems that Genet is aware of Giacometti’s sense of scale as an elision of the present. An awareness that causes the past and the future to be mentally elided, and therefore allows Genet to say of the sculpture that, “Each object creates its own infinite space”.<sup>441</sup> Smithson writes above that the Non-Site “is a three dimensional logical picture that is *abstract*, yet it *represents* an actual site. ... It is by this three dimensional metaphor that one site can represent another site which does not resemble it.” Resemblance is for Smithson a matter of implication or inference, it is a logical consequence derived from his “logical” pictures. It is probably prudent to assume that Smithson’s use of the word logical is colloquial, although consistent throughout, rather than rigorous.<sup>442</sup> The Non-Site is at least two sites simultaneously, one where the work is materially located, and the other where the referent(s) are located. The prefix ‘non’- of Non-Site describes an action of qualification rather than cancellation. The ‘non’- prefix serves to treat the word ‘site’ as qualified, as in for example non-uniformly, or non-skid. The prefix presents an idea of site that does not conform to the way that sites are usually described, whether serving as examples of placement in sculpture or geography. The Non-Site oscillates “between the syntactical construct [artwork] and the complex of ideas, letting the former function as a three-dimensional picture which doesn’t look like a picture”.

In his definition of Non-Sites Smithson refers to the material component of the work as “syntactical”, and to the conceptual element of the work as “metaphor”. Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language. A metaphor is a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else, especially something abstract. It is then understood as a device that transfers meaning. Significantly, Smithson seems to view artworks as forms of language, or at least as material entities that are capable of taking on linguistic features. This would align itself perfectly with the idea that artworks are allographic forms, and that they are, in short, examples of that genus of drawing that includes diagrams and informal notations. Nelson Goodman introduces the term “allographic art” in

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440. Jean Genet, “Alberto Giacometti’s Studio”. *Alberto Giacometti*. (1958. Rpt. Liverpool and London: Tate Gallery, 1991), p. 22.

441. Genet, “Alberto Giacometti’s Studio”, p.19.

442. A counter-example may elucidate the difference. It is not a logical truth that a kettle of cold water placed over a flame will always boil. This is an experiential truth that cannot be a guaranteed outcome by formal logic. It may, however, be spoken of colloquially as a logically consistent outcome. Although it cannot be proven, it may be expected.

his discussion of representation and notation in *Languages of Art*.<sup>443</sup> Allographic representations are graphic records carried out by other means than conventional drawing, engraving, or lettering. In essence, allographic representation, allows for the widest possible set of variations of a form, and includes an unlimited selection of media. Such an understanding does necessitate, as Smithson points out, the expansion of the notion of drawing to include three-dimensional representation. In Smithson's case his "three dimensional logical pictures" that are abstract utilize an indexical relationship with the world. The map for *Double Nonsite, California and Nevada*, 1968, itself a two-dimensional collage, is iconic insofar as it records two-dimensional information, but it is indexical in that it consists of existing maps that are formed into a montage, and additionally serves as an index of an icon.

Smithson is claiming that his two- and three-dimensional work is cohesive in its formal method, viz., to function as "logical pictures" in which the material used to make the picture no longer looks like a picture. In particular, the "logical picture" no longer looks like "the thing it stands for". The "logical pictures" are drawings of places, and whether a drawing is two- or three- dimensional no longer carries any significance in Smithson's aesthetic. The map for *Double Nonsite*, or the drawing of *The Hypothetical Continent of Lemuria*, 1969, are no different from the physicality of the materialized Non-Sites, for example *Non-Site (Palisades Edgewater, New Jersey)*, 1968, and the *Non-Site* containing mica from Portland, Connecticut, also 1968, or *The Map of Glass (Atlantis)*, 1969. In certain examples, *Non-Site, Franklin, New Jersey*, 1968, for instance, the combination of a two-dimensional montage with an aerial photo-map is echoed by a trapezoidal three-dimensional piece containing ore from the area. Together, the two- and three-dimensional combination provides evidence of the topology and geology of the area through processes of abstraction, such as photography and mining.

Any exhibition of the Non-Sites corresponds to the geological idea of an allochthonous deposit, which is a deposit or formation that originated at some distance from its present position. Given Smithson's interest in geology, an allochthonous deposit is a term with which he may well have been familiar. It seems appropriate therefore, to think of his three-dimensional pictures as allographic representations. These allographic drawings rely on a form of draftsmanship that uses rocks, mirrors, photographs and maps. Thus, allographic representation merely extends the practice of allochthonous deposit employed by the Non-Site installations. Allographic work is an aspect of Richard Serra's aesthetic that is usually discussed as drawing with materials; "Drawing was implied in the activity. The making of the form itself, whether lead rolls or poles for the *Prop Pieces*, was implied in the drawing within the physical transformation of material from one state to another".<sup>444</sup> By this definition, Fred Sandback, Barry LeVa, Michael Heizer, Eva Hesse, Robert Rohm, Nancy Graves, and Sol LeWitt may all, in addition to Smithson and Serra, be considered to be drawing with materials. Drawing as a conscious aspect of American sculpture certainly extends back at least to David Smith, Richard Lippold, and Ibram Lassaw's work from the late 1930s.

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443. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976), p. 225.

