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THE SPACES OF EVERYDAY LIFE: CLAES OLDENBURG, 1959-1969

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

1-12. Pat Mucha as *Street Chick*; Claes Oldenburg as *Beggar*, still from performance *Ray Gun Theater: Store Days, II*, 1962.

1-13. Found "Ray Guns," as installed in the *Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, 1977 version, Museum Moderne Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna.

1-14. *The Store*, installation, 107 East Second Street, New York, December 1961.

1-15. Typical Orchard Street shop, 1960s.

1-16. Sidewalk display in front of a store on the Lower East Side, New York. Printed in Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1979.

1-17. Supermarket Exhibition, installation, Bianchi Gallery, New York, 1964.

1-18. Front window, looking out of *The Store*, with *Pies*, 1962.

1-19. *Mu-mu*, 1961. Muslin soaked in plaster over wire frame, panted with enamel, 64 x 41 1/2 in.

1-20. Oldenburg's one-man show, installation, Green Gallery, New York, Fall 1962.

CHAPTER TWO

2-1. Brandt refrigerator advertisement, *Marie Claire*, May 1955.

2-2. Oldenburg's one-man show, installation, Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, 1963.

2-3. *Soft Fur Good Humors*, 1963. Fake fur filled with kapok and wood painted with enamel, each 2 x 9 1/2 x 19 in.

2-4. *Vinyl Good Humor Bar*, 1963.

2-5. *Giant BLT (Bacon Lettuce and Tomato Sandwich)*, 1963. Vinyl filled with kapok and wood painted with acrylic, 32 x 39 x 29 in.

2-6. *Bedroom Ensemble*, Replica I, 1969 version of a 1963 original (first exhibited 1964). Wood, vinyl, metal, fake fur, muslin, dacron, polyurethan foam and lacquer.

2-7. The Oldenburgs posed with the *Bedroom Ensemble*, photograph by Lothar Wolleh.

2-8. *Soft Bathtub*, 1966. Vinyl, polyurethane sheets, painted with Liquitex, wood, rubber shower fixture, 30 x 80 x 30 in.

2-9. *Soft Toilet*, 1966. Vinyl, plexiglas, and kapok on painted wood base, 57 x 27 x 28 in.

2-10. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.

2-11. *Soft Dormeyer Mixer*, 1965.

2-12. *Notebook Page: Dormeyer Mixer*, 1965. Ink and collage on paper, 11 x 8 in.

2-13. *Four Soft Dormeyer Mixers ("Ghost" Version)*, 1965. Canvas filled with kapok, sprayed enamel, wood, 36 x 36 x 24 in.

2-14. *Soft Switches*, 1964. Vinyl filled with dacron and canvas, 47 x 47 x 3 1/2 in.

2-15. *Soft Juicit*, 1965. Vinyl filled with kapok and fake fur, 20 1/2 x 17 x 16 in.

2-16. *Cut-Out Airflow*, cover of *Art News*, February 1966. Photo-printed drawing.

2-17. *Soft Engine Parts II, (Filter and Horns)*, 1965. Canvas filled with kapok, patterned with spray enamel, and wood, 41 x 31 x 9 in.

2-18. Oldenburg making *Soft Engine Parts*, with *Soft Engine for Airflow* with *Fan* and *Transmission* and *Soft Tires*.

CHAPTER THREE

3-1. Richard Hamilton, cover, Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell, *Fantastic Architecture*, New York: Something Else Press, 1969.

3-2. View of Sunset Boulevard looking east from the Chateau Marmont hotel, photo from Oldenburg's archives, printed in Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*. Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1979.

3-3. Ugly Dog Records, Washington Boulevard, Los Angeles and Oldenburg's sketch for a poster for the one-man show at Dwan Gallery (not used) — building in the form of a sitting dog, 1963. Crayon, 28 x 21.6 cm.

3-4. *Brown Derby Restaurant*, Wilshire Boulevard.

3-5. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Lower East Side, NYC: Ironing Board*, 1965. Crayon and watercolor, 21 3/4 x 29 1/2 in.

3-6. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Lower East Side: Ironing Board*, 1965. Crayon and watercolor, 12 x 17 1/2 in.

3-7. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park North, NYC: Teddy Bear*, 1965. Crayon and watercolor, 24 x 19 in.

3-8. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park: Teddy Bear (Thrown Version)*, 1965. Crayon and watercolor, 23 x 29 in.

3-9. *Proposed Colossal Monument to Replace the Washington Obelisk, Washington, D.C.: Scissors in Motion*, 1967.

3-10. Washington Monument, Washington D.C., erected 1885.

3-11. Heart ashtray, "Washington, D.C.", 1963, and Ashtray with obelisk, "Washington, D.C.", 1963, both from the Mouse Museum inventory.

3-12. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, NYC: Bowling Balls*, 1967. Pencil and watercolor, 28 x 22 1/4 in.

3-13. Pan Am Building, (now MetLife), erected 1963.

3-14. *Proposed Colossal Monment for Park Avenue, NYC: Good Humor Bar*, 1965. Pen, ink, watercolor, 12 x 17 3/4 in.

3-15. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Times Square, NYC: Banana*, 1965.

3-16. *Study for a Colossal Monument in Times Square: Banana*, (model), 1965. Canvas formed on plaster, wire, metal pipe, wood, 16 3/4 (including base) x 9 x 8 1/4 in.

3-17. *Lipsticks in Piccadilly Circus, London*, 1966. Clipping on postcard, 4 x 5 1/2 in.

3-18. *Notebook Page: Drill Bit in Place of the Statue of Eros*, 1966. Collage on postcard, 4 x 5 1/2 in.

3-19. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River: Thames Ball*, 1967. Crayon, pen and watercolor on postcard, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.

3-20. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River: Thames Ball*, 1967. Crayon, pen and watercolor on postcard, 3 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.

3-21. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park, NYC: Moving Pool Balls*, 1967. Pencil and watercolor, 22 x 30 in.

3-22. *Proposed Colossal Monument for Battersea Park, London: Drum Set*, 1966.

3-23. *Proposed Monument for Oslo: Frozen Ejaculation (Ski Jump)*, 1966.

3-24. Ron Herron, *Walking City: The Walking City in New York*, 1964.

CHAPTER FOUR

4-1. *Inverted Collar and Tie*, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1994. Fiberglass-reinforced plastic painted with gelcoat, steel, polymer concrete, 39 ft x 27 ft. 9 in. x 12 ft 7 1/2 in. (*West End Str. I*, Mainzer Landstrasse 58).

4-2. *Inverted Collar and Tie*, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

4-3. *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Walker Arts Center, Minneapolis, 1988. Aluminum painted with polyurethane enamel and stainless steel, 29 ft. 6 in. x 51 ft. 6 in. x 13 ft. 6 in.

4-4. Oldenburg with *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, also called *Lipstick Monument*, 1969, original installation, Bieneke Plaza, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

4-5. Installation of *Lipstick Monument*, May 15, 1969.

4-6. *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969. Steel, aluminum, wood, painted with enamel, 23 ft. 6 in. x 24 ft. 10 1/2 in. x 10 ft. 11 in. Bieneke Plaza, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

4-7. *Lipstick (Ascending) on Caterpillar Tracks*, re-installation at Morse College, Yale University, 1974. Cor-Ten steel, steel, aluminum, cast resin, painted with polyurethane enamel, 23 ft. 6 in. x 24 ft. 10 1/2 in. x 10 ft. 11 in.

INTRODUCTION:

The Spaces of Everyday Life

I am for an art that is political-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.
I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero.
Oldenburg[1]

There are two voices, as in a fugue – one says: "This is not Art"; the other says, at the same time: "I am Art." For meaning is cunning: drive it away and it gallops back. Pop art seeks to destroy art (or at least do without it), but art rejoins it: art is the counter-subject of our fugue
Barthes [2]

SPACE VERSUS SURFACE

This thesis proposes a reconsideration of the early work of Claes Oldenburg that problematizes certain assumptions about Pop Art, its relationship to the subject

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[1] Claes Oldenburg, "Statement on Art," originally published for the exhibition catalogue *Environments, Situations, Spaces*, Martha Jackson Gallery, May-June, 1961. Revised for publication in Oldenburg's own *Store Days: Documents from the Store (1961) and Ray Gun theater (1962)*, (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), a collection of writing, scripts, and printed matter by the artist.

[2] Roland Barthes, "That Old Thing, Art…," in *Pop Art: A Critical History*, ed. Steven Henry Madoff (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 370 and 372; originally published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Pop Art* at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, first published by Electa, 1980; translated into

of everyday life, and its role in 1960s art. An emphasis on spatial and embodied experience is central to '60s art, from the phenomenology of Minimalist sculpture, to a whole range of work falling under the rubric of installation, performance and body art, to the direct engagement with landscape in Earth Art. Pop Art, on the other hand, is often seen in contrast to these developments as dealing solely with the surface and the two-dimensional, even simulacral, arena of image and representation. Despite the breakdown of boundaries between media and between the traditional categories of painting and sculpture in recent art, the split between space and surface has been reconfigured as a fundamental division in art from the '60s onward, with the former seen as leading to various practices grouped under institutional critique and site-specificity,[3] and the latter to text and photo-based "post-modernist" or "image" art.[4]

English by Richard Howard in *The Responsibility of Forms*, (n.p.: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1985).

[3] On the legacy of Minimalism, (and to a lesser degree, Pop) see Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art*, ed. Howard Singerman (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art and New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

[4] In just one example of many, Rosalind Krauss describes the link between the prioritization of the surface image in Pop and later "postmodernist" artists in the following: "Andy Warhol had already made perfectly clear (that) media has constructed its own supposedly

I would argue that the easy adoption of any such division must be complicated by a close examination of Oldenburg's contribution to art of the 1960s. Certainly, a number of shared underlying premises between Minimalism and Pop have long been acknowledged: seriality and multiples, the use of methods of mass or industrial production, withdrawal of gestures of expressivity or the mark of the artist's hand, etc. Yet all of these still rely on a definition of Pop that prioritizes its flatness. "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it,"[5] Andy Warhol famously proclaimed; and Roy Lichtenstein remarked that he found all space to be traditional.[6]

In contrast to these and other Pop artists, Oldenburg did not focus on the slickness and superficiality of media

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transparent world as a space entirely peopled by commodities… so that the signs that circulate within it are as *opaque and depthless* as one could want. And on the other hand, the conditions of reproduction … have turned every gesture and every seemingly resistant surface of painting, into the glitteringly transparent sign of its own subordination to a spectacle world…." "Louise Lawler: Souvenir Memories," in *Louise Lawler – A Spot on the Wall*, eds. Helmut Draxler and Hedwig Saxenhuber (Munich: Kunstverein Munich, 1995), p. 36.

[5] Andy Warhol, "Warhol in his Own Words," untitled statements (1963-87) selected by Neil Printz and collected in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York and Boston: Museum of Modern Art and Bullfinch Press with Little Brown, 1989), pp. 457-67.

and commercial imagery like logos, comics, pop-culture icons, and celebrity images, which were prized, at least in part, for their very flatness, for his subject matter.[7] Nor did he employ the cool impersonality of mass media production methods, like Roy Lichtenstein's use of benday dots, Andy Warhol's photo-silk-screening, or James Rosenquist's billboard painting techniques. While Oldenburg often did draw on commercial representations of objects, this was more for their instant recognizability and banality than their function qua representation. On the contrary, he made explicitly two-dimensional imagery like packaging, advertising, photographs and logos, secondary to the real experience of the objects themselves – how we use them, where we encounter them. Indeed, he chose objects of the most ordinary and immediate familiarity, particularly those with strong physical, experiential and tactile, even intimate or explicitly sexual, associations – objects we pick up, move, ingest,

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[6] In Bruce Glaser, "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), pp. 20-24.

[7] Robert Rosenblum, for example, has argued that this embrace of the flatness of the picture plane was *the* key of Pop Art, insuring its place in the lineage of Modernist abstract painting. Robert Rosenblum, "Pop Art and Non-Pop Art," *Art and Literature,* vol. 5 (Summer 1964).

use, and touch. He further emphasized the tactile and experiential in the materials and spatial installations of his pieces. Thus, in both subject matter and form, Oldenburg's sculptures and installations give the viewer a strong and immediate sense of an embodied experience in real space, rather than a purely visual experience.

The affinity of Oldenburg's sculpture with literal space, a concept that later became associated almost solely with Minimalist sculpture, was noted as early as Donald Judd's seminal essay "Specific Objects".[8] Satisfying Judd's description of objects that were "neither painting nor sculpture," but rather what he called "three-dimensional," Judd identified Oldenburg as one of a group of artists whose work engaged the viewer's experience of objects existing in real space. "Three-dimensionality is not as near being simply a container as painting and sculpture have seemed to be," he wrote, "Much of the motivation in the new work is to get clear of these forms. The use of three dimensions is an obvious alternative. It opens to

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See also John Russell and Suzi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969) for a similar argument.

[8] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," *Arts Yearbook 8,* 1965; reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975,* (New York and Halifax: Press

anything…."[9] Significantly, in 1965 when Judd identified this new approach to art, he didn't draw the distinction between Pop and Minimalism that later would become accepted in art history, including Robert Morris, Tony Smith and Dan Flavin alongside Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenburg and Oldenburg.[10]

The use of the element of space might seem self-evident for an artist who works in an inherently spatial medium as the only major sculptor consistently identified with Pop art. But Oldenburg's interest in space and lived experience was not just on the level of form. On the contrary, the exploration of space was a central object of inquiry on a number of levels. The formal aspects of space, what the artist referred to as "art space," included, for him, both the representation or illusion of space within two-dimensional imagery, and the literal space of the work itself, especially for three-dimensional work like performance and sculpture.[11] But this was only the

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of the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1975).

[9] Judd, "Specific Objects."

[10] In fact, Judd includes a long and rather diverse list of artists that he sees as contributing to this new tendency.

[11] Oldenburg's discussion of his different conceptions of space can be found in his interview with Paul Cummings, December 4, 1973-January 25,

first level on which Oldenburg addressed the issue of space. Much of his early work extended this sense of direct experience to include the actual, concrete spaces in which we encounter the work, whether theater, gallery, installation, or, with his larger sculptures and proposals, the landscape itself, either natural or architectural. And further still, Oldenburg's work reached beyond the spaces of art exhibition and display to the real spaces and interactions of everyday life. In many cases these spaces – the street, the store, the home, the city – and not just the objects that inhabit them, become themselves the very subject of the work.

EVERYDAY LIFE

If the idea of "real space" in Minimalist work was conceived as a phenomenological relation between subject and object, between a perceiving body and its perceptual environment, this ran the risk of proposing both that "body" and "environment" operated as abstract entities

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1974, conducted and transcribed as part of the oral history project for the Archives of American Art, New York.

isolated in the gallery or on the stage.[12] In Oldenburg's work, evident as early as the installation of *The Street* in the Judson Gallery in New York in 1959, neither the body nor the space in which they interact can be thought of as simply given or neutral, but are each social constructions and, moreover, mutually constitutive. Oldenburg's installations fulfill what Frederic Jameson has called the "spatial turn" in recent art, described as the "development of a whole range of properly spatial Utopias, in which the transformation of social relations and political institutions is projected onto the vision of place and landscape, including the human body."[13] Whether the literal body of the performer or viewer, or through the sculptures as stand-ins for the body, the body in Oldenburg's work is conceived not as an abstract perceiving entity, but as a socially invested body, one constituted in and through social spaces and interactions. It is a body marked by

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[12] Institutional Critique and related projects that engaged a wider field of spaces and interactions – from Daniel Buren or Lawrence Weiner, whose work incorporates the physical space of the exhibition, to Hans Haacke, the subject of whose work is the broader field of institutional and economic support of the arts – were a later development, made possible, indeed, by the innovations of Minimalist explorations of "real space," but not identical to it.

[13] Frederic Jameson, "Space, Utopianism After the End of Utopia," in *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

gender and class and circumscribed by the desires, constraints and freedoms of its surroundings.

It will be useful here to clarify two terms that I have been using throughout and that give rise to the title of the thesis: namely "everyday life" and "space." Everyday life implies the ordinary and the banal; utterly familiar yet at the same time hardly noticed; the ever present and in-between moments that appear to take place outside of social institutions and discourses. Henri Lefebvre defined everyday life as "'what is left over' after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis."[14] This tends to make everyday life seem natural, if not, for all intents and purposes, invisible. However, a range of theoretical, social and philosophical studies attempt to make this invisible visible and insist on recognizing such moments as far from innocent or neutral, but as the product of socially, economically, and politically determined forces.[15]

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[14] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* (originally published in French as *Critique de la vie quotidienne* in 1947; republished with new preface in 1958), trans. John Moore (New York/London: Verso, 1991), p. 97.

[15] Key texts include Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* and his later *Everyday Life in the Modern World,* (original edition, 1968) trans. Sacha Rabinovitch (New Brunswick, NJ/London: Transaction

As Kristin Ross and Alice Kaplan suggest, critical focus on the themes and structures of daily life in philosophy and theory was in one sense a specific European development in the 1950s and 60s, having only a belated reception in the U.S. in the form of Cultural Studies in the 1980s.[16] Thus, employing this construct here may seem incongruous considering that Oldenburg was primarily working in the U.S.. At the same time, these European writings developed, to a large degree, in response to a specifically American middle-class culture that was gaining hegemony in post-war Europe.[17] Furthermore, they are products of a lineage that, according to Ben Highmore, reaches back to the foundations for modern thought in the writings of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud whose theories are based on the fundamental insight that there is another

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Publishers, 1984). On theorization of the everyday as a "practice," see also the later Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley/LA: University of California Press, 1984). For an overview of pertinent texts, see Ben Highmore, ed., *The Everyday Life Reader*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

[16] Kristin Ross and Alice Kaplan, eds. *Everyday Life*, special edition of *Yale French Studies*, (Number 73, 1987), still felt it necessary to programmatically introduce theories of everyday life to an American audience in 1987.

[17] Kristin Ross explores this more fully in her *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1995).

actuality structuring the apparent experiences of everyday life.[18]

Closer to Oldenburg's specific context, everyday life was a rallying point, too, for the social and political activist movements in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s, especially the women's movement and the civil rights movement. Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in 1963, for example, put the seemingly "natural" and insignificant drudgery of daily routine at the center of revolutionary ideas of women's liberation. The exclusions of segregation and the humiliation of racism at the everyday level of eating lunch or riding the bus played a role on par with institutional issues such as suffrage, education and employment in the civil rights movement. And boycotts of everyday conveniences and commodities had a huge impact on politics and economics. The slogan "think globally act locally" summed up many activist communities' attitude toward the banalities of everyday life.[19]

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[18] Highmore, p. 6.

[19] See Gerald Howard, *The Sixties: Art, Politics and Media of our Most Explosive Decade*, (New York: Marlowe & Co., 1995); and Sohnya Sayres, et al., eds., *The Sixties Without Apology*.

I believe this framework can help elucidate important and overlooked aspects of Oldenburg's work. Differing from notions of "low art" or "mass culture" often brought to bear on Pop art, the construct of "everyday life" prioritizes not the world of representations but the structuring of lived experience. Furthermore, Lefebvre's concern was not only to analyze the power of disciplinary institutions and discourses, but also to reveal how social interaction simultaneously produces the potential for resistance. While fundamentally a Marxist argument for an analysis of the superstructure based on the concept of alienation, Lefebvre's theory was also influenced by the Surrealist ideas of the inextricable nature of personal and social freedom. His model of everyday life argues for the possibility of freedoms, diversities and critique, not by escaping to or constructing an alternate (utopian) space, but in the ruptures and gaps within the structures of regulation and control.

