Summary

The topic of this dissertation is the literalness that was attributed to Minimal works of art during the early to mid 1960s. In a general sense, this literalness, by which I mean an object- or thing-like character, was a way of defining what many critics felt to be the impersonality and lack of aesthetic quality which such works seemed to them to exhibit, though my particular focus on the terms ‘literal’ and ‘literalism’ derives from the art critic Michael Fried’s negative characterization of Minimalism as anti-modernist. I interrogate the idea of literalness, arguing that it was complexly instituted in relation to other kinds of artistic meaning. I suggest that, far from being self-evident, Minimal Art’s literalness was of a ‘pretended’ or rhetorical kind. The main purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate this and to inquire into certain of its consequences.

I begin with an account of the various interpretations of Minimalism from the phenomenological interpretation of the late 1960s and 1970s, to more recent, more historically conscious, interpretations. I address here certain problems which arise in understanding Minimal Art in terms of representation. Chapter 2 is concerned with an important literalist precedent, Frank Stella’s early stripe paintings. Chapter 3 begins with Fried’s definition of literalism, and goes on to discuss the problems in interpretation which arise from the use of the term ‘literal,’ particularly in terms of its opposition to the figural dimension of meaning. In the next three chapters, I discuss how the Minimalists, Robert Morris, Donald Judd, and Carl Andre, engaged with the problems of representing the literal in their art and in representing their art as literal. The final chapter speculates on the consequences that the figural character of Minimalism’s literalness holds for an understanding of its practice.
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Literalism and Minimalism

Minimalism, or Minimal Art, names the art produced by individuals such as Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Frank Stella, and others, in New York during the 1960s. I locate the first use of the term ‘Minimal Art’ to apply to the works of such artists in Barbara Rose’s article, ‘ABC Art,’ published in November 1965. Rose appropriated the term from an article by Richard Wollheim published earlier in the year, entitled ‘Minimal Art,’ which dealt with the aesthetic issues arising from the minimal evidence of work in certain twentieth century art (particularly the work of Duchamp and Ad Reinhardt), but not with the artists named above.¹ The term was often used throughout 1966,² although even by the summer of 1967, by which time Minimal Art as a style had become well-established, Michael Fried could begin his well-known critique of Minimal Art, ‘Art and Objecthood,’ “[t]he enterprise known variously as Minimal Art, ABC Art, Primary Structures, and Specific Objects...,” and go on to use his own term “literalist art.”³

Minimal Art, or Minimalism, has been the term which has stuck. The most substantial books to date which have taken Minimal Art as their subject are Frances Colpitt’s Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective (1990), and James Meyer’s Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties (2001). Each of these books have their

¹ Barbara Rose, ‘ABC Art,’ Art in America vol. 53 no. 5 (October/November 1965), p. 59. “...the works I have singled out to discuss here have only one characteristic: they may be described as minimal art.” (‘ABC Art,’ incidentally, was not Rose’s term, and it appeared only in the title of the essay.) See also Richard Wollheim, ‘Minimal Art,’ Arts Magazine vol. 39 no. 4 (January 1965), pp. 26-32.
² The term was used in reviews of ‘Primary Structures.’ See Frances Colpitt, Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p. 3.
own way of defining Minimal Art. Colpitt restricted the term to "those artists who shared a philosophical commitment to the abstract, anticompositional material object in the 1960s."\textsuperscript{4} Meyer's emphasis in his definition was on the negative use of the term 'minimal' in the contemporary critical discourse, where it referred either to the simple, "impoverished" forms of the art concerned, or to the lack of "artistic labor" or self-expression in it.\textsuperscript{5}

Andre, Judd and Morris figure as central in these two books as they do in most accounts of Minimal Art. Stella is not necessarily included in such accounts, though I have included him here, for reasons I will refer to later. I have concentrated on the period from 1959, which was when Stella's black stripe paintings were first exhibited and written about, through to around 1966-67, which was when Minimal Art coalesced as a distinct art movement through a series of important exhibitions and, one would have to add, texts. The period under scrutiny thus includes Stella's stripe paintings of 1958-60; Andre's wood sculptures of 1959-60, and his stacked and modular sculptures of 1964-66; Morris's grey plywood sculptures of 1961-65; and Judd's red sculptures and wall pieces of 1962-64, and his metal and plexiglass sculptures of 1964-66.\textsuperscript{6} On a descriptive level, these works could be said to have various characteristics in common. They were made with materials generally used in manufacturing or construction, or at least with materials made for practical 'real world' use, rather than those traditionally used in art. By and large they were monochrome or uncoloured, and were constructed or arranged according to the modularity of their elements or according to simple, abstract, rectilinear schemes and forms.\textsuperscript{7}

As Meyer's definition of the term 'minimal' suggested, the ways such works were constituted in contemporary art-critical discourse concentrated on

\textsuperscript{6}Many of the significant Minimalist works of the period prior to 1967 have unfortunately not survived. This includes Andre's 'Pyramid' series of 1959-60 and the works in his first two solo exhibitions in 1965 and 1966, and almost all of Morris's grey plywood sculptures of 1961-65 (some of which, at least, were not intended to last).
\textsuperscript{7}David Batchelor, in Minimalism (London: Tate Gallery, 1997), pp. 8-13, discusses Minimalism's "common ground."
their reduction of formal or expressionistic means. Such a reading was taken to
the extreme of seeing the works as having an object- or thing-like quality. Judd,
writing as an art critic, referred, in 1963, to an aluminium stripe painting by Stella
as “something of an object... a single thing.” Michael Fried wrote, in 1966, of the
“literalness isolated” in the work of Judd. The art criticism from around 1963 to
1966 contains a lot of similar phrasing. The sculptures in Judd’s first exhibition
“look more like useless objects than sculpture.” A painting by Stella was a
“painting trying to be an object.” Minimalist artists made “sculptures that are
solely objects—the logical culmination of the idea that a work of art is a thing-in-
its entirety against the representation of a thing.” Minimal works of art “transmit a
feeling that painting and sculpture are exhausted, and that a new concept is
needed, that of an “object” combining the “thereness” of reality and the
decision-making of art.” Minimal Art “deals with the surface of matter and
avoids its “heart.””

This object- or thing-like quality attributed to Minimal Art is not clearly
registered by the use of the word ‘minimal.’ It is, however, a quality which
would seem to be deeply problematic in terms of the usual ways of defining the
special mode of existence of a work of art, in terms of its expressiveness, for
example, or its being understood in a wider, more universal sense, or as
constituting a unity more than the sum of its parts. It is this object- or thing-like
quality interpreted in Minimal Art which most interests me, and which I have
taken as my object of study. I think that the word ‘literalist,’ coined as a
derogatory term by Michael Fried in 1966, best describes this quality, not only
because it contains the sense of matter-of-factness suggested by objects and
things, but also because one understands in it the sense of its negated opposite,
the metaphorical, the symbolic, or the illusionistic, that is, those ways of effecting
meaning I just associated with the special mode of existence of works of art. The

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8 The quotes are from the following: Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975 (Halifax:
Fried, ‘Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s New Paintings,’ Artforum vol. 5 no. 3 (November 1966),
p. 22; Barbara Rose, ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 8 no. 1 (February 1964), p. 41;
Max Kozloff, ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 8 no. 3 (April 1964), p. 64; Irving
Druids,’ Newsweek (16 May 1966), p. 104; Mel Bochner, ‘Primary Structures,’ Arts Magazine
vol. 40 no. 8 (June 1966), p. 34.
terms 'literalist art' and 'literalism' refer to the same works of art as 'Minimalism' and 'Minimal Art,' but point more clearly to its interpreted object- or thing-like quality.9

Minimal Art's literalness was occasionally recognized as having precedents in twentieth century art. Parallels were drawn, for example, with the Constructivism of Tatlin and Rodchenko, particularly in terms of the treatment of materials.10 It was also recognized that there were similarities with certain aspects of the French nouveau roman, particularly as practiced and theorized by Alain Robbe-Grillet, in which novelistic devices such as narrative and character-motivation were negated through the excessive description of objects.11 In America, the literalism of the 1960s can be seen as an extension of certain artistic concerns of the 1950s, particularly those to do with a made nothingness or nothingness as a resource associated with the composer John Cage and the critic Harold Rosenberg.12 On the level of "sensibility," such works were related to other kinds of contemporary work which were similarly theorized as 'impersonal,' such as Pop Art, and, in their apparent impersonality, were often seen as a reaction to Abstract Expressionism.13 In spite of these precedents and apparently common concerns, the particular moment I am interested in, the early 1960s, was characterized by an unsnureness as to the significance of Minimalism's literalness. There was not yet a coherent and positive explanation

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9 Dan Flavin and Sol LeWitt often figure as central to accounts of Minimal Art, and also both wrote, but were not as central to the discourse concerned with its literalness, perhaps because the work of both appear to have an important immaterial aspect—luminous or 'conceptual' (though this distinction is relative, and not at all straightforward). LeWitt distanced his own art from one concerned with materials or physicality: "The danger is... in making the physicality of the materials so important that it becomes the idea of work (another kind of expressionism)." See his 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' Artforum vol. 5 no. 10 (June 1967), p. 83.

10 See Meyer, Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties, p. 156. Contemporary references can be found in Rose, 'ABC Art,' p. 62; or Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture' [Part 1], Artforum vol. 4 no. 6 (February 1966), p. 43.

11 The theoretical writings of Robbe-Grillet were often cited in contemporary criticism. See, for example, Rose, 'ABC Art,' p. 66, and Mel Bochner, 'Primary Structures,' Arts Magazine vol. 40 no. 8 (June 1966), p. 32. See also Roland Barthes' essay on Robbe-Grillet, 'Literal Literature' (1955), reprinted in Critical Essays (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 51-58.

12 Fred Orton has pointed to Rosenberg's 'The American Action Painters' (1952) as a precedent for 1960s literalism, in 'The Plain Sense of Things' (unpublished paper). Cage was important for various avant-garde practices, including that of the Judson Dance Theatre, whose choreography could be described as 'literalist.'

13 For example, Rose 'ABC Art,' and Sandler, 'The New Cool-Art.'
comparable to the phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art, which was developed towards the end of the 1960s, and in the 1970s.

**Literal and figural**

In her recent introduction to the reprinted edition of *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Gregory Battcock and first published in 1968, Anne M. Wagner cited an article written by the art critic Brian O'Doherty in 1966 which spoke of "The latest objects, which pretend to be inert or non-emotional..." Wagner thought this suggestion of pretence valuable in suggesting a way to begin to write the history of Minimalism as representation, in spite of its literalness. Part of the difficulty in understanding Minimalism as representation is that it contradicts the understanding of it as literal, as matter-of-fact. There seems to be a difference, almost of an ontological order, between seeing Minimal works of art as objects or things, and seeing them as representative of some other thing or realm. I understand this contradiction to be a central problem of the interpretation of Minimalism, one that keeps resurfacing. One could not say that the contemporary criticism got it wrong by not recognizing that Minimalism's literalness was a pretended one. The negative understanding of it as literal comprises an important part of its historical existence, and would have been a determinant of its practice. Nevertheless, there is something important and revealing in the suggestion of a pretended literalness, a literalness that is not 'real.'

Of course, physical, material objects do not pretend to be anything,


15 There were, of course, many attempts to explain Minimalism's literalness. For example, there was Fried's characterization of literalist art as manifesting a "misinterpretation" or "misconstr[u]al" of the development of modernist painting (*Three American Painters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1965), p. 43; 'Shape as Form,' p. 27), or Irving Sandler defining the "cool-art" of Stella and Judd negatively against the "fervid, energy-packed gestures" of de Kooning ('The New Cool-Art,' pp. 96-97). Or Robert Smithson writing about the "dull facts" of "urban sprawl" in relation to Morris's grey sculptures ('Entropy and the New Monuments' (1966), in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, edited by Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 11-12), or Rosalind Krauss considering the meaningfulness of Judd's objects as "objects of perception" ('Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,' *Artforum* vol. 4 no. 9 (May 1966), p. 24).
pretence can only be understood in the realm of interactions between people, of discourse. A pretended literalness would therefore exist at the level of interpretation and understanding, rather than 'reality.' Nevertheless, the claim of the literal as a kind of meaning or significance is that it immediately and directly points to reality; literalness is a quality belonging to an object insofar as it is in and part of reality. I have found it useful in this regard to make a distinction between the literal and the figural. Whereas the literal is a mode of meaning that involves claims to immediacy and directness with respect to reality, the figural is a mode in which meaning is effected by way of divergences from the usual orders of meaning. Pretending would lie on the side of the figural, which would make the pretended literalness a figured literalness.

Another way to point to the problem that concerns me is suggested by the following remarks made by Leo Steinberg in 1972, during the course of a discussion of American art's "liberating impulse towards something other than art":

> Not art but objects, and these objects touted as things beyond art, though they were conceived with a legitimate esthetic objective: to keep the thing made unarticulated, its internal relations so minimized that nothing remains but an immediate relation to its external environment. At which point rhetoric enters. The reduced art object, now fully subsumed by its environment, is declared to be at last a real thing, possessed of more "reality" than art ever had. 16

It is the central thesis of this dissertation that Minimalism’s literalness, as an interpreted quality or value, should be understood as ‘pretended’ or ‘rhetorical’ in character. As Steinberg suggested, Minimal works of art were made as art, their literalness, or ‘reality,’ being something “declared” of them. The literal and the rhetorical, however, are usually understood to be opposed to one another. To describe one in terms of the other implies a tension at the least, and at the most, an irresolvable paradox. My understanding of this opposition

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on a theoretical level is most indebted to the work of the literary theorist Paul de Man. The interest of de Man's work, as I see it, lies in the way that the figural or the rhetorical, usually considered an attribute of literary language, was brought to bear on, to the extent of defining and accounting for, all kinds of ontological and epistemological topics which bear on the consciousness or knowledge of 'reality.' Often the target of de Man's essays was the priority given to the presumed reality of what was represented over a given mode of representation itself. Rhetorical figures and tropes were important in this critique because they were the means by which a concealment of the gap between a representation and what it represented was effected, at the same time as, by their very 'presence,' they revealed the existence and intractability of this gap. Works of art were particularly important in revealing this gap because they were kinds of knowledge characterized by an awareness of the ability of modes of representation to posit 'reality' as much as refer to an already existing 'reality.'

It should be understood that this is a special understanding of rhetoric. Rhetoric has usually been understood to refer to the ways that language achieves its effects for the purposes of persuasion, though the classification of rhetorical figures and tropes has taken on an importance in its own right in accordance with the increased emphasis on language in twentieth century intellectual history, and especially with the efforts to define the literariness of

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17 The essays I found most suggestive for the development of the thesis tended to be from the 'middle' period of de Man's work, such as the 'Rhetoric of Temporality,' in Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (second edition) (London: Routledge, 1983), and 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),' in Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979). At certain points earlier essays, such as those in Blindness and Insight concerned with the ontology of self, have been useful, as have certain later essays, in Aesthetic Ideology (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), concerned with the materiality, or literality, of language. Two books which collect essays discussing de Man's work are Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (editors), Reading de Man Reading (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), and Tom Cohen et al (editors), Material Events: Paul de Man and the Afterlife of Theory (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). For examples of discussions or uses of de Man's work in art history, see the following: Fred Orton, Figuring Jasper Johns (London: Reaktion, 1994), and 'Painting (Out of Time),' Parallax no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 99-112; Richard Shiff, 'Phototropism (Figuring the Proper),' Studies in the History of Art vol. 20 (1989), pp. 161-79; T. J. Clark, 'Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne,' in Material Events; Gail Day, 'Allegory: Between Deconstruction and Dialectics,' Oxford Art Journal vol. 22 no. 1 (1999), pp. 103-18.
literary language.\textsuperscript{18} Roland Barthes once described classical rhetoric as the "glamorous ancestor" of literary structuralism, in the sense that it attempted to analyze and classify language as a whole. He suggested that rhetoric embrace what he regarded as the connotative level of language, that is, its second level of semiological meaning, above denotation.\textsuperscript{19}

Part of de Man’s work, however, has been directed at showing how tropes and figures are not only radically unassimilable to a structuralist mode of thinking, but can operate as an important mode of undecidability in the strategies of deconstruction.\textsuperscript{20} Since the literal could be considered as a mode of representation which, in its claim to immediacy, effects a divergence from the mediacy of representation, it can be considered to function as a trope. To demonstrate this would be to effect an undecidability in the opposition between the literal and figural as each could be substituted for the other without this necessarily impacting on the fidelity of the mode of representation.\textsuperscript{21} To see the literal in this way obviously would be to problematize the sense of its self-evidence. In respect of Minimal Art, such an understanding of the figured character of the literal would be a way of enquiring into the ‘pretended’ or ‘rhetorical’ nature of its object- or thing-like literalness. The word ‘rhetoric’ in my title is meant to signal not only that of an opposing and problematizing term to that of the word ‘literal’ in literalism, but also that the problematizing is one


\textsuperscript{21} Relevant essays here would be Paul de Man, ‘Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),’ in \textit{Allegories of Reading}, and Jacques Derrida, ‘White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,’ in \textit{Margins of Philosophy} (1972), translated by Alan Bass (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1982). I discuss these in chapter 3. The undecidability of the opposition between the literal and the figural would also seem to apply in the case of deciding whether a representation is a re-presentation or a presentation.
that takes place according to an understanding of the figured character of this literalness.

Structure and argument

In constructing an account of an art movement such as Minimal Art, there are various ways in which one could go about it. Colpitt's *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*, for instance, was structured so that the material was presented from "the least to the most abstract," from that relating to process and composition to that relating to the experience of the beholder and broader theoretical issues. Meyer's *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, on the other hand, was structured chronologically, year by year, covering the period 1963-68. Another kind of structure might treat the artists concerned individually. Any of these structures could be regarded as implicitly critical of the others; for example, Meyer's might criticize Colpitt's for concealing the extent to which some critical positions developed in response to others. Each approach is necessarily already an interpretation. Meyer's central thesis, for instance, as I understand it, is that a genealogical approach, treating 'Minimalism' as a discourse, preserves the real heterogeneity of the practices, which are distorted into a unity if the discourse is taken to be the same as the art.

The accounts by Colpitt and Meyer aim, with certain qualifications, to circumscribe the entire field of Minimalist discourse and practice, which, to some extent, determine the character of their interpretations. As I have suggested, this dissertation is directed towards an understanding of a 'pretended,' or figural literalness, which, although necessarily involving a reconstruction of the

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23 To an extent, this is the approach in Batchelor, *Minimalism*, and Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*.
24 Meyer's stated aim was to present what he called a "minimal field," not as a "clearly defined style" or a "coherent movement," but as a "field of difference," as a chronologically narrativized "argument... that initially developed in response" to the work of the 'Minimalists.' The character of the terminology suggests that Meyer had in mind the definition of the kind of discursive unity described by Michel Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) (London: Routledge, 1972). See Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, pp. 3-4, 7, 206. One way to respond to Meyer's thesis might be ask from what position could one judge the separateness of the practice from the discourse.
discourse of Minimal Art, has aimed to keep this reconstruction relevant to a central problematic. The dissertation begins with a discussion of the significance of literalness in the main interpretations of Minimal Art, from the phenomenological interpretation of the late 1960s and 1970s to more recent, more historically conscious, interpretations. I also discuss here certain problems which arise in seeing and understanding Minimal Art in terms of representation.

Chapter 2 is concerned with an important literalist precedent, Stella’s early stripe paintings. The significance of Stella’s stripe paintings for the dissertation lies in their importance in defining the literalist position, not only for the Minimalists themselves, but also for Fried, who, though he considered Stella a modernist rather than a literalist, was aware of the closeness of Stella’s modernism to the literalist implications of his work. Chapter 3 begins with Fried’s definition of literalism, and goes on to discuss the problems in interpretation which arise from the use of the term ‘literal,’ particularly in terms of its relation to the figural. With the problematic mode of existence of the literal in place, I discuss, in the next three chapters, how the literalists, Morris, Judd and Andre, engaged with the problems of representing the literal in their art and representing their art as literal. These problems were worked out most vividly, as a development, in the early stages of each artist’s career, and through their writings (it was significant in the coining of the term “literalist” that the artists concerned were also writers25), and the subject matter of these chapters is organized accordingly.

There are, however, certain common themes which appear and reappear in the discussions of each artist, such as the foregrounding of the material literality of language and the distancing of self. Generally, what tended to be revealed was that a sense of literalness was negatively figured through the removal of value, by negation, displacement, attenuation, figures of distance and self-duplication (such as irony), from ideas which explained the mode of existence of art, such as expression, self-realization, and metaphor. At the same time, value was given to the modes of existence or means of producing non-art things. The literal was thus figured in terms of ideas both about art and the ‘real world.’

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chapter presents a discussion of the consequences of the understanding of the literal as figured for literalist practice, given that the gap between 'reality' and representation that is concealed by the trope of the literal is prefigured in the relation between the material and its working. In the structure of the dissertation there is thus a movement from general interpretations to the particularities of making, though the main theoretical statement comes in chapter 3 and is returned to in the last.

A brief chronology

I will conclude this introduction with a brief chronology which lays out the main order of exhibitions and publications of texts which are referred to in the main body of the dissertation.

In 1958, Stella graduated from Princeton, moved to New York and began, in the winter, to produce a series of black enamel stripe paintings. His friend, Carl Andre, shared his studio and produced his first large sculptures in wood there. In 1959, Stella began to exhibit his Black Paintings, culminating in his inclusion in the Museum of Modern Art's 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition at the end of the year. Andre wrote a brief statement for Stella, which appeared in the catalogue. In the following year Stella had his first solo exhibition, at the Leo Castelli Gallery, of Aluminium Paintings, the first that were shaped and painted in metallic paint. The period from 1960 to 1962 saw the publication of Clement Greenberg's collection of essays Art and Culture, as well as the important statements of the "infra-logic" of modern art, 'Modernist Painting' and 'After Abstract Expressionism'. By 1960, Judd was writing art criticism on a regular basis for Arts (later Arts Magazine). Morris had moved to New York from San Francisco, and had become involved in avant-garde performance, as well as starting to produce sculpture. The Green Gallery, which had opened in 1960, first showed the work of Judd and Morris in a group exhibition at the beginning of 1963. Morris had his first solo exhibition, consisting mainly of 'Neo-Dada'-type works, at the Green Gallery in the autumn of that year. Judd showed a
number of wooden constructions, painted the same cadmium red, incorporating various different material elements, in his first solo exhibition there in the winter. Fried was writing art criticism regularly from the end of 1962, mainly for *Art International*. Morris, in a second solo exhibition, showed a number of large block-like plywood sculptures, painted the same light grey, at the Green Gallery at the end of 1964.

At the beginning of 1965, the Tibor de Nagy Gallery held the group exhibition 'Shape and Structure,' which included works by Judd, Morris and Andre, and, a few months later, held Andre's first solo exhibition, which consisted of bulky constructions made of styrofoam beams. *Art in America* published 'The New Cool-Art' by Irving Sandler and 'ABC Art' by Barbara Rose, the earliest attempts to define the new "sensibility." Judd's essay 'Specific Objects' was published in the 1965 *Arts Yearbook*. During the first few months of 1966, Judd and Andre both had solo exhibitions in New York. Judd's exhibition, at the Leo Castelli Gallery, consisted of industrially-made, often serially organized, sculptures of metal and perspex. Andre's installation, at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, consisted of a series of low structures made of firebricks. The first of Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture' was printed in *Artforum* in February (another set of 'Notes' would follow later in the year). There were also a number of significant group exhibitions in New York, beginning with 'Primary Structures' at the Jewish Museum in the spring of 1966, and continuing with 'Art in Process' at Finch College, and '10' at the Dwan Gallery. Fried developed a highly influential critique of what he called "literalist art" in his essays of 1966 and 1967, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings' and 'Art and Objecthood,' both published in *Artforum*. Robert Smithson's complex, idiosyncratic interpretations of Minimalism, notably 'Entropy and the New Monuments' (1966) and 'A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art' (1968), were also published in *Artforum* at this time.

By the time Fried's 'Art and Objecthood' was published in the summer of 1967, Minimal Art was generally well recognized as a distinct art movement. In 1968, The Hague Gemeentemuseum held the major exhibition 'Minimal Art,'
and in the years 1968 to 1970, all the artists I consider here had, individually, major museum exhibitions of their work.
Part I

Interpretations of Literalism
1. Interpretations after Literalism

This chapter gives an account of the major interpretations of Minimal Art since Michael Fried's seminal critical article 'Art and Objecthood' (1967). I divide these interpretations into two main categories. The first kind of interpretation, associated principally with Rosalind Krauss, adapted certain insights from the philosophical discourse of phenomenology to explain the experience of the beholder of Minimal Art at the same time as it aimed to criticize the historicism of the high modernist critical paradigm associated with the art criticism of Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. The second kind of interpretation I associate with an historical understanding arising first of all with the theorization of a post-modernism. The seminal article here is Hal Foster's 'The Crux of Minimalism' (1986). Since the publication of Foster's article, there have been several efforts in accounting for the representativeness of Minimal Art in a wider historical sense, at crucial moments often with reference to the aesthetic theory of Adorno.

My concern in addressing these interpretations is to give an outline of the main ways in which the literalness of Minimal Art objects has been imbued with significance, and to show how the attribution of literalness is problematic in any account of Minimal Art as a form of representation.

Literalist art

Fried's article 'Art and Objecthood' was published in Ariforum in the summer of 1967, as part of a special issue on sculpture. By that time, Minimal Art had already been subject to theorization, particularly by the artists involved:
Judd's 'Specific Objects' had been published in the *Arts Yearbook* at the end of 1965, and Morris had published two theoretical articles under the heading 'Notes on Sculpture' in *Artforum* during 1966. Fried regarded these interpretations as amounting to a "position," and it was principally against this position, as it was reconstructed in 'Art and Objecthood,' that Fried argued. Fried's own position was that of a defender of the values of modernist painting. I will not be discussing Fried's modernism here since it will be addressed in detail in chapter 3; the simplest way of putting it would be that, in the terms of the title of the article, the "identity" of painting as a modernist art was that it "defeat or suspend its own objecthood." In contrast, Minimal Art, or "literalist art" as Fried termed it, aimed to "discover and project objecthood as such," and, in this respect, its identity as art was doubtful.1 Another way of putting it would be to say that modernist painting as a modernist art had to manifest itself as more or other than literal whereas literalist art was merely or only literal. An essential element of Fried's attribution of the term 'literalist' was its character as a misreading of the development of modernist painting, particularly its most recent manifestations in the forms of paintings by Stella and Noland. "Roughly, the more nearly assimilable to objects certain advanced painting had come to seem, the more the entire history of painting since Manet could be understood—delusively I believe—as consisting in the progressive... revelation of its essential objecthood."2

The literalness of literalist art elicited a kind of perception attuned to the actuality of its situation. "[T]he experience of literalist art is of an object in a

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2 Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' p. 20.
situation—one which, virtually by definition, includes the beholder.”3 Fried described the effect whereby the beholder was distanced from, subjected to, the literalist work of art, in the same way that they might be confronted by another person.4 As I will be discussing shortly, this would be the same effect that Krauss would appropriate from Merleau-Ponty’s account of the double perspective constituting the self, although the distance was a negative factor for Fried. The literalness of situation was made to correspond to the literalness of the sense of time involved in the experience of literalist art, what Fried termed “duration,” “time both passing and to come, simultaneously approaching and receding, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective...”5 This perceptual experience of literalness, of the object and its situatedness with respect to the beholder, was a reading that was supported above all by statements made by Morris, in particular, those which treated perception in phenomenological terms. James Meyer has made the plausible statement that Fried’s critique of literalist art effectively prescribed the ways in which Minimal Art was subsequently defined, even by critics who were concerned with its defence,6 and, generally speaking, this defence was most substantially conducted in phenomenological terms, often with reference to the work of Morris, as in Annette Michelson’s ‘Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression’ (1969)7 and in certain essays by Krauss.

Krauss’s phenomenological interpretation

Above all, it is Rosalind Krauss who is associated with the phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art, or at least with it as informing a positive evaluation of Minimal Art. The essays written in 1972 and 1973, which were explicitly antagonistic to Michael Fried’s essays of 1965-67, constitute a defining moment of the formation of this view. It is arguable, however, that

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3 Ibid., p. 15.
4 Ibid., p. 16.
5 Ibid., p. 22.
6 Meyer, Minimalism, p. 229.
Krauss's reading of Fried was in many ways the same as that which he had attributed to the literalist reading of modernism. Krauss sought to replace the modernist explanation of modern art with a phenomenological one, just as literalist art, according to Fried, sought to replace it with a literalist one. However, the distinction which Krauss wished to draw between the modernist and the phenomenological was more difficult to make, because Fried's modernist explanation, particularly in his long introductory essay to the catalogue of the exhibition Three American Painters (1965), was also articulated in part in phenomenological terms. The phenomenological interpretation was conducted primarily through reference to the writings of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty, which were first being translated into English in the early 1960s. Merleau-Ponty's thought had its own particular trajectory and set of concerns, and Krauss and Fried each tended to refer to different parts of it. Krauss's main references were to an earlier phase, around 1945-46, which was concerned with the phenomenology of perception. Fried's tended to be to a later phase more concerned with language and the sense of history.

Krauss only developed a position antagonistic to Fried in the early 1970s. During the 1960s, they wrote from a similar standpoint, indebted to the critical writing of Greenberg, but also incorporating certain insights from phenomenology. One of Krauss's earliest pieces of criticism—'Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd' from 1966—was notable, first, because it attempted to place Judd's work within a modernist development (when Judd would shortly become for Fried the "foremost ideologist of the literalist position") and

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8 Fried seems to have first read Merleau-Ponty in French around 1960. See 'An Introduction to My Art Criticism' in Fried, Art and Objecthood, p. 6.


11 Michael Fried, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings,' Artforum vol. 5 no. 3 (November 1966), p. 27 n. 8. (This essay is reprinted as 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons' in Fried, Art and Objecthood.)
second, because it did so partly through an account of the work in phenomenological terms. The essay attempted to wrest Judd’s work from an interpretation—particularly by Barbara Rose, in her essay ‘ABC Art’ (1965), but also by Judd himself—that saw the works as objects and consequently as a “negation of meaning.” Krauss asserted that the works themselves were “insistently meaningful” because they addressed themselves to perception (“they are meant as objects of perception”) and were only to be “grasped in the experience of looking at them.”12 Essentially, her experience consisted of having her initial ideas about the structure of the work confounded by the subsequent perceptions which resulted from moving around the work.13 In elaborating on this effect, Krauss made a succession of references to Merleau-Ponty:

 [...] the sculpture can be sensed only in terms of its present coming into being as an object given “in the imperious unity, the presence, the insurpassable plenitude which is for us the definition of the real.” In those terms the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty describes perception which “does not give me truths like geometry, but presences.” The “lived perspective” of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is very different from the rational perspective of geometrical laws. “What prohibits me from treating my perception as an intellectual act is that an intellectual act would grasp the object either as possible or as necessary. But in perception it is ‘real,’ it is given as the infinite sum of an indefinite series of perspectival views in each of which the object is given but in none of which is it given exhaustively.”14

The emphasis on the sense of the ‘real’ being dependent on perception and “lived perspective” was typical of Merleau-Ponty’s thought around 1945-6, from which Krauss’s references derived. Phenomenology in general, as a mode of

12 Krauss, ‘Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,’ p. 25.
13 “[T]he work itself exploits and confounds previous knowledge to project its own meaning.” Ibid.
philosophical reflection, was principally concerned with the description of objects as they appeared in consciousness or a description of consciousness as it was of objects. Merleau-Ponty stressed the importance of conducting this reflection through an awareness of the embodied nature of consciousness, the body being, ambiguously, both the subject and object of perception. 15

It is worth noting, however, that Krauss's first quote, from Merleau-Ponty's 'Cézanne's Doubt' (1945), was concerned with the representation of the plenitude of reality, whereas Krauss used the quote as if Judd's sculpture partook of the plenitude of reality, as if it was part of reality itself. Alex Potts has pointed out that Merleau-Ponty’s earlier discussions of art (as in the Cézanne essay) tended to see it in terms of a “representation of the artist's perception” rather than as an object of perception in its own right. Thus it tended to be Merleau-Ponty’s account of the perception of objects in ‘everyday’ reality that was used to authorize such descriptions as Krauss’s. (Potts himself makes a very interesting case for the importance of Merleau-Ponty’s later work, particularly the essay Eye and Mind (1964), more concerned with the work of art as “itself a material thing in the world,” for elucidating a mode of perception more appropriate to the particular mode of existence of art. This later work, however, as Potts notes, was not a resource for the phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art.) 16 The relation between 'real'-ness and illusion in Judd’s works was made to figure by Krauss as a development of certain concerns apparent in the sculptures of David Smith. 17 This “critical relationship” of the later to the earlier work was linked to parallel developments in painting, so that Krauss’s

16 Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, chapter 6, ‘The Phenomenological Turn,’ pp. 207-34.
17 Smith’s ‘Cubi’ pieces were described, in their use of a framing device, as having “embraced the modality of illusionism within pictorial space from painting, and used this to powerful sculptural advantage.” Krauss, ‘Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,’ p. 26. Judd’s critical move, according to Krauss, was not to rid his work of illusion, in spite of all the rhetoric of the “theoretical line” about objects, but to keep the contradiction between illusion and literalness in play without the “artiness,” the balancing and adjusting, of Smith’s pieces.
modernist Judd was made to become the sculptural counterpart to Noland. 18

Already, in this early essay, Krauss had identified the experience and the meaning of Minimal Art with the phenomenological priorness of perception. However, the objection could be made that perception, in Merleau-Ponty’s sense, took place prior to reflection; it was essentially unreflective. And as such, it could not distinguish (from the point of view of the beholder) between natural objects and intentional objects (such as works of art). 19 A sense of intentionality was, probably inescapably, attributed to Judd’s works (“they are meant as objects of perception” [my italics]), but this would necessarily be to go beyond perception towards interpretation. 20

The self understood only in experience

By the early 1970s, Krauss was attempting to leave behind her modernist critical stance. Her essay ‘Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post ‘60s Sculpture’ from 1973 aimed to criticize certain assumptions which prefigured the understanding of art objects, including the modernist understanding. These were all to do with the idea of a self existing prior to experience, a constitutive consciousness, on which other kinds of assumption, such as intention 21 and expression, in turn depended. 22 Illusion too depended on the prior assumption of a spatial ground, and Krauss considered the Minimalist rejection of illusion to

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18 Needless to say, Krauss’s views sat uneasily with Fried’s account of the antithetical relationship between modernist painting, like that of Noland, and what he called literalist art, like that of Judd, in ‘Shape as Form’ published a few months after Krauss’s essay. See chapter 3.

19 This is a point also made in J. P. Vickery, The Dissolution of Aesthetic Experience (chapter 2). Vickery’s constant point of return in his thesis is the aesthetic status of the Minimal work of art; the phenomenological interpretation was problematic in terms of the specifically aesthetic.

20 Compare M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (1945), translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. x-xi: “Perception... is not even an act... it is the background from which all acts stand out, and is presupposed by them.” See also p. 241 for remarks on perception and the “unreflective experience of the world.”

21 As opposed to the phenomenological sense of ‘intentionality,’ which Krauss can hardly have been rejecting.

22 For example, the usual reading of Abstract Expressionism “proceeded from the very logic of ‘expression,’ seeing every mark on their canvases as asking to be read in the context of a private self from which the intention to make that mark has been directed.” Rosalind Krauss, ‘Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post ‘60s Sculpture,’ Artforum vol. 12 no. 3 (November 1973), p. 46.
constitute a rejection of the constitutive consciousness. These were all essentially
types of priorness. Instead Krauss, drawing again on Merleau-Ponty's
phenomenology of perception, posited a sense of self as object, in the sense of
being embodied. Embodiment necessarily entailed situation, and this was
phenomenologically prior to any assumption of priorness. Perception, for
Merleau-Ponty, was of space and things as configurations of sense-impressions.23
It was prior to any sense or attribution of causality, rather presenting itself as "a
re-creation or re-constitution of the world at every moment."24

In art, this meant that instead of an interior prior self exteriorizing itself in
the form of an art object by way of expression, the sense of self as already
exterior was occasioned by the sense of being in the same space as the art
object.25 In this latter case, what the beholder experienced was the art object as
object, as exterior only, rather than as the externalized interior self of the artist,
and consequently he or she was made aware of his or her own externality. The
self, it would be realized, was constituted according to a double perspective—
that of the self on itself and that of the other on the self.26 There was no
priorness here, just situatedness. The art that exemplified this condition,
according to Krauss, was Minimal Art.

Again it can be wondered how the perception of Minimal art objects was
to be distinguished from other kinds of objects. Krauss's way of meeting this
was to state that Minimal Art in general was a "metaphorical statement" of the
"self understood only in experience," a "metaphorical expression of the Self."27
In such formulations, Krauss moved away from the realm of perception and the

23 Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, p. 222.
24 Ibid., p. 207
25 Her example was Robert Morris's untitled work from 1965 known as the L-Beams, which
"serve as a certain kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning upon the
body as it surfaces into the world in every external particular of its movements and gestures." 
Krauss, 'Sense and Sensibility,' p. 49.
26 Krauss quoted the following from Merleau-Ponty: "Of course these two perspectives, in each
of us, cannot be simply juxtaposed, for in that case it is not I that the other would see, nor he
that I should see. I must be the exterior that I present to others and the body of the other must
be the other himself." 'Sense and Sensibility,' p. 49 [Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of
Perception, p. xii].
27 Krauss, 'Sense and Sensibility,' pp. 49, 51. Annette Michelson called Morris's work an
"aesthetic analogy" for "phenomenological inquiry." Michelson, 'Robert Morris—An
Aesthetics of Transgression,' p. 43.
literal to the realm of language and the figural. Perception, she suggested, was exemplified metaphorically in Minimal Art. However, since metaphor involves a comparison or an interaction between two separate entities, it would seem that a metaphor as such could not be an object of perception, but only one of interpretation. The place of language in phenomenological description was not an easy one to establish, not only as an object of description, but also, necessarily, as the means of description. Merleau-Ponty spent much of the later part of his career working on problems of language. Since this was the aspect of Merleau-Ponty's thought which Fried made reference to, I will hold off discussion of it until chapter 3.

*Krauss's critique of modernism's historicism*

The kinds of priorness which Krauss criticized in 'Sense and Sensibility' also extended to history and tradition, at least in the modernist senses. Minimal works of art were to be experienced in a situation, a present, and this was phenomenologically prior to any historical sense. She addressed the modernist sense of history more directly in an essay published the previous year (in 1972), 'A View of Modernism.' There she characterized the modernism of Greenberg and Fried as "historical," as logical and progressive. Krauss's complaint was that this modernism depended on the prior assumption of an ideal point of view:

Modernist criticism is innocent. And its innocence obtains on three counts: it refuses to see the temporality it never tires of invoking—"the entire history of painting since Manet" [Krauss takes the phrase from Fried]—as that perspectival armature on which it structures the art in question (and on which that art has increasingly tended to structure itself); it thinks of that history as "objective"—beyond the dictates of sensibility, beyond ideology; and it is unself-critically prescriptive.

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28 Krauss, 'Sense and Sensibility,' p. 52.
29 Krauss, 'A View of Modernism,' p. 49.
30 That is, an "idea of the world's perspective," by which Krauss meant the perspective of an idea of the world. Ibid., p. 51.
31 Ibid., p. 50.
Although this sense of modernism was possibly applicable to the position Fried held in his *Three American Painters* essay (against which Krauss’ essay particularly set itself\(^\text{32}\)), it soon after became more or less the same as that which Fried attributed to the literalists in his essays of 1966 and 1967. In Krauss’s view, the failure of modernist criticism to come to terms with the art she valued in 1972, such as that of the sculptor Richard Serra, was that its narrative crowded out another narrative which Serra’s work elicited from the beholder, a “narrative” of experience.\(^\text{33}\) Each “moment of perception” of a work by Serra “supersede[d] in affective importance, the viewer’s intuition of the work’s actual structure.”\(^\text{34}\) What was narrated in and by the work was thus the realization of the priorness of perception in experiencing the work, as something apparently literal, and it was on this which its ‘affect,’ its meaning over and above the literal, depended. The implication was that the meaning of the work, over and above the literal (which involved the transference of affect, metaphor, even the narrativization of perception) always had perception as its first moment, thus linking the perceivable, that is, the phenomenal, with the literal.

**Literalism as representation**

Some of the critical accounts of Minimal Art, especially since Foster’s essay ‘The Crux of Minimalism,’ have registered disquiet over the apparent literalness of its use of industrial materials, asking whether this literalness was somehow representative of its relation to American capitalist society, whether it affirmed the current mode and hence relations of production.\(^\text{35}\) The other side

\(^{\text{32}}\) Fried’s 1965 introductory essay for the exhibition *Three American Painters* obviously served as a kind of emblem of modernism for Krauss—shown in the layout of the first page of Krauss’s essay in *Artforum*, the top half of which ‘prefaced’ the essay with reproductions of three paintings, one each by Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski and Stella (the only reproductions accompanying the essay). The paintings by Noland and Olitski reproduced were actually in the *Three American Painters* exhibition; the aluminium stripe-painting by Stella, *Kingsbury Run* from 1960 was not, but in structure was one half of *Union Pacific*, which was.


\(^{\text{34}}\) Ibid.

\(^{\text{35}}\) For example, Anna C. Chave, ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,’ *Arts Magazine* vol. 64 no. 5 (January 1990), pp. 44-63, and Charles Reeve, ‘Cold Metal: Donald Judd’s Hidden Historicity,’ *Art History* vol. 15 no. 4 (December 1992), pp. 486-504.
of this question was how or whether Minimal Art kept a critical distance with respect to this kind of social embeddedness. This question has often been taken up with reference to the writings of Adorno, in particular with reference to his thesis of the necessary but threatened autonomy of the modern work of art.

Recent books by James Meyer and Alex Potts, which deal with Minimal Art (Potts' book only in part\textsuperscript{36}), both make significant references to the writings of Adorno. Before I discuss these, I want to consider Foster's account of Minimalism as an "historical crux," as an end of modernism and a beginning of postmodernism, since, although Foster did not mention Adorno, the question of the autonomy or otherwise of Minimal Art is partly bound up with this distinction.\textsuperscript{37} Foster took the dominant model of response to Minimal Art to be the phenomenological model put forward by Krauss in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{38} The problem with this model insofar as it was used to account for Minimalism's postmodernism was that, by the late 1960s, phenomenology had itself become subject to the same criticism that Krauss's phenomenological reading of Minimalism had directed at modernism, namely that it continued to assume an idealist conception of the self, except that, differently from modernism, the self concerned was that of the beholder.\textsuperscript{39} Foster argued that a better way of accounting for Minimalism as a postmodernist beginning was to understand that

\textsuperscript{36} Potts' book is concerned with the aesthetic distinctiveness of sculpture, and its theorization from the late eighteenth century to the present. His account of Minimal Art is structured around what he describes as a "tension between the idea of a new, more open intervention in three-dimensional space and the awareness of a work's resistant object-likeness." This tension, between the phenomenological object and the literal thing, is suggestively associated with the figures of Merleau-Ponty and Adorno. See Potts, \textit{The Sculptural Imagination}, pp. 4, 202-3, 306-7.

\textsuperscript{37} The idea of a postmodern art began to be extensively theorized towards the end of the 1970s (especially in \textit{October}, a journal founded by Krauss and Annette Michelson in 1976). Important early essays on postmodern art by Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens also took as a point of departure the valorizing of what Fried had rejected in 'Art and Objecthood,' so that Minimal Art came to occupy a position as one of the beginnings of a canonical postmodernism. Crimp, for instance, in 'Pictures,' \textit{October} no. 8 (Spring 1979), pp. 75-88, was concerned with a kind of theatricality taken back into picture-making. Owens, in 'Earthwords,' \textit{October} no. 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 121-30, was concerned with the 'return' of discourse and language following their 'repression' in modernism.


\textsuperscript{39} The phenomenological beholding self was as unaware of its own determination by, say, sexual difference as it was unaware of the institutional framing of its objects. Foster, 'The Crux of Minimalism,' pp. 170-71.
what lay behind its particular reading of modernism was in part a “reprise of avant-gardism.” 40 Minimalism’s avant-gardism, its transgression of convention, Foster argued, was directed at modernism as a critical institution rather than at the institution of art as such. 41 In modernism as a critical institution, painting and sculpture were distinct kinds of entity defined according to a tradition of self-criticism, and it was this which secured the separateness of modernist art objects from ordinary objects. For the Minimalists, the conventionality of painting and sculpture was a cause for doubt, and to doubt the conventionality was also to doubt the separateness. 42 It was Foster’s argument, however, that this doubt was effected within the institution of art, and not from without. 43

The crux of Minimalism was that it was conditioned by modernism as much as it created the conditions for a postmodernist art. This meant that its condition was as much one of autonomy as a critique of autonomy. 44 Foster’s way of accounting for this contradictory mode of existence was to describe Minimalism’s relation to the society in which it was embedded as one of a “resistance” to the circulation of representations in a consumer-oriented culture at the same time that it made integral to itself the serial modes of production characteristic of industry. 45 It was this ‘resistance,’ Foster claimed, which gave Minimalism its historical specificity, made it representative of its time. Minimalism’s literalness, its resistance to the circulation of representations, was also its literal adoption of serial modes of production. 46 However, at this point a paradox arose because Minimalism had also to be defined as a representation of this resistance to the circulation of representations, a representation of

40 Ibid., p. 174. Such a reprise of avant-gardism in the art of the 1960s was commonly recognized at the time. For example, Fried, in a symposium paper presented in 1966, pointed to the “recent acquisition, by contemporary neo-Dada movements, of the aura, or anyway the rhetoric and ideology, of what might be called traditional avant-gardism.” Poses Institute of Fine Arts, Art Criticism in the Sixties (New York: October House, 1967) [n.p.]. See also Harold Rosenberg’s critique of Minimal Art in ‘Defining Art’ (1967), reprinted in Gregory Battcock (editor), Minimal Art (1968) (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 298-307.
41 For reasons to do with its self-consciousness as an avant-garde. See Foster, The Crux of Minimalism,’ pp. 175-77.  
42 Ibid., pp. 163, 171-2.
43 Ibid., p. 176.
44 “minimalism refuses both mass mediation and high rarefaction.” Ibid., p. 178.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., pp. 178-9.
literalness, for it to maintain the possibility of keeping a critical distance.

Though involvement with this logic [the logic of difference and repetition in serial production] must ultimately qualify the transgressivity of minimalism and pop, it is important to stress that they do not merely reflect it: they exploit this logic, which is to say that, at least potentially, they release difference and repetition as subversive forces.

The paradox was that Minimalism’s literalness, its criticism of the circulation of images by its condition as nonrepresentation, was achieved by its representing of a serial mode of production (by “exploit[ing]” it artistically).

Foster’s problematical characterization of Minimal Art as both a negation and a maintaining of modernist autonomy resurfaced in other accounts, often with explicit reference to Adorno. As I mentioned earlier, Foster had criticized the phenomenological interpretation for positing an idealized and generalized beholder, one that was not determined either by gender, sexuality or class, and so affirming the inequalities and prejudices associated with these categories of identity. Certain of the critical responses to Minimalism which followed, through the last ten years or so, amplified and extended Foster’s criticism. The best known of these is Anna C. Chave’s ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,’ first published in 1990. This essay characterized Minimalism as complicit with the ways that power was exercised by the state and by corporate business, so that it was suggested that the beholder was subject to the oppressing and implacable Minimal art object in the same way that they were subject to the oppressiveness and implacability of state and economy. The sense of complicity was mediated by a metaphorics of masculinity and femininity. From the discourse surrounding Minimalism, and particularly from the Minimalists themselves, Chave drew various instances of more or less coded, or

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48 See Ibid., pp. 177-78. See also Margaret Iversen, ‘Spectators of Postmodern Art: From Minimalism to Feminism,’ in Francis Barker, Peter Hulm, and Margaret Iversen (editors), Postmodernism and the Re-reading of Modernity (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). For a discussion of Minimalism in terms of psychoanalytically-defined subjectivity, see Briony Fer, ‘Bordering on Blank: Eva Hesse and Minimalism,’ Art History vol. 17 no. 3 (September, 1994), pp. 424-49.
"conventional," masculinist assertions of dominance, which she related to the patriarchal discourse of art criticism and history, and the discourse of power in general. In her conclusion, however, Chave acknowledged that certain works of Minimal Art had a "denunciatory" quality, characterized as, in Adorno's phrase (from Aesthetic Theory), "expressionless expression." She regretted, though, that Minimal Art, in its "refusal to picture something else," did not appear to contain the necessary "utopian moment" that Adorno required of modern art. The literalness of Minimal Art, again associated here with nonrepresentation, made its attitude with regards to its social embeddedness on one hand, and its oppositional potential on the other, difficult to determine.

Adorno and the barbarism of the literal

Before considering the references to Adorno's writings in the more recent considerations of Minimal Art, it is useful to look briefly at Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, his last work, written during the 1960s and published posthumously in 1970, and in particular, with Foster in mind, to see what can be gathered from this book about the condition of Minimal Art as an art which perhaps exceeds the bounds of modernism. A major concern of Aesthetic Theory was with defining the mode of existence of the modern work of art, and in particular, the special mode of its autonomy. The historical coming into being of the autonomy of art, "its growing independence from society," was, Adorno wrote, a "function of the bourgeois consciousness of freedom that was itself bound up with the social structure." Yet the social existence of this autonomy was also in opposition to society. By appearing as something "unique to itself," it resisted appropriation by, and thereby criticized, a society which tended towards the condition of a "total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously

49 Chave, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,' p. 61 n. 4.
50 Ibid., pp. 55-6.
51 Ibid., p. 61.
Autonomy was thus posed against heteronomy, the definition of a thing in terms of itself against its definition in terms of something else. In Adorno’s terms, heteronomy described the definition of things in terms not of their use value, but of their exchange value, i.e. as commodities. Autonomy was constitutive of art’s special existence as art at the same time as it was threatened by the work of art’s commodity character in modern society, a character which works of art necessarily had to take on in order to exist, even as they resisted it. “Only as things do artworks become the antithesis of the reified monstrosity.” In other words, the existence of the modern work of art was contradictory, suspended between the objective nature of produced things in a capitalist society and a subjective response to this state of affairs which nevertheless was constrained to act within its terms.

The aspect of modern art that was able to maintain the illusion of autonomy, a definition in terms of itself in the face of an heteronomous state of affairs, was its nature as subjective response. Adorno defined this aspect in terms of an opposition between what he called “mimesis,” and the “rationalization” of modern society. Mimesis was defined by Adorno as “the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other.” Peter Osborne has enlarged on the definition as follows: Mimesis “express[es], in the form of a trace, that material unity of subjectivity with nature (objectivity) that is denied by the reified opposition of subject and object in conceptual thought, and which exists and is reproduced only through practice.” In a work of art this would be a kind of sensuous immediacy prior to the imposition of form, prior to representation. The imposition of form was bound up with rationalization, and was therefore opposed to mimesis. (But not absolutely; form was bound up with rationalization in the same way that works of art as things

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54 Ibid., p. 167. Minimal works of art were relatively unsuccessful at being commodities, at least in the 1960s (which is not to say that they represented a resistance to commodification). See Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 115, 134.
were bound up with things as commodities.) Commenting on this opposition, Terry Eagleton has written:

One of the many paradoxes of art is how the act of making can cause the appearance of a thing unmade; the 'natural' materials which the art work mimes, and the 'rational' forms which regulate them, will always be divergent, constituting a slippage or dissonance at the very heart of the work. Mediated through one another, these two dimensions of the artefact are nevertheless non-identical, which allows art's mimetic aspect to provide an implicit criticism of the structuring forms with which it interpenetrates.57

The contradiction between mimesis and rationalizing form, which was constitutive of the modern work of art, had a bearing on the possibility of a 'postmodern' art, which would presume the resolution of this contradiction. For Adorno, the contradictory nature of the modern work of art was expressed by its dissonance—what he called an "invariant of the modern."58 Dissonance, unharmoniousness, was essentially a formal aspect of the work which resisted the rationalization of form, the threat to the mimetic aspect of the work.59 It was on the issue of dissonance that Adorno thought that certain recent art departed from the contradictory nature of modern works of art.

For this aesthetic sensorium dissonance bears all too closely on its contrary, reconciliation; it rebuffs the semblance of the human as an ideology of the inhuman and prefers to join forces with reified consciousness. Dissonance congeals into an indifferent material; indeed it becomes a new form of immediacy, without any trace of what it developed out of, and therefore gutted and anonymous.60

59 See Osborne, ‘Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism,’ p. 37: "...the reification of the mimetic undermines the tension, the basic irreconcilability, between art's mimetic and rational moments, out of which springs its capacity to function critically as an image of reconciliation. To regenerate this tension, and thereby to maintain art's reconcilability to reality, irreconcilability must be consciously introduced into the work by the artist as a constructive principle, that is, as dissonance."
60 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 15.
Osborne equated this recent “aesthetic sensorium,” what he referred to as “hyper-modernism” following the 1984 English translation of Aesthetic Theory, with postmodernism, “the final, dissolutive stage in the degenerate dialectic of modernism.” Following the discussion of Foster’s account of Minimalism as an “historical crux” between modernism and postmodernism, it can be asked how far Adorno’s description of an art which avoided the subjectivity of the mimetic completely would be applicable to it. The negation of the mimetic occurred in other manifestations of modern art too, notably in what Adorno referred to as “the purely constructed, strictly objective artwork.” Of constructivism, Adorno wrote that “constructivist form succeeds only at the cost of the individual impulse, ultimately the mimetic element.” Construction in art was bound on one side by the aim to rid art of self-expression and make its forms appear as if by themselves, yet on the other it had to borrow the sense of nonself by way of its “mimesis of functional forms.” “The need for objective art... disavows art as the product of human labor, one that nevertheless does not want to be an object, a thing among other things. Art that is simply a thing is an oxymoron.” Adorno thought that if art really took on the condition of being a thing, it would cease to be art, becoming, in his word, a “barbarism.” Dissonance, and hence the oppositionality of modern works of art, required the continued presence of the mimetic, however beleaguered this presence was.