444. Richard Serra, "About Drawing". *Interviews, Etc. 1970-1980* (New York: The Hudson River Museum, 1980), p. 77.

Understanding Smithson's work to be primarily graphic particularly makes sense when considering the diagrammatic layout and significance of *Broken Circle-Spiral Hill*, or *Spiral Jetty*. His *Nonsite "Line of Wreckage," Bayonne, New Jersey*, 1968, and the attendant photo-documentation, also accords with this view of Smithson's work as abstracted drawing. Indexical signs, as noted earlier in this piece, possess an existential relationship to the world that establishes the dual aspects of metaphoric and metonymic signification. Smithson clearly indicates his understanding that the artwork functions in two ways—metaphorically as conceptual proposition and syntactically as physical presence. The physical presence of the object includes the combination of materials and the observer, and in its combinatory aspect is metonymic and existential. The illative dimension of Smithson's work extends to *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969, *Glue Pour*, 1969, *Island of Broken Glass*, 1970, and *Sunken Island*, 1971. All of these works function as indices in that they physically manifest themselves as artworks but also refer to inaccessible places elsewhere: the La-Brea tar pits of geology; Atlantis and pre-history; and the distant future of the heat-death of the universe. Entropy is a constant theme in these works, but it is augmented by removal. Spatial distance has been supplanted by temporal distance. The tar pits and Atlantis reference the distant past; while the equally distant future is indicated by temporal projection whereby glass turns into sand and rocks placed in the sea become islands. Vast scales of time are invoked that echo the experience of Tony Smith on the New Jersey Turnpike. One's spatio-temporal frame of reference is expanded to the point at which the existential moment is understood as a fleeting series of iterations that approach the elided past and future that Jean Genet indicated. Continuity, in Smithson's aesthetic, amounts to no more than a series of chance combinations in a degenerating entropic chain of events. Such is the intensity of this conception that any other aesthetic position is tantamount to a distraction and is finally inconsequential.

6. Conclusion: Minimalist sculpture as a consequence of artifice, and some paragraphs on Maya Lin's *Vietnam Memorial*.

1.

Minimalist sculpture consolidated the idea of the precinct in modern sculpture. Immediately arising from that consolidation was an awareness of place that is accurately described by the now almost archaic word *ubiety*. Both Brancusi and Newman, in their different ways, provided modern sculpture with paradigms for an awareness of precinctual space that heightened the viewing agent's sense of *ubiety*. This is especially the case with Brancusi's ensemble at Tirgu Jiu, and with Newman's plans for a synagogue and the associated *Zim Zum* sculpture. The Tsim Tsum is indicated, in a sketch for his proposed modern interior of a synagogue, as zigzag panels for the opposite sides of the room. Remarkably, a central feature of the Tirgu Jiu complex and the synagogue proposal is some sort of *temenos*. That some form of holy of holies should feature in two independent modern works linked by and to the ancient idea of a sacred complex is most striking given the shared concern for place and context.

Minimalist sculpture was involved from the outset with materials that were factitious and specific. They were specific in the sense of being found in the street—Don Judd—or specific to industrialization—Richard Serra. Carl Andre used construction material such as cement blocks and bulks of wood, and Dan Flavin relied on electric lights. The factitious nature of the materials selected is reflected in their having been mediated by industry, even if that industry was understood to be industriousness. The work of Richard Long that was completed in the landscape, using whatever materials came to hand, heightened the artificiality of the artwork by imposing geometric form onto the brash that the site yielded. In his later works the mass of fragments that were to be subordinated to a geometric figure took the form of muddy handprints on the wall. In both cases the use of geometry marks the practice as artifice, with the work carrying an existential or indexical trace of the passing human agent. At the broadest possible level, artifice constantly signals an involvement with industry.

The specifics of manufacture in Minimalist sculpture may avoid the overt handicraft reference of Vitalist sculpture, but that aesthetic is replaced by another equally significant referent—the industrial or mechanical. Long's work is mechanical in two ways, first, by way of the photographic recording, and second, by way of the assembly of the raw material into a geometric shape for the purpose of photography. Minimalist sculpture is fully engaged with that most modern form of mimesis, the industrial. Earlier, classical forms of mimesis can be divided into three groups, the representation of the sensuous appearance (the Platonic), the representation of the essential (the Aristotelian), and the representation of natural action (the Democritean).<sup>445</sup> Industry provided a much later alternative to the already established classical troika, and, as a form of mimesis, is capable of being pressed into the service of different philosophical and aesthetic positions. The Gothic Romanticism of

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445. Stefan Morawski, "Mimesis as a Cognitive-Artistic Axiological Category", in *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), p. 204.

William Morris emphasized medieval craft guilds and pressed industry into serving that viewpoint, while the Constructivists took on an economically aware productivist tone. Even within the Orphist group the work of Robert Delaunay and Sonia Delaunay-Terk contrasted with Duchamp's and Picabia's distaste for the mechanical, with their celebrations of the machine, while both positions retain an overarching anthropomorphic inclination.

Minimalist sculpture assumed the industrialization of practice as a continuum without any of the negative connotations implied by Vitalism. Duchamp's entanglement with Bergson's *élan vital* is avoided in Minimalism by the focus that is placed on the individual unit of the work as a component, a component, furthermore, that is understood to be an integral part of the whole, rather than an active element within an interconnected organic whole. In addition, the Minimalist conception of the whole as an assembly of components carries with it the idea of the prosaic, and the vernacular. Peculiarly wrought parts of the whole, while commonplace in a Vitalist aesthetic, need to fulfill some definite function in a Minimalist aesthetic. Herein lies the confusion around Robert Smithson's status as a Minimalist sculptor. If the use, by Smithson, of organically derived structures, in the form of crescents and spirals, is seen to be expressive then his work assumes a Vitalist complexion. If, on the other hand, his work is viewed as a cluster of devices comprising something akin to a metalinguistic toolkit it takes on a markedly different set of meanings.

## 2.

The political stance of many of the Minimalist sculptors caused them to think against the dominant forms of ideology that were prevalent or incipient in the 1960s. In particular the war in Vietnam, and its consequences, the US-backed coup in Chile, and the events in Paris during May 1968 drew attention to the ideological complexion of everyday life. Global capitalization had already, by the early 1960s, given rise to trans- or multi-national formations. Such formations eluded and elided the notion of place in favor of a de-centred network of production and development that avoided national control or supervision. The overthrow of Allende's government in Chile provides the starkest example of this globalized development, where a multi-national company acted as an agent for US interests in securing unrestricted access to Chile's copper deposits. These global networks rely upon a condition of flows: flows of information; flows of capital; and indeed flows of material. Manuel Castells explores this situation of flows in his book *Informational City*.<sup>446</sup> In his conclusion he discusses the inescapable fact that production must take place somewhere.