In 1957, Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* approached everyday life from the other side of the academic divide,

bringing a semiotic approach to bear on everyday life.[20] *Mythologies* was a compilation of essays written in the 1950s that "read" everyday objects and practices such as detergents, food, wrestling, and plastic. Barthes thereby bridged the gap between theories of everyday life and the structuralist and post-structuralist theories developed for the study of language and literature. In giving everyday materials the kind of attention that was usually reserved for the canon of literary works, he didn't just reveal their inherent qualities, but the way that they circulate in modern life. Ben Highmore has suggested that, for Barthes, "in capitalist culture the commodity becomes 'magical,' containing properties normally bestowed on sacred objects (fetishes and gods)."[21]

I don't mean to suggest a direct influence of these texts on Oldenburg. In the late 50s and early 60s, Oldenburg was primarily reading psychoanalytic texts (while undergoing psychoanalysis himself) as well as art and architectural history through his job in the library of the

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[20] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (originally published in 1957,) trans. Annette Lavers, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
[21] Highmore, p. 305.

Cooper Union.[22] He also kept abreast of many of the developments in art in Europe as well as the U.S., though he does not recall any specific awareness of the Situationists who were probably the group most influenced by theories of everyday life, particularly that of Lefebvre.[23] Also, while a prolific writer of prose, performance scripts, and "Notes", Oldenburg was not a "theoretical artist" like some of his contemporaries.[24] His writing was more an extension of his artworks rather than a commentary on or a context for them.

Lefebvre is also a touchstone for the term "space" that I am positioning as central to my argument. As "space" has become, at least since Minimalism, something of a theoretical trope in critical and academic writing, its historical specificity too often falls by the wayside. I will endeavor to avoid this by looking at the socially and historically specific instances that Oldenburg addresses and by retaining a heterogeneous sense of space that is

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[22] Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970).
[23] Conversation with the author, June 15, 2002.
[24] The 1960s saw a new breed of art school educated artists who were also critics and theorists, such as Donald Judd, Robert Smithson, and Dan Graham.

indebted to Lefebvre's theory.[25] Inextricably caught up with his understanding of everyday life, space, for Lefebvre, is similarly never neutral or abstract but always a multiply determined social field. But again, rather than a conception of space organized as a totalizing system of social control, or as an empty plane upon which social relations are unilaterally produced, Lefebvre allows for the anticipatory and formative role of the actors on that space as a kind of praxis.[26] As bodies interact with the spaces of the city, its systems of bureaucracy and commerce, its architectural structures, and its social transactions, they move, perceive and behave accordingly. In the process, they reproduce existing conditions while also having the potential to produce new meanings.

An inventory of the material life of everyday experience from Lefebvre reads like a description of

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[25] The key texts are Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (original French edition, 1974) trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); and "Right to the City," (1968) reprinted in *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 66-70.

[26] Lefebvre's observations offer a useful alternative to the influential construct of space on the model of the panopticon; a system of social control based on visuality, articulated most famously by Michel Foucault. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). See also Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," reprinted in *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, ed. Joan

Oldenburg's projects: "sustenance, clothing, furniture, homes, neighborhoods, environment."[27] Oldenburg's sculptures at the same time, become stand-ins for the body. Using waste, deviance, sexuality and humor, as well as outmoded, in-between and imaginary spaces, Oldenburg operates on the limits of the administrative and classificatory operations that regulate everyday life and allows for the possibility of alternate practices, critique, and play.

NEO-AVANT-GARDE

To talk about Oldenburg's work in relation to the real spaces that comprise the social field of everyday life is to bring up another issue, perhaps *the* central debate of Pop Art and indeed the broader neo-avant-garde – and that is whether the project takes a critical stance toward the dominant culture and pursues the avant-garde aim to transform the institutions of art; or whether it is fundamentally an affirmative project, its satire and humor merely an empty provocation void of any real radical

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Ockman (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture and Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 420-26.

impulse and ultimately complicit in the institutions of popular culture and everyday life.[28] This dilemma is itself part of a much older dilemma of the avant-garde, what could be called the problem of autonomy – that is, the desire to transgress the boundaries between art and life and yet to maintain an arena of autonomous activity for art, to maintain the specificity and difference of those things called art.[29]

There is an important distinction between the reference to everyday life and real spaces in Oldenburg's work, and the classic avant-garde aim of dissolving art into life. Oldenburg adamantly and consistently refused this as a goal, and insisted instead on the distinction between his art and the objects and spaces they addressed.

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[27] Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 21.

[28] Some of the key texts on this debate are Andreas Huyssen, "The Cultural Politics of Pop," [1975] in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1986) pp. 141-159; Thomas Crow, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts" [1983], in *Modern Art in the Common Culture*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 3-37; Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990).

[29] The claim that the neo-avant-garde fundamentally betrayed the basic precept of the historic avant-garde, understood as the destruction of the false autonomy of bourgeois art, was argued most influentially by Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). According to his argument, once the historic avant-garde has "failed," the return or repetition, as in the case of what he called "neo-dada," can only transform the avant-garde into an empty "style." See also Hal Foster,

> If I make an image that looks very much like a commercial image I only do it to emphasize my art and the arbitrary act of the artist who can bring it into relief somehow. The original image is no longer functional. None of my things have ever been functional. You can't eat my food. You can't put on my clothes. You can't sit in my chairs.[30]

This attitude and the concomitant "artiness" of much of Oldenburg's sculpture have contributed to the perception of his work as retrograde or reactionary. But I would argue that it is the very maintenance of the boundary or distinction between art and life that allows Oldenburg to engage the everyday and to act upon it, to transform objects and experiences of everyday life from seemingly neutral and invisible backdrop into legible signs.

Here we touch on the operations of defamiliarization or estrangement that trace back to the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. As Frederic Jameson put it, referring to Bertolt Brecht's method of theater: "the theory of estrangement, which always takes off from the numbness and familiarity of everyday life, must always estrange us from the everyday."[31] By making familiar objects and experiences

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"Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?" in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 1-34.

[30] Glaser.

[31] Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 84

strange to us through alterations in scale, material, or context, Oldenburg allows for a new relationship to be established. Defamiliarization is also a construct of humor which operates in Oldenburg's work, especially the particular category of humor that is parody, which Linda Hutcheon has defined as "repetition with critical distance."[32]

Roland Barthes also drew on Brecht to make a claim for the critical value of "distancing" specifically in regards to Pop Art:

> [The] new nature is accommodated by pop art, and moreover, whether it likes it or not, or rather, whether it admits it or not, pop art criticizes this Nature. How? By imposing a distance upon its gaze (and hence upon our own). Even if all pop artists have not had a privileged relation with Brecht (as was Warhol's case during the sixties), all of them practice, with regard to the object, that repository of the social relation, a kind of "distancing" which has a critical value.[33]

Taking as a starting point this brief but important essay on Pop Art by Barthes, "That Old Thing Art…," the insistence on the specificity of art production and its

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[32] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*, (New York and London: Metheun, 1985). Hutcheon explicitly connects operations of parody to the defamiliarization strategies of the early avant-garde, specifically the Russian Formalists.

difference from everyday life as a site of critical distance in Oldenburg's work will be a recurring thread throughout my discussion.

WRITING ON OLDENBURG

To write on Oldenburg is to enter a crowded field mid-game. A well-known and immediately recognizable and accessible artist, he has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, catalogues and reviews. However, popular success has been more forthcoming for Oldenburg than serious critical reception within academic circles. Such attempts to deal with Oldenburg's work have been complicated by a number of factors. One is the very difficulty in categorizing his work in terms of a style or movement. Not surprisingly, Oldenburg's work has always had a complicated relationship to the body of work that has come to fall under the term Pop Art. While he is consistently cited as one of the major, even definitive figures of Pop, (usually along with Andy Warhol, Roy

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[33] Barthes, "That Old Thing Art…," p. 374.

Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist),[34] his work does not often fit comfortably into the theoretical or interpretive models usually applied to it. Correspondingly, the reception his work received did not follow the same trajectory as that of other Pop artists.

Included in the enthusiastic embrace of Pop by its early critics, Oldenburg's work was also considered under labels as diverse as Happenings and Environments, Specific Objects, Earth Art, Fantastic Architecture and more, his relationship to each I shall explore further in the following chapters. In the 1970s, Pop Art in general fell in the esteem of the critics of the neo-avant-garde in the in the wake of the Conceptualists' institutional critique and the celebrated dematerialization of the art object.[35] However, the redemption of Pop Art in the 1980s through semiological and post-structuralist theory, as a kind of precursor to the "post-modernist" interrogation of media culture, served only to push Oldenburg further out of

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[34] Steven Henry Madoff, ed. *Pop Art: A Critical History,* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997), for example, a "definitive" collection of critical essays, identifies these four as "The Major Artists," with a chapter devoted to each.

[35] Lynne Cooke's "The Independent Group: British and American Pop Art, a 'Palimpcestuous' Legacy," in Steven Madoff, ed., *Pop Art: A Critical*

esteem in intellectual circles.[36] His failure to tackle "media culture" per se tended to position him as the friendly, mild Pop artist. Formal descriptions and morphological connections replaced more radical interpretations; and the inexorable trajectory of biography replaced the multiplicity of influences.

A major retrospective of Oldenburg's work in 1995 and '96, curated by Germano Celant for the National Gallery in Washington D.C. and the Guggenheim Museum in New York,[37] has triggered a renewed interest in his work, once again in the expanded context that is more appropriate to it.[38] My own interest in Oldenburg and the original impetus for the

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History, (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 385-397, provides a useful review of Pop Art reception.

[36] For a more thorough review of Pop Art reception and criticism, see Carol Anne Mahsun, *Pop Art: The Critical Dialogue*, (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989); Mahsun, *Pop Art and the Critics*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987); and Madoff, ed. *Pop Art: A Critical History*.

[37] Germano Celant, *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*. (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1995).

[38] For example, Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 1999) considers Oldenburg as a key figure in the early history of installation art; Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), places him among the earliest practitioners of earth art (or proto-Earth Art), devoting the majority of the first chapter to Oldenburg's *Placid Civic Monument*; Judith Rodenbeck, "The Black Box of Experience: Happenings and the Mechanization of Effect," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2002, examines Oldenburg within the context of the Happenings; and Robin Clark, "Artist-Proposed Museum: Polemical Projects by Claes Oldenburg, Robert Smithson, and Gordon Matta-Clark, 1960-1978," City University of New York,

present study was this exhibition, where I was struck by how different the experience of his work was from my "Pop Art" expectations.

Another challenge for any art historian who approaches Oldenburg's work is Oldenburg's careful control over his own history. The preponderance of published accounts of his work is in the form of exhibition catalogues or "definitive" collections in which he had extensive input.[39] Consistently, these rely on Oldenburg's own extensive archives of notebooks, sketches, models, statements, both published and unpublished, and other printed matter and ephemera which he quite consciously maintained from the very beginning of his career. The unarguable boon of these resources is often clouded by rumors of selective editing, revision, even pre-dating. As his work evolved, he had the

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forthcoming, considers Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* in the context of museums as artists projects.

[39] Important sources for early Oldenburg remain the catalogue of an early career "retrospective" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1969 with text by art historian Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970) and the catalogue for the exhibition of the Mouse Museum in 1979, with text written by Oldenburg's wife and partner, Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1979), original text in Dutch; English translation by Machteld Schrameijer. Also, Richard Axsom and David Platzker, *Printed Stuff: Prints, Posters and Ephemera by Claes Oldenburg, A Catalogue Raisonné, 1958-1996*, (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1997); Thomas Lawson, Claes Oldenburg, Arthur Solway, *Claes Oldenburg: Multiples in Retrospect,*

tendency to see his early work through the filter of later developments. I endeavor to refer to such items here as evidence of Oldenburg's thinking at the time the statement was offered rather than retrospectively or factually.

In these collections, including especially the massive catalogue and essays accompanying the 1995 retrospective, the twin pillars of humanist modernism – formal innovation and personal expression – are erected to support the entire weight of Oldenburg's massive and varied output. As in much of the criticism written about Oldenburg's work, we discover a process familiar to many neo-avant-garde projects whereby the authority of traditional categories of art history is reasserted in the period following their initial reception. As Frederic Jameson has observed,

> the most radical developments of the 1960s, the 'death of the author' and the investigation of the nature and function of the culture industry and concomitant transformations of both art and everyday experience, are reversed: the expressive, authorial subject is reestablished as the sole creative source; and the relationship of high art to the culture of everyday life is rendered unproblematic.[40]

1964-1990, New York, 1991 and Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994).

[40] Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in Sayres, et al.

I will endeavor to reintroduce this issue of the "relationship of high art to the culture of everyday life" to Oldenburg's early work in the present study. The following chapters address Oldenburg's response to three sites of everyday life, roughly chronologically and geographically delineated. Chapter One will deal with Oldenburg's exploration of the spaces of public interaction in New York City, particularly the Lower East Side, in the late '50s and early '60s, focusing on the installations of *The Street*, *The Store* and surrounding work. Chapter Two will discuss Oldenburg's exploration of spaces and consumer objects of the domestic sphere as Oldenburg encountered them in Los Angeles in his work of the early to mid '60s. Chapter Three will analyze the more architectural project of Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monuments, mostly in New York City and Europe during the mid- to late 60s, which speaks to the urban and natural landscape as systems of signification. These are usually assumed to be part of or perhaps predecessors to the Large-Scale Projects that Oldenburg made starting from the mid-70s to the present day. I will endeavor to establish why the Proposed Colossal Monuments are more appropriately considered within

the discussion of his earlier projects that I am exploring here. The decade defined by the years 1959 and 1969, indicated in the title of the present study, brackets a body of work by Oldenburg that has a particular relationship to the spaces of the city and the sites of everyday life, one of active exchange. Chapter Four will attempt to underscore the shift in Oldenburg's work at the end of the '60s, using his first built monument as a case study with a brief review of the later projects.

CHAPTER ONE

Taking it to the Street

PERFORMING THE CITY

Oldenburg's early years in New York, 1958 to 1963, were a period of intense exploration of the sites and interactions of urban life of that city, characterized most famously and paradigmatically by his installations *The Street*, 1960 and *The Store*, 1961 and related performances and Happenings. But one must trace Oldenburg's relationship to the city and the street back to a project he had initiated a few years earlier. Moving to the Lower East Side in 1958, Oldenburg began to conduct an exploration of the city by means of wandering the streets, directed only by personal impulse. On these wanderings, he collected items as they appealed to him, items of studied insignificance, from cheap plastic

figurines, to scraps of newspaper, and even unformed masses of partially decayed material.

These walks were not unlike the *dérive* of the Situationists working in Europe in the late 50s and 60s.[1] In their early period, the Situationists were actively engaged with theories of both space and everyday life in France at that time, particularly those of Henri Lefebvre (until they split from Lefebvre in 1963). Their activities were conceived, in a sense, as the praxis to Lefebvre's theory. In an essay published in the same year as Oldenburg's move to New York, Guy Debord defined the dérive as follows:

> The dérive entails playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psycho-geographical effects; which completely distinguishes it from the classical notions of the journey and the stroll… One or more persons for a certain period drop their usual motives for movement and action, their relations, their work and leisure activities, and let themselves be drawn by the

[1] Using the journal of the Situationists as a means of setting parameters to the group, *The Internationale Situationiste* was initiated in 1958 and ran through 1969, making it basically simultaneous to Oldenburg's explorations of the city. See Michel Trebitsch's preface to *The Critique of Everyday Life*, translated by John Moore (London: New York: Verso, 1991), p. xxvii for a discussion of Lefebvre's influence on a number of artists mostly working in Europe, notably the Cobra Group particularly in the work of the architectural theorist Constant, and Guy Debord and the Situationist movement.

> attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there.[2]

For the Situationists, this was a means of creating a radical alternative to the city intended by urban planners.[3] For Oldenburg, too, the city provided an arena for deriving new meanings out of the sites and objects of everyday life.

Unlike the Situationists, however, Oldenburg's scavenging and reassignment of the city and its detritus was not part of a Marxist program of explicitly political or revolutionary practice. Instead, Oldenburg conceived of these experiences on the one hand as an exploration of his inner subjectivity. He was undergoing psychoanalysis at the time as well as reading psychoanalytic theory, and conceived of the items he collected as a kind of fetish, that is, a real world substitute for an unconscious desire.[4] "I would walk down the street," he later

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[2] Guy Debord, "Théorie de la dérive," *Internationale Situationniste* #2 (December 1958); originally in *Les Levres Nues* 9 (November 1956); translated and reprinted as "Theory of the Derive," in *Situationist International: Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb, (Berkeley, Ca.: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995), pp. 50-54. See also, Peter Wollen, "The Situationist International," *New Left Review*, p. 174 (1989), pp. 87-90, for an overview of the group and its history.

[3] See Thomas McDonough, "Situationist Space," *October* 67 (Winter 1994), pp. 59-77 which positions Situationism in part as a response to the "Hausmannization" of Paris in the previous century.

[4] Specifically Wilhelm Stekel's *Sexual Aberrations*, authorized English translation from 1st ed. by S. Parker, (New York: Liveright, c. 1930),

recalled, "and whatever it was I was drawn to I would photograph and then I would go home and I would say 'this structure fascinates me, why does it…?"[5] At this time, Abstract Expression, which carried its own understanding of the relationship of psychoanalysis to art, was still the dominant style and force in the New York art world.[6] One common definition of Happenings saw them as evolving directly from expressionist tendencies.[7]

On the other hand, in contrast to the Abstract Expressionist quest for the sacred and transcendent, Oldenburg looked to the low, the profane, the banal.[8] More

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a collection of case histories of fetishes. For more on the role of psychoanalysis and a psychoanalytic reading of Oldenburg's early work, see Lisa Freiman, "(Mind)ing The Store: Claes Oldenburg's Psychoaesthetics," Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 2001.

[5] Oldenburg, interview with Paul Cummings, December 4, 1973-January 25, 1974, conducted and transcribed as part of the oral history project for the Archives of American Art, p. 84.

[6] Oldenburg's "expressionism" particularly in his early figure drawings have been widely remarked in the literature. See, for example, Gene Baro, *Claes Oldenburg: Drawings and Prints* (London and New York: Chelsea house Publishers, 1969) and Richard Axsom and David Platzker, *Printed Stuff: Prints, Posters and Ephemera by Claes Oldenburg, A Catalogue Raisonné, 1958-1996*, (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1997).

[7] The genealogy of Happenings is far from a closed subject. I refer here to Allan Kaprow's "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News*, 1958; reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 1-9, among others. In this famous essay, Kaprow, the leader in theorizing and defining Happenings, positions them as a direct outgrowth of the work of Abstract Expressionist painter Jackson Pollock.