It is here that the idea of the literalism of Minimal Art can be rejoined. The works of Judd, Fried had written in 1966, did not “acknowledge literalness; they simply are literal.” Just as Fried saw literalism, in distinction to modernist painting, as a regression, so Adorno saw “the barbaric literalness of what is aesthetically the case,” by which he meant “what cannot become art—canvas and mere tones,” as a regression from the necessity of illusion or “aura.” “The literal is barbaric” he wrote, at the end of a discussion on construction and

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61 Ibid., pp. 42, 47 n. 52.
63 Osorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 58.
64 Ibid., p. 156.
65 Ibid., p. 58.
66 Ibid., p. 61.
67 Ibid., p. 103.
function in art.\textsuperscript{68} In view of this, it seems likely that Adorno would have viewed literalism with much the same suspicion as Fried,\textsuperscript{69} although the verdict would have depended on whether Minimal Art's appearance of literalness could be conceived as a "negation of meaning" which was nevertheless significant in the sense that the negation of meaning "takes shape as a negative," or whether it was merely meaningless.

Everything depends on this: whether meaning inheres in the negation of meaning in the artwork or if the negation conforms to the status quo; whether the crisis of meaning is reflected in the works or whether it remains immediate and therefore alien to the subject.\textsuperscript{70}

The status of Minimal Art's literalness has been a recurrent concern since Fried designated it as "literalist." James Meyer, in his introduction to \textit{Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties} (2001) wrote

Seeing minimalist work as both a practice of complicitousness and refusal provides a more nuanced understanding of its social posture than those reflectionist accounts that view its vaunted meaninglessness as a repression of political content, its serial methods as a naïve embrace of the assembly line, and the artists themselves as opportunistic capitalist tools. The social attitude of minimalism... is ambivalent.\textsuperscript{71}

By "reflectionist accounts," Meyer was referring not only to Chave's 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,' but also to earlier critiques of Minimalism such as those by Ursula Meyer and Jutta Held, and Karl Beveridge's and Ian Burn's essay on Donald Judd,\textsuperscript{72} all of which took Minimalism to task for its complicity with the dominating character of American industrial society through its seemingly uncritical (or literal) use of industrial techniques and

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 61.
\textsuperscript{69} Potts puts this case, which I discuss further below, in \textit{The Sculptural Imagination}.
\textsuperscript{70} Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{71} Meyer, \textit{Minimalism}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{72} Ursula Meyer, 'De-objectification of the Object,' \textit{Arts Magazine} vol. 43 no. 5 (Summer 1969), pp. 20-22; Jutta Held, 'Minimal Art: eine amerikanische Ideologie' (1972); Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, 'Don Judd,' \textit{The Fox} no. 2 (1975), pp. 129-42. I discuss these briefly in chapter 7.
materials. Meyer's response was to suggest that it also offered up an attitude of "refusal," through it being an art that "refuses to signify."73 In this, it could be described, Meyer thought, as "negational in the Adornian sense," i.e. in the sense that its relation to "external reality" (Adorno's phrase) was determined both by this reality being something it refused to point to whilst also being its deepest content.74 According to Meyer, the phenomenological interpretation that works of Minimal Art elicited—what he called "[l]iteralist experience"—focusses the beholder's attention on the "here and now," but "offers no conclusions about what this encounter means." "Its failure to signify is a refusal of higher truths—of any truth beyond one's experience of the work itself and gallery site. Yet in refusing to point directly to the world, minimalist work sublates, and obliquely alludes to, the reality it negates."75 Minimal Art's literalness, then, was equated with its phenomenologically apparent self-evidentness, and it was by virtue of this literalness that Minimal Art refused to point to "reality."

However, in the passage I have been quoting, Meyer left out certain aspects of Adorno's theory (which I have already mentioned above), which would appear to bear on Minimal Art specifically, as well as on the constitution of the idea of the literal. On one hand, nowhere did Meyer acknowledge the necessity of dissonance, which was Adorno's way of accounting for the autonomous and critical moment of even the most subjectless work of modern art. An authentic work of art, for Adorno, could not be merely literal ("[e]ven demystified artworks are more than what is literally the case"76). That it presented a more- or other-than-literalness was how it could "postulate the existence of what does not yet exist and thereby come into conflict with the latter's nonexistence."77 This aspect would be required if Adorno's writing were to be enlisted in a defence of the critical potential of Minimal Art. On the other hand, Meyer did not acknowledge the other side of the necessity for dissonance,

73 Meyer, Minimalism, p. 187.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 45.
77 Ibid., p. 59.
Adorno’s consideration of what he called a “resigned art,” which is to say an art in which a “negation of meaning” is only “stubbornly replicated” as meaninglessness. 78 This art would be one of “barbaric literalness” (to recall Adorno’s phrase), where “[d]issonance congeals into an indifferent material,” the art that Osborne considered as a “hyper-modernism,” a post-modernism. This would be the aspect needed if Adorno’s writing were to support a critique of Minimalism’s literalism. Since Meyer did not develop either of these aspects, the value of the literal (as a refusal to signify) in Minimal Art in his account was left suspended as ambivalence.

Alex Potts’ account of Minimal Art in his recent book The Sculptural Imagination (2000) also incorporated a reading of Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory as part of a consideration of Minimalism and High Modernism (mainly the art criticism of Fried). In very general terms, Potts saw Minimal Art in terms of a problematic relation between its existence as a phenomenological object, an object eliciting a sense of the shared space of it and its beholder, and as a literal thing, as something totally separate from the beholder. As he noted, Minimalism’s literalism was a particular concern in the early part of its reception (the period with which this dissertation is mainly concerned) and hence was closely bound up with modernism. 79 Potts’ reading has the advantage of having Adorno reflect the critique of literalism by Fried, which meant that it was more specific with regard to the critical consequences of the distinction between the literal and the more- or other-than-literal in modernism that were partly elided by Meyer. Potts made it clear that Fried and Adorno shared many views regarding modernism—in particular, the necessity of the autonomy of art, and the necessity of this autonomy being secured in the face of whatever threatened it: what could be called literalness as such and ‘theatricality’ in the case of Fried, the literal and reification in the case of Adorno. 80 It should be said (as Potts did) that the literal in Adorno was not to be equated simply with thingness. 81 In the terms used above, the literal was rather the absence of dissonance at the level of

78 Ibid., p. 154.
79 Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, p. 179.
80 Ibid., pp. 178, 200-2.
81 Ibid., p. 200.
form, which could include the situation in which form was wholly ‘rationalized’ (in Adorno’s negative sense of the term).\textsuperscript{82} Nevertheless, as Potts showed, both Fried and Adorno took the tension between the merely literal (the literal as such; "thing-likeness") and the necessity of overcoming or negating it as constitutive of the modern work of art. It was important for both that the merely literal was maintained at a formal level. In Adorno’s case, it was the debased necessity of its presence that provoked the necessity of dissonance. In Fried’s case, Potts argued, the literal was maintained in the work as a consequence of the increasing undifferentiatedness of the internal figure-ground relation in painting which threatened the ability of this relation to secure the work’s autonomy. The literalness of the painting support was brought in to supply the necessary sense of internal context.\textsuperscript{83} In both cases the literal was maintained as the basis of the more- or other-than-literal, as the transcended literal, and it was necessary to both that the literal was seen to be transcended, however momentarily.\textsuperscript{84}

For Fried, clearly, it was the failure to be seen to transcend the literal that defined Minimalism’s literalism, and made it mere “objecthood” as opposed to art. And yet Potts also suggested that the literalists, in opposing relational modes of composition, could also be said to oppose the more general ‘rationalization,’ in Adorno’s sense, that such composition implied.\textsuperscript{85} Since ‘rationalized’ form was closely related to the literal in terms of their common opposition to the principle of dissonance, the literalists could be seen in this regard as opposing a certain kind of literalness. However, for Adorno, a complete lack of formal articulation would also amount to a mere literalness, and this, as Potts suggested, would be the likely charge that Adorno would make against Minimal Art.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Osborne, ‘Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism,’ p. 37.
\textsuperscript{83} Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, pp. 186-87.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., p. 204. The relation between a ‘rational’ form and societal ‘rationalization’ is relevant to Judd’s associating of relational composition to what he called a European rational philosophy. See chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 206.
The literal and ‘reality’

What could be regarded as the literal in Adorno’s sense—indifferent material, art as “mere fact,”67 and so on—was significant for an understanding of works of art only insofar as it meant also the absence of illusion, the absence of dissonance. Because dissonance signified the resistance at the level of form to ‘rationalizing’ form, ‘rationalizing’ form being continuous with ‘rationalization’ at the level of society in general, the absence of dissonance—literalness—would signify the affirmation of this ‘rationalization.’ The ‘rationalization’ of society, towards what Adorno called a “total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined,”88 was a matter of ideology, and what could be called the ‘truth’ of dissonance for Adorno was in its resistance to this ideology, its assertion of a ‘reality’ beyond it. It would follow that the literal in art for Adorno could not be any reliable indication of ‘truthfulness’ or immediacy with regard to this ‘reality.’

This conclusion is very different from the phenomenological interpretation outlined earlier, where the significance of Minimalism’s literalness was understood in terms of its phenomenal immediacy, but it has elements in common with the undermining of the priority of the literal which I will be discussing later, in chapter 3.89 There it will be claimed that the literal was derived from the figural, or metaphorical, rather than the other way around. The literal so conceived would problematize the opposition between the literal and the figural, or metaphorical, on which much of the discourse on Minimal Art has depended in one way or another. However, before turning to this, the next chapter will be concerned with the early stripe paintings of Stella, and the period around 1960. These paintings, and their first interpretations by Stella himself and by Andre, will furnish a kind of context (though a problematic one) for the

67 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, p. 61.
68 Ibid., p. 226.
more detailed discussion of Fried which follows it.
2. Literal-mindedness in Frank Stella's Early Stripe Paintings

I focus here on the contemporary interpretations that were made of Frank Stella's first two series of stripe paintings, the Black and Aluminium Paintings, by others, and by Stella himself. I argue that these interpretations involved two related accounts of meaning in painting. The first, that meaning originates with the expressive self, was subjected by Stella, and by Andre, to a negative reading which placed an emphasis on the objective character of painting. The second, that meaning in painting arose out of its qualities as a medium, was subject to a reading which blurred distinctions between the medium conceived as a means of conveying a pictorial experience and as a mere means of making. I characterize Stella's attitude to artistic aims and means as one of an ironic literal-mindedness in order to signal that the sense of literalness in Stella's paintings was representative of the interpretations I describe (and not simply an aspect of the paintings themselves), but also that it was achieved through a self-reflection which can be characterized as ironic.

The Black Paintings

It is generally accepted that Frank Stella first gained art world prominence and art historical importance with his inclusion in the exhibition organised by Dorothy C. Miller of New York's Museum of Modern Art entitled 'Sixteen Americans.' The exhibition was held between 16th December 1959 and February 14th 1960—a turn-of-the-decade exhibition—and was intended to introduce new or up and coming American artists to a wider public. Stella exhibited four large paintings: Die Fahne Hoch!, Arundel Castle, The Marriage of
Reason and Squalor (second version) and Tomlinson Court Park (second version) [fig. 1]. These were all painted by Stella in 1959, the ‘second versions’ being painted especially for the exhibition.1 These four paintings, and others like them, are known collectively as the Black Paintings. During the early part of his career, Stella painted several celebrated series of monochromatic large-scale works, all with some kind of regular striped pattern, in commercial paints, of which the ones painted with black enamel—the Black Paintings—were the first, the next two series being painted in aluminium and then copper paint. The patterns were ruled on with pencil (though not on the ‘first versions’ and other earlier Black Paintings, which were less regular and straight), the painted stripes (typically two and three-quarter inches wide on the Black Paintings) occupying the areas between the pencil lines, leaving these lines more or less as unpainted canvas. The aluminium and copper series were painted on unconventionally shaped formats which departed from the rectangular in a determinate way. The Black Paintings were all conventionally rectangular, though never square.

In art historical narratives which present the development of art as progressive and coherent, the Black Paintings occupy a transitional position between Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism.2 That they were (to some extent) painterly, and were black, or near-black, meant that they could be seen as mood-evoking or affective in some way. That the patterns of stripes were repetitive in character and rhymed with the dimensions of the stretcher meant that the paintings could be seen as constructive and object-like. In addition, their emphasis on the flatness of the painted surface meant that they could be seen as modernist paintings in Greenberg’s or Fried’s sense, yet the literalness with which they seemed to declare this flatness meant they could be seen as what would be referred to as literalist in Fried’s essays of 1966-67. To present the Black Paintings as transitional, however, would be to ignore the ways that they could be seen differently by different people at the same time, and the ways that

2 E.g. James Meyer, Minimalism (London: Phaidon, 2000), pp. 20-21: “Most accounts of Minimalism rightly begin with Frank Stella’s Black Paintings. [...] However, the Black Paintings, as traditional works emerging from Abstract Expressionism, do contain a residue of subject matter, later erased by the Minimalists.”
the interpretations offered by Stella and others of his practice inserted
themselves into an already existing set of possible interpretations. The difficulty
in fixing on an interpretation of Stella’s early stripe paintings is made clear in
Fried’s view, discussed in my next chapter, that although Stella was an
exemplary modernist painter, his paintings also had the effect of making what
would be referred to as the literalist position “arguable.” Fried had been a
fellow student and friend of Stella’s at Princeton and once he started writing art
criticism in the early 1960s he was an important supporter of Stella’s painting. In
the winter of 1958-59, when Stella began to paint his Black Paintings in New
York, Fried was still at Princeton but saw Stella regularly. Fried left to study in
England in September 1959 (returning to study at Harvard in 1962), so was not
in New York at the time of the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition. The following
discussion sets out the case for the literalist orientation of Stella’s early stripe
paintings, which was opposed to Fried’s later interpretation of them, on the
basis of interpretations of his practice made by Stella himself, and by Andre, to
whom he was close around the time of the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition. The
emphasis will be on the description of the complexities of subjectivity which
corresponded to this literalism. I will be writing around a relatively brief period
in Stella’s career which begins with the first exhibition and interpretation of the
Black Paintings in mid-1959 and finishes perhaps a year later when Stella was
already engaged in painting a second series of stripe paintings, known as the
Aluminium Paintings.

Representation and distancing of self

The artists in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition had, in the catalogue, the
opportunity to include, along with a portrait photograph and reproductions of
their work, a personal statement [fig. 2]. This was Stella’s:

3 Michael Fried, ‘Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s New Paintings,’ Artforum vol. 5 no. 3
(November 1966), p. 22; reprinted as ‘Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s Irregular Polygons’ in
Fried, Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews (Chicago and London: University of Chicago
Preface to Stripe Painting

Art excludes the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. There is nothing else in his painting.

Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity. He is interested in the necessities of painting.

Symbols are counters passed among people. Frank Stella’s painting is not symbolic. His stripes are the paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into painting.  

The statement was written (and acknowledged as such in the catalogue) by Carl Andre, who was sharing Stella’s studio on West Broadway. It was actually a slightly revised version of a statement written by Andre for an earlier exhibition in which Stella took part called ‘Three Young Americans’ held at the Allen Memorial Art Museum in May 1959, so it must have been conceived some time before this exhibition. Stella had been working on the Black Paintings for only about six months or so, so the statement can be regarded as the closest piece of discursive production to the actual paintings themselves. In fact, by calling itself ‘Preface,’ it stated that its job was to prefigure an understanding of the paintings. However, as a preface it is curiously opaque—as befits an ‘origin’ it is strangely inscrutable. Some parts of it appear tautologous, and there is a kind of circular eliding of distinctions between painting as collective enterprise, as individual practice, and as object. A cursory reading reveals that there is an interest in the technical requirements of the act of painting which excludes any notion of what those technical requirements might be in the service of, be it personal expression or other kind of communication or representation. I will be returning to this text several times but for the moment it seems clear enough from it that Stella’s painting was not about painting as a means of self-expression but about painting as such.

In fact, this distancing of Stella from his painting is also represented in the

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7 Ibid.
photograph of Stella by Hollis Frampton, which accompanied the reproductions of the paintings and the statement in the catalogue of the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition. Wearing a suit and standing against a blank background, Stella looked like the 'executive' of his own work—there is no sign of him being a producer—creating a quite different effect from most of the other artists' photographs in the catalogue. The statement and the photograph together amounted to a representation of Stella in which the signs of self-expression had been deliberately problematized. Andre wrote that "Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity." The word "expression" suggests a movement or transference from the inner to the outer. "Sensitivity" suggests the reverse movement. In terms of how modern art was conventionally understood, these movements were centred on the self of the artist, who produced a work of art which was an objectified version of an inner distillation of their own felt experience. Stella, in representing his self as distanced from the production of his work and the explanation of it, went to lengths to avoid his self being seen as the origin of a work of art.

The expressive self as origin

The representation of the self as distanced was part of a rhetorical strategy which could only be meaningful as a distancing if there was already in place a discourse which ratified the self as origin. The emphasis on painting 'as such' in the 'Preface' has therefore to be understood in tandem with the corresponding distancing of self that took place at an interpretative, figural level.

8 Miller apparently asked Stella for a "more informal photograph" which Stella refused. See Caroline Jones, Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 116. This section of Jones' book contains a detailed discussion of the different roles—'executive' and 'worker'—with which Stella played at this time. Frampton took other photographs of Stella around the same time which could be brought to bear on an interpretation of Stella's part in the painting process. One series of photographs showed Stella painting Getty Tomb (1959) which clearly depict him as a maker. (See Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981).) On the other hand, another photograph shows Stella in three-quarter profile against one of the Aluminium Paintings, either Six-Mile Bottom (1960) or Avcenna (1960), in such a way that the stripes radiate from his head in what looks like a parody of the 'mental swirls' of Van Gogh's Self-portrait of 1890 [fig. 3]. (See Kasmin Limited, 'Frank Stella: Recent Paintings' (29th September - 24th October 1964) [publicity card].)
Interpretations of what painting consisted in and of painting as representative of a self were each used to effect a divergence, or ‘turn,’ in the understanding of the other. Stella has said that when he began to paint seriously, rather than being mainly influenced by precursors such as Jackson Pollock or Hans Hofmann, he was actually more influenced by what was in the magazines and around and talked about at the time: people like the second generation, like Al Leslie and Grace Hartigan and Mike Goldberg and Helen Frankenthaler. They were the ones that were most active, were getting the most publicity in general, or were the most known at the time. Those were the people I was most influenced by. 9

*Art News* and *Arts*, in particular, were the magazines which best represented the discourse associated with the ‘second generation’ of Abstract Expressionists. *Art News*, during the period under discussion, was edited by Thomas B. Hess, one of the most conspicuous promoters of the style of de Kooning-derived gestural abstraction favoured by the ‘second generation.’ (Although Stella began painting in this mode whilst still a student at Princeton, soon after he graduated in the summer of 1958 and moved to New York, his painting changed radically. He started the series of Black Paintings that winter.) Writing in 1957, Hess had defined ‘style’ as “the “look” in a picture that is distinctly the artist’s own, his signature of form, his unique perception, modification and reflection” opposing it to ‘manner,’ “the “look” of a picture which relates it to other pictures, to a certain time, place, climate, cultural situation.” 10 The distinction rested on the possibility that there was something which originated inside the artist, something which was able to retain something of its purely inner identity in


10 Thomas B. Hess, ‘Younger artists and the unforgivable crime,’ *Art News* vol. 56 no. 2 (April 1957), p. 48. Stella said later, recalling the time: “I think I had been badly affected by... the romance of Abstract Expressionism... particularly as it filtered out to places like Princeton and around the country, which was the idea of the artist as a terrifically sensitive, ever-changing, ever ambitious person - particularly in magazines like *Art News* and *Arts*, which I read religiously. It began to be kind of obvious and... terrible, and you began to see through it... I began to feel very strongly about trying to find a way that wasn’t so wrapped up in the hullabaloo... something that was stable in a sense, something that wasn’t constantly a record of your sensitivity, a record of flux.” Rubin, *Frank Stella*, p. 13.
being made to appear and something which was recognizable as such by someone else. When he reviewed ‘Sixteen Americans’, Hess did not mention Stella by name but merely said that “the other artists in the exhibition do not yet seem to have found a sufficiently personal way of working."\textsuperscript{11} For him, the paintings of Hartigan, Leslie and others were “the paintings of the 1960's” as opposed to the “hopped-up wide-screen effects by some of the younger artists at the Museum of Modern Art,” by which he was surely referring to Stella’s Black Paintings.\textsuperscript{12}

Many of the ‘second generation’ artists, including Leslie and Hartigan, exhibited at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, some of whom had been recommended to John B. Myers, who ran the gallery, by Greenberg.\textsuperscript{13} As it happened, this gallery was the first commercial gallery to show a painting by Stella—\textit{Club Onyx}, one of the earlier Black Paintings—as part of a group exhibition called ‘Selections’ which took place in April 1959.\textsuperscript{14} Stella’s showing at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery proved to be a turning point. Dorothy Miller (organizer of the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition) visited the gallery at the suggestion of William Seitz, Stella’s teacher at Princeton. In the summer of that year, Miller visited Stella’s studio accompanied by Leo Castelli (whose gallery Stella would soon join), and soon after invited him to participate in her exhibition.

At the time that Stella was exhibiting at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, he would have known that he would be taking part in another group exhibition at the Allen Memorial Art Museum the following month. Since it was in the catalogue for this exhibition that the first version appeared of what would be slightly revised to become the ‘Preface to Stripe Painting,’ Andre must have composed it more or less at the same time as \textit{Club Onyx} was on show at Tibor.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} John B. Myers, \textit{Tracking the Marvellous: A Life in the New York Art World} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{14} This occurred at a time when Stella was looking around for a gallery to represent him. However, Myers was not interested at that time in spite of recent defections from his gallery. Neither was Richard Bellamy, who was running the Hansa Gallery, one of the artists’ cooperative galleries that had recently appeared corresponding to the growth of the art community in downtown New York. (Bellamy would go on to set up the Green Gallery, where both Judd and Morris had their first major exhibitions.) Calvin Tomkins, ‘The Space Around Real Things,’ \textit{New Yorker} (10th September, 1984), p. 72.
de Nagy. The formulation in the earlier version was even more concerned to
distance the sense of self from painting. "He is not interested in sensitivity or
personality, either his own or those of his audience." The conjunction
between this statement and the de Nagy context suggests that there was a
conscious attempt to distance Stella's painting from the discourse associated with
the 'second generation,' the discourse of 'expression' and 'sensitivity,' at the
same time that it occupied a position in close proximity to it. (It is in this sense
that Stella's claim that he was most "influenced" by painters like Leslie and
Hartigan must be taken.) It suggests that Stella's paintings, from the beginning
of their public life, were being situated in relation to certain modes of
interpretation antagonistic to one another.

The 'second generation' was under attack from other quarters too. The
use, in Hess's review of 'Sixteen Americans,' of words like "hopped-up" and
"effects" aimed to discredit Stella's painting by pointing to its superficiality, its
shallowness and emptiness. However, this was in the face of a critical current
which saw 'second generation' gestural painting as having just those qualities.
Leo Castelli, who became Stella's dealer the summer before the 'Sixteen
Americans' exhibition, recalled: "We... had been bored, all of us, I think, or
many of us, by nothing happening after Abstract Expressionism... All these
younger people seemed just to repeat their empty gestures." Alfred Barr, the
director of the Museum of Modern Art, was also known to be impatient with
'second generation' painting. At the Club (where the main public exchanges of
ideas in the New York School took place), Barr had challenged younger artists to

15 'Frank Stella,' as part of 'Three Young Americans,' Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin
vol. 17 no. 1 (1959), p. 19. The full text, which was unsigned, was as follows:

Art is the exclusion of the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint
stripes. There is nothing else in his paintings. He is not interested in sensitivity or
personality, either his own or those of his audience. He is interested in the necessities
of painting. Symbols are counters passed among people. Frank Stella's painting is not
symbolic. His stripes are the paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into
painting.

16 De Antonio, Painters Painting, p. 100. The phrase "empty gestures" probably refers to the
epigraph quoting Apollinaire which headed Harold Rosenberg's 'The American Action
Painters' (1952). For an account of the "standardization" of "gestures" in the paintings of the
followers of the Abstract Expressionists, see also Clement Greenberg, 'Post Painterly
Abstraction' (1964), in Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism (vol. 4) (Chicago and
"reject their elders more strongly." According to Castelli, Barr had "never liked Abstract Expressionism." Barr was, however, greatly impressed by Stella's work and bought, in spite of great opposition, The Marriage of Reason and Squalor for the museum during its exhibition in 'Sixteen Americans.' Irving Sandler also noted that Barr had a couple of years earlier begun "to promote Jasper Johns as the alternative to Abstract Expressionist academicism." Johns also had Castelli as his dealer and Barr had bought three of Johns's paintings from his first one-man exhibition in early 1958 at the Castelli Gallery for the Museum of Modern Art [fig. 4]. These kinds of reaction to the 'second generation' throw the derogatory words of Hess into relief.

In a situation such as this, the art world was divided into ever narrower circles of exclusivity. In the same article in which he reviewed the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition, Hess wrote, regarding an exhibition of 'second generation' painters taking place at the Stable Gallery at the same time, that "[t]he Stable exhibition is like a cocktail party among intimates; it has elation, a specific social texture and a rather smug sense of exclusivity." This exclusivity had its social character. However, the situation was complex and social positions tended to be symbolically represented. Stella himself was educated privately at Phillips Academy, Andover, and then at Princeton University. Of his circle in New York, Frampton and Andre had also attended Phillips Academy (Andre on a scholarship), and many of those who first supported his work, such as William Seitz, Robert Rosenblum and Michael Fried, were either teachers or fellow students from Princeton. Caroline Jones has pointed to the ambiguities in

19 Apparently Barr had "bullied" this acquisition through the committee. Rubin recalled: "If you look at the minutes of that meeting, you see that Alfred [Barr] had to virtually force it down their [the committee's] throats... for a price of about $600 or $900 for this very large picture. This period is very recherché now and these pictures are worth $45,000 or $50,000 if you can find them of that quality." quoted in Russell Lynes, Good Old Modern: An Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art (New York: Atheneum, 1973), p. 300.
22 Tomkins, 'The Space Around Real Things,' pp. 57-8.
23 Rubin, Frank Stella, p. 155. According to Rubin, Stella and Andre had first met at Phillips Academy; according to Tomkins, 'The Space Around Real Things,' p. 68, and Andre's own recollection, they first met in New York in 1958.
terms of class character in Stella’s self-representation during this time. When it was common for painters to be photographed in working clothes, whatever their background, Frampton’s ‘Sixteen Americans’ photograph showed Stella in a suit. Conversely, the non-art character of the enamel paint used to paint the Black Paintings, and their being painted with a house-painter’s brush, was meant to create the opposite effect.24 The initial negative response to the Black Paintings, in the New York daily press, tended to see them primarily in terms of Stella’s self-representation in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ catalogue: “One of the artists here is described as being interested only in the “necessities of painting.” The same can be said of the others although they take very different views on what the “necessities” are. For Mr. Stella, they are no more than pin-stripes on a black ground.”25 “Stella... paints huge black canvases carefully lined with white pin-stripes and calls the results, very accurately, “stripe painting.””26 The aptness of the “pin-stripes” description was no doubt partially effected by Frampton’s photograph of Stella wearing a suit. A published response, in Stella’s name but written by Frampton, attacked the “pin-stripes” description as false (what were called “pin-stripes” were not the stripes of “stripe painting” but the unpainted gaps between the stripes), and included the text of Andre’s ‘Preface to Stripe Painting’ in support.27 The beginning of the discourse of the Black Paintings was therefore not only complexly articulated in relation to paradigms of artistic practice, but also, as the joint efforts of Stella, Andre and Frampton, had a “specific social texture” too.

Alfred Leslie, one of the most prominent of the ‘second generation’ painters, was also a participant in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition. The statement which appeared in the catalogue was, like Stella’s, written by an artist friend, the painter Grace Hartigan. She wrote:

24 Jones, *Machine in the Studio*, pp. 115-119, 123-129. De Antonio also described Stella’s early paintings as being “a litmus test for middle class sensibility,” and how they were taken as “art jokes” by this sensibility. De Antonio, *Painters Painting*, p. 25.
In the expression of my generation, which turns to irony on one hand and rhetoric on the other, it is infinitely moving to come upon true and controlled passion.  

The contrasting of irony and rhetoric with a passion which is true and moving echoed Hess's charge of mere "effects." Although Hartigan's complaint was probably widely meant, within the context of the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition she would no doubt have pointed to the work of Stella, or perhaps Johns or Rauschenberg. The implication was that "irony" and "rhetoric" were untruthful modes of indirect expression; that "passion" was "true." The expression of passion depended on the self as its origin, and the maintaining of the integrity of this self throughout the act of expression. In the act of expression, it is assumed that there is no code or figure to come between what is to be expressed and its expression, unlike, say, irony, in which the expression is, in a reversal which depends on context, the opposite of what is to be expressed.

"Originality gone dead"

The surfaces of the Black Paintings were such that it was difficult to see the way that the paint was applied and so relate the gesture of this application to an expressive intention. In Die Fahne Hoch!, for example, the surface retains, to some extent, the texture of the canvas, in spite of the building up of several layers of paint [fig. 5]. The paint is fairly evenly, but dimly, reflective in the stripes. The black enamel bled into the canvas, which can be seen in the 'unpainted' lines, which suggests that the evenness of reflection was something that had to be consciously aimed for, there having to be a certain number of layers before the enamel stopped being soaked up by the canvas and came to be dense enough to attain something of its characteristic surface quality. The lines

28 Miller, 'Sixteen Americans,' p. 34.
29 Certain of Rauschenberg's titles suggest rhetorical, or figured modes of representation, such as Rebus (1955), exhibited in Rauschenberg's solo exhibition at the Castelli Gallery in March 1958, or Allegory (1959-60). (Neither of these was exhibited in the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition.)
30 Die Fahne Hoch! is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. (Where I give locations of works, this means I have seen the work.)
that Stella left unpainted remained fairly indistinct as a result of the absorption (creating a kind of counter-illusion of ‘cloudiness’ over the whole surface). Completely bare canvas (the canvas was unsized and unprimed) can only be seen in certain parts of the unpainted lines, though the aggregate regularity of these lines still has a strong graphic quality. One of the most striking aspects of the quality of the black enamel, and this must be one of the reasons why Stella chose it, is its failure to retain the evidence of strokes of the brush, the small ridges left by the bristles.31 Although the unevenness of the stripes suggests a painterliness, there is little evidence of the movement of the hand that could be read in gestural terms.

In April 1960, Stella participated in a panel discussion entitled ‘Art 60’ at New York University.32 The other participants—Jasper Johns, Alfred Leslie, Robert Mallary, Louise Nevelson and Richard Stankiewicz—had been co-exhibitors in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition, and the discussion was moderated by Robert Goldwater. Stella’s comments during the discussion survived in the form of notes taken by the critic Irving Sandler. Sandler first used these notes in a review of Stella’s first exhibition—of Aluminium Paintings—at the Leo Castelli Gallery later that year, in which he wrote:

In a recent panel discussion, Stella affirmed that it was enough for him to have a good idea; he would be just as happy if someone else, or a machine, made his pictures according to his specifications. This posture is reflected in his painting which is apathetic, listless. Both in his indifference to painting and in his attempt to make the picture into an object, Stella approaches Neo-Dada.33

The qualities of listlessness and indifference in Stella’s painting were the opposite of the passion in Leslie’s painting, and were related to the non-necessity of the self as their apparent origin. Stella would be “just as happy if someone else, or a

31 Stella would have been aware of the technique of staining the canvas, utilized in paintings by Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis.
32 The panel discussion took place on 21st April 1960 according to Sandler, The New York School, p. 288 n. 31. According to Rubin’s chronology, it took place in January-February, Rubin, Frank Stella, p. 155.
machine, made his pictures.” ‘Neo-Dada’ was a term often applied to the work of Johns and Rauschenberg in the late 1950s and into the 1960s to register its ‘anti-art’ quality, and later too, to describe Minimal Art.\(^{34}\) Max Kozloff made the suggestion in 1964 that Stella should be called an "Abstract Dadaist," partly because of the ‘given’ quality of his motifs, which related his paintings to those of Johns, a designation that Fried called “sheer fantasy” in a symposium in which both he and Kozloff took part in 1966.\(^{35}\)

Also in Sandler’s notes, as they were later related, Stella reinforced the managerial character of his photographic portrait: “He [Stella] referred to a certain artist who had sent his pictures out to be painted as an executive artist, commenting that he was a good painter when he did not paint.”\(^{36}\) All of Stella’s comments on the panel contributed to the sense of a negation of the self as the origin of the meaningfulness of painting, at least in the sense of painting being for the purpose of expression as the conveying of sensitivity, to recall the words Andre used. Such comments must have connected very vividly with Stella’s self-representation in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ catalogue. Speaking at ‘Art 60,’ Stella claimed that his own painting aimed for unoriginality—originality gone dead [...] He... said that his idea of a picture was one that was the same all over and the same in the next painting, one in which only paint was used and none of himself.\(^{37}\)

Stella seems not to have meant the word ‘originality’ in the sense of being new or being a beginning, but rather in the sense of its defining the relation of self to painting. Unoriginality, or “originality gone dead,” was a quality of Stella’s painting in which “none of himself” was used. “Originality gone dead” was a


\(^{36}\) Sandler, *The New York School*, p. 309.

\(^{37}\) Ibid.
curious way of putting it because of its invoking of temporality; it continued to require the existence of an originality which existed prior to it, because that was how it defined itself, but which was no longer living. Originality was not simply absent, it was more like an absent presence, like a frustrated expectation.

If originality was a quality of ‘second generation’ painting, as a mode of painting in which sensitivity as an attribute of the self was expressed, then “originality gone dead” as a quality of Stella’s Black Paintings was not simply a cancellation of expressive painting, but one in which the expectations connected with it were frustrated. In the passage quoted above, it seems that Stella attempted to do this in two ways. Firstly, the uniqueness of originality (what Hess had called a “signature of form”) was frustrated by sameness and repetition, “same all over and the same in the next painting.” Secondly, the idea of the self as origin was frustrated by the idea of objective materiality, “only paint... and none of himself,” where paint was not conceived as the means by which the self can express its sensitivity, but simply as the material of painting. The positivity of “only paint” echoed the statement in the ‘Preface’ that Stella “is interested in the necessities of painting.”

The medium as origin

So far, I have been discussing Stella’s Black Paintings, and the particular cases that were made for them by Andre and Stella, in relation to the privileging the self as origin and the discourse of expression connected with the painting of the ‘second generation.’ There was another discourse, however, which needs to be considered, which was the account of modern art put forward by Greenberg, which would be so important in Fried’s writings. The sentence with which the ‘Preface’ begins, “Art excludes the unnecessary,” and its correlative, “He [Stella] is interested in the necessities of painting,” seem to indicate an investment in an idea of purity or autonomy in art or in the idea that painting has of itself certain essential requirements, both of which seem like Greenbergian ideas. “Excludes” might even be read as a historical tendency. Thierry de Duve has commented
that in the light of Greenberg’s prominence in 1961 with the publication of his collection of critical essays *Art and Culture*, and the important essay, ‘Modernist Painting,’ Andre’s ‘Preface’ (although written two years earlier, in 1959) “appears utterly Greenbergian.”

Yet this can only be partially agreed with. “The essence of Modernism,” as Greenberg put it in ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960), “lies... in the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” In the case of the art of painting, this meant that it had to determine those “effects exclusive to itself,” and these “effects” were to be found in the nature of the medium and were bound to its limitations. The principal limitation to which modernist painting “oriented itself” was “flatness,” since it was “flatness alone [which] was unique and exclusive to pictorial art.” It was characteristic of modernist painting, for Greenberg, that it openly acknowledged the contradiction, which defined all pictorial art, between the flat surface of the painting and the illusion of space. The flatness to which modernist painting oriented itself was not, as Greenberg made clear, the same thing as the “literal and utter flatness” of the unpainted canvas, but a painted flatness, that is, a flatness co-present with illusion.

There was no mention of flatness or illusion in the ‘Preface.’ Yet it appears that flatness was at least one of the concerns in a lecture Stella gave at the Pratt Institute in New York during the time of the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition:

> There are two problems in painting. One is to find out what painting is and the other is to find out how to make a painting. The first is learning something and the second is making something.

[...]


40 Ibid., p. 90.
I found... that I... didn’t like painting them [Stella’s earliest paintings] at all. The painterly problems of what to put here and there and how to make it go with what was already there became more and more difficult and the solutions more and more unsatisfactory...

There were two problems that had to be faced. One was spatial and the other methodological. In the first case I had to do something about relational painting, i.e., the balancing of the various parts with and against each other. The obvious answer was symmetry - make it the same all over. The question still remained, though, of how to do this in depth. A symmetrical image or configuration placed on an open ground is not balanced out in the illusionistic space. The solution I arrived at - and there are probably quite a few, although I know of only one other, color density - forces illusionistic space out of the painting at a constant rate by using a regulated pattern.

The remaining problem was simply to find a method of paint application which followed and complemented the design solution. This was done by using the house painter’s technique and tools.\textsuperscript{41}

The spatial problem engendered a “design solution.” The compositional side of this solution was related to Stella’s comments two or three months later in the ‘Art 60’ panel discussion, which was to make the painting the “same all over.” In terms of flatness, though it was not mentioned explicitly, the solution was essentially the same. “The solution... forces illusionistic space out of the painting at a constant rate by using a regulated pattern.” This quality of patterned sameness as an orientation to flatness, which in the ‘Art 60’ comments was a means for Stella to have “none of himself” in the painting, could not be called Greenbergian. All-overness was a quality, particularly as a description of Pollock’s ‘drip’ paintings of 1947-50, which Greenberg affirmed. But Pollock’s all-overness was something that was arrived at, not predetermined in the way that Stella’s Black Paintings were.\textsuperscript{42}

The possible relation of Stella’s mode of painting to Greenberg’s ideas about flatness are further complicated by what Thierry de Duve regarded as a

\textsuperscript{41} Frank Stella, ‘Pratt Institute Lecture,’ in Robert Rosenblum, \textit{Frank Stella} (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 57. It was Andre who preserved Stella’s handwritten notes for the lecture.

\textsuperscript{42} For example, see Clement Greenberg, ‘Jackson Pollock: “Inspiration, Vision, Intuitive Decision”’ (1967), in \textit{The Collected Essays and Criticism} (vol. 4), pp. 246-47.
defensive movement in Greenberg’s writings regarding literal flatness around the time that Stella exhibited his Black Paintings. De Duve gave an account of how Greenberg’s description of the development of painting as increasingly acknowledging the condition specific to it, flatness, had contained within it a potential moment in which it comes not to matter whether this flatness is painted or not, whether this flatness is that of a monochrome painting or a blank canvas. (For de Duve, this potential moment subverted the distinction, so important to Greenberg’s account of modernist painting, between the specific term ‘painting’ and the generic term ‘art’—if it was granted that a blank canvas could be art—the latter of which turned out to be a crucial strategic term in the defining of Minimal Art.43) In 1958, painting, as far as Greenberg was concerned still had “a relatively long way to go before being reduced to its viable essence.”44 By 1961, however, what de Duve perceived as a defensiveness was being formulated, so that “the flatness toward which Modernist painting orients itself can never be an utter flatness,” it “must permit optical illusion.”45 In 1962, Greenberg conceded that “utter flatness” can exist in pictorial form as a blank canvas, “though not necessarily as a successful one,”46 with the distinction between a successful and unsuccessful work of art having taken over from the distinction between that which was essential and that which was nonessential to painting. As it turned out, the “irony”—as de Duve characterized it—was that that which had ensured painting’s specificity, flatness, had ended up by negating it.47

The implication in de Duve’s essay was that the appearance of Stella’s art

43 De Duve stressed the importance of the generic term ‘art’ for Minimalism in opposing Greenberg’s views, especially in Donald Judd’s essay ‘Specific Objects’ which begins “Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.” Quoted in de Duve, ‘The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas,’ p. 267. Stella’s work was included in the Judd essay as exemplifying this neither/nor-ness.
45 Greenberg, from ‘Modernist Painting’ (1961), quoted in ibid.
46 Greenberg, from ‘After Abstract Expressionism’ (1962), quoted in ibid.
47 “Its [Greenberg’s resistance to Minimalism] “theoretical” stumbling block is the issue of the monochrome repeating itself in particularly sensitive conditions of reception. The irony is that those conditions are set by the success of Greenberg’s account of the progressive surrender of painting to its own specificity.” De Duve, ‘The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas,’ p. 258 (my italics).
around 1960 played a significant part in raising the possibility of this irony. It is
difficult to say, conversely, how much Stella took on board Greenberg's ideas.
Stella met Greenberg in late 1958 at Princeton (probably through Fried who was
still a student there and had already met Greenberg) when the critic gave the
Gauss Seminars on art criticism. Fried at this time was already familiar with
Greenberg's ideas and Stella probably to some extent was too. Greenberg, for
his part, never wrote about Stella's paintings. Although parts of what Stella said
around the time of the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition, and Andre's 'Preface,'
could be interpreted as in accord with Greenberg's ideas about painting, there
were several parts of them that were not, as in the unGreenbergian solution of
forcing out illusionistic space through pattern, automatically as it were.

However, a more important discrepancy was in the various ways in
which Stella problematized the discourse of the expressive self as origin. Richard
Shiff has suggested that although Greenberg's modernism was oriented to
discoveries made in terms of medium, the self remained as the other side of
what Shiff called an "artistic double origin." In contrast, Andre's 'Preface', and
the various statements by Stella, seemed concerned with the medium at the
expense of the self, though at the same time, the 'Preface,' particularly, was
formulated in such a way (Stella "has found it necessary to...", he "is interested
in...") as to show that Stella was clearly the agent of the negation of his self as
origin.

Abstraction

Greenberg's stress on the medium as the basis for artistic innovation was
closely related to abstraction, and certainly Stella saw himself within and
continuing such a tradition. The images produced in abstract painting are
usually said to derive from the self and the properties of medium, and from

48 See Fried, 'An Introduction,' Art and Objecthood, pp. 4-5; Rubin, Frank Stella, p.155.
49 Richard Shiff, Cézanne and the End of Impressionism (Chicago and London: University of
50 Greenberg did not equate the two. See 'Modernist Painting,' The Collected Essays and
Criticism (vol. 4), pp. 87-88.
ideas to do with the integrity of these things, rather than from the visible world. As a tendency, abstraction has often supported the idea that art's history develops as if by itself. Because it does not represent aspects of the world in the usual sense, it is difficult to see it in terms of the wider ideological limits on representation, unless it is seen as a determinate work against representation. Social historians of art have argued that abstraction originally had a social basis. Meyer Schapiro, in countering Alfred H. Barr's view of the history of art as an "internal, immanent process," argued, in 1937, that the tendency to abstraction after impressionism was an attempt to regain "elements of community" which had been lost in the increasingly private experience of capitalist society. Thomas Crow, writing more recently, has put the origins of abstraction further back, writing that it was based on an ideology of vision and purity, which appeared first in the writings of Joshua Reynolds and corresponded to the humanistic ideals of a particular forward-looking bourgeois elite. In both these views abstraction in art represented, paradoxically, a bourgeois ideal antagonistic to certain aspects of capitalism. Crow suggested that this privileging of abstraction continued, via Clement Greenberg's 1939 essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch,' up until the 1960s.

For Stella, and perhaps his generation, abstract painting appeared as a fait accompli, and not as something that he found during the course of working. In Stella's case, therefore, abstraction was not so much a work against representation, but merely a starting point, a given. Stella's response to the private experience expressed in the painting of the 'second generation' could be

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54 Rubin, Frank Stella, p. 8. Newman, Pollock etc. began as figurative painters; Stella, Judd and Morris began as abstract painters. See also Stella's remarks on starting from Pollock in de Antonio, Painters Painting, p. 36.
seen as a reprise of the response which for Schapiro had formed the basis of abstraction, except that Stella's response took place within abstraction as a given.

This view of abstraction as a given and ongoing mode, required a particular historical consciousness on the part of Stella. Stella had studied history at Princeton, and had taken courses in the history of art. A higher education was also, like the sense of abstraction as a given, peculiar to the artists of Stella's generation. Many of those who supported his work when it first appeared were art historians, such as William Rubin. Fried published a defence of formal criticism in 1964, discussed in more detail in the next chapter, which stressed the problem-solving character of modernist painting, and which followed from its conception as a self-critical autonomous enterprise. This problem-solving character had been present in Stella's Pratt Institute lecture, which was structured around "painterly problems" and "solution[s]." For Fried, the problem-solving character of modernist painting gave it a moral dimension, in the sense that painterly solutions were necessary, rather than gratuitous. But it was also what drove its historical development, which had intensified as a result of what Fried called the "historical self-awareness" of artists like Stella, by which he meant their awareness of their situation with respect to the modernist art of the recent past and the modernist art of the near future.

*A painting that looks like a thing*

Another side to abstraction appearing as a given, and not something that Stella found through working, was an apparent affinity with constructivism. One of Fried's earliest interpretations of Stella's stripe paintings, from 1962, claimed that they "represented the pursuit of an esthetic that owed its basic

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55 Rubin, Frank Stella, p. 9.
56 See Anna C. Chave, 'Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,' *Arts Magazine* vol. 64 no. 5 (January 1990), p. 62 n. 31, for a summary of Stella's milieu.
57 Michael Fried, 'Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism,' in *American Scholar* vol. 33 no. 4 (Autumn 1964), p. 648. (This essay, revised, became the first part of Fried's introductory essay for the exhibition catalogue *Three American Painters.*
58 Ibid., p. 647. See also the quote from Stella in Rubin, *Frank Stella*, pp. 28-29, regarding Pollock: "He made it really necessary for you to think about abstract painting: to think through it, and think ahead with it."
aspiration to Constructivism: to make a painting that looks like a thing." At almost exactly the same time that this must have been written, Andre wrote in a dialogue composed with Frampton:

Frank Stella is a constructivist. He makes paintings by combining identical discrete units. Those units are not stripes, but brushstrokes. We have both watched Frank Stella paint a picture. He fills in a pattern with uniform elements. His stripe designs are the result of the shape and limitation of his primary unit."

Stella’s way of making paintings was recorded in some photographs Frampton took of Stella beginning work on one of the Black Paintings, Getty Tomb [fig. 6]. In this series of photographs, Stella can be seen painting stripes of black paint using a flat house painter’s brush, working inwards from the edge according to ruled pencil guidelines. However, Stella did not only fill in a pattern in the manner suggested by the photographs, but built up several layers of enamel paint, which were varied in density and reflectiveness.

The patterns were ruled on first with a pencil. The painted stripes would occupy the areas between the pencil lines, leaving these lines more or less as unpainted canvas. Out of the four Black Paintings shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1959-60, the simplest pattern appears to be that of Tomlinson Court Park, where the stripes echo the picture’s edge inwards [fig. 7]. The patterns of the other three paintings use inversions of the corners of the whole picture, which create different arrangements of stripes. Die Fahne Hoch! inverts all four corners so that they meet in the centre forming a cross, the stripes echoing these inverted ‘edges,’ rather than the actual edge of the picture. Fried, in 1965, coined the term “deductive structure” (which he later acknowledged was problematic) to describe this apparent dependency of the ‘image’ on the edge. The shape of the edge could, however, equally be seen as the echoing the


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shape of the centre, as William Rubin pointed out in 1970 in opposition to Fried’s view.\footnote{For Fried’s notion of “deductive structure,” see Fried, Three American Painters, p. 23; for Rubin’s disagreement, see Rubin, Frank Stella, pp. 54-60. The disagreement is discussed in Frances Colpitt, Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), pp. 51-54.} There is a sense in which any verbal description of the patterns of the Black Paintings necessitates some kind of causal hierarchy—between edge and inverted edge, or between stripes and edge, or centre and edge—which is not actually present. Where the stripes turned corners, this also gave the illusion of a virtual diagonal. In Die Fahne Hoch!, these diagonals cross, or would if they were real, at the centre of the canvas, which is already occupied by the emphatic real cross of the actual lines of unpainted canvas.

The difference between Andre’s and Fried’s interpretations of Stella’s painting in terms of what each thought characterized ‘constructivism’ ultimately turned on whether paint was considered \textit{a priori} as a medium. For Fried, it clearly was; he stressed that the thing-like character of a painting by Stella was “made with paint,” which “involv[ed] the pattern, shape of canvas, and handling of paint,” and, in the way that it was made, demonstrated the “painterly nature of Stella’s talent.”\footnote{Fried, ‘New York Letter: Louis, Chamberlain and Stella, Indiana,’ in Art and Objecthood, p. 284.} Andre, on the other hand, seems to have seen the paint not as a medium through which some aspect of the ‘real world’ was made over into an image, but as a material that was itself an aspect of the ‘real world’ and that could serve as something, an “element,” which could be “combin[ed]” to make a painting. The emphasis was on the action of the painter (“brushstrokes”) without this action being subordinated to some other purpose. Whereas, for Fried, the ‘real’-ness (the “thinglike” quality) of Stella’s painting resulted from the painted image, for Andre it was the other way round, the ‘image’ (“design”) resulted from the ‘real’-ness of paint, as material to be applied with a brush over and over again over a given area.\footnote{Fried has recalled that “[i]n a sense Carl Andre and I were fighting for his [Stella’s] soul, and Andre and I represented very different things.” The value attached by Andre to the “combining [of] identical discrete units” represented, for Fried, an early version of what later would be regarded as a characteristic of Minimal Art, which he would come to regard as antithetical to modernist painting. Foster (editor), Discussions in Contemporary Culture 1, p. 79.} Fried’s reference to constructivism perhaps reflected his conversations with Stella, whose own views may have arisen in

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those conversations, or in conversation with Andre. Stella had on occasion, similarly to Andre, described his painting in terms of a predetermined sameness, as in the ‘Art 60’ panel, in which he had said that his idea of a picture was that it was “the same all over and the same in the next painting.”

**House painting**

Andre and Stella were particularly close during the time that Stella painted the first Black Paintings, in the winter of 1958-59. At this time Stella was earning his living working three or four days a week as a house painter, and Andre worked in his West Broadway studio, carving into found construction timbers, whilst Stella was out. Regarding Stella’s employment as a house painter, Rubin noted:

Stella had an arrangement with a painter named J. Huriash who lived in Astoria, Queens. As Huriash worked for unusually low rates, he got many jobs in the slum districts where the courts were forcing landlords to repaint. The ambience of these jobs is directly connected with the titles of the Black pictures.64

Aside from the titles (an early non-black stripe painting was titled Astoria; Arundel Castle was named after an apartment block near Tomlinson Court Park in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of New York65), this experience also directly affected the actual technique of the Black Paintings themselves, as Stella had suggested in his lecture at the Pratt Institute. Although one of the ways that Stella problematized the idea of his self as the origin of the meaning of his paintings was to subordinate this determining self to the determinacy of the medium of painting as such, the Greenbergian emphasis on medium was itself problematized by the idea of house painting. The medium of painting became subordinated to ‘real-world’ work. In house painting, as a ‘real world’ activity, paint cannot be said to constitute a medium, a vehicle by means of which

64 Rubin, *Frank Stella*, p. 151.

65 See Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings*, for information regarding Stella’s choice of titles.

63
something is conveyed. Even in a Greenbergian sense, where the emphasis is on the medium of painting as such as the basis for the self-critical tendency of modernist painting, it must still function as a vehicle for an aesthetic experience, a pictorial experience. Kozloff wrote, in 1964:

One hears that Stella used to work as a trimmer, that is, an edger in house painting, and it is not inconceivable that deadpan swathes from that utilitarian métier have been introduced in the totally aesthetic realm of abstract painting. What becomes so radical is that he practically accepts each form in itself, as unalterably real...66

If the 'Preface' is looked at again in the light of the Pratt Institute lecture, the view that it "appears utterly Greenbergian"67 becomes difficult to sustain. In the Pratt Institute lecture, the "technique and tools" of house painting were brought to bear on the problems of painting as an art. House painting, however, belonged to the realm of practical necessity, the necessity of protecting a surface, or of unifying a blemished or uneven surface. (House painting can also be decorative, but Stella's emphasis was on practicalities.)

An individual brushstroke would have a different mode of existence depending on whether paint was conceived as an artistic medium or as the material of house painting. As medium, a stroke of paint would have its ability to act as a medium incorporated within itself. It need not be the same as other strokes, nor necessarily depend on them for its ability to act as a medium. As material, on the other hand, a stroke of paint would be subordinated to a particular purpose: in the case of house painting, evenly covering a surface. As a result, the basic action of the stroke would be more or less the same, dipping a brush into a can of paint and applying the paint to the surface, and the strokes would be dependent on other strokes, since each would be purposeless on its own. In fact, the use of enamel paint meant that the brushstrokes (the physical evidence of brushstrokes) effectively disappeared as Stella applied them. Of course, Stella did not paint the Black Paintings as he would have painted a wall, a

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window, or a door. Nevertheless, that he appropriated the technique and tools of house painting to some extent, and perhaps more unambiguously in discourse than in practice, demonstrated a commitment to problematizing the usual mode of existence of paint as a medium. The use of stripes by Stella, and of patterns composed of them, reinforced the sense of the repeatability of the brushstrokes, as Andre had suggested. This repeatability also frustrated the ability of the strokes of paint to function as medium within the confines of the painting as standing for relations of difference, as forming an internal context.