The new techno-economic paradigm imposes the space of flows as the irreversible spatial logic of economic and functional organizations. The issue then becomes how to articulate the meaning of places to this new functional space. The reconstruction of place-based social meaning requires the simultaneous articulation of

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446. Manuel Castells, *Informational City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989)

alternative social and spatial projects at three levels: cultural, economic, and political.<sup>447</sup>

Regardless of economic dependency, local societies need to preserve and extend their identities. Castells warns against the tribalism and fundamentalism that may arise from the assertion of the local. Better, he says, to establish local culture as a sub-culture, and to link symbolic cultural practice with the larger economic and political practice. His intention, in advocating this, is to anticipate and avoid the pitfall of parochialism that is latent in provincialism.

The thrust of Castells' argument is to make local places relevant to the larger culture, economy, and political continuum. He argues that local communities may overtake nation states in importance within the new space of flows. Such local communities without the identity buffer provided by local culture are vulnerable to ideological manipulation. The situation under discussion is one in which the ubiquity of trans-nationalism replaces the ubiety of the vernacular as a spatial concept. The reinvestment of meaning in ubiety has now become an intellectual issue that is particularly well suited to modern sculpture. Minimalist sculpture not only establishes ubiety as a contemporary theme, but also provides a starting point for the consideration of place as a temporal—if temporary—locus of aesthetics as ethics.

### 3.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding ideas about art production that surfaced in the 1960s and survives today is that art is a language or is like a language. This linguistic tyranny in art discourse has proven itself useful in shedding light on areas such as sign formation and the attribution of meaning to artworks. However, the broader and more casual claim that art is a language form fails to convince in one major artistic aspect; language forms are translatable one into another. Transliteration loses some poetic nuances no matter how well it is done, but the essential meaning of a linguistic construction is capable of being transferred into another language. The salient question regarding art forms is what sense does it make to say that a painting is a translation of a dance, or a piece of music of a building? Transcription, as a process of putting something into written or recorded form, perhaps comes closest to the idea that art functions as if it were a language. However, the actuality of transcription also favours language, in that music notation or words cast the record into an existing and ramified conceptual scheme—in which encoding and decoding are already fully conventionalized.

Imposition of language as a paradigm for art making coincides with the rise to prominence of Marcel Duchamp, and forms a key feature of his aesthetic. It is the strongly linguistic feature of his aesthetic that far outweighs his reactionary horror of technology and the machine. The rise to aesthetic prominence of the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein consolidates and extends the idea of art as language, most notably by adding "family resemblance" to the lexicon. Duchamp and Wittgenstein share a penchant for *homo ludens*—man the game player, at the expense of *homo faber*—man the maker. Semiosis is never a clear-cut business. Ludic strategies and practices always include an

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447. Castells, *Informational City*, p. 350.

element of fabrication. In a similar fashion homo faber incorporates ludic practices. This zone of overlap, however, does not conflate the two tendencies; rather, it indicates a source of differing trajectories that begin in concrete practice.

The playful or scholastic aesthetics that results from an involvement with Duchampian or Wittgensteinian ideas often depends upon the assumption of language as a paradigm, as in the works of the Pop artists or the Art and Language group. Such a drive to centralize the controlling concept of art's equivalence to language lends itself to the phenomenon of scholastic conceptual art asserting a position of importance over craft practices. Intellectual labour is thereby indirectly asserted to be more valuable than manual labour.<sup>448</sup> In the light of Castells' argument for a revalorization of place, to be understood in the plural, art, as a language, would need to be seen as a local dialect or regional accent. To continue with the language/art simile, language needs to make the local dialect relevant, even essential, to the greater entity. The 'accent' of Richard Long's Minimalism was immediately acceptable in New York, but Ulrich Rückriem's was not. As Minimalism later became marginalized by more current fashions within the art world, Rückriem's work became useful in serving a different purpose, one of apparent stylistic continuity, diversity, endurance, and residual international relevance.

The history of modern art forms a system of breaks, epistemological breaks or semiological ruptures, in which meaning as sign formation is changed. Art cannot, therefore, be a simple form of expression, predicated upon the notion of presence. It must belong instead to a coherent system of meanings, or, at the very least, constitute a way of interconnecting messages. Sign formation is a constant and contingent process. The contingent nature of the performative utterance makes it a unique event. Mikhail Bakhtin points to this element of the unique performance—its contingency—as a fundamental attribute of his theory of the utterance.<sup>449</sup> The best-known example of Bakhtin's non-verbal communication thesis involves the following situation. Two Muscovites are sitting at a table in a room during a late spring day. One of them nods towards the window. The other looks around and observes that a blizzard is taking place. He turns to the first person and shrugs. Communication has been achieved without a word being spoken. In general, the contingency of the event makes the present moment a non-repeatable temporal instance, a moment of un-timed iteration, a state of null time in which tense is of minor importance.

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448. For a full discussion of issues around manual and intellectual labour see Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

449. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984), p. 18. In general see MM. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), and with VN. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

Castells' model for localization as a dynamic force is allied with the ideas of the Italian Autonomia group and the philosophy of the recent Italian left, most notably in the works of Toni Negri and Mario Tronti. In conjunction with the Autonomia group the French advocates Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have been very active in disseminating ideas of the relationship between the centred and the decentred. Whilst attempting to avoid the subjectivist perils of anarchy, these groups maintain the idea of diversity in the service of a common goal. Local practice is a practice of materiality and conception. Praxis is localized but relevant to the overall network of locations. In effect a network of precincts is recognized to contain social practices relevant to the immediate conditions that obtain at each location. Therefore, by implication, local, immediate, practices are relevant to the whole network. This formulation is that of the rhizome that Deleuze and Guattari popularized. The tension between trans-nationalism and the local is discussed in terms of deterritorialization, territorialization, and reterritorialization in their works. Guattari and Negri write:

The task of organizing new proletarian forms must be concerned with a plurality of relations within a multiplicity of singularities—a plurality focussed on collective functions and objectives that escape bureaucratic control and overcoding, in the sense that the plurality develops towards optimizing the processes of involved singularities. What is at stake here then is a functional multicentrism capable, on the one hand, of articulating the different dimensions of social intellection, and on the other hand of actively neutralizing the destructive power of capitalist arrangements.<sup>450</sup>

In his book, *Empire*, Toni Negri and his co-author Michael Hardt, alert us to an over-simplification of the idea of the local. They maintain that a naïve conception of localization is “both false and damaging” because the issue is poorly posed.<sup>451</sup> Homogenization and undifferentiation—the deterritorialized consequences of globalization—do not form a simple binary dichotomy with heterogeneity and difference—the territorialized, or reterritorialized, consequences of localization. The implicit assumption that is at play here is naturalization. Difference and locale are understood to be synonymous with the natural and, in addition, their origins are likewise understood to be natural, organic, and spontaneous. Defence of the local, as expressed in the terminology of traditional ecology to protect its nature and biodiversity, resorts to a “primordialism that fixes and romanticizes social relations and identities”.<sup>452</sup> The authors continue:

What needs to be addressed, instead, is precisely the *production of locality*, that is, the social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences that are understood as the local. The differences of locality

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450. Félix Guattari and Toni Negri, *Communists Like Us* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), p. 107.

451. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2000), p. 44.

452. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 45.



are neither preexisting nor natural but rather effects of a regime of production. Globality similarly should not be understood in terms of cultural, political, or economic *homogenization*. Globalization, like localization, should be understood instead as a *regime* of the production of identity and difference, or really of homogenization and heterogenization. The better framework, then, to designate the distinction between the global and the local might refer to different networks of flows and obstacles in which the local moment or perspective gives priority to the reterritorializing barriers or boundaries and the global moment privileges the mobility of deterritorializing flows.<sup>453</sup>

Negri and Hardt suggest that rather than a simple binary opposition that maintains good and bad as its poles, deterritorialization and reterritorialization need to be understood as processes of production. Such an understanding then allows for an informed engagement with those forces of production.

A Minimalist aesthetic is tacitly asserted in the establishment of a network of site-specific, non-hierarchical, precincts that may function for a short time or for a much longer duration. These are the singularities or locales that concretize an aesthetic of reterritorialization. Minimalist works constitute local moments that concentrate attention onto the existential conditions of being in a particular place. Immanence is the central idea that holds ubiquity, site-specificity, the precinctual, and locale together. Multiple centres ramify but do not dilute the assertion of immanence in the face of transcendence and ubiquity. The multicentrism suggested by the rhizomatic model is similar to the modularity of Minimalist sculpture either in the modularity of Judd's sculptural units, Smithson's deployment of his symbolic lexicon, or Serra's material interpolations into the built or natural environment.

The parochial, as a form of localization, maintains already constituted values as inherently valuable in themselves. By contrast, localization, as suggested by Castells and Negri, is an expression of the continuous assessment of relevance for the particular in terms of the general situation. Localization is thereby understood to entail a constant dialectical expression of reappraisal of itself, and therefore the past, as contingency in the present. Such an understanding of the relevance of place, when applied to the work of art, renders the work a limited and provisional response to the past that is located in the present. Newman's late aesthetic concretizes the provisional and conditional nature of the artwork within an overarching framework of the immediate and quotidian. The experience of being adjacent to his artwork is not one of transcendence or transportation, but rather mundane observation, an experience of the everyday that locates one's adjacency to the artwork as something that is nominated, and is both an actual requirement and normal function of the aesthetic event. As an aesthetic event, the singular becomes an exemplar of the manifold. Singularity, beginning in modern art with Newman, is understood to be that sense of identity gained through the state of being adjacent, or relational, to an artwork that strongly references itself.

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453. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, p. 45.

The identities of the work and the viewer are thus self-reflexive and nominate the intervening spatio-temporal continuum as the decisive experience.

## 5.

The *Vietnam Memorial* of Maya Ying Lin, on the Mall in Washington DC, is a good example of a localized artwork that figures the local as ideologically engaged, and is distinct from an ideologically generalized and endorsed figuration, such as the nearby statuary by Frederick Hart. The *Vietnam Memorial* was the result of an open competition that was initiated by Vietnam Veterans intent on generating recognition for their role in the USA's thwarted military intervention in South-East Asia. The ensuing tension between the proponents of the dominant, ideologically endorsed aesthetic and those supporting the 'popular' choice for figuring the Vietnam conflict is very instructive.

Maya Lin's \$20,000 prize-winning proposal was abstract, symmetrical, simple, democratic, and Minimal. Opponents to Maya Lin, who was the outright choice of the judges, imposed Frederick Hart's \$330,000 supplemental piece.<sup>454</sup> It was figurative, politically correct, narrative, and thoroughly conventional in its conception and configuration. Although appearing to be small, the statue of three bronze soldiers, depicting ethnic diversity and period detail, is approximately one-third larger than actual size, observing a sculptural convention intended to make statues placed outdoors perceptually life-sized. Thus, the grouping appears to be small while actually being oversized. Hart was the highest-placed figurative sculptor in the competition, in collaboration with the landscape architecture firm EDAW he was placed third.<sup>455</sup> The final works selected were exclusively abstract. The competition elicited 1,421 entries, with no well-known artists, designers, or architects participating. Hart's sculpture was eventually sited some distance from Lin's wall, and that distance was a result of the unexpected popularity of the *Vietnam Memorial*. It is estimated that some five million people visit the memorial every year, making it the most popular monument in Washington D.C., a city that contains a large number of nationally iconic monuments.

Lin's design was dedicated on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1982, after being started on 11<sup>th</sup> March the same year. The Secretary of the Interior at that time was James Watt, who delayed the progress of Lin's building permit until the funding group agreed upon the inclusion of Hart's sculpture and the American flag.<sup>456</sup> Hart's piece was installed during the autumn of 1984, and the entire ensemble was dedicated on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1984, Remembrance Day. The 11<sup>th</sup> November 1993 saw the addition of another satellite figurative group dedicated to the women of the US military forces who took part in the Vietnam War. This piece, by Glenna Goodacre, is also figurative, politically correct, narrative, and thoroughly conventional in its conception. It depicts three women administering aid to a fallen soldier, and stands in a grove of eight yellowwood trees. Each tree symbolizes one of the eight servicewomen killed

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454. Mary McLeod, "The Battle for the Monument; The Vietnam Veterans Memorial", in *The Experimental Tradition: essays on competitions in architecture*, ed. Helene Lipstadt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 115-137.