[8] The argument for the low as a source for certain Abstract Expressionist work, specifically for the painting of Jackson Pollock has also been made in Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993).

significantly, in contrast to the fundamental assumptions of the Abstract Expressionist conception of the psyche characterized by archetypes, the absolute, and the primacy of the individual, Oldenburg's goals necessitated an active involvement with external social reality. "This sort of bringing things out of yourself doesn't mean very much," he later remarked, "unless it's related to an environment or a social situation."[9] In other words, this operation occurred precisely at the intersection of public, everyday reality and private impulses, or what both Lefebvre and the Situationists called "psychogeography." The exploration of the city environment was for Oldenburg not just a source for artistic inspiration, but a means of reconfiguring the experience of the city itself. In this practice, the city had meaning only as experienced by a concrete, situated subject, one simultaneously motivated by private conscious and unconscious desires and directed by the public environment; simultaneously constrained by social

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[9] This comment was made as an explicit contrast with abstract art: "...but I'm impressed by the idea of transcending period. The abstract artist's goal is really a kind of madness, I mean its desire to achieve the absolute, you know, to present the absolute, which is a very twentieth-century goal; probably it will disappear." Interview with

divisions and exclusions and empowered by chance encounters and personal choices. The items that Oldenburg collected, then, became both a kind of mapping of the city and a self-portrait – the individual writes his version of the city, just as the objects of everyday life inscribe themselves on him.[10]

Of course, Oldenburg wasn't the only artist scavenging the street for source material for his art at the time. The '50s had witnessed the growth of assemblage, environments, and happenings, as well as funk and junk art, all of which incorporated urban debris into works of art. Robert Rauschenberg had begun to incorporate found elements into his paintings in 1955 and later to assemble them into combines as a way of expanding the definition of the painted field: "A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails,

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Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, pp. 91-93.

[10] Oldenburg's 1962 performance "World's Fair II" (part of the Ray Gun Theater in the installation *The Store*) presented the theme of a man being defined by his possessions. See Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1979), original text in Dutch; English translation by Machteld Schrameijer, p. 30.

turpentine, oil, and fabric."[11] Jim Dine, who was showing at the same galleries as Oldenburg, recalled:

> at the Reuben and the Judson … it was all about junk. Finding things and putting them together…. I just figured that if you worked on it long enough it worked and if it didn't you threw it away…. When my show was over I just threw most of it away. That's what almost everyone did that year.[12]

But Oldenburg didn't incorporate his found objects into paintings or sculptures and he didn't throw them away. Oldenburg catalogued and stored these items and continued to add to them to use as a kind of mad archive from which he could draw his own connections between things creating new meanings. The items he picked up would eventually accumulate into a vast collection that would later serve as source material for future projects and come to stand as an installation in its own right. [Fig. 1-1] As Oldenburg said regarding Happenings: "To pick up after a performance to be very careful about what is to be discarded and what still survives by itself. Slow study and respect for small things. One's own created 'found

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[11] Robert Rauschenberg, untitled statement, in *Sixteen Americans, ed.* Dorothy C. Miller, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 58.

objects'. *The floor of the stage like the street. Picking up after is creative."*[13] He began to include items purchased or donated from cheap novelty stores, items contributed by friends, small sculptures produced in the studio and props from Happenings, in addition to those found in his wanderings of the city.[14] [Fig. 1-2]

While the objects often served as the basis for new works, the collection also became an object in its own right. A selection of found "ray guns" from the collection, mostly reproductions of children's toys, was on display with the installation of *The Street* at the Judson Gallery in 1960. Fifty of the objects from the collection were exhibited in a 1966 exhibition, "As Found," at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. They were exhibited in Oldenburg's studio on 14th Street as the "Museum of popular art, n.y.c." and at the Documenta 1971 – 1972. Finally, they formed the basis of a "museum" of Oldenburg's creation in the early '70s, *The Mouse*

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[12] Jim Dine, quoted in Julie H. Reiss, "Introduction," *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 20.
[13] Oldenburg, Notes, cited in Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969/70).
[14] See Van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, for a detailed description of objects in the collection. In 1963, Oldenburg

Museum, named after the structure built to house it which was modeled after both the form of a Mickey Mouse head and an old-fashioned movie camera.[15] [Fig. 1-3]

THE STREET

During the fall of 1959, Oldenburg also began making sketches of scenes in the neighborhood, particularly along the Bowery, that would become the basis for the shapes and figures that would comprise his Environment or installation called *The Street*.[16] [Fig. 1-4] These were crude, graffiti-like sketches that echoed the coarse, dirty, and chaotic streets of the Lower East Side. Random and fragmented images of objects, substances and people in these drawings suggested the disorganized patterns of city life. An unsigned program accompanying the installation described *The Street* as "a painting in the shape of a city

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visited the warehouse of the mail-order company, Valmor Products Co. and acquired several cheap novelty items from them.

[15] On the Mouse Museum, see Van Bruggen, *Mouse Museum*. Also Robin Clark, "Artist-Proposed Museum: Polemical Projects by Claes Oldenburg, Robert Smithson, and Gordon Matta-Clark, 1960-1978," Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, forthcoming.

[16] The use of the term "Environment" was the common term for such projects at the time, preferred by Allan Kaprow to describe his and others room-size multi-media works, although the term "installation" later came to dominate. See Reiss, "Introduction," *From Margin to Center*. The idea of an Environment tended to imply that the viewer was expected to enter and interact with it. See Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966).

street."[17] Something between huge drawings and sculptures, the figures and objects in *The Street* were for the most part flat, jagged silhouettes mounted on board. Made from cardboard, burlap, paper, metal and other material associated more with the detritus of urban life than with traditional sculpture, they were cut, ripped, or even burnt with a blow torch, and outlined in heavy black lines. [Fig. 1-5] It was as if the surrounding elements of the picture, the rest of the city scene, had been torn away.

> I think of space as material as I think of the stage as a solid cube or a box to be broken. That air and the things in it are one, are HARD, and that you can RIP a piece of air and the thing out of it, so that a piece of object and a whole object and just air, comes as one piece.[18]

By extension, the real space of the exhibition became the background, thereby incorporating the negative space in between the objects – the space allotted to the viewers – as an integral part of the artwork itself. The play on space was even more pronounced, with larger, freestanding figures and objects indicating close-up events and smaller

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[17] Judson Memorial Church Archive, New York.
[18] Claes Oldenburg, Notes, New York, 1961, cited in Van Bruggen, *Mouse Museum*, p. 27.

figures on the walls suggesting events at a distance, the blank areas of the wall becoming distant, open space.[19]

The Street was installed originally at the Judson Church from January 30th to March 17th, 1960 and in an altered format in the Reuben Gallery the following May. The Judson and Reuben Gallery, along with other downtown galleries, were alternative spaces, informal and open to experimentation relative to the more established commercial galleries uptown. Oldenburg, along with Jim Dine served as directors at the Judson beginning in 1960. The gallery was located in the Judson Memorial Church at 239 Thompson Street in the West Village, and the Reuben was on Third Street in the East Village,[20] just around the corner from where Oldenburg would in 1962 establish his own alternative art space cum installation, *The Store*.

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[19] My description of *The Street*, of course, cannot be firsthand. As with such temporary events, they can only be known historically by photographs and eye-witness descriptions. I draw on a number of such sources here, primarily Michael Kirby, *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1965); and Richard Kostelanetz, *Theater of Mixed Means* (New York: R.K. Editions, 1968), as well as material from the Judson Church Memorial Archive, New York and Oldenburg's personal archives.

[20] The Judson Church is still present and maintains a useful archive of its history. Anita Reuben opened the gallery in 1959 at 61 Fourth Avenue then moved to 44 East Third Street. Lawrence Alloway, "The Reuben Gallery: A Chronology," in *Eleven from the Reuben Gallery*, (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1965).

For the first version at the Judson Gallery, the forms, although affixed to boards which gave them a stronger sense of three-dimensional structure, were, for the most part, positioned against the walls and laying across the floor. In the Reuben Gallery, the forms were also suspended from the ceiling directly incorporating the space of the gallery and the viewers' physical presence into the piece.[21] [Fig. 1-6] The Judson installation was rougher, messier, with a more spontaneous feel – "more dramatic," as Oldenburg put it, contrasted with "its environmental counterpart" in the Reuben iteration.[22]

The original exhibition also included an environment by Jim Dine called "The House" as well as a series of six performances called the "Ray Gun Show and Spex," which was a group collaboration including Jim Dine, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman, and Oldenburg's own *Snapshots from the City*.[23] For *Snapshots from the City*, the performers, including Oldenburg himself and his

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[21] For more on the Reuben Gallery, see Lawrence Alloway, "The Reuben Gallery: A Chronology."
[22] Rose, p. 48.
[23] I will not be focusing on the performance aspect of Oldenburg's work per se in this study. For general texts on the Happenings, see Kirby, *Happenings;* Kostelanetz, *Theater of Mixed Means;* and Mariellen R. Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

wife Pat Muchinski Oldenburg (now Pat Mucha), were covered in costumes made of the same rough materials that comprised the sculptures and posed for a series of still tableaux visible only during brief flashes of light, that depicted possible encounters one might have on city streets. [Fig. 1-7] Audiences, performers, sculptures, and, in a sense, the city itself thereby occupied the same physical space of the gallery and were brought into the work of art as more or less equivalent elements.

This sensibility was extended in the Judson version by means of the quite literal interplay between the space of exhibition and performance, and that of the city street itself. The floor of the gallery was strewn with various items, garbage and pieces of litter found in the surrounding neighborhood, some remnants of Oldenburg's collecting activity. An often-repeated anecdote even includes homeless people from the neighborhood periodically coming in to hang out. Furthermore, viewers and audiences were invited to participate by bringing in

and adding to the debris on the floor, thereby literally bringing the street into the exhibition space.[24]

Conversely, the exhibition continued out to the street, with paintings and posters on the exterior walls. [Fig. 1-8] There were originally performances planned to take place in the street as well. Oldenburg later recalled,

> The original performance was supposed to take place in front of the Judson on Thompson Street. It was called Post No Bills. We had planned to block the street at the moment of the performance by stalling a car, but the more I thought about the piece, the more I felt it was very closely connected with the construction I had made. I decided that I wanted to show my construction at the same time that I presented a performance…. So, my first performance, my theatre work was linked to my sculpture or construction.[25]

But this does not mean that relationship of inside to outside, of the space of art exhibition and display to the space of the city street was, for Oldenburg, simply a continuity. On the contrary, as with the gesture of Duchamp's ready-mades, to bring items from the street inside the boundaries of an art exhibition

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[24] Barbara Haskell, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), p. 26.
[25] Claes Oldenburg, quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *Theater of Mixed Means*, p. 139.

was to change their context and thus their meaning, in other words, to transform them into art. The street and by extension the city were transformed into a representation, becoming simultaneously real and discursive.

THE CITY

One of the key aspects of Oldenburg's work at this time was its urban context. In contrast to other Happenings and Environment artists, including Kaprow, whose explorations could be adapted to the countryside or empty fields, Oldenburg's projects were specific to their urban context.[26] I would go so far as to argue that Oldenburg was doing no less than attempting to reconfigure existing and preconceived models of urban experience.[27] Both *The Street* and the related Happenings intentionally disrupted or reconfigured the idealist illusion of rational and transparent space. The experience of fragmentation and chaos in Oldenburg's view of the city

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[26] See Alloway, "Allan Kaprow, Two Views."

[27] Oldenburg often commented about his work's relationship to the city and to what he called "city nature," and his desire to transform urban experience, although he was neither polemical nor theoretical. For example, see Oldenburg's Notes, 1963, published in Rose, p. 191.

stood in distinct contrast to the structured orderliness of the (imagined) ideal city, the modern city characterized by optical coherence, what Lefebvre called "the undifferentiated state of the visible-readable realm."[28] The city, in Lefebvre's model, as in Oldenburg's, was not a fixed entity, but an open one. In the bustling and chaotic neighborhoods, in the detritus and waste, in the ignored and overlooked details, what Lefebvre called the practitioners of urban life could carve out specific experiences rather than being overdetermined by structures of surveillance and control.

Oldenburg's version of urbanism resists the kind of visual access that is the structuring principle for contemporary theories of regulation and order. Michel Foucault, for example, was concerned with the overarching governance of everyday life as it is organized and regulated by institutions such as prisons and asylums arranged around principles of visibility and how such

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[28] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 355-56. Thomas McDonough makes a similar point in his study of situationist space: "For the Situationists… the dérive was distinguished from [nineteenth century] flânerie primarily by its critical attitude toward the hegemonic scopic regime of modernity… The city and its quarters are no longer conceived of as 'spontaneous visible objects' but are posited as social constructions through which the dérive negotiates while simultaneously fragmenting and disrupting them." McDonough, p. 73.

institutional practices instill a sense of a disciplinary self.[29] The visual experience in *The Street* was disturbed and fragmented: the piece cannot be seen from any one viewing position and many of the sculptures depict only fragments or glimpses of their subject. In certain cases, viewers could only see parts of the exhibition or performances by peering around corners or through doors. In *Snapshots from the City*, the performance was entirely occluded but for brief flashes of light.

This was in part Oldenburg's attempt to reproduce the experience of the city itself,[30] but it also served to undermine the modernist ideal of objective perusal and aesthetic judgement. Michael Fried in his famous polemic against Minimalism, "Art and Objecthood," decried the new art on the basis of a theatricality that is both temporal and spatial. Where the Modernist ideal is one of pure visuality, to see all and all in an instant,

> [a]t every moment the work itself is wholly manifest… as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to

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[29] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, translated by Richard Howard (London: Tavistock, 1971) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[30] This interpretation was put forward by Barbara Rose in *Claes Oldenburg*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969/70).

> experience the work in all its depth and fullness and to be forever convinced by it.[31]

Oldenburg's work intentionally and explicitly foils any such attempt.[32]

The idealist illusion of rational and transparent space, in fact, goes back much earlier, to the Cartesian concept of the central eye/I that sees and controls the space that is laid out before it. This is a fundamental condition of space throughout modernist thought, embodied as much in the geometric city grid and glass surfaces of High Modernist utopian architectural projects as it is in Renaissance paintings of cityscapes, finding a new expression, for example, in Le Corbusier's utopian ideal of towers surrounded by empty expanses of green parks in the midst of a rational and well-ordered radial city.

Henri Lefebvre describes this condition in *The Production of Space*:

> Here space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein… the illusion of transparency goes hand in hand with a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places. Anything hidden or

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[31] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), pp. 12-23.

[32] Fried explicitly contrasts what he called at the time "Minimal Art" with Pop Art, but he does include Oldenburg in his description of "theatricality" in footnote 4, along with a diverse group of other artists.

> dissimulated – and hence dangerous – is antagonistic to transparency, under whose reign everything can be taken in by a single glance from the mental eye, which illuminates whatever it contemplates.[33]

The familiar image of the Renaissance city comprises an open central plaza beaming with the clarity of mathematically precise perspective and bright illumination. [Fig. 1-9] Surrounding buildings are precisely arranged according to a symmetrical, aligned, and balanced arrangement. The plaza is either empty or populated with a few representative (male) citizens. The place is devoid of shadows, dark or hidden spaces, labyrinthine forms, or any sort of spatial confusion, as well as women, slaves, animals or unclean objects. These represented spaces effectively symbolize the idea of the civitas, the public forum, in which a few with privileged knowledge represent and speak for others, who are not allowed to enter the picture.[34]

This ideal of urban space recalls as well Habermas' utopian version of the bourgeois public sphere that

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[33] Henri Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) (original French edition, 1974).
[34] See Irit Rogoff, "Studying Visual Culture," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed. *The Visual Culture Reader*, (London, New York: Routledge), pp. 14-27: "To some extent the project of visual culture has been to try and

provides unrestricted, non-hierarchical, and transparent discourse on public matters.[35] Feminist theorists, among others, have criticized this model, arguing that the bourgeios public sphere was never transparent, but was grounded on exclusionary operations quite the contrary of unrestricted access. "Space," as Irit Rogoff has argued, "is always differentiated: it is always sexual or racial; it is always constituted out of circulating capital; and it is always subject to the invisible boundary lines that determine inclusions and exclusions."[36] Rosalind Deutsche has suggested that the hidden motor behind theories such as that of Habermas is a "desire to restore the subject to a lost position of mastery, conceived of as a healthy place."[37]

In some ways, the rationality of this model is carried over into the utopian urban spaces of Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus whose corrupted legacy still dominated

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repopulate space with all the obstacles and all the unknown images, which the illusion of transparency evacuated from it."

[35] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1989). Habermas' definitive text was first published in Germany in 1962 as *Strukturwandel der Öffentlicheit*.

[36] Rogoff, p. 22.

[37] Rosalyn Deutsche, "Boys Town," *Environment and Planning: Society and Space*, (Volume 9, 1991), pp. 5-30.

architecture and urbanism in the 1950s and into the 60s. Late International Style in its selective and formalistic adaptation of modernism became the architectural parallel of Greenbergian formalism in art, whereby an abstract aesthetic could sublimate disturbing substance and contents and become generic and hegemonic. We can see this in dominant forms of 1960s architecture and urbanism, for example, in the superscale high-rises that were the degraded incarnation of Le Corbusier's Radiant City idealistically proposed in the 1920s; and in functionally compartmentalized urban planning characterized by an isolated urban core, single-use zoning, and organized and controlled commercial and graphic expressions.[38]

The hold of Modernism and its approach to urbanism was already waning in the face of strong challenges from a number of emerging architectural projects and urban theories when Oldenburg came onto the scene in the late '50s and early 1960s. New York City was the center of major debates concerning urban planning that underscored

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[38] On the architectural debates of this period, see Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture and Rizzoli, 1993).

this struggle to find a new direction.[39] Here, a new breed of planning was proposed on the one hand by Lewis Mumford's socialist ideals of idyllic garden cities for the lower and middle classes,[40] and on the other, by Robert Moses' more right wing project of slum clearance and creating parks and parkways for the elite.[41] Against both kinds of urban planning, as well as the tenets of High Modernism, stood community-housing activists such as Jane Jacobs who espoused a nostalgic version of integrated and diverse urban neighborhoods.[42]

Other critiques of Modernist tenets in architecture and urbanism came from various segments of the neo-avant-garde. A 1954 essay signed "Lettrist International," a predecessor of the Situationists, summed up a spreading dissatisfaction with the utopian functionalism of Le Corbusier:

> But today, the prison is becoming the preferred housing type, and Christian morality advances unopposed, Le Corbusier is trying to *do away with streets*. He even brags about it. His

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[39] See Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City*, (New York: Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1995).
[40] See Robert Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[41] See Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).
[42] See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

> program? To divide life into closed, isolated units, into societies under perpetual surveillance; no more opportunities for uprisings or meaningful encounters; to enforce an automatic resignation. … With Le Corbusier, the interplay and insight that we have a right to expect from truly impressive architecture — disorientation on a daily basis — have been sacrificed….[43]

Their preferred urban field was exactly the kind of bustling, mixed-use, anarchic neighborhoods that crowd in the masses in industrialized countries, neighborhoods such as those Oldenburg found on the Lower East Side. They saw here not only a playground for avant-garde experimentation, but also a site of freedom and play determined by the people who lived there. In contrast to the sleek, ordered streets of the uptown neighborhoods, the hustle and bustle of commerce and immigrant working-class life — cluttered sidewalks, noise, clamor, chaotic activity — provided a sense of organic life and integral development rather than the *a priori* grid of urban planning.

Oldenburg not only represented the experiences of street life, he used found material that carried its own

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[43] The Lettrist International, "Skyscrapers by the roots," *Potlatch* #5, July 20, 1954; reprinted in *Theory of the Derive and other*

history of use in the city itself: the textures – burlap, corrugated cardboard, string; the shapes – torn, bent, decayed; the color – flat, even, dull brown-black. Perusing his own installation, Oldenburg noted to himself a warning: "watch for these: too elegant forms, too dull, too general, too white, too neat."[44] In Oldenburg's *Street*, the urban illusion of transparency and cleanliness is overturned. His is instead a populated space full of all the obstacles and unknowns.

The move downtown by the group of artists working with the new vocabulary of Happenings and Environments was, in part, a pragmatic one, done in order to find places willing to show their work or available for adaptation. But the move was also, for Oldenburg, integral to his particular interest in the spaces of the city. The Lower East Side was a geographically and historically specific context for these projects. New York City was being defined by two opposing forces: modernist urban planning and huge building projects on the one hand, and a grass roots movement for the preservation

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situationist writings on the city, Libero Andreotti, Xavier Costa, eds., (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996.)