The Aluminium Paintings

I have been discussing how the representation of Stella's Black Paintings in writing by Andre and Stella himself problematized the idea of paint as a medium, as conveying a specifically pictorial experience. Whatever had animated the significance of paint as a medium was deadened, as another "originality gone dead." The reference to house painting effectively revealed paint as medium to be metaphorical in character, in relation to which house painting provided the assumedly literal meaning. This distinction between the literal and the figural, however, is not one that holds hard and fast, as I will be discussing in the next chapter. The negative responses to the Black Paintings when they were first exhibited, in the New York daily press, and in Thomas B. Hess's remarks cited earlier, seemed to register their literalness, at least when compared to the positive response of Rubin, writing in *Art International*: "Seeing a roomful of them [Stella's Black Paintings] at the Museum, I was almost mesmerized by their eerie, magical presence."68 Rubin later claimed these words had been a response to the Black Paintings' "more subjective, and more enigmatic, character."69

69 Rubin, *Frank Stella*, p. 42. While Stella may have been interested in the unevenness of enamel paint on canvas, he progressively, even in the sequence of the Black Paintings, rid his paintings of unevenness. Some of the earlier Black Paintings, such as *Seven Steps*, and the first version of *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor*, had stripe patterns which noticeably swayed to one side. The stripes in the second version of the latter painting, which appeared in the 'Sixteen Americans' exhibition, were straighter.
At the same time that the Black Paintings were on show at the Museum of Modern Art, Stella had already started to experiment with aluminium paint, which he would use to paint the next series of stripe paintings. On the cover of the same issue of *Art International* in which Rubin had written of the “eerie” quality of the Black Paintings, was a design by Stella which, although based on one of the Black Paintings, *Clinton Plaza*, was printed using reflective silver ink. Before this, probably late in 1959, Stella had used aluminium paint in a small painting based on a maze configuration, and had also experimented with burglar-alarm tape, which was shiny and metallic.70 The pattern of the *Art International* cover, no doubt because it was designed to be printed, was far more evident than those of any of the reproductions of the Black Paintings which appeared in print around the same time.71 The stripes in the Aluminium Paintings themselves, which Stella began to paint early in 1960, had less clearly defined edges than the *Art International* cover, but were nevertheless much more clearly defined than the stripes of the Black Paintings.72

The reflective nature of the ink in Stella’s cover for *Art International* created a light-dark ambiguity between the stripes and the unprinted lines, and it is likely that the Aluminium Paintings created the same ambiguous effect when they were first made (although *Six Mile Bottom* [fig. 8], for example, seems to have dulled over time73). In June 1960, a couple of months before seven of these paintings were exhibited in Stella’s first solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery [fig. 9], Stella showed them to his interviewer, Donald Key:

In a quick preview of two of them [the Aluminium Paintings] (one with the corners deleted) he [Stella] pointed out that the stripes take on a white look when viewed

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71 The Black Paintings did not reproduce particularly well. There were reproductions of *The Marriage of Reason and Squalor* in Rubin, ‘Younger American Painters,’ p. 24, and in Emily Genauer, ‘Modern Art Museum’s New Show Presents A 12-Foot Pin Stripe Canvas It Calls “Exciting,”’ *New York Herald Tribune* (21st December 1960), p. 23, as well as in the ‘Sixteen Americans’ catalogue.
72 Aluminium paint was also subject to a certain amount of bleeding, yet, to a different extent than the black enamel, this was more an attribute of the binding agent of the paint. Rubin, *Frank Stella*, p. 63.
73 *Six Mile Bottom* is in the collection of the Tate Gallery, London.
from directly in the center of the canvas. From other vantage points they look aluminium.74

Regarding the use of aluminium paint, Stella later described how “[a]ll of the action would be on the surface, and that metallic surface would be, in effect, kind of resistant. You couldn't penetrate it, both literally and, I suppose, visually.”75 It would not suggest another space both by referring the viewer back to a sense of the space whose light it reflected, and by way of the more tactile sense of the resistance of metal as a substance. The emphasis on surface frustrated the possibility of the kind of affect associated with Rubin's adjective “eerie,” which he applied to the Black Paintings in 1960, which connoted a kind of atmospheric quality.

The aluminium paint itself was, like the enamel of the Black Paintings, a commercial paint—usually used as an undercoat when painting radiators.76 One of the contemporary reviewers of the exhibition of Aluminium Paintings at the Leo Castelli Gallery, Valerie Peterson, wrote “The qualities of aluminium paint allow for very little of what Stella considers to be irrelevant to painting anyway—sensitivity and expressiveness.”77 The stripes in the Aluminium Paintings were, unlike those in the Black Paintings, uniformly vertical in orientation, apart from stripe-width steps to one side. One sidestep of a stripe would cause a similar sidestep in the one adjacent, and these steps together created the effect of a kind of diagonal ripple.78 The extent of the stripes was usually constrained either by the figure of a square (or, more accurately, a near-square) suggested by the diagonal ripples, or by the convergence of ripples which made further sidestepped stripes impossible.

74 Donald Key, ‘Stripe Painting Has Been Rough Road,’ Milwaukee Journal (12th June 1960), pt. 5.
75 De Antonio, Painters Painting, p. 140.
78 In a contemporary review, this effect of movement was characterized as “turn[ing] or mak[ing] flanking movements like perfectly trained soldiers parading in a marching exercise.” Stuart Preston, ‘Housing in Art’s Many Mansions,’ New York Times (2nd October 1960), sec. 2 p. 21.
The most radical aspect of the Aluminium Paintings lay in the decision to construct the stretcher to accommodate the outermost (and, on a couple of occasions, the innermost) steps of the stripes. Before making the paintings, Stella had been working on some drawings which he had shown to a friend from Princeton, Darby Bannard, also a painter. The drawings consisted of parallel stripes which stepped to one side but the overall patterns they made were, like the Black Paintings, fitted to a rectangle. Stella was bothered by the fact that these steps led to leftover areas in the form of small blocks. Bannard suggested that he just get rid of them, a suggestion that Stella utilized, physically altering the shape of the canvas stretcher to fit the extent of the pattern. Stella may have seen this as practicable because he was already butt-ending the one by three wood that he used to make the stretchers for the Black Paintings, which had made it easier, he said, to put in the bracing necessary to make such large stretchers rigid—the possibility of making shaped canvases was doubtless due to this kind of practical experience.

Stella recalled in 1966 that he “just began to build the stretchers leaving out the part I didn’t want.” Later, he commented: “It was a kind of simpleminded thing.” However, it sounds a lot simpler than it would have been. It is possible that Stella constructed the stretchers for the Aluminium Paintings in Hollis Frampton’s apartment, where Andre was then working on a group of stack sculptures (the ‘pyramids’), and used Andre’s radial machine saw. Certainly, the complicated and “enormous” stretchers were stored there. The structures of the stretchers would have been particularly complicated where, as in Six Mile Bottom, the pattern included a space at the centre, and which, in the

79 Current Moment in Art II [“Discussion between Phillip Leider and Frank Stella during a symposium held at the San Francisco Art Institute during 1966”]. Audiotape in the library at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Six Mile Bottom “still retains its original stretcher, quite roughly nailed together by Stella himself.” Alley (compiler), Catalogue of the Tate Gallery’s Collection, p. 706.
80 Rubin, Frank Stella, p. 50.
81 De Antonio, Painters Painting, p. 141.
82 Hollis Frampton, ‘Letters from Framp 1958-1968’ (correspondence with Reno Odlin), October no. 32 (Spring 1985), p. 35 (letter dated 8 February 1960). Frampton described his apartment at this time as a “factory.”
actual painting, had to be open to the wall. It would have also been difficult to stretch the canvas, again particularly so with the central holes, and would have necessitated risky cuts to the canvas almost to the surface that would be painted. None of this practical complexity could be seen—the Aluminium Paintings were edged with thin strips of wood painted with aluminium paint, including the central holes.

The stripe patterns, to a greater extent than in the Black Paintings, were coextensive, or rhymed, with the shape of the stretcher, which confused a sense of either one having priority over the other. The articulation of the two aspects constituted the form of the paintings, as opposed to it being formed separately in the realm of paint, with the stretcher as merely the support. The shape of the support was considered by Greenberg (in 'Modernist Painting') to be, with flatness, one of the "limitations that constitute the medium of painting." But, as I mentioned earlier, flatness and the shape of the support delimited pictorial illusion, which defined the art of painting, and the kind of experience to which it addressed itself. That the medium was made to exhibit a self-consciousness with regards to itself as a medium did not stop it being a medium in the sense of a vehicle of expression. I suggested earlier that the use of the technique and tools of house painting problematized the idea of medium, because it was a kind of activity that was not normally associated with the notion of a medium. It had a different kind of intentionality. As I also mentioned earlier, Kozloff had suggested a correspondence between the non-aesthetic quality of house painting and the treatment of the form as "unalterably real." This was reinforced by Stella's decision to construct his stretchers to accommodate the pattern. The shape of the support stopped being simply an edge but became a structural element of the form (particularly for Fried, who, as I mentioned earlier, coined the term "deductive structure" to deal with this aspect). However, the kind of intentionality associated with the construction of a support was necessarily directed towards a different end to that of the painting. Whereas a support

83 This cutting of the canvas would be necessary to stretch canvas over any angle of concavity beyond a straight edge.
84 Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' The Collected Essays and Criticism (vol. 4), p. 86.
would normally be made for painting on, that would be its purpose, painting on it would be for some different purpose, appropriate to painting as an art. Canvases can be bought ready made, and in that sense they are a kind of material, like paint, made to satisfy a demand but not necessarily a particular painting. In that sense, making a support need not be done with an artistic intention, making it more like house painting than painting. Constructing supports, especially ones as complex as Stella’s, has the same character of ‘real world’ practical necessity as the use of the technique and tools of house painting. That Stella gave the shape of the support the kind of emphasis that he did, meant that, as a solution to a painterly problem, it was of the same problematic kind in terms of the medium of painting as house painting.

Preface to Stripe Painting

So far I have discussed Stella’s Black and Aluminium Paintings in terms of their embeddedness with respect to two kinds of idea which tended to prefigure the manner in which they were represented in discourse, as well as the ways they were made. These were the idea of the expressive self as origin, particularly the version associated with ‘second generation’ gestural abstraction, and the idea of the centrality of the medium in Greenberg’s account of the self-critical development of modernist painting. In the latter, the medium was less something through which the world was represented, but one side—the describable side—of an artistic double origin, of which the self remained the other. The representation of Stella’s paintings by Andre and by Stella himself subjected these two kinds or aspects of originality to doubt, aiming for an “originality gone dead.”

The question becomes whether the deadened or devalued originality of Stella’s paintings itself constituted a kind of originality. Certainly, Andre’s ‘Preface’ reads like a brief manifesto, the manifesto form being the prime literary manifestation of artistic new beginnings. The purpose of the ‘Preface’ was to prefigure the reading of the Black Paintings. Partly it was designed to
interfere with an anticipated reading in terms of expressiveness or sensitivity, but it was vague, or deliberately ambiguous, about what the correct reading should be. Whereas Stella was “not interested” in “expression or sensitivity,” he was interested in “the necessities of painting.” Originality in its expressive, subjective sense is only evoked to produce the sense of its opposite. But what is this opposite? Stella “found it necessary to paint stripes” and stripes were “the paths of brush on canvas,” or one could say that in order to satisfy the necessities of painting, Stella merely paints, or paints painting. This tautology, where the word ‘painting,’ as a transitive verb, refers to an act and, as a noun, to the object of that act, gave the ‘Preface’ its hermetic quality. To maintain the act of painting “the paths of brush on canvas” required the deliberate forgetting of the tradition of painting as a pictorial art. Although this forgetting can be regarded as paradigmatically modernist in motivation, it would also have been at odds with the emphasis in Greenberg’s modernism on its “continuity.”

There was also, in the ‘Preface,’ a projection into the future. It was asserted that Stella’s paintings were “not symbolic,” they were not “counters passed among people.” By “symbolic,” Andre seems to have intended a range of meanings in the areas of exchange and communicability, whereby something comes to stand for something else or a value. However, in the last two sentences of the ‘Preface’ it appears they take on such a meaning. Stripes are first of all described as the “paths of brush on canvas,” which corresponds to a generally accepted literal meaning of the word ‘path’ as a line along which a thing or a person moves, or the linear remainder of the movement of a thing or person. In the following and final sentence, the word “path” here takes on a figural meaning as a course of action to be followed, the object of which is the abstract value “painting.” This second way of using the word “path” is in the realm of an imagined future and is at odds with the suggestion of the primacy of the material or technical aspects of painting. It is also what gives the ‘Preface’ its defining rhetorical assertion, and perhaps signals a temptation to give back meaning to something from which it had been taken.

85 Ibid., pp. 92-93.
There is a sense then in which "originality gone dead" becomes itself a new origin from which painting can start anew, with the 'Preface' defining painting as extrasubjective, exterior and material. Yet, in practice, there would be the problem of how to reproduce this prefigured origin. In language, it is possible to assert that something is, for example, "not symbolic." "Symbolic" remains as a meaning which is negated, the adding of "not" does not make it disappear. How would saying "not" translate into painting? This is a problem that relates to the one briefly raised in the last chapter with reference to Adorno—the necessity of a negation of meaning “take[ing] shape as a negative” rather than lapsing into mere meaninglessness. In an art that took on the appearance of literalness as a negation of the more- or other-than-literal, it would be necessary to determine how the literalness was meant, subjectively, if the literalness was to be meaningful in Adorno’s sense.

Andre seemed aware of the problem of saying 'not' in painting when, in a dialogue composed with Frampton in November 1962, he wrote:

Frank Stella insists that thumb print expressionism is an inherently inferior style. The irony of his position is that Frank Stella’s stripes are generated by his thumb print brushing.86

The phrase “thumb print” was used to suggest the ways that works of art were made by hand, and thereby signified the self of the maker, like a signature. Stella thought that the expressionism he had in mind was inferior because it signified the self in this way, indeed presumably because it exaggerated this quality. He, in contrast, had wanted “none of himself” in his painting. However, Andre suggested that Stella’s painting continued to signify his self by his action of brushing, so that to have “none of himself” in his painting—to say “not”—turned out to be an impossibility.

86 Andre and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, p. 43.
Andre characterized this situation as ironic. But he meant irony as something observed rather than as an attitude or mode of expression, in the sense that Grace Hartigan meant it when she complained of the “expression of my generation, which turns to irony...” The trope of irony has a long history in which its usage as a concept has changed considerably. In its simplest form irony occurs when one thing is said and another thing, usually the opposite, is meant, and as such is usually classified as a trope, a deviation from literal meaning. The word derives from the Greek term eironeia, meaning a way of speaking in understatement or self-deprecation to strengthen the listener’s understanding of the intended meaning by forcing them into an act of reflection, so that the eiron, the speaker, “appears to be less than what he is, and the reader’s [or listener’s] experience of the “irony” is his discovery that what is being said is more than it first appears.”

In this sense irony was a mode of expression directed towards a particular rhetorical end. Because irony consisted of a kind of concealing of what was really meant, it sometimes took on connotations which linked it to lying, where both share a common notion of an intended deceit. In Hartigan’s statement for Alfred Leslie, the kind of expression which “turns to irony” was opposed to the “true and controlled passion” manifested in Leslie’s paintings, suggesting that, as a mode of expression it was dispassionate or distanced, somehow false or dishonest. There was the further suggestion that irony (or rhetoric) denied the communicability of passion that was capable of “moving” Hartigan.

In the Romantic era, however, the concept of irony underwent some significant changes. It was posited that irony need not be a mode of expression, but could be seen in sequences of events, or in states of being; it was these that forced the necessary act of reflection. An ironic state of things was sometimes universalized and seen in metaphysical terms as a distinctively human predicament. This philosophical view of the ironic consciousness represented what D. C. Muecke called a general irony, which was “life itself or any general

88 This kind of irony is termed ‘instrumental irony’ by D. C. Muecke, in Irony and the Ironic (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 20.
aspect of life seen as fundamentally and inescapably an ironic state of affairs." 89  

Irony seen in this way could be said to rely on an act of interpretation rather than a kind of expression. An example given by Wayne C. Booth of a more limited kind of interpreted irony was the inscription ‘Arbeit macht frei’ which was wrought in iron over the gates of Auschwitz, where a knowledge of the historical context forces the interpretation that in such a place work did not make one free. 90  

(One of Stella’s Black Paintings was entitled Arbeit Macht Frei, which was evidence, Anna C. Chave has suggested, that Stella was “fascinated by... contradictory or unstable signs,” a fascination which seems confirmed by other choices of title. 91)  

Andre’s view of the irony of Stella’s position, that what he regarded as inferior was something from which he could not escape in his own painting, was of this second kind, irony as observed or interpreted.

Irony can be defined in terms of a reflection on a particular state of things or a ‘proper’ or literal meaning. This act of reflection works by seeing or seeking opposing states of things or meanings, according to context. It can be regarded as a critical activity which finds that the opposing meanings or states of things work just as well as, or are truer than, what was first understood or seen. In theory, every irony must have a subject who takes a state of things or meaning for granted and who does not reflect on them. The opposite of irony is therefore the failure to reflect. Alazony was the opposite of the Greek eironeia, and referred to the “confident unawareness” 92 of the alazon that they were the victim of an irony. In Greek comedy, irony was played out between a character, the eiron, who appeared simpleminded or naive but who was really clever, and

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89 D. C. Muecke, The Compass of Irony (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 120.
91 Anna C. Chave, ‘Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,’ p. 48. Chave also points out that the “glamorous titles of two other Black Paintings, Arundel Castle and Morro Castle, also conceal grim allusions”, referring to a Brooklyn apartment building and a disastrous fire on an American steamer. Chave goes on, however, to state that the titles which make reference to Nazism (Die Fahne Hoch! and Arbeit Macht Frei) suggest that the Black Paintings are “abstract images of totalitarianism” (p. 49), and, like Minimalism in general, are guilty of reproducing “power discourses” (p. 56). The problem with this conclusion is that it takes the significations of the titles at face value, rather than enquiring into what had earlier been the “contradictory or unstable” nature of these same significations. In other words, the conclusion seems not to take into account the possibility of a difference between saying one thing and meaning another.
92 Muecke, Irony and the Ironic, p. 37.
another character, the alazon, who appeared clever but whose real 
simplemindedness was revealed by the eiron. Irony involves two kinds of 
subjectivity, which undergo a reversal in terms of superiority and inferiority. 
Andre’s interpretation of Stella’s position as ironic had Stella as the unreflective 
subject, unaware of the impossibility of having none of his self in his painting, 
and Andre himself as having the superior awareness of this impossibility. 

In the dialogue, after Andre’s interpretation of the irony of Stella’s 
position, there followed an exchange between Andre and Frampton which 
increases the complexity of this interpretation, and the irony. First of all 
Frampton responded to Andre’s point by writing that he thought Stella had 
“deliberately eliminated from his paintings every element a human being might 
find satisfying in the act of painting.” Andre disagreed, writing that “[h]is 
brush stroke is the house painter’s... Frank typically disguises his humanity with 
the appearances of a crystalline habit.” Andre continued to insist on the 
necessity of Stella’s brush strokes signifying his own activity of making the 
painting. This activity was not expressionist, but nevertheless still involved 
Stella’s self, but in the form of the house painter. Whereas Frampton had 
suggested that Stella had “eliminated” his humanity, Andre preferred to think 
that he had “disguise[d]” it through the “crystalline habit” of house painting. 
Stella’s “thumb print brushing” was associated with that of the house painter, 
which changed its connotations. It suggested not only an intentional act on the 
part of Stella, which lessened the sense of his unawareness, but also that hand- 
madeness as such could be regarded as an inescapable and ironic state of things. 
Certainly, the remarks by Andre came during a discussion of a particular 
problem of making works of art—whether it was better to use a predetermined 
form (such as a mould, or even an idea) to make a work of art, or whether it 
was better to allow the material to form itself. The problem was that the latter 
resulted in formlessness, whilst the former raised the question of whether or not 
the predetermined form was the work of art, not what came out of it.

93 Andre and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, p. 43.
94 Ibid., p. 44.
95 Ibid., pp. 42-43.
This ironic state of affairs can be posed in relation to the "irony" attributed by Thierry de Duve to the story of how Greenberg's account of the self-criticism of modernist painting in terms of the specificity of its medium, in particular its quality of flatness, ended up by admitting that this flatness need not be painted, thus negating the specificity of the medium. A "stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture." The focus on the medium of paint as if it were something in its own right results in its expendability—some other thing will do just as well. In general terms, the ironic state of affairs was that whatever the intention or will involved in making a work of art, it had to be made in terms of something else with its own properties.

Duplication of self and material possibility

An ironic state of things could be seen as a kind of ground for Stella's practice. Yet Stella had also to work with this ironic state of things. The interpretation of irony depends on an act of consciousness, and this act of consciousness would have entered into Stella's mode of working. In this act of consciousness, the two figures of the eiron and the alazon effectively take on a relation within consciousness. The act creates two kinds of self, or a self-duplication. One is an 'original' self immersed in the world, but nevertheless believing itself to be superior to it, which corresponds to the alazon. The other is a kind of self distanced from the world, and aware of the delusion of the 'original' self, which corresponds to the eiron. Paul de Man, who considered irony in these terms in his 1969 essay 'The Rhetoric of Temporality,' wrote that the artist or philosopher is especially able to gain this consciousness, this ironic distance from his or her own self, through a particular conception of language. The 'original' self, the alazon, treated language as "a tool by means of which the

97 See Fred Orton, 'The Plain Sense of Things' (unpublished paper), for an account of the self-consciousness of Stella's practice regarding its "peculiar ambiguity or undecidability in relation to formalism and burgeoning literalism." The "cognitive value" of this undecidability lay in its demonstration, by refusing to prioritize either, that there could be no literality without the involvement of the figural.
heterogeneous material of experience is more-or-less adequately made to fit.” The ironic self, on the other hand, treated language itself as material; the stress was on the “technicality of... [the ironist’s] action.”98 De Man went on to write:

The reflective disjunction [constitutive of irony] not only occurs by means of language as a privileged category, but it transfers the self out of the empirical world into a world constituted out of, and in, language—a language that it finds in the world like one entity among others, but that remains unique in being the only entity by means of which it can differentiate itself from the world. Language thus conceived divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self-definition.99

According to de Man, that the “empirical self” (the alazon) feels itself superior to the world is really a (false) substitute for a knowledge of the self’s radical difference from the world. This is the knowledge belonging to the ironic self, the self which has removed itself from the world.

What makes the act of consciousness which results in this self-duplication specifically ironic is that it takes place in connection with a ‘fall,’ that is, a loss of the sense of superiority over the world. The ironic self is created out of a reflection on the fall of the empirical self.100 In Stella’s case, his particular kind of self-awareness would have been the result of a reflection on the nature of his own alazony, the potential expressiveness of his own touch. In the act of self-expression, the self maintains its integrity throughout. No code or figure intervenes, so that the relation between the self and the material—paint or painterly language—by which it realizes itself is immediate and is one in which the material is completely in the service of this self. Stella came to realize, or

100 Ibid., p. 214.
came to imagine, that the material had its own mode of existence beyond its existence as a medium, and that it suggested its own possibilities even though it would be him that would realize them.\textsuperscript{101} Stella had evidently come to have a view of the language of painting that was unusually related to its ‘materiality.’ In Andre’s ‘Preface to Stripe Painting,’ Stella was described as painting stripes, as painting “the paths of brush on canvas.” Hollis Frampton said: “Stripes are the whole content of Stella’s paintings.”\textsuperscript{102} But since he used the “house painter’s techniques and tools,” was he house-painting or painting house-painting? In both cases, the ‘proper’ or conventional meaning of painting is ironized by the evocation of a context in which practical, ‘real world’ painting was linked to ‘artistic’ painting, almost as if it was a simple matter of reference to the polysemic potential of the word ‘painting.’ At a symposium held in early 1966 in San Francisco, Stella was interviewed by Phillip Leider, the editor of \textit{Artforum}. There, he said of house painting that it was:

\begin{quote}
just another way of painting... but it's still painting, its putting material on a surface, and when you put it on a wall you use a certain kind of tool; you have a certain dead-pan way of painting. It seemed to me that it was economical, it was also direct...\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

The ‘authority’ for this attitude would have been a concern with the material necessities of painting where these were literal-mindedly identified with its formal necessities. Stella’s literal-mindedness can be identified with the figure of the \textit{eiron}, the ironic self. In 1964, he had said:

\begin{quote}
I knew a wise guy who used to make fun of my painting, but he didn’t like the Abstract Expressionists either. He said they would be good painters if only they could keep the paint as good as it was in the can. And that’s what I tried to do. I tried to keep\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} “...you have a brush and you’ve got paint on the brush, and you ask yourself why you’re doing whatever it is you’re doing, what inflection you’re actually going to make with the brush and with the paint that’s on the end of the brush. It’s like handwriting. And I found out that I didn’t have anything to say in those terms. I didn’t want to make variations; I didn’t want to record a path. I wanted to get the paint out of the can and onto the canvas.” Stella, in Bruce Glaser (interviewer), ‘Questions to Stella and Judd’ (1966), in Battcock, \textit{Minimal Art}, p. 157.


\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Current Moment in Art II} (my transcription).
Stella adopted the "wise guy" position, turning this figure from alazon to eiron, thereby effecting his ironic statement on Abstract Expressionism.

At the San Francisco symposium, Stella was asked about the negativity of his stripe paintings. Stella's response moved increasingly in the direction of an awareness of a duplication of self in his painting.

I don't stress negative things, or I don't get involved in negative issues, except when I seem to be forced into them by what's happening on my paintings as I'm working on them, as I'm working through the problems that I have to work through. [...] Artists are people who work in things or problems. You get backed into corners, you get backed into situations that you don't want to be in and at certain times it seems that there's no way out, and sometimes there really is no way out. [...] Sometimes you have to work around it, and nobody likes to be forced, nobody likes to be pushed, and in particular it almost seems like, almost insane or stupid to be pushed around by what you're doing yourself.

And yet some of the most significant aspects of Stella's practice arose from his allowing himself to be pushed around by what he was doing.

When Stella made the stretchers for the Aluminium Paintings, he made them to fit the drawings that he had already made. The drawings suggested leftover areas if made to fit a conventional rectangular or square stretcher, so he constructed stretchers which left out these areas. Stella had described this solution as a "kind of simpleminded thing." It could equally be characterized as literal-mindedness. The drawing was taken literally, as if the form represented there was already "unalterably real." Of course, this literal-mindedness had complicated repercussions where the literalness of the support was concerned—as noted, the stretchers would have been difficult to construct and it would have been difficult to stretch the canvas over them. There resulted a kind of reciprocity between the pattern of stripes and the shape of the support, which

104 Glaser, 'Questions to Stella and Judd,' in Battcock, Minimal Art, p. 157.
105 Current Moment in Art II (my transcription).
gave the latter more prominence than it would otherwise, or normally, have, so much so that sometimes the support seemed prior to what it supported. This was to give priority to the aspect of making paintings that has the character of practical, 'real world,' purposefulness. It is possible too that the idea of the shaped canvas came to seem possible because of the practice of butt-ending the wood—the "easiest" and "most economical" way—to make the stretchers for the Black Paintings. The mode of painting that Stella adopted was also one which had the character of a 'real world' purposefulness. House painting was "economical" and "direct," and not only entailed the use of a certain kind of brush and way of applying the paint, but also implied a different mode of existence of the brushstroke. The kinds of paint, enamel and aluminium, were also deflected from their usual purposes. In the period around 1959-60, Stella appears constantly to be aware of such divergences of material possibility in painting. It is because of this that the best way to characterize Stella's attitude to painting during this time seems to be that of an ironic literal-mindedness.
3. Michael Fried’s Literalism; The Literal as Figured

Although for Fried the early stripe paintings of Stella were not literalist, he recognized that they were crucial to the literalist position. In this chapter, I argue that Fried’s attribution of literalness and coining of the term ‘literalist’ was bound up with his understanding of modernism, which gave the term an historical complexity that got lost in later interpretations. From there, I move on to discuss the wider theoretical implications of the attribution of literalness and the necessity of its opposition to the figural. I examine the conception of ‘reality’ that the opposition between the literal and the figural implies, and the ‘deconstruction’ whereby the literal is always a special case of the figural, i.e. itself a trope. I suggest that it may be the failure to consider the literal in figural terms which explains the ambivalence of interpretations which seek to define the critical value of Minimal Art.

Fried’s modernism as a project

Michael Fried’s art criticism of the mid-1960s, though it made use of the phenomenology of perception, all times kept in contact with a sense that modernist works of art were instances in a kind of project, or tradition. Merleau-Ponty also provided certain justifications for this latter sense, but these were taken from a later phase of his thought which, although still concerned with the definition of lived perspective, had language and the sense of history as its main preoccupations. Language and historical sense were also important for Fried’s characterization of Minimal Art as “literalist,” and a consideration of these makes for a more complex view of “literalist art” than that of an art
concerned merely with the literal as such. In the first half of this chapter, I will try to follow the complexities of Fried's understanding of modernism as a project and of how literalist art was seen as setting itself apart, in his major essays from 1965 and 1966.

Fried's catalogue essay for the exhibition *Three American Painters*, held at the Fogg Art Museum in 1965, was concerned with situating the paintings of Noland, Olitski and Stella into an account of the development of modernist painting, most particularly an account of its recent developments in America. In the first, theoretical part of this essay, Fried wrote that this development could be "characterized in terms of the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality—or of reality from the power of painting to represent it—in favour of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself." This withdrawal had an historical development which was the result of the decisions of painters over time to engage with the requirement that modernist painting be a criticism of its formal means, a development which, although only perceived in retrospect by the historian or critic, nevertheless constituted a kind of project. It was this sense of a project which determined painterly decisions and actions.

Fried always made a point of declaring his debt to the writings of Greenberg. In the last chapter, on Stella’s stripe paintings, I mentioned the central importance of the notion of medium for Greenberg in accounting for the developmental logic of modern painting. In essays such as ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960) and ‘After Abstract Expressionism’ (1962) (which, because it was published in an art magazine, *Art International*, probably had a greater effect in the early 1960s on other art critics and artists), Greenberg laid out his highly influential view of what he saw as the “infra-logic of modernist art."  

2 This “withdrawal" was spoken about a couple of pages later as painting’s gradual freeing of itself from the "concerns, aims and ideals" (in short, the ideology) of bourgeois society. Fried, *Three American Painters*, p. 5.  
3 Ibid., p. 6.  
"infra-logic" was characterized as a "self-criticism," by which what was particular to each art, how it defined itself, would be determined. In the case of painting, what had been previously thought to be its limitations, its flatness, the shape of the support and the properties of paint itself, became the aspects by which painting could secure its identity as a medium. In particular, for Greenberg, it was flatness which chiefly defined painting, and so it was the condition of flatness towards which painting "oriented itself." Although painting "oriented itself" towards flatness, this flatness could not be an absolute condition of painting. Greenberg pointed out that "[t]he first mark made on a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness," which meant that the flatness which painting aimed at was rather a kind of virtual flatness cognizant of its difference from the literal flatness of the canvas support.5 Even as modernist paintings defined themselves against flatness, they were always more- or other-than-literal by virtue of their special address to the sense of sight. Fried stressed that what Greenberg regarded as a self-critical imperative was determined by the decisions of individuals to meet this imperative. In his defence of Greenberg against Hilton Kramer's review of Art and Culture (Greenberg's collection of essays, published in 1961), where Greenberg was criticized for positing "immutable laws" which governed the development of painting, Fried said that the "logic" was perceived "only in retrospect" and only as a "result" of what were previously the decisions of individuals.6 This was important, because it acknowledged that individuals could also refuse, or fail, to respond to the imperative of modernism.

In this part of the text, Fried specifically referred to Merleau-Ponty's book Adventures of the Dialectic (1955), and, in all likelihood, he was thinking of Merleau-Ponty's reading, in that book, of Lukács' History and Class Consciousness (1923), to which Fried also referred.7 Merleau-Ponty appropriated Lukács idea of a social "totality," but relativized it so that a "work of totalization," a

5 Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' (1960), in Ibid., pp. 86-87, 90.
6 Fried, Three American Painters, p. 6.
7 Fried's reference was to Merleau-Ponty's book in its original French (Les aventures de la dialectique). He also referred to a French translation from 1960 of Lukács' book (Histoire et conscience de classe). Neither book at that time was available in an English translation.
 theorization, was undertaken from a lived perspective. This theorization determined political action in an analogous way to the determination of painterly action by modernism conceived as a project. In *Three American Painters*, Fried was careful to show that each of the painters interpreted and acted on the history of their medium—its tradition—in different ways; the commitment to the project was made by the individual.

Merleau-Ponty’s 1952 essay ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ was also referred to at several points in Fried’s text, most usually where a sense of history or language was at issue. This essay has relevance not only for Fried’s definition of modernist art, but also for what Fried came to regard as its antithesis, literalist art. In terms of modernism, Fried was particularly interested in the relation between action and tradition. He quoted Merleau-Ponty’s essay in the context of a discussion of Stella: “A man is judged neither by his intention nor by his act, but by whether or not he has been able to infuse his deeds with values.” Fried continued: “The values in Stella’s case are pictorial values; and they are to be found, or found wanting, only in one’s first-hand experience of the paintings in question.” The experience of a modernist painting was therefore, for Fried, one which took it into a sense of value arising

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8 In this way Merleau-Ponty linked the sense of history with that of perception: “It [the main current of history] reveals itself only through asymmetries, vestiges, diversions, and regressions. It is comparable to the sense of perceived things, to those reliefs which take form only from a certain point of view and never absolutely exclude other modes of perception.” M. Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955), translated by Joseph Bien (Evans: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 39. Merleau-Ponty’s book was written against what he saw as the dogmatism of Soviet communism, and contained a lengthy critique of a recent defence of communism by Sartre.

9 This is Fried talking about Noland later in the essay: “it is chiefly through transformations of pictorial structure based on an act of perpetual radical criticism both of his own art and what he takes to be the art of his time most relevant to his own situation that Noland’s commitment to modernism expresses itself most powerfully.” Fried, *Three American Painters*, p. 24.


11 Fried, *Three American Painters*, p. 44. The translation was Fried’s. The quote from Merleau-Ponty comes during a discussion of Hegel’s thinking on action in *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*.

12 Ibid.
from a tradition, and not merely the aspect it presented to perception, yet it was still "one's first-hand experience," still from a lived perspective.

Abstract painting and indirect language

'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence' began with an account of Saussure's theory of language, which provided the implicit theme of the essay as a whole. Merleau-Ponty's reading of Saussure started with the idea that language was defined as a whole from its simplest oppositions, and that it was built up, or structured, by an inward elaboration, or "internal articulation." For this reason, language was "indirect or allusive"; it referred to and expressed the world, but only by virtue of being itself a self-contained universe and capable of taking into itself things in the world. The possibility of originating new meanings therefore was bound up with the potentialities of relations within language and not from without: "Language signifies when instead of copying thought it lets itself be taken apart and put together again by thought." To consider language as an "originating operation," as having the potential to produce a new expression, was to consider its background of silence, of purely lateral relations. According to Merleau-Ponty, the referential dimension of language was secondary to its indirectness. "It goes without saying that language is oblique and autonomous, and that its ability to signify a thought or a thing directly is only a secondary power derived from the inner life of language." Nevertheless, language was oriented towards the world in the sense that it partook of the fundamental intentionality of the subjective relation to the world.13

Later in the essay, Merleau-Ponty extended this view of language to abstract painting. When the principle holding together a painting was not its resemblance to any aspect of the world but its "cohesion with itself," it was not the purely subjective which came into play (here Merleau-Ponty was writing against Malraux, the ostensible subject of 'Indirect Language'), but "the allusive

13 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, pp. 40-46.
logic of the perceived world."¹⁴ When a "stroke of the brush" did not describe an objective appearance, it did not signify the self of the painter, but was still continuous with perception, in the sense that it was only on the basis of what was perceived that such gestures can have meaning. Right at the end of Three American Painters, Fried stated that:

> because of its concern with problems intrinsic to itself, modernist painting today is perhaps more desperately involved with aspects of its visual environment than painting has ever been. It is as though there isn't the room any more that would be needed for modernist painting to be pure, to immure itself, even relatively, from its environment. "What replaces the object [in abstract painting] is not the subject, but the allusive logic of the perceived world"—in a world as copiously full and visually sophisticated as our own, Merleau-Ponty's insight is true with a special vengeance."¹⁵

This typically ambiguous phrase of Merleau-Ponty's—"the allusive logic of the perceived world"—was clearly valued by Fried. He had also used it to conclude his 1963 catalogue essay for an exhibition of sculptures by Caro.¹⁶ The phrase appears to turn on something like 'gesture,' in its continuity with perception as an orientation towards the world. It suggested a way of conceiving an abstract or indirect mode of meaning.¹⁷

**Two kinds of historicity**

In 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,' it was the lateral, 'abstract' potentialities of language, by which new areas of meaning were

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¹⁴ Ibid., p. 57.
¹⁵ Fried, Three American Painters, p. 48.
¹⁶ Michael Fried, 'Anthony Caro' (1963), in Art and Objecthood, p. 275.
¹⁷ Another kind of analogy between modernist painting and the non-referential aspects of language was also made earlier in the essay, when Fried pointed to an aspect of Noland’s painting as being "roughly analogous to that of syntax in a verbal language: an aspect, that is, which has to do with how the coloured elements in Noland’s paintings are juxtaposed to one another with the result that they make sense." Fried, Three American Painters, p. 26. Syntactical relations, though, are not the same as the lateral relations of indirect language, which are more like the structural possibilities for a poetic or creative language, though both kinds of relations were evoked by Fried to suggest abstractness. Cf. the discussion of Fried's invoking of syntax in relation to Caro's sculpture in chapter 6 of this dissertation (on Andre).
opened—that is, unknown aspects of the world were taken into language—that allowed for its historical development. However, in this essay, Merleau-Ponty evoked two senses of history which correspond to those evoked by Fried to characterize the opposition between literalist art and modernist painting. Merleau-Ponty defined the living historicity of painters as “the historicity which lives in the painter at work when with a single gesture he links the tradition that he recaptures and the tradition that he founds.”18 ‘Museum’ historicity, the “historicity of death,”19 on the other hand, was ironic or even derisory, and made of misinterpretations, for each age struggles against the others as against aliens by imposing its concerns and perspectives upon them. This historicity is forgetfulness rather than memory; it is dismemberment, ignorance, externality.20

This negative historicity figured in all of Fried’s major essays of 1965-67, becoming increasingly identified with literalist art.

Fried spoke in 1965 of how Stella had “asserted” pictorial values against the “apparent logic of his own development.” This “apparent logic,” he said, could be “fitted neatly into a version of modernism that regards the most advanced painting of the past hundred years as having led to the realization that paintings are nothing more than a particular sub-class of things, invested by tradition with certain conventional characteristics [...] whose arbitrariness, once recognized, argues for their elimination.”21 A few pages further, Fried elaborated on this version, which presented to modernism a “risk of misinterpretation.”22 He explicitly related this view to the neo-Dadaist

18 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 63.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 60. Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of Malraux’ presentation of the entire undertaking of art from all times and from all cultures as a “musée imaginaire,” was essentially that Malraux subordinated the living historicity of painterly acts to ‘museum’ historicity. Le musée imaginaire was one of the volumes of Les voix du silence.
21 Fried, Three American Painters, p. 43.
22 Ibid., p. 47.
attempts to get rid of any distinctions between works of art and things, which he interpreted as an attempt to rid art of "value" or "quality," those qualities which secured the distinct separateness of painting. He also regarded it as dependent on the proper modernist reading (similar to the way that, for Merleau-Ponty, 'museum' historicity depended on living historicity).24

This rival sense of history reappeared in Fried's essay of 1966, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings,'25 which was concerned principally with the necessity for modernist painting to acknowledge the "literal character of the picture support."26 In 'Shape as Form' he acknowledged the importance of Stella's stripe paintings for what he now called a "literalist sensibility," identified explicitly with what was then starting to be called Minimal Art.27 Fried characterized this sensibility as follows:

there are certain younger artists to whose sensibilities all conflict between the literal character of the support and illusion of any kind is intolerable, and for whom, accordingly, the future of art lies in the creation of works that, more than anything else, are wholly literal—in this respect going beyond painting. It should be evident that literalist sensibility is itself a product, or by-product, of the development of modernist painting itself—more accurately, by the increasingly explicit acknowledgment of the literal character of the support that has been central to that development. But it ought to be observed that the literalness isolated and hypostatized in the work of artists like Donald Judd and Larry Bell is by no means the

23 Fried was thinking particularly of the work of John Cage, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. He also, in support of his point, quoted the following from Greenberg's 'After Abstract Expressionism' (1962): "By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as a picture: thus a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture—though not necessarily as a successful one. [...] much more than before lends itself now to being experienced pictorially or in meaningful relation to the pictorial: all sorts of large and small items that used to belong entirely to the realm of the arbitrary and the visually meaningless." Ibid.
24 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, p. 60.
25 Michael Fried, 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings,' Artforum vol. 5 no. 3 (November 1966), pp. 18-27. (The essay is reprinted as 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons' in Fried, Art and Objecthood.)
26 Fried, 'Shape as Form,' p. 18.
27 By November 1966, which was when 'Shape as Form' was first published, Minimal Art had been clearly defined as a movement by a series of exhibitions, including 'Primary Structures,' 'Art in Process,' and '10.'

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same literalness as that acknowledged by advanced painting throughout the past century: it is not the literalness of the support. Moreover, hypostatization is not acknowledgment. The continuing problem of how to acknowledge the literal character of the support—of what counts as that acknowledgment—has been at least as crucial to the development of modernist painting as the fact of its literalness; and this problem has been eliminated, not solved, by the artists in question. Their pieces cannot be said to acknowledge literalness; they simply are literal. And it is hard to see how literalness as such, divorced from the conventions which, from Manet to Noland, Olitski and Stella, have given literalness value and have made it a bearer of conviction, can be experienced as a source of both of these—and what is more, one powerful enough to generate new conventions, a new art.28

Stella’s stripe paintings played a unique role in the literalist misreading of modernism. Because these paintings “[…] represent the most unequivocal and conflictless acknowledgment of literal shape in the history of modernism, they have been crucial to the literalist view […], both because they are seen as extreme instances of a putative development within modernist painting—i.e., the increasingly explicit acknowledgment of literalness per se—and because they help to make that development visible, or anyway arguable, in the first place.”29

The problem with removing the contradiction between illusion and literalness, by making literalness the underlying substance of painting, was that it removed any imperative for change. Change could then only be seen retrospectively as a linear development leading to the present situation—what Fried criticized as a “reductionist conception” of modernism. (This was the conception that Krauss would later criticize, attributing it to Fried.) The elaboration of this criticism in a footnote, where Fried took issue with the idea that the aim of modernist painting was to realize an unchanging essence, was obviously directed at Greenberg’s formulations in ‘Modernist Painting’ and ‘After Abstract Expressionism,’ which were open to such a reading, as Greenberg himself

28 Fried, ‘Shape as Form,’ p. 22.
29 Ibid.
acknowledged. Greenberg’s discussions of the “literal” in art, however, always stressed that the literal—the “literal surface” or “literal flatness” of painting, for example—could not be a value in itself, but was always there to reinforce or to trouble any painted depiction of flatness or of the painted illusion of depth.

Two kinds of literalness

In the passage quoted above, there was a definite distinction made between what Fried called “literalness per se” or “literalness as such” and literalness as an attribute of the support, of painting (“...the literalness isolated and hypostatized in the work of artists like Donald Judd and Larry Bell is by no means the same literalness as that acknowledged by advanced painting throughout the past century: it is not the literalness of the support.”) These were two different literalnesses, with different modes of existence. One was constituted (“given... value”) from within, or had been taken up into, painting; it was figured in and through painting. The other, literalness as such, was simply the oblivious factual existence of the painting as a thing, and as such fell outside the concerns of painting. This opposition is further complicated when one considers that the concern with the literal as such which Fried attributed to the literalists was itself a “misinterpretation” of the concerns of modernist painting, and therefore also derived from the side of art.

Literalism

Fried had first coined the term ‘literalist’ in 1966 to describe, and

30 Ibid., pp. 24, 27 n. 11. Greenberg denied that he “advocate[d]” the reduction he described in a note appended to a reprint of ‘Modernist Painting.’ The Collected Essays and Criticism (vol. 4), pp. 93-94.
31 See, for example, Clement Greenberg, ‘Collage’ (1959), in Art and Culture: Critical Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 70-83.
denigrate, the “art,” the “sensibility,” the “position,” and the “point of view” of the Minimalists. It is worth briefly considering some changes in terminology prior to this term being adopted. In 1962, Fried wrote (in a review) that Stella’s aim in producing his series of stripe paintings was to “make a painting that looks like a thing.” The “looks like” was important; a painting was not a thing, although it could be regarded as having some of the visible qualities of one (what Fried called its “thing-nature”). What Stella aimed for was an overall effect, or illusion, of thingness in which use was made of the painting’s actual thingness—the stripe pattern appearing to be determined by the shape of the canvas. The word ‘literal’ that Fried began to employ instead of “thinglike”—it appeared in the Three American Painters essay—was doubtless meant to complicate the opposition by giving it a ‘poetic’ character, so that the opposition became that between the literal, or non-‘poetic,’ and the figural, or ‘poetic’ (meaning an intensified sense of reality achieved through the use of metaphor, etc.). By using the word ‘literal,’ the opposition between actual thingness and illusion was implicitly recast at the level of language and meaning, of reading and misreading. The word ‘literal’ appeared at more or less the same time as the awareness of Stella’s “apparent” place in a misreading of the modernist tradition.

It was in ‘Shape as Form’ that Fried added the suffix ‘-ist’ to ‘literal’ to describe a “sensibility,” a “view,” and a “position” which determined the actual

33 All these words and phrases were preceded by the word ‘literalist’ in Fried, ‘Shape as Form,’ and in Fried, ‘Art and Objecthood,’ Artforum vol. 5 no. 10 (Summer 1967), p. 15. (The latter essay is also reprinted in Fried, Art and Objecthood.)
35 Michael Fried, ‘Frank Stella’ (1963), in Art and Objecthood, p. 277. Fried’s earliest consideration of the “thing-nature” of Stella’s stripe paintings, and in particular what he took to be the constructivist “aspiration” behind them, probably arose through conversation with Stella, whose ideas in turn would have registered his own conversation with his friend, Carl Andre. Andre wrote around the same time: “Frank Stella is a Constructivist. He makes paintings by combining identical, discrete units. [etc.]” Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), p. 37. See chapter 2.
37 The word ‘literal’ was not uncommon as a descriptive term at the time. It was used by, among others, Greenberg, Hilton Kramer and Judd. Fried probably appropriated the word from Greenberg. As far as I know, the use of the word ‘literalist’ was particular to Fried.
practices and ideas of certain artists, of which Judd was the "foremost ideologist." The "ideological" character of literalist art was reiterated in 1967, in Fried's 'Art and Objecthood.' Essentially, it was ideological because it was not grounded in experience; literalist art exemplified a position that could be, and was, "formulated in words." Because, as Fried argued, the literalist position set itself in relation to its own misreading of the development of modernist art, its literalism was not only that of the thing-nature of art objects, but also that of its own mode of reading. Modernist works of art, on the other hand, were more like articulations of different "existential possibilities" and implied a different kind of sensibility. In 'Art and Objecthood,' he claimed that the possibility of "objecthood," or literalness as such, had become more the "expression of a general and pervasive condition" belonging to the "history... of sensibility," against which modernist painting had to be, at any given moment, "capable of compelling conviction."

The literalness as such (the objecthood) of literalist art elicited a kind of perception attuned to its actualness. "Literalist sensibility... is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work." In chapter 1, I mentioned how the literalness of situation was made to correspond to the literalness of the sense of time involved in the experience of literalist art. This sense of time, however, was opposed to the sense of history that Fried conceived, with reference to 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,' as the accumulation of actions—it was historical time objectified. Fried contrasted this objectified sense of time, time as isolated, with that of the experience of a modernist work of art: "It is as though one's experience of [modernist painting and sculpture] has no duration[...] because at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest." This being manifest at every moment was experienced as "a kind of

38 Fried, 'Shape as Form,' pp. 22, 27 n. 8.
39 Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' p. 12.
40 Ibid.
41 Fried used this phrase to describe the ways that Stella's irregular polygons created ambiguities between the literal and illusive. 'Shape as Form,' p. 24.
42 Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' p. 12.
43 Ibid., p. 15
instantaneousness." 44 The conditionals warned against this instantaneousness being taken literally—it did not mean that a modernist painting or sculpture was experienced "in no time at all." Rather, what is recalled is that this instantaneousness applied to an action conceived in the dialectical terms that Fried outlined in Three American Painters, as a kind of articulation, centred on the self, of a past and a future.

Fried’s negative characterization of the experience of literalist art in terms of the perception of the apparent literalness of situation and duration, was effectively reversed, in terms of value, by Krauss in her phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art, which I discussed in chapter 1.45 What got lost in Krauss’s interpretation was the sense of literalist art, in ‘Shape as Form,’ as a particular reading of modernism, a “misinterpretation.” With this sense of “misinterpretation,” one starts to understand the negative aspect of the work of literalists such as Judd, which could be characterized as that of the wilfully literal-minded misreading of the metaphorical character of art, of taking metaphor literally. In modernism, the separateness of art depended on it being more or other than literal. However, the literalness that the literalists produced out of this “misinterpretation” could not be the same as the literalness transcended in modernism since it too was the result of an artistic act.

**Literal meaning**

I have been discussing the complex nature of the literal, as a quality which has been used to define Minimal Art. As the literal as such, it was a quality which likened Minimal art objects to ordinary things, to objective appearances,

44 Ibid.

45 This is perhaps the place to signal an interesting exchange between Fried and Krauss regarding the Saussurian characterization of language as a structure of differences without positive terms. The relevant references are: ‘Theories of Art after Minimalism and Pop: Discussion,’ in Hal Foster (editor), *Discussions in Contemporary Culture* 1 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), pp. 71-75, 87; Rosalind Krauss, ‘Using Language to do Business as Usual,’ in Norman Bryson *et al* (editors), *Visual Theory: Painting and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 87-93; and Fried, ‘An Introduction to My Art Criticism,’ in *Art and Objecthood*, pp. 60-61 n. 35. What was notable in the exchange was the way it moved from a concern with the nature of experience (with whether it could be one of plenitude or whether it was necessarily one of difference) to the writing, or representation, of experience.
and so on. As a literalist art, Minimal Art was a "misinterpretation" of the nonliteral, figural nature of art. To describe a work of art as literal was clearly a very complicated issue, but what does the word mean? In this second half of the chapter, I will be examining the implications of the word 'literal' and the difficulties inherent in taking it as a definite, substantive term. Apart from Fried's coining of the term 'literalist,' it was usually used in critical discourse to describe the thing-nature or matter of factness of the objects being described, such as Greenberg's contrast between "undepicted" or "literal flatness" and "depicted flatness." This corresponds to a common, loose, definition of the literal as how something is in actuality. In this sense, the literal could be regarded as a property of a thing, its as-it-isness. The word, however, literally means 'of the letter' or 'of letters.' The *Oxford English Dictionary* puts the meaning of the 'literal' as "[p]ertaining to the 'letter' of scripture," and "[h]ence, by extension, applied to the etymological or the relatively primary sense of a word, or to the sense expressed by the actual wording of a passage, as distinguished from any metaphorical or merely suggested meaning." So the literal also refers to words in their usual or direct sense, as they convey literal, non-metaphorical meaning. This definition of the literal would therefore acknowledge that the literal is not so much a property of things, but a way of saying or meaning or reading things, in the most direct way, according to how the things meant are in actuality. It is this sense that I tried to incorporate into the earlier discussion of Stella (chapter 2) when I characterized his approach as one of an ironic literal-mindedness. 'Literal-minded' (in the *Oxford English Dictionary*) means "characteristic of one who takes a matter-of-fact or unimaginative view of things." From, say, an allegorist's point of view, literal-mindedness may, of course, describe a reader who was only understanding the superficial meaning of a text. However, a deliberate literal-mindedness that is conscious of the literality of a text as text, in terms of the processes by which a text is understood, would not be of this mystified kind.47 I argued that one

46 For example, Greenberg, 'Collage,' in *Art and Culture*.
47 For the distinction between "lazy" literal-minded reading, and reading 'literally,' in the sense of understanding text as text, see Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), pp. 67-68.
aspect of Stella's practice was that he projected a sense of his 'meaning' his materials and technique, his mode of painting, in a 'matter-of-fact' way, which in the context of the ways in which painting was then commonly understood could only be seen in terms of a reversal characteristic of an ironic and demystified consciousness.

In language, the literal meaning of a word, as usually understood, is one which most directly refers to a thing, or aspect of the world, as it is. Literal meaning is oriented towards reality. It is the denotative, direct, use of a word or set of words to mean something without the detours, substitutions or reversals of figures and tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, and so on). Figures and tropes, in contrast, are connotative, they refer to things indirectly, from a further remove. The distinction between the literal and the figural, with one meaning directly and the other indirectly, presupposes a coherent and single 'reality,' in relation to which the directness or indirectness of meaning can be measured. Thus literal meaning implies the substantiality and 'real' existence of what it refers to, whereas figural meaning implies the relative insubstantiality of language. 'Literalness' as a property would similarly suggest the substantiality and 'real' existence of the object concerned.

The speech-act philosopher John R. Searle has argued, however, that literal meaning as such cannot be considered completely context-free, that the possibility of literal meaning depends on various assumptions that are not part of the semantic range of a given statement. For Searle, the upshot of this realization of the "relativity" (as opposed to absoluteness) of literal meaning was not to throw the possibility of literal meaning into question, or that of a coherent 'reality,' but to acknowledge that the nature of the assumptions on which literal meaning depended were, in the end, to do with perception and belief.48

According to this view, the orientation of literal meaning to 'reality' corresponded to the orientation of what Searle called "intentional states" in general, by which he meant "mental states such as belief or desire that are

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directed at or about objects and states of affairs in the world."49 To attribute any kind of priority to literal meaning, then, would necessarily involve assumptions regarding the nature of ‘reality,’ ‘meaning,’ and so on.