455. Louis Menand, "The Reluctant Memorialist". (*The New Yorker*, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2002), p. 60.

456. Menand, "The Reluctant Memorialist", p. 60.

during action in Vietnam. The total cost of Lin's work and its extensions was \$7 million, raised entirely by contribution.

Undoubtedly, the most compelling reason for Lin's final selection is the way in which she incorporated the demand for democratic representation of the names of the dead and missing. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund was the idea of Jan Scruggs, who was a veteran infantryman of the war. The group that he founded decided on four basic criteria for the memorial: "(1) that it be reflective and contemplative in character, (2) that it harmonize with its surroundings, especially the neighboring national memorials, (3) that it contain the names of all who died or remain missing, and (4) that it make no political statement about the war".<sup>457</sup> Lin's proposal literally catered for the first three points.

The work, in essence, is a 400-foot-long open V-shaped retaining wall. Only a matter of inches high at its extreme ends, the wall descends to a depth of ten feet at its vertex. If seen as arrows, or indicators, the walls point to the *Washington Monument* to the south and the *Lincoln Memorial* to the north. Also, because the work is sited below ground level, it is singularly unobtrusive to the pre-existing and existing surroundings. This configuration caters to the second criterion of the competition.

On the surface of the wall are engraved 57,939 names listed chronologically by year of their death. The memorial is the only one in the United States to list all of the war dead, and to make no distinction between branches of the military, nor as to military rank or decoration. It is this cluster of features that has resulted in the *Vietnam Memorial* being broadly perceived as a thoroughly democratic structure. More than anything else, this democratic feature of the work recommended it as the winning entry, and met the third criterion of the competition.

The simple bilateral symmetry of the piece reinforces the sense of its being a directory that is open at the two, facing, pages of the volume that deal with the Vietnam War. The mass of excavated earth in front of the sculpture, understood as a retaining wall, creates a contained fenced-off area of lawn. The open space allows reflections of the sky and landscaping to augment the reflections of the visitors. A narrow pathway provides access to the face of the wall, and also serves to channel and control the volume of foot-traffic through the precinct that the memorial constructs. The natural, if manicured, reflections add a sense of poignancy to the temporality experienced through the work, a sense of poignancy that is generated by the 'timed' appearance of the viewer's reflection cast within a seasonal setting, and reflected by the unyielding surface of the memorial. The surface is inscribed with the names of the missing and dead. This aspect of the work conforms to the first criterion of the competition, which called for reflection and contemplation.

However, the fourth and final point became a matter of contention. Her design was variously referred to as "a shameful, degrading ditch, a black gash of sorrow and degradation," and as "a tribute to Jane Fonda".<sup>458</sup> Certainly the work was understood to have clear political overtones; hence calls were made to have the work completed in white, rather than black, granite, to have it

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457. "Vietnam Veterans Memorial pamphlet", (National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1998).

458. McLeod, "The Battle for the Monument; The Vietnam Veterans Memorial", pp. 123-124.

raised above ground level, and, inevitably, to prominently display the national ensign. Such reservations display a clear concern with the implications of the memorial rather than its style as sculptural/architectural landscaping. Issues of heroism, grandeur, and celebration seem to confuse the role of a monument with that of a memorial, a confusion that goes far to explain the fractured response of right-wing commentators. Those people who understood the project to yield a monument expected a celebration of an event or effort, namely the Vietnam War. Alternately, one expects a memorial to be essentially commemorative and to address the issue of loss or absence. A memorial, therefore, functions as a cenotaph, as a marker for graves that are to be found elsewhere. Its main purpose is remembrance rather than celebration, however much that celebration may involve memory.

The *Vietnam Memorial* by definition deals with a questionable foreign military adventure, one that entailed considerable loss of life and consequent domestic civil disruption. Questions of loss and absence were considerably exacerbated by debates about the value and purpose of the war itself. It is unsurprising that the political relevance and role of the *Vietnam Memorial* would rapidly surface as areas of major contention. That contentiousness taken in conjunction with the memorial's popularity makes it an excellent example of a local manifestation that has national relevance. Five million visitors a year give the work a prominence uncontested by any other single artwork.

As discussed earlier, localization is understood to be an expression of the continuous assessment of the particular in terms of its relevance for the general situation. An understanding of the relevance of place, when applied to the work of art, shows the work to be a limited and provisional response to the past that is located in the present. Maya Lin's piece achieves just this by using physical adjacency as a formal element that lends the *Vietnam Memorial* its sense of immediacy. Physical adjacency, in the form of 'timed' reflections, overlays the finite list of engraved names of the dead and thus provides another example of the relevance of the localized. The immediate viewer is made aware of those who are absent, either as fatalities or as past and future visitors, and their relationship to a specific place.

## 6.

The physicality of Lin's *Vietnam Memorial* raises one final consideration of the local and immediate as aspects of a precinct, in contrast to the generalized and symbolic qualities of a ubiquitous artwork. Indexicality necessitates direct experience as something immediate and specific. In *Art Povera* Germano Celant writes:

The reality, in which one participates every day, is in its dull absurdity a political deed. It is more real than any intellectually recognizable element. Thus, art, politics and life 'poveri', as reality do not send back or postpone, but they offer themselves as self-representatives, presenting themselves in the state of essence.<sup>459</sup>

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459. Celant, *Art Povera*, p. 230.