[44] Rose, p. 37.

of traditional neighborhoods on the other. *The Death and Life of Great American* cities by social reformer Jane Jacobs came out in 1961, and became a rallying cry for a wide range of New Yorkers.[45] Well-known for successfully organizing against certain kinds of development in the West Village that she saw as destructive, Jacobs popularized the concept of "urban decay," and warned against the imminent death of neighborhoods due to urban planning. She protested against modernist notions of urban space, among which Le Corbusier's *Ville Radieuse* was, for her, the biggest culprit.[46] Against this trend stood valiantly what she called the "exuberant diversity" of mixed-use neighborhoods, family-operated small businesses, and the local character of their streets.

If Oldenburg didn't have as sentimental or utopian a notion of the integrated neighborhood as a remedy against alienation, he did see value in the unpolished, entropic quality of such neighborhoods. As in Lefebvre's model, the city for Oldenburg was an open-ended proposition. It could be playful, subject to the imminent use of its

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[45] Jacobs, 1961.
[46] Ibid., p. 24.

citizens, a site of knowledge and activity which contrasts with the irreversible tendency towards money and commerce.[47] The city can be a site of "non-instrumental play" or what Debord, drawing on the theory of Dutch philosopher and sociologist Johan Huizinga, called "ludic-constructive behavior."[48] Huizinga proposed that humans are fundamentally defined by their facility and need for play, in contrast to functional or utilitarian behavior.[49] For the Situationists, as for Oldenburg, this concept of play allowed for a notion of human endeavor liberated from functional and utilitarian constraints associated with Modernist ideals.

Oldenburg's most directly acknowledged influence during this period is Dubuffet's *art brut*, with its recuperation of rough forms and textures as well as "primitive," children's, and "outsider" art. As Dubuffet once wrote:

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[47] Lefebvre, "Right to the City," (1968) reprinted in Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), pp. 66-70.
[48] Debord, "Theory of the Dérive." On Huizinga's theory and the Situationists, see Peter Wollen, "The Situationist International," *New Left Review*, 174 (1989), pp. 87-90. See also Deborah Broderson, "Building a Ludic Environment: The aesthetics, Ethics and Economics of Play in the Postwar Avant Garde," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2001.

> In the name of what – except perhaps the coefficient of rarity – does man deck himself out in necklaces of pearls and not of spider webs, in fox furs and not in fox innards? In the name of what, I want to know? Don't dirt, trash, and filth, which are man's companions during his whole lifetime, deserve to be dearer to him and shouldn't he pay them the compliment of making a monument to their beauty?[50]

References to death, decay and filth can be seen throughout Oldenburg's notebooks and sketches during this period.[51] For him, this represented a sense of flexibility that allowed for the potential for freedom as well as formal play. As Oldenburg described it, his art dealt with:

> …the decay of technological civilization. And that's why sometimes it looks very much like the decay…in a bombing…. When I lived in the Lower East Side there was a great deal of tearing down going on especially between where I lived and where I worked. So I could pass through all these ruins all the time. And the sense of ruination is not necessarily a pathetic effect; it's more a formal effect.[52]

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[49] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), originally published in 1938.
[50] Cited in Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), p. 173, n. 2; Jean Dubuffet, "L'Auteur répond à quelques objections." This text was first published in the catalogue of the exhibition "Mirobolus, Macadam $ Cie, Hautes Pâtes," at the Galerie René Drouin in 1946, then republished many times, notably under the title "Réhabilitation de la boue."
[51] See Yve-Alain Bois, "Ray Guns," in Bois and Krauss, *Formless*, pp. 172-178.
[52] Interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, pp. 114-115.

Scatological references also frequently appear. Feces are affixed to the *Street*-related cardboard head called MUG.[53] [Fig. 1-10] Messy, misshapen sausage forms appear as well. Famously, Oldenburg has described himself as a "sausage-maker" and the studio as a sausage factory; clearly alluding to a more bodily process, he described the artist's function as churning up diverse bits and pieces then extruding them into various formless expressions.[54]

With this, Oldenburg flirted with a formally reactionary mentality – merely aestheticizing the ordinary, the low. But while Oldenburg was indeed interested in the aesthetic value, even the beauty, of his work and its specificity as art, this aesthetic, this formalism explicitly counters a social attitude of elitism or paternalism. It opposes both an architectural program that purports to serve the needs of the people through surveillance, control and the false choice of limited options, and a version of art which purports to simply embrace the ordinary, the everyday, within its domain.

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[53] Rose, p. 33.
[54] See James R. Mellow, "On Art: Oldenburg's Scatological 'Soft Touch,'" *The New Leader* (London), Nov. 10, 1969, p. 49.

And it is opposed to the classical aesthetic of cleanliness and bodily perfection.

FIGURES AND BODIES: *STREET CHICK* AND *RAY GUN*

The characters that inhabited Oldenburg's street were themselves the excluded, the marginalized, the detritus, or "other" of society proper, exactly those excluded from classic depictions of urban space, whether Renaissance or Modern. Homeless, wandering, random, rejected; they are the figures in between the controlled arenas of public intercourse. Ann Hollister, an interviewer for *Time* magazine described *The Street* as containing "rough figures, leaning against the wall … made of brown paper bags, stuffed, and … supposed to represent an All-American Shoe-Shine Boy, an All-American Sandwich Man and an All-American Bum."[55] In Irving Sandler's review of the Reuben Gallery show, he wrote:

> Oldenburg's characters…are humorous and tender, but grim. They are as abstract and as real as the human wrecks that inhabit downtown New York. Cut-out words, 'Orpheum,' 'Empire' and 'Tarzan' cover some of the figures to indicate the American dream of glory, unfulfilled in the anonymity of city life. Above all, it is the drawing that distinguishes these pieces. Line

[55] Cited in Rose, p. 48.

> is direct and rough, in keeping with the content, but it is also precise and animate—like children's scribblings on tenement walls.[56]

Oldenburg reconfigured several of these *Street* figures for subsequent projects. MUG, for example, a hanging figure of a derelict in the shape of a mug made from corrugated cardboard affixed to a wood board, roughly silhouetted and coarsely outlined in black, was included in the first Martha Jackson exhibition. [Fig. 1-10]

The *Street Chick* was another embodiment of street identity, this time explicitly gendered female. Like certain other figures, *Street Chick* was not made of cardboard affixed to wood board, but of burlap and muslin with frayed edges suspended from the ceiling, creating a flaccid form of indeterminate shape. [Fig. 1-11] Barbara Rose has suggested that this character also stood as an embodiment of Death by way of reference to Céline's anti-hero Ferdinand, or more specifically as a combination of Eros and Thanatos – sex and death.[57] As a female figure, that is, one without access to the traditional conception of the public sphere, as well as a social outcast, the

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[56] Irving Sandler, "Reviews and Previews," *Art News* (New York, Summer 1960), p. 16.

Street Chick doubly represents a disruption to that conception.[58]

The persona of the *Street Chick* re-appears in different versions in Oldenburg's sketches and notes, standing in at different times for different characteristics. Formally, she is a direct outgrowth of earlier figure drawings, particularly those that used his wife as a model. Oldenburg has explained that Pat came to stand for the character of the *Street Chick*.[59] Later, Pat literally embodied the *Street Chick* when she enacted the character in several early performances including the 1962 performance Store Days II. [Fig. 1-12] This analogy represents a contradiction, for at the same time that the *Street Chick* represents a radical and liberatory figure, its real world analog remained, for Oldenburg, rooted in traditional gender stereotyping. "Patty was always with me and … she would represent different types …which in terms of The City was known as *The Street Chick*, which was

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[57] Rose, pp. 39 and 187.
[58] On the disruptive role of women in public spaces, see Diane Agrest, "Architecture from Without: Body, Logic and Sex," from *Architecture from Without: Theoretical Framings for a Critical Practice*, (1993) in *Gender, Space, Architecture*, Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner and Iain Borden, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 358-370.
[59] Interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, p. 315.

a kind of sprite without innocence. … Of course she was a person besides this. She took care of the house and cooked and all that sort of stuff and made love…."[60]

The figures in Oldenburg's creations represent the antithesis of the anthropocentrism of the Renaissance paradigm. Man, far from being the center of the universe, is merely a part of it, taking on an equivalence with other forms of the city, natural and man-made, animate and inanimate. These figures do not stand out against the backdrop of the street – instead, they are merely a part of it. In events such as *Snapshots from the City,* the represented figures are joined by the real bodies of the performers, who, wearing the same materials of which the installation is comprised, dissolve into the setting, becoming one with their environment. Oldenburg was "dressed in tattered clothing, his head wound about with dirty grey rags, his feet tied up in orange rags, sprawled to one side of the street scene he had created for his 'living picture.'"[61] Pat Mucha was another performer incorporated into the environmental surround during these

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[60] Interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, p. 315. More on the living and working relationship of Claes and Pat Oldenburg in Chapter Two.

performances. The bodies dissolve, in a kind of psychasthenia, into their surroundings.[62]

Sally Banes, in her study of performance in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s proposes a model for thinking about the representation of the body that can be useful here. Her "effervescent body" is an extension of Mikhail Bakhtin's "grotesque body":

> The effervescent, grotesque body is seen as literally open to the world. It freely indulges in excessive eating, drinking, sexual activity, and every other imaginable sort of licentious behavior. And it is precisely by means of the image of this grotesque body of misrule that unofficial culture has poked holes in the decorum and hegemony of official culture.[63]

According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body "is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits."[64] Moreover, the effervescent body is rooted in the popular or folk humor and carnivalesque performance, which sets it against official culture. Lefebvre, too, saw carnival as a privileged site of rupture and release, "contrasting violently with

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[61] Ann Hollister of *Time Magazine*, cited in Rose, p. 48.
[62] See Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village, 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
[63] Banes, p. 192.
[64] Bakhtin, cited in Banes, pp. 26-27.

everyday life, but … not separate from it."[65] "Above all," for Banes, "these forms not only emphasize 'the material bodily principle' but harness it to a utopian conception where the disparate strata of cosmos, society, and body are unified. Thus, the effervescent body is a profoundly political symbol."[66]

The figures and bodies in Oldenburg's *Street* period and the environments and performances they inhabit reconfigured the traditional relationship of figure to ground and subject to object, undermining the putative isolation of the sense of vision in modernist art. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological investigations in the field of aesthetics are famous for the emphasis on a lived perspective, on the relation between the living body and the visible world, abandoning the univocal, planimetric perspective. According to Merleau-Ponty, artistic creation can neither be explained as the artist's imitation of the world nor as a subjective projection but as the fusion of the self and the world. In *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he discusses what he

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[65] Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life,* p. 38.
[66] Banes, p. 193.

calls the chiasmatic relationship between objects and subjects in space. "The body [is] no longer conceived of as an object of the world, but as our means of communication with it, to the world no longer conceived as a collection of determinate objects, but as the horizon latent in our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought."[67]

The spectator's physical inclusion in and embodied experience of Oldenburg's works replace the ideal of pure opticality as the primary apprehension of art. Merleau-Ponty called this chiasmic relationship between viewer and world, subject and object, "visibility." His notion of visibility should not be confused, however, with the modernist belief in vision as a privileged means of access to truth, where "vision" was separated from the other senses and kept as pure and objective as possible. On the contrary, the notion of "visibility" does not exclude or dominate smell, taste, touch, and hearing, and incorporates this lived sensuousness into a bodily perception of being in the world.

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[67] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (London/New York: Routledge, 1945/1995), p. 92.

Visibility, in other words, is not the equivalent of opticality, but rather is located in and passes through the locus of the body and through the body to the interaction with the things of the world. Hugh Silverman offers a useful explanation of how the ideas of Merleau-Ponty can be extended into textual discourses and social reality of everyday life:

> Visible objects surround us, and even enter into us as embodied seers in the world. One's fleshly situatedness in the world makes one particularly susceptible to the sensuous qualities of the texture of things. We see things, we touch things, we feel things – we thereby incorporate them into our daily existence. Visibility is our incorporation of things and that which renders it possible for us to, in fact, incorporate things.[68]

The phenomenological extension of the self into space usually associated with the abstract space of minimalist sculpture[69] is here brought to bear on the real and discursive experience of the street in daily life.

Ray Gun, the primary male persona of Oldenburg's work in *The Street* period, was a kind of counterpoint to the female persona of the *Street Chick*. Ray Gun first

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[68] Hugh Silverman, "Interrogation and Deconstruction," *Textualities: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 41-42.

[69] For example, in Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993).

appeared in notes typed up and pinned to a bulletin board in the Judson Gallery while *The Street* was exhibited there and in the posters throughout the neighborhood during the show. His name and image identified the mimeographed sheets "Ray Gun Poems," "More Ray Gun Poems," and "Spicy Ray Gun," distributed from January to June; and, of course, in the title "Ray Gun Spex" of the performance series. "Spex," in English, is the slang for spectacles, but Swedish, Oldenburg's native language, provides a second meaning, that of "burlesque."[70] I would suggest that the reference to burlesque in Oldenburg's performance events was not only for the coarse play of sexuality of the bodies on display, but also in its theatrical structure. Burlesque unfolded with no narrative, no pace, and no climax. Short vignettes of bawdy vaudevillian humor and an erotic striptease replace the expectations of traditional theater, creating a style that borders on historical avant-garde techniques of anti-theater yet at the same time is accessible as a popular spectacle.

Ray Gun was conceived as a kind of pathetic, absurd loser; the opposite of the tragic, humanist hero of

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[70] Rose, p. 30.

Abstract Expressionism's mythology. Different meanings for the personage developed over time. *The Street* at the Judson Gallery included a series of small mounted "ray guns," battered re-creations of the child's toy. First collecting found toy plastic ray guns, of the sort popular from children's sci-fi fantasies, Oldenburg later began producing his own versions. In 1959, manifestations began to proliferate as drawings in his notebooks and later as a free-form sculpture hanging in space. Soon, the ray gun became an almost universal form for Oldenburg, consisting of anything with a discernable right angle, even wads of unidentifiable material found in the street. [Fig. 1-13] He later wrote in his notes: "Examples: Legs, Sevens, Pistols, Arms, Phalli-simple Ray Guns. Double Ray Guns: Cross, Airplanes. Absurd Ray Guns: Ice Cream Sodas. Complex Ray Guns: Chairs, Beds."[71]

Ray Gun also appeared as an alter-ego for the artist, a signatory for written texts, authoring poems, organizing theater programs, and eventually taken as the name for the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company, which oversaw the installation of *The Store*. Although phallic in many of

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[71] Oldenburg, Notes, 1961, cited in *Mouse Museum*, p. 24.

its manifestations, Oldenburg's Ray Gun did not convey a masterful masculinity. Its representations were most often flaccid and distorted, even morphing into its fetish substitute, fragments of women's bodies – foot, leg, torso. Oldenburg declared Ray Gun to be "an assertion of a new and rude potency," embodying what was for him "the necessity of composing true and vulgar art."[72]

AGENCY: THE CITY AS TEXT

In *The Street*, there is no evidence of humanist empathy with these derelict figures, whether heroicizing or pitying. They do not represent a utopian escape from the confines of the restrictive architecture of social order. Nor does Oldenburg's stance allow for an expression of pathos or a humanist plea for empathy with their plight. At one level, the figures are just part of the environment, part of what Oldenburg called "city nature" or everyday life. This city nature exists prior to, in, and through the figures, with the figures dissolving into their "background" rather than standing out in a distinctive contrast.

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[72] Oldenburg, quoted in Rose, p. 60.

The embrace of the function of the exterior, a space that is not an expression of the *a priori* of personal intention suggests a departure from the Cartesian notion of the subject that knows the world from afar, as distinct from the self. The reconfiguring of the artwork from an isolated and autonomous whole into situated moments of experience calls for a parallel reconfiguring of the autonomous subject. Instead of a subject transparent only for itself and the world it constructs around it because it has not yet ventured out into the world, the subject has meaning only in relation to the world.

For Oldenburg, this exteriority stands in a dialectical tension with the expressionistic tendency in his work, what he described as "going into yourself and bringing out the obsessional self."[73] But even this was not to be understood solely as a personal concern. Oldenburg connected this attitude or technique to the philosophical principle of the "objective correlative": "expressing emotion is not enough," Oldenburg observed in 1967, "you have to locate your emotions in the outside

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[73] Interview with Paul Cummings, the oral history project, Archives of American Art, p. 84.

world and your subjectivity has to be discovered almost by someone else in another form."[74] Oldenburg might see art as a kind of obsession, as he has stated, but "obsession put into some kind of objective receptacle."[75]

Oldenburg's installation did not allow the viewer any position of aesthetic appreciation or disinterested contemplation but on the contrary left the viewer physically implicated and even disoriented. In this regard it departs from the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a 19th century German concept of a "total work of art," traceable to Wagnerian opera and baroque sculpture, that incorporates all media and engages all the senses.[76] The concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* was one of an overall apprehension, a kind of gestalt that was the antithesis of the fragmented, interrupted and disturbed experience of Oldenburg's installations. Oldenburg's form of installation correlates instead with awareness of the space and of the concrete placement of the exhibited objects. As the

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[74] Ibid., p. 84

[75] Ibid., pp. 91-93.

[76] Kaprow used the notion of a "total work of art" to describe Environments and Happenings in "Notes on the Creation of a Total Work of Art," [1958] reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*; and Lawrence Alloway traced the genealogy of the Happenings to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in "Allan Kaprow, Two Views." On different

viewers must engage physically with the space of the artwork, this heightens an awareness of the contingency of the body on its immediate material environment.

By extension, as the material environment is never neutral, the broader sociopolitical context was also implicated. The phenomenological and the broader contextual readings overlap one another and even complement each other. Oldenburg's installations engaged and in turn were engaged by the spectator in what we could call, borrowing from Merleau-Ponty, a chiasmic relation. His or her body served as a location for the negotiation between what was perceived as pure subjectivity and what was experienced publicly and collectively. The spatial and physical engagement of the viewer's body with the physical objects, figures, and sites of the installation, in addition to discursive framing and broader political context, provided a space in between where meaning could be found if only provisionally. The viewers thus entered a position of engagement with the work quite different from the traditional model of contemplation wherein we are

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definitions and genealogies for Happenings and Environments, see Reiss, "Introduction," *From Margin to Center*.

self-contained, intact and whole in relation to an intact, complete and eternal work of art.[77] So, what position did Oldenburg allow for the viewer then? In the classic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, perception is entirely controlled by the artist. In Oldenburg's work, the viewer's experience was intentionally open to a variety of approaches.

The broader question, then, is not the viewer's relationship to the art, but the viewer's relationship to the city implied and indeed created by the work. In other words, can we operate on the city or does it operate on us? As in the theoretical exploration of the city described by Michel De Certeau, the city for Oldenburg is embodied and experienced, not something known from a distance, rational and abstract. Here, De Certeau's model of the city recast as a *text* rather than a *view* can be helpful. And not just a text to be *read*, but one to be *written* by the participant. De Certeau's essay "Walking in the City" opens with a figure gazing down on the city from the top of the World Trade Center. From here, the city is neither a phenomenological nor a social

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[77] See Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988) for a formulation of this position.

experience, but a disembodied abstraction – a representation, or what de Certeau calls an "optical artifact." One's body is "lifted out of the city's grasp…no longer clasped by the streets."[78] And the visual experience enabled by the distant vantage point produces a distinctly modernist sort of mastery. Even as the city stretches out below in its "rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production," as de Certeau writes, "Its agitation is momentarily arrested by vision… immobilized before the eyes."[79] This allows one to *read* it, "to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god,"[80] a fiction of knowledge akin to the model of the perspective representations of Renaissance painters.