The literal as trope

However, as Derrida and de Man have shown, the priority of literal over figural meaning can be undermined if the figural is shown to be the condition of all language; the literal then becomes dependent on the figural. The writings of Derrida and de Man are usually classed under the heading of deconstruction, which describes a practice of reading and interpreting texts whereby structures of thought which hierarchize opposing terms, privileging one over the other, are subjected to doubt and displacement through the identifying of contradictions which admit no resolution.50 The privileging of the literal over the figural is a principal target of deconstruction, which focusses on the unsettling implications of rhetorical tropes and figures for any claims to a self-evident or direct, literal meaning. Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s The Essay on the Origin of Languages in Of Grammatology (1967), for instance, showed that Rousseau considered language to be originally figural, and that its development consisted of overcoming this figurality to arrive at a literal, more impersonal language.51 Derrida argued that in spite of this insight, Rousseau reasserted the priority of the literal in writing of the original figurality of language as inseparable from what could be defined as the literalness of “passion.” Derrida showed, however, that the object of the “passion” of which Rousseau spoke could only be expressed by way of a metaphor with no prior literal meaning.52

Another essay by Derrida, ‘White Mythology’ (1971), elaborated at length on the

49 Ibid., pp. 130-31.
52 Ibid., p. 276: “Nevertheless, what we interpret as literal expression in the perception and designation of giants [‘giants’ as a “literal expression of... fear”], remains a metaphor that is preceded by nothing either in experience or in language. Since speech does not pass through reference to an object, the fact that “giant” is literal as sign of fear not only does not prevent, but on the contrary implies, that it should be nonliteral or metaphoric as sign of the object.”
inseparability of metaphor from philosophical discourse. The beginning of the
easy, for example, made a similar point to that made in relation to Rousseau.
There, Derrida (in the course of a reading of Anatole France's *The Garden of
Epicurus*) described the movement in philosophical language whereby the
"sensory figure" which defined language at its first moment comes to be
"effaced," or metaphorically "displace[d]" in the "philosophical concept," which,
for its part, forgets this displacement and sees the first moment of language as
"proper meaning."53

To make a similar point in his essay 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche), de
Man referred to an assertion that Nietzsche made which reversed the assumed
priority of the literal. For Nietzsche, de Man wrote,

> tropes are not understood aesthetically, as ornament, nor are they understood
> semantically as a figurative meaning that derives from literal, proper denomination.
> Rather, the reverse is the case. The trope is not a derived, marginal, or aberrant form
> of language but the linguistic paradigm par excellence.54

Language was seen as fundamentally figural, which implied that the assertion of
literal 'truths' resulted from a forgetting of this figurality. De Man quoted
Nietzsche's answer to his own question "What is truth?": "A moving army of
metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms... Truths are illusions whose
illusionary nature has been forgotten, metaphors that have been used up and
have lost their imprint and that now operate as mere metal, no longer as
coins."55 De Man called this forgetting of the metaphorical quality of all
language a "false literalism." In this way of seeing things, the literal became a

of Philosophy* (1972), translated by Alan Bass (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1982),
54 Paul de Man, 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche), in *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in
Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979),
p. 105. De Man quoted Nietzsche as follows: "language is itself the result of purely rhetorical
tricks and devices [...] Tropes are not something that can be added or subtracted at will; they
are its truest nature. There is no such thing as a proper meaning that can be communicated only
in certain particular cases." pp. 106-7.
55 Ibid., pp. 110-11. This quote from Nietzsche also appears in 'White Mythology,' p. 217.
Derrida elaborates extensively on the analogy with money, particularly in terms of the
concept of usury.
figuring of the already figural, a figure which is defined by the denial of its own figuredness.56

The privileging of the literal as the mode of language which directly represents 'reality,' or, by inference, as the mode of existence of objects in terms of their matter-of-factness, is subjected to doubt in these analyses. The claim that meaning is literal would seem to be complicitous with making claims of truthfulness, and so, to problematize the literal would also be to problematize criteria of truthfulness. In art, the situation is more complicated because its claims to represent 'reality' are supposed to be indirect, by way of the imagination, of illusion, of fictional worlds, and so on. In the case of Minimal Art, the situation seems doubly complicated because its apparent literalness was both valued for its objectivity, the sense it gave of 'real' existence as opposed to illusion, and at the same time criticized, particularly, as we saw, by Fried, for its being merely literal.

A further distinction can be made between the literal and the 'proper,' in relation to the figural, as Richard Shiff has done in his essay on the modes of representation of classicist and modernist painting and photography, 'Phototropism (Figuring the Proper)' (1989), which introduced a sense of conventionality into the opposition between the literal and the figural.57 Shiff argued that although all representation was necessarily figured, in the sense of diverging from what he termed its "original" (an exterior or interior, imagined, object of representation), at any time what would be judged to be the fidelity of a representation depended on a conventionally accepted standard, a "proper" mode of representation. A "literal" representation, in contrast to a "proper" one, would be one that did not diverge from its "original" at all, would copy it exactly, yet this would seem to be precluded by the nature of a given mode of representation, particularly in painting.58 This meant that if classicist painting

was considered a 'proper' mode of representation, the figural divergence

56 This point is made by Bill Readings, 'The Deconstruction of Politics,' in Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (editors), Reading de Man Reading (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 228-29; and by Fred Orton, 'The Plain Sense of Things,' (unpublished paper).
57 Richard Shiff, 'Phototropism (Figuring the Proper),' Studies in the History of Art vol. 20 (1989), pp. 161-179. (I am grateful to Gail Day for introducing me to this essay. )
58 Ibid., pp. 162-64.
effected by modernist painting would be in respect of this 'proper' mode rather than with respect to any claims to a 'literal' truthfulness.\textsuperscript{59}

For Fried, as we saw, Minimal Art effected a divergence, in the form of a "misinterpretation," with respect to modernist painting. Modernist painting, then, constituted a 'proper' mode of representation in relation to Minimal Art, which sought to problematize it as a mode of representation, by positing another, perhaps more truthful, mode. Fried's attribution of 'literalness' to Minimal Art therefore described a divergence from, or a figuring of, the 'proper,' that is, the properly figural. It was thus a figured 'literal.' At the same time, Fried's attribution of 'literalness' described the condition of Minimal works of art in terms of their "literalness as such," by which he meant their non-divergence from the literal, their non-figurality. The term 'literal,' used by Fried to describe Minimal Art, was one which had different meanings depending on what aspect of the art was being described. Literalness meant a figural divergence from the 'proper'-ness of modernist painting at the same time as it meant the mode of existence of works of art as material things, or of things that were not art. It could refer both to a refiguring of the already figural, and to the nonfigural.

\textit{A critique of phenomenalism}

De Man also showed, in his essay on Nietzsche, how the undermining of the priority of the literal over the figural was reiterated, in a different terminology, in Nietzsche's critique of phenomenalism. Since this analysis suggests consequences for the relation between the literalness as such of Minimal works of art and the interpretation of them as phenomenological objects, it is worth considering. De Man pointed to how Nietzsche undermined the priority, derived from "the experience of the phenomenal world,"\textsuperscript{60} of external cause over internal effect in defining the nature of consciousness.

\textsuperscript{59} The modernist painting, in contrast to classicist painting, most directly indexed a self. Ibid., pp. 170-71.
\textsuperscript{60} De Man, 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),' p. 107.
Nietzsche claimed instead that what was thought to be an internal effect could be said to be rather the cause. De Man pointed out that the possibility of such reversals and substitutions in the relation between consciousness and what it is conscious of arises with language, in particular the figural dimension of language, and that the recognition of this undermined the priority of phenomenal experience as grounding consciousness. Just as the priority of the literal over the figural was undermined by considering the literal as itself a figure, the priority of a phenomenal cause over its effect in consciousness was undermined by considering this cause as itself an effect of consciousness—a substituting of phenomenal experience for the workings of consciousness. In each case, what was regarded as direct and immediate (literal meaning, phenomenal experience) was defined by making the coming before of what was indirect and mediated (figural meaning, consciousness) come afterwards. The priority of literality and phenomenality was thus effected through the figural substitution of before for after, cause for effect.

It was suggested earlier that language was figural at its first moment. This idea problematized the coherence of the ‘reality’ according to which the directness of literal meaning was distinguished from the indirectness of figural meaning. The possibility arose that the coherence of ‘reality’ was really an effect of refiguring the figural as literal. This kind of constitution of an understanding of ‘reality’ from within language contrasts with a phenomenological view of language, in which language is an instrument of a more fundamental relation to the world. The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, in the 1940s at least, posited a mode of experience, sense-experience, which was prior to language. It was this sensory, embodied, relation to the world that circumscribed meaning, rather than meaning being a capability of words as such. “Words are only the vehicles of meaning” James M. Edie wrote in his essay on the phenomenology of language, ‘Expression and Metaphor’. In phenomenology, the orientation of meaning is already in place prior to language. This implies a view of the relative

\[1\] Ibid., pp. 108-9.

Once primary perceptual experience has been organized in some way through naming of various salient aspects of it, these primary "names" can then be used to distinguish and comprehend new experiences through a purposive variation of the referential structure of the original words. [...] A word becomes a metaphor when it is used to refer with a new purpose, with a new intention, to a previously disclosed aspect of experience in order to reveal a hitherto unnamed and indistinct experience of a different kind. The metaphorical use of words thus brings about a re-organization, a re-focusing of experience...

According to Edie, although the literal naming of aspects of experience was prior to the use of metaphor, metaphor was still oriented to, and aimed to describe, the same experience, though aspects of it which had not been literally named. It just described it indirectly. In support of this, Edie showed how many of the most basic philosophical terms to do with understanding and thinking were originally metaphorical terms derived from concrete sense experience. That a metaphorical term for 'understanding' such as 'grasping' has a literal meaning based on phenomenal experience does not make it any less a way of referring to understanding as something that is experienced. However, in de Man's account of Nietzsche's critique of phenomenalism, it was just this describing of acts of consciousness in terms of phenomenal experience that made the outside world appear as a cause, when it was as much an effect.

The phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art tended to treat the literalness of its objects as experientially more fundamental than their metaphorical or figural nature. In Fried's account of Minimal Art in 1966, there remained the sense that the literalness of Minimal Art was a refiguring of the 'proper,' an historical "misinterpretation," whilst it was also characterized in terms of the merely nonfigural literalness of things. Later, in 1972, as I discussed in chapter 1, Krauss began to counterpose a narrative of actual (or literal)
perceptual experience to what she regarded as the historicist (or figural) narrative of modernist painting. This view could be said to elaborate on the second of Fried's senses of the term 'literal,' as "thing-nature," at the expense of the first, the literal as a "misinterpretation" of the 'proper.' In chapter 1, I suggested that the attribution of literalness as such, or the merely phenomenologically apparent, made it difficult to determine the nature of Minimal Art as a critical representation because it could not be determined how this literalness as such was meant. The problem was identified by Adorno in his view that if what appeared to be merely literal was not to be "barbaric" but significant as art, its "negation of meaning" had to be figured as such, rather than consist in mere meaninglessness.66

Fried's defining of Minimal Art in terms of a "misinterpretation" of the development of modernist painting offered a negative view of such a figuring. Fried was clearly bothered by the visual similarity between Minimal Art and modernist painting.67 An important question which follows from his view of Minimal Art as a "misinterpretation" of modernist painting would be how, or to what extent, Minimal Art could create the sense of the 'literal' from the resources of art, as a figural divergence from what were taken to be the 'proper' meanings of art. In the last chapter, I suggested that the sense of literalness in Stella's stripe paintings were effected through an engagement with painterly self-expression and the notion of a medium, which I characterized in terms of an ironic self-separation. To ask the question of Minimalism's literalness in figural terms would be to problematize the claims to 'reality' which seem to follow automatically from the use of the term 'literal.' The chapters which follow

67 In a note to 'Shape as Form,' Fried wrote: "My own feeling is that the (extremely limited) ability of literalist work in general to incite and sustain interest derives from its relation to the most advanced painting of the present and recent past—a relation which may be wholly unintended, wholly fortuitous. For example, what seems to me to give certain pieces by Judd such effectiveness as they have is the contrast between the laconic self-evidence with which they present themselves in all their literalness as shapes and volumes and the way in which literal shape is minimized throughout Noland's oeuvre and even subverted in some of his recent paintings. [...] But I cannot believe in the quality of... Judd's... work." Fried, 'Shape as Form,' p. 27 n. 8. This paragraph is omitted from the reprinted version of the essay in Art and Objecthood.
address this question in the case of several of the artists concerned, in particular through what can be reconstructed of the interpretations these artists made of their own work. These texts are an important way in to the question of literalness, because they consisted of reflections by the artists on their own activity, an activity that, being directed at literalness, seemed to imply the non-involvement of the self. The aim is to ask how the literal was figured in Minimal Art, which is not to claim that all 'reality' in Minimal Art is figural, or an effect of its discourse, but to clarify what is meant when claims are made for its literalness, and to clarify the nature of literalist practice, the concern of chapter 7.
Part II

Literalist Interpretations
4. Next to Nothing: Robert Morris's Grey Plywood Sculptures

The previous chapter indicated the possibility of seeing the literal in figural terms, as a way of problematizing its value in an explanation of Minimal Art. Here, I argue that the self-evidence attributed to Morris's large grey plywood sculptures as the basis for their interpretation in phenomenological terms can be problematized by a consideration of an early text written by Morris, 'Blank Form.' This text, which was written at the time of the making of the earliest grey sculptures, was informed by a close engagement with the ideas of John Cage, as was, I argue, Morris's work of the same period, which took place on several fronts, notably performance as well as sculpture. The early reception of the grey sculptures, and to an extent Morris's own theorization of his work in 'Notes on Sculpture,' tended to see them in terms of their divergence from usual modes of visual or sculptural appeal, a divergence that came to be explained in phenomenological terms. I argue, however, that the literalness which grounded this explanation was effected by the figural substitution of cause and effect, demonstrably an aspect of Morris's practice from 'Blank Form' on.

1969: "Phenomenological inquiry" and Blank Form

The catalogue for Morris's 1969 retrospective at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, contained a lengthy essay by Annette Michelson, the first major effort at theorizing Morris's work. Michelson characterized Morris's work as "transgressive" in the sense that it crossed the boundary, put in place by "traditional aesthetics," between virtual and real space. This was because Morris's sculptures (Michelson was thinking mainly about the large grey
plywood ‘Minimalist’ sculptures Morris produced in the period 1961 to 1965) were “perceive[d]” as “being co-present with [the beholder].”

Attention to the simplicity of its structure, to its qualities, directs him [the beholder] back, as it were, upon the quality of his perception. The inner rehearsal of its modes, of the aspects and parameters of that perception, conduces to an experience of a reflective nature. Every aspect of that experience—the ‘reduction’ on which it is posited, its reflexiveness, the manner in which it illuminates the nature of our feeling and knowing through an object, a spatial situation, suggests an aesthetic analogy to the posture and method of phenomenological inquiry, as it is familiar to us in the tradition of contemporary philosophy. It is the commitment to the exact particularity of experience, to the experience of a sculptural object as inextricably involved with the sense of self and of that space which is their common dwelling, which characterises these strategies as radical.1

By “phenomenological inquiry,” Michelson meant the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, whose lectures at the Collège de France she had attended during the 1950s.2 This phenomenological interpretation would be reiterated by Rosalind Krauss during the 1970s in her writing on Morris and others, as I discussed in chapter 1, and it has had a powerful effect on how Morris’s ‘Minimalist’ works—the large grey plywood sculptures—are seen and understood. This interpretation also found support in Morris’s own theorization of his work, particularly his ‘Notes on Sculpture,’ published in 1966.

Michelson’s interpretation of Morris’s grey plywood sculptures can be juxtaposed with a text that was written by Morris just as he was constructing the first sculptures of this kind, in 1960 or 1961. The text, as it turned out, was not published at the time it was written. However, most of it came to be published in 1969 as part of an article by William S. Wilson, ‘Hard Questions and Soft Answers,’ which was published in Art News to coincide with the opening of

2 Ibid., p. 78 n. 22.
Morris's retrospective in Washington. Wilson contextualized and discussed the text, the first writer to do so, and gave an account of the subsequent development of Morris's work. From 1969 on, Morris's text has existed as an important formulation of his concerns at the time of his earliest sculptural works. It reads as follows:

BLANK FORM

From the subjective point of view there is no such thing as nothing - Blank Form shows this, as well as might any other situation of deprivation.

So long as the form (in the broadest possible sense: situation) is not reduced beyond perception, so long as it perpetuates and upholds itself as being object in the subject's field of perception, the subject reacts to it in many particular ways when I call it art. He reacts in other ways when I do not call it art. Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one's awareness as art.

Blank Form is still in the great tradition of artistic weakness - taste. That is to say I prefer it - especially the content (as opposed to "anti-form" for the attempt to contradict one's taste). Blank Form is like life, essentially empty, allowing plenty of room for disquisitions on its nature and mocking each in its turn.

Blank Form slowly waves a large gray flag and laughs about how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics.

Some examples of Blank Form sculpture:
1. A column with perfectly smooth, rectangular surfaces, 2 feet by 2 feet by 8 feet, painted gray.
2. A wall, perfectly smooth and painted gray, measuring 2 feet by 8 feet by 8 feet.
3. A cabinet with simple construction, painted gray and measuring 1 foot by 2 feet by 6

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feet - that is, a cabinet just large enough to enter.4

There are some shared concerns between 'Blank Form' and Michelson's phenomenological interpretation. (Michelson did not appear to be aware of the 'Blank Form' text when she wrote her text on Morris in 1969.) In 'Blank Form,' the object had to be perceived for the subject to be able to react to it, so that there was a sense of the inseparability of the subject and object of perception. This corresponded to Michelson's emphasis on the experience of an object which was "inextricably involved with the sense of self and of that space which is their common dwelling." To experience an object in this way depended on an awareness of one's perception of it, which included the realization that one's sense of self depended on such an awareness. Morris perhaps meant something similar when he wrote that "[f]rom the subjective point of view there is no such thing as nothing." In any case, it is typically phenomenological to say that consciousness, awareness, is always of something, and this would seem to be a point of commonality between the two texts.

Differences start to appear when one considers distinctions between the kinds of objects in one's awareness. In the passage from Michelson, it was the "simplicity of structure" of Morris's art which "direct[ed]" the beholder "back... upon the quality of his perception." This structure did not elicit a virtual "synthetic reading"5 associated with modernist aesthetic convention. Instead, the "predominant focus of his early work is on the "simple," assertive sculptural shape."6 Morris's word "Blank," however, signifies emptiness, expressionlessness, an unmarked surface, without incident, etc. (In view of this, one can perhaps agree with Wilson that it was only gradually that Morris realized the "underlying and durable forms" of blank form sculpture. These "positive values, while obvious in '69, receive no mention in '61," Wilson

4 This is the text as reproduced in Barbara Haskell, BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance, 1958-1964 (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), p. 101. In Wilson's article the text was interspersed with Wilson's own words, and the order slightly altered.
5 Michelson, 'Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,' p. 43.
6 Ibid., p. 37.
wrote.7) Besides this signification of emptiness and expressionlessness, 'Blank Form' also asserted that a consciousness of art was only consequent to something being "call[ed]" art. It was a performative speech act which defined the existence of art as an object in one's awareness. "[T]he subject reacts to it [form] in many particular ways when I call it art... Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one's awareness as art."

Here, the "awareness" was prior to the reaction to it "as art."

Following the theoretical categories laid out in the last chapter, it could be said that art, as a realm in which one responds to something as something, which involves a comparison characteristic of simile or metaphor, was subsequent to what could be called, in contrast, the prior 'literalness' of "awareness." This order between the literal and figural was represented differently in Michelson's essay, where Morris's objects were works of art before they were objects of awareness. It was their apparent simplicity as works of art which led to a reflection on the priority of perception, and on the embeddedness of the experience of sculpture in the space of perception. This reflection on the priorness of perception, in turn, was what allowed Morris's works to function as a transgression of the aesthetic meaning already in place. Michelson associated this aesthetic meaning with the Greenbergian modernist distinction between illusion and literalness, and this functioned as the 'proper' meaning against which the interpretation of Morris's works, as eliciting an understanding of the priorness of perception, were figured. Thus, what could be called the literalness of the works in the space of perception was a figuring of the proper, the already figural.

This was a different kind of literalness to that of the "awareness" written about by Morris. It was the text by the artist rather than the critic which seemed to put the work of art at a greater distance. One would think that Morris's text would in some way register a closeness to the making of art, since the object's existence as art would presumably, in some complex way, correspond to his intention in making it. However, the 'Blank Form' text, Wilson thought,
suggested a kind of "experiment" in which he characterized Morris's attitude to his works, in 1961, as "call them art, and see what happens." The literalness of such objects of "awareness" was, in contrast to the figural literalness described by Michelson, best described as nonfigural because their identity lay in their existence prior to an act of naming which can be called metaphorical in the sense that it brought literal "awareness" into the realm of "art." This chapter is concerned with these two modes of literalness in the context of the production and reception of the grey plywood sculptures that Morris produced in the period 1961-65.

1961: objects and events

Before he moved to New York at the beginning of the 1960s, Robert Morris lived and worked in San Francisco. He was a painter, but was also involved, with his then wife, the dancer and choreographer Simone Forti, with improvisational dance and theatre. By 1961 Morris had given up painting and had begun to experiment with other media. His involvement with performance continued in New York, at first through the composer La Monte Young, who Morris had known in San Francisco and who in New York asked him to participate in various projects and performances he was organizing. Morris's text 'Blank Form' was written for one of these projects, a book of writings and ideas for performances edited by Young with the title An Anthology. (George Maciunas designed the book and it consequently became associated with the art movement 'Fluxus,' although this was not the project's

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8 Ibid.
10 Berger, Labyrinths, p. 28.
11 The 'Blank Form' text formed the greater part of Morris's contribution, entitled 'Compositions'; see Wilson, 'Hard Questions and Soft Answers,' p. 27. The text and another shorter one were reproduced as "word pieces written in 1960-61 for An Anthology" in Haskell, BLAM! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance, 1958-1964, p. 101. The shorter one read: "Make an object to be lost. Put something inside that makes a noise and give it to a friend with the instructions: "To be deposited in the street with a toss." 1961."
first context.\textsuperscript{12} Morris withdrew his contribution prior to the book's publication in 1963.\textsuperscript{13}

At this time, Morris shared a studio with Forti, and sometimes performed in her dance pieces.\textsuperscript{14} Forti's choreography at this time incorporated 'ordinary' tasks, which often required simple objects which determined the nature of the task. A description of the kind of performances designed by her was written by Morris as part of an article he wrote in 1965, 'Notes on Dance,' dealing with his own work in this area. Forti, he wrote, "explored the possibilities inherent in a situation of 'rules' or game-like structures which required the performer to respond to cues..." The purpose was to prevent the dancer from dancing conventionally, "reduc[ing] him from performance to action." The objects Forti used, which she termed "constructions," "structured the actions."\textsuperscript{15}

Forti was a founding member of the Judson Dance Theater, a loosely organized collective of dancers and choreographers which had its origins as a group in a dance composition class taught by the composer and accompanist Robert Dunn at Merce Cunningham's New York studio.\textsuperscript{16} This collective included composers as well as artists, notably Morris and Robert Rauschenberg. Michelson has written that the Judson Dance Theater's problematizing of "traditional or classical balletic forms" was analogous to the aesthetics of transgression present in Morris's sculptural work, in the sense that the traditional forms of dance could be regarded as relying on a temporal virtuality, whilst the new dance of Forti and others was based on real time and real world

\textsuperscript{12} An Anthology was referred to as a "seminal pre-Fluxus anthology," and as the "model and catalyst" for a number of later collective Fluxus anthologies, in Jon Hendricks, \textit{Fluxus Codex} (Detroit: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, and New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), p. 40. Berger also discussed the context of An Anthology. (He stated that Maciunas was the publisher of the book.) See Berger, \textit{Labyrinths}, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{13} This was possibly due to his dissatisfaction with its association with Maciunas, see Berger, \textit{Labyrinths}, p. 28; Wilson, in 'Hard Questions and Soft Answers,' remarked that Morris had not been entirely successful in withdrawing his contribution since his copies of An Anthology contained it.


\textsuperscript{15} Robert Morris, 'Notes on Dance,' \textit{Tulane Drama Review} vol. 10 no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 179.

In this sense, the new dance could be regarded as ‘literalist.’ An article written by one of the main protagonists in the Judson Theater, Yvonne Rainer, entitled ‘A Quasi Survey of Some “Minimalist” Tendencies in the Quantitively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A’ (1968), began with a table which compared the characteristics which defined Minimalism on one side and the new dance on the other. Where Minimalism had substituted “literalness” for “illusionism,” the new dance had substituted “task or tasklike activity” for “performance.”

Anna Chave has recently argued that the props in Forti’s Platforms (first performed in May 1961), two wooden boxes each designed to enclose a person, were the precursor to Morris’s first blank form sculpture, a column [fig. 10].

Morris’s description of this sculpture in ‘Blank Form’ —”A column with perfectly smooth, rectangular surfaces, 2 feet by 2 feet by 8 feet, painted gray”— corresponded to the object as it was made. It is not known exactly when the column was made, but the consensus seems to be sometime in 1961. It was not exhibited as sculpture in a conventional sense until its appearance in an exhibition called ‘New Works II’ at the Green Gallery in early 1963. Its first public appearance, in fact, was as an object in a performance. In early 1962, La Monte Young organized two concerts at the Living Theater to raise money for the publication of An Anthology. Morris’s performance, in February 1962, consisted of his column standing upright for three and a half minutes, then falling over and remaining there for the same length of time. Morris had

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20 Chave discussed the dating of the column in ibid., p. 162 n. 47. In addition to the sources cited by Chave, Morris’s own recollection was that “[t]he Column was made in 1960 and put together in 61.” Quoted in Thomas Krens, ‘Introduction,’ Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem, p. xix.
intended to be inside the column, causing it to fall. Unlike the boxes in Forti's *Platforms*, which were open on one side so that the performers could be seen, the column would have completely hidden Morris. Although Michelson wrote that Morris had first begun to make sculpture in 1961, of which the column was one of the first pieces, she also wrote that the column was “in fact, designed for a performance.” The nature of the column's first existence is difficult to ascertain. As a made object, it first appeared as an object in a performance, then, a year or more later, it was exhibited as sculpture. Its earliest existence, as a proposed “Blank Form sculpture,” was, perhaps fittingly, as a description in a context which made a distinction between its modes of existence as an object of perception and a work of art.

In 1961, and up to around 1964, Morris was also constructing small-scale objects which were concerned with, as Michelson put it, “the dialectic of contradiction, paradox, or tautology,” and which were the result of an engagement with the work of Duchamp and Johns. Often these objects combined or juxtaposed two kinds of representation of the same thing, or made the thing a representation of its own coming into being. Michelson’s word “tautology”—meaning saying the same thing twice in different ways, or the self-evidently true—characterized these works succinctly. Early in 1961, Morris made *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, which consisted of a small box made of walnut roughly ten inches square which had inside it a speaker linked up to a tape recorder (somewhere outside the box) which played a recording of the sounds which occurred during the whole of the time (three hours) that Morris took to construct it [fig. 11]. The critic Jill Johnston, in the context of a dance

21 Berger, *Labyrinths*, p. 47. Chave dated the performance as February 1962; see ‘Minimalism and Biography,’ p. 162 n. 47. In this she followed Edward Strickland in *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993) p. 263. Morris had intended to stand inside the column, but after an injury in the rehearsal, it was pulled over using a length of string.

22 Michelson, ‘Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression,’ p. 49.

23 A similar point is made by Strickland in *Minimalism: Origins*, p. 264: the column could be a “concept” or a “prop” depending on its context. Strickland wrote that Morris had stated (presumably to him) that *Column* was made as an independent sculpture. Morris may have had Brancusi’s *Endless Column* in mind—the work of Brancusi was the subject of a master's degree thesis he completed in 1966, ‘Form-Classes in the Work of Constantin Brancusi.’ See Berger, *Labyrinths*, pp. 58-59.

review in 1964, wrote of such works that "...either the function of an object or
the process of construction of an object is exposed in the display of that object."
"Process becomes explicit in the product. The process is contained in the
product. Process and product become the same thing." 25 Similarly, Donald
Judd wrote in a review in 1963 that these smaller works were concerned with a
"philosophy of the equivalence of things and times." 26 Equal worth was
attached in such objects to the representation of the process by which they came
to be objects, so that the 'before' and 'after' of the objects co-existed. Others of
these tautologous works were about the representation of Morris's self, rather
than things as such. 27 In I-Box (1962), for example, its sculptmetalled and
monochromatically painted front had set within it a hinged 'I'-shape which
opened to reveal a photograph of a naked Morris, as if to say that behind the
generalized, linguistic self there was a physical, embodied self, an actual self [fig.
12]. However, this 'actual self' was also, as a photographic image, presented in
its surface aspect—what might have seemed to be a revealing of a depth turned
out to be another representation of a surface.

The small sculptures effected doubts about the autonomous coherence of
things and selves by presenting different aspects of them, and by so doing
expressed that it was only through these aspects, which were always mediated
by language or other conventional modes of representation, that such things
and selves could be known. Typically, these aspects were presented in terms of
oppositions of inside and outside, or before and after. Morris used a wide
variety of real objects, materials, references to the works of Duchamp (in
particular), 28 and means of making, and this meant that these works often
appeared to have a vivid readability. In contrast, the column, in the context of
the 'Blank Form' statement, was, if anything, to be unreadable, in the sense that
it was blank. Unlike Box with the Sound of Its Own Making, the column did not

26 Donald Judd, Complete Writings 1959-1975 (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and
27 See Berger, Labyrinths, pp. 41-42, and Maurice Berger, 'Wayward Landscapes,' in The
Mind/Body Problem, for discussion of Morris's representation of self.
28 For what Morris appropriated from Duchamp, see Michelson, 'Robert Morris—An
Aesthetics of Transgression,' pp. 50-53, and Berger, Labyrinths, pp. 28-41.

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incorporate a representation of how it came to exist, an 'explanation' of it. Nevertheless, in a reversal of the opposition between before and after that described *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, the 'explanation' of the column lay in what happened to it—it being 'called' art, or sculpture, or, in another context, on the event of its being caused to fall over. (Although the column may have been made so that Morris could fit inside it, this, I do not think, was so as to incorporate into it an aspect of its own making.)

Of course, the column had to be made, caused to come into existence. But it was not made to be seen as made as *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* was. David Sylvester wrote in 1971 that the sound in the latter work was relevant "because the box is explicitly a piece of carpentry, is palpably hand-made." On the other hand, the "neutral, anonymous surface" of the column "suggests that anyone could have made the piece as it stands... To have put a tape of the sound of its making inside the 'Column' would have been as beside the point as to type one's signature on a cheque." The column was actually made from standard sheets of plywood, which came in dimensions of eight feet by four feet. Morris would have cut it with an electric saw, and probably nailed the sections together. The surface of the plywood was painted a uniform light grey, unlike *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, which was left unpainted.

I made a distinction earlier between two kinds of literalness that could describe Morris's grey plywood sculptures—the sense of the literal that arose through the figuring of the 'proper,' which I associated with Michelson's interpretation of Morris's work in terms of the "transgression" of the boundary between illusion and literalness which characterized modernist criticism, and a literalness imagined to be nonfigural and prior to art, which I associated with Morris's 'Blank Form' text. At this point, it is possible to describe the literalness of the column, in relation to *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, in terms of a

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substitution of before and after. The rhetorical substitution of before and after was one which defined the trope of the literal, as I discussed in the last chapter, and made the literal seem prior to the figural rather than as a subsequent level of figuraiity. Whereas Box with the Sound of Its Own Making incorporated a representation of its cause which made the walnut box itself a result, the column concealed how it was made, suggesting that its mere existence was the prior term, and that any event which gave its existence a definition came after this mere existence.

Nothingness and Cage

The phrase “Blank Form” suggests a contradiction—blankness is usually associated with emptiness and nothingness, whereas form is associated with fullness and somethingness (particularly in aesthetic terms). Blankness could therefore not be an attribute of form in this sense, but only of surface.31 A blank form would be a kind of thing which presented nothingness. The relation between things and nothingness had been theorized, and enacted, by John Cage in his ‘Lecture on Nothing’ (1949), which drew attention to the silences that lay between the words he was speaking. “What we require is silence; but what silence requires is that I go on talking.”32 Later in the lecture, speaking about material, he said

If one is making something which is to be nothing, the one making must love and be patient with the material he chooses. Otherwise he calls attention to the material, which is precisely something, whereas it was nothing being made; or he calls attention to himself, whereas nothing is anonymous. The technique of handling materials is, on the sense level what structure as a discipline is on the rational level: a means of

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31 Blankness as surface is discussed in Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, ‘Blankness as a Signifier,’ Critical Inquiry 24 (Autumn 1997), pp. 159-175. Gilbert-Rolfe makes the following point (p. 167): “There are no such things as blank forms, while there clearly is such a thing as a blank surface. A smooth surface can be blank, but a smooth form is still a shape, with a figurai relationship to an at least implicit field and all that that implies.”

experiencing nothing. 33

Morris’s way of working with the material from which the column was formed was intended, as Sylvester thought, not to call attention to the material or to him having worked it. To call attention to either would have been to draw attention to something or an intention existing beyond the thing made, which was to be nothing, unintended.

Cage also contributed to An Anthology, and Morris would probably have been aware of his thinking through La Monte Young, who was familiar with Cage’s ideas, 34 and certainly would have been as he formulated his ‘Blank Form’ statement, which demonstrated a concern with nothingness that can be related to Cage’s ideas. In the latter half of the 1950s, Cage taught a course on experimental music composition at the New School for Social Research, which, with his earlier teaching at Black Mountain College, was appropriated as a resource for the development of Happenings. Cage’s course at the New School also, through his student Robert Dunn, had an effect on the ideas of the choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater, whose origins as a group lay in a class given by Dunn. 35 By 1961, Cage was well known in the New York art world, particularly with the publication that year of Silence, a collection of his writings and lectures, including ‘Lecture on Nothing.’ In a review of Silence published in 1962, Jill Johnston briefly formulated Cage’s thought as follows.

“Cage’s heresy, of course, is his partial, sometimes total, abdication of will... Cage achieves this position through external (as distinct from subconscious or “automatic”) techniques—methods of chance and indeterminacy—which release him from his own psychology, taste, and permit the natural flow of impermanencies as they impress themselves on a mind empty of memories, ideas, and preconceptions; in short, empty.” 36 Cage’s composition 4’33” (1952), for instance, comprised a ‘silence’ which consisted of ambient noises; the

33 Ibid., p. 114.
34 Berger, Labyrinths, p. 27.
35 Banes, Greenwich Village 1963, pp. 29, 52.
presence of a pianist and a piano which was not played foregrounded the
unintentionalness of the music.

Cage's remarks on material, quoted above, give an indication of the way
that a painting or a sculpture might be produced which would foreground the
kind of nothingness in which Cage was interested. Some paintings which did
impress Cage were Rauschenberg's White Paintings, which were made in 1951
at Black Mountain College, where Cage was teaching at the time. These
paintings, a series of six works composed of from one to seven panels, which
were painted in white enamel, have been called "prototypical Minimalist
paintings." On their exhibition at the Stable Gallery in New York in late 1953,
Cage composed a short statement about them: "To whom/No subject/No
image/No taste/No object/No beauty/No message/No talent/No technique
(no why)/No idea/No intention/No art/No feeling/No black/No white (no
and)/After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is
nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in
any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows." The negatives
point to the absence of any pretext for the paintings, so that they exist in a state
of potentiality—they provided a kind of delimitation of an awareness of their
conditions, conditions of light and shadow that can be regarded as the
equivalent of the ambient sounds that constituted the 'silence' in 4'33'.

In the early 1960s, Morris sometimes showed Cage his works. Morris
recalled how impressed he had been when he showed Cage Box with the Sound of
Its Own Making and he listened for the entire time of its making. During this
time, Morris also corresponded several times with Cage, often explaining the
works he was making at the time in Cagean terms. In 1960, for example, he
wrote "I need some way of giving these things [the process-oriented works he

38 John Cage, [Robert Rauschenberg] (1953), in Kostelanetz, John Cage: An Anthology,
pp. 111-12. (The statement was published in Emily Genauer's column in the New York Herald
Tribune (27th December 1953), sec. 4 p. 6.)

39 The White Paintings and Cage's understanding of them can be related to Harold Rosenberg's
Oxford Art Journal vol. 14 no. 2 (1991), p. 15 n. 42, for the suggestion that Rosenberg may have
been thinking of Rauschenberg's White Paintings when he wrote 'The American Action
Painters.'

40 Berger, Labyrinths, p. 31.
was working on then] existence and at the same time removing the "me" which would make them occur too much in terms of habits." 41 In another letter, in early 1961, Morris wrote that

a kind of "nothing" image is very important to me and I have even said that I want to arrive at zero, although going toward it is like successive divisions of a line—for the arrival one must go outside the process. For the time being I am involved in a kind of reducing process of attempting to find images that are closer and closer to the limit. [...] I am able to assign both a negative and positive value to this approach. On the one hand it reflects the desire to get outside by making logical steps (doing next to nothing so that nothing will be a real "next"). [...] On the positive side there is my feeling about perception itself. You mentioned in your letter of July that "most of what happens never was in anybody's mind"; I feel that all of what does happen is in everybody's mind—the statements are not exclusive to one another, I guess it is more a matter of focus. I feel that by reducing the stimulus to next to nothing... one turns the focus on the individual... 42

Cage's remark, that "most of what happens never was in anybody's mind," accorded with his general view of existence as indifferent to consciousness. Existence was a state that was revealed through, as Johnston put it, an "abdication of will." Nothingness, like silence, consisted in the absence of anything intended. Morris was faced with the practicalities of realizing such an idea, the potential contradictions of making an "image" of "nothing." A particular realization at the time of the letter quoted from above was the making of the column. His stated solution was to engage in a "reducing process" in which the condition of nothingness was acknowledged in the form of a "desire." Morris's 'Blank Form' statement asserted that there was "no such thing as nothing," but posited nevertheless a kind of perceptible object that existed prior

42 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
to being art, that would approach this condition. Morris's account in his letter similarly suggested a working towards the condition of nothingness, "doing next to nothing," rather than arriving at it, like the "successive divisions of a line." One of La Monte Young's Compositions 1960, 'Composition #10,' included in An Anthology—"Draw a straight line and follow it"—was dedicated "to Bob Morris." Young himself had been engaged in his own working through of Cage's ideas, particularly in the area of the experience of duration, and his own solutions, such as the use of excessively long notes and rests, may have affected Morris's thinking.

Branden W. Joseph has recently suggested that Morris, although endorsing Cage's ideas at first, moved away from certain of their radical implications. Cage wanted to remove all separateness from art, including bypassing all conventional forms, as forms of consciousness, which served to maintain its separateness. Morris, however, was clearly interested, in the letter quoted from above, in the role of consciousness in perception, and this, Joseph argued, marked Morris's departure from Cage, and the beginnings of his more typically Minimalist "investigation into the phenomenological conditions of subjectivity." However, it is worth remembering that, in the 'Blank Form' statement, Morris stressed the conventional nature of art. Art was a particular kind of consciousness imposed, by calling something art, on one's "awareness." Morris became more explicit about his art needing to define itself against artistic convention. In a letter to Henry Flynt (a composer and writer associated with Fluxus), written in the summer of 1962, Morris wrote that "I for one am not so

43 In the "Blank Form" text, blank form "waves" a grey flag, i.e. it appears to communicate using something that normally signifies, but, because blank does not. It "laughs" about its proximity to an entropic situation, to a de-centring, disorganizing tendency, a tendency towards nothingness. Robert Smithson wrote in 1966 of entropy in connection with the Minimalists: "...many of the artists have provided a visible analog for the Second Law of Thermodynamics" which 'tells us' that "in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness." See Smithson, 'Entropy and the New Monuments,' Artforum vol. 4 no. 10 (June 1966), p. 9.

44 Strickland, Minimalism: Origins, p. 141.


self-sufficient and when avoiding "given" structures, e.g. art, [...] I am bored."47 By ""given" structures" Morris was referring to "such things as tradition in art (some body of stuff to react against—to be thought of as opponent or memory or however)."48 In working against the "given" conventions of art, Morris would have also kept in mind the conventionality of the category of art itself as a form of consciousness.

The response to the grey plywood sculptures: understatement

Only the first and the third of the three descriptions of blank form sculpture were more or less actualized, most closely in the case of the first, the column. The third related less closely to a sculpture called Untitled (Box for Standing) (1961) which was photographed at the time by Morris both empty and with himself standing inside it [fig. 13].49 The dimensions of this work appear to more or less correspond with the 'Blank Form' description, although in the photograph it is unpainted. The second of the descriptions seems not to have been made, but relates to the proportions of two works made in 1962, Slab and Cloud, though these were orientated horizontally, not vertically. The column was the only example of blank form sculpture to be exhibited.

Column was first exhibited as a sculpture as part of a group exhibition called 'New Works II' held at the Green Gallery in New York in January-February 1963. It was noticed by the critics Jill Johnston, who referred to its "monolithic purity," and Sidney Tillim, who said that "... with a certain amount of Romantic irony, it protested the ineluctable modality of an aesthetic that had stripped it bare."50 The "ineluctable modality" Tillim referred to was the necessity of "illusionistic space," so that Column's "bare"-ness was a function of

48 Ibid.
49 Morris is credited as the photographer of Box for Standing in Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem, p. viii, and in Compton and Sylvester, Robert Morris, p. 4. Wilson, in 'Hard Questions and Soft Answers,' speaks of the realized "examples" in his recollection of a visit to Morris's studio in 1962.
the attempt to reject the convention of illusion. The aesthetic modality of illusion, and the association of this aesthetic with sight, were the terms within which much of the early response to Morris's grey plywood sculptures took place. This response accorded with Morris's remarks, above, regarding the "given" structures of art, and may well have gone into the works which were made after Column.

Shortly after the Green show, Morris exhibited several works at Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery as part of a group show (with three other artists) called 'Boxing Match.' In his review of the exhibition, Donald Judd wrote: "The large pieces are medium gray and completely bare. The understatement of these boxes is clear enough and potentially interesting, but there isn't, after all, much to look at. The horizontal slab suspended at eye level does work. It is a good idea."51 The "horizontal slab," called Cloud (1962) [fig. 14],52 like Column, would have been constructed from standard plywood sheets of eight feet by four feet. Its horizontal plane was six foot square and its sides were each ten inches deep. Four standard sheets would have been needed for its construction if the ten inch deep edge planes were each made from a single length, which seems likely as the sides were the most visible surfaces of the sculpture, since it was suspended at eye-level. The horizontal planes would have been made from two sections joined together, perhaps two three feet by six feet sheets. The whole plywood construction was painted a light grey. From a photograph of the installation, it appears that Cloud was suspended from the gallery ceiling by four "light ropes"53 attached to points on the upper surface set in from the mid-point of each edge.

Cloud was also singled out in another review, by Kim Levin: "Robert Morris is the purist of the group with neutral monolithic box forms. Cloud, a horizontal box (a grey plane) suspended at eye level gives a curious effect of

51 Donald Judd, Complete Writings, p. 90 (Arts Magazine, May/June 1963).
52 Virtually all of Morris's plywood constructions are referred to in Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem as 'Untitled,' with a 'description' (like 'L-Beams') in brackets afterwards. However, this formula is followed even with the early work called Slab, even though this work did originally bear that title.
The lack of visual incident was something which took up so much of her field of vision that she felt as if she were not seeing anything at all. Cloud, and the other works, were troped as understatement, as Judd had said. The meaning that was understated was recognized by critics as the convention that works of art be visual. When Cloud was exhibited again in Morris's second solo exhibition at the Green Gallery in the winter of 1964-65, David Bourdon wrote of it in Village Voice: "Walk around it and you see no more than you first did. The sculpture becomes its own obstruction for viewing." The beholder was prevented from seeing the object, or at least the main part of its surface.

Cloud is related to another work made in 1962, called Slab [fig. 15], which was exhibited at Morris's first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery towards the end of 1963 [fig. 16], and may have been exhibited, also at Green, as early as mid-1962. Slab was, like Cloud (which was itself described as a "suspended slab"), a flattened box-shape eight feet by eight feet horizontally and eight inches deep, made of plywood (the standard dimensions of this material again relating to the dimensions of the sculpture), and painted light grey. Unlike Cloud, it was not suspended, but raised about four inches from the gallery floor (whatever supported it is not visible in the photographs). Bourdon's description of his first encounter with Morris's work was similar to his response to Cloud. "I first came into contact with Robert Morris's work in mid-1962 when I tripped over a low platform eight feet square at the Green Gallery... Wondering what piece of sculpture was missing from its pedestal, I picked myself up and went to the wall to read the label. It said: SLAB. [...] I believe it is still possible to walk by Robert Morris's work without noticing it: or, if noticing it, not realizing that it is art." The reference to the "missing" sculpture is again, as for Cloud, to do with the frustration of an expectation determined by convention.

Slab was exhibited again as part of the exhibition 'Black, White and Gray' at the Wadsworth Atheneum at the beginning of 1964. Of the works by Morris

55 Bourdon, 'Art: Robert Morris I,' p. 9.
56 Ibid. There is no mention of this exhibition in any of the retrospective catalogues.
57 Ibid. Apparently, John Cage had gone to see Slab but had told Jasper Johns that he saw "only a platform with nothing on it." Katy Siegel, 'First Break: Robert Morris,' Artforum vol. 39 no. 8 (April 2001), p. 27.
shown (which included Column), Judd liked Slab best; its horizontal “expanse” (“which you look down upon”) and its position, “flat on the floor” (although in fact it was raised from the floor), meant that it was, for Judd, “more interesting than the vaguely sculptural and monumental upright positions of the other three pieces.”58 In this review, Judd expanded on his earlier concerns, in what is probably the most insightful of the early responses to Morris’s grey plywood sculptures.

They are next to nothing; you wonder why anyone would build something only barely present. There isn’t anything to look at. [...] Morris’s pieces exist after all, as meager as they are. Things that exist exist, and everything is on their side. They’re here, which is pretty puzzling. Nothing can be said of things that don’t exist. Things exist in the same way if that is all that is considered— which may be because we feel that or because that is what the word means or both. Everything is equal, just existing, and the values and interests they have are only adventitious. Morris’s objects seem to express this flat, unevaluating view. [...] Morris’s work implies that everything exists in the same way through existing in the most minimal way, but by clearly being art, purposefully built, useless and unidentifiable. It sets a lowest common denominator; it is art, which is supposed to exist most clearly and importantly, but it barely exists. Everything is caught in between and flattened.59

The relation of Morris’s sculptures to the view that existence is undifferentiated was that they “express” it, or “seem” to, which would suggest that though they may be part of it, they also distinguished themselves from it in some way. The particular mode of existence of Morris’s objects was determined by an opposition between art, as something which existed “most... importantly,” in other words as something both different and valued, and undifferentiated existence. They were situated where difference appeared to be at its closest to sameness, or where importance was closest to unimportance. In Judd’s word, they “flattened” existence.

This way of putting things was not so far from the way that Morris

59 Ibid., pp. 117-8.
himself had put them in his 'Blank Form' text. What he had called "awareness" was an awareness of existing things, and it was only when "one assume[d] an attitude of reacting to some of one's awareness as art," that art as a different kind of thing came to exist. "Everything is equal, just existing," Judd had written, "and the values and interests they have are only adventitious." Judd may have been picking up on what he probably knew of Cage's ideas. In any case, he seemed remarkably attuned to the play in Morris's work between art as a conventional, or "adventitious," form of consciousness, and a generalized, indifferent consciousness.

Morris's first two solo exhibitions at the Green Gallery were remarkably different from each other. His association with the Green Gallery had begun in 1962 and lasted until the gallery closed in the summer of 1965.60 In his first show, in October-November 1963, at least twenty, mostly small, works were exhibited, including Box with the Sound of Its Own Making and I-Box. Slab was one of the two or three larger works shown. Morris's second solo exhibition at the Green Gallery, just over a year later in December 1964-January 1965, consisted only of the large plywood constructions [fig. 17]. Cloud was remade for it, along with six other plywood constructions made in November 1964.61 Aside from Cloud, the pieces exhibited were all apparently untitled— but known as Frame (like Cloud, dating from 1962 and possibly also remade), Table, Corner Beam, Floor Beam, Boiler and Corner Piece. They were again painted the same light grey—Merkin Pilgrim grey (as Judd, for one, identified it62).

The light grey was a principal way in which the visual understatement of the sculptures was achieved. The most common response to this grey at the time was that it served to abstract the forms from the material from which they were made. Morris's "technique of isolation," David Antin wrote, "is one of the

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60 The Green Gallery had been set up in 1960 by the art dealer Richard Bellamy and was known for showing new but "problematic" work—including debut solo exhibitions by Oldenburg, Segal, Judd and others, as well as Morris. See Amy Goldin, 'Requiem for a Gallery,' Arts Magazine vol. 40 no. 3 (January 1966), pp. 27-28; Thomas Crow, The Rise of the Sixties (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996), p. 91.

61 Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem, p. 170. Morris had spent September and October of 1964 in Düsseldorf, making a series of lead reliefs for an exhibition there, which would be shown later in 1965 as part of his third exhibition at the Green Gallery.

things that underlies the continuity of grey. It is a neutral hue that removes objects from all alien contexts." One of these contexts was the materials used to make the sculptures, "...the fundamental purpose [of the grey] seems to be to remove the contextual plywood... etc., as irrelevant to the artist's constructions."\(^{63}\) However, the material was not exactly concealed. "With the plywood it is different [from Morris's later use of fibreglass]. The lines of juncture are evident and the paint lies on top."\(^{64}\) Nevertheless, the grey had the effect of making all the surfaces seem continuous, the same and flat. The most common mode of expression attached to the work was "silence." "[T]he work itself makes no statement and is resistant to any interpretation."\(^{65}\) "[T]heir silence is both empty and provocative."\(^{66}\) Lucy Lippard spoke of the "formal silence" of Morris's "muted creations."\(^{67}\) The use of the word "silence" may have recalled to some readers the title of Cage's 1961 book. Cage's 'silence' required, in the context of his 'Lecture on Nothing,' the presence of the words he was speaking, although a lecture might be normally expected to consist only of spoken words. The "silence" of Morris's grey sculptures can similarly be said to lie in their understatement of artistic convention.

The response to the grey plywood sculptures: overstatement

Where the surface attributes of Morris's grey plywood constructions were figured as understatement, another attribute, their occupation of space, was often written about as being excessive, overstated. The seven large plywood sculptures which made up Morris's second solo exhibition were dispersed over the extent of the gallery space, not just the floor space but the space between wall and floor (Table), between wall and wall (Corner Beam), and,

\(^{63}\) David Antin, 'Art and Information, 1: Grey Paint, Robert Morris,' *Art News* vol. 65 no. 2 (April 1966), p. 56.

\(^{64}\) Antin, 'Art and Information,' p. 24. Here, Antin contrasted the plywood pieces of this Green Gallery show with those of Morris's exhibition just over a year later at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, which were made of fibreglass, and which Antin described as "sudden materializations of some undefinable grey substance."

\(^{65}\) Bourdon, 'Art: Robert Morris I,' p. 9.


\(^{67}\) Lucy R. Lippard, 'New York Letter,' *Art International* vol. 9 no. 2 (March 1965), p. 46.
in the case of Cloud, between ceiling and floor. One work, Corner Piece, was situated in the space between two walls and the floor [fig. 18]. Some of the works were seen as occupying space by displacing the beholder, or appearing to displace parts of the gallery space. Earlier, Judd had said of Slab that “you are displaced from sixty four square feet, which you look down upon.”68

It was Corner Piece, in particular, which exemplified this displacement. Although it was a freestanding structure, like a pyramid leaning to one of its corners, it had the appearance of a single triangular plane leaning into a corner of the room. Lippard wrote of Corner Piece (when it was exhibited again in 196669) that it did not “fill or alter the corner so much as remove it. The architectural fact known as corner ceases to exist when it is interrupted by a triangular plane and the pyramid ceases to exist when only that plane is visible. In principle, therefore, the least autonomous of objects (since it depends on the presence of a corner), in actuality it is independent, defining a new planar shape.”70 The corner, known to be there but “interrupted,” was what the sculpture depended on to produce its effect of a sculpture consisting of a single flat plane. (Morris, however, seems to have preferred it to appear freestanding.71) Other works in the exhibition were similarly dependent on the walls of the gallery—Table formed a right angle seen in profile and touched the wall and floor, and echoed the angle at which they meet, whereas Corner Beam formed a diagonal traversing the space between two adjacent walls, touching the walls at points about seven feet up from the floor.

69 It was exhibited in the group exhibition 'Art in Process' at the Finch College Art Museum in May-June 1966.
70 Lucy R. Lippard, 'Rejective Art,' Art International vol. 10 no. 8 (October 1966), p. 34. Mel Bochner, writing about the same exhibition, said: “Its placement in the room corner is sufficient to demolish the corner space.” Bochner, 'Art in Process-Structures,' Arts Magazine vol. 40 no. 9 (September-October 1966), p. 39.
71 Jack Burnham later recounted an anecdote told by Morris relating to the time when Corner Piece was first exhibited at the Green Gallery: “Each day he [Morris] would pull the piece six inches out from the wall, and sometime during the day Dick Bellamy would push it back into the corner.” The photographs of the installation show Corner Piece pushed back into the corner, not quite touching but as near as possible to the walls. Morris, however, evidently intended Corner Piece to be separate, far enough from the corner to create a deep shadow but near enough to suggest that it could fit there (enough at least so that Bellamy felt that it should go there). See Jack Burnham, 'Robert Morris: Retrospective in Detroit,' Artforum vol. 8 no. 7 (March 1970), p. 69.
The particular grey that the plywood constructions were painted was very light (Antin later recalled that: “In the Green show in ’64 the paint was so light it appeared white rather than grey”72), and would have contributed to the sense that the surfaces of the art objects were more or less the same as the surfaces, the walls, of the gallery. Lucy Lippard had once written that “Morris’s greys, as well as dematerializing his forms, evoke an anonymous institutional atmosphere,” a connotation that was echoed later in Mel Bochner’s description “‘San Quentin’ gray.”73 In works like Corner Piece, Table, and the similar work Wall/Floor Piece, made at the same time but exhibited in ‘Shape and Structure’ at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in early 1965, the condition of dependency was projected, as if the actuality of the gallery walls and floors flowed into them, against the convention that works of art should have the appearance of autonomy and difference from the world of things.

Descriptions by Barbara Rose and, later, Robert Smithson were concerned with the obtuseness and negativity of the works’ occupation of space. Rose referred to Morris’s sculptures in 1965 as “clumsy inert volumes.” “They displace so much and are so grossly awkward that they are at the same time both destructive and greedy.” “Having no parts, they are only one continuous volume. Thus, they look like cloddish objects...”74 Smithson wrote in 1966 that “Morris’s monstrous “ideal” structures are inconsequential or uncertain ready-mades...”75 The flavour of such language suggests not only an overstated sculptural literalness in space, but also, as distinct from the usual aspirations of sculpture in terms of, say, poise, a kind of baseness or excess.