Maya Lin's sculptural wall of cenotaphic dedication, understood as a self-representation of the sensuous, presents the experiential aspect of the artwork as a predominantly indexical sign. Indexicality, as remarked upon earlier, is intrinsic to space and time since it functions primarily as an event. Smoke, a weather vane, a knock at the door all constitute themselves as indexical signs. The existential nature of the relationship between the sign and its referent inevitably weights that relationship in favour of the index. To reiterate Peirce's explanation of what an index is:

An *index* is a representamen [sign] which fulfils the function of a representamen by virtue of a character which it could not have if its object did not exist but which it will continue to have just the same whether it be interpreted as a representamen or not. For instance, an old-fashioned hygrometer is an *index*. For it is so contrived as to have a physical reaction with dryness and moisture in the air, so that the little man will come out if it is wet, and this would happen just the same if the use of the instrument should be entirely forgotten, so that it ceases actually to convey any information <sup>460</sup>

Thus, an indexical sign, for Peirce, conveys information about the world by means of an indicative relationship based upon physical qualities. At the very least, this information may be self-representational, or self-nominative, but it is always reflexive in that it directs attention to itself. Celant observes:

Art, life, politics 'poveri' are not apparent or theoretical, they do not believe in 'putting themselves on show', they do not abandon themselves in their definition, not believing in art, life, politics 'poveri', they do not have as an objective the process of the representation of life; they want only to feel, know, perform that which is real, understanding that what is important is not life, work, action, but the condition in which life, work and action develop themselves. <sup>461</sup>

Maya Lin's *Vietnam Memorial* does not represent a situation or an event. It is an event, a temporal situation in which visitors literally reflect upon those who are missing. It is the very condition of being reflective and transitory within a particular, and limited, setting that is incorporated into the work. The fact that the vertical engraved planes of the work constitute retaining walls, serves to focus attention on the site as occupying split-levels and as belonging to the earth. Lin's work establishes a novel relationship with the normal cultural association of the subterranean and death. Once thought of as retaining walls the *Vietnam Memorial*, which was incised into the ground, allows the engraved marble to function as a cicatrix. Her memorial is the evidence of a wound inflicted on the ground and on American society. The black vertical planes span the difference between the upper, original, ground surface and the lower, current, viewing level. While located wholly above ground, Lin's work literally faces the onlooker with a discrepancy that involves the awareness of verticality and the constraint of boundaries. The vertical

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460. Peirce, "Lecture 3", p. 170.

461. Celant, *Art Povera*, p. 230.

space is dedicated to the dead and defined by the two reflective walls excavated into the undulations of the site, an excavation that was designed to recover rather than uncover both the dead and the past. The reflective walls at once present an unbridgeable barrier, a surface for what is below ground, removed, or absent, and a mirror for the colour, movement and appearance of the world. The visitor experiences a sense of constraint, or intimacy, due to the expanse of the roped-off lawn to one side, and the cliff-like wall of commemoration on the other. These two features serve to hem in the strand of the pathway. As a path that is too narrow to be considered a concourse, and too rustic to be considered a pavement, the overall effect is one of informal closeness. Intimacy is evoked between both the visitors and the names incised into the walls; the muted reflections of the polished black stone provide the visual link. Where Celant speaks of "the condition in which life, work and action develop themselves" unselfconsciously, Lin's work presents the casualties of war in a context that puts "life, work and action" on show within the condition of the world. The self-reflexive materiality of Lin's work makes it an indexical sign that permanently deals with the present existential moment.

Brancusi integrated and dispersed his *Tirgu Jiu* ensemble within the city along a single axis, effectively creating a series of localized centres within a larger entity. Maya Lin also articulated a significant and vivid axis, which relies upon the narrow corridor of the pathway to observe a series of centres that are nominated by each of the years that mark the course of the war. Her indicant axis owes nothing to the observation of conventional orientation found in sacred architecture, a feature that allows the work to avoid a specific religious affiliation. It is entirely determined by its specific location, and is orientated to the *Washington Monument* and the *Lincoln Memorial*.

In the cases of both the *Tirgu Jiu* complex and the *Vietnam Memorial* the stasis inherent in sculptural memorials is brought into a state of adjacency with diurnal time and ambience. A precinct is formed in which spatial integration constructs a condition of ubiety, and the local is charged with a non-parochial significance. The artifice of the work calls attention to itself, and is thereby asserted as an armature, as a localized substructure that supports and indicates its consequent structures of wider implication.

## 7.

The discussion instigated by Castells revolves around the central issue of the relationship of a part to the whole. His working idea is to replace the de-centred, but operationally correct, conception of trans-national capital with the multi-centred idea of multi-national capital. However, his conception is one that lays its emphasis more upon dynamic multi-centralism than on multi-nationalism. A model for contemporary trans-national capital is thereby proposed that uses the idea of the rhizome as just such a multi-centred counter-part to internationally ramified capitalism.

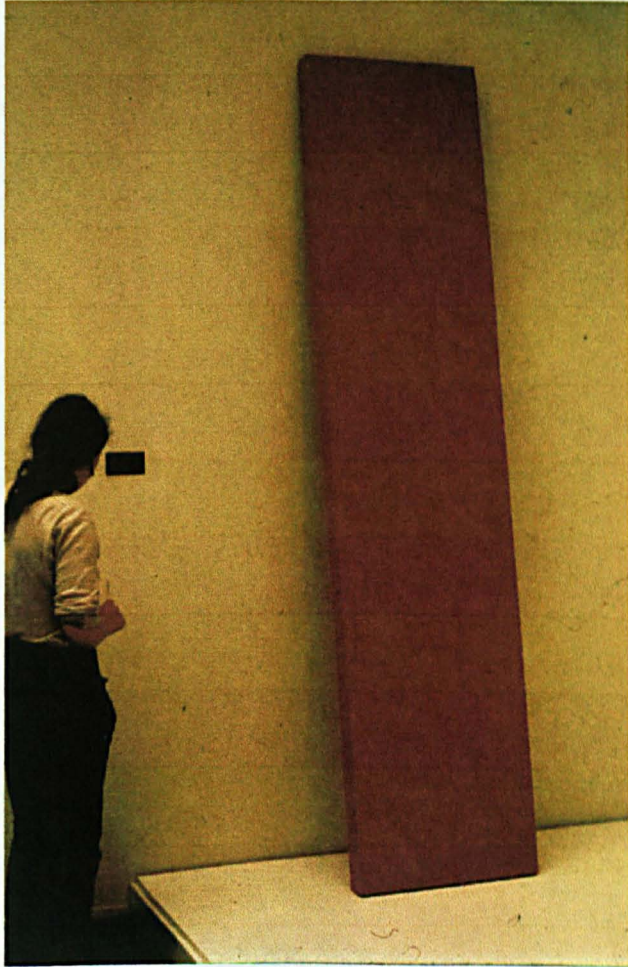
Consideration of the relationship of the part to the whole is also crucial consideration in making the distinction between Vitalism and materialism as operational determinants upon aesthetic positions. Presence, viewed from a Vitalist position, leads ineluctably to considerations of what is essential as timeless, transcendent, or beyond appearance. Michael Fried and Jean-Paul