This stands in contrast to the actual, ordinary urban inhabitants and to the figures, forms, installation and performers, as well as viewers, in Oldenburg's early work. For De Certeau, the bodies of "practitioners of the city" "follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write

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[78] De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 92.
[79] Ibid., p. 91.
[80] Ibid., p. 92.

without being able to read it"[81] – that is, one that they cannot *see*. The visual here is equated with mastery; the experiential, by contrast, with partial and unfixed knowledge. It is this partial and unfixed experience of the city, however, that allows the potential for slippage and play within the social field. This is not to say that *The Street* represents a kind of utopia, a "free" space, intact and available, hidden within the midst of social control. But while it does not present an already-existing utopian moment, neither does it suggest the desire for an escape, or a program for another kind of city, but rather the possibility of liberation and transformation within the existing reality. *The Street* was an experiment in transforming the material of the everyday life of the city into an alternate version of itself. As Oldenburg later said, "[the] images really come from the street and … the decay of a technological civilization; that is the transformation of shit sort of into gold, I mean the dirty newspaper, the Bowery bum, and all these things which are discredited objects…."[82] What

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[81] Ibid., p. 93.
[82] Interview with Paul Cummings, the oral history project, Archives of American Art, p. 106.

Oldenburg celebrated were the cracks in the system, the experiential rather than the visual, the fragmented rather than the whole. Following the urban theory of De Certeau, perhaps we can see the city, like Oldenburg, as a text to be written, not just read.

HAPPENINGS, ENVIRONMENTS AND POP: BEYOND KAPROW

Martha Jackson's exhibitions "New Media, New Forms in Painting and Sculpture" in 1960 and "Environments, Situations, Spaces," in 1961, provided a new "uptown" context for Oldenburg and other artists of that circle.[83] This brought them to the attention of a wider audience. Oldenburg credited Martha Jackson, along with Rosalind Constable, as the people who "discovered" the Judson and "discovered" happenings for the wider audience of the art world as well as mainstream American culture. The reception from the art world was mixed: art critic Jill Johnston, for example, asked, "why would Miss Jackson (whose commercial acumen is well known) clutter up her

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[83] The Martha Jackson Gallery was located at 32 East Sixty-ninth Street. "New Media, New Forms," October 1960, included Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg and Robert Whitman; "Environments, Situations, Spaces," Martha Jackson Gallery, June 1961,

fashionable yard with a bunch of junky car tires that she permitted Alan [*sic*] Kaprow to put there?"[84] Many critics ignored it altogether. Meanwhile, Happenings were being portrayed in the popular press as a riotous expression of outrageous content that played into the emergence of a rebellious attitude in American culture, while at the same time their seeming playfulness and use of everyday materials and familiar activities and spaces gave them an instant accessibility in contrast to the abstract styles of expressionism and hard-edge geometric abstraction.[85]

Oldenburg's contributions to Jackson's first show were very closely related to his *Street* pieces, using torn newspaper to make paper sculptures and pasting up fragments as figures. The second stage, the "Environments" Show in 1961, consisted entirely of artists who had shown at the Reuben Gallery and triumphantly presented Environments as "the new art." The press release issued by the gallery described them as "complete

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showed George Brecht, Jim Dine, Walter Gaudnek, Allan Kaprow, and Robert Whitman.

[84] Jill Johnston, "'Environments' at Martha Jackson's," review of *Environments, Situations, Spaces, Village Voice*, July 6 1961, p. 13.

[85] See Sandford, *Happenings and Other Acts* for notes on the reception of the Happenings Scene. Also, Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene," *Art News* 60, no. 3, 1961, pp. 36-39, 58-62; reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*.

utilization of all facets of environmental space… walls, ceilings and floors lose their confining identity, merging into this recreated space. The viewer finds himself within the artistic statement, forcing him to forgo his passive objectivity."[86]

By this time, however, Oldenburg had departed from the group that had become associated with Allan Kaprow as the de facto spokesman of Happenings and the kind of Environments being shown in the Lower East Side galleries. Oldenburg's sculptures became increasingly distinct from his performance work. He had started making plaster objects painted first with tempera and later with enamel, increasingly larger and more colorful. The size, the more "finished" quality, the surface of the enamel, etc. were part of Oldenburg's transition to creating more permanent objects. "Pop Art" was not yet a recognized category as such, but early or proto-Pop artists such as Johns and Rauschenberg were becoming established and Oldenburg's work was moving in this direction.

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[86] Press release for *Environments, Situations, Spaces*, 1961, Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.

Despite his early participation in events organized under the term "Happenings", Oldenburg later related to art historian Barbara Rose that he had always resisted Kaprow's definitions[87] and their differences became increasingly pronounced leading to a definitive break as early as 1961.[88] Oldenburg rejected Kaprow's inclusion of his work within the umbrella definition of the Happening scene in Kaprow's 1961 *Art News* article and in his subsequent book, *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings*.[89] Oldenburg avoided the terms "Happenings" and "Environments," in part because they were Kaprow's,[90] preferring "performance" or "theater":

> Despite what I say, the pieces are called happenings. I might have done happenings or may do in the future but these are not my idea of them. RG [Ray Gun Theater] is something else, closely related to my *Store* pieces. It seeks to present in events what the store presents in objects. It is a theater of real events (a newsreel)….[91]

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[87] Oldenburg, audiotape of interview with Barbara Rose, 1968, Barbara Rose Archives, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[88] Oldenburg, letter to Kaprow July 15, 1961, Allan Kaprow Archives, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

[89] Allan Kaprow, "'Happenings' in the New York Scene"; Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments, and Happenings*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966. Kaprow began working on this book as early as 1961, although he continued to update and revise it until the publication in 1966.

[90] Reiss, p. 6.

[91] Claes Oldenburg, *Store Days: Documents from The Store (1961) and Ray Gun Theater (1962)*, selected by Claes Oldenburg and Emmett Williams; photographs by Robert R. McElroy, (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 80.

The crux of this disagreement was the two artists' definition of art and its relationship to everyday life.

One of Kaprow's most significant contributions was in his commitment to an art that defied traditional boundaries of genre and media purity, or what he has called "the blurring of art and life".[92] Famously, Kaprow's approach hinged on an interpretation of Jackson Pollock that was divergent from the dominant reading, propounded most influentially by Clement Greenberg, of Kantian self-reflexivity and immediacy. In the essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," Kaprow traced the genealogy of the Happening to a direct outgrowth of the performative qualities of Pollock's painting, specifically the shift of the field of painting to the horizontal plane and the increase of scale to that of environment. A painting, like its offshoot the Happening, was understood by Kaprow to be an action, an arena, and an event.[93] For Kaprow, this led out of the painting or performance into the real world in a smooth transition. "Anywhere is everywhere" in Pollock's work "and we dip in and out when and where we

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[92] Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life.*

can."[94] Kaprow's inventory of objects and experiences for the new art implied a porous membrane between what could from then on be categorized as "art" and what could be categorized as "everyday life."

Oldenburg, with a background in theater from his studies at Yale,[95] saw his performance events as evolving from a theatrical enterprise, related to his sculpture through props and souvenirs, as well as being, in Kaprow's terms, an extension of painting. His work was also in many ways less ephemeral than Kaprow's. The immediate experience, the memories of participants and the fading of that memory over time were central to Kaprow's definition of Happenings.[96] The photographs and films of his events became the only remaining objects. Oldenburg on the other hand, often created or used objects in his Happenings or Environments that had an independent existence as sculptures after the fact. Also, Oldenburg was adamant

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[93] Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *Art News*, 1958, reprinted in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, pp. 1-9.
[94] Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," p. 5.
[95] Oldenburg had studied art, drama, and English literature at Yale University from 1946-1950. For a brief biography of the artist's life, see Marla Prather, "Claes Oldenburg: A Biographical Overview," in Celant, *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology*.
[96] On this aspect of the Happenings, see Judith Rodenbeck, "The Black Box of Experience: Happenings and the Mechanization of Effect," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2002.

about his performances being pre-scripted, many of the scripts even being issued as publications, and "performed" by knowing performers, rather than a set of suggestions for audience or individual participants to follow loosely.

But the difference was more fundamental than that, coming down to conflicting positions regarding the desire to unify or "blur" art and life. Oldenburg's use of the everyday in his work was never a desire to dissolve art as a distinct category of activity and production. On the contrary, for Oldenburg, the specificity of art production was never something to be denied, but to be embraced as necessary to establish a position from which to address so-called "real life." In 1961, Oldenburg stated bluntly in a letter to Kaprow that their differences constituted a fundamental disagreement on the nature of art itself: "An art of non-artistic reality or philosophical reality is impossible and to flirt with it is an irrelevance…."[97] In the same letter, Oldenburg dismissed Kaprow's desire to distance himself from art-making as a symptom of a general

[97] Oldenburg, letter to Kaprow July 15, 1961, Kaprow Archives, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

suspicion of the arts in American culture, part of what he derisively called "American Puritanism."

There was a humanism underlying Kaprow's position that the aim of the avant-garde should be to dismantle the autonomy of art in order to reconnect art and life that was at odds with Oldenburg's project.[98] "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps indistinct, as possible," is an often-quoted line of Kaprow's.[99] Kaprow extolled a mythic and expressionistic model of art: "we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street."[100] Seeking mythic patterns and "organicist principles"[101] in everyday experiences: "a walk down 14th Street is more amazing than any masterpiece of art."[102] Oldenburg was, like Kaprow, interested in the relationship of the "real world" –

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[98] While Kaprow did not have a simplistic understanding of this gesture, he was espousing here a classic definition of the avant-garde, as discussed for example in Peter Bürger's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[99] Allan Kaprow, untitled guidelines for happenings, from *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings*, p. 188.
[100] Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock."
[101] Alloway, "Allan Kaprow, Two Views."
[102] Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock."

everyday life and activities – to his work. But while he wanted to transform objects of everyday life into art, they remained at this time the ugly and discarded, the banal and familiar, not "dazzling" "masterpieces". Inclusion of everyday experience was, for Oldenburg, a process of defamiliarization of everyday life that stood in contrast to Kaprow's all-inclusive expressionism.

Oldenburg was always insistent upon the specificity of art production and its manifestations, even as he explored the potential mutual impact between art and everyday experiences. But for Oldenburg, for this impact to exist demanded a boundary between art and life rather than the collapse of the two. Oldenburg later commented:

> Well, it's not, say, like Kaprow used to maintain, that art should dissolve, that everything was art. That would be one extreme position… that anything is art, which is a very current attitude. Then there's the other attitude, which is more traditional, of Rauschenberg saying, or having been quoted at one point I think as saying: that he walks a tight rope between art and nature (which I don't think he ever said.)[103] But that would be a little bit more hedging point of view. I think mine would

[103] The actual quote as published in Miller, *Sixteen Americans,* was: "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in the gap between the two)."

> tend to be in the other extreme, saying that what I was after was to turn nature into art….[104]

COMMERCE AND NEIGHBORHOOD: *THE STORE*

The year following the installation of *The Street*, in June of 1961, Oldenburg, under the name of the Ray Gun Manufacturing Company, rented a commercial storefront on East Second Street in the Lower East Side to house the life-sized installation project *The Store*. [Fig. 1-14] The back room served as his studio while the front offered for sale roughly-hewn, brightly painted plaster sculptures of clothes and shoes, machines and appliances, baked goods and raw meat – all wares typical of stores and sidewalk vendors in the area – and complete with display cases and marked with typical retail prices like $99.95 or $249.99.[105] Leaving behind even the "alternative" spaces he had been showing with, Oldenburg established his own space for making, showing and selling art, although it was co-

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[104] Interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art. Oldenburg's entire statement "I am for an art…" is printed in Appendix I.

[105] Oldenburg's inventory of The Store from December 1961 lists 107 items and their prices ranging from $21.79 to $499.95, including a *9.99* sculpture for $399.95 and a *39 Cents* relief for $198.99. Oldenburg, *Store Days*, pp. 31-34.

sponsored by the more mainstream Green Gallery.[106] This was quite explicitly an attempt to re-think traditional exhibition contexts; insofar as the art market will always recuperate any avant-garde gesture, why not go straight to the marketing of artworks as commodities? As Oldenburg wrote in 1961,

> Assuming that I wanted to create something what would that thing be? Just a thing, an object. … An "artistic' appearance or content is derived from the object's reference, not from the object itself or me. These things are displayed in galleries, but that is not the place for them. A store would be better (Store = place full of objects). Museum in b. [bourgeois] concept equals store in mine.[107]

But in so doing, Oldenburg defamiliarized the process of commodity exchange and the dominance of exchange value.

Even more than the downtown galleries where he had been showing, this installation directly engaged with the specific realities of the neighborhood. In contrast to Warhol's famous shop window exhibition at Bonwit Teller's

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[106] The idea of using a storefront for this purpose was not new. Oldenburg recalled a number of artists in Chicago (where he was from) who used storefronts as studios and the Reuben Gallery had in fact been located in a former storefront just around the corner on East Third Street.

[107] *Store Days*, 1961, p. 8.

uptown,[108] Oldenburg's store eschewed the newest kind of rational, even "scientific" methods of selling represented by the department store, supermarket, fast-food chains and new marketing techniques aimed at the increasing affluence of post-war America.[109] Publications on "motivation research," "display techniques," "merchandising and packaging," exploded in the 1950s and '60s. Instead Oldenburg turned to what was already an old-fashioned, outmoded form of cluttered, bustling, commerce predominant in earlier parts of the century and lingering in the immigrant and working class neighborhoods. [Figs. 1-15, 1-16] *The Store* was not immediately distinguishable from other neighborhood shops. As Cécile Whiting described it:

> Oldenburg's slices of pie evoked the sweets produced by local bakeries; his sandwiches correspond to those found in delis on Houston Street; his wedding mannequin and bouquet mimicked the type displayed along "brides' row" on Grand Street; and his girdle, dress, and jacket echoed the inexpensive clothes in the open air shops along Orchard Street.[110]

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[108] See Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 9-22.
[109] For an overview of this trend, see *A Bibliography of Theory and Research Techniques in the Field of Human Motivation*, (New York: Advertising Research Foundation, 1956); and R. Clifton Andersen and Philip R. Cateora, *Marketing Insights: Selected Readings*, (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1963).

On consumer and marketing trends of the '50s and '60s in relation to Pop Art, see Whiting, "Shopping for Pop," *A Taste for Pop*, pp. 7-49.
[110] Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*, p. 23.

The Store and the objects within represented the flipside of the luster and efficiency of modern consumer goods, mass produced appliances and pre-packaged goods. The vast majority of his objects avoided brand names and other modern techniques of mass marketing.[111] This stood in contrast to other Pop Art displays of commodities, Warhol's stacked Brillo Boxes or rows of Campbell's soup can labels, for example, or the Bianchi Gallery's Supermarket exhibition in 1964. [Fig. 1-17] This was not simply a nostalgic or humanist investment – as the old "Mom-and-Pop" store arguably was for urban community activists like Jane Jacobs. This kind of space represented, like *The Street*, an unordered space that could evade the increasing regulation of the newer, more administered and controlled, forms of commerce.

It also confounded the organization of city space into regulated zones, with the modern industrial separation of the means of production and the means of consumption. Oldenburg produced in the back room the

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[111] Exceptions like the *Pepsi-Cola Sign* and *7-Up* with their explicit use of a brand name, though not representative, is quite often used as an example of *Store* objects because it tends to bring Oldenburg's work more in line with that of other Pop Artists.

actual objects that would be displayed and sold up front, harkening back to a pre-industrial, artisanal mode of production.[112] Oldenburg said he wanted to imitate the activity of making objects, not just the objects; not to return to an ideal of unalienated labor, but to make the activity of making itself into a performance. He imitated the activity, but with the critical difference, always explicit, that this is art production: "to be a signmaker, a baker, a cutter of suits – absurd imitations (i.e. useless) of perfectly sensible and useful pursuits."[113]

As an extension of Oldenburg's private, even obsessive, accumulation of found objects and discarded scraps collected since *The Street* period, *The Store* also undermined the consumer culture's demand for obsolescence and perpetual newness.

> …I collected things. I also had a lot of objects. So that happenings always began by looking through what was on hand… I was right next to First Avenue which is a great source of material. All the stores along there and the whole Lower East Side had many peculiar stores… And that happened too when I went to other cities, I would spend a couple of days just

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[112] See Caroline Jones for a study of studio practices as labor in the post-war period. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
[113] Oldenburg, *Store Days*, p. 62.

> going to thrift shops and Salvation Army stores and so on and collecting material….[114]

This cluttered, messy, chaotic display was the antithesis of the emphasis on the purely visual shared by Modernist Art and modern consumer marketing.[115] Here, instead, viewers (shoppers) were enticed to handle items, to pick them up, touch them, and to move in and among them. *The Store* environment, like the *Street*, appeals as much to the bodily experience of the viewer as to an experience of aesthetic distance.[116] In *The Store* the body is addressed not only as figures, performers and viewers, as in *The Street*, but also through our psychic and sexual investments in commodities.[117] The modes of display invite close perusal and casual handling. The plaster is thick, the paint applied in generous gestures and abundant drips. [Figs. 1-18, 1-19] The objects are intimate and

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[114] Rose, pp. 152-152.

[115] In an intriguing analysis of the modern shopping experience as fundamentally visual, Anne Friedberg posits the theoretical construct of the "virtual and mobilized gaze" which she traces back to the 19th century in the figure of the Baudelarian flâneur. Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

[116] The category of "aesthetic distance" is central to Cécile Whiting's critique of *The Store*. In *A Taste for Pop*, Whiting posits different visual practices for different audiences defined by class and gender. The privileged viewers of the art world adopt the male vision of aesthetic distance and the neighborhood shoppers the feminine invested visuality associated with shopping.

suggestive: pie, sliced and ready to be eaten; butchered cuts of meat; a shirt (just removed from the body of the wearer?) draped over a chair. Susan Stewart's description of the contradictory nature of the body in "lived experience" is useful: "Although this body is culturally delimited, it functions nevertheless as the instrument of lived experience, a place of mediation that remains irreducible beyond the already-structured reductions of the sensory, the direct relation between the body and the world it acts upon."[118]

While probably one of the best known and most well-respected of Oldenburg's works, *The Store*'s meaning of is still the subject of debate, most of which centers around the two fundamental questions of Pop Art: First, is Oldenburg's *Store* critical of commodification and consumerism; celebratory of the consumer culture; or merely a complacent participant? Leftist critiques, including Lefebvre's, widely condemned commodity consumption as a negative force, characterized by the

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[117] Oldenburg basically stopped using the figure in his work for the remainder of his career, literally replacing it with objects. In *The Store* there is one figure represented, that of the *Bride Mannequin*.

false freedom of limited choice and the manipulations of the culture industry. But consumer culture – defined by mass appeal, the ideal of accessibility, and the logic of equivalence and exchange – also challenges the high modernist ideals of originality, rarity, uniqueness, and abstraction. Some feminist scholars have explored redeeming possibilities – the potential for freedom, creativity, and diversity, particularly for women and others excluded from the more rarefied domains. Mary McLeod observed in the essay "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces," that even Lefebvre "seems to have an acute understanding of the role of the everyday in woman's experience and how consumption has been her demon but also her liberator, offering an arena of action that grants her entry and power in the public sphere."[119] Other feminist theories of everyday life, from Janet Wolff's construction of a "female flaneur" for the 19th century city, to Anne Friedberg's proposition of the "virtual and mobilized gaze" of the contemporary shopping mall, have further

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[118] Susan Stewart, *On Longing:Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. xiii.
[119] Mary McLeod, "Everyday and 'Other' Spaces," in *Gender, Space, Architecture*, pp. 182-202.

developed this argument, noting the "emphasis on pleasure, the intensification of sensory impressions, the freedom and positive excesses of consumption as experiences that counter the webs of control and monotony in daily life."[120]

While consumption can and does operate as a negative force, it can also be instrumentalized as an arena of freedom, choice, creativity, and invention. McLeod's analysis provides insight into the fundamental ambivalence in Oldenburg's position. Alongside and indeed part of any position of critique is the potential for pleasure, sexuality, excess, and sense of play in everyday life that is conveyed in his work.