The effect on critical discourse of Morris’s exhibition of grey plywood sculptures can be described as understatement in terms of a visual surface incident often associated with painting, and overstatement in terms of a literalness in space often associated with sculpture. Judd wrote that these sculptures were “minimal visually, but... powerful spatially. It’s an unusual

74 Rose, ‘Looking at American Sculpture,’ p. 35.
75 Smithson, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments,’ p. 16.
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asymmetry.\textsuperscript{76} Smithson, characteristically, put the mixture of understatement and overstatement in terms of urban environment. \textquote{The lugubrious complexity of these interiors [\textquote{discount centers and cut-rate stores}] has brought to art a new consciousness of the vapid and dull. But this very vapidity and dullness is what inspires many of the more gifted artists. Morris has distilled many such dull facts and made them into monumental artifices of \textquote{idea}.\textsuperscript{77} The combination of understatement and overstatement in the first responses to Morris grey sculptures, the feeling of the oversizedness of the barely existing, was a way of making sense of them as art in terms of their deviation from the usual understandings of painting and sculpture. It effected the assimilation into discourse of what was different about Morris's art.

\textit{Self-evidence}

In her 1969 essay on Morris, which I referred to at the beginning of this chapter, Michelson placed his work in relation to a modernist critical tradition, more broadly conceived than that which had been espoused by Greenberg and Fried, which was founded, she wrote, on the \textquote{post-Symbolist allegiance to the primacy of the Imagination and the apprehension-in-immediacy of its works}.\textsuperscript{78} It was desired, in such works, that form and meaning coincide, or arise together, so that form would not be seen as the realization of a prior, and metaphysical, meaning. Michelson gave the example of Mallarmé's \textit{Un Coup de Des}, which attempted to give words an \textquote{immediacy of presence} by drawing attention to their placement on paper, and thereby undermining their existence as signs pointing to already existing meanings. Abstraction in art was motivated by a similar desire. However, Michelson wrote, even when art was considered purely as a \textquote{formal statement} (by which she would have been referring to Greenberg's art criticism), it still implicitly depended on the prior existence of the \textquote{subject} as grounding the form's meaning.\textsuperscript{79} It was here that she thought

\textsuperscript{76} Judd, \textit{Complete Writings}, p. 165 (\textit{Arts Magazine}, February 1965).
\textsuperscript{77} Smithson, \textquote{Entropy and the New Monuments}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{78} Michelson, \textquote{Robert Morris—An Aesthetics of Transgression}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
Morris's grey plywood sculptures differed. By appearing self-evident, form and meaning could coincide in the object, away from and separate from the subject.

Michelson termed the self-evident character of sculptures like Slab, or more exactly, the kind of statement such works appeared to be making, "apodictic." By this, she meant that as statements they "brook neither denial nor debate." Such statements about things were not subject to interpretation, but were clearly the case. Michelson wrote that this apodicticity opposed the "prevailing critical techniques founded on notions of aesthetic metaphor, gesture or statement," and caused a crisis in such criticism. An apodictic statement, in contrast to metaphor and gesture, was a literal description of things as they were, clear and immediate, without the mediation of the figural. The opposition between the figural and the literal reappeared in different guises throughout Michelson's text. She characterized the idea of "presentness" in Fried's writing as a secularized version of timeless Presence, which she contrasted with the time-bound condition of experience. Literalness was put on the side of temporality. The "comprehension" of Morris's work "demand[ed] time." The opposition was also apparent in the distinction between "real" and "virtual" space. It was, Michelson wrote, in "the nature of virtual space to be entirely distinct from the space in which we live and act." Virtual space was a space made visual, as opposed to an "operational space," in which events and actions took place. Events and actions took place in time as well as space, and this, too, was privileged as 'real' time, "the time of experience, of our actions in the world."

Objects and performers

Michelson thought that Morris's work in performance gave him an understanding of such "operational," or literal, space and time, and how these could be occupied sculpturally. The difference between sculpture and performance was that in the latter the objects utilized were to be inseparable

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80 Ibid., p. 13.
81 Ibid., pp. 23, 43, 55.
from the action of a performer. Speaking of his own work in ‘Notes on Dance,’
Morris wrote

By the uses of objects which could be manipulated I found a situation which did not
dominate my actions nor subvert my performance. In fact the decision to employ objects
came out of considerations of specific problems involving space and time [...] The objects
I used held no inherent interest for me but were means for dealing with specific
problems.82

It was important for him that such objects did not have an independent
existence. Early in 1966, he criticized a dance work by Steve Paxton for allowing
objects to predominate in the performance, which made it more “pictorial.”83
This suggests a different understanding of the objects Morris made as sculpture
from the rhetorical understatement and overstatement figured through the
conventions of painting and sculpture. This would have been true not only of
Morris himself as a practitioner engaged on several different fronts, but also of
his ‘public.’ The worlds of art and dance, as I suggested earlier, were not at all
exclusive of one another in the early 1960s in New York. Morris was associated
with the Judson Dance Theater in its early years, as was Rauschenberg.
Performances would often involve participants or contributions from both
worlds, and one would expect that the audiences reflected this. There would
have been an audience for Morris’s work who brought with them different
kinds of knowledge derived from dance and performance.

Morris’s first solo exhibition was reviewed in the ‘Dance’ column in the
Village Voice, by Jill Johnston, a prominent supporter of the Judson Dance
Theater. The same column contained a review of Morris’s dance piece 21.3,
which was first performed at the Surplus Dance Theater in New York in
February 1964, as part of a series organized by Steve Paxton. Morris
contributed several dances to the Judson’s programmes or to programmes
arranged by its members at other venues—Arizona (1963), 21.3 (1964), Site (1964)

Check (1964) and Waterman Switch (1965). Morris's performances often incorporated art historical references. In 21.3 (the title derived from the listing number of an art history survey course which Morris had taught at Hunter College), Morris mouthed, out of time, the words of a recording of his reading aloud art historian Erwin Panofsky's essay 'Iconography and Iconology,' as well as performing various gestures, again out of time, associated with the giving of a lecture. Johnston's review of the performance reiterated the comments she had made with regard to product and process in relation to Morris's sculptures. The "duplication" of product and process involved the presentation of "found" materials and the illustration of that material in a "found" situation which expresses an aspect or the function of the material. One aspect of a written paper is its potential functions as a lecture. The written paper is a product, and Morris illustrates the product in the process of a lecture, which in turn becomes a product illustrating the process of the paper. It all turns around on itself.

In its presentation of the lecture in terms of its aspects as process and product, 21.3 was clearly related to the small "tautologous" works that Morris showed in his first solo exhibition. Another performance with an art historical reference was Site, first performed as part of the same series as 21.3 in March 1964, and then at the Judson Theater the following month [fig. 19]. Whereas 21.3 had used props associated with lecture-giving—a lectern, a glass of water, etc.—Site involved more substantial materials and more of the physical task-performing usually associated with Judson Dance. The performance involved Morris, wearing a mask moulded from his own face (made by Jasper Johns), moving sheets of plywood painted white to reveal an actualized version of Manet's Olympia, performed by Carolee Schneemann, and then manipulating these

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84 These were not always premiered at the Judson Theater. See Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem, pp. 160, 168, and Morris, 'Notes on Dance,' pp. 179-186.
85 The part of Panofsky's essay which Morris read was the part that dealt with the different levels of visual meaning.
88 Berger, Labyrinths, p. 84.
sheets in various ways, to the sound throughout of construction work. It revealed the process and site of production of a 'work' of art, an object of 'sight' (alluded to in the pun of the title).

Michelson wrote that the new dance and sculpture were together engaged in a "systematic focussing upon the ways of organising and apprehending the movement of bodies in space." Morris had written in 'Notes on Dance' that the objects he used in performance "held no inherent interest" for him, but were rather a means of defining action. Michelson's assertion suggested that the exhibition of grey plywood sculptures exhibited as works of art at the Green Gallery in 1964 were likewise a means to define a bodily movement, but on the part of the beholder.

The point I wish to make here is that Morris's involvement in dance may have contributed to the rhetorical substitution of before and after which I discussed earlier, which I am suggesting accounted for the way that the large grey sculptures effected their meaning. The representation of how something came to exist along with its actual existence, or in the terms which Johnston used, of "process" with "product," was the explicit subject matter of many of Morris's small Duchampian sculptures of the early 1960s, such as Box with the Sound of its Own Making, and, too, of certain of his dance works. The grey plywood sculptures, in contrast, were made so as not to draw attention to how they were made materially; they were made to appear unintended. In the context of performance, Morris used objects that "held no inherent interest" for him, except in their manipulation, and so had a different mode of existence than that of an art object, the inherent interest of which conventionally lay in its being seen to be the result of a manipulation of materials. The analogy is between the

89 Accounts of Site are in Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem, p. 168, and Berger, Labyrinths, pp. 81-82.
92 This insight formed the basis of the phenomenological interpretation. Alex Potts makes the point, which is sometimes lost, that Morris's awareness of the attitude of the beholder would also have been a self-awareness as the maker and beholder of his own work. Alex Potts, The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 242. The aspect of Morris's sculpture which functioned to make the beholder aware of their own beholding was rarely registered, however, in the critical discourse of 1964-65, apart from the sense of displacement remarked on by Rose and, particularly, Judd.
objects used in performance that "held no inherent interest," and the appearance of unintentionality in the sculptural objects. Both suggested a kind of experience that came after the thing.

Defining sculpture

In later critical discourse it was particularly Morris's sculpture known as the L-Beams, which consisted of two separate block-like schematized right-angles, which were singled out to discuss the importance of the movement of the body in defining the consciousness of objects [fig. 20]. They had been made early in 1965, and were exhibited as part of a group show (with works by Donald Judd, Dan Flavin and Neil Williams) at the Green Gallery in May-June of the same year, and again in 1966 as part of the 'Primary Structures' exhibition at the Jewish Museum. Although the two parts of the work were more or less identical, they were placed differently—one laid along one of its sides, like an 'L', whilst the other rested on its ends, like an inverted 'V.' Rosalind Krauss, following Michelson, wrote in 1973 that the L-Beams "serve[d] as a certain kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning on the body as it surfaces into the world..."93

Morris briefly discussed the work himself in a statement published as part of Barbara Rose's article 'ABC Art' (1965). There he wrote that "[t]he use of a constant form carried over from one work to the next occurred in a series of nine "L" shaped forms (of which two were executed and exhibited at the Green Gallery in May 1965). [...] Nine possible positionings of the "L" form gave nine discrete works." He also made a distinction between what he called "continuous elements," like his use of the colour grey, and "things,"94 which became particularly important in the first of his 'Notes on Sculpture,' published early in 1966 in Artforum. The publication of the 'Notes on Sculpture,' and probably its writing, came at a time when the majority of the sculptures made, like the L-

93 Rosalind Krauss, 'Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post '60s Sculpture,' Artforum vol. 12 no. 3 (November 1973), p. 49.
Beams, from plywood painted grey, had already been made. The text theorized a set of concerns that were related to the plywood sculptures (it had on its title page a full page reproduction of Morris’s Corner Piece) and to the work of others that Morris regarded as similarly motivated.

The main concern of ‘Notes on Sculpture’ was, like the ‘ABC Art’ statement, with contrasting formal wholeness with formal relationality. This contrast was put into the terms of formalist, or modernist, criticism, so that the idea of a singularity of form was a necessary consequence of each art’s, in this case, sculpture’s, concern with its essence. Michael Fried’s introductory essay to Three American Painters was one interlocutor present in Morris’s text; Judd was probably another. Apparently, the ‘Notes on Sculpture’ had started out as a “parody of formalist criticism.” Sculpture was said to have been, “for some time,” “hostile” to painting, its difference from painting being in its “essentially tactile nature.” This tactility was associated with sculpture’s “physical” and “literal nature,” and it was the working with this condition that “made visible” the essentially sculptural attributes of scale, mass, shape, etc. A distinction between seeing and touching also played a prominent role in modernist art criticism. Greenberg, in ‘Sculpture in Our Time’ (1958), claimed that: “Under the modernist “reduction” sculpture has turned out to be as exclusively visual in its essence as painting itself.” Painting had tended to rid itself of the three-dimensional illusion of space because this illusion appealed to the sense of touch by depicting things. Sculpture, on the other hand, was already and incontrovertibly three-dimensional, so the illusion that it tended to rid itself of was that of being analogous to the human body. This resulted in sculpture that was “constructed” and “arranged” rather than modelled or carved, that is, sculpture that was more procedurally self-conscious, more aware of its own particular economy of means. This meant, for Greenberg, that sculpture was figured less through the solidity and tactility of things and persons, and more

97 Robert Morris, ‘Notes on Sculpture’ [part 1], Artforum vol. 4 no. 6 (February 1966), p. 43.
98 Ibid.
through the delineation of a space which "light alone inflects" and in which only the eye can move.99

However, the relationality that "constructed" and "arranged" sculpture entailed was something that Morris questioned. He quoted Mondrian on the communicability of sensations: it was only the "relations" between sensations, Mondrian had said, that could have "objective value" and therefore be communicable. Morris asked instead

Could a work exist that only has one property? Obviously not since nothing exists which only has one quality. A single, pure sensation cannot be transmissible precisely because one perceives simultaneously more than one property as parts in any given situation. [...] However, certain forms do exist that, if they do not negate the numerous relative sensations of color to texture, scale to mass, etc. do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shapes. Such are the simpler shapes that create strong gestalt sensations.100

Morris thought though that it was possible to frustrate such relations by using forms that gave a sense of the wholeness and constancy of shape. The relational quality of art was incompatible with what Morris regarded as the essential nature of sculpture—its literalness—but he acknowledged that this literalness could only be approached negatively, by frustrating the convention of making art by parts that relate, i.e. by 'composing.' In a sense, this imperative is almost the exact reversal of the movement described by Greenberg, where it was relationality that turned out to be more literal than singleness and wholeness, which were associated with the illusion of being analogous to the human figure.

The perception of wholeness or singleness of shape was, for Morris, the result of a "faith" in "spatial extension," the belief that what was presented to one's eyes was in fact a real thing existing in one's own space. Necessarily, this

100 Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture' [part 1], p. 44.
space was open to touch and sight (and to the other senses). The kind of form which Morris thought best suited the condition of sculpture—its "literal nature" and its being sensed as a "whole"—were simple polyhedrons, such as cubes and pyramids. In the second 'Notes on Sculpture,' published in November 1966, Morris wrote that "[t]he constant shape of the cube held in the mind but which the viewer never actually experiences, is an actuality against which the literal, changing, perspective views are related." The cube example was standard phenomenology, but Morris's emphasis on the "cube held in mind" as the foil to the "perspective views" was opposed to Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the cube seen from the "point of view of my body" and the "cube itself, the cube in reality." This second cube, Merleau-Ponty's "cube in reality," served, in the act of perception, as an "explanation" of its appearance. But its explanatory power came from the ability to "interpret" the experience of this appearance on the basis of a knowledge of the body being able to move in "objective space" and from that "construct" the 'real' cube. The ambiguities of cause and effect apparent in Merleau-Ponty's text are somewhat lost in Morris's account. In fact, most of Morris's plywood sculptures fell into the category of what he called "simple and irregular polygons," that is, shapes which were not geometrically regular but nevertheless simple enough to appear to be singular and whole. The irregularity of such shapes became "a

101 In the phenomenological analysis of sense experience put forward by Merleau-Ponty in his Phenomenology of Perception, which Morris may well have read in 1966, not only do the senses of sight and touch necessitate objects of those senses but that these objects must be the same, since those senses must "open on the same space." The alternative, an object that was only present to one sense, would be a "ghost," a being lacking "fullness of being." The senses of space peculiar to the individual senses were only, for Merleau-Ponty, "moments" of the "one and only space," which was space as it was lived and experienced. Being situated in this space—and for Merleau-Ponty this entailed being situated via one's own body—was the condition from which all forms of consciousness followed. M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (1945), translated by Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962), pp. 217, 222.

102 Morris never actually constructed a work consisting of a single cube during this period, although he did use four cubes together in Mirrored Cubes, made in January 1965 for his third solo exhibition at the Green Gallery. The concern in that work did not appear to be with the singleness and wholeness of shape, rather the opposite.

103 The difficulties in reconciling Morris's more gestalt-like understanding of an object of perception with Merleau-Ponty's are discussed in Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, pp. 245-46.

104 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,' Artforum vol. 5 no. 2 (October 1966), p. 22; Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, pp. 203-204.
particularizing factor,"¹⁰⁵ and, in the context of Morris’s text, could be seen as a corrective to the unsatisfactory virtuality of the shape “held in the mind.”

In the second of his ‘Notes on Sculpture,’ Morris left behind the problematic object “held in the mind” by making the object only one of the "terms" of the situation and conditions under which it was beheld. “The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic” was how he put it.¹⁰⁶ The relationality between “terms” was to be made by the beholder, or by their experience, and the object was to be as if it were a catalyst. Just as the first ‘Notes’ suggested that a condition of unrelationality could be made to inhere in the object by the use of simple shape, here unrelationality came to be in a relation with a situation of relationality. The problematic mode of existence of the sculptural object that was evident in the first of the ‘Notes,’ was passed over in the second in favour of the beholder’s experience. Morris made the distinction, however, that this situation was not an “environmental situation;”¹⁰⁷ it was not that relational situation was caused by a space being altered by an object or objects, it was that it was rather ‘caused’ by the presence of the beholder, who was looking at an object. “[T]he better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision.”¹⁰⁸

Substitutions of before and after, and literalness

I started this chapter with the juxtaposition of Morris’s ‘Blank Form’ statement and Michelson’s phenomenological interpretation of Morris’s grey plywood sculptures. The last quote, from the second of Morris’s ‘Notes on Sculpture,’ fits very well with Michelson’s interpretation, as it does with Krauss’s, which I discussed in chapter 1. This interpretation has proved to be the one that has stuck, yet it does not quite cancel out what Morris said in the ‘Blank Form’ statement. In ‘Blank Form,’ a consciousness of art, or art as a form of

¹⁰⁵ Morris, ‘Notes on Sculpture’ [part 1], p. 44.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Ibid.
consciousness, was only subsequent to something in consciousness being called art. Art as a form of consciousness was the result of an act of naming, a matter of convention. In Michelson’s interpretation, the existence of Morris’s sculptures as art was not in question. As art, each sculpture was structured in such a radically simple way that it occasioned a reflection on the part of the beholder as to the processes by which he or she was conscious of it, that closely corresponded to the understanding of the consciousness of things generally.

However, a form of consciousness, such as art, which arises through convention, is not the same as consciousness understood in phenomenological terms, as consciousness of. Morris’s statement, from ‘Blank Form,’ that “Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one’s awareness as art” can be seen as the opposite to the situation described by Michelson, in which one assumed an attitude of reacting to art as one’s awareness. The change in emphasis from one to another in Morris’s own interpretations of his work and those of others turned on substitutions and reversals of before and after. It was through these rhetorical reversals that the self-evidence, the literalness, of Morris’s grey plywood sculptures was effected; the necessity of such reversals points, also, to the gap that separates the “Blank Form” from the phenomenological object of perception.
5. Parataxis: Donald Judd’s Sculpture and Art Criticism

In this chapter, I examine the parallelism between what I take to be the characteristic rhetorical mode of Judd’s art criticism and the modes of arrangement in his sculpture. I begin by laying out some of the principal concerns of Judd’s criticism, and showing how it deviated from Fried’s formalist criticism of modernist painting, a deviation which Fried had, as I discussed in chapter 3, characterized as a literalist misinterpretation. I discuss in detail Judd’s criteria of specificity and wholeness as these are present in his art criticism, and in relation to the works shown in his first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery in 1963-64. Judd’s characteristic use of language in his art criticism, I argue, arose through an engagement with problems of description. In particular, it was paratactical in style, a mode I associate with a negation of the syntactical order of language and the rationalizing, generalizing representation of reality which it implied. In this sense, Judd’s parataxis was attuned to the antirational character of some of his philosophical remarks. I discuss the serial works in Judd’s solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1966 in this context. Finally, I suggest that the literalness of Judd’s work be understood as effected through the rhetorical use of parataxis.

Judd as art critic

In October 1962, the Roko Gallery in New York held an exhibition called ‘Artists Critics...’ in which a number of art critics were invited to exhibit
examples of art which they had produced. Some of the exhibitors, such as Elaine de Kooning and Rudolf Baranik, were better known for their art than for their criticism, but most of the others, including Clement Greenberg, Dore Ashton, Sidney Tillim and Donald Judd, were better known as critics. Judd, of course, would later become better known as an artist, and his one-time activity as a critic would fade from view to some extent. By October 1962, however, Judd had already been writing art criticism regularly for more than three years. His first reviews appeared in Art News in September of 1959. After three issues, he switched to Arts, then under the editorship of Hilton Kramer. He wrote reviews, and later longer articles, for Arts, or Arts Magazine as it became in January 1962 after James R. Mellow became editor, more or less consistently from December 1959 to March 1965. Judd left the magazine at the same time that Mellow resigned after a change in ownership and for a brief period wrote reviews for the Lugano-based Art International (two issues, April and May 1965). After that, his published writings consisted of the odd major article—‘Specific Objects’ in the Arts Yearbook at the end of 1965, ‘Jackson Pollock’ in Arts Magazine in April 1967—but, more often, of artist’s statements, as he became increasingly well known for his work.

In the ‘Artists Critics’ exhibition, Judd showed an untitled work, made in 1961, which consisted of a painted plywood panel onto which two concave-curved sections of galvanized iron were attached so that the surface of the ‘painting’ projected out at its top and bottom edges. Judd later described this work as his “first three-dimensional relief,” one which inaugurated a progression from “low to high relief and then to free-standing works,” that is,
to the kinds of works—the boxes, the stacks, and so on—that he began to produce in the mid-1960s and for which he is now best known. Although Judd had had some success as a painter in the 1950s, he seems to have regarded this as a false start. His participation in 'Artists Critics' was the first time he had shown work for five years. The work exhibited can therefore represent a beginning, as far as the public existence of Judd’s work was concerned. The theme of the exhibition, however, points to the fact that this beginning took place within the context of an ongoing activity—that of the writing of criticism, and this suggests a context not only for how Judd’s art was seen and understood when it first appeared, but also for how he himself saw and understood it.

*Individual style and style in general*

Judd, in his criticism, gradually came to adopt a position which held that painting, particularly recent abstract painting, had reached, or was reaching, an impasse, and that a new kind of abstract art was needed. His earliest reviews of exhibitions by contemporary painters, however, were primarily concerned with, on the one hand, stating influence and derivativeness and, on the other, with formal description, i.e. the description of colour, tone, pictorial form and technique of application. The formal description was often tied to remarks on derivativeness. A painterly technique such as de Kooning’s, which was widely adopted, or influential, at that time, was given a negative characterization by Judd as being in the “public domain”; what belonged to an individual painter had to be “disentangled” from what had become ‘public.’ One of Judd’s main complaints throughout his criticism was that the so-called ‘second generation’ of Abstract Expressionists—the artists who appropriated de Kooning’s ‘gestural’ style—“weakened” the particularity of the ‘personal’ in, say, the work of Pollock

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4 Judd exhibited paintings at the Panoras Gallery in New York. He had a solo exhibition there in 1956 (wrongly dated 1965 in Coplans, Don Judd, p. 68).

5 Judd, Complete Writings, p. 3 (Art News, October 1959).
and Newman.\(^6\)

The forms or techniques developed by individuals tended, for Judd, to become progressively impersonal as they were utilized by others, and constituted the "deterioration" of a style.\(^7\) Such a deterioration resulted in the situation where an artist was able to acquire an "Abstract Expressionism's lexicon."\(^8\) At the furthest remove from personal originality was "public style,"\(^9\) a style that had become detached from any individual, or collective group. Therefore, there was an implicit progression or directionality in the life of a style. As a style became increasingly public, its "source," an individual practice, became more obscure. In terms of the individual development of an artist, the movement was the reverse. It tended to move from derivativeness to an originality that, although it had been there all along, had to emerge and distinguish itself from derived stylistic elements.\(^10\) These formulations by Judd suggest that he had in mind two directionals running counter to each other—one towards the dissolution of an original and individual style according to its appropriation by more and more individuals; the other towards the isolation of an original style by an individual from a context of appropriated styles.

A different kind of directionality was attributed to styles in general. Judd wrote of "stylistic time"\(^11\) in relation to statements about the necessary priority and subsequence of styles, in order to denounce the work he regarded as

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\(^6\) Ibid., p. 151 ("Local History," *Arts Yearbook* 7, 1964). *Art News*, to which Judd initially contributed reviews, and *Arts* too, strongly favoured the paintings of the so-called 'second generation' of Abstract Expressionists, i.e. those painted in a primarily gestural style, usually abstract but sometimes figurative, comparable to that of de Kooning or Kline. Judd seems to have attached a special value to the original which was at odds with the magazines' focus on art which appeared to continue a tradition of gestural Abstract Expressionism.

\(^7\) For example, Judd wrote, in his very first review for *Arts*, that the best aspects of Friedel Dzubas' paintings were forms derived from Pollock's black and white paintings of the early 1950s; however, their most original aspects—those particular to Dzubas—were those which contributed to a weakening and indefiniteness of these forms. Judd's complaint was not so much that Dzubas had used good forms badly but that he had not understood why the forms were good in the first place—he had not understood them "constructively," as part of his own activity of making. Dzubas' use of already existing forms thus "further[ed] the deterioration" of the style from which the forms came. Judd, *Complete Writings*, p. 6 (*Arts, December 1959*).

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 29 (*Arts, January 1961*).


\(^10\) Ibid., p. 28 (*Arts, January 1961*).

\(^11\) Ibid., p. 47 (*Arts Magazine, March 1962*).
retrogressive (usually with respect to the achievements of post-war American painting). Although he was critical of work which appeared "predictable" from other already existing work, Judd seems to have thought there was a logic involved in "stylistic time"; there was "a kind of necessity and coherent, progressive continuity to changes in art." This coherence, however, was a consequence of a "new form of art" appearing to have a greater 'coherence' and 'expressiveness' than the form it replaced. For example, reviewing the paintings in Stella's second solo exhibition at the Castelli Gallery, Judd wrote that "They show the extent of what can be done now. The further coherence supersedes older forms." However, Judd also acknowledged that the attribution of an insufficient coherence to the "older forms" could only be from the standpoint of the "new form." This suggested a progression of coherences as well as the coherence of the progression.

Judd's historical scheme owed something to Greenberg, especially in the general sense that there was a progression in art describable and to some extent accountable for in intrinsic terms. There was also the sense that at some level the progression was historical in a wider sense. Judd's implicit theorization of the origins and development of individual style, however, was generally from the point of view of the constitution of an artistic self as an original deviation from the style already existing, either as prevailing or emerging.

At the time that Judd was writing art criticism, he was also (until 1962)

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12 Judd wrote dismissively that there were always "areas of possible syntheses or next moves." Ibid., p. 91 (Arts Magazine, September 1963).
13 Ibid., p. 150 ('Local History,' Arts Yearbook 7, 1964).
14 Ibid., p. 57 (Arts Magazine, September 1962). The paintings shown by Stella were the Copper Paintings, the series subsequent to the Aluminium Paintings.
15 Ibid., p. 150 ('Local History,' Arts Yearbook 7, 1964).
16 This historical scheme suggested certain problems in the development of an individual artist. Although the beginning of an artist's development of an original style could be derivative of older forms, the potential originality and newness that the artist had by virtue of their being an individual existing in the present would necessarily have led them towards newer forms being developed by others. However, this movement was potentially at the cost of the stylistic elements that were particular to the artist from the beginning, their "permanent references," and which had determined the way that they had been derivative of older forms. Ibid., p. 28 (Arts, January 1961).
17 Reviewing an exhibition of figurative paintings, Judd criticized the obviousness of the techniques and the composition, and complained of the ignorance of the fact that "these techniques occurred as necessarily at a given time as social or scientific events, that they were radical inventions at the moment..." Ibid., p. 44 (Arts Magazine, February 1962).
studying art history in graduate school at Columbia University in New York with Meyer Schapiro and Rudolph Wittkower. Schapiro, in ‘Style,’ an essay discussing the term first published in 1953, defined style as “the constant form—and sometimes the constant elements, qualities and expression—in the art of an individual or a group.” In its constancy, it served as a “common ground against which innovations and the individuality of particular works may be measured.”18 Judd seems to have taken on something of this criterion of constancy, at least in the sense of it providing a foil for originality, which marked a difference between his own critical position and Michael Fried’s. In 1965, in *Three American Painters*, Fried took issue with Schapiro’s characterization of style as a constancy of form, and as a “common ground” against which the degree of originality could be measured, arguing that innovation and individuality should be defined in terms of their “legitimacy or validity” according to the self-critical project of modernist painting, which meant in terms of painting as a medium.19

*Against the criterion of medium*

If Judd had an historical sense related to the modernism of Greenberg and Fried, it was not in terms of the specificity of medium. In a review of an exhibition of Noland’s chevron paintings [fig. 21] published in September 1963, Judd stated, in explicit opposition to Greenberg, that “[p]ainting has to be as powerful as any kind of art; it can’t claim a special identity, an existence for its own sake as a medium.” He wrote too that “...advances in art are certainly not always formal ones. They always involve innovations, but the actual formal advance, measured by the generalization of historical linearity, may be small.” The chief problem being addressed by Noland’s chevron paintings, and contemporary painting generally as Judd saw it, was of “further increasing the unity of the rectangle and its figure,” but he thought this “impossible,” and that the convention on which the problem was based, that of the image and its

framing edge, should simply be bypassed or surpassed. 20 This view can be compared with the review of the same exhibition by Fried. (In some ways, the careers of Fried and Judd as critics during the early 1960s shadowed each other, 21 and their views were in many ways not as antagonistic, especially early on, as Fried’s later attack on Minimal Art has often seemed to suggest. Both critics were in agreement in their valuing of certain artists—Pollock and Newman, Morris Louis, Stella, John Chamberlain, and Noland—and often for the same kind of formal reasons. However there were important differences, which I began to allude to above.) Where Judd, with reference to Noland, wrote of the paintings as an attempt at “unity,” the unity of “the rectangle and its figure,” Fried emphasized the “relation” of these. For Fried, the chevron paintings addressed the problem of “finding a self-aware and strictly logical relation between the painted image and the framing-edge.” 22 The difference depended on the importance attributed to the specific characteristics of painting as a medium. For Judd, what Noland was attempting to unify—image and edge—was a “relic of pictured objects in their space.” In accordance with his understanding of the development of modernist painting, Judd stated that the separateness of image and edge had been “progressively reduced.” However, he concluded that “It has to go entirely.” 23

Picture-things

This conclusion was arrived at while Judd was, in his own work, beginning to construct three-dimensional free-standing objects. At the same

21 Fried’s first published piece of writing (a book review) appeared in Arts in January 1960, one issue after Judd’s first reviews for that magazine appeared. Fried was employed as the London correspondent when Arts became Arts Magazine, following a change in ownership of the magazine and its reviewing policy; Judd was sacked when that change took place and re-employed again a few issues later. In the autumn of 1962, Fried switched from Arts Magazine to Art International, for which Judd also briefly wrote reviews in early 1965.
23 Judd, Complete Writings, p. 93 (Arts Magazine, September 1963). Judd’s review of Noland’s exhibition may have been written in response to Fried’s; Noland’s exhibition closed in mid-May 1963—Fried’s review was published in the May issue of Art International, Judd’s in the September issue of Arts Magazine.
time he was continuing to construct painting-like works, like the one exhibited in ‘Artists Critics…’. In the winter of 1963-64, Judd had his first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York, which was comprised of both kinds of work [fig. 22].

(He had already appeared in group exhibitions there earlier in the year.) The painting-like works shown were three variations of the piece shown in the ‘Artists Critics…’ exhibition, that is, they were wall pieces consisting of a flat panel with concave-curved sections projecting out at the top and bottom. The format was evidently one which sustained Judd’s interest during the period 1961-1963.

Tillim, reviewing one of the earlier group exhibitions at Green, used the phrase “picture-thing” to refer to one of the wall pieces, which suggests something of these works’ ambiguity. Two of the ‘picture-things’ in the solo exhibition were of the same media. The largest was just over six feet high and eight feet in length and projected almost a foot from the wall at its top and bottom [fig. 23]. Its central panel was wood, painted in cadmium red light oil paint on its front surface, black oil paint on its side edges. This painted section was about four feet high and had fourteen wooden strips running horizontally along its length, each around three inches wide with the ‘grooves’ between them somewhere between a half and one inch wide. Tillim related the use of strips in this work to “late abstract painting with their banded patterns,” by which he would have been alluding to Stella’s painted stripes. The strips introduced a

24 The exhibition was open from 17th December 1963 to 11th January 1964.
25 Judd made five different versions altogether, all of which were exhibited at the time. Another, aside from the ‘Artists Critics’ piece and the three Green Gallery solo exhibition pieces, was exhibited in a group exhibition ‘New Work: Part 1’ at the Green Gallery in early 1963.
26 Sidney Tillim, ‘Month in Review,’ Arts Magazine vol. 37 no. 6 (March 1963), p. 62. Fried, reviewing this exhibition, referred to “large painted wood and aluminium constructions by Donald Judd that make one want to see more of his work.” ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 7 no. 2 (February 1963), p. 64.
27 The smaller of the two wall pieces was just over four feet high, about three and a half feet wide and projected just under six inches. Its painted section was about three feet high with thirty-five strips. See Smith, Donald Judd, p. 114. The third wall-piece had more or less the same dimensions, although instead of strips, the central panel of the third was unpainted, consisting of a sheet of aluminium which had nearly eight hundred regularly-spaced small holes drilled into it. The projecting sections were galvanized iron painted with raw sienna enamel paint. See Coplans, Don Judd, p. 23; and Smith, Donald Judd, p. 116.
28 For descriptions, see Coplans, Don Judd, p. 23; Smith, Donald Judd, p. 115. There is also a description in Sidney Tillim, ‘The New Avant-Garde,’ Arts Magazine vol. 38 no. 5 (February 1964), p. 20.
29 Tillim, ‘The New Avant-Garde,’ p. 20. The widths of the strips were more or less the same as Stella’s painted stripes.
relief element into the monochrome panel which, paradoxically, was probably to keep it as a surface, as opposed to a field of indeterminate illusionistic depth.\textsuperscript{30}

The concave sections at the top and bottom of the work were each constructed with four sheets of galvanized iron overlapping each other and fixed at their edges and to each other, and half-way along each sheet, with small studs or nails. Where these sections joined the painted panel, they were more or less continuous with it. Then at about half their height they were made to curve outwards from the surface—in profile by a quarter of a circle—so that the top and bottom edges formed narrow surfaces (here sections of aluminium were added) parallel to the painted surface.

These works can be considered as attempts to give surface and edge the same character of actuality. They were probably regarded as the most successful of a number of mostly unexhibited painting-like works produced in 1961-62 which incorporated 'foreign' elements into or onto relatively flat painted surfaces—an aluminium baking tray in the centre of one, a length of asphalt pipe in another. However, although the introduction of 'real' elements in these works disrupted the integrity of the painted surface, they still retained some form of the "rectangle and its figure" convention that Judd had rejected in his critical writing. The concave-curved projection pieces resisted this conventionality because the 'foreign' elements—the galvanized iron curved sections—continued the painted surface at the same time as presenting a new surface of a different material, parallel and, as it were, in real 'space.' But since this new surface also appeared as if the surface of the painting had been 'turned up' to reveal its edges, its quality of actuality was an extension of the painting support.

Fried, in a review of the exhibition, regarded these 'picture-things' as a "compromise... with certain norms of painting,"\textsuperscript{31} as, too, did Tillim who, in his

\textsuperscript{30} Judd recalled, in 1971, that the purpose of the drilled holes in the central panel of the third of concave-section wall-pieces was to make the surface more "definite," saying that "[w]ithout the holes the metallic surface would be too illusionistic, too soft." Coplans, \textit{Don Judd}, p. 23. This was probably true of all the various disruptions of the central flat panel in this series of wall pieces. The first of this format, the 'Artist Critics' work, had sand mixed with the cadmium red light oil paint to produce a roughly textured surface. Smith, \textit{Donald Judd}, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{31} Michael Fried, 'New York Letter,' \textit{Art International} vol. 8 no. 1 (February 1964), p. 26 (reprinted in Fried, \textit{Art and Objecthood}, pp. 312-13).
article 'The New Avant-Garde,' stated that "Judd seems to have recognized their fundamentally retrograde character."32 Fried, at this time, responded fairly positively to Judd's work, and, as was evident in his review, took Judd's art criticism seriously.33

As one might expect on the strength of Judd's monthly criticism in Arts Magazine it is an assured, intelligent show; it also provides a kind of commentary on the criticism and is doubly interesting on that account. In general I think one can say that Judd in his art writing has expressed strong suspicions that easel painting is more or less defunct and has championed artists whose paintings are on the verge of becoming objects, such as Frank Stella and Al Jensen.34

Fried was interested in how Judd's art lived up to his art criticism. His main reservation was that, although Judd's criticism favoured objects and the object-like, neither the work nor the criticism provided criteria with which to evaluate such objects. At the end of the review, Fried turned Judd's criticism back onto his own work. Although Judd valued paintings that were "on the verge of becoming objects," his own painting-like works were characterized by their "retention of the most conventional shape of the picture support."35

As I discussed in chapter 3, Fried gradually came to conceive of Judd's views as a literalist "misinterpretation" or "misconstru[al]" of the development of modernist painting, one that took literally its imperative of acknowledging the painting support. From Fried's point of view, this acknowledgment was necessary because it was in the face of its mere literalness that the identity of modernist painting as an art addressed especially to the sense of sight was secured. Its identity was in its being more- or other-than-literal, its being seen figurally as more or other than it was. For Fried, the literalness that a literalist

33 Elsewhere in Fried's 'New York Letter' (February 1964) reviewing Judd's exhibition, he wrote "I find less to admire in his [Varujan Boghosian's] work than in Judd's, where the emphasis is on intelligence rather than on "poetry."" Fried, 'New York Letter' (February 1964), p. 26. Tillim, too, attached a special importance to his fellow review writer's critical standpoint, quoting in his article the passage in Judd's review of the Noland exhibition which had ended "It has to go entirely." Tillim, 'The New Avant-Garde,' p. 18.
35 Ibid.
like Judd saw in modernist painting's acknowledgment of the support was made
to figure as its underlying condition. Although Fried saw in the work of Judd
and others a concern with mere literalness (the "wholly literal," "literalness per
se"), there was also an element in his thinking which was at odds with this and
saw the literalness as the result of a "misinterpretation" of modernist painting.
From another point of view, I suggested, it could be seen simply as the result of
an interpretation of modernist painting to meet new needs, in which case the
literalness should not be taken as such but as a figuring of modernism. (The
understanding of the literalness of Minimal Art as a move away from the
metaphorical was a common response in the early criticism which tried to make
sense of it. With reference to Judd's work exhibited at the Green Gallery, the
following remark by Hilton Kramer can be compared to Fried's defining of
literalness: "one is again [seeing Judd's exhibition] made conscious of the shift
away from an analytic and metaphorical style to the more literal mode of
utterance making itself felt at the present time." 36)

Judd's so-called 'picture-things' can be seen, in their treatment of surface
and edge, as an interpretation of what he would have seen as recent abstract
painting. According to this relation, their literalness, which would be their
refusal of the more- or other-than-literal character of the special address to sight,
would have to be seen as figural in character. The significance of the
incorporation of elements which were not paint and canvas, such as sections of
galvanized iron, or aluminium, would also reside, to some extent at least, in the
same refusal, which meant that the mode of existence of such materials in the
'picture-things' was potentially double—as representing the refusal of the special
address to sight, and as materiality as such.

**Wholeness and more-than-wholeness**

The other works in Judd's exhibition at the Green Gallery were free-

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36 Hilton Kramer, 'Art Centers: New York, the Season Surveyed,' *Art in America* vol. 52 no. 3 (1964), p. 112.
standing, and perhaps in this respect less ambiguous than the ‘picture-things.'

Both Tillim and Fried thought these more successful. It was also the free-standing works which tended to be singled out in the reviews of the exhibition by supportive critics such as Barbara Rose and Lucy Lippard. These pieces were mostly rectilinear wooden constructions which incorporated either a diagonal or a tubular element which consisted, with one exception, partly or wholly of a material other than wood. All were, like the majority of the wall pieces, painted mainly in cadmium red light oil paint, usually with the non-wooden material element keeping its own colour or painted a different colour.

Even the work which was entirely wood and painted in cadmium red light oil paint incorporated a kind of distinct element. This work, which was untitled, but referred to by Tillim as the “record cabinet,” consisted of a constructed box around twenty inches high, three and three-quarter feet long and two and a half feet wide [fig. 24]. Along its top surface, spanning its whole length and parallel to the longest edge, was what looked like a semi-circular “groove” (Tillim’s word). This “groove” was a channel which separated the upper surface of the box into two sections, one of which was about half the width of the other, the channel itself being around half the width—about four inches—of the smaller section. Where the channel met the end surfaces of the box, a semi-circle, whose diameter matched the width of the channel had been sawn away. This semi-circular gap was repeated along the channel in a series of twenty-eight planes parallel to the end surfaces—what Tillim referred to as “shelving.” The distances between the ‘shelves’ were organized as a kind of grouped progression, so that the “space seemed squeezed out,” as Robert Smithson put it in an article from 1965.

Tillim, speaking of the constructions in general, wrote that the “cutting, grooving and notching are further addenda to a style whose physical

37 There was another wall-piece besides the ones I mentioned which consisted of a length of aluminium pipe incorporated into a similarly proportioned wood construction.
38 Ibid. Hilton Kramer, reviewing the exhibition, also referred to a “record cabinet” as one of the “common objects” to which the works made “reference.” ‘Art Centers: New York, the Season Surveyed,’ p. 112.
deportment is otherwise immaculate,” but thought the “addenda” necessary to “avoid a completely monolithic passivity.” Rose, in her review, related the work to a more general trend, writing that “[l]ike much of the new work (both painting and sculpture), Judd’s work looks machine-made, industrial, standardized, materialized or stamped out as a whole, rather than as parts that relate one to another.” The difference in focus between these two interpretations, one on wholeness, and the other on “addenda” pointed to what may constitute a logic of the supplement (of which Tillim’s word ‘addendum’ is a synonym) at work in Judd’s constructions. The groove could be regarded as completing the work, as revealing an insufficiency (perhaps not being able to see the inside of the box), at the same time that the box without the groove had a kind of (“monolithic”) wholeness already. The attribution of “whole”-ness was one which corresponded to a quality which Judd, in his criticism, attached value, as I will discuss. The word “addenda” would not have been approved of by Judd, but, because the elements to which it referred mostly departed from what could be called the ‘generality’ of the cadmium red light, they gave each of the works a ‘specificity,’ another term which had a special value in Judd’s criticism.

Specific and general

Virtually throughout the period that he wrote criticism, Judd’s writing made use of an opposition between the “general” and the “specific.” Sometimes

40 Tillim, ‘The New Avant-Garde,’ pp. 20-21. Rose and Lippard also noted the internal contrasts in the work, between the metal and wood (Rose), or the “hot red” and the “cold, hard form” (Lippard). Lippard also likened the constructions to “the scattered units of a stage set.” Barbara Rose, ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 8 no. 1 (February 1964), p. 41; L. R. Lippard, ‘New York,’ Artforum vol. 2 no. 9 (March 1964), p. 19.
42 The word ‘supplement’ has two contradictory significations, to which particular attention has been drawn by Jacques Derrida, in his 1967 reading of Rousseau, from whom Derrida appropriated the word. On one hand, “the supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence.” On the other hand, “the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as one fills a void.” In the first meaning, the supplement shows that what it supplements already had a fullness by showing that it is extra to it; in the second, it shows that what it supplements did not have a fullness, but rather a lack, or an emptiness, by filling it. See Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology (1967), translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 144-45.
the term "particular" was opposed to "general." The word "specific," in particular, has come to be associated not only with a positive value Judd gave to works which he thought had the quality of specificity, but also with the intent of his own work. Judd's article 'Specific Objects,' probably written in late 1964, and published in the 1965 Arts Yearbook, has commonly been read as a "stylistic manifesto." In Judd's earliest reviews, the opposition tended to be put into the terms of the stylistic opposition which I discussed earlier between originality and derivativeness, or else, more interestingly, in terms of individual experience and impersonal form. 'Generality' was usually used to connote the latter term in each of these oppositions. Art could maintain both sides of the opposition and be both general and specific. For example, although the "generality" of work by artists such as Malevich, Mondrian and Albers was an attribute of the impersonal forms with which they began, this did not preclude their originality. Judd clearly thought, however, that certain senses of generality were irrelevant for the contemporary American situation; certain art could appear "too general for now or general in the wrong way." Judd stated elsewhere: "There are a lot of ways art changes. One of them is from a greater to lesser generality, at least in relation to one particularity. (What is general and particular at one time may be rearranged in another.)" The privileged "particularity" of the present, for Judd, was the "personal." In this regard, Judd considered his present to be one
which included the achievements of the Abstract Expressionists, where, along with its "singleness of the format and so of the quality," the "more unique and personal aspects of art, which had been subservient before, were stated alone, large and singly." This emphasis on the "personal" is, of course, at odds with the common attribution of impersonality to Minimal Art.

However, there was yet another way that the opposition between the "general" and the "specific" was invoked. Judd related "generalization" to "idealization" and "being allusive." (This aspect connects vividly with Judd's philosophical outlook, which I will be discussing later on.) In contrast, and strongly praised by Judd, works by Lee Bontecou [fig. 25] "exclude[d]" allusion by making the shape, structure and image "coextensive"—"It is actual and specific and is experienced as an object." The work [of Bontecou] asserts its own existence, form and power," as he put it in a later article. In this later article, however, Judd also wrote that "Bontecou's reliefs are an assertion of herself, of what she feels and knows." The work was therefore an assertion of itself and the self of the artist. The area of the work in which these 'selves' could coincide was in the material and its working. In 'Specific Objects,' Judd stated that "Materials... are simply materials... They are specific. If they are used directly they are more specific." Similarly: "There is an objectivity to the obdurate identity of a material. Also, of course, the qualities of materials... have unobjective uses."

Provisionally, the specific can be defined as a term which brought together different aspects of the experience or the mode of existence of art which were individual. Its function within Judd's criticism seems to have been to unify the work of art in terms of the knowledge it effected, of the self and of things in the world. There were two corollaries of specificity which tended to be stressed. One was that an art object should project the condition of being a thing in some way. It could be a thing as a combination of 'real world' things, as

49 Ibid., p. 178 ('Lee Bontecou,' Arts Magazine, April 1965).
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 187 ('Specific Objects,' Arts Yearbook 8, 1965).
though the latter were materials, as in early works by Dan Flavin. Judd wrote, early in 1964, that Flavin’s objects were “things themselves,” but their thingness was constituted by two different kinds of material put together—paint and lights. Judd referred to the lights as “materials” rather than as things in their own right and to the painted blocks to which the lights were attached as “not paintings,” so that their combination to form a thing was more important than any condition of separateness that they may have had on their own. (This could apply equally well to the cadmium red constructions incorporating ‘foreign’ elements in Judd’s Green Gallery exhibition.) Anything used to make a work of art was not to be metaphorical, yet the term “literal” was usually used disparagingly, to describe aspects of the work which were merely themselves and not an aspect of the work as a whole. There was a difference between things as just things, as materials, as literal, and the existence of a work of art as a thing itself. The difference was sometimes difficult to pin down. In his article ‘Chamberlain: another view’ (published in Art International at the end of 1963), Judd wrote of John Chamberlain’s use of metal salvaged from wrecked cars, that this material was “initially and recurrently... pretty much something as anything is something. A piece always seems as if that is all it is going to be.” Even after a structure was discerned, Judd said, the work’s initial thingness recurred—“Nothing is done which will contradict the ordinary appearance of the metal.” From this emphasis on thingness, and the disparaging of the literality of the irrelevant detail, it can be inferred that it was important to the sense of specificity that the object was a made thing, a made literalness.

This relates to the other corollary of specificity I want to point to, which was wholeness. It was by the wholeness of form that the art object could be a thing over and against what it was made of materially, i.e. other things, and what Judd called its “aspects,” such as scale, structure and image. The

53 For example, in the Bontecou review, the “literality” of the detail was regarded by Judd as secondary to the form, or in a review of the paintings of Paul Feeley in which the use of some patterns were “literal, simply patterns.” Ibid., pp. 65 (Arts Magazine, January 1963), 95 (Arts Magazine, September 1963).
"wholeness" of the work was "primary... experienced first and directly. It is not something understood through the contemplation of parts." "The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting." However, this wholeness did not need to be simple. The singularity and wholeness of form that Judd particularly valued was something that had to be arrived at in the face of the complex manifestation of form in things in general.

The term "specific," probably the most privileged in Judd's critical vocabulary, therefore had a range of meanings that contributed to the sense of the integrity of the work of art. It meant the stylistic originality realized by the artistic self, as a self which only realized itself (what it "feels and knows") through materials. Specificity was a characteristic of these materials too, but only as they were worked by the artistic self, and were not made to allude to other things or other selves. In terms of form, specificity meant wholeness. Given Judd's disparagement of the irrelevantly literal, specificity would not have meant the merely literal as such. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the specific can be said to pertain to a remade literality. The nature of this literalness was that it was not metaphorical or allusive, idealized or generalized. Things or materials were put together in such a way as to foreclose such readings-in; the literalness of such things or materials in themselves was important but not sufficient.

It was evident that Judd thought about his own work in similar terms. The 'specificity' of the free-standing pieces at the Green Gallery perhaps lay in

the bringing together the potentially generalized wholeness of the wooden box-

55 Ibid., pp. 184, 187 ('Specific Objects,' Arts Yearbook 8, 1965), 66 (Arts Magazine, January 1963), 57 (Arts Magazine, September 1962), 60 (Arts Magazine, December 1962). His review of Morris's work in 'Black, White and Gray' approved of the objects insofar as they 'expressed' the idea that all things existed equally and unhierarchically, but complained that they were "as simple as they are obdurate... I need more to think about and look at." Ibid., p. 117 ('Black, White and Gray,' Arts Magazine, March 1964). One example of the kind of complexity which Judd attributed to a singularity of form was his worrying of the way that the form of Oldenburg's Soft Switches (1964) seemed "like" breasts, but did not "suggest" the form of a breast so much as that the form of the work "is it, or nearly it." The suspension of the form between two kinds of reference (to "man-made" and "emotive" objects) was what made it "single, as it is felt." Ibid., p. 133 (Arts Magazine, September 1964). Later, Judd wrote of Oldenburg's forms—which were "simple, basic, profound"—that "The reference to objects gives them a way to occur." Ibid., p. 192. (This latter piece was written in July 1966 but not published at the time.) Alex Potts discusses in detail the "psychosexual dynamic" in certain passages in Judd's criticism, in The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 272-78.
like forms with the potentially irrelevant extraneousness of the material elements. Thus the specific was achieved through a negation of the general. In a statement published as part of Barbara Rose’s ‘ABC Art’ (1965), Judd wrote

One of the important things in any art is its degree of generality and specificity and another is how each of these occurs. The extent and the occurrence have to be credible. I’d like my work to be somewhat more specific than art has been and also specific and general in a different way. [...] Of course, finally, I only believe in my own work. It is necessary to make general statements, but it is impossible and not even desirable to believe most generalizations. No one has the knowledge to form a comprehensive group of reliable generalizations. [...] Some of my generalizations, like these verbal ones, are about this situation. Other generalizations and much of the specificity are assertions of my own interests and those that have settled into the public domain.56

As well as applying the terminology of his criticism to his own work (by this time, Judd was no longer writing criticism), this statement was about itself as well. It generalized about the impossibility of making believable generalizations; and it demonstrated the extent of Judd’s self-consciousness regarding his own use of language.

At this point in the chapter, I want briefly to try to make clear why I think it is important to look closely at the language that the Minimalists used in the interpretations they made (directly or indirectly) of their own work. The dissertation as a whole is concerned with questioning the self-evidence of the ‘literal’ as a term used to explain Minimal Art, arguing instead for an understanding of the literal (as a value) in figural terms. In many of the responses to Minimal Art, the self-evidence of its literalness was evidence of its impersonality, yet at the same time, the artists involved felt the need to self-consciously reflect on their activity in the medium of language. Generally speaking, language can be said to consist in, on one side, its referential or representational function, and, on the other, its materiality and positional capability. The problem of the priorness of either of these two aspects of

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language lay behind the problem of the priorness of the literal or the figural, a problem I discussed in chapter 3. That the Minimal artists chose to write about their art (in the case of Judd, mostly via the work of others) could be said to compensate for the lack of meaning or the lack of representation in the work; this is a point that has often been made, at the time and since. However, the point I wish to make here is that the actual use of language, particularly in the cases of Judd and Andre (not so much in the case of Morris), tended towards an awareness of the opacity of language, its ability to position its object, to figure it through the orders particular to language. Both Judd and Andre developed ways of writing, which amounted to implicit theorizations of language, which were attuned to its literality, in both a material and a semantic sense. This awareness of language, I want to suggest, was the correlate of their art, and not at all a compensatory or explanatory gesture.

_Art and criticism_

The systematic nature of Judd’s critical terminology probably had its basis in his earlier education. Although until 1962 he was studying art history at Columbia University, he had first studied philosophy (also at Columbia) from 1949-1953. His grounding there seems to have been from the standpoint of American pragmatism, but also aesthetics—he studied the philosophy of Dewey, as well as that of Bergson and Santayana. Judd made no reference, however, to any of these philosophers in his art criticism (although he did once make a reference to the empiricist philosophy of Hume to make a point about representational painting). Judd did, on occasion, use the same kind of

57 Contemporary examples would include Harold Rosenberg, ‘Defining Art’ (1967): “No art has ever been more dependent on words than these works pledged to silent materiality,” in Battcock, _Minimal Art_, p. 306, or Darby Bannard’s characterization of Minimal Art as a style “made to be talked about.” ‘Present-Day Art and Ready-Made Styles,’ _Artforum_ vol. 5 no. 4 (December 1966), p. 33.