Sartre share this idea of a contemplative timeless other. This attitude implies a view of the essential that is vitrine-like. One catches a view of reality that is removed from quotidian spatio-temporality, and may be glimpsed through some other medium that serves as its agent but is subject to spatio-temporality. The sum of the parts, in this conception, is taken to be greater than the whole, and is accorded some sort of overarching spiritual or essential status. A materialist position, on the other hand, adopts a viewpoint in which the parts constitute the whole. This viewpoint requires that both the parts and the whole exist within the same framework of spatio-temporality. Organic and energetic processes are seen as electro-chemical interactions rather than as interventions of, or recourse to, some external agency or source. Thus, presence, for Richard Serra and Bertold Brecht, is the necessary involvement of human activity within the site available to it. The device, that is, the artwork, is made plain by the activity of inspection based upon physicality. The difference that exists between a Vitalist outlook and that of a materialist is ideological, and leads to results that are appropriate to the adopted ideology. Minimalism presents a moment of aesthetic choice between a new simplicity based on materialism, and an enduring, richly ramified, tradition of Vitalist sculpture. The consequences of artifice, of which Minimalist simplicity itself is one, describe positions of ideological preference, conviction, or ignorance. The artworks of different persuasions provide quasi-theatrical sets upon which complex ideological viewpoints continuously refine and define themselves in order to naturalize a world-view. The relationship of the part to the whole, which is a dialectical one, remains crucial at all levels of aesthetic activity. Artifice is triggered by ideology and constitutes an ideological investigation in terms of art making.

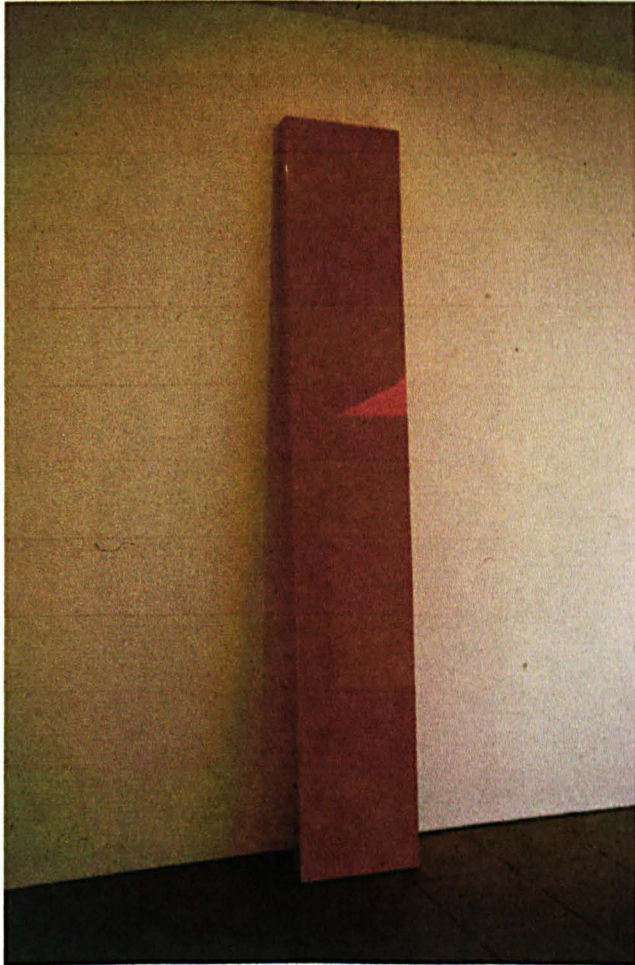
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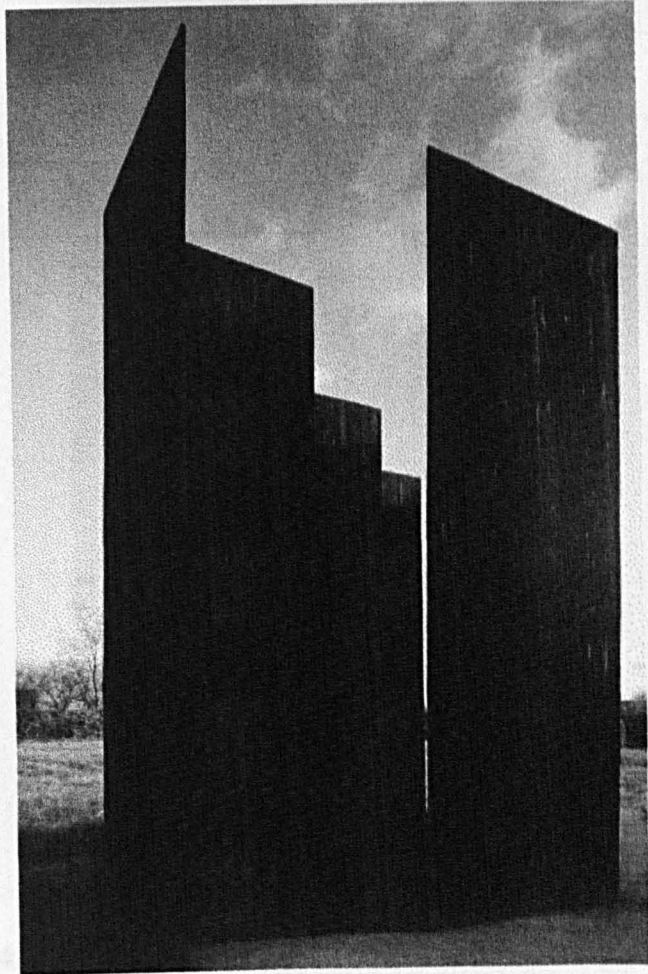