And this brings us to the second question faced by critics approaching *The Store*: Is it a unification of art and life, bringing art to "the people," or is it an outlet for aesthetic perusal only available to the elite? Oldenburg does not (and can not) position his work, as the historical avant-garde perhaps could, as part of society on the verge of a revolution. But neither is he willing

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[120] McLeod, p. 189. Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), esp. "The Female Flaneur," pp. 34-50; Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. See also Hilary Radner, *Shopping Around:*

to be complacent or passive. Despite the radical re-altering of our expectations of the experience of art engendered here, his *Store* still maintained its artifice, its specificity as an art space, even while dealing directly with objects, spaces, and experiences of "real life."

The Store – at once a studio, a museum, a gallery, and, indeed, a store (the items were, after all, for sale) – complicated established distinctions between art and everyday life, between high culture and low, between the institutions and rituals of art and those of commerce. Yet the work that was sold was not sold to anonymous buyers off the street, as in the shop next door, but to an art audience who had to make a special trip into the neighborhood. In response to critic Benjamin Buchloh's suggestion in a 1985 interview of "an inherent assault on esoteric qualities of high art" in *The Store*, Oldenburg responded:

> One thing was to admit the commercial nature of art production by comparing it to ordinary production, and of course that was carried further because people came down and bought things at absurd prices. They bought a loaf of

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Feminine Culture and the Pursuit of Pleasure, (New York: Routledge, 1995).

> bread for ninety-nine dollars… Then, on the other hand, it was an antimuseum situation, an antipedestal situation, with all kinds of jokes on pedestals, museum presentations, and so on. But it never was – and I think it would have been naïve in a way to have made it – a real store. I think that would have meant *not* recognizing the realities of artistic existence.[121]

What Hal Foster has said of the work of Duchamp is applicable to Oldenburg as well: "The aim is neither an abstract negation of art nor a romantic reconciliation with life but a perpetual testing of the conventions of both."[122]

Indeed, it was the very difference between his objects and those they represented, between his installation and a real store that enabled the work to produce and carry meaning and the possibility of critique. If the people from the area had come in and bought objects without realizing the difference, for example, we could by definition no longer have the operations and negations of defamiliarization. On the contrary, not only were the objects on display art, but the real space of the store, the very interactions of commerce, even the neighborhood

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[121] Benjamin Buchloh, "Three Conversations in 1985: Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Robert Morris," *October* 70 (Fall 1994), p. 36.

itself, to gallery-goers visiting from uptown, were transformed into art, into signifying objects, by the process of defamiliarization. As critic Ellen Johnson wrote, "After seeing Oldenburg's Store…one feels compelled to walk and linger through the Lower East Side, suddenly aware of the curious, tawdry beauty of store-windows full of stale hors d'oeuvres, hamburgers on Rheingold ads, stockinged legs."[123]

The Store also demonstrates how the meaning of an object is not given and static, nor organic or integral to the object itself, but defined and potentially redefined by its context. In a gallery, one of Oldenburg's *papier maché* objects might have looked as if it belonged in a junk shop, but in a store, it looked very much as if it belonged in a museum.

The *Store* was followed in the fall of 1962 by a more mainstream gallery exhibition of some of the same pieces along with new work in the Green Gallery itself on Fifty-seventh Street, that is, in the heart of "establishment" art galleries. [Fig. 1-20] The Green Gallery was founded

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[122] Hal Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?" in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1996), pp. 1-34.

and owned by Robert and Ethel Scull, two of the most prominent of the patrons of Pop Art,[124] and run by Richard Bellamy who had previously been the director of the Hansa Gallery on Tenth Street, which was responsible for some of the earliest staging of Happenings and Environments.[125] More than with the Martha Jackson show, Oldenburg's foray uptown got the attention of the uptown art world. What had until then been largely an underground cultural phenomenon was now a full-blown trend, eagerly consumed by dealers, collectors, and the mass media.

The Green Gallery show engendered some harsh criticism from the art establishment with accusations of selling out, even by Oldenburg's (former) supporters. To give one example, Peter Selz wrote:

> A critical examination of ourselves and the world we inhabit is no longer hip: let us rather rejoice in the Great American Dream. The striking abundance of food offered us by this art is suggestive. Pies, ice cream sodas, coke, hamburgers… – often triple life-sized – would seem to cater to infantile personalities capable only of ingesting, not of digesting or interpreting. Moreover, the

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[123] Ellen Johnson, "The Living Object," *Art International* 7 (January 1963), p. 43.
[124] On the Sculls and on the patronage of Pop Art generally, see Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*.
[125] On the Richard Bellamy's career at the Hansa Gallery and the Green Gallery, see Amy Goldin, "Requiem for a Gallery," *Arts* 40, no. 3 (January 1966), pp. 25-29.

> blatant Americanism of the subject matter...may be seen as a willful regression to parochial sources just when American painting had at last entered the mainstream world of art... [Pop Art] is as easy to consume as it is to produce and, better yet, is easy to market, because it is loud, it is clean, and you know what you're looking at. Eager collectors, shrewd dealers, clever publicists, and jazzy museum curators, fearful of being left with the rear guard, have introduced the great American device of obsolescence into the art world.[126]

Indeed, how *could* the meaning of the work from *The Store* in the rented storefront on the Lower East Side be maintained in this new context? The reinstallation of the sculptures meant a definite departure from the site-specific installation on East Second Street and the kinds of concerns discussed above. And it couldn't have looked more different, with the room's white walls, slick wood floor, and bright track lighting carefully aimed at each object. There were a few mini-tableaux reminiscent of the installation at *The Store* – a shirt draped over the back of a chair with wallet and keys on the seat; a table set for breakfast; a pastry display case with pies – but these separate tableaux and the other individual sculptures were

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[126] Peter Selz, "Pop Goes the Artist," *Partisan Review*, (New York), Fall 1963, pp. 315-316.

otherwise discretely installed, several ensconced on pedestals.

The Green Gallery show should not, in fact, be understood as a re-installation of *The Store* at all, but rather as an exhibition of a new program of sculpture. (In fact, only a few of the works had been previously shown in *The Store* or even entailed the same formal processes of roughly painted *papier maché* in a similar size and shape to its referent). We see here for the first time the oversized, stuffed soft canvas, unstructured forms like the *Floor Cake*, 1963 and *Giant Hamburger*, 1963. [Fig. 1-21] These sculptures belong more properly to the series of work Oldenburg began for this show and continued making over the next several years – sometimes called "the soft sculptures" or "the home sculptures" – and it is to these we will turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

Suburbia, the Home, and the Car

LOS ANGELES

Toward the end of the summer of 1963, Oldenburg moved with his wife, Pat Muchinksi (now Mucha), to Los Angeles on the promise of an exhibition at the Dwan Gallery, a trip that was to have a significant impact on Oldenburg's work from that point on. As he remarked in his notes, "I experienced a revulsion against my situation in New York, hating my Store (my studio and theater since 1961) on Second Street, my apartment, my body, my wife, everything."[1] Venice, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, became their base of operations until April 1964. The move from the tight urban spaces of what was basically a 19th century city like New York, to the sprawling automobile city of the 20th century brought with it a

different experience of everyday life. Here Oldenburg encountered a new kind of urban environment that engendered a corresponding new approach in his work. In an essay for a 1967 exhibition, he would write, "I conceived of these cities – at other ends of the nation – as opposites in every possible way (fictionalizing the differences into black and white)."[2]

Investigating the city by car over freeways now, in place of his ubiquitous walks in New York, a whole new urban experience was opened up to Oldenburg. Notes and images in his archives from this period reflect these new fascinations.[3] Los Angeles was characterized, for Oldenburg, as he later recalled, by:

> the effect of continuously changing perspectives caused by the eye-catching billboards and lettering, which face in all directions. The observations of architecture in movement, the machine look, the tactile surfaces, the artificial materials such as fake marble and fake fur and the erotic titillation of kitsch.[4]

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[1] Claes Oldenburg, Notes, quoted in Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969/1970), p. 92.
[2] *Environment U.S.A.: 1957-67*, National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 1967, p. 92.
[3] Several of these are reprinted in Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 1979), English translation by Machteld Schrameijer.
[4] Oldenburg, quoted in van Bruggen, *Mouse Museum*, p. 53.

Instead of the compact, thriving life of the street that had so struck Oldenburg in New York, he found a city comprised of the isolated pockets of the private home and the in-between space of freeway and automobile. Reyner Banham described this new urban phenomenon in his famous observations of architecture and culture in Los Angeles of the 1960s:

> … in Los Angeles, you tend to go to a particular place to do a particular thing, and finally a long way back to your home, and you've done a hundred miles in a day. The distances and reliance on mechanical transportation leave no room for accident, even for happy accidents. You plan the day in advance, programme [*sic*] your activities, and forego those random encounters with friends and strangers that are traditionally one of the rewards of city life.[5]

This new version of city life, epitomized by Los Angeles, was the negative example for many architects and urban planners in the 1960s, both modernist and traditional, mainstream and avant-garde.

Preservationist movements, for example, decried the disruptions and isolations brought about by the new

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[5] Reyner Banham, "Beverly Hills, Too, is a Ghetto," *The Listener* (September 5, 1968), p. 298; cited in Nigel Whitely, *Reyner Banham, Historian of the Immediate Future*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2002), p. 238.

automobile city.[6] From the opposite camp, architect and theorist Constant observed in "Another City for Another Life":

> The streets have degenerated into freeways, leisure activities are commercialized and denatured by tourism. Social relations become impossible there. The newly-constructed neighborhoods have but two motifs, which dominate everything: driving by car and comfort at home. They are the object expression of bourgeois wellbeing, and all ludic preoccupations are absent from them.[7]

Whether looking to a nostalgic notion of integrated village life or toward a technological and political utopia of the future, both views proffered an alternative possibility for the city relying on a humanist ideal.

Oldenburg, by contrast, characteristically did not approach the condition he found in Los Angeles with an eye toward overthrowing it or establishing an alternative way of life. Instead, he took this condition – what he once rather poetically referred to as "the cemeteries of Formica strewn in the opium mists on the western shores"[8] –

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[6] Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

[7] Constant, "Another city for another life," *International Situationist* #2, (December 1959), pp. 37-40; reprinted in Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, eds. *Theory of the Dérive and other situationist writings on the city*, (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 1996).

[8] Claes Oldenburg, Notes, cited in Rose, p.94

as a given, a condition to be explored on its own terms. We again find Oldenburg's ambivalent stance of acceptance but with the critical distance necessary for defamiliarization.

Whereas in New York, in projects such as *The Street* and *The Store,* Oldenburg had looked to the outmoded, the discarded, and the margins of urban life, Los Angeles was all about the new and the clean, discrete sites and activities. Here, he turned his attention to the central preoccupations of this new city. The private home, along with its counterpart the private car, appeared to Oldenburg as fetish items of a new America.[9] He moved away from exploring the everyday life of the street to everyday life as it was lived in the domestic interior. Household furnishings, kitchen appliances, plumbing fixtures, and the like became the new subjects of his sculptures; the

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[9] My use of the term "fetish" here is not accidental. Oldenburg often conceived of his work as a series of substitutions, one thing for another, often for bodies or body parts, particularly as sexualized objects. See Lisa Freiman, "(Mind)ing The Store: Claes Oldenburg's Psychoaesthetics," Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 2001, for a psychoanalytic reading of Oldenburg's early work.

new artificial materials like vinyl, Formica, and fake fur, his new media.[10]

A necessarily brief review of the history of the American suburban home is useful here. The structuring of domestic spaces had undergone a significant redefinition in the post-war period, and this was nowhere more evident than in the landscape of Los Angeles. The growth of Los Angeles corresponded to a great extent with the history of the modern American suburb in its two great growth spurts of the 1920s and the 1950s.[11] Suburbia as such had first evolved in the mid-nineteenth century when affluent citizens began to move to outlying areas of the city emulating the ideal of the country estate of the dwindling elite classes and in reaction against industrialization and the growing population of workers in the cities. Again in the 1920s, new developments in transportation and building technology facilitated the increasingly middle-

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[10] For a fascinating cultural history of plastic, see Jeffrey L. Miekle, *American Plastic: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995); on Oldenburg and other 1960s artists' and architects' use of plastic, pp. 215-241.

[11] More specifically between armistice in 1918 until the Wall Street crash in 1929, and again after W.W.II through the 1980s. Peter G. Rowe, *Making a Middle Landscape* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1991). See also, Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

class phenomenon.[12] But it was in the aftermath of World War II that the American suburb experienced its massive explosion with the new appeal of an idealized middle class life to the returning soldier and the working family. Middle and upper-middle class suburban developments around the country saw unprecedented growth of between 300% and 500%, and in Los Angeles, the affluent suburb of Beverly Hills grew a staggering 2485%.[13]

Since the 19th century, the very definition of the home had changed from another site of industry and production to that of a retreat from productive life. The ideology of an intimate sphere of domestic life separate and apart from the demands of civil society that accompanied the rise of the suburb correspondingly idealized the nuclear family and its hierarchy and insisted on its autonomy. By virtue of its remove from

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[12] John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939*, (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1988).

[13] Other suburbs around Los Angeles: Glendale, 363.5%; Inglewood, 492.8%' Huntington Park, 444.9%; and Beverly Hills, 2485%. Similar degrees of suburban expansion was also being seen around other major urban centers, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, etc. John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner and Everett Walters, *Change and Continuity in 20th Century America* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1968). See also Mark S. Foster, *From Streetcar to Superhighway, American City Planners and Urban Transportation*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

the city, the privacy of the suburb seemed to literalize this ideal, the suburban home symbolically enacting this separation by acting as a spatio-temporal retreat from the public sphere.[14] But what was celebrated as an exodus for the affluent and middle classes to the liberation of autonomy and stability also came to be seen as its opposite – a self-imposed exile, a virtual imprisonment that reflected a fundamental conformity marked by exclusions of race and class and fostering a deep-seated insecurity. The mass-produced house, epitomized by Levittown in suburban New York and other housing experiments, along with its new population of middle- and lower-class residents engendered conflicting responses. The cherished American myths of the cult of privacy and the integrity of the nuclear family emerged part and parcel with an anxiety of the suburbs as a cultural wasteland of mindless automatons.[15]

The division between public and private space was also conceived as a division along gender lines, with men

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[14] The ideology of the public sphere versus private sphere is part of a much larger debate within political philosophy. See Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), especially Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."

participating in economic and political institutions and women staying at home.[16] Naomi Schor, writing on turn-of-the-century Paris, has suggested that theories of everyday life can be divided into two camps. On the one hand, there is the "feminine or feminist," which "links the everyday with the daily rituals of private life carried out within the domestic sphere traditionally presided over by women"; on the other hand, the "masculine or masculinist" version, where the everyday exists in the "public spaces and spheres dominated especially, but not exclusively, in modern Western societies by men."[17] Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* first came out in 1963, the same year that the Oldenburgs moved to Los Angeles. It was a polemical reaction against the forces operating to exclude women from the public sphere in the 1950s, and sought to reveal the drudgery of everyday life

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[15] Rowe, *Making a Middle Landscape*, 1991.
[16] For an urban studies analysis of women's inaccessibility to the public sphere, see Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream: The Future of Housing, Work and Family Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).
[17] Naomi Schor, "Cartes Postales: Representing Paris 1900," *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 18, 1992), p. 188.

for women relegated to the home. It became a rallying point for the incipient women's movement.[18]

Of course, the "feminization" of domestic space was a much older division, traceable, as Mark Wigley has noted, to Alberti's architectural treatises of the Renaissance and further back, to the ancient world.[19] However, there were distinct characteristics to this trend in the post-WWII period. A new vehemence was evident in magazine articles, books, and advertisements, in reaction against women's newfound independence in the workforce during World War II and to the new movements of gender rights and many kinds of experimentation with individual freedoms. And now there was also a new role for the feminine in the home – that of consumer and decorator – drawn in contrast to the masculine role as creative and productive.[20] [Fig. 2-1]

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[18] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* [original copyright, Dell 1963] (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). See also Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of 'The Feminine Mystique': The American Left, the Cold War and Modern Feminism* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

[19] Mark Wigley, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," in *Sexuality and Space* (Princeton: Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 327-389.

[20] See Joan Ockman, "Mirror Images: Technology, Consumption, and the Representation of Gender in American Architecture since World War II,"

Cécile Whiting, in her study of the role of gender in the reception of Pop art, makes the case for consumer culture as a gendered field:

> I use the term "consumer culture" … to refer to the woman's domain precisely because the commodities, the retail spaces, the marketing techniques, as well as the many characterizations of shopping behavior that I describe operated within a society that assumed that the principal consumer of quotidian objects of everyday life, and hence the consumer that mattered, was female.[21]

"Consumer culture" is not to be understood then, to exist only or even primarily in the representations of media, advertising, and logos, but has surely worked its way into the real spaces of everyday life, permeating even the most intimate of private domains. The masculine/feminine division was also reflected in the reception of Pop Art. Until Pop Art, the objects of the home were seen as feminine subject matter, unfit for the subject of art, with the exception of the "minor" arts of genre and still life. Lucy Lippard observed in 1976:

> In the early 1960s, the male artists moved into woman's domain and pillaged with impunity. The result was Pop Art, the most popular American art

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in *Sex of Architecture,* eds. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman,, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), pp. 191-210.

[21] See Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.

> movement ever…. If the first major Pop artists had been women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen. Then it would have struck those same critics who welcomed and eulogized Pop Art as just women making more genre art. But since it was primarily men who were painting and sculpting ironing boards, dishwashers, appliances, food and soap ads, or soup cans, the choice of imagery was considered a breakthrough.[22]

This new definition of the division between public and private as that of production versus consumption brought with it a new set of ironies and inconsistencies, altering the very conception of what we can mean by "public" and "private." While the traditional economic and political activities of civil life became increasingly removed from the idyllic domestic retreat and the earlier role of the home as a place of industry and production became obsolete, a new force now came to disrupt the tidy boundary. The economic pressures requiring constant demand for consumer goods and the production of that demand through marketing focused on the housewife. The interior, ostensibly *private* or intimate spaces of the home were increasingly defined by the very *public* social and economic consumerist accumulation of mass-produced

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[22] Lucy Lippard, "Household Images in Art," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976), p. 56.

objects and accessories; its décor, furnishings, machines, modes of work and leisure, and organization of family life were increasingly dictated by the *public* realms of fashion and advertising. What was idealized as a private retreat, became the primary arena of mass consumption and the primary target of mass marketing.