59 Judd criticized what he saw as the anachronism of representational still-life painting, which, historically, had depended on a belief in essences, a belief questionable since Hume. Judd, _Complete Writings_, p. 72 (_Arts Magazine_, February 1963).
terminology that appeared in the art criticism to support a more general pragmatic world view, such as in a statement he made in early 1965, published in an article on the New York art scene in Newsweek: "There is a breakdown in universal and general values. I don't think the artist believes in them. I think they are happy to help break down general values like any great statement you can make about the way people should live."60 Dewey's aesthetics, with its emphasis on experience, may have provided Judd with a version of this view in terms of art criticism. Dewey wrote, in his 1934 book, Art as Experience:

"Criticism is judgment. The material out of which judgment grows is the work, the object, but it is this object as it enters into the experience of the critic by interaction with his own sensitivity and his knowledge and funded store from past experiences."61

The critical judgment was founded on the experience of the work, which was itself, in Judd's critical scheme, founded on the experience (on the part of the artist) of the material used to make art. The critic also had his experience of the material used to make criticism—language. This raises the problem of how Judd saw the relation between the critic's way of constituting the object in language and the object itself. A rare instance in which Judd made a self-conscious statement on this relation was in his opening sentence of a review of Stella's second solo exhibition in 1962: "Criticism is pretty much after the fact."62 However, there could still be quite different views on how criticism came 'after' art and therefore how separate and objective it could be. Northrop Frye, for example, in his 'Polemical Introduction' to his 1957 book Anatomy of Criticism, defended literary criticism as a particular kind of knowledge legitimately separate from, and not in a parasitic relation to, literary art. The necessity of this, he claimed, was due to art being "disinterested," i.e. not directed to any particular end and therefore not concerned to "'say' something." The autonomy of art meant that its criticism was separate and different in the

62 Judd, Complete Writings, p. 57 (Arts Magazine, September 1962).
knowledge it attained. A few years later, an alternative view was put forward by de Man, in his essay ‘Form and Intent in the American New Criticism,’ which criticized Frye for his assumption of the autonomous unity of the literary text. This sense of unity, de Man argued, came with the concealment of the work’s intentionality, its consisting of an act of interpretation. In fact, the unity sensed by the critic was the result of their own act of interpretation so that the relation between the critical text and the artistic text was one of extension rather than different in kind.

These two different views of the relation between criticism and art—one of a relation of difference, the other one of extension—become more complicated if considered in relation to Judd. Whereas literary criticism uses the same medium as its object (i.e. words, text), art criticism uses a different medium from, for example, paint on canvas, or steel and perspex. Writing and reading texts implies sequence whereas looking at (but not making) works of art implies an initial apprehension all at once. To write about a work of art would necessarily involve its description, and this description, involving a translation, would easily shade into interpretation. Judd seems to have been acutely aware of the problems of the fidelity of description, which accounts for his, at times, disconnected and seemingly awkward style of writing.

Descriptive criticism

Robert Smithson, in 1966, described Judd’s “writing style” as having “much in common with the terse, factual description one finds in his collection of geology books,” an observation which has often been made and sometimes used to suggest parallels between Judd’s critical and artistic practices. This

63 Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 4-5. (The italics are Frye’s, presumably signalling the reference to Kant.)
66 For example, David Batchelor wrote that Judd’s “style of spare and unadorned writing is... the corollary of his art.” Minimalism (London: Tate Gallery, 1997), p. 67.
"factual description" contrasted with the more poetic descriptions of other contemporary reviewers, particularly in the early 1960s in magazines like Art News and Arts Magazine, though it could be likened to the formalist criticism of Greenberg and Fried, which was influential in the early to mid-1960s.

A couple of years later, Smithson made another, more substantial, attempt to characterize Judd's critical writing. (His focus was on the article Judd had written about the sculpture of Lee Bontecou in 1965, which I referred to earlier).

Donald Judd at one time wrote a descriptive criticism that described "specific objects." When he wrote about Lee Bontecou, his descriptions became a language full of holes. "The black hole does not allude to a black hole," says Judd, "it is one." In that article Judd brings into focus the structure of his own notion of "the general and the specific" by defining the "central hole" and "periphery" of her "conic scheme." Let us equate central with specific, and general with periphery. Although Judd is "no longer interested in voids," he does seem interested in blank surfaces, which are in effect the opposite of voids. Judd brings an abyss into the very material of the thing he describes when he says: "The image is an object, a grim, abyssal one." The paradox between the specific and the general is also abyssal. Judd's syntax is abyssal—it is a language that ebbs from the mind into an ocean of words. A brooding depth of gleaming surfaces—placid but dismal.

Smithson pointed to the paradox whereby Judd, having described the "image" as an "object," meaning, for him, that it did not "allude," that it was something definite itself, also described this object as "abyssal," indefinite. He then extended the paradoxical coexistence of the materially specific and the abyssal to encompass Judd's use of language. He suggested, by the metaphor "ocean of

67 For example, Judd's Arts Magazine co-reviewer Sidney Tillim wrote the following on Joan Mitchell's paintings in 1961: "... exfoliating brushwork that climbs bramble-like over the surface... Her color too is forged under internal pressure. It glints like precious gems, hard and refractory." Sidney Tillim, 'In the Galleries,' Arts Magazine vol. 35 nos. 8-9 (May-June 1961), pp. 84-5.

words," that Judd’s language receded from the condition of being language in
the service of thought, or concepts, ("the mind") to the condition of being an
undifferentiated mass of equal elements ("words"). This suggests a double
nature of language; as something used to shape and make experience
meaningful and as something merely material, by itself meaningless. (Smithson
described Carl Andre’s writing, in the same article, in very similar terms, as
"bur[ying] the mind under rigorous incantatory arrangements."69)

Parataxis

Something of what Smithson must have meant when he wrote of Judd’s
"syntax" as something that "ebbs from the mind" can be detected in the
following note, sent to Judd by James Fitzsimmons, then editor of Art
International, rejecting his submissions of reviews.

What you’re sending me is not what I want. It’s not what you say that bothers me—I
have always held that the critic should be allowed to call his shots as he sees
them—it’s the way that you say it, or at least the way that you say it some of the
time. I like your writing when you settle down, dig in, and do a good square job of work;
I don’t like it when you talk off the cuff, it’s too “informel” for my taste. Even garrulous
at times—not because what you say isn’t to the point or worth saying but simply, again,
because of the shambling basic-Hemingway you elect to write in. “Most of the work
shown is painting. There’s some sculpture. John Smith shows a painting. It’s red. It’s
fine. It’s more than after-image.”
What it amounts to is that I like prose, and don’t believe writing should sound, like,
formless, like conversation mostly sounds.70

Fitzsimmons’ description “shambling basic-Hemingway” and his parody of
Judd’s style makes it clear that he objected most to Judd’s use of parataxis, the
placing of parts of sentences or complete sentences one after another without
showing how they are related, either by time or other kind of order or

69 This description is discussed in the next chapter.
70 ‘Facsimiles of correspondence with Art International,’ in Judd, Complete Writings, p. 170.
hierarchy. He thought this too “off the cuff,” too unplanned, “formless.” I am going to suggest that, on the contrary, parataxis was used rhetorically by Judd to effect literality, not just in his writing, but also in the serial works he began to produce from around 1964.

The sentences or parts of sentences in parataxis tend to be joined or punctuated by neutral means such as the word ‘and’ or commas and full-stops. Subordinate clauses are not used. Although Fitzsimmons’ parody exaggerated the parataxis (Judd, of course, often—usually—used subordinate clauses and all the usual means of constructing sentences), it is also not difficult to find examples of it in Judd’s criticism: “The space between is clear. It’s fairly nice. Its scale is fine.” Or: “The arrangement is relatively uncomposed, unstressed, is simple in a novel way, seems unusual, isn’t pompous.”

It is also noticeable in the parody, and in the actual examples, that any adjectives used were not directly connected to the noun (the art object or some aspect of the art object), but were given their own short sentences, or parts of sentences. Since adjectives are used to supplement nouns in such a way as to describe the objects which the nouns name more fully, they effect specificity, but in doing so they ‘modify’ the already existing wholeness of the noun. Given the values of specificity and wholeness in his criticism, it may have been the kind of material resistance effected by language in constituting these attributes that led, consciously or unconsciously, to Judd’s paratactical way of putting things.

Another aspect of Judd’s parataxis was his extensive use of the copula ‘is.’ The ambiguous meaning of ‘is’ has been a recurrent problem in logic, in particular the confusion between the ‘is’ of identity (e.g. ‘Judd is the artist who made the stacks’) and the ‘is’ of predication (e.g. ‘Judd’s style is paratactical’). The confusion can result in the joining of dissimilar things or qualities by identifying different aspects of these things or qualities. In this way, a

71 M. H. Abrams, ‘Style,’ in A Glossary of Literary Terms (sixth edition) (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), p. 204. Hemingway’s writing style was the one used by Abrams to exemplify a paratactic style.
conception of a reality is built up in language through a process of reasoning based on generalization. In an article about the modern American poet William Carlos Williams, Patrick Moore described how Williams, in tune with the attack on scholastic logic in the early part of the twentieth century, saw this kind of reasoning as basically syntactical in character. The problem with syntax was that it privileged relations and correspondences between things over the things themselves. Williams thought that it was “the words we need to get back to,” words that were not subject to syntactical subordination and coordination.

Williams separated syntax from logic. Things were merely there for Williams, or better still, things merely were. He did not like to use syntax in his poetry to assign a single meaning or a related set of meanings to a thing and then use the newly assigned meanings to prove a point or convey an idea. He avoided constructions like, “This thing is like that thing,” or “This thing is that thing.” He preferred constructions like, “This thing, that thing, that other thing,” or “This thing is every thing,” or “This thing is that thing, and that other thing, and that other thing, etc.”

Williams avoided the use of metaphor or simile to convey a generalized idea, preferring to present things in a fragmentary or serial manner. Two of the poetic strategies identified by Moore which were adopted by Williams to problematize logical syntax, and which bear on Judd’s writing, were the use of parataxis and the use of the copula ‘is.’ Williams used the ‘is’ of predication, rather than the ‘is’ of identity (the basis of metaphor), to attach several qualities to one thing, or to relate several other things to one thing, without suggesting any kind of priority. “This thing is that thing, and that other thing, and that other thing, etc.” This corresponds to the most characteristic way that Judd put things. “The arrangement is relatively uncomposed, unstressed, is simple in a novel way, seems unusual, isn’t pompous.”

The use of parataxis, and the ‘is’ of predication to multiply qualities, but all the while preserving the particularity of the object, was a typically modern way

75 Ibid., p. 897.
76 Ibid., p. 904.
of combating a mode of reasoning based on syntactical relations, which represented reality as a kind of ordered, rational edifice. (Adorno, in a very different context, described paratactical constructions as “artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax.”77) Judd, the “Antihierarchical American” as he was once called,78 on occasion made antirationalist statements which suggest that the paratactical style of his art criticism was attuned to his philosophical world view. In an interview, conducted in 1964 and published in 1966, Judd related the idea of composition to a European “rationalistic philosophy.” “All that art [European art] is based on systems built beforehand, a priori systems; they express a certain type of thinking and logic that is pretty much discredited as a way of finding out what the world’s like.” When pressed on how his own work reflected an antirationalistic view, Judd’s response was to say that “[t]he parts are unrelational.”79 This corresponded with his description of Stella’s stripe paintings, in ‘Specific Objects.’

Stella’s shaped canvases involve several important characteristics of three-dimensional work. The periphery of a piece and the lines inside correspond. The stripes are nowhere near being discrete parts. [...] The order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another.80

One thing after another. The word ‘parataxis’ derives from the Greek paratassein ‘to place side by side,’ and this way of putting things or aspects side by side, or one after the other without giving anything priority or special importance, was the most characteristic aspect of Judd’s writing. It was probably something that

80 Judd, Complete Writings, pp. 183-84 (‘Specific Objects,’ Arts Yearbook 8, 1965).
Judd arrived at fairly unconsciously, yet the description of Stella's work suggests that he could see the same kind of paratactical ordering in works of art.

One thing after another: progressions, rows and stacks

In 1964, Judd was just beginning to use repetition and simple sequences to make works which consisted of several elements. When he made the untitled work referred to as the "record cabinet," Judd saved the semicircles of wood cut from the internal planes which had constituted the 'groove' of the work. He used these semicircles to construct another work which consisted of a block of wood on which the semicircles of wood (there were thirty) were attached in four groups, from left to right, according to the arithmetic progression: six, seven, eight, nine. The whole construction was lacquered red and hung on the wall [fig. 26]. Between the four groups of semicircles were three gaps which corresponded in width to the groups of eight, seven and six, so that the entire sequence ran: six, (gap of eight), seven, (seven), eight, (six), nine. There were thus two sequences, one positive and one negative, which ran counter to one another. Judd produced several versions of this work in galvanized iron, usually lacquered red, during 1965 [fig. 27]. One was made with the sequence: six inches, (gap of one and a half inches), five and a half, (two), five, (two and a half), four and a half, (three), four, (three and a half), three and a half, (four), three, (four and a half), two and a half, (five), two, (five and a half), one and a half. The proportionality, which was in inches, is harder to read than that of the wood version, where the semicircular segments can be seen individually and counted.

Judd utilized different kinds of sequence in other wall-pieces he made during 1965, including a proportionality in which the positive elements and the gaps between them were progressively doubled (or halved). The most complicated and hardest to read of this period was the long wall piece shown in

81 William C. Agee, 'Unit, Series, Site: A Judd Lexicon,' Art in America vol. 63 no. 3 (May-June 1975), p. 43 p. 44.
82 This work is in the Froehlich Collection, and has been exhibited at the Tate Gallery. In the case of this kind of wall piece, Judd "did not insist that they always be installed so that the narrowest projection is always on the left." Smith, Donald Judd, p. 93.
his second solo exhibition at the Castelli Gallery in early 1966 [fig. 28], which
looks to have a sequence based on arithmetic progression, but perhaps
combined with a constant element. The implication of such works was that the
sequences could extend further in either direction, and no direction was
privileged over the other. Even in the Castelli progression the positive element
at the left end had a proportionally corresponding gap between two positive
elements at the other end. The nature of the sequences meant that there was
effectively no centre to the arrangement. Any attempt to account for the
arrangement in terms of a proportionality derived from the whole was
frustrated, and in this sense its visual order was intended to disrupt a reading in
which the meaning of the whole was built up syntactically through the
interrelating of parts. The parts of the work had to be seen in a relation to the
next part. This relation was only in terms of adjacency, rather than in terms of
the work as a whole. In fact, there was nothing to connect the part with the
whole. The order was not “rationalistic and underlying”; the mode of reasoning
which constituted the work was easily seen but had to be consciously read, its
elements seen one by one.

The elements which comprised the long wall progression exhibited at the
Castelli Gallery were aluminium boxes lacquered purple; inset into them was a
continuous unlacquered aluminium bar which covered its entire length (it was
more than twenty feet long). Rosalind Krauss, in a review article about the
exhibition, ‘Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,’ suggested that the irregular
widths of the purple boxes “confound[ed] a perspective reading.” For her, this
meant that the work “cannot be seen rationally, in terms of a given sense of
geometrical laws or theorems evolved prior to the experience of the object.”
This reading fits with the kind of antirational order that Judd wanted in his
work. Krauss, however, turned to actual perceptual experience, described in

83 James Meyer wrote that this work was “based on a system of inverse natural numbers (1 - 1/2
+ 1/3 - 1/4 + 1/5).” Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties (New Haven and London,
2001), p. 172. Jane Harrison Cone claimed that the work had an “implied sequence or series,
which is in fact not the case.” ‘Judd at the Whitney,’ Artforum vol. 6 no. 9 (May 1968),
pp. 36-39.
84 Rosalind Krauss, ‘Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,’ Artforum vol. 4 no. 9 (May 1966),
p. 25.
phenomenological terms, to explain how the wall progression was seen. Her analysis picked up on an opposition between facticity and illusion. This opposition, which is a recurrent theme in discussions of Judd’s work, was inaugurated in one of the contemporary responses to Judd’s 1963-64 Green Gallery exhibition, by Gene Swenson. “Seen from different angles, it [a box construction which had a diagonal step, the vertical face of which was violet plexiglass] appears to change from a more to less “absolutely simple” shape. It never seems to exist as pure fact (what it is in complete simplicity) nor as an illusion (more or less than what it is)—which is a logical if not a visual paradox.” Krauss made a similar distinction. “Judd’s own criticism would seem to accept only that art which eschews both allusion and illusion. Yet his own sculpture derives its power from a heightening of illusion...” The illusion was that of an “initial reading,” the appearance that the purple lacquered elements gave of hanging from the continuous aluminium element, being revealed as an illusion by a subsequent reading’s “confound[ing]” of it, through seeing that the aluminium element was in fact supported by the purple elements.

As Krauss suggested, the illusion in Judd’s work appeared to contradict what he said about specificity and wholeness in his criticism. Similar works, including a set of four identical galvanized iron boxes which had a continuous aluminium element lacquered blue inset into them [fig. 29], were exhibited in a group exhibition at the Green Gallery. In 1965, Smithson wrote that such

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85 See the discussion of Krauss’s phenomenological interpretation of Minimal Art in chapter 1.
88 Ibid., pp. 25-26. The opposition between facticity and illusion was also focussed on in Grégoire Müller’s article ‘Donald Judd: Ten Years,’ Arts Magazine vol. 47 no. 4 (February 1973), p. 35: “I feel confident that, if my questioning of the literalist intent of Judd’s work seems to contradict his own writing, the emphasis on its unique illusional qualities can do more to bring the eyes back to the pieces.” Briony Fer recently extended Krauss’s argument, in particular her suggestion that there was in Judd’s work “something which exceeded the theoretical apparatus offered in Judd’s own account of the work,” into a consideration of Judd’s work in the psychoanalytical terms of lack and disphasia. Briony Fer, ‘Judd’s Specific Objects,’ in On Abstract Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 136, 151. See also Frances Colpitt, Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p. 106.
89 The other artists in the exhibition were Morris, Dan Flavin and Neil Williams. Some of the same works were exhibited as part of the American section of the São Paulo Bienale in 1965.
works had a "reversible up and down quality [...] It is impossible to tell what is hanging down from what or what is supporting what. Ups are downs and downs are ups."\textsuperscript{90} The way that Smithson described these works suggest that their vertical reversibility may have been intended not so much as an illusion but as a correlate to the lateral either-way directionalities of the progressions, and similarly meant to frustrate a rational, built, sense of order.

Smithson introduced a further self-opposing element, the "uncanny materiality" of the surfaces. By this, he probably meant the quality of the galvanized iron, which had a kind of granular, but also sheen-like surface, or the use of a metallic motorcycle lacquer made by Harley-Davidson. This lacquer had a thin, transparent, but deeply coloured surface, which William C. Agee later described as seeming to be "closely integrated with the material it covered."\textsuperscript{91} Smithson wrote that the "uncanny materiality" of the surface "engulfs the basic structure," resulting in a "suspended condition" between inside and outside, definiteness and disappearance, insubstantiality and facticity. "The work seems to have no natural equivalent to anything physical, yet all it brings to mind is physicality."\textsuperscript{92}

The progressions frustrated a sense of order derived from the whole by incorporating an either-way directionality and uncentredness, so that attention was focussed either on the elements as next to one another or on the whole, but not any relation of generalization between part and whole. This order was simplified further in Judd's exhibition at the Castelli Gallery in February-March 1966, which was dominated by works which consisted of a series of elements that were separate from each other, the same in appearance but not in placing. The four boxes incorporating the blue aluminium continuous element, which I mentioned earlier, was remade towards the end of 1965 for the exhibition.\textsuperscript{93} (It would be made again, as part of a larger bipartite version, for the 'Primary Structures' exhibition.)\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{90} Robert Smithson, ‘Donald Judd’ (Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art Catalog 'Sculptors' 1965), in The Writings of Robert Smithson, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{91} Agee, ‘Unit, Series, Site: A Judd Lexicon,’ p. 43.
\textsuperscript{92} Smithson, ‘Donald Judd,’ p. 23.
\textsuperscript{93} Smith, Donald Judd, p. 122.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., pp. 140-41.
length of the work, it was the four individual and separate boxes that constituted its main physical existence. Two other works in the exhibition consisted of entirely separate elements. One consisted of a row of four boxes, each just under three feet cubed and separated by a gap of eight inches, made of stainless steel with orange plexiglass sides, creating what Lucy Lippard referred to as a "tunnel of light." The other—the ‘stack’—consisted of seven rectangular galvanized iron boxes, each nine inches high, placed above one another and each separated from the other by nine inches [fig. 30]. Both these works were hung on the gallery wall, the wall itself perhaps functioning as a kind of continuous element.

It was the stack which most simply conformed to the paratactical order that Judd had attributed to Stella’s stripe paintings—"simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another." Like the progressions, these works frustrated the relating of the individual elements and their character of being-next-to another, to the wholeness of the work. A version had first been made in mid-1965, also in plain galvanized iron, and exhibited in Stockholm at the end of the year. The Castelli version was made early in 1966. Eight elements were initially fabricated, but the number actually exhibited, seven, depended on the height of the gallery wall. Their means of support—they were cantilevered from the wall—was hidden, so that they appeared to defy gravity. Although these works are generally referred to as 'stacks,' there was not a physical relation between the different elements; each was separated from the other by a gap equivalent to itself.


96 A similar description of Judd’s works consisting of several unconnected elements is given by Alex Potts: “one’s viewing [of a work consisting of, say, a series of boxes] is caught up in a successive displacement from unit to unit that actively forestalls seizing on the work as a firmly centred whole.” Potts’ point was that repeating the elements extended and exaggerated the already existing decentredness of a single box-like form. *The Sculptural Imagination*, p. 290.

97 Judd would later use plexiglass for the top and bottom of each element, creating an effect similar to the four-box wall piece with orange plexiglass sides.
Earlier I discussed the characteristic parataxis of Judd’s way of describing works of art in his art criticism, his way of listing attributes without connecting them in the usual syntactical ways. I suggested that there was a link between this way of putting things and Judd’s many remarks regarding his antirational outlook. There was a complicity between the kind of reality suggested by order in general, or the mode of reasoning based on generalization which effected this, and the syntactical dimension of language. A paratactical mode of description was one way of combating this. Judd’s word ‘specific’ performed a similar function, incorporating into it various aspects of the work of art which were not to be generalized, either formally or symbolically. Writing paratactically was a way of preserving, at the level of language, the matter of factness of things against their being taken up into syntactical relations of subordination and coordination. Parataxis, especially when used in description, would privilege isolated acts of reference over context, literal over figural meaning, so that the rhetorical use of parataxis can be considered the rhetorical privileging of the literal over the figural. The literal meaning that results, however, is figured negatively against those aspects of language which effect combination and contribute the sense of coherence to language as a representation of reality in general. If language in this sense is regarded as its proper function, then the literality effected by parataxis can be regarded as a rhetorical figuring of the proper, in the sense I discussed in chapter 3.

In his work, Judd wanted a mode of ordering that did not detract from the individuality of each element, nor from the individuality of the work as a whole. In a statement published in 1968, he complained about the “sense of order” in rationalist philosophy, that in it “[o]rder underlies, overlies, is within, above, below or beyond everything.” There he made clear what he thought was the negative relation between this order, and a “local order,” an arrangement of literal “matters of fact.”
A shape, a volume, a color, a surface is something itself. It shouldn’t be concealed as part of a fairly different whole. The shapes and materials shouldn’t be altered by their context. One or four boxes in a row, any single thing or such a series, is local order, just an arrangement, barely order at all. The series is mine, someone’s, and clearly not some larger order. It has nothing to do with either order or disorder in general. Both are matters of fact. The series of four or six doesn’t change the galvanized iron or steel or whatever the boxes are made of.\footnote{Judd, \textit{Complete Writings}, p. 196 (statement in ‘Portfolio: 4 Sculptors,’ \textit{Perspecta}, March/May 1968).}
6. Metaphorical Materialism: Carl Andre’s Sculpture and Poetry

In this chapter, I track a parallel development in Andre’s sculpture and poetry in which a sense of the literalness of materials, wood, say, or words, came to be foregrounded out of a negative work on the already figural nature of artistic or poetic meaning. Firstly, I argue that the character of works such as the ‘pyramids,’ in which the form appears as a necessary consequence of the material element used, was one which developed out of a work against the symbolic character of the earlier carved beams, such as Last Ladder. I point to a similar development in Andre’s poetry of the same period, which changed from a relatively conventional lyric poetry to poems which were arranged according to the literality of words, i.e. words isolated and treated as sets of letters. I examine some of the implications of this denial of the usual means of organizing artistic material. I then move on to consider certain poems by Andre which functioned as artist’s statements, and the sculptural works they referred to or to which they were contiguously related. I argue that the literalness foregrounded in both the poems and the sculptures was produced through a suspension, or disorientation, of the usual ways of using the chosen materials, and that this suspension effected a doubt in the first critical responses to Andre’s work as to its materiality or conceptuality.

**Last Ladder**

In early 1959, Andre had just completed, according to the recollection of his friend Hollis Frampton, a series of what Frampton termed “negative
sculptures." These were at the time Andre's largest sculptures to date and are often taken, especially the two which bear the title 'Ladder,' as representing the beginning of his practice as an artist. The sculptures in this series were made from lengths of timber found on construction sites in New York City, by Andre or his friends. The raw material for the second of the 'Ladders,' now known as Last Ladder [fig. 31], was found by Frank Stella and Frampton and carried back to Stella's West Broadway studio, where it was worked on by Andre (as were the other works in the series). At this time, Stella was working on the Black Paintings, which he had begun that winter, and Andre probably used his studio whilst Stella was out working as a house painter. Last Ladder was photographed by Frampton sometime in early 1960, standing in Stella's studio in front of the latter's Union Pacific (1960), one of the Aluminium Paintings, the series which came after the Black Paintings.

The found material from which Last Ladder was made was a six inch by six inch square section timber about seven feet long, or high, since the work which it became stands upright. Into this length of timber, while it laid lengthwise on the studio floor, Andre carved, using chisels, a series of five recesses, more or less of equal size (but not exactly so), along one of its faces. They do not continue along the whole of its length—at what would be its top, about six or seven inches was left uncarved, and at its bottom, about eighteen inches. In between each recess there was about two inches left uncarved and there was about an inch left between the recessed areas and the sides of the carved frontal

3 William S. Rubin, Frank Stella (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 151 n. 17. Others who probably saw or knew of the work would have been Barbara Rose, who had known Andre since 1956, the year of Andre's arrival in New York, and was at that time studying at Columbia University, and Michael Fried, a friend of Stella's, then in his final year at Princeton. (Stella had graduated from Princeton the previous year.) See chapter 2 for more on this social network around 1960.
4 This photograph (and others) was published in Carl Andre and Hollis Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1981), p. 99. Many of Andre's works made at this time only survive in the form of photographs taken by Frampton. Last Ladder is one of the very few which remain—it is in the collection of the Tate Gallery.
The recessed planes were carved in such a way that they receded from the surface according to a curve, deep enough so that they seem almost to reach the back of the timber, and in such a way as to make each recess appear as if it were half of an arc in profile. Because the uncarved areas between the recessed planes appear to intersect an arc which determines the form of the two recesses either side of it, two of these areas have at their top and bottom a more gradual, curved recession from the frontal plane, whilst the other two have a directly horizontal recession and appear more shelf-like. (Frampton photographed Last Ladder in three-quarter profile so that the arcs—two and a half full arcs or five half-arcs—are easily seen.) Such is the basic form of the work—if it is seen as a ladder, then the carved recesses would be the spaces between the ‘rungs.’

The wood, hemlock of fir, is quite heavily knotted, with a particularly prominent knot in each of the five recessed planes, and has a series of deep splits along one side. There are a number of holes (including a large one at the left side of the central recess) which refer to its previous use as a construction timber. A bolt can be seen running through the bottom of the timber, whilst near to the top there is a hole with a shallow indentation around it, suggesting that there was once a bolt there too. There is evidence too of Last Ladder having been left in Stella’s studio for a while once it had been made. Flecks of aluminium paint, as if flicked off a brush (doubtless Stella’s), but also a couple of solid areas, can be seen on one side. One area of flecked aluminium paint has a hard edge suggesting the subsequent removal of something coming between the flecked aluminium paint and the surface of the wood, possibly a piece of paper since there are a number of staples with bits of paper still caught in them nearby. Last Ladder, therefore, has a visible history. It can be seen that the wood was sawn to suit a particular practical purpose, then used in combination with other construction timbers or materials, before being removed from this context and carved into by Andre, according to another purpose, in relation to another context.
Although Andre worked on the timber, its prior appearance was not concealed. This seems to have been important for the way that the work was first theorized. In Frampton’s account of Andre’s early work, he describes the “negative sculptures” as being concerned, on one hand, with “Brancusi’s insistence on the superiority of direct cutting,” and, on the other, with the “sculptural immanence” of uncarved or otherwise unworked pieces of material (which in the winter of 1958-59 were usually blocks of wood or plexiglass). This seems to fit with Last Ladder, which was directly carved but also retained much of the dimensionality and the state in which it was found. In the standard accounts of Andre’s work, Last Ladder has come to assume a virtually mythic status as a beginning, for reasons related to the “sculptural immanence” of the unworked timber—the vast majority of Andre’s subsequent sculptures were made from materials such as bricks and metal plates which were unaltered by him. In particular this beginning is always coupled with an anecdote in which Stella is said to have remarked to Andre that the uncarved surface, the ‘back,’ of Last Ladder “was sculpture too.” Stella appears to have meant that Andre should be carving the ‘back’ as well as the front whereas Andre literal-mindedly thought that he meant that he should leave it uncarved. Andre later said: “I realized the wood was better before I cut it than after. I did not improve it in any way.” But better as what? As wood or as sculpture? As material or material for art, or both at the same time?

And why was it better not worked? One of the concerns of works like Last Ladder had been, according to Frampton, “Brancusi’s insistence on the superiority of direct cutting.” According to his own account, Andre became

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7 Dodie Gust, ‘Andre: Artist of Transportation,’ The Aspen Times (18th July 1968), p. 3-B, quoted in Develing, Carl Andre, and in most of the subsequent accounts. (In David Bourdon’s account, in Carl Andre: Sculpture 1959-1977 (New York: Jaap Rietman, 1978), p. 19, this ‘realization’ led to that of the “sculptural presence” of the unworked material, making the concern with “sculptural immanence” come after the making of Last Ladder, rather than as part of its making.)
interested in Brancusi through Frampton’s interest in the poet Ezra Pound, who
had written on Brancusi. Bourdon wrote in 1966 that Andre, at one point,
“realized he was doing the [Brancusi’s] *Endless Column* in negative with a cutout
beam.” Whereas Brancusi’s “direct cutting” would have resulted in an
outwardly oriented positive form in space, as in *Endless Column* [fig. 32], Andre’s
carving resulted in an inwardly oriented form, negative with respect to the
original state of the material, which was itself already a positive form. The
inwardly oriented form, the series of recessed planes, therefore functioned as a
counterfigure to the found form—in it, but also separate and different. A sense
of the separateness of the carved ‘negative’ form is increased by the perspectival
illusion within each recessed plane, which makes them seem deeper than they
are. Speaking of *Endless Column* in 1966, Andre said that “Brancusi, to me, is
the great link into the earth and the *Endless Column* is, of course, the culmination
of that experience. They reach up and they drive down into the earth with a
kind of verticality which is not terminal.” A similar suggestion of endless
verticality can be seen in the curved recesses of *Last Ladder*, particularly
downwards because the half-arc of the lowest recess suggests an
incompleteness, and it would seem that it was a function of their curvature
to suggest such a potential continuation.

Later in 1959, during the summer, Andre worked in his home town of
Quincy, Massachusetts, on a series of small machine-sawn sculptures made from
single wooden blocks, now known as the ‘Quincy Exercises.’ Frampton recalled
that Andre “had modified the wood blocks in varying degrees, but the premise
remained that the original block in itself implied a set of sculptures.” This can
be related to a comment made by Andre during the course of a series of
‘dialogues’ that he and Frampton co-wrote in 1962-63. There, referring to

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8 Phyllis Tuchman (interviewer), ‘An Interview with Carl Andre,’ *Artforum* vol. 8 no. 6 (June
10 This perspectival illusion is created by the sides of the recessed planes converging inwards
whilst retaining the sense of their being parallel.
11 Tuchman, ‘An Interview with Carl Andre,’ p. 61.

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Brancusi's wood pieces, he said that "[a] good seasoned piece of oak or hard pine has a set of sculptures in it." The idea that sculptural form was found in material specificity—a conventional idea in terms of modern sculpture—would have also have gone into the making of Last Ladder, a few months before the 'Quincy Exercises.'

The symbolic quality of Last Ladder

The material and the already existing form of the found construction timber used to make Last Ladder would have determined the kind of formal intervention made by Andre. Nevertheless, certain qualities of the forms that Andre carved could not have been immediately derived from the literalness of the found timber, such as the curvature of the recessed planes, their repetition, and their perspectival illusion. Conceivably, these qualities could relate to the material specificity of the wood—the circularity suggested by the curvature of the recessed planes could be related to the cyclical character of nature seen in the grain of the wood, for example. Such qualities were necessarily to be understood in a wider sense than the specific and literal qualities of the material as found. The form of Last Ladder, therefore, suggested that it was not to be understood merely according to its literal character as a particular thing, but according to the wider significance of its form. This kind of significance corresponds to a conventionally symbolic conception of artistic meaning, the symbol being, in the classic definition provided by Hegel, "an external existent given or immediately present to contemplation, which yet is to be understood not simply as it confronts us immediately on its own account, but in a wider and more universal sense." A thing which is to be a symbol is thus to be understood not merely as it is literally, but as representative of more than it is literally, i.e. as representative of itself in a more general, transcendental or ideal sense. In terms of modern or modernist works of art, their symbolic function is

in their being “vehicles for feeling.”

A work of art seen as symbolic does not refer to, say, feeling, in the sense that it is a sign for it; rather it exemplifies it. However, Hegel also said that “the symbol is prima facie a sign,” which suggests that although the symbolic is a mode of meaning on another, perhaps higher, level than that of the sign, i.e. more capable of generalizing, it could be regarded as an imposition on the realm of signs, and a concealment of the relation between signs and the world to which they refer.

Work against the symbolic: the ‘pyramids’

Because the form of the curvature of the recessed planes in Last Ladder could not be seen to have any simple basis in the work as a literal thing, the work could be regarded as suggesting some other more general significance, and thus be regarded as a symbolic exemplification of this more general significance. From the time of making Last Ladder, however, Andre’s attention was directed towards expunging any significance of this kind from his work. He stopped “cutting” into the material. In the first instance, this was achieved through a close dialogue with and theorization of Stella’s stripe paintings. It was probably quite soon after Andre completed Last Ladder that he composed the short text which would serve, slightly altered, as a statement for Stella for the catalogue of the ‘Sixteen Americans’ exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art at the end of the year.

As I discussed in chapter 2, Andre’s ‘Preface to Stripe Painting’ was resolutely negative when it came to the expressive. Stella’s paintings were not to be seen as representatives of “sensitivity.” However, although the positive side of the ‘Preface’ was not to do with any general realm of significance, either to do with the self or some aspect of the world, of which the paintings could serve as representatives, it nevertheless asserted that

15 See Fred Orton, ‘(Painting) Out of Time,’ Parallax no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 99-101, for the argument that the “dominant theory of modern art is a variation on the theory of the symbol” and the quote (“vehicles of feeling”), which comes from Greenberg.

16 Hegel, Aesthetics, p. 304. For a discussion of the significance of this distinction, see Paul de Man, ‘Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics,’ in Aesthetic Ideology (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 91-104.

“painting” was a general realm of significance for Stella’s paintings. The last couple of sentences went “His [Stella’s] stripes are the paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into painting.”

Painting was both material process and content. The rhetoric of Andre’s text was such that it attempted to prevent Stella’s paintings from being symbolically motivated by making the general realm of significance of which they appeared to be the particular representative no more general than the particular (the mere action of painting), thereby cancelling it out.

Andre’s radical theorization of Stella’s stripe paintings put in place an imperative to be worked out by him in his own practice, which led to the large sculptures that he produced in the winter of 1959-60, which incorporated certain of the practical solutions arrived at by Stella. (Frampton’s photograph of Last Ladder, which shows it standing in front of Stella’s Aluminium Painting Union Pacific, functions as a kind of emblem for this imperative. The forms of the carved recesses seem to have come from somewhere else and therefore speak of somewhere else, whereas the stripes appear to define the field which they themselves constitute.) This time Andre worked in Frampton’s apartment, which was large enough to house Andre’s twelve inch radial saw which he used to cut the lengths of standard two inch by four timber from which these sculptures were made.

Although all of the seven to nine sculptures that Andre made in this series were destroyed the following winter (not by Andre), one would be remade (although of substantially different dimensions) for Andre’s first exhibition in October 1964, a group exhibition called ‘Eight Young Artists,’ curated by E. C. Goossen at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York.

Goossen may have been one of the “incessant stream of droppers-by” who saw the series of sculptures—known as the ‘pyramids’—in Frampton’s apartment

18 Ibid.
19 Stella also seems to have used Frampton’s apartment to possibly construct, but certainly to store, the stretchers for the series of aluminium stripe paintings he had begun in early 1960. See Frampton, ‘Letter to Enno Develing,’ p. 61, and Hollis Frampton, ‘Letters from Framp 1958-1968,’ (correspondence with Reno Odlin), October no. 32 (Spring 1985), p. 35 (letter dated 8th February 1960). Frampton described his apartment as a “factory” in the letter to Odlin referred to above.
20 After Frampton left the apartment in September 1960, the ‘pyramids’ remained for a few months, the new tenant, Richard Bellamy, having agreed to store them; but he destroyed them soon after, burning them for firewood that winter. Frampton, ‘Letter to Enno Develing,’ p. 61.
during 1959-60 (certainly he saw the original versions before they were destroyed); Frampton recalled that these works were "generally admired" by Andre's "peers." 21

The work exhibited in 1964 was based on a 'pyramid' with a square base, now known as *Pyramid* (Square Plan) [fig. 33] (although the 1959 work no longer exists in its original form), and again, the work was documented by Frampton, probably also early in 1960. 22 It was made from standard construction timber (which here was fir). In a photograph of another of the 'pyramids,' part of the timber yard's stamp with the letters 'CONST...' ('construction') can be seen on one of the sections. *Pyramid* was constructed out of 31-inch lengths of this timber stacked as a sequence of nineteen square/cross plan units, or tiers. The sculpture as a whole was three inches or so under six feet. 23 The first tier, which rested on the floor, consisted of four lengths of timber, each laid on its 'side,' joined to form the sides of a square. On this was another tier of four lengths of timber, still enclosing a square, but this time the square was smaller because the lengths of timber intersected each other at right angles, mortised at roughly one and half inches in from the ends of each 'side.' In other words, the second tier formed a step inwards on all sides from the first. The subsequent tiers followed this pattern, enclosing an ever smaller square on the inside, creating further steps on the outside, the mortised intersections approaching the middle point of each length, until the middle tier—the tenth up—which was made up of just two lengths of timber intersecting to form a cross. From this, the pattern rose in reverse, symmetrically, so that the last tier—at the top—was, like the first, a square. This description corresponds more or less to how *Pyramid* would have been assembled—the tiers were separable, and would have just been stacked on top of one another. The tiers also could be, and were, stacked in another configuration in which the top and bottom tiers were crosses, and the middle


23 The discrepancy between the total height and the height of each section multiplied by 19 means that the 'four inch' dimension of the timber was an approximation, not the actual dimension (presumably, the planing of the wood accounts for the difference).
was a square [fig. 34].

The pattern which was built up therefore consisted of a set of regular intervals which depended on the widths and heights of the timber lengths and two limit-forms, a square and a cross. The elements of the pattern were the same throughout, like Stella’s painted stripes. Many of Stella’s configurations for the Black Paintings, four of which were, at the time that Andre was constructing his ‘pyramids,’ on show at the Museum of Modern Art, were similarly organized as a series of regular intervals between an interior cross or line form and the rectangular shape of the canvas. In these paintings, the cumulative effect of a series of stripes rhyming with a corner produced a virtual diagonal. The same kind of diagonals appear in *Pyramid* as well, as the elongated ‘X’ shapes suggested by the stepped end faces of the lengths of timber. The end faces of the two lengths of timber which formed the cross of the middle tier also form the ‘intersections’ of each of the four ‘X’ shapes. Many of the standard accounts of Andre’s work refer in passing to the similarity of *Pyramid* to Stella’s stripe paintings, as well as, again, to Brancusi’s *Endless Column*. In the case of the latter the similarity lies in the potential of its form for continuation and repetition along a vertical axis. But it is to Stella’s paintings that *Pyramid* seems most to relate, for the reason that its form is made to appear as if it were a result only of the logic of its own making. At first, the ‘X’ shapes (or in the other—‘cross plan’—pyramid I have referred to, the diamond shapes), because they coincide with the whole extent of the sculpture, read as if it is they which define the form of the whole. However, they really operate as a counter-figure to that of the stack, that is, as a figure of continuity which cuts across the actual tiers. What gives this figure its ambiguity is that although it could be regarded as constituting the form of the work, it could equally be regarded as a mere arbitrary effect of the regular intervals in the actual forms of the tiers. The possibly arbitrary nature of the figure is left in a kind of suspended state in relation to the literal nature of the stacked tiers.

In this, it is different from *Last Ladder*. There the given literalness of the

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24 Frampton, ‘Letter to Enno Develing,’ p. 61. See the photograph in Andre and Frampton, *12 Dialogues 1962-1963*, p. 115. (The description below it is slightly wrong.)
timber was altered by Andre’s chiselling, which, although retaining something of this original state in the ‘ladder’ form, nevertheless produced a figure—the series of curved recesses—which could not be regarded as a merely arbitrary effect of this literalness. Its form was clearly composed and, to an extent, imposed, and thus appeared to suggest more or other than it literally was. The figure which appeared to define Pyramid (the ‘X’ shapes), on the other hand, could not be seen to have been made by Andre in the same way. This figure, which consisted of the illusion of diagonals when there were no actual diagonals present, could be regarded as a mere arbitrary effect of the way the work was constructed, and therefore not an intentional figure at all. What remained was not a mere literalness as such but a literalness suggested by the possible unintentionality of the figure.

The standard retrospective accounts of Andre’s sculpture as it developed from this time, when stating what it was ‘about,’ have tended to stress its literalness. Diane Waldman, for example, began the final paragraph of her essay in the catalogue of Andre’s 1970 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York by commenting that Andre’s work was “resolutely concrete, and aspires to document no condition other than its own existence.” She went on to say that “in an art with no overt references to life, his work is all the more real,” and concluded with the sentence: “Unlike Pop art, which must of necessity make explicit its references to the real world, and is therefore constrained to deal only with the present, Andre’s art is free (of those limitations) to dwell upon the fundamental sources of reality.”25 Andre’s sculptures were “concrete” and “real” because they did not refer to the “real world.” They did not refer to reality from a separate representational realm, like, say, language, but were real themselves. More recently, and similarly, Eva Meyer-Hermann, in the catalogue for Andre’s 1996 retrospective at Wolfsburg and Krefeld in Germany, wrote of Andre’s works that “[t]hey simply are there, as the world is there.”26 And yet Meyer-Hermann’s sense of the literalness of Andre’s sculptures was achieved by way of simile, and Waldman, by saying that Andre’s work was not concerned

with "overt" or "explicit" reference, left open the possibility that it was
concerned with covert or implicit reference, so that in these affirmations of real-
ness and literalness there remained the contradictory involvement of language
and rhetoric.

From lyric poems to poems about words

In September of 1960, Frampton gave up his apartment. It was likely that
Andre was left without a place to work on large sculptures, his own apartment
being too small. During the following years, Andre produced a lot of literary
work—mainly poems—as well as continuing to produce sculpture, although in
the case of the latter, it does seem as though the possibility of realizing large
works was restricted—Frampton's way of putting it was that Andre, by 1961,
had "run out of money and sculptural opportunity." (An instance of his
unrealized work at this time was Andre's proposal, put forward in 1960, or
possibly 1961, for a series of sculptures known as the 'Element Series' (some
were finally made in the early 1970s), which would consist of one foot by three
foot construction timbers in a series of simple configurations. He proposed the

27 Frampton, 'Letter to Enno Develing,' p. 61. Andre seems to have commemorated this period
by assembling a collection of various items of ephemeral material representing his life of the
past six years or so. Passport, as it is called, begins with Andre's own passport, and includes
the visa pages stamped in London and Paris in November 1954. It also contains quite a few
photographs, taken by Frampton, of the carved wood sculptures Andre made in 1958-59, as well
as a number of items of material relating to Stella's work—reproductions of a 'transitional'
stripe painting and what appears to be a small aluminium work, the pages from the Sixteen
Americans catalogue which feature the portrait of Stella by Frampton, the black paintings
themselves, and Andre's text, Stella's handwritten notes (with diagrams) for a lecture he gave
in early 1960 to the Pratt Institute, New York, and a jokey poem by Stella. There is a quite a
lot of more general material: postcards, a page of decorative symbols, the words 'New York' in
different typefaces (probably from the mast-heads of newspapers), a playing card (the two of
diamonds), images of poets, etc. There also appear two of Andre's poems from this time. One
consists of a whole page filled with the typewritten word 'green'; the other of the word 'rain'
arranged in a block ten words across, fourteen words down. An account of the background to
Passport can be found in James Meyer, 'Carl Andre: Passport,' in Susan Faxon, Avis Berman and
Jock Reynolds (editors), Addison Gallery of American Art: 65 Years (Andover, MA: Addison

28 Frampton, 'Letter to Enno Develing,' p. 61. The main accounts of Andre's work move pretty
swiftly through the years which separate the first 'pyramids' of 1959-60, and the remade (and
exhibited) 'pyramid'—known as Cedar Piece—of 1964. Bourdon describes these years as
"difficult, confusing" for Andre: "[Andre was] making art that was antithetical to what he
had done before. In place of the purist forms, which previously occupied him, he now turned
series to Leo Castelli, who had been Stella’s dealer since the summer of 1959, but it went no further.) There was, instead, a sustained interest in the production of poetic and other kinds of literary texts from around 1960. Some of the questions Andre asked of words at this time may have followed from his experience of making sculpture. Frampton certainly thought so: “Earlier poems had been freely rhymed lyrics; now he began taking texts and “cutting” directly from them as from a timber, mapping upon words what he had learned from sculpture.” Conversely, it may be that a consideration of Andre’s literary practice would elucidate the role of language and rhetoric in creating the sense of the literal in his sculpture.

Even by 1960, Andre had had quite a long-standing interest in poetry. When Frampton arrived in New York in the spring of 1958 to stay with his old schoolfriend, he found him producing mainly lyric poems. The lyric form is often considered to be the most personal, expressive and spontaneous of literary forms. In 1963, Andre remarked that “All my earlier poems originated in some conceit or observation or sentiment of my own.” By 1960, however, Andre was writing poetry of a different kind. It would have been during this year that Andre produced his First Five Poems, which seem to have figured as a beginning for him. First Five Poems consisted of five poems on five pages, each consisting

30 In 1953, he studied briefly at Kenyon College, Ohio, his teacher there being the critic and poet John Crowe Ransom (whose book The New Criticism had had a hand in giving that literary-critical movement its name). Ransom was apparently “bemused” by Andre’s “talent.” See Barbara Rose, ‘A Retrospective Note,’ in Bourdon, Carl Andre: Sculpture 1959-1977, p. 9. Another of the critics associated with the new criticism, R. P. Blackmur, was Michael Fried’s “mentor” in poetry at Princeton. See Michael Fried, Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 29.
31 Andre and Frampton had been room-mates at Phillips Academy, Andover, “the Eton of the Eastern Seaboard.” See Lynda Morris, ‘Carl Andre Poems 1958-1974,’ Studio International vol. 190 no. 977 (September/October 1975), p. 160. (Stella had also attended Phillips Academy, but did not know Andre until they met in New York in 1958.)
32 Andre and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, p. 75.
33 First Five Poems, as they are referred to in 12 Dialogues, are reproduced (as ‘Anthology of Five Poems’) in A Theory of Poetry 1960-1965, one of Andre’s Seven Books of Poetry (New York: Dwan Gallery and Seth Siegelaub, 1969), a uniform manuscript edition of 36 signed and numbered sets (one of which is owned by the Tate Gallery), including Passport, 1960; Shape and Structure, 1960-65; A Theory of Poetry 1960-1965; One Hundred Sonnets, 1963; American Drill, 1963-68; Three Operas, 1964; Lyrics and Odes, 1969. Most, but not all, of Andre’s poems are collected in these books. A few other poems can be found reproduced in Develing, Carl Andre and Waldman, Carl Andre. The majority of the poems are undated, but it is possible to reconstruct some of the periods in which certain works were made from 12 Dialogues and Frampton’s ‘Letter to Enno Develing.’
of a single typewritten word (in lower case) placed at the centre of each page. The words were ‘green,’ ‘five,’ ‘horn,’ ‘eye,’ and ‘sound.’ Andre said—this can serve as a first characterization of a change in poetic concerns—that his First Five Poems were the “first poems in which I took the English language for subject matter.”34 He went on: “These poems begin in the qualities of words. Whole poems are made out of the many single poems we call words.”35 What does it mean for a word to be a poem? Andre seems to have had in mind an idea about the original act of associating a voiced sound and a thing, and the particularity of that association—the “specificity of [its] referent”—rather than the general capacity of combinations of words, or language, to represent the world, or, within its world, to create (poetic) associations. Andre was arguing against the primacy of the metaphorical level of poetry. Whereas the metaphorical, or any combination of words which transcends the literal meaning of individual words, pointed to what Andre called a “super-referent,”36 the words (‘green,’ ‘five,’ ‘horn,’ ‘eye,’ and ‘sound’) he selected for his First Five Poems purposely did not together suggest one. It might be concluded that Andre was interested in foregrounding the literal, the one-to-one correspondence of each word with what it stands for.37 However, each word was intended to refer to more than one thing—green: the colour or a village green; sound: noise or Long Island Sound, and so on—as if the more abstract and general meanings of each of the words were somehow balanced with the literal meaning, or that the two could not be told apart. To invoke this polysemy seemed to have been a way, paradoxically enough, to draw attention away from meaning and reference to the specific properties of the word itself and its distance from the world of things. The words in First Five Poems were also, in their singularity, non-syntactical, which was another way that the possibility of their meaningfulness was limited. Andre thought that in these poems he had achieved “a kind of dissociation, an isolation of single words from all the others.”38

34 Andre and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, p. 75.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Andre wrote about language being “only a set of symbols and operations” and about the fragile relationship between a “symbol and its referent.” See ibid., p. 50.
38 Ibid., p. 76.
was not just that there was a single word in the case of each poem, but that each word was isolated—at least, an attempt was made to isolate it—from language in general.

Literal meaning and the literalness of words

In these early poems, however, Andre was not only interested in the literal meaning of a word, in its specific relation to the thing it names, but at the same time in the literalness of the word itself as having certain thing-like attributes. Early attempts to isolate this thing-like quality tended to produce images suggested by the meanings of the words. For example, the word 'green' was also used in an earlier poem as part of the book Passport, but there it was repeated to fill the whole page and this has the effect, in the case of this particular word, of suggesting a 'field.' This field of 'green' could, therefore, be considered a "super-referent," i.e. a meaning beyond literal reference. A similar thing could be said about the other poem in Passport, based on the word 'rain' [fig. 35]. The word was repeated in the form of a block (ten across and fourteen down) which, because of the nature of the typewriter, produced a series of vertical lines consisting of the repeated letters 'r' 'a' 'i' 'n' and the gaps between them. Verticality or the quality of falling would be the "super-referent" in this case. It could be argued that these two poems were not that dissimilar from more traditional examples of concrete poetry in which the words follow a shape which bears a visual resemblance to what the words mean, such as Apollinaire's 'Il pleut,' to which Andre's 'rain' perhaps refers.

However, although Andre's poems are sometimes referred to as concrete poetry, they are generally not of this imagistic kind. The literalness of the words themselves as having thing-like attributes was revealed in other ways, in tandem with the suppression of non-literal reference. The repetition of a single word 'rain' over a hundred times, for example, could, by its monotony, be said to deaden the sense of its meaning. Most of Andre's poems during the period

\[39\] See note 34.
under discussion were written with a typewriter, and he emphasized the qualities of typewritten letters to draw attention to the nature of his words’ mode of inscription, particularly the grid-like arrangement which the use of the typewriter entailed. André said in 1975 that “I’ve used the typewriter as a kind of machine, or lathe, or saw, to apply the letters on a page. I really do feel, in a very tactile sense, using a typewriter.” This suggests that the action of pressing the keys was important to André, and the repetitious nature of many of his poems would have given André’s physical action the character of being an extension of the typewriter as a machine, which, again, would have put the emphasis on the material realization, as opposed to the meaningful realization, of the words.

Ironizing poetic conventions

Repetition was also used to problematize certain conventional literary forms, and subject these forms to radical doubt. The poem ‘rain’ was repeated as ten words across by fourteen down, which corresponds to the conventional form of the sonnet. Sonnets are usually considered a sub-category of the lyric genre, and have ten syllables per line (iambic pentameter), and fourteen lines, which were rhymed according to certain patterns. André continued to investigate this form after First Five Poems in a set of poems called Twelve Sonnets, which probably also dates from 1960, in which one word was repeated, like the ‘rain’ poem, according to the sonnet form. The words that André used for these poems—‘earth,’ ‘fuck,’ ‘fire,’ ‘water,’ ‘me,’ ‘you,’ ‘air,’ ‘age,’ ‘death,’ and three others, possibly ‘red,’ ‘blue,’ and ‘yellow’—were repeated according to a typewritten block form. The words corresponded to the number of required syllables of the sonnet form, and the requirement of rhyme was not so much

41 See Cummings, ‘Carl Andre,’ p. 185. André: “A typewriter is essentially a grid.”
42 Audio Arts vol. 2 no. 2 (1975) (my transcription).
43 Twelve Sonnets, referred to by this name in André and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, almost certainly refers to the nine poems in sonnet form at the end of the book Shape and Structure 1960-1965, and probably to the further three poems in sonnet form in A Theory of Poetry 1960-1965 (original order of the sonnets not known). The other main grouping of poems in sonnet form is the whole of the book One Hundred Sonnets 1963.
affirmed or denied but made an irrelevance. The requirements of the sonnet form were thus both satisfied and negated. These requirements were satisfied in a literal-minded way that at the same time made the conventionality seem nonsensical and random, as if from a more objective position outside these requirements. Effectively, the sonnets were written ironically, in a sense similar to that which I attributed to Stella’s practice in chapter 2, where irony was an act of consciousness which resulted in an ironic self arising from the treatment of language as a material and not as a means of expressing the world or one’s own experience. Although Andre said that the Twelve Sonnets were an attempt to “generate a form by the repetition of isolated elements,” what they also were was an ironic foregrounding or isolating of the conventionality of the sonnet form, a form normally associated with the expression of a self.