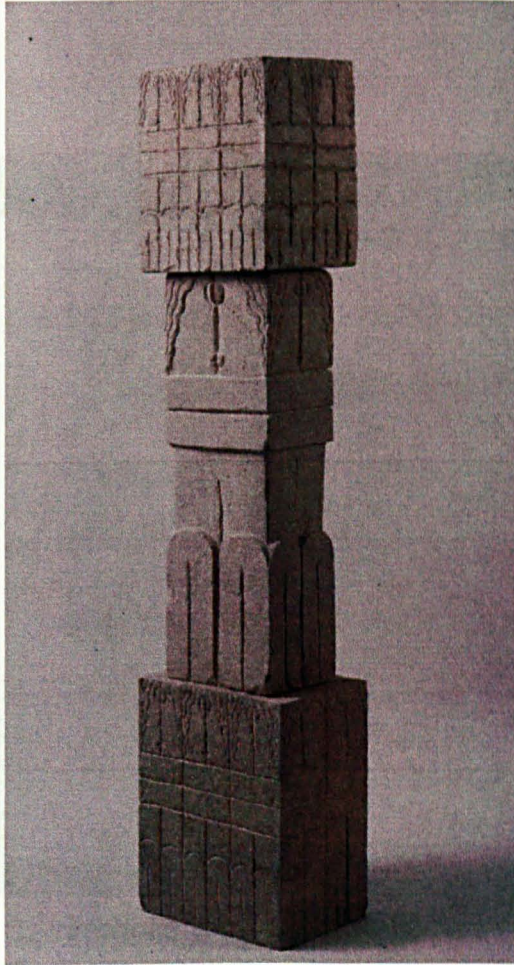
1. John McCracken, *Red Plank*, 1966.



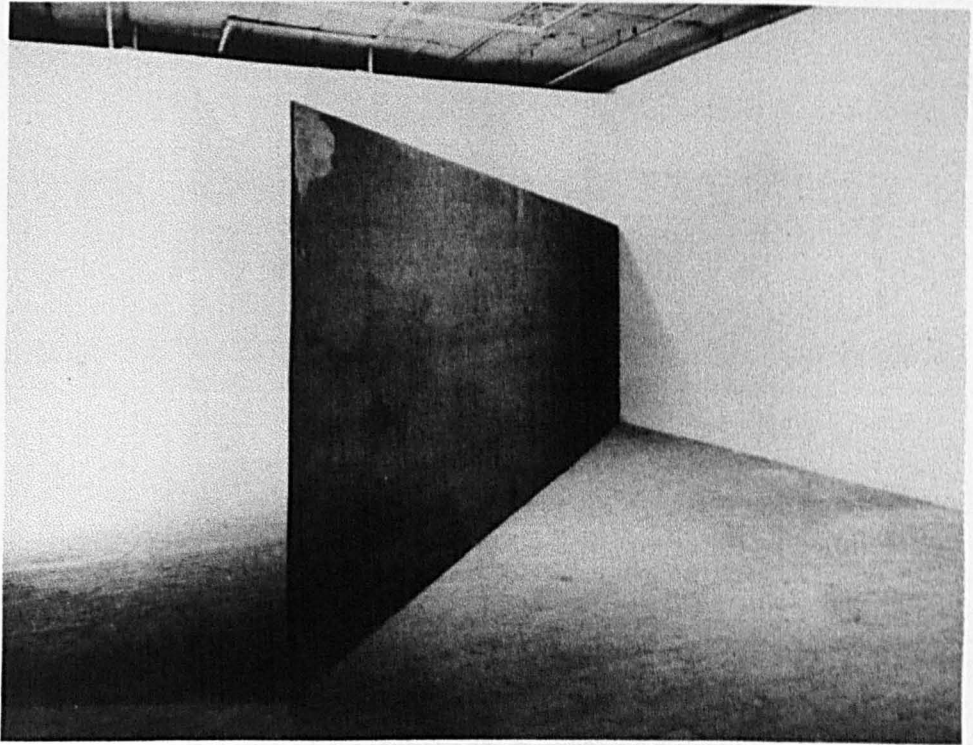
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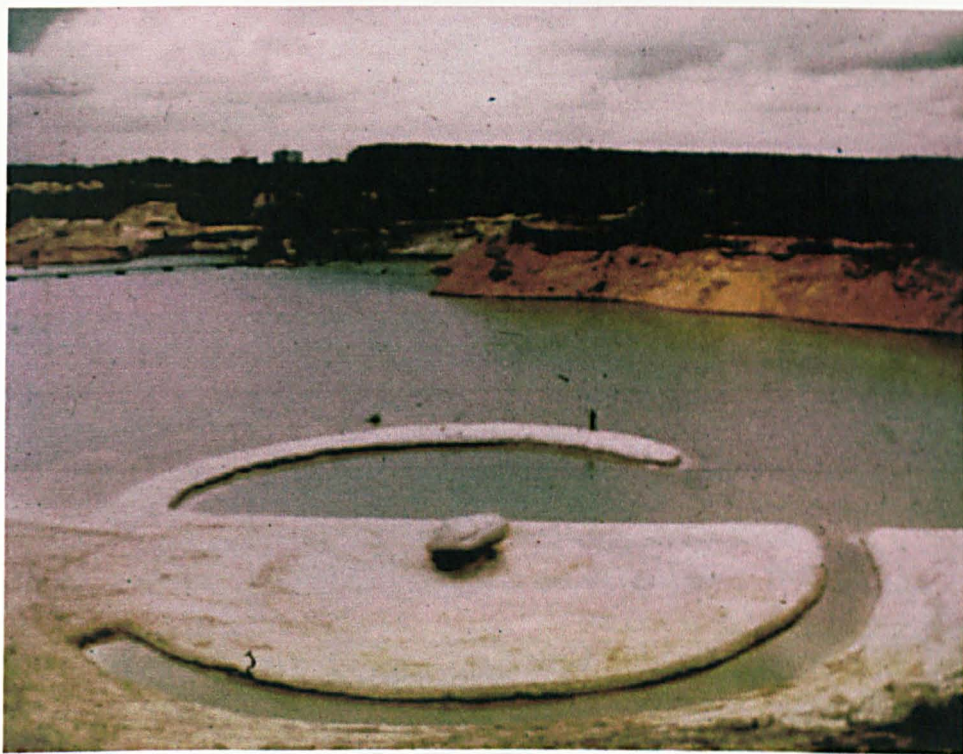
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