Ironically, perhaps, Oldenburg and his wife were, during the time they were living in Los Angeles, reproducing traditional divisions in both their work and home lives. Claes concentrated on producing artwork while Pat worked at home taking care of domestic duties. For the Oldenburgs, "domestic duties" had also come to include assisting with the production of Claes's sculptures. Pat had started taking on a larger role when sewing had become the means of producing the soft sculptures in New York. Although part of Oldenburg's art production, because sewing was traditionally considered "women's work," the Oldenburg's grouped it with the unpaid contributions of domestic chores rather than with economically productive labor.[23] By this point, Mucha was making almost all the

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[23] See Caroline A. Jones' study of the role of labor in the production of post-war art, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar*

sculptures and the physical demands of the sewing got harder with the new materials, particularly the tough, heavy, large pieces of vinyl.[24]

Mucha, however, in her own recollections, does not identify a relation of oppression or exploitation in this domestic segregation. In her forthcoming memoir, she recalls how she preferred living in suburban Venice to the rough chaos of the life of the New York street. In contrast to the potential for experimentation and play that Claes found in the crowded and chaotic streets of the Lower East Side, for Mucha, "tramping through dirty, loud streets" was happily replaced by California's "palm trees and warm ocean breezes." She particularly framed positively the domestic niceties that became her domain – a small private garden, a lawn where she could work or sunbathe, even the swivel wash line that, as she put it, always "stood in readiness."[25]

Mucha also noted the experience of freedom in the new material expressions she discovered in this city and which

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American Artist (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); on Claes and Pat Oldenburg, see p. 97.

[24] Pat Mucha, *Clean Slate*, forthcoming. Excerpts published in *Art in America*, (October 2002), pp. 79-87.

[25] Ibid.

at the same time had begun to enter Oldenburg's work. The fake furs, leopard and polka-dot patterns, cowhide and zebra-striped vinyl, represented a kind of liberation for her from the black restrictions of New York fashion. She writes in her memoir of the "endless ecstatic palette," "brilliant garb" and theatricality of make-up, particularly false eyelashes, that could be found in Southern California.[26]

It was in the context of these new fascinations that Oldenburg developed the sculptures on the theme of the Home that he exhibited at Dwan in October 1963 and continued to produce for the next several years. Several earlier works already shown at the Green Gallery in New York were exhibited at Dwan as well: The *Floorcone*, 1962 was propped up against a wall, ice cream side down; *Baked Potato*, 1962 and *Giant Gym Shoes*, 1962 were each displayed on small pedestals; and the *Giant Blue Shirt* was mounted on a wheeled cart with its tie dropping down onto the floor. [Fig. 2-2] But the new works in the Dwan show stood out in their use of the new "L.A." materials and colors. The *Soft Good Humor Bars*, 1963, were made of

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[26] Ibid.

artificial fur that was clearly not intended to imitate or even represent the original, but was to be desired for its very artificiality: fuzzy, plush cowhide; bright green leopard spots; orange tiger stripes; and yellow with orange polka dots. [Fig. 2-3] The 5-foot-tall chocolate *Good Humor Bar, 1963,* leaning against the wall of the gallery with the stick projecting out of its middle was made of stuffed shiny black vinyl. [Fig. 2-4]

Another new California piece, the *Bacon, Lettuce and Tomato Sandwich,* 1963, stood in the center of the room. [Fig. 2-5] Unlike Oldenburg's earlier foodstuffs, the *BLT* announces its artificiality. This was first and foremost due to its gigantic scale, that of furniture, not food. Assembled from separate elements like a real sandwich, each element used a different material suggestive of the item it was representing: stuffed vinyl for the soft white bread slices; thin green pieces of plastic, slightly curling and drooping around the edges for the lettuce; hard, stiff boards for the bacon; and squishy soft red vinyl for the tomatoes; all held together with a giant wooden pole through the center like a toothpick. Where a sandwich passes in everyday life without much thought,

through the process of defamiliarization, this one becomes a sign for the *BLT*.

One is reminded of Reyner Banham's exultant description of the Los Angeles hamburger, which, analogous to Oldenburg's *BLT*, was a "fantastic hamburger" whose primary function, as he saw it, was to convey meaning, as distinguished from the "functional hamburger" which served as food.[27] That is, in both of them, the visual display and the role as symbolic form overwhelmed their function as food:

> Its component parts have been carefully opened up and separated out into an assemblage of functional and symbolic elements, or alternatively, a fantasia on functional themes. The two halves of the bun lie face up with the ground beef on one and, sometime, the cheese on the other. Around and alongside on the platter are the lettuce leaves, gherkins, onion rings, fried potatoes, paper cups of relish or coleslaw, pineapple rings, and more besides… Assembled with proper care it can be a work of visual art as well; indeed, it must be considered as visual art first and foremost, since some components are present in too small a quantity generally to make a significant gustatory as opposed to visual contribution…[28]

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[27] Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, 1971, updated with an introduction by Anthony Vidler, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 93

[28] Ibid.

Banham's implication is that the real thing has already become a sign for itself. By extension, this would mean that Oldenburg's subject was not in fact food, but a sandwich that already had a sign-function, was already an icon of Americanness, of fast food, or of roadside diner culture.

Even after leaving Los Angeles in April of 1964, Oldenburg continued making sculptures on the themes of the Home and the Car, themes still clearly influenced by his experience of the dominant forces of urban organization of Los Angeles and by the increasing consumer culture of the 60s.

THE BEDROOM ENSEMBLE

Late in 1963 Oldenburg began working on the most famous and probably the most significant work of the Home series, the *Bedroom Ensemble*. [Fig. 2-6] Constructed in Los Angeles, it was first shown back in New York at the famous Sidney Janis Gallery in January of 1964 as Oldenburg's contribution to the "Four Environments by Four New Realists," with George Segal, Jim Dine and James Rosenquist. The combination of the term "Environments"

with the term "New Realists" in the show's title is telling. Marking a shift from Kaprow's Happenings and Environments "style" and the emergent Pop Art, the projects proved a challenge for the critics to define. The critical reception to this show was largely negative, to a large degree because of the works' positioning as "Environments." While John Canaday described Oldenburg's piece as the only "true environment" at the gallery,[29] Gene Swenson denounced it as a disaster when judged as an Environment, adding that "the gallery compounded the error by chaining off the room to make us look at it rather than letting us sense it."[30]

Neither statement was true. It is true that Oldenburg was no longer interested in making the kind of "Environments" as defined by Kaprow. *The Bedroom Ensemble* very much represented a shift away from the kind of work Oldenburg had been doing earlier in New York. He had for all intents and purposes split from the group around Kaprow and from their ideas of Happening-style performance

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[29] John Canaday, "Hello, Goodbye, a Question About Pop Art's Staying Power," review of *Four Environments by Four New Realists* and the *First International Girlie Exhibit*, *New York Times*, (January 12, 1964), p. 17.

and installation as multi-sensory, chaotic, temporal, fragmented, etc., to a style of installation that was entirely still, cool, distanced, almost preserved. But this change in viewing practice, decried by both critics, was entirely intentional on Oldenburg's part.

Here, rather than merely an object or set of objects, an entire room of the home was the subject of the work. It presented what was expected to be one of the most private spaces of the home, a space of vulnerability, sexuality, and intimacy, and then confounded these expectations. We see what at first appears to be a life-sized replica of an ordinary interior. Perhaps a bit more trendy, more tidy than typical, the way a room might appear in a glossy magazine layout: a large bed; slick, bright blue marble furniture suite – matching dresser and night stands; fashionable accessories in leopard and zebra skin; a plush fur rug; and art on the walls.

But something is not right. On closer inspection, a number of oddities begin to reveal themselves, details that underscore the artificiality of the environment.

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[30] Gene Swenson, review of "Four Environments by Four New Realists," *Art News* 62, no. 10 (February 1964), p. 8.

First and foremost, as mentioned, we are not invited to enter the room, but are cordoned off by a rope. The rope was obvious and intrusive. The "frame," the space of the exhibition presented like a diorama in a natural history museum, or a room in a historic house, becomes part of the work.

The feeling of distance was further exaggerated by distortions of visual perspective. The rectangular shaped objects in the room were presented as exaggerated rhomboids, as one might see them in parallax or from a distance. The perspective distortions also confused the flat surface of a (photographic) representation with the three-dimensional experience of a real room. It was as if the idealized room of the designer or advertiser's imagination as transformed into the glossy surface of a magazine layout or newspaper advertisement, was transformed back on itself; now the glossy surface image with its two-dimensional perspective was transposed into a three dimensional space. Was it a real bedroom, then, that Oldenburg was reproducing or taking as his source? Or was it the (magazine or advertisement) representation or the image of a bedroom that was his subject?

But even this reading is not continuous. The bed and the nightstands are geometrically proportioned to the same vantage point, while the dresser and chair follow another indeterminate alignment. The pictures affixed to the wall follow strict right angles, yet seem diagonal due to the actual perspective from the viewer's restricted access. There is no comfortable position for the viewer. Defying traditional perspective expectations, there was no one point that made the space of the room "cohere" visually or "make sense" coherently, thus undermining the viewer's sense of his or her own position in space in relation to the room.

Furthermore, the scale of the room is distorted. Each piece is made bigger than normal, not as gigantic as the *BLT* or *Floorcone*, but slightly less obviously so — just enough to make the viewer feel uncomfortable. The absence of the warm embrace expected in bedroom design is further underscored by the hard edges where we would expect soft: the bed itself, block-like and crisp; the hard, square pillows; and shiny vinyl in place of sheets. The shapes are those of Minimalist sculpture, rather than domestic life. Oldenburg described it this way:

> Geometry, abstraction, rationality – these are the themes that are expressed formally in *Bedroom*. The effect is intensified by choosing the softest room in the house and the one least associated with conscious thought. The previous work had been self indulgent and full of color, the new work was limited to black and white, blue and silver. Hard surfaces and sharp corners predominate.[31]

The pieces in this room were not manufactured by the artist's hand (nor, in this case by his wife's or by another assistant in the more traditional sense) but, echoing a broader pursuit in 1960s art for both Pop and Minimalism, by hired upholsterers and carpenters using industrial procedures.[32] As Oldenburg noted:

> The style I am concerned with in these works from Los Angeles is the style of manufacturing and production, a rehearsal of machine style, affecting not only the image or object produced, but also the method of producing it. Involving others, involving technicians, visits to industries, having parts made. The style of manufacturing abstracted into the production of art.[33]

Or elsewhere:

> Object made by conventional industrial procedure according to plans by artist serving his

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[31] *Environment U.S.A.*, p. 92.

[32] Richard Artschwager, at that time an aspiring artist earning a living by making furniture, was hired by Oldenburg to produce elements of this installation, leading to controversy over who is to be credited with first conflating the object-ness of minimalist geometries with the everyday-ness of furniture and the new mass-produced materials.

[33] Oldenburg, Notes, cited in Rose, p. 93.

> purposes and not the purpose for which objects made by this procedure normally are intended.[34]

Yet in contradiction to their practical and industrial manufacture, none of the items in the room work. The bedside radio, lamps, and the cosmetic or jewelry boxes on the dresser are simplified into solid geometric forms. The air conditioner on the back wall, at first hardly noticed, is on closer inspection quite obviously painted on. Less obviously, despite the one opened drawer with cotton pillows suggesting clothing half shoved in half falling out, the other drawers and handles are merely painted on. Even texture itself is not real, but merely *photographed* texture in the surface of the Formica.

Finally, there is one more fake in the room – the art on the walls. Small canvases on the wall echo Pollock's famous drips but here in thin black and white, rather than lush, glimmering drips, and in repeating, seemingly mass-produced, patterns as if cut off a roll, they are almost aggressive in their antithesis of the ideals of Abstract Expressionism and Modernist art: individual expression, authenticity, and originality. Adolph Gottlieb and Mark

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[34] Oldenburg, Notes, Los Angeles, 1963, cited in van Bruggen, *Mouse Museum*, p. 55.

Rothko once wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* that their art "must insult anyone who is spiritually attuned to interior decoration; pictures for the home; pictures for over the mantel."[35] And yet this is exactly what Oldenburg does with them, but instead of "over the mantel" with its connotations of traditional homeyness, Oldenburg mis-places them even further in this hyper-new interior. As Cécile Whiting pointed out, Abstract Expressionist paintings tended to find their place in the traditionally designed interiors of collector's homes. Newer collectors, or newly rich collectors, with the hyper-modern Pop interiors of the '60s, tended to find Pop Art imagery more suitable.[36] Where Abstract Expressionism did find a place in modern interiors, as Peter Wagner has observed, it was for their illusion of space and the element of separation from the world.[37] This was utterly

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[35] Quoted in Christopher Reed, Introduction, *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Architecture*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p. 9.

[36] Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*.

[37] Describing an interior designed by Billy Baldwin for SI Newhouse with paintings by Morris Louis, Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko: "The interiority of the room's soft enclosure found its visual foil in the two color field paintings in which the depth was as hermetic as the paintings were introspective." Peter Wagner, "ultrasuede," [*sic*] *Mining Autonomy*, special issue of *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, eds. Michael Osman, et al. no. 33,(2002), p. 94.

impossible in Oldenburg's version where any depth of space was belied by the cheap black and white printing and cut-from-the-bolt repetition of pattern.

But once again, the target of Oldenburg's barb is not so clear cut. The cheap copies, the tacky wallpaper-like prints are not simply juvenile rebellion against the grand-daddies of the New York scene, not merely critiques of the grand gestures of Abstract Expressionism by transforming them into kitsch. On the contrary, Oldenburg is reproducing an act that had already been performed by the wider culture, that is, to transform the gestures of the avant-garde into kitsch versions of themselves. This phenomenon began almost as quickly as the work was made, evidenced, famously, in Cecil Beaton's magazine photographs that used Pollock's drip paintings as backdrops to glamorous fashion poses.[38]

The artificiality of the room is not as simple or unidirectional as the idea of a "replica" might imply, for what is the original here being replicated? The artificiality of this piece lies not only in Oldenburg's

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[38] See Timothy J. Clark, "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-*

Bedroom Ensemble, but also in the "original" or "real" bedroom he takes as his subject. For example, the fake leopard skin used for the coat on the couch was probably not a copy of a real leopard skin coat, but of a coat which would have already been made of fake fur in the "original." The same could be said of the faux marble finish and fake fur rug. One inspiration for this piece may be a childhood memory of a famous motel in Malibu, Las Tunas Isles, that Oldenburg had visited in 1947 in which each suite was decorated in a theme based on the skin of a particular animal.[39] Here was a "real" space, but at the same time a space already configured as artifice. And it wasn't just the material of the animal skin that was already a simulacrum, but the very ideals of privacy, intimacy, both sexual and domestic, here mass-produced for consumption.

Even leaving aside the motel room, the domestic interiors themselves were becoming simulacra of a suburban ideal of privacy in the 1960s. Once shared by extended family, entered by neighbors and even used as workshops,

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1964, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 172-238.

the domestic space in its modern ideal was to be pristine and pure – a purity that was contaminated as soon as it was conceived by the new invaders of consumerism, fashion, and kitsch. What becomes of the myth of domestic space as a place of privacy and intimacy when it is characterized by the acquisition of mass-produced goods and organized by a taste determined by advertisement and fashion? The exaggerated garish and tacky décor of Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble*, with its faux marble surfaces, faux animal skin throws, faux paintings on the walls, is anything but personal. Such interiors undermine the very notion of what constitutes the private sphere, the putative retreat from the public sphere of the marketplace, because they are pre-determined by economic forces of production, distribution and marketing.

The 1968 essay, "Structures of Interior Design," by Jean Baudrillard (who had been a student of Lefebvre's) identifies the penetration of everyday life by the commodity in interior design.[40] According to Baudrillard's argument, the contemporary arrangement of domestic

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[39] *Environments USA*, p. 93.

interiors reveals the extent to which social subjects have become identifiable as consumers. For Baudrillard, freedom from the spatial rigidities of traditional objects and modes of organization of the home also marks an historical shift from a system dominated by the moral landscape of bourgeois patriarchy to a system dominated by the amoral landscape of consumption. A photograph by documentary art photographer Lothar Wolleh reveals the tensions inherent in Oldenburg's vision of modern domesticity. The man and the woman recline together on the floor with the white, fluffy (fake) fur rug folded up under them, Claes' arm around his wife. [Fig. 2-7] But the inhabitants of *this* bedroom remain conspicuously excluded from the room. Unlike an earlier anecdote, relayed by Pat, of the couple making love between the layers of the vinyl hamburger, using the bun as a cover,[41] here the playful intimacy is undermined by a sense of alienation. The couple inhabits this idealized magazine image of domesticity in the only way it can be inhabited –

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[40] Jean Baudrillard, "Structures of Interior Design," [1968] in *The System of Objects*, translated by James Benedict (London and New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 15-29.

[41] Mucha, *Clean Slate*, excerpts *Art in America*.

from outside, beyond the edge of the still, pristine tableau.

Finally, the room under consideration in this installation is not only a fictional bedroom, but also the real front room of the Sidney Janis Gallery in which it was exhibited – a gallery that epitomized the status of the established art world of Fifty-seventh Street. Oldenburg was very aware of the weight of history in this space. Janis was where many of the great Abstract Expressionist painters had staged their grand gestures. The gallery had shown the work of Marcel Duchamp in '52, '53, '56, and '59. Janis also staged the important "New Realists" exhibition in 1962, the first show to bring together many of the American Pop artists.

Details of the physical context of the gallery installation thus become integral to the work. The characteristic track lighting, the venetian blinds in the window, the grey color on the walls, the office door labeled, with a wink, "Private," were in Oldenburg's mind even when he was first developing the idea back in Los Angeles, and subsequently reproduced with each iteration.

> I was very aware that this room had been the room where de Kooning had shown, and Pollock had shown…and I did these parodies of Pollock in The Bedroom with the little paintings around…. It all had to do with being in the Janis Gallery. And the thing was designed for the Janis Gallery…. You see, what I wanted to do was preserve that room forever. And the way I did it was to put the Bedroom Ensemble in it and have careful plans drawn up for the whole room. And as you know, the room has been reconstructed in Darmstadt even if the room no longer exists. In other words, I took that legendary room and I preserved it. I preserved the color of the carpet, and the ghastly gray color of the walls, all that stuff… the door to the "Private" and the air conditioner and all that – all that shit is all there in it like a mausoleum preserved.[42]

All subsequent reconstructions of the *Bedroom Ensemble* recreate the Janis Gallery room to the last detail.

As in the *Store* on the Lower East Side the transformation of the gallery here confounded the fundamental expectations of art viewing as well as the expectations of public and private. What sort of category of space is a gallery? Is it indeed a public space, a kind of civic institution like a museum, open to all comers, the neutral public audience for whom art is presumed to be made? Or is it essentially private, a place of restricted access for those in the inner circle,

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[42] Interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, New York, p. 193.

those in the know? Or is it, finally, a site of commerce, existing fundamentally for those who may purchase, here transformed into a bedroom filled with items already drawn from the (public) sites of commerce, itself transformed back into an art installation, another version of the display of objects for sale?