The concerns of First Five Poems and Twelve Sonnets with the dissociation of meaning, repetition and the ironizing of poetic conventionality, continued in Andre’s work throughout the early 1960s. A number of conventional literary modes besides poetic forms were worked with, including novelistic form, historical narrative and autobiography. (I shall be returning to Andre’s work on historical narrative and autobiography in the next chapter.) The methods he developed to ironize such conventional forms were also widened, and included a variety of alphabetical, numerical and spatial means.45 The development implicit in the difference between First Five Poems and Twelve Sonnets took place during 1960 when Andre had completed or nearly completed the series of Pyramid sculptures. In particular, it was the mode of writing of Twelve Sonnets which would seem to relate to the procedure arrived at with the Pyramids. Both kinds of work were built up through repetition of an identical element, according to a form which was made to seem as if it were arbitrary. Both were ironic with respect to conventional modes of artistic forming which were adopted literal-mindedly at the same time as they were made to appear groundless.

44 Andre and Frampton, 12 Dialogues 1962-1963, p. 76
45 Barbara Rose recalled: “He wrote in many genres: satirical novels, which became ever more abbreviated until they were but a paragraph in length, anticipating the contemporary attention span, as well as concrete poems with words arranged in symmetrical grids, as his metal plates would later tile the ground with neat adjacent squares.” Rose, ‘A Retrospective Note,’ in Bourdon, Carl Andre: Sculpture 1959-1977, p. 9.
Metaphorical materialism

Many critics and commentators have drawn attention to the relation between Andre’s literary and sculptural practice, though usually this relation was merely implied and left suspended. It was well known, even at the time when Andre’s sculpture began to receive critical attention in 1965-66, that Andre produced poetry—references to it appear in some of the key articles dealing with the emergence of Minimal Art, notably in Barbara Rose’s 1965 article on Minimal Art, ‘ABC Art,’ 47 in Lucy Lippard’s 1966 article ‘Rejective Art,’ 48 and in David Bourdon’s monographic article ‘The Razed Sites of Carl Andre’ in 1966.49 The articles by Rose and Bourdon also each reproduced one of Andre’s poems, as an illustration (like the reproductions of Andre’s sculptural works) rather than incorporated into the text. Bourdon, for example, wrote that Andre’s “‘shaped’ poetry,” was “analogous to his sculpture in that it consists of monosyllabic words blocked out in regular, orderly arrangements. Revivifying the syntax of Gertrude Stein, Andre strips words of contextual significance and gives to each monosyllable equal stress and importance. He permits the shape to be determined by the systematic ordering of the words.”

46 Aside from Rose’s remarks in note 45, see Bourdon, in ibid., p. 21: “The regularly notched gestalt of the poem obviously alluded to his carved beams”; or Enno Develing, ‘Carl Andre: art as social fact,’ Artscanada (December 1970/January 1971), p. 49: “The development of his poetry is comparable to that of his sculpture. ‘Sculpture as form’ equals the lyrical poetry of 1958-60, ‘sculpture as structure’ relates to the ‘shaped poetry’ using words as material to build structures, comparable to his pyramid sculptures. In the equivalent of ‘sculpture as place’ Andre uses the words as matter, as interchangeable self-contained units, creating a whole out of equivalent ‘word material.’”

Whereas Judd and Morris published writings on art which were an important part of the discourse on Minimal Art, Andre considered his poetry as a separate activity. Barbara Rose recalled recently: “Carl was, very much more than one would imagine, part of the dialogue. But since he didn’t write criticism, you don’t see it. I think he thought that art criticism was stupid. That the art was the criticism.” See Amy Newman, Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974 (New York: Soho Press, 2000), p. 234.

48 Lippard wrote that Andre “wrote deadpan poetry that takes the inventory motif to ultimate conclusions, consisting as it does of progressively and regressively listed nouns, arranged as ideograms, which depart from but have no further relation to the pictorial calligrams of Mallarmé or Apollinaire, and are closer to Robert Lax.” Lucy R. Lippard, ‘Rejective Art,’ Art International vol. 10 no. 8 (October 1966), p. 35.
49 Bourdon, ‘The Razed Sites of Carl Andre,’ pp. 107-08.
50 Ibid. The article (in its first published form) reproduced a poem along with other sculptural works.
The most insightful contemporary description of Andre's poetry, however, was written by Robert Smithson in 1968:

Carl Andre's writings bury the mind under rigorous incantatory arrangements. Such a method smothers any reference to anything other than the words. Thoughts are crushed into a rubble of syncopated syllables. Reason becomes a powder of vowels and consonants. His words hold together without any sonority. Andre doesn't practice a "dialectical materialism," but rather a "metaphorical materialism." The apparent sameness and toneless ordering of Andre's poems conceals a radical disorientation of grammar. Paradoxically his "words" are charged with all the complication of oxymoron and hyperbole. Each poem is a "grave," so to speak, for his metaphors. Semantics are driven out of his language in order to avoid meaning.51

In this paragraph, Smithson described how Andre's arrangements of words frustrated the idea that language was a medium of thought. Normally, language would be regarded as facilitating thought rather than hindering it. Andre's use of language "bur[ied] the mind" and "crushed" thought through "rigorous incantatory arrangements," i.e. through ritualistic arrangements designed to enchant, designed to focus attention on the words rather than what these words meant. The references to "rubble" and then "powder" suggest that thought and language were regarded as constituting an edifice which was reduced, in Andre's poems, to undifferentiated matter, consisting of the elements of written language, i.e. letters, rather than sounds, hence Andre's words "hold together without any sonority." This extreme literalism was achieved, Smithson thought, through the practice of a "metaphorical materialism." Not a "dialectical materialism," a knowledge of reality gained through the 'this-sidedness' of practice, but perhaps a knowledge of the literal or material gained through a work against the structural and figural dimensions of language. Certainly, Smithson saw Andre's words as being already complicated by "grammar" and rhetoric ("oxymoron and hyperbole"). And this grammar

was “disorientat[ed],” metaphors were deadened (“Each poem is a “grave,” so to speak, for his metaphors”), and meaning was “driven out.” The sense of the literalness of language in Andre’s poems, therefore, was achieved through the various attempts to cancel the always already existing rhetorical and grammatical dimensions of language. Smithson’s phrase “metaphorical materialism” captures the paradoxical nature of Andre’s enterprise—a materialism, or literalism, conducted through art, which traditionally operates in the realm of the metaphorical (the other than literal) or the symbolic (the more than literal).

This insightful paragraph was partially taken up by Craig Owens in 1979, who related Smithson’s phrase, “disorientation of grammar,” to what Owens thought was a parallel “disorientation of the grammar of sculpture.” The suggestion of a disorientation of sculptural grammar makes for an interesting contrast with Michael Fried’s positive invocation of syntax with relation to the sculpture of Anthony Caro [fig. 36]. (Caro was, for Fried, the best exponent of modernist sculpture, and, during the mid-1960s, as we saw earlier, the art of Andre, Judd and Morris, came to be regarded by Fried as antithetical to modernist art.) Fried said, in 1963, that “Everything in Caro’s art that is worth looking at—except the color—is in its syntax.” The term ‘syntax,’ which usually refers to the internal grammatical relations between parts of sentences, was used by Fried to elucidate the abstractness of Caro’s art which was to do with the “construction of expressive gesture.” At the end of the essay, he spoke of Caro’s sculptures as manifesting an “allusive syntax”—which suggested that they alluded to, referred indirectly, to an externality by way of their internal relations. This kind of abstract mode of reference can be seen as an argument against the emphasis on the arbitrariness of the elements of language in relation to the reality to which they refer. Roman Jakobson, in an essay which argued

52 Building on this analogy, Owens continued: “In demonstrating that Andre deploys linguistic signifiers as he would the cinderblocks, logs, or metal plates of his sculpture, writing and work are made to confront each other like parallel mirrors mounted in series, opening onto an infinite play of reflections in which the distinctions between writing and sculpture are, in effect, dissolved.” Craig Owens, ‘Earthwords,’ October no. 10 (Fall 1979), p. 125.

against the fundamental arbitrariness of the linguistic sign posited by Saussure, referred to Peirce's remark that the "arrangement of the words in the sentence... must serve as icons, in order that the sentence may be understood."\textsuperscript{54} Another way of saying this is that this view privileged the idea of language as containing within it relations which were analogous to relations in the world over that of isolated acts of naming. The way that Jakobson described the relation between these two characteristics of language, however, was to say that the relational aspect of language was "universally superimposed" on language as a set of names.\textsuperscript{55}

Andre's "radical disorientation of grammar" problematized this kind of abstract mode of reference associated with relation (a mode of reference which Fried attributed to Caro's sculpture), by placing his emphasis on language as a set of names.\textsuperscript{56} If grammar describes relations between words—of causality, of belonging, etc.—that represent relations between the things that words name, and the experience of things, then its "disorientation," its being deprived of direction or correctness, will frustrate such relations and isolate what Andre thought was the more primary relation, that between the word and the thing it named. Words were thus treated as names—"the great natural poem about anything is its name"\textsuperscript{57}—as particular entities which referred (poetically) to particular entities in the world. Andre's poems sometimes consisted of collections of names which referred to specific people and places, but were never narrativized or otherwise grammatically related to one another in any usual sense. Names were single word poems, but, as Smithson thought, this poetry

\begin{footnotes}
\item[55] "the distinctly diagrammatic [the diagram is a one kind of Peircean icon] constituents in the system of verbal symbols are universally superimposed upon the vocabulary." Ibid., p. 422.
\item[56] Andre wrote, in reference to his First Five Poems, that they were "radically different from the poem: 'I am a red pansy.' These latter five words relate most strongly to each other and depart very far from the specificity of their referents. In fact we may presume that the five words together share one super-referent." Andre and Frampton, \textit{12 Dialogues} 1962-1963, p. 75. Andre also said in 1975: "Certainly my interest in elements or particles in sculpture is paralleled in my interest in words as particles of language, and in units which are different from sentences, grammatical sentences. Of course words will always have grammatical connection when they are placed together if they are not nonsense words, but I have attempted to write poetry in which the sentence is not the dominant form but the word." \textit{Audio Arts} vol. 2 no. 2 (1975) (my transcription).
\end{footnotes}
was a literalist poetry, about the literalness of words as groups of letters, or the literalness of literal meaning, rather than the metaphorical reconstitution of experience in the world of language. Language was treated as a material part of the world rather than something by means of which the experience of the world was shaped and understood. Aside from the favouring of isolated words, or the uniformly repeated word, the disorientation of grammar that Smithson attributed to Andre's words was also due to their being "charged" with rhetorical "complication." This rhetorical complication of grammar was attributed to oxymoron (the conjunction of contradictory meanings) and hyperbole (overstated meaning). These rhetorical figures disoriented grammar by creating an excess of meaning which extended beyond the normal grammatical functions of words, but had the effect, paradoxically, of isolating the individuality of words as material, or literal, entities.

Poems as artist's statements: 'ESSAYONSCULPTURE1964'

Andre's work first began to attract attention in the New York art world around 1965. His poems played a role in this that was not just to do with their status as examples of a parallel literary practice. Sometimes they were reproduced as if they were works, like the sculptural works also reproduced, but certain poems were also reproduced in the guise of 'statements' in art magazines and exhibition catalogues. The first was published, towards the end of 1965, in Barbara Rose's article 'ABC Art.' Here Rose attempted, as she put it, to "surround the new sensibility" with relevant ideas "now in the air."58

Accompanying the article were statements and reproductions of work by some of the artists representative of this new sensibility, beginning with Stella (one of the Black Paintings and part of the text of his 1960 Pratt Institute lecture), and including other 'shaped-canvas' painters such as Larry Zox, Darby Bannard and Neil Williams. Most of the sculptors, or makers of "object-sculpture" (a then current term used by Rose), featured—Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris

58 Rose, 'ABC Art,' p. 62.

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and Andre—were ‘Minimalists.’ Many of these artists, including Andre, had been in the group exhibition ‘Shape and Structure,’ organized by “an anonymous curator and a painter” as one contemporary reviewer put it, but was, in fact, Stella and Henry Geldzahler. The exhibition, which took place in January 1965 at the Tibor de Nagy gallery, was only the second time that Andre had exhibited his work.

The poem by Andre that was reproduced (with a photograph of his work and a statement) in ‘ABC Art’ was called ‘ESSAYONSCULPTURE1964’ [fig. 37]. Given its title, and the context, the poem could have been taken as another kind of statement about Andre’s work, as well as, or instead of, a work in its own right. Rose, in the main body of her article, on the page opposite the poem, referred to Andre’s poetry in the context of some remarks on the ordinariness of the objects represented by artists representative of the ‘ABC sensibility,’ which she saw paralleled in the use by poets of ordinary words.\(^{59}\) The poem also appeared in the catalogue of Andre’s 1969 retrospective at the Hague Gemeentemuseum, titled ‘ESSAYONSCULPTUREFORECGOOSSEN1964’ and was dated December 1964, probably by Frampton.\(^{60}\) E. C. Goossen, as I mentioned earlier, had invited Andre to exhibit one of the 1959-60 ‘pyramids,’ in a group exhibition called ‘8 Young Artists’ he organized at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York, in October 1964, but since these had been destroyed, Andre had made a new version of Pyramid (Square Plan). This work, known as Cedar Piece (1964) [fig. 38], Andre’s first exhibited work, was made in roughly the same configuration as the earlier version, but with four by four timber instead of two by four.\(^{61}\) ‘ESSAYONSCULPTURE1964’ has then, via the dedication to Goossen, a particular relation to this sculpture, perhaps being a kind of explanation of it, or of Andre’s approach to sculpture in general. On one level, the poem shared with the Pyramids (and Cedar Piece) the same kind of relation between what appeared to be its form and how this form was

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., p. 66.

\(^{60}\) Develing, Carl Andre, p. 37. The poetic and other documentary material in the catalogue was supplied by Frampton.

The poem consisted of two columns of words. One of the ways the words were arranged was according to the number of letters in each word. The poem begins with a three-letter word 'arc,' underneath is a four-letter word 'arch,' then a five-letter word 'aisle,' then a six-letter word 'bridge.' The sequence is reversed under that—a five-letter word, a four-letter word, etc.—and repeated throughout the two columns until the last word, 'urn.' The columns were aligned at their left which meant that their right sides 'step' in and out, line by line, by the width of a letter (or, more accurately, by the width of a type-written letter), which resulted in the illusion of a kind of serrated edge, which moved in and out in diagonals. There was thus the same kind of relation between what appears as the graphic form of the poem and the indifference to form of the systematic mode of construction as in the illusory 'X' shapes and the actuality of the stack in *Pyramid* (Square Plan) (and in *Cedar Piece*). This was reinforced by the words all having one syllable regardless of its length.

The words were also arranged alphabetically from the top of the first column to the bottom of the second, and according to the number of letters in each word (so that all the three-letter words were in strict alphabetical order, all the four-letter words, etc. but not necessarily the sequence of words as a whole). The words—all nouns, though some could be verbs too—could generally be described as "ordinary," though a few, like 'flange' or 'strake,' appear more technical. Mainly, they denote terms to do with construction—of buildings, ships, etc. Some of the words which appear ordinary, such as 'chair,' or 'throat,' have other, specific (if metaphorical) meanings in construction or industry. ('Chair' can mean something that holds a railway rail in place; 'throat' can refer to the narrow part of a chimney or furnace.) Although the words share a common area of meaning it is difficult to relate the words to one another in the poem, which makes the way in which they were actually related—according to lengths of words, etc.—all the more apparent. Of course, Andre intended a relation to be noticed between the general meaning to do with the choice of words—building, construction, and so on—and what he did with these words,
that is, put them together according to principles which are analogous with
construction—a predetermined regularity, an additive method, etc. But it was
also made apparent that what the words meant had no actual relation, only an
arbitrary relation, with the literalness of the words themselves, since it was the
letters which comprised the latter which determined the modes of organization
of the poem. The normal purposefulness of the words, not only in terms of
literal meaning, but also their use in sentences, was cut short by this
organization (or “incantatory arrangement”). Attention was thus focussed on
the literalness of the words themselves as opposed to the literalness with which
they referred to the things they denoted, or the states of affairs which they
would have been used to describe. (The use of words which suggested more
than one meaning, such as ‘chair’ and ‘throat,’ contributed to the sense of
disorientation.) The attention to the literalness of letters meant that the poem
could not be regarded as ‘diagrammatic’ in the sense that Jakobson attributed to
the syntactic.62 The representational character of the internal relations of a
sentence, in terms of, for example, the relation between subject and predicate,
could not apply to Andre’s words, which were all nouns or ‘names.’ The literal
meanings of the words, as references to things, were deflected by the
arrangement of the poem according to the literalness of letters. Language was
treated in the poem not as something by means of which the experience of the
world was shaped and understood, but as itself a material part of the world.

"Any part can replace any other part"

_Cedar Piece_ was also made to draw attention to the materiality of its
constitutive elements, and the way that these determined its form. Like words
as names, these constitutive elements had already a kind of purposefulness or
meaning in terms of the world of things. Their standard machine-sawn
dimensions pointed to a future ‘real world’ use. Andre, of course, appropriated

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62 According to Jakobson, the syntactic, relational dimension of language constituted a kind of
‘diagram’ (in the sense of a Peircean icon) which represented real relations in the world in a
nonarbitrary manner. See note 58.
them for a different use. He discussed his use of materials in the statement that accompanied the poem in ‘ABC Art.’

The function of sculpture is to seize and hold space. [...

I have used standard units in the pyramids which are made of 2 x 4 and 4 x 4 slotted beams. I make sculpture that anyone can do and nobody seems able to buy. The basic principle is anaxial symmetry: any part can replace any other part. Rather than cutting into the material, I use the material as the cut in space.63

That any part could replace any other part meant that there was to be no interior relationality in the form based on any priority of any part over another, any hierarchical principle. There was to be no “cutting into the material,” no making of an interior in the material. The sculpture was to be all outwardness, it was “to seize and hold space.” Its meaning would not be generated out of a relation between interiority and exteriority, between content and form, the metaphorical and the literal.

Actually, the requirements that any part could replace any other part and that the material was not cut did not strictly apply to Cedar Piece. Joints had to be cut into the sections of timber to form the tiers, and these cuts had to be, to produce the form, at different points on each section. The requirements were, however, satisfied in the sculptures he produced next—Well (the elements of which were reconfigured as another work, Redan), which was exhibited as part of ‘Shape and Structure’ at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in January 1965, and the works which comprised his first solo exhibition, also at Tibor de Nagy, in April-May 1965 [fig. 39]. An installation shot of the latter was reproduced in ‘ABC Art,’ with the statement and the poem. This reproduction—captioned “Untitled styrene foam construction”—showed one view of Andre’s installation,64 which consisted of three stacked configurations of white styrofoam beams, each beam

63 Rose, ‘ABC Art,’ p. 67.
64 The styrofoam beams were reused for another work called Reef (1966), made for the back room at the Park Place Gallery in New York at the time of an exhibition of paintings by David Novros in February 1966. After this exhibition the styrofoam beams were destroyed. Andre remade Reef in 1969, but the work was made from orange styrofoam beams because white styrofoam was no longer being manufactured. See Alley (compiler), Catalogue of the Tate Gallery, p. 13; Tuchman, ‘An Interview with Carl Andre,’ p. 61.
measuring about nine feet in length, nine inches high and one and three-quarter feet deep. Like Cedar Piece, the constitutive elements were identical-looking parts. The material too had a ‘real world’ purpose—it was usually used for refrigeration or for ship’s ballast. It was very light with a porous-looking texture and was possibly chosen by Andre to counter what had been the extreme heaviness of his earlier wooden stack, Well. Two of the configurations—Crib and Compound—were square in plan. Crib was stacked so that its eleven tiers (making it somewhere between eight and nine feet high—as a whole approaching the dimensions of a cube), each consisting of two beams opposite each other, alternated in orientation making four open ‘walls’ which interlocked at the corners. Compound was only three tiers high and differed from Crib in that its corners were abutted at right angles, which meant that each tier consisted of four beams (making a larger square plan). In the reproduction in ‘ABC Art,’ Compound is in the foreground, with Crib behind it, whilst the third sculpture, Coin, would have been out of shot just to the left of the photographer. Coin was eight tiers high, stacked according to a right angle plan, its one corner stacked in the same way as Compound—abutted at right angles, but the alternation of the abutting meant that, at the outermost parts of the ‘angle,’ every other beam in the ‘wall’ jutted out beyond the beams immediately above and below it. The three structures were placed side by side, each one very close to its neighbour—judging from photographs of the installation the gap between them looks to be well under a foot—and there appears to have been little floor space left around their edges.

Contemporary reviewers tended to see the three structures as one work—“Large styrofoam slabs stacked in a zigzag pattern across a whole room, like some great white marshmallow stockade” wrote one. The reviewer who paid it the most attention, Lucy Lippard, wrote: “No attempt had been made to make them [the three styrofoam structures] look like “art,” or in fact, to make

them visible at all, since there was only room for the determined spectator to edge around the forms, and vantage points were denied. Consequently, the three pieces were seen as one effect, but they were not connected in any way except visually.”

This “one effect” was caused, Lippard thought, by the “actual filling of space,” or a few lines further, “the displacement of space.” Lippard went so far as to say that the space which was “fill[ed],” that is, the gallery space, seemed “more important” than what was filling it. This way of putting things seems close to some of Andre’s formulations in the statement he contributed to ‘ABC Art.’ “Rather than cutting into the material, I use the material as the cut in space.” Lippard’s formulation made the gallery space into a form with a kind of interior. However, the fragmentary, dissociated way the three works were seen could be regarded as foregrounding the way that the structures had actually been put together, and it was this putting together which defined the “cut” rather than the ‘thing’—the gallery space—that was cut into.

Poems as artist’s statements: ‘LEVERWORDS’

A few months later, Andre participated in the major exhibition of contemporary sculpture ‘Primary Structures’ at the Jewish Museum in New York, which opened at the end of April 1966, often regarded as the exhibition which first clearly presented the work of the ‘Minimalists,’ (though the exhibitors were actually quite diverse). The catalogue itself provided another instance where Andre had one of his poems represent his work. In the ‘Primary Structures’ catalogue, the poem was entitled ‘beam...room.’ The same poem was reproduced in the catalogue of Andre’s Hague retrospective, there called ‘LEVERWORDS’ [fig. 40]. There it was dated 8th February 1966 and described in a note as having been written as a “poem-essay for brick piece Lever in Jewish Museum “Primary Structure” [sic] Show.” Unlike ‘ESSAYONSCULPTURE1964,’ ‘LEVERWORDS’ would seem to have been written to relate to a specific work, Lever (1966) [fig. 41]. Lever, exhibited in the ‘Primary

68 Lucy R. Lippard, ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 9 no. 6 (September 1965), p. 58.
69 Develing, Carl Andre, p. 67. The accuracy of the date suggests that Andre dated it.
Structures’ exhibition, consisted of a row of 137 light-coloured firebricks laid on their sides flat against one another. Each firebrick was just over eight inches long, just over four inches high and two and a half inches deep, which made the row approach something like thirty feet in length. One end of the row was against the wall of one of the galleries in the Jewish Museum. The placing of the row was apparently determined by the gallery space—“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 drawing which proposed Lever (dated 2nd February 1966, a few days earlier than the poem), which was reproduced in the ‘Primary Structures’ catalogue, shows that it was to have consisted of a hundred firebricks, and that it was to have passed through a doorway between two galleries, so that it could only be partially seen from the gallery it passed into. This would have meant that it could only have been seen in its entirety from somewhere around one or other of its end-points, in drastic perspective (which is how it usually appears in photographs). When the work was installed it actually stopped before the doorway, so that, as suggested above in the quote from Bourdon, the row could be seen all at once from the side. However, it seems likely Andre was intending to disrupt the perception of the whole in a way similar to the styrofoam exhibition, by using the confining space of the gallery.

The “poem-essay,” or “poem statement” as Lippard referred to it, ‘LEVERWORDS,’ consisted of four ‘verses,’ each with six lines. The first line of the first ‘verse’ read ‘beam,’ the second ‘clay beam,’ the third ‘edge clay beam,’ so that each line repeated the previous one except for adding a new four-letter word (all the words have four letters) at the beginning. This meant that each new word appeared both after (in terms of the next line) and before (in terms of reading across the line) the word before it. The lines were aligned to the left which meant that each ‘verse’ formed an approximation of a triangle, the

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70 Bourdon, ‘The Razed Sites of Carl Andre,’ p. 103.
71 Ibid. Lippard also remarked on this: “This piece, originally planned to extend from one room to another, had its style cramped by the other people’s work which intruded, not quite on its space, but on its periphery.” ‘Rejective Art,’ p. 35.
repeated word 'beam' suggesting a hypotenuse, though really this 'edge' was stepped according to the width of a word. 'LEVERWORDS' was type-written, which meant that this 'stepping' was regular and the words formed into columns, though the reproduced version 'beam...room' was typed in conformity with the typeface used for the catalogue text, so that the letters are not evenly spaced. Bourdon wrote in 1966 that the title of Lever (the sculpture) "referred ironically to the French infinitive "to raise" as well as the English word denoting a rigid bar." These two senses seem to fit with many of the words in the poem which are in the general area of meaning of elongated or low structural elements or characteristics of those things, such as 'beam,' 'edge,' 'path,' 'reef,' 'slab,' 'line,' 'dike,' etc. Some of the words, like 'beam,' 'reef,' 'heel,' have nautical meanings, while others, like 'clay,' 'bond,' 'wall,' have meanings related to bricks and bricklaying.

The potentiality of materials

As a representation of or statement about Lever, 'LEVERWORDS' shares with "ESSAYONSCULPTURE1964' a suggestion of the separateness of the meanings of words with the actual literalness of words, as things used to make a poem, which in turn suggests the separateness of the meanings of the materials and their use as things with which to make a work of art. 'LEVERWORDS,' however, is specifically related to Lever, which suggests a more direct relation. Obviously, there were words which related to the material and to the general form of the sculpture, and these were made into a poem according to the number of letters in each word. The additive and repetitive structuring of the words both reinforced the meaning of the words as linear structure-type words, but it also foregrounded the arbitrariness of the relation between word and meaning, by treating the words in terms of their literalness, as groupings of letters. The same kind of awareness of the divergence of material possibility may be regarded as determining the arrangement of Lever, especially since the

72 Bourdon, 'The Razed Sites of Carl Andre,' p. 103.
material had its own kind of already existing purposefulness, and probably had a range of associations for Andre himself. There would have been a kind of possibility already in the material, but the material was arranged in such a way as to treat it in terms of its literalness, in terms of its dimensionality and ability to be arranged repetitively.

The idea that Andre’s chosen materials had ‘consequences’ suggested by themselves was often a characteristic of those materials, in the sense that they were usually manufactured for the purpose of their future utilization in the construction industries. In a sense, these materials had a kind of intentionality latent within them (their ‘meaning’); in being appropriated by Andre for the purpose of producing art, they were effectively suspended from their usual purpose. (Andre said in 1968 that he believed in “using the materials of society in the form the society does not use them.”73) The use of such materials foregrounded the fact that they had been appropriated to make art, in a way in which the use of more standard artistic materials would not.

Another work made using bricks, a set of eight works collectively called Equivalents, was shown at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in March-April 1966 [fig. 42], just before ‘Primary Structures’ opened, as the main work in Andre’s second solo exhibition.74 It consisted of eight configurations of whitish sand-lime bricks, obtained from the Long Island City Brickworks and mostly returned there afterwards, laid two deep (to prevent drift) on the dark-stained parquet floor of the larger room of the gallery.75 The bricks were of a different kind and size to the firebricks used to make Lever. Each configuration consisted of 120 bricks arranged according to the rectangular plans formed from the

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73 Quoted in Develing, Carl Andre. (The quote was originally from a transcript of a symposium held at Windham College, Putney, Vermont on 30th April 1968.) Andre later said: “The materials I use have been processed by manufacture, but have not been given the final shape of their destiny in the manufacturing culture... I wouldn’t even be interested in laying a brick wall with mortar. [...] If my work has any subject matter at all, it is the immense potentiality of the things around us.” Quoted in Bourdon, Carl Andre: Sculpture 1959-1977, p. 27. (The quote was originally from Sandy Ballatore, ‘Carl Andre on Work and Politics,’ Artweek (July 3 1976), p. 1.)

74 The Equivalents no longer exist in their original form, apart from one, Equivalent VII. They were all remade, using a different kind of brick, in 1969 (Equivalent VIII, in the collection of the Tate Gallery, is one of the remade ones).

75 See Alley (compiler), Catalogue of the Tate Gallery, p. 11, and Bourdon, ‘The Razed Sites of Carl Andre,’ p. 107.
combinations three by twenty, four by fifteen, five by twelve and six by ten. There were two configurations of each of these combinations according to the orientation of the bricks. The eight configurations were arranged more or less evenly and in rectilinear accordance with the dimensions of the floor of the gallery space. Their exhibition was the occasion for Lippard to write that Andre’s works were “audacious in their possibilities rather than in reality.”76 Andre’s “attitudes,” she thought, “show a metaphysical tendency, a refusal to reject imagination,” and stressed the possibilities for rearrangement inherent in his choice of material.77

Materiality and conceptuality

The earliest responses to Andre’s work by art critics tended to stress the rawness or roughness of the material that he used to make his sculpture. This contrasted with the concern of other critics, such as Lippard, with the conceptual nature of his work. This could be regarded as the registering in critical response of the sense of the divergence of possibility in Andre’s use of materials, that is, the sense of the materials being appropriated from their normal use, and used for some other purpose. Towards the end of 1964, Andre had been asked to take part in a group exhibition—his second, after Goossen’s—at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, called ‘Shape and Structure’ (I briefly referred to it earlier). Andre first exhibited Well (1964), which was made from standard one by three feet construction timbers (the same standard units that he had wanted to use for the 1960 ‘Element’ series). This sculpture consisted of seven stacked tiers (making it about seven feet high), each of which was four timbers arranged—abutted at the corners—to form a square. It would have had the appearance of being a massive block, although it would have been apparent from the way it was constructed, in which the dimensions of the individual timbers were clearly visible, that it had a space within it. This stack proved too heavy for the gallery floor, and the timbers had to be moved to another part of the gallery and

76 Lippard, ‘Rejective Art,’ p. 35.
77 Ibid.
reconfigured. The new work, called *Redan* (1964) [fig. 43], distributed its weight more widely since it was only three tiers high and formed a kind of zig-zag wall of interlocking right-angle abutted corners about twenty feet long. It was this second work that was mentioned in contemporary reviews of the exhibition. 78 One reviewer referred to it as a “raw wood labyrinth.” 79 Another said: “The most impressive object was a very large wall (about forty pounds to the square foot I believe) of rough wood blocks by Carl André. For the show, the blocks, about 12” x 12” x 30”, were piled in three layers on a key-shaped plan about nine feet long; but they can be rearranged to taste and according to the strength of the floor.” 80 Rose also wrote about the sculpture in the exhibition as part of her review article ‘Looking at American Sculpture,’ also mentioning Andre, “whose construction of rough wood beams was a radically simple way to approach the problem of making sculpture.” 81 She also singled out Andre’s work from the rest of ‘Shape and Structure’: “everything except Andre’s Rodchenko-like raw beams was painted.” 82 These quotes represent pretty much the whole of the first critical response to, and representation of, Andre’s work, and evidently the writers thought the materiality of the wood, its rawness and roughness, was something to mention, and that it was partly this which separated his work from the rest of the ‘Shape and Structure’ artists. 83

This can be regarded as one kind of contemporary response to Andre’s work which corresponded to his concern with materiality or literalness, not just as a sculptural concern, but also as a poetic concern. But there was also another kind of contemporary response dealing with the realm of the idea, or the conceptual. Rose, in the article cited above, said that one of the things that all the sculptors in ‘Shape and Structure’ (Robert Murray was the fourth, after Andre, Judd and Morris) had in common was that “theirs was a thoroughly conceptual

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79 Kim Levin, ‘Reviews and Previews,’ *Art News* vol. 63 no. 10 (February 1965), p. 16.
80 Vivien Raynor, ‘In the Galleries,’ *Arts Magazine* vol. 39 no. 5 (February 1965), pp. 53-54.
81 Barbara Rose, ‘Looking at American Sculpture,’ *Artforum* vol. 3 no. 5 (February 1965), p. 34.
82 Ibid.
83 Cf. the descriptions of the other Minimalist work: “Robert Morris’ diagonal white wall leaned floating against the gallery wall; Donald Judd’s cadmium red sandbox-life-raft...” Levin, ‘Reviews and Previews,’ p. 16.
art; although Morris actually executed his piece, someone else could have easily followed his instructions, and the other three works were in fact not executed by the artists but by others according to their instructions. The works were literally willed into being...\textsuperscript{84} By "conceptual," Rose seems to have meant that the sculptures were conceived before their making, that ideas, rather than entering (or appearing to enter) into, or being integral to, the process of making, were prior to and determined absolutely their actual realization, this latter being merely the mechanical carrying-through of the idea, or the making of a thing to stand for it. Lippard was the critic who paid most attention to the idea-quality of Andre's work. In her review of Andre's styrofoam show, which I referred to earlier, she said: "The styrofoam logs are not attached, only laid on top of each other, so that the structures are dismantled after the show, ceasing to exist as anything but ideas—which is their prime role in any case. The form is impermanent but the materials remain—somewhere—as keys back to the intellectual domain in which these pieces exist."\textsuperscript{85} This sits uneasily with the "rough"-ness and the "raw"-ness of Andre's wood as being taken to have some significance, since these words not only suggest particularity, a state of the material, but also an unfinished-ness. "Rough"-ness and "raw"-ness suggest a state of material prior to being worked, whereas "conceptual"-ity suggests a state of idea prior to it being realized materially.

The two kinds of early response to Andre's work, one which dealt with the particularity and the state of the material, and the other which dealt with the idea or concept that the arrangement of material was in the service of, taken together manifest an unsureness as to which was prior to the other. To treat material and idea separately corresponds to the analytical division of the sign. In practice, the sign has no such division. It already points away from what it is itself literally, or materially. In modern art, which has an obvious material existence, this pointing away from itself is not literal (in the sense of literal meaning), but metaphorical or symbolic, modes of meaning which retain a suspended sense of literalness, at the same time as they point to another or

\textsuperscript{84} Rose, 'Looking at American Sculpture,' p. 34.  
\textsuperscript{85} Lucy R. Lippard, 'New York Letter,' \textit{Art International} vol. 9 no. 6 (September 1965), p. 58.
more universal meaning. I have been arguing, however, that Andre's poetic and sculptural work ironized—through "incantatory arrangements" and the "disorientation" of the 'real world' purposefulness of materials—the already existing symbolic or metaphorical motivatedness of works of art to arrive at a sense of the literal. This literalness was effected through the unconnectedness of materiality or literality and symbolic or metaphorical significance, but an unconnectedness arrived at though the "disorientation" of such significance. Thus the literalism of Andre's works did not consist only in their self-evident matter-of-factness, but in a literalism made out of metaphor, a metaphorical materialism.
Part III

Literalist Practice
The previous three chapters, collected together in one part under the heading of 'Literalist Interpretation,' were concerned principally with interpretations by Minimalist artists and contemporary critics of Minimalist works and ways of working. The aim was to show how the 'literal,' as a description of Minimal works of art, was not a matter of self-evidence and immediacy, but one which was articulated and deliberated upon partly in relation to understandings of other modes and paradigms of artistic practice. Literalness as a value may have been something that the Minimalists aimed for, but this value would have been already embedded within a system of interpretations. Literalness was therefore not to be unquestioningly aligned with the visual evidence as such.

One of the aims in the earlier chapters was to investigate the figural character of the literal in Minimalist discourse, the ways that the turn was effected from the properly figural character of art to what was claimed to be unfigured and immediate. Yet further distinctions need to be made. The materials and techniques that the artists decided to use can be seen as a means of effecting interpretations of the resulting works as literal within the context of a system of art-interpretations, yet these interpretations were not necessarily of the forms into which the materials and techniques coalesced. The possible meanings of the ways that the materials and techniques were formed would not be totally circumscribed by such interpretations. Nevertheless, one of the things that characterized Minimal works of art was that they were made to look as if their forms were a necessary consequence of the material and technique used, and this made it difficult to determine how the literalness of the works was meant. (This recalls the problem I associated earlier with Adorno, in chapter 1, of how or whether the negation of meaning implied by the literal can itself be significant.)
This chapter is put under the heading ‘Literalist Practice,’ and here I am concerned with the relations between materials and modes of forming and the self of the artist, insofar as this self is a determinant of the work. I look at the distancing of self associated with Minimal Art in theoretical terms, first in terms of the idea of the development of self in and through art, then in terms of the division or duplication of self. Then I move on to discuss the relations between self and material in the practices of Judd and Andre.

Literalness and self

Minimal Art might seem be the style of modern art most resistant to being treated in terms of the category of self. A lack of concern with the self was recognized in Minimal Art right from the time that it first appeared, in the early 1960s. In this first phase of response, it was the self of the artist that Minimal Art appeared to be unconcerned with, that is, its forms appeared to have nothing to do with self-expression. Towards the end of the 1960s, and through the 1970s, the view took hold that Minimal Art was primarily concerned with the experience of the beholder, explaining the lack of self-expression. The artist, according to this phenomenological interpretation, had an attitude towards their work similar to that of its beholder. In spite of the fact that the question of the self has rarely been raised in relation to Minimal Art, that its various characteristics—its lack of apparent self-expression, the relatively unworked nature of its materials, its emphasis on the experience of the beholder, and so on—can be defined negatively against this category suggests the possibility that the self may really be at the centre of its concerns. If this were true, it would make the various attempts to define Minimal Art a circumlocution of this central concern.

It was a common element in the texts by artists relating to their own work that there was a desired distancing of self. The rhetoric of Stella's self-presentation around the time of his participation in the 'Sixteen Americans'
exhibition in 1959-60, and Andre's interpretation of Stella's stripe paintings from the same time, were concerned with negating signs of "personality," "sensitivity" and "expression," in order that Stella's paintings would have "none of himself" in them. Morris, similarly, spoke in 1960 of "removing the "me"" from his works. This desired distancing of self was achieved partly through the use of impersonal techniques and materials. Stella appropriated "the house painter's technique and tools." Judd had his sculptures fabricated by a metalworking company. Andre's sculptures consisted of materials usually used in the construction industries. The impersonality of the materials, and of the way that these materials were formed, was what seemed to preclude any sense of self in the works. The image of exteriority that the literalness of the materials and techniques presented was opposed to an image of interiority that would be presented by the signs of self-expression. The art critics of the time commonly regarded the works that were made as impersonal and objective, both in terms of the materials used and the means of making.¹

One way of looking at the opposition between the interiority of a self and the exteriority of materials would be to see it as a spatial opposition between inside and outside, related, in the discourse of Minimal Art, to other oppositions, such as that between illusion and reality, or that between the figural and the literal. Language could be said to occupy an intermediary place in the opposition between the interiority of the self and the exteriority of the world, and as we saw, particularly in the last two chapters, language was an important

¹ Sometimes, for example, they were characterized as negative or nihilistic with respect to the means of artistic expression, as in a review of Stella's exhibition of metallic purple stripe paintings at the Castelli gallery in early 1964, in which Brian O'Doherty described them as "perversions of feeling." As art they were "a perversion of the function of art by using its formal repertoire to deny the possibility of feeling." Brian O'Doherty, 'Frank Stella and a Crisis of Nothingness,' New York Times (19th January 1964), sec. 2 p. 21. Similarly, Hilton Kramer complained that the artists in the Jewish Museum's 'Primary Structures' exhibition "care nothing for the personal touch, the subjective inflection, the private vocabulary—the whole panoply of individual expressive devices that have yielded modern painting and sculpture some of their most glorious achievements." Hilton Kramer, 'Art: Reshaping the Outermost Limits,' New York Times (28th April 1966), p. 48. More general treatments of the relation between the impersonality of Minimal Art and Abstract Expressionism would include Irving Sandler, 'The New Cool-Art,' Art in America vol. 53 no. 1 (February 1965), pp. 96-101, and E. C. Goossen, '8 Young Artists' (1964, a catalogue text for an exhibition of the same title at the Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York), in Gregory Battcock (editor), Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology (1968) (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 165-69.
medium through which the Minimalists reflected on their practice, not just as a medium for representing ideas, etc., but also as something with its own material resistances. Language, however, can be understood in terms of the same kinds of opposition between interiority and exteriority with respect to each of the terms, self and reality, which it mediates. Language could be regarded both as an exteriority with respect to the interiority of the self, as something a self makes use of to communicate with others, and as an interiority with respect to the exterior reality which it represents, or to which it refers. Both kinds of relation, however, are open to question.

The first relation, between the interiority of the self and the exteriority of language with respect to it, presupposes a self which exists prior to language, one that uses language to shape its experience of the world. However, this priority of self over language has been problematized through a reversal particularly associated with structuralism. Structuralism transferred to all kinds of knowledge certain insights gained in the study of language, in particular the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's proposal that the proper object of linguistic study was the nature of language as a synchronic structure, rather than the individual speech acts which were its manifestations.\(^2\) One of the major consequences of this view was the priority of language-like structure over self, so that the self, as a formerly privileged term in thought, was "decentred," seen

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as a construct rather than as an origin. In art, the structuralist decentring of self entailed the questioning of the author of a work as an authority in determining the work's meaning. Roland Barthes, in 'The Death of the Author,' for instance, wrote that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...], to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me.'" Language, or language-like structure, was thus essentially impersonal and synchronic, and the oppositions which it tended to put into doubt were those which were diachronically related to each other, such as, for example, cause and effect.

The relation between language as constituting a kind of interiority with respect to the exteriority of the reality to which it refers and presupposes, can also be questioned. From the side of language, this relation can be put in terms of the opposition between the literal and figural. One of the ways of putting the opposition would be to say that the figural is oriented to the inside of language, that is, it functions by means of substitutions, divergences and reversals of the terms and orders of language, whereas the literal is oriented to the outside of language, it refers to things directly and immediately. As I discussed in chapter 3, literal meaning presupposes a coherent and single reality to which language

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3 For the 'decentring' of the subject, see Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge (1969) (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 13. In the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, to take another example, the structural constitution of the subject took place in the realm of what he designated the 'symbolic,' by which he meant language in the Saussurian sense, though it should be said too that this subject was in discord with a prior stage in the formation of the self, the recognition of the self in the form of an image. (This discord was important in determining the nature of desire.) See Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,' in Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection (London: Routledge, 1977), pp. 1-7. For commentary on Lacan from the point of view of a critique of structuralism, see Fredric Jameson, The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), for example, p. 130: "Consciousness, personality, the subject, are... secondary phenomena which are determined by the vaster structure of language itself, or of the Symbolic." See also Alan Sheridan, 'Translator's note,' in Ecrits p. ix. In visual art, an influential use of the structuralist "Klein group" or "logically expanded field," is in Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' (1978), in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985).


5 Fredric Jameson criticized the synchronic bias of structuralism for obscuring historical questions. The Prison-House of Language, pp. 5-6. For the kind of relations between cause and effect that structuralism questioned, see Barthes, 'The Death of the Author,' p. 145: "The Author is... in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child. In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text."
can refer directly. The quality of literalness by inference is one which applies
to a thing which belongs to this single reality. However, the directness of the
relation between the literal and reality can be problematized, as in the work of
Derrida and de Man on the precedence of the figural over the literal. Language,
or any representation, involved the workings of the figural (in the most general
terms, the putting of things in terms of other things, the divergence from things
as they are) from the beginning and the literal was seen to be an effect of which
language was capable, as itself a figure, defined as the concealment of figularity
(and in this sense a "false literalism"6). This view entailed certain epistemological
consequences, such as the putting into question of the ability of language to
refer reliably to reality, and so on.

The opposition between the self and literalness, which is what we are
concerned with here, becomes difficult to determine if the intermediary between
them, language, is capable of undermining the priority of each of the terms.
However, the opposition takes on a different character if it is seen in temporal
terms rather than spatial ones. To see the literal as a trope, as a figural denial of
the figural, necessarily involves two moments, one of which (the figural) always
precedes the other (the literal). Therefore, although it might seem as if the literal
conceived in this way denied the reality to which it was supposed to refer
directly, this would not simply incorporate reality into the realm of the figural,
denying any exteriority whatsoever. Rather, the troped character of the literal
suggests a movement, rather than a structural relation, which consists in the
inherent subjective inability to accept the impossibility of a direct and immediate
representation of reality.7 The inability to accept this was, as de Man suggested,
bound up with the figural nature of the self as a metaphorical substitution of
significance ("a human-centred set of meanings") for insignificance ("a mere
transitory accident").8 For the self to accept the situation where its significance
was seen to have no immediate impact on reality would effectively be to deny

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6 Paul de Man, 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),’ in Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in
Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979),
p. 111.
7 Ibid., p. 113.
8 Ibid., p. 111.
its own real existence, which it cannot do.

To put such privileged terms such as self and reality, which seem to delineate all possible knowledge, into the realm of the figural would not be to deny a pre- or non-figurality but to say that this realm can only be known through its effects. This knowledge could only be fitful within the realm of the figural, but nevertheless may be something that happens in the practice of art, in the sense of it being a practice which resists being figured in terms of a purpose beyond it, and a sensuous activity open to the possibilities of materials. The relation between a pre- or non-figurality and the category of the self is hard to determine, but one way of thinking of the relation might be in terms of Adorno’s concept of mimesis, which was discussed in the first chapter. Mimesis was a kind of nonrational “affinity” between subject and object, an “individual impulse” realized materially. It was the mimetic aspect of a work of art which defined the irreconcilability of its subject with reality, and meant that it could constitute an image of future reconciliation.

**Self-realization**

From the preceding brief discussion, it can be gathered that the relation between the self and literalness is not one which can be easily exhausted in terms of a relatively simple opposition between interiority and exteriority. To bring the discussion closer to Minimal Art, the terms of self and literalness can be provisionally put into the terms of the self of the artist and the literalness of their materials and techniques, since, as I mentioned near the beginning, it was these two terms that were often taken to oppose one another, in the sense that the emphasis on the literalness of the materials and technique was apparently at the expense of the sense of self in the works.

A useful way to begin is to consider Irving Sandler’s article from 1965,

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'The New Cool-Art,' because it addressed the problem of literalness, both in terms of the literalness of materials and techniques (as in the work of Stella and Judd) and in terms of literal representation (as in the work of the Pop artists Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein), from the point of view of a defender of the values and methods of Abstract Expressionism. Sandler coined the term 'cool-art' to distinguish the approach by artists such as Stella, Judd and Warhol from what he described as the "ardent romanticism" of Newman and Still, or the "intense feelings" conveyed by the "action paintings" of Pollock and de Kooning. Sandler wrote, regarding Stella's stripe paintings: "An art as negative as Stella’s cannot but convey utter futility and boredom. Abstract-expressionist painting also possesses a sense of existential absurdity, but at the same time—and it's here that Stella diverges—it affirms that meaningful action, self-realization and transcendence are possible." The phrase "existential absurdity" would have called to mind the essential isolation of the self and the meaninglessness of existence. The Abstract Expressionist self, however, was able to rise above this condition and give meaning to its actions.

Here, Sandler clearly had Harold Rosenberg's article, 'The American Action Painters,' in mind. Rosenberg argued that action paintings were not concerned with representation but with what resulted from the action that painting as such constituted. "The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter."

11 Sandler, 'The New Cool-Art,' pp. 96-101. This article was arguably the first general attempt, particularly in its descriptions of Stella’s stripe paintings, to define the characteristics of what would become known as Minimal Art, being published several months before Barbara Rose's "sensibility"-defining article 'ABC Art.' Sandler was at that time writing a history of Abstract Expressionism, which would be published in 1970 as Abstract Expressionism: The Triumph of American Painting. See 'The New Cool-Art,' p. 96.
12 Ibid., p. 96.
13 Ibid., p. 97.
in Rosenberg's formulations. For Sandler, Pollock or de Kooning were “discover[ing]... forms which might stand for intense feelings,” or Rothko or Newman were “search[ing] for pictorial equivalents for their visions of the sublime,” that is, their paintings were made in order to represent (“stand for,” be “pictorial equivalents for”) something prior belonging to the self. Rosenberg, in contrast, in a note later appended to his article, made it clear that Action Painting was not concerned with the representation of the “personal,” in the sense of an expression of the self: “Action Painting has to do with self-creation or self-definition or self-transcendence; but this dissociates it from self-expression... Action Painting is not ‘personal,’ though its subject matter is the artist’s individual possibilities.”

The phrase of Sandler’s that I want to hang on to is “self-realization,” and in particular what this phrase says about the relation between the artist and their work. Provided the self that is ‘realized’ is not taken to be the one already existing as the self of the artist prior to making the work (“the ego as it is” as Rosenberg put it), the phrase “self-realization” is not necessarily at odds with what Rosenberg wrote. Self-realization suggests a self able to move beyond itself and develop. The work of art would seem to afford a means for such a movement. In this sense a work of art would constitute a form of self, upon which the self that made it can reflect, and thereby achieve a degree of self-knowledge. The problematic nature of self-realization in the work of art was the topic of one of de Man’s essays written in the 1960s (one of several on the theme of self collected in Blindness and Insight), ‘Ludwig Binswanger and the Sublimation of the Self.’ In this essay, de Man described the paradox whereby what might have seemed to be a fulfilment of the self in the totalizing form of

18 Ibid.
19 Paul de Man, ‘Ludwig Binswanger and the Sublimation of the Self,’ in Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (second edition) (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 36-50. (Binswanger was a Swiss psychiatrist who was associated with existential philosophy.)
the work of art really resulted from a corresponding reduction in the constitutive self, defined empirically, in terms of its various social, historical, psychological, etc., determinations. The loss of the constitutive self in the constitution of the work, and the gaining of another kind of self appropriate to the totalizing form of the work, were the movements that defined the work of art. Binswanger’s view was derived in part from an earlier essay by Lukács which held that a work of art was characterized by its total immanence. As a project of self-realization, the work entailed the reduction of the constitutive self to its own immanence. Again there was a distinction made between the actual, literal self of the artist and the artistic self belonging to the work of art. Whereas the actual, literal self was open to the world, the artistic self was characterized by its closed-offness. In order to make a work of art, defined by its total immanence, the artist had to forget his or her actual self in order to realize a totally impersonal mode of self, which would constitute, according to Lukács, the only mode of subjectivity appropriate to the work’s objectivity.

_Self-realization and self-expression_

Self-realization in the work of art was, then, a complex movement involving two different, incompatible modes of self—an actual, literal self and a figural mode of self appropriate to the form of the work of art. Self-realization suggested a self able to move beyond itself and develop, the work of art affording a means to do so, yet in de Man’s discussion of Binswanger the form of self constituted in the work was discontinuous with the actual, literal self of the artist that got the project of the work under way. This was very different from the kind of self-realization which Sandler attributed to Abstract Expressionism. For Sandler, the Abstract Expressionists arrived at what he called their “subjective images” through the “spontaneous act of painting.” In

21 Ibid., p. 41.
22 Ibid., pp. 41-3. According to de Man, Binswanger’s failure was his ultimate concern with the well-balanced personality, which meant that he could not pursue to their ends the philosophical consequences of the reduction he described.
23 Sandler, ‘Cool-art,’ p. 97.
this spontaneous act, it was gesture, “fervid, energy-packed gestures, as personal as handwriting,” which effected the continuity between the self that was engaged in making the painting and the resulting form of self. Being spontaneous, the act of painting was open to possibility, and hence to the possibility of self-realization, yet, for Sandler, this self-realization was closely related to the idea of self-expression, so that the figural form of self in the work of art was an expression of, and therefore continuous with, the already existing actual, literal self of the artist.

The presumption that the actual, literal self of the artist constituted the origin of the work of art is problematized if the work is considered in terms of material process. As in de Man’s discussion of Binswanger, this process was oriented towards a form, that is, a principle of arrangement particular to the work of art and involved a movement away from the self in the world. However, the projection of self into a form would necessarily take place in and through materials and techniques which were more or less impersonal and indifferent, more or less conventional. These can represent another possible origin since they exist prior to their use by the artist. It would be through these that the movement away from the self in the world occurs. The relation between the self and the material of the work of art would seem to be paradoxical: On one hand each needs the other to exist; on the other hand, each occurs at the expense of the other. What can also be said is that the involvement of each in the other entails a divergence from the actual, literal existence of each on its own. This paradoxical relation between self and material was, however, concealed in the act of self-expression in which the actual self of the artist retained its unity and status as an origin throughout the process of representation. This self-expression may be realized materially, but the material was imagined to be transparent, effecting no reduction or loss of self.

Hal Foster, in his essay ‘The Expressive Fallacy,’ described expressionism as a “specific language,” a language that had to “deny its own status as language—a denial that is necessary given its claim to immediacy and stress on

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24 Ibid.
the self as originary." Expressionism was a "paradox," "a type of representation that asserts presence—of the artist, of the real." Drawing on de Man's essay 'Rhetoric of Tropes (Nietzsche),' Foster stated that the idea of expression was based on an opposition between interiority and exteriority in which interiority was the privileged term, and yet a consciousness of this interiority entailed the always prior involvement of language as exteriority. Similarly, expression always entailed the "sign" of expression. In my earlier discussion of this essay by de Man (in chapter 3), the same problem of priority occurred with respect to the opposition between the figural and the literal. Foster argued that expressionism saw itself as literal expression, as immediate and direct, though its literalness resulted from the denial of its own figurality; it "suppresse[d] its rhetorical nature."

**Self-realization and the ironic self**

In contrast to the self-realization suggested by the works of the Abstract Expressionists, Sandler had suggested that in Stella's stripe paintings there was no sense of possibility, they only conveyed futility. Stella was the quintessential 'cool-artist,' anti-expressionist and impersonal. In Sandler's terms, there could be no transcendence of existential absurdity, no self-realization, in Stella's paintings. Was there a form of self in a painting by Stella? In de Man’s essay on Binswanger, the process of the work of art entailed a reduction in the actual, literal self which corresponded to the coming into existence of a form of self appropriate to the form of the work. Sandler appeared to recognize that there was a reduction of the possibility of a self-realization in Stella's work; he complained that Stella had "reduced his aspiration—almost to zero." The implication was that Stella intended this reduction to register in some sense in his paintings, which was borne out by certain of the statements from around 1960.

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., pp. 61-2.
28 Ibid., p. 62.
29 Sandler, 'Cool-art,' p. 97.
that Sandler himself had recorded in published articles, such as Stella’s expressed desire to have “none of himself” in his painting. However, the reduction of “aspiration” noted by Sandler was not the same as the reduction of self which corresponded to the fullness of form in de Man’s essay. The reduction of “aspiration” could result in mere nothingness, which was what Sandler, in fact, regarded as the “content” of Stella’s paintings.30

In my earlier discussion of Stella (chapter 2), I made the suggestion that his mode of working could be explained by his adopting the position of an ironic self, by means of which he could reflect on the material nature of his practice. The trope of irony conceived as a means for a self-reflection was the concern of the second part of de Man’s essay ‘The Rhetoric of Temporality.’ It is worth briefly reiterating the argument here since the modes of self involved in the self-reflection were comparable to those of the Binswanger essay, but discussed in more explicitly rhetorical terms.

Irony was an “act of consciousness”31 which created, in effect, two modes of self, one an ‘original,’ actual self immersed in the world, but nevertheless believing itself to be superior to it, the other a self determined by language and thus separate from the world. The relation, within consciousness, between these two modes of self was one of difference and irreconcilability, rather than superiority, although one (the ‘original,’ actual self) was prior to the other. The disjunction between the two modes of self was achieved by way of language. The self immersed in the world used language to shape its experience of the world. The self which resulted from irony as an act of consciousness, on the other hand, arose from treating language as a material which was capable of constituting a world by itself, and therefore a realm in which a self could exist at a remove from the actual world.32 What made this act of consciousness ironic was that it took place in connection with a ‘fall’ (a realization of non-superiority). In being made to ‘fall’ (by the ironic act), the superiority that the ‘original,’ actual self felt with respect to the actual world was revealed to be a mystified

30 Ibid., pp. 97, 99. Sandler was not the only one to see a content of nothingness in Stella’s paintings. See also O’Doherty, ‘Frank Stella and a Crisis of Nothingness.’


32 Ibid., p. 213.
assumption that stood in place of the knowledge that the relation between the self and the world was one of difference and irreconcilability. The ironic consciousness was the same as that of the self-conscious narrator who disrupts the mystified immersion of the reading self in a fictional world, except, of course, that its target could extend to the mystified immersion of the actual self in the actual world.

It was my argument that Stella performed a similar kind of disruption with regards to the immediacy demanded by painting as self-expression, treating materials and technique—the language of painting—as the means of self-distancing. A similar attitude to materials can be seen in the practices of Andre and Judd, which I will be discussing later in this chapter. For now, it is worth repeating the sequence of relations I have laid out between the actual, literal self of the artist and the form of self appropriate to the arrangement of materials which constitutes the work of art. First, there was the self-realization which took place through the act of expression, whereby the relation between the actual, literal self and the form of self in the work of art was one of continuity, effected through spontaneity and the ability of materials to convey the gestures of the actual, literal self transparently. Secondly, there was the self-realization whereby in the process of making the work of art, the actual, literal self underwent a reduction which corresponded to the gaining of an impersonal form of self appropriate to the immanent form of the work. Thirdly, there was the act of consciousness in which the mystified state of the actual, literal self was revealed through the creation of a demystified language-determined ironic self. The ironic form of self which came into existence by means of treating language as a material rather than a means gained the demystified knowledge of its separateness from the world. Yet, as de Man wrote, this ironic self also risked losing its grip on reality and hence losing all sense of self in the process. This mode of self would necessarily be fitful, unable to sustain itself. It was therefore at the furthest remove from a self engaged in a process of self-realization as a

33 Ibid., p. 214.
34 Ibid., pp. 218-19.
development, of “aspiration,” but, I suggest, closer to the mode of self in Minimal Art.

The ironic self and the beholding self

Before I discuss the practices of Judd and Andre, I want to look again at the self of the beholder, that is, the mode of self posited by the phenomenological interpretations of the late 1960s and 1970s (laid out in chapters 1 and 4), because it might be thought that if there was such a thing as a Minimalist mode of self, then it would lie in this area. Michelson and Krauss, as we saw earlier, effectively reversed the terms of Fried’s negative characterization of Minimal Art as an impoverished art that failed to transcend its own literalness, so that the non-transcendence of the literal became the necessary requirement for an art concerned with the common space of it and its beholder. According to this view, the Minimal work of art was not self-expressive in the usual sense. Krauss, for example, denied the existence of a prior, interior self which, in the act of self-expression, was given an exterior form. There was no explicit distinction made between the artist and the beholder, since the work was effectively as separate from the artist as from the beholder. For Krauss, there was no form of self in the work except in the sense that the work was to be seen as “a metaphorical statement” of the “self understood only in experience.”

It would be necessary that a work of art, at least materially, existed prior to the experience of it. The form of self appropriate to the Minimal work of art seen phenomenologically, that is, the understanding of self occasioned by the work, was seen as caused by the work rather than the self of the artist. In a sense, this bears comparison with the impersonal mode of self appropriate to the immanence of the work discussed earlier. What is missing, however, is the reduction that the actual, literal self of the artist underwent in constituting the work, one that was mediated by the techniques and materials—the

language—of the work. It would be in this area that the practice of art, the articulation of materials oriented towards a form, would be located.

In making a form, the Minimalist artist may well incorporate the attitude of a beholder but this could only be a temporary attitude; the beholding self could not coincide with the self that makes the work. If the self that makes the work undergoes a reduction in the terms described earlier, then the artist holding the attitude of a beholder would not only be beholding the work but also a moment in this process of reduction of self. That there seemed to be an emphasis on beholding in Minimal Art suggests a self-consciousness with regard to this reduction of self in the work, and this may be borne out by the relatively unworked character of the materials which constituted Minimal works of art. Instead of the self maintaining itself as an origin throughout an act of self-expression, there was the awareness in Minimalism that the work was oriented towards a form of self which left behind the actual, literal self of the artist. This awareness necessarily meant an ambivalence of attitude towards the material to be articulated and the technique to be used, because these could not be seen as being in the service of the actual, literal self of the artist, yet it was this self that got the project of the work under way. Materials and techniques had, rather, to be seen as capable of positing a mode of self radically different from that of the self immersed in the world. In this sense, the mode of self in Minimal Art bears comparison with the ironic self in the de Manian sense that was discussed earlier.

_Judd: technique as material_

I have been discussing the different modes of self which correspond to certain relations possible between the self of the artist and their work. It is characteristic of Minimal Art, as we have seen, that it distanced the artistic self from the work of art in various ways, and represented itself as so doing in discourse. In what follows I will examine two instances of literalist practice in which there was such an apparent distancing of self. The first will be Judd's decision to have his works fabricated by an industrial metalworking company, a
practice which caused controversy. The second will be Andre’s seemingly negligible technique of the simple contiguous placement of material elements.

Sandler had begun his article on ‘cool-art’ by citing remarks made by Stella and Warhol to the effect that they desired that their mode of making art be machine-like, formalized to the extent that somebody else could do the work equally well.37 This possibility was actually realized in the work of another of the Sandler’s ‘cool-artists,’ Judd, who, to make what Sandler called “sculptures that are solely objects,”38 had begun in 1964 to have his works made by an industrial workshop. The use of industrial means or materials later became a way to characterize the content of Minimal Art,39 yet in 1965 an industrial appearance was seen principally as a means of achieving ‘cool-ness,’ or non-expressiveness. By having the work consist of the products of the labour of others who work in an impersonal and formalized way, a distance was created between the self of the artist and the work. The form of self in a work of art by Judd was therefore one which seemed restricted from the beginning by the impersonality of the way that the work was made.

The reaction to this impersonality first surfaced in critical discourse in the spring of 1966, partly occasioned by Judd’s second solo exhibition at the Castelli Gallery. Hilton Kramer, in the New York Times, complained about the lack of evidence of the artist’s “hand” in Judd’s works,40 a complaint that he soon, following the opening of the ‘Primary Structures’ exhibition soon afterwards, extended to a whole “New Anonymity” in art. “Fundamental to this new esthetics is an attitude that finds its proper expression in forms and materials that do not require the interventions of the artist’s hand; that may, in fact, be best executed by mechanical means that do not permit the artist’s hand to play

37 Sandler, ‘Cool-art,’ p. 96.
38 Ibid., p. 101.
39 As in, for example, Hal Foster, The Crux of Minimalism,’ in Howard Singerman (editor), Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945-86 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986). This essay was discussed in chapter 1.
any role whatever." 41 Two days after this was published, on 3rd May 1966, a symposium was held at the Jewish Museum in New York to coincide with the 'Primary Structures' exhibition. 42 It was reported in Newsweek that "Morris and 37-year-old Judd are the philosophes of the new movement, and at a lively symposium they sparred with 32-year-old Mark di Suvero." 43 Di Suvero had said that "Judd didn't qualify as an artist at all since he has been sending his work out for construction," that "he doesn't do the work." Judd's response at the symposium was to say that "the point is not whether one makes a work oneself or not, the point is that it's all a case of technique which makes the thing visible." 44 This statement by Judd made an unequivocal distinction between the self of the artist and the technique used to make the work. Technique was seen as a means of realizing the work, or the idea, rather than as something belonging to the self.

The works in Judd's first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery were all constructed by him, although they clearly incorporated industrially produced materials. Early in 1964, Judd had a wooden piece he had made, which consisted of a wall-mounted block around two feet by just over two feet by six inches deep with a "trough" removed from the upper surface, covered in galvanized

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41 Hilton Kramer, "Primary Structures"—The New Anonymity,' New York Times (1st May 1966), sec. 2 p. 23. In another review a few days earlier, Kramer had stated that many of the participating artists "do not even execute their own work, but simply design it and pass on the workaday task of actually making it to specialists in metal, plastics and carpentry." 'Art: Reshaping the Outermost Limits' New York Times (28th April 1966), p. 48.

42 The participants in the symposium were the critic Barbara Rose, the sculptor Mark di Suvero (who was not in the exhibition), Robert Morris and Judd (who both exhibited); the curator of the exhibition, Kynaston McShine, was the moderator.

43 'The New Druids,' Newsweek (16th May 1966), p. 104. Di Suvero had said "I find this ABC Art [i.e. Minimal Art] is a special kind of commercial acceptance of the technological world—an acceptance of regimentation."

44 Judd was quoted by Lucy Lippard in her 'New York Letter,' Art International vol. 10 no. 6 (Summer 1966), p. 114, and by Martin Friedman, in 'The Nart-Art of Donald Judd,' Art and Artists vol. 1 no. 11 (February 1967), p. 59. Friedman quoted Judd from a transcript of the symposium.

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iron by Bernstein Brothers, a metalworking company in Long Island City.\(^45\) The first work which Judd had entirely fabricated by this company was a large metal free-standing construction which came out of the workshop on 6th July 1964 [fig. 44].\(^46\) It was shown as part of the exhibition ‘Shape and Structure’ at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in January 1965,\(^47\) and described by Lucy Lippard, in a review of the exhibition, as looking like “a life-raft without a bottom.”\(^48\) This work, often referred to since as the ‘life-raft,’ is pivotal in the early development of Judd’s work, and interesting in terms of the purposes of this chapter because of the ambiguity of purpose in the technique by which it was made.

The ‘life-raft’ was a rectangular frame-like structure with rounded corners which lay directly on the gallery floor.\(^49\) It was made from thin sheets (perhaps one-twentieth of an inch thick) of galvanized iron, and the whole structure was evenly painted, probably spray-painted, with a glossy cadmium red light enamel paint. The enamel was highly reflective on the planes which faced upwards.

Each of the straight ‘sides’ of the structure were probably made from a single sheet of iron bent along four lines to form a square-sectioned ‘duct.’ The corners, which were much more complicated since they consisted of planes

\(^{45}\) Judd had first attempted to incorporate an industrial technique into the technique by which a work was made in one of the wall-pieces with concave-curved projections exhibited in his first solo exhibition. The central panel of this piece, made in around April 1963, consisted of a sheet of aluminium which had nearly eight hundred regularly-spaced small holes drilled into it. Judd had taken the sheet to Bernstein Brothers Sheet Metal to have the holes drilled for him, but it proved to be too expensive and Judd ended up drilling them himself. See Brydon Smith, Donald Judd (Ottowa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 116, and John Coplans, Don Judd (Pasadena, Calif.: Pasadena Art Museum, 1971), p. 32. Of the work with the ‘trough’ (which was shown at the Kaymar Gallery in New York in March-April 1964 as a contribution to the Dan Flavin-organized exhibition ‘Eleven Artists’), Judd recalled “even though it has wood underneath which I had made—was ostensibly made of metal. Bernstein, at the time, was a little crude and not used to my ideas, and the wood construction made it difficult to do carefully.” See Coplans, Don Judd, pp. 32, 36.

\(^{46}\) Smith, Donald Judd, p. 119. In this catalogue, where applicable, Judd’s works were dated according to the day they were released from the manufacturer.

\(^{47}\) Barbara Rose, reviewing the exhibition, wrote that the work of all of the four sculptors in the exhibition (Robert Morris, Carl Andre and Robert Murray were the other three) was “thoroughly conceptual,” because, she pointed out, the works were “in fact not executed by the artists but by others according to their instructions.” The exception was Morris’s, which “could” have been. Barbara Rose, ‘Looking at American Sculpture,’ Artforum vol. 3 no. 5 (February 1965), p. 34.

\(^{48}\) Lucy Lippard, ‘New York Letter,’ Art International vol. 9 no. 2 (March 1965), p. 46. The description was also used by K[im] L[evin], ‘Reviews and Previews,’ Art News vol. 63 no. 10 (February 1965), p. 16. Levin described Judd’s work as a “cadmium red sandbox life-raft.”

\(^{49}\) The work, Untitled (1964), is in the collection of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld, Germany.
curving at a forty-five degree slope, were each made from four separate sections. Where each section was joined to the one adjacent, the sheet iron would overlap—evidence of the joining technique could be seen by way of fairly evenly spaced indentations (with either one or two inches between depending on the orientation of the join). The straight parts had two screws (also painted) where each of its planes joined the curved planes. The monochrome colour gave the structure a singularity, as did, in a sense, the form, but the ‘built’ quality of the structure was also apparent. Although it had the general appearance of being industrially made, there were unevennesses and signs of the use of tools.

In 1971, Judd recalled that this work was “not too well made because they didn’t realize how I wanted it. Bernstein made it as he would have made a ventilating duct.”50 Its industrial appearance would have looked too ‘literal.’ It was also the case that no real ventilating duct could look like this, not just for the obvious reason that the ‘duct’ didn’t go anywhere, but also because the square section of the ‘duct’ was turned through forty-five degrees. This gave the curved corners a complexity that would not normally be practicable to make, but this complexity was essential to the simplicity of the whole form, because it meant that the work effectively consisted of four continuous planes that all had the same qualities. With the forty-five degree turn, Judd’s work became all ‘sides,’ facing either inwards or outwards.

The technique that formed the ‘life-raft’ work was therefore compromised. It was directed towards two different, and perhaps even contradictory, ends. One was the ‘real world’ actual and literal form of a metal duct; the other was an artistic form, characterized by wholeness and immanence. Although Bernstein Brothers made the work, it was made according to two ideas, theirs and Judd’s. Clearly, Judd wanted the technique (metal-working) separated from the literalness of its usual purpose. The technique served as another material from which the work was made, but Judd’s working of the material was, in part, negative—directed at the apparent literalness of the technique.

50 Coplans, Don Judd, p. 36.
Because it was made according to two different ideas, one could say that the intentionality of this work was difficult to determine. Intentionality can be understood as that which determines and structures the coming into being of an object. It determines the mode of existence of a work of art, like Judd's *Untitled* (1964) (the 'life-raft'), as distinct from a utilitarian object, like a ventilating duct. Correspondingly, intentionality will also define the mode of existence of its subject, as an artist, or as the producer of useful things, or commodities. The 'life-raft' was not how Judd “wanted it” because it was defined according to two different kinds of intentionality and therefore according to two different kinds of subject. The possibility of an intersubjective relation in the work (as two kinds of intentionality) would conflict with the form of self appropriate to the immanent form of the work of art.

Nevertheless, Judd continued to use the technique as the means by which his works were formed but also as a material which he himself formed. In his art criticism (see chapter 5), Judd had repeatedly stressed that the artistic self and the material realization of the work came into being together. However, he had also often noted that the use of techniques and materials were apt to be at the cost of the integrity of the artistic self, just as it was only by these techniques and materials that the artistic self could realize itself. This irony could be extended to Judd's own practice, except that Judd's way of working arose out of a reflection on this predicament. In the relation between the self of the artist and the material it forms, this predicament can be ignored, the self seeing itself, from a position of superiority, as using the material to shape its own experience, and by so doing assume the material as its own. Or the self of the artist can see the material as something capable of positing a different mode of self. Judd, consciously using for his material a technique which posited a different intentional subject, would fall under the second kind.

That Judd considered the techniques by which his works were made as another kind of material was registered in an essay written by Robert Smithson,

published in 1965. "Donald Judd," he said, "has set up a "company," that extends the technique of abstract art into unheard-of places." Smithson went on,

He may go to Long Island City and have the Bernstein Brothers, Tinsmiths put "Pittsburgh" seams into some (Bethcon) iron boxes, or he might go to Allied Plastics in Lower Manhattan and have cut-to-size some Rohmhaas "glowing" pink plexiglass. [...] These procedures tend to baffle art-lovers. They either wonder where the "art" went or where the "work" went, or both... This new approach to technique has nothing to do with sentimental notions about "labor." There is no subjective craftsmanship. Judd is not a specialist in a certain kind of labor, but a whole artist engaged in a multiplicity of techniques.52

Technique was differentiated from the idea of subjective artistic labour because it was seen as something that Judd could go and appropriate in the same way that he could go and appropriate materials.

Technique, as Judd said, was what "makes the thing visible," but it did not need to belong to him. Normally, where modern works of art are concerned, the technique by which a work of art was realized was valorized as the artist's own, it constituted their originality, their modernism.53 For Judd, technique was something in the world, as a material, able to be appropriated for the purpose of making art. Yet it could also be said that part of Judd's own way of producing his work was to give it to someone else to do, so that something of his subjectivity, against appearances, remained as a constitutive part of the work. In thinking about Judd's work, it is useful to keep in mind a broad definition of 'material,' as Smithson had suggested. In this regard, it is useful to refer to Adorno's general definition of "material" put forward in Aesthetic Theory.


53 For example, see Richard Shiff, Phototropism (Figuring the Proper), Studies in the History of Art vol. 20 (1989), pp. 170-71.
Material is what is formed [...] Material... is what artists work with: It is the sum of all that is available to them, including words, colors, sounds, associations of every sort and every technique ever developed. To this extent, forms too can become material; it is everything that artists encounter about which they must make a decision. The idea, widespread among unreflective artists, of the open eligibility of any and all material is problematic in that it ignores the constraint inherent in technical procedures and the progress of material, which is imposed by various materials as well as by the necessity to employ specific materials. The choice of the material, its use, and the limitations of that use, are an essential element of production. Even innovative expansion of the material into the unknown, going beyond the material's given condition, is to a large extent a function of the material and its critique, which is defined by the material itself.54

Techniques, modes of forming and representing, even forms and paradigms of representation themselves as these had been historically developed, were part of the material worked, or formed, by the artist. Part of the importance of material so conceived was that, as Adorno said, it was subject to an “historical tendency.” Any attempt to move beyond this condition conceived in terms of tradition, by, say, the use of material which was apparently artistically meaningless, would still necessarily conform to this tendency, though negatively.55

Judd’s work has often been subjected to criticism on the basis of its apparently unreflective acceptance of modern industrial materials and techniques. Charles Reeve, for example, argued that Judd valued materials such as plexiglass and stainless steel because they had an appearance of “neutrality” which was in accord with the ‘specificity’ that Judd required of his works, that is, they appeared not to point beyond themselves to any other thing. This meant that he was blind to the character of these materials as exemplary instances, through their use in the manufacture of appliances, of the efficiency of modern mass production, and hence blind to their historical character.56 This view

55 Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, pp. 148-49.
reiterated earlier criticisms by Karl Beveridge and Ian Burn, who asked, confrontationally, whether the "materials (and techniques) you [Judd] use are "specific" to an advanced industrial society?" As with Hal Foster's ambivalent remarks on the affirmative or critical nature of the use of a serial mode in Minimal Art, which were discussed in the first chapter, the question becomes one of whether or how this mode is represented, or, to put the question in another way, whether the technique presupposed by the use of industrial materials was the 'material' to be worked, in Adorno's broad sense, or whether it wholly defined the way that the material was worked, allowing no sense at all of a subjectivity in the work.

One way of dealing with the difficulty in deciding whether industrial-type seriality constituted the forming of the work, or whether industrial-type seriality was a material worked by the artist, is to reconsider the suggestion that parataxis was Judd's characteristic rhetorical mode. In chapter 5, I argued that Judd's interest in an antirationalist world view meant that his way of putting together texts and works of art tended, perhaps unconsciously, towards a paratactical, or unconnected, way of putting things, and that this was partly how the literalness of the works were effected. In the sculptural work, unconnectedness tended to be manifested in sets of elements that were the same in appearance but different in placing, where each was contiguously related to the next, but not related as a part to the whole. Parataxis meant the way that the material was formed, the way the language was arranged. It was a characteristic of parataxis that it was negative with respect to usual ways of ordering; paratactical orders were "artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax." Adorno's essay on parataxis, from which this quote comes, defined the mode of subjectivity which such an arrangement of language (or other artistic material) entailed. Adorno posited an opposition


between the generalizing capability of language and the resistance to this
generalizing by poetic subjective expression. The user of parataxis, however,
was aware of the dependency of subjectivity on language, and therefore of the
insufficiency of subjective expression in resisting language. Parataxis consisted
in a subject divesting itself of a subjective use of language through "language
itself," through the realization of a language that appeared intentionless. The
point to be made in respect of Judd's work is that even if an industrial-type
seriality was used, it would not necessarily follow that this use consisted in a
subjective affirmation of industrialization as such, as has been argued. It would
depend on how the mode of forming artistic material was characterized. The
artistic material that Judd used was no doubt closely related to what could be
called the rationalizing language of industrially-produced things, yet there was
a part of his practice which moved in the opposite direction, in the way that
the part of his artistic material which would have consisted of the inherited
modes of forming artistic material was subjected by him to an antirational,
antigeneralizing parataxis.

The "rote execution of an idea" in Andre

Andre, like Judd, used materials that were generally associated with
industrial modes of making things, particularly, in Andre's case, those used in
the construction of buildings, ships, and so on. The nature of Andre's materials
were determined by industrial techniques. However, in realizing these as forms,
Andre reserved an aspect of technique, which was the simple placing together of
the material elements. There was thus an opposition in the work between an
impersonal, industrial technique and a 'personal' technique of placement by
hand. This 'personal' technique, however, did not seem to be one which

59 Ibid., pp. 136-37. "Without externalizing itself in language, subjective intention would not
exist at all. The subject becomes a subject only through language."

60 Ibid., p. 137.

61 In 1970, Andre said: "Part of the reason I make things in elements is because they come in
sizes that I can handle. I can actually put down a piece myself." 'Carl Andre' (interviewed),
Avalanche no. 1 (Fall, 1970), p. 24. Alex Potts refers to this aspect of "tactile engagement" in
Andre's work in The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist (New Haven
involved the interiority of a self, but rather one that was determined by the
material, a mere means of arrangement. In an interview in 1978, Andre stated:

My work reflects the conditions of industrial production; it is without any hand-
manufacture whatsoever. My things are made by machine. They were never
handworked, because they come from furnaces, rolling mills and cutting machines. I'm
the only one who handles these things by hand when I take them off the stack and put
them on the floor. I'm not claiming that as any kind of craft. But is it possible to make
art, which is a branch of productive activity, in which the hand does not enter into the
production of the materials of which it is made? Perhaps my work poses the question
as to whether it is possible to make art which parallels the present organization of
production, technologically and economically.62

This handling and placing of materials was both what formed these materials
into art, but also, at the same time, what seemed to least transform them. This
technique of simple placement would be difficult to see as part of the material, in
Adorno's generalized and historical sense of the term, which marks a point of
difference with Judd's use of technique.

In my earlier chapter on Andre (chapter 6), I argued that the
development of Andre's early work, particularly from works like Last Ladder,
through the 'pyramids' to the first works that utilized identical unjoined
elements, was engaged in a negative work against the symbolic, that is, the
mode of meaning in which an idea is sensed which transcends its particular, or
literal, mode of appearance. Andre sought to foreclose the sense of this ideal
realm by making works whose forms seemed to be a necessary consequence of
the material from which they were made, and thus consisted in an ironizing of
the symbolic. Here, I am concerned with how to describe and account for the
technique by which such forms were made, and what the technique entailed in
terms of the mode of self in the works.

62 Peter Fuller, 'An Interview with Carl Andre' (1978), in Beyond the Crisis in Art (London:
Writers and Readers, 1980), p. 122. See also the interview with Andre in Audio Arts vol. 2 no. 2
(1975): "It's not the look of bricks that I like in my sculpture, it's their placeability—the fact
that I can, as an individual, make a fairly large work by handling brick by brick, and can do it
myself." (My transcription.)
At this point, I want to refer to one of de Man's later essays, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics," which in common with several other of the later essays was concerned with the pre- or non-figural, defined in terms of the materiality of language, its ability to posit 'realities.' De Man stated, in the latter part of this essay, that the Romantic symbol was based on a model of internalization. The symbol was the external perceptible manifestation of an internal content, which was itself an internalized version of an external reality, or the experience of this reality, and in this, it was the "sensory appearance [or manifestation] of the idea"—Hegel's definition of the aesthetic symbol. In de Man's account, the symbol was an ideological defense because it made the self—what the internalization and the externalization turned on—figure as something which had a determinate relation to external reality, something which had the capacity to contain and make totalizations of this reality, whereas the self could be defined as a singularity in a reality consisting of an infinity of other singularities, and therefore only able to have an arbitrary relation with this reality. De Man went on to ask whether the kind of external form made from an internalized content which characterized the artistic symbol could really be said to be the result of an act of recollection, i.e. an activity of a constitutive consciousness. For an answer, he looked to Hegel's Encyclopedia, where Hegel discussed the role of memory and recollection in the mediating area of representation. Here Hegel pointed to the importance of memorization by rote, that is, a kind of mechanical inscription, in the representation of the idea. The medium in which this memorization took place was written language, words, but where words were treated as if they were names. Representation by memorization was necessarily determined by exteriority, by the act of writing, and, in a sense, recollection—the activity of the constitutive consciousness—had

64 Paul de Man, 'Sign and Symbol in Hegel's Aesthetics' (1982), in Aesthetic Ideology, p. 100. ibid., pp. 93, 100.
65 "Memory, for Hegel, is the learning by rote of names, or of words considered as names and it can therefore not be separated from the notation, the inscription, or the writing down of these names." Ibid., p. 101.
to be forgotten so that the past being memorized could be realized, 'externally manifested.' The relation between the material of memorization, written words, and the meaning of these words, what was being memorized, was essentially the same as that between sign and meaning, i.e. it was an essentially an arbitrary relation.67

This opposition, between memorization and recollection as differing modes of representation, is useful for attempting to characterize Andre's practice, both literary and sculptural. Before moving on to consider Andre's practice of simple placement, it is worth looking again at Andre's poems, many of which dealt directly with the writing of memory and history. These poems did not attempt to recreate past events in any usual sense: his autobiographical poems were not recollections, his historical poems were not narratives. Rather they tended to be collections of names; subject matter was ordered and sorted according to some kind of impersonal system, numerical or alphabetical. Around the time that he was writing Twelve Sonnets (which was discussed in the last chapter), for example, Andre was also experimenting with manipulating a found text, a history of King Philip's War. He began in the spring of 1959 by selecting certain passages from the book which interested him, then, a few months later, he alphabeticized the words (presumably from the passages he had selected) to form what he titled the Long History. Then in the spring of 1960, he produced the Short History, made of 52 of the "canonical" terms from the book, arranged in four columns.68 Frampton likened Andre's first manipulations of the already existing text of King Philip's War to the carving of found timbers—"he [Andre] began taking given texts and "cutting" directly from them as from a timber, mapping upon words what he had learned from sculpture"69—and certainly the making of works such as Last Ladder was more or less contemporaneous with that of the Long History.

67 Ibid., p. 102. De Man's essay ends with a discussion of allegory, the rhetorical trope which narrates the distance between sign and meaning.
However, it is perhaps the poems that dealt with autobiography that best exemplify the difference between recollection and memorization. Many of these poems tended to deal exclusively with the names of places or people, as if it were solely by names that the past was to be remembered.\textsuperscript{70} There was a series of circular poems, in which names—‘Frampton’ (referring to his friend), ‘Rosemarie’ (Andre was living with the painter Rosemarie Castoro in the early 1960s), ‘Academy’ (Phillips Academy, Andre’s school), ‘Bethlehem’ (Andre’s father worked as a draughtsman for Bethlehem Steel), ‘Merrymount’ (the district of Quincy where Andre grew up), ‘Stonehenge’ (Andre visited there in 1954), etc.—were placed and orientated seemingly randomly within the bounds of a circle, as a kind of contained cosmos.\textsuperscript{71} Andre also produced a major ten page poem called ‘AUTOBIOGRAPHY’\textsuperscript{72} in which the alphabet was typed out in a vertical column eight times per page, and words or names relating to his autobiography were typed against the letters with which the words began. Again, like the circular poem, the words generally referred to places (‘Quincy,’ ‘Halifax,’ ‘Massachusetts,’ ‘Boston,’ etc.), institutions or places where he worked (‘Bethlehem,’ ‘Intelligence’ (which refers to Andre’s service in U.S. Army Intelligence in 1955-56), ‘Railroad’ (which refers to his employment with the Pennsylvania Railroad from 1960-64), ‘Kenyon’ (refers to Andre’s brief study at Kenyon College, Ohio), etc.) and people (‘Stella,’ ‘Frampton,’ ‘Johns,’ ‘Rauschenberg,’ ‘Morgan’ (Patrick Morgan was Andre’s (and Stella’s) art teacher at Andover), etc.). Not all of the letters had names attached to them, and as the poem continued, there were less names to be put against them, so that on the final page, there was just one word, ‘Sylvia,’\textsuperscript{73} against the letter ‘S’, that letter being the first letter which occurred the most in the whole collection of words.

\textsuperscript{70} Frampton refers, in a letter dated 11th March 1964, to Andre’s recent poetic work: “the most interesting is the Kennedy sequence AN ABSOLUTION FOR THE NAMES OF WORDS, and the new sequence from maps called simply THE NAMES.” Hollis Frampton, ‘Letters from Framp 1958-1968‘ (correspondence with Reno Odlin), \textit{October} no. 32 (Spring 1985), p. 44.

\textsuperscript{71} These circular poems appear in \textit{Shape and Structure} 1960-1965. Biographical accounts can be found in Frampton’s ‘Letter to Enno Develing’ and in Phyllis Tuchman, ‘Background of a Minimalist: Carl Andre,’ \textit{Artforum} vol. 16 no. 7 (March 1978), pp. 29-33.

\textsuperscript{72} This poem appears in \textit{Lyrics and Odes} 1969. The poem dates from 1963; it is referred to as ‘Autobiographical References, 1963,’ in Rob Weiner, ‘On Carl Andre’s Poems,’ (published on the internet as part of Chinati Foundation News. The text describes an installation of Andre’s poetry at the Chinati Foundation).

\textsuperscript{73} Sylvia probably referred to his aunt (his mother’s sister), who he visited in England in 1954.
thereby determining the length of the poem. The systematic alphabeticization of this collection of names provided a kind of narrative sequence which bore no relation to what would normally be considered as the actual narrative of Andre’s life up to about 1963. (A kind of narrative, poignant in a way, can, however, be read into the gradual lessening of the frequency of autobiographical references, a kind of loss of memory.) The ‘actual’ narrative, if it were written, would be the recollection, a kind of re-creation and making present, of a life; Andre’s text in contrast was an anti-recollection, a presentation of autobiography as a memorization, characterized by a kind of unthinking, mechanical inscription which bears comparison with the rote inscription which de Man pointed to in Hegel.

This method of unthinking, rote inscription can also be attributed to other ‘constructed’ poems. The words in ‘LEVERWORDS,’ for example, were not as obviously to do with a past (although they probably were, given Andre’s biography74), but the meaning of the method by which the poem is structured was similar. Oddly, the word ‘rote’ appears in the poem as a kind of mistake. In the third ‘verse’ of the poem, which starts with the word ‘root,’ the fourth line ought, following the structure of the poem, to read ‘rate line heel root,’ but reads ‘rate line heel rote.’ Andre could have made a typing error—‘rot’—and recovered by turning it into a new word, but it is possible, perhaps more likely (and anyway he left the word in), that he meant it the word as part of the poem.75

But could this way of working—the rote inscription of words treated as individual sets of letters—be attributed to, say, Lever itself, as a work of art? Irving Sandler, in his article ‘The New Cool-Art,’ which I discussed earlier, wrote of the “rote execution of an idea” in relation to the work of the cool-artists.76 In accordance with the discussion of Andre’s ironizing of the symbolic in the last chapter, the “rote execution of an idea” as a possible description of Andre’s

74 See Tuchman, ‘Background of a Minimalist: Carl Andre,’ p. 31.
75 The word ‘rote’ only appears in the original version reproduced in Develing, Carl Andre, p. 37. It does not appear in the reproduced version (‘beam...room’) in the ‘Primary Structures’ catalogue, though the reason it does not do so is perhaps a mistake by the typesetter, since the poem would have been retyped to fit the typeface of the rest of the catalogue text.
technique was opposed to the definition of the symbol as the "sensory appearance... of the idea." Although the bricks Andre used were a material with a 'real world' purposefulness, an already existing 'meaning,' the way that they were arranged together was not the way that they would usually be combined, i.e. built up, using mortar, into a wall. Although the bricks would have signified this potentiality, they were placed together rather than joined so that they retained their singularity. Furthermore, they were placed together in what looked to be a mechanical and unthinking manner, according to the dimensionality of each brick.

It is with regard to memorization in the rote execution of an idea, however, that seems most obscure with regard to the sculpture, but it is perhaps this which reveals most about the mode of self in the work. The only detailed account of Andre's deliberations prior to making a work was that written by Enno Develing for his catalogue text for Andre's 1969 exhibition at the Hague Gemeentemuseum.77 There, he described how Andre arrived in Holland in early June 1969 to settle on the material for the work he would make for the exhibition. There were several false starts in which he tried to select materials which had some kind of relation with the environment ("cement blocks as typical for Dutch building" and so on). Develing said that Andre, "[c]oming directly from New York... found it difficult to settle a relationship with this to his new environment." The situation reached a resolution when Andre "noticed a vacant lot behind the museum, which has been used as a dump... He at once inspected it and, as he later explained, almost felt like being in New York again. Seeing that dump and being used to them in New York somehow resettled a relationship with his environment in The Hague."78 Andre eventually used material from this dump for his installation. In this account, the relation with the environment which was considered important for the realization of the work depended on an internalized recollection of a previous relation.

However, this recollection was for Andre only in a precursive relation to

77 Develing, Carl Andre, pp. 43-46. The account was also incorporated into an article by Develing, 'Sculpture as Place,' in Art and Artists vol. 5 no. 8 (November 1970), pp. 20-21.
78 Ibid., p. 45. The awkwardness of the language is left unchanged from the original.
the work which followed. This work [fig. 451, which involved the collection of a quantity of old pieces of metal—pipes, rods, and nails—and the arranging of this collection according to certain attributes of the material used, according to, for example, whether the elements were bent or straight,79 was different from the recollection that occasioned it. The work presented the material according to a technique that was more habitual and repetitive in nature than it was imaginative or transformative, and in this sense, it was opposed to the generalizing recollection that started the process off. The forgetting of the internalization of the recollection was implicit in the unthinkingness of the technique, which was characterized by an externality unmediated by internalization. This technique made and marked (by rote inscription) a distance between what was appropriated, material already inscribed with intentionality, already meaningful, and another intentionality, that of making art. Yet what mode of self did this technique of apparently unthinking placement imply? Andre, in the 1970s, often made remarks regarding what he saw as a primary sense of sculpture. He stated, for instance, that “sculpture is a mediation between one’s own consciousness and the inanimate world."80 On another occasion, he said “It’s a disaster when one realizes one is discontinuous [with the universe]. There is the self and all that is not the self. And sculpture has something to do with that fundamental feeling.”81 Did Andre’s technique of the simple contiguous placement of material elements constitute a mediation or

79 Ibid.
80 Fuller, ‘An Interview with Carl Andre,’ p. 116. Similar remarks were made in the Audio Arts interview.
81 Paul Cummings (interviewer), ‘Carl Andre,’ in Artists in Their Own Words (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979) p. 185. Alex Potts, with particular reference to this quote, has given an account of the paradoxical nature of Andre’s work in terms of its literalness, on the one hand, and its evoking of an “enveloping fantasy,” on the other. His conclusion is particularly interesting: “The modern work of art, particularly a sculpture, at one moment seen as mere object, as thing in the world, at another as the embodiment of inner desires and fears... is an inherently intractable presence. For the most part, aesthetic convention seeks to stabilise the illusion that there is a convergence between these two kinds of response mediated by qualities inherent in the work of art. A particularly intriguing feature of the sculpture of Andre is that it is designed to repel such mediation, while at the same time making the viewer acutely aware of the duality of its presence as fact and fantasy, as thing out there and stirring of thought and feeling.” Alex Potts ‘Paradoxes of the Sculptural,’ in Ian Cole (editor), Carl Andre and the Sculptural Imagination (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), pp. 60-61. This essay has been revised and incorporated into the discussion of Andre in Potts, The Sculptural Imagination.
was it a manifestation of the feeling of discontinuity? Certainly, the purpose of this technique did not seem to be to make the material Andre's own, in the sense of him using it to shape an experience beyond that of the material. This could be seen as a denial of the possibility of self-realization as a development figured through the work of art, in the terms I described earlier, and comparable with the parataxis that I associated with Judd. Both parataxis as a negated arrangement, and rote inscription as a negated recollection, implied a consciousness aware of its dependency on a generalizing language (or artistic material), but which resisted this through the intentional positing of a language which appeared to be intentionless. In their interpretations and theorizations of their own practices, the Minimalists desired a distancing of self in order to realize a literalness in their works. In practice, however, this tended to involve the duplication of self characteristic of irony.
Conclusion

When Minimal Art first appeared in the early 1960s, it appeared shockingly inartistic in the way that its objects seemed to present themselves as no more than they were literally. Such objects went against the requirement that works of art be more- or other-than-literal—that they be expressive, symbolic or illusionistic. The materials that were used resisted being seen as a medium (something by which something else could be conveyed), and the techniques used resisted any association with the hand, and hence the individuality, of the artist.

This literal character of Minimal Art was problematic with regards to its interpretation and incorporation into critical discourse, if this interpretation and incorporation took place according to the usual ways of understanding art as more- or other-than-literal. At first, its literalness tended to be taken at face value, as negative in character. The later interpretations, as I understand them, tended to go in two directions. The phenomenological interpretation, often regarded as the most persuasive account of Minimal Art, saw the works as primarily phenomena, immediately sensed or perceived. Their significance, how they were understood to be meant, was that they explicitly included the beholder as the subject of perception. This was to take the literal self-evidence of the object as given, as an object of perception, and to understand it as configured within actual, beholder-inhabited space. The sense of configuration was partly achieved by the deliberate bracketing out of the question of the structuring process by which the work was made. The other kind of interpretation tended towards the understanding of Minimal Art as representing a wider historical condition, such as the way that things
tended to get produced industrially, particularly in terms of its materials and modes of forming. The literal matter-of-factness of the art was thought to represent some wider kind of literal matter-of-factness. The problem here was that the literalness of the art could not be continuous with this wider literalness. There would necessarily be a divergence between the representation and what it represented, a divergence which would compromise the literalness attributed to the former. There was thus an uneasy relationship in Minimalism between literalness as such, as nonrepresentation, and what was understood of its critical potential, critical reflection being located in the space opened up by representation. In these two kinds of interpretation of Minimal Art, the tendency seemed to be to try to maintain Minimalism's literalness as a given, as a starting point, yet to go on and interpret this literalness in ways which departed from it, either in figural or configural terms.

The aim of the dissertation was to try and approach the problem of interpreting Minimal Art in another way—by looking closely at its literalness in order to see how it was constituted. This involved subjecting its self-evidence to doubt, seeing it as something arrived at, rather than as given. In opposition to many of the other ways of interpreting Minimal Art, I tried to concern myself not so much with what amounted to a figural divergence from the literal but with how literalness itself constituted a figural divergence, an interpretation. I thought, for instance, that the sense of the literal as a figural divergence could already be read in Fried's essays of 1966-67. For Fried, literalist art was a "by-product" of the development of modernist painting. The literalness that the literalists saw in modernist painting's acknowledgment of its support was made to figure—Fried saw this as a misreading—as its underlying condition. In this sense the 'literal' understood by the Minimalists was a figural divergence from the 'proper,' modernist, understanding of the significance of the literalness of the support. The identity of modernist painting, for its part, was secured in the face of its literalness, and was thus figural in character. Minimalism's literalness could then be defined as a figural divergence from the figural. Of course, Fried also regarded Minimalism's literalness as merely literal as such, inartistic in some
essential way, yet Fried’s opposition between literalist art and modernist art was not of an absolute kind, as between art and non-art.

It became apparent that Minimalism’s literalness did not just arise in the form of a divergence from a modernist conception of art, but also as a wide-ranging problematization of the ways in which artistic meaning was effected through the modes of expression, metaphor and symbol. The literal was not just an absence of such modes, but a term (along with its cognates) already existing within a rhetorical system (in which certain meanings took on force whilst others did not), and therefore not to be unproblematically aligned with the visual evidence as such. It was also not the case that these modes of artistic meaning were simply got rid of in favour of an immediate literality, but that they were worked against in determinant ways, largely in the terms of these modes. The literal, I argued, was a value, one that was figural in character. This value was not the same thing as the materiality of the works concerned, neither would its existence necessarily constitute a denial of this materiality. On a theoretical level, my engagement was principally with the work of de Man, and, in particular, with what I understand to have been one of its central concerns—a suspicion with regards to the idea of the immediacy of a work of art’s access to the phenomenal. For de Man, the phenomenal, that is, what is immediately sensed or perceived, was discontinuous with its representation. The rhetorical dimension of language was important because it effected the continuity between phenomenality and representation, but also because it revealed the real discontinuity. The value of works of art was that they declared their rhetorical character and were self-aware as to the potential of modes of representation to posit a ‘reality’ as much as represent an already existing ‘reality.’ This view was relevant for the thesis because it could be used to problematize various assumptions associated with the term ‘literal,’ in particular, the assumption of a direct and unmediated representation or exemplification of ‘reality.’

The research I carried out relating to Minimal Art itself was oriented to determining how those aspects of the works which were understood to be literal were arrived at. The following were the thematic areas that arose during
the research, around which the figural divergences resulting in the literal tended to be played out.

(i) I touched on it above—the idea that the literal was made to figure by the literalists as the underlying basis of modern painting, as something progressively revealed in its development. (ii) The use of materials and techniques that were associated with construction and industry effected a divergence from the understanding of materials and techniques as constituting a medium through which feeling was conveyed. (iii) Judd and Andre, in particular, reversed the normal orders of language in their writings. In Judd's writing, there was a tendency towards the use of parataxis in description which privileged isolated acts of reference over context, and hence the literal over the figural. In Andre's poetry, there was an ironizing of poetic conventions through the material literality of language. I argued that such implicit 'theorizations' of language were important for Judd's and Andre's understanding of their own art practices, since it allowed them to see, by analogy with the difference in language between its material or positional potentiality and its representational or referential function, a difference between the materials and techniques of artistic practice as material or as medium. (iv) There was a distancing of self as the origin of the meaning of the work. This distancing was itself an act of consciousness that I described in terms of the positing of the demystified self determined by the materiality of language characteristic of irony. (v) In the practices of the artists concerned, the techniques used were radically impersonal, to the extent of being mechanical, and involved a deliberate attenuation of the relation between the constitutive self and the constituted work.

I laid out the thematic areas above in terms of an increasing emphasis on the consciousness of self. The mode of subjectivity particular to Minimal Art is something which is difficult to determine, since the literalness that it projected seemed to subvert many of the usual ways in which this dimension was usually understood. The Minimal work of art was not easily seen in terms of, for example, the pictorial, in the sense of a point of view, or as an expression of self through the 'hand' of the artist, or even of a leap of the imagination,
metaphorical or symbolic. The problem of the indeterminacy of a literalist mode of subjectivity would seem to be inseparable from its literalness; there would seem to be nothing determinant which could connect a self with the literal. When Adorno, in *Aesthetic Theory*, wrote that "[t]he literal is barbaric" he meant that art which took on a literal existence as mere facticity constituted a regression from the condition of art because it denied that a work of art was a product of a subjective human labour (though for Adorno, of course, this denial also defined the ‘progression’ of modern art). It was necessary for art to continue to contain something of this subjectivity if it was to function as an image of how things could be otherwise, in a society which tended towards a totally exteriorized world of relations of exchange.

In the last chapter, I tried to characterize the practice of Minimal Art in terms of a distance between the constitutive self and the constituted work. The form of self in Minimal works of art was one that seemed completely detached from the self of the artist who started the process of work off. The intention which structured and determined the work seemed precisely not to make the material the artist’s own, though, by necessity, and at the same time, the work had to be recognized as an intentional object if it was to be recognized as art. In theory, and at the level of representation, this distancing of self was figural in character, that is, it was articulated in terms of already existing modes of representing the self. In practice, however, a mode of positing had to be found that resisted the figural, that was unshaped by a consciousness, individual yet radically impersonal. The theory informed the practice, but an aspect of the practice had to be allowed to remain blind. The ‘materiality’ of a literalist work of art did not lie so much in the literalness of its materials but in its resistance to the figural closing of the gap between its interiority (as an image of a subjectivity) and the exteriority of its making. This, I thought, revealed something of a literalist mode of subjectivity as well as the kind of knowledge that literalist art may be said to effect.

I want to conclude by briefly considering Rosalind Krauss’s essay from
1990 'The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,'¹ which provides a useful summary of the main line of the recent interpretation of Minimal Art against which my interpretation can be posed. The essay was concerned with the recent tendency for museums of modern art to take on the identity of large corporations, able to make use of their assets to restructure and reorganize themselves according to the products they wished to sell, and how they wished to sell them. These assets were, of course, works of art; the products exhibitions and catalogues. Krauss's essay was partly occasioned by the expansionist policy of the Guggenheim Museum, and its recent sale of three works from its collection in order to buy three hundred works from the Panza Collection.² Panza was an important collector of Minimalism, and most of Krauss's essay was an attempt to account for the apparent link between Minimal Art and the new kind of museum.

Krauss's account of Minimal Art was similar to the account put forward by Hal Foster in 'The Crux of Minimalism' (as she acknowledged), which I discussed in chapter 1. Foster's claim was that Minimal Art represented a critique of modernist autonomy at the same time that it retained a critical autonomy in the form of a resistance—through its literalness—to the circulation of representations characteristic of consumer society. Minimal Art's literal character, as nonrepresentation, lay in its appeal to a phenomenological way of looking. This was Krauss's starting point. She wrote that the "phenomenological ambitions" of Minimal Art, or "1960s Minimalism," as she called it, constituted its "aesthetic base."³ This phenomenological interpretation, familiar from chapter 1, held that the experience of Minimal Art was defined by the immediacy of perception, as an act or an attitude defined neither by the form of the object itself, nor by the artist as the maker. The absence of the artist did not mean the absolute presence of the beholder; rather the beholder, defined as the subject of perception, arose " provisionally and moment-by-moment" out of the experience of the work, which was itself one

¹ Rosalind Krauss, 'The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum,' October no. 54 (1990), pp. 3-17.
² Ibid., p. 16.
³ Ibid., pp. 8, 12.
aspect of the subject’s “spatial field.” Minimal Art was defined by Krauss according to a “bodily immediacy,” which she contrasted with what she regarded as an affinity between the visuality of modernist painting and an “entirely rationalized, instrumentalized, serialized subject” operating in a world of circulating representations. Minimal Art, for Krauss, resisted this world of representations by its “promise of some instant of bodily plenitude.”

However, there was another side to this “immediacy” and “plenitude.” Minimal Art’s use of the techniques and materials of industrial production, which was meant to problematize the privileging of the artist as the originator of meaning, ended up seeming complicit with the mode of existence of the commodity. The commodity was radically nonimmediate, defined by its exchangeability. There was therefore a contradiction, which defined Minimal Art, between the immediacy of perception and the nonimmediacy of the commodity. “How is it,” Krauss asked, “that immediacy was always potentially undermined... by its opposite?” The side of nonimmediacy was the side that came to be privileged, Krauss thought, in recent understandings of Minimal Art as an art to be experienced by a new “fragmented subject,” as an art not constructing an “experience of itself” but a “euphorically dizzy sense of the museum as hyperspace” (that is, space without knowable depth).

This new mode of viewing Minimal Art constituted a forgetting of “1960s Minimalism” and the perception-determined beholder appropriate to it, in favour of a new commodity-determined beholder, whose experience was one of non-immediacy. The paradox of this distinction was that the priority of the perception-determined beholder over the commodity-determined beholder had depended in the beginning on the likeness to commodity production of the Minimalist way of making. It was this ‘industrial’ way of making which had effected the necessary loss of self in the work which allowed for the emphasis on the beholder’s experience, which Krauss valorized as ‘immediate.’

In Krauss’s account, the Minimal work of art was assumed to be literal,

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4 Ibid., pp. 8-10.
5 Ibid., p. 10.
6 Ibid., pp. 12, 14.
either in the "immediacy" of the relation between it and the beholder, or in the 'industrial,' or impersonal, way that it was made. In this dissertation, I have tried to problematize this assumed literalness of Minimalism by showing that it was a quality or a value which was complexly articulated rather than merely an attribute of the 'there'-ness of things. I argued that the literal should be understood as 'pretended' or 'rhetorical' rather than 'real' or self-evident, that it was effected through the 'literal-minded' ironizing of artistic convention, through rhetorical substitutions of before and after, or through the rhetorical use of parataxis. This figured literalness was apparent in the discourse and practice of the Minimalists from the beginning and considerably complicates, I take it, what Krauss called Minimalism's "aesthetic base" and its claim to "immediacy."

One of the consequences of seeing and understanding Minimalism's literalness as figural was the questioning of the loss of self that its literalness had seemed to imply. The use of an 'industrial' way of making made it difficult to see the materials and techniques used as a medium through which the experience of a self might be expressed. Yet I argued that this distancing of self was itself an act of consciousness, so that what took place was not so much a loss of self but a kind of self-separation in which a particular kind of reflective mode of self was posited through the work. The distinction between an unreflective mode of self immersed in the world and the reflective mode of self particular to the work of art could correspond to the different modes of self Krauss attributed to the possible beholders of Minimalism, between the commodity-determined self and the perception-determined self. The nature of the Minimalist artistic self was, however, not addressed in Krauss's essay, except to state that the use of an 'industrial' way of making was connected with the "desire" to "erode the old idealist notions about creative authority."7 In fact, the "immediacy" of the relation between the perception-determined self and the work depended on the complexities of the structuring process by which the work was made not being a subject of reflection, as did the distinction between

7 Ibid., p. 8.
the commodity-determined beholder and the perception-determined beholder. Such a reflection would however be one way of resisting the commodity-determined beholder that Krauss talked about.
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Illustrations


11. Robert Morris, Box with the Sound of its Own Making (1961).


27. Donald Judd, Untitled (1964).

Preface to Stripe Painting

Art excludes the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. There is nothing else in his painting.

Frank Stella is not interested in expression or sensitivity. He is interested in the necessities of painting.

Symbols are counters passed among people. Frank Stella’s painting is not symbolic. His stripes are the paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into painting. —Carl André


arc
arch
aisle
bridge
bench
ball
bin
beam
booth
flange
cairn
bell
cam
cone
chair
groove
chord
crux
cog
dike
crypt
ground
depth
disk
cup
dome
ditch
height
field
doors
hub
edge
floor
length
frame
gate
keg
grid
joint
source
mound
hill
log
hole
notch
sphere
plane
hull
oar
lens
plank
square
range
line
peg
mast
ridge
stance
scale
pole
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stair
throne
stake
sill
rod
slab
stile
trench
stool
slot
sun
tomb
truss
trough
waist
wall
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LEVERWORDS

beam
clay beam
edge clay beam
grid edge clay beam
bond grid edge clay beam
path bond grid edge clay beam

reef
slab reef
wall slab reef
bead wall slab reef
cell bead wall slab reef
rock cell bead wall slab reef

root
heel root
line heel root
rate line heel root
dike rate line heel root
sill dike rate line heel root

room
time room
hill time room
inch hill time room
rack inch hill time room
mass rack inch hill time room

42. Installation view; Carl Andre, solo exhibition, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York (29th March - 16th April 1966), showing Equivalents I-VIII (1966).
44. Donald Judd, Untitled (1964).

Detail of 44.