THE HOME AND THE BODY

Continuing to live and work in Los Angeles through April of 1964, the Oldenburgs then drove back to New York for another one-man show at the Janis Gallery, mostly consisting of soft sculptures continuing the theme of the Home interior. But they did not yet resettle in New York. That year brought a new level of recognition for Oldenburg's work and for American Pop Art through the Venice Biennale. The U.S. pavilion that year, curated by Alan Solomon, was split into two installations. Oldenberg was part of a group show of Pop artists at an off-site annex that included Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, John Chamberlain, and Jim Dine, while the main pavilion featured the abstract painters Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis. The stars of the U.S. show were

Johns and Rauschenberg, with Rauschenberg becoming the first American ever to win the grand prize at the Biennale, much to the consternation of the European press.[43]

Oldenburg spent the next year travelling to various cities in Italy, France and the Netherlands, and holding a one-man show in Paris at the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in October. Finally settling back in New York in April 1965, Oldenburg continued making sculptures on the theme of the home interior – appliances, light switches, toilets and sinks. Most of these were repeated in several media, scales, and forms: soft and hard versions, shiny vinyl and rough canvas or "ghost" versions, large and small versions, or as both drawing and sculpture. Looking back, Oldenburg tends to discuss these pieces as formal experimentation for its own sake[44] – as entailing an

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[43] On the impact of this show in relation to Cold War politics, see Laurie J. Monahan, "Cultural Cartography: American Designs at the 1964 Venice Biennale," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*, Serge Guilbaut, ed. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1990), pp. 369-416. A typical French headline cited by Monahan read, "In Venice, America Proclaims the End of the School of Paris and Launches Pop Art to Colonize Europe," Pierre Cabanne in the French periodical *Arts*, (June 24, 1964), while the American press lauded America's cultural superiority. Monahan, p. 369.

[44] Conversation with the author, June 15, 2002.

interest in the malleability and variability of the relationship between form and material – and this is the interpretation most often found in the literature on Oldenburg. But the distortions he brings to bear on these objects – the altering of scale, material, texture, etc. – are specifically implemented to create references to the human body, often the sexualized human body. Soft, even fleshy, these objects become substitutes for the bodies of the home's imagined inhabitants, and, by extension, for the viewer:

> I guess that reflects a principle of all my work: I never show a human being or whole body; instead, I depict objects related to the person or a part of the body. You could say the spectator himself supplies the whole body in question. Usually the object is something the spectator could wear, use, eat or relate his body to.[45]

Compare the pieces in Oldenburg's *Bathroom Suite*, 1966, *Soft Bathtub, 1966*, and *Soft Toilet*, 1966, [Figs. 2-8, 2-9] for example, to their most obvious predecessor, Duchamp's readymade urinal, *Fountain*, of 1917. [Fig. 2-10] Both take as their starting point the most banal of industrially produced objects. But in contrast to

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[45] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings, 1965-69* (Chicago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1969), p. 31.

Duchamp's gestures of selection, designation and signature to mark its difference as art, Oldenburg creates a clearly manipulated version. Oldenburg's bathroom fixtures confront the viewer in their own space.

> [T]hey were always anti-base. I mean that was part of the idea that a sculpture should be an object rather than a sculpture. And an object is something that doesn't sit on a base. It's held in the hand or it's hung up like a coat or it's thrown on the ground... In other words it interacts with the life around it.... It's not sitting on its ass in a museum.... I wanted sculpture to do or to exist in space the way the object existed in space.[46]

Not just through their anthropomorphism of scale and texture, paralleling that of the human body, but also in the familiarity of their subject matter from everyday life and the intimacy of their associations: clothing we wear on our bodies; food that we eat; bathtubs into which we recline, naked, and wet; toilets on which we sit for the most private of bodily functions. Looking at Oldenburg's *Bathtub*, so familiar from our own, we can't help but replay the banal ritual of turning the faucets, filling the basin, stepping in, etc. But our imaginary rehearsal is disrupted by the differences in *this* bathtub: We

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[46] Oldenburg, interview with Paul Cummings, oral history project, Archives of American Art, p. 361.

imagine the feel of its skin-like vinyl; it both attracts and repels; soft and formless, it gives the sense it would engulf us. Similarly with the *Soft Toilet* – what would be the act of sitting on, or more like *falling into*, this object?

As Rosalind Krauss observed in her 1977 *Passages in Modern Sculpture*,

> these objects, staged like lugubrious obstructions in our space, do theatricalize their environment, do render us participants or actors in the drama of their presentation. …They are obstructions in the viewer's space … because they promote a sense of interaction in which the viewer is a participant, their mass being construed in terms that suggest his own body – pliant and soft, like flesh. The viewer is then forced into two simultaneous admissions: "They are my things – the objects I use everyday"; and "I resemble them."[47]

We must be reminded here again, as in *The Street*, of Merleau-Ponty, and what he called the chiasmatic relationship between objects and subjects within space. In what could be a paraphrase of Merleau-Ponty, Oldenburg later described this quality of his work as one in which "the model of the animate body with its interchange through the skin with its surroundings, is combined with

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[47] Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993/1977), p. 229.

the inanimate subject."[48] As Krauss goes on to argue, in contrast to the object being considered an outward manifestation of the self, Oldenburg stages a reversal that "cuts much more deeply into an *a priorist* view of the self, by which the self is thought to be structured, in its most basic sense, prior to experience."[49] Though softened and veiled by irony, the relationship Oldenburg's work has with its audience is one of attack. One of the disturbing effects of Oldenburg's sculpture, "terror" Krauss called it, comes from the realization of the degree to which we are constructed *in* experience rather than prior to it.

This is, of course, the same kind of language more typically used to describe Minimalism. In the same discussion, Krauss specifically referenced the famous *Column* of Robert Morris:

> one is struck by the parallels between it and the work of Oldenburg – no matter how differently shaped. In being an actor, it is anthropomorphized – made into a kind of model of the self – at the same time that, being an object, it is made completely inexpressive or deadpan.[50]

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[48] Claes Oldenburg, *Raw Notes*, note 13.
[49] Krauss, *Passages*, p. 230
[50] Krauss, *Passages*, pp. 236-37.

However, Oldenburg's sculptures are less deadpan and more psychologically loaded than their clean-lined, geometric, Minimalist counterparts. That is, they operate on the symbolic level as well as the spatial level, on the discursive as well as the real. Oldenburg was fascinated by the new kinds of psychological investments being made in the objects that filled and decorated the private home. We identify with or *become* our furnishings, more than just phenomenologically as with a column or a cube; and we *desire* them in a way that cannot be said of abstract geometric forms. In the 1960s, the home was propagandized in advertisements and magazines as an idealized domain of modern elegance and ease, proliferating with the abundance and availability of the new, high-tech, labor-saving devices, especially geared towards women.[51] The appliances and "labor-saving" kitchen devices such as the Juice-it and the Dormeyer Mixer specifically reference domestic work — i.e. women's work.

If the allusion to pendulous breasts is not evident enough in the *Soft Dormeyer Mixer, 1965,* [Fig. 2-11] then Oldenburg's sketches make it perfectly clear, with images

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[51] See Joan Ockman, "Mirror Images."

of the mixer, juxtaposed with naked breasts and the lapel of a ladies' blouse. [Fig. 2-12] The partner to this sculpture, the *"Ghost" Version* of *Four Soft Dormeyer Mixers*, 1965, reference instead male sexual parts, a simple rotation of the appliance positions the protruding handles to swing out, clearly referencing a penis between the hanging "testicles" of the mixer blades. [Fig. 2-13] Even in cases where such references are not as explicit, other ambiguous references to body parts are nonetheless evident. The *Light Switch*, 1964 soft version, allude perhaps to nipples in shiny orange vinyl, protruding from holes in the drooping sack mounted on the wall; the drip of juice emerging from the spout of the *Juice-it, 1965*, can be read also as a tongue.[52] [Figs. 2-14, 2-15]

In the Home sculptures as with the bedroom furniture of 1963, Oldenburg is picking up on a new direction of "post-functionalist" interior design that corresponded to "post-functionalism" in architecture. In contrast to the functionalism of the design of the home implied in Le Corbusier's "machine for living in", or "the kitchen is a

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[52] Germano Celant acknowledges this allusion to bodies and body parts in Oldenburg's work but ascribes it to an updating of the classic

machine for feeding," Oldenburg was much more interested in an altogether different, non-functional investment in the objects of the home. As the interior spaces of the private home become less defined as a site of productivity, functional design of items was replaced by a fanciful and fetishized appeal. Asger Jörn described this new attitude in an article in 1956:

> By dint of this false notion [functionalism], they [Modernists] constructed an aesthetic ideal that consists in seeing the outside of the object as a reflection of the practical functions of its inside and of the constructivist idea. Nevertheless, these analyses of usefulness and necessity which, according to their lights, must be the basis for the construction of any object created by man, are immediately rendered ridiculous if one analyses in depth all objects manufactured today. A fork or a bed cannot come to be considered as necessary for the life and health of man and still retain a relative value.[53]

This attitude was shared with certain 1960s designers and architects, groups such as Utopie, Archigram, Superstudio and Ant Farm, who were designing furniture and interiors with inflatable plastics, walking rooms, and

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figure or to formal play on shared morphology. Celant, *Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology.*

[53] Asger Jörn, "On the Current Value of the Functionalist Idea," reprinted in Andreotti and Costa, eds., *Theory of the Dérive*, p. 33.

integrated virtual reality machines.[54] However impractical, though, the theoretical premise of these designs was nonetheless, in the end, a kind of functionalism, even if utopian. They were implemented with complete sincerity, relying on imagined future technologies that would coincide precisely with an imagined future political utopia of rational socialism. As with Jörn, their critique of functionalism was its suppression of an innate humanism, struggling to break free: "It is a question here of acquired necessities. Modern man is smothered in these necessities – the television, the fridge, etc. – which render him incapable of living his real life."[55]

One crucial difference here is that Oldenburg's anti-functional objects were not, of course, actual interior design. They, as always, maintained the specificity of high art production. Oldenburg was not a designer, nor a utopianist, and his response to the everyday life we now experience was not to propose an alternative, but to "defamiliarize" and critique the present condition. The

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[54] See Peter Cook, et al, *Archigram*, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

non-functionality of his objects was not an escape, but a means of enabling them to signify meanings other than those of appliances or furniture – to draw attention to the new model of urbanism, the ideology of the home, and the fetishization of consumer objects.

THE CAR

Oldenburg's experience of Los Angeles also inspired another motif that was to become important in his work – the automobile. In December of 1963, Oldenburg staged the performance *Autobodys* in the parking lot of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics on Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles.[56] The word "Autobodys" was meant to suggest the interrelation of automobiles with bodies of drivers as participants in the new car and freeway culture of this new kind of city. Twenty different performers enacted different aspects of automobile and freeway culture, both inside and outside of cars, motorcycles, and

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[55] Ibid., p. 34.

[56] December 9-10, 1963. Claes Oldenburg, *Autobodys: The Script,"* in Michael Kirby, ed., *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965).

in one case, a wheelchair.[57] *Autobodys* also evoked the element of violence with the parking lot strewn with various objects including tires and long sheets of fabric suggesting bandages.[58]

Staged in a parking lot as a theatrical analogy to a "drive-in" cinema, spectators drove to the site of the performance and remained in their cars. Audience "participation" in the event was limited to providing illumination with their cars' headlights. This stands in sharp contrast to the earlier New York Happenings where the boundaries of audience, performer and space were dissolved in favor of a more communal, multi-sensory experience. Here instead, each member of the audience remained in separate units provided by the private car, isolated both from the performers and from one another, reproducing the reality of urban life in Los Angeles.

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[57] The performers were Tony Berlant, John Daggert, Ken Dillon, Tom Etherton, Charles Frazier, Judy Gerowitz, Dejon Greene, Lloyd Hamrol, Nancy Hamrol, Jim Howell, Richard Matthews, Bobbie Neiman, Rolf Nelson, Claes Oldenburg, Pat Oldenburg, John Romeyn, Deborah Sussman, John Weber, Laurie Weber, and Santos Zuniga. David Platzker, "Performance History and Selected Filmography," in Celant, p. 568

[58] Barbara Rose suggested that the elements of death and violence became accentuated in response to President Kennedy's assasination while riding in a motorcade just a few weeks prior to the staging of *Autobodys* and the repeated media images of the black cars in the funeral procession.

America's fascination with the car, and its impact on society, was more than simply as a means of transportation. The new forms of spatial interactions it provided soon changed the face of architecture and urbanism as well as the structuring of our human interactions.[59] The automobile changed, the way the railroad had one hundred years before it, the very experience of time and space for human beings.[60] In the context of Los Angeles, in particular, it delineated its own vital urban "space." The car was a ubiquitous and definitive cultural element in the new city represented by Los Angeles, as crucial to its particular patterns and structures of interactions and movement as was the private home. Reyner Banham in 1971 coined the term "Autopia" to describe what he called the "ecology" of the freeway and the cars that traveled it. "The freeway system in its totality is now a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, the fourth ecology

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[59] See Mark S. Foster, *From Streetcar to Superhighway, American City Planners and Urban Transportation*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

[60] Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, (New York: Berg, 1977).

of the Angeleno."[61] The language of design, architecture, and urbanism in Los Angeles is the language of movement. It is characterized by parking lots, freeways, drive-ins, and other facilities; to read it, to see it, to experience it, is to drive. As early as the end of the 1920s, Los Angeles was experiencing the effects of the automobile's impact such as rush hour and holiday traffic, and soon after its effect on patterns of urban development itself.[62]

The car also took a central role in consumer culture as an indispensable commodity in its own right. In a 1955 article, "Vehicles of Desire," Banham described "the contemporary Detroit car" as a kind of architecture, but one distinguished from conventional architecture's "universalism and permanency" by its "symbolic iconographies and consumerist impermanancy."[63] In 1959, Guy Debord also observed the importance of the automobile as a commodity to the operations of capitalism:

> The mistake made by all urbanists is to consider the private automobile essentially as a means of transportation. Such a misconception is a major expression of a notion of happiness that

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[61] Banham, *Los Angeles*, p. 195.

[62] Braeman, et al.

[63] Banham, "Vehicles of Desire," *Art*, 1 (September 1955); reprinted in *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996), p. 3.

> developed capitalism tends to spread throughout society. The automobile is the centerpiece of this general propaganda, both as sovereign good of an alienated life and as essential product of the capitalist market: this year we hear that American economic prosperity is soon going to depend on the success of the slogan "Two cars per family."[64]

That is, the automobile operates both on the real and the symbolic level of American life. And for Debord, this was a particularly American cultural phenomenon, one that carried with it the threat of Americanization to Europe:

> The breaking up of the dialectic of the human milieu in favor of automobiles (the projected freeways in Paris will entail the demolition of thousands of houses and apartments although the housing crisis is continually growing worse) masks its irrationality under pseudopractical justifications.[65]

Oldenburg's project was neither to propose a more integrated city nor a more efficient means of transportation. Neither was he simply celebrating the technological power of the car and other machines the way the Futurists had. What interested Oldenburg about the car, as with the objects of the Home, were those aspects

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[64] Guy Debord, "Situationist theses on traffic," 1959, *Situationiste* #3, December 1959, pp. 36-37; reprinted in Andreotti and Costa, eds., *Theory of the Dérive*, pp.81-82.
[65] Ibid.

and attributes that were not purely functional, but carried social and psychological implications. Oldenburg's "Chrysler Airflow" exhibition, his next show at the Janis Gallery, included Car sculptures along with various sculptures from the Home theme (including the various pieces of the *Bathroom Suite*). Here the motif began to take on a less violent, more playful connotation. In 1965, he had been commissioned by *Art News* to make a cover for one of its issues. He depicted the front, back, top, bottom and sides of the Chrysler Airflow in the schema of a simple geometric design that would be easy to assemble from a flat sheet – a rectangular box. [Fig. 2-16] Oldenburg literalized the drawn illusion of three-dimensional space by making a drawing that could actually be cut out and assembled into a sculpture. Each purchaser of the magazine could own their own Oldenburg sculpture, a multiple, in what Oldenburg intended as a joke on the American ideal that each person could (should) own their

own car and their own house.[66] After this, Oldenburg returned again and again to the subject of the automobile.

Oldenburg chose the Chrysler Airflow for a number of reasons. First, the Chrysler Airflow was one of the earliest mass-produced and widely distributed models immediately associated with the heyday of automobile growth in America, and the exuberance of car ownership. Its streamlined 1930s "modern" design was named "Airflow" because its wing-like parts were based on birds in flight. In 1900, the automobile was an anomaly, a toy of the rich. There were 8000 cars registered in the U.S. in that year, growing steadily through the first two decades of the 20th century. Between 1920 and 1930, however, the expansion of the presence of the car was phenomenal, from two and a half million to twenty-six and a half million.[67]

Also, the Airflow was a typical and standard car and could embody, for Oldenburg, the abstract idea of "car," perhaps because he was a young boy when it was designed in 1935. Just over thirty years old, it bore the same relationship to outmoded mechanical objects as do his

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[66] On Oldenburg's multiples, see Thomas Lawson, Claes Oldenburg, Arthur Solway, *Claes Oldenburg: Multiples in Retrospect, 1964-1990*, New York,

other "soft machines," the toaster, mixer, telephone, and typewriter. Oldenburg deliberately wished to choose a subject, as he put it, "far enough away to be on the verge of disappearing from function into archetype."[68]

Next was the design itself. As Banham had pointed out in "Vehicles of Desire," the early modernists like Le Corbusier, while exalting the virtue and necessity of standardization, tended to select as exemplars of good design, unique, handcrafted, expensive models.[69] But unlike the High Modernist designs, exemplified by those objects exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art's design department or exalted by the early Modernists, the Airflow was in fact standardized, mass-produced, and relatively accessible. As Banham wrote,

> As an expendable, replaceable vehicle of popular desires it clearly belongs with the other dreams that money can buy…the world of expendable art. The motor car is not as expendable as they are, but it clearly belongs nearer to them than to the Parthenon, and it exhibits the same creative thumbprint – finish, fantasy, punch, professionalism, swagger.[70]

1991.

[67] From 2,490,932 to 26,531,999. Braeman, et al.

[68] Rose, p. 97.

[69] In "Towards a New Architecture," 1923, Le Corbusier juxtaposed illustrations of automobiles with images of the Parthenon implying a shared aesthetic of order, precision and impersonality. Cited in Banham, "Vehicles of Desire."

[70] Banham, "Vehicles of Desire," p. 6.

Oldenburg had access to the details and history of the Airflow's design through Carl Breer its designer, who was the father of Oldenburg's friend, the sculptor and filmmaker Robert Breer. Robert had shown Oldenburg a group of photos taken at the annual meetings of Airflow owners. Later, Oldenburg made a trip to Detroit to meet the designer, get inside stories on the design and development as well as some photographs of old models and drawings and even an original Airflow.

Like other objects that Oldenburg selected, the car was a machine with which we come into most intimate contact – enclosed in it, touching it, wearing it like a "second skin," as Oldenburg has said.[71] In addition, what fascinated Oldenburg about the car, as with the other "soft machines" was its internal mechanism. For him, its pipes and wires, its combustion and flows of energy, once again served as apt models or stand-ins for the human body.

> Of the doubles man has made of himself, the car (in Swedish, *karl* is guy – autobody) is the most ever-present, competitive, and dangerous. Also the one which most naively represents man. Our robot. The most notably different fact about

[71] Rose, p. 96.

> this robot, which is always greedy to occupy our space, with whom we share almost equally our space in a game of chance and watchfulness, is the hardness of its flesh, its relative invulnerability.[72]

But in contrast to the examples of furniture and fixtures discussed above, Oldenburg's approach to the body in this case was more like an anatomic dissection, rather than a psychological portrait or phenomenological exploration.

Oldenburg remarked that he went on a diet in the summer of 1965 when he began work on the *Airflow*, not to lose weight, but "as a method of becoming aware of my body's internal parts."[73] The series of sculptures he made on the theme included several so-called "Soft Engine Parts" which depicted selected mechanisms of its interior structure – like *Radiator and Fan for Airflow*, *Soft Engine for Airflow with Fan and Transmission*, and *Soft Tires for Airflow* [Figs. 2-17, 2-18] along with those which showed the car in its entirety, each in several versions of hardness and size. Even the first drawing for the cover of *Art News* included details of the car's internal mechanisms on the panel that illustrated its underside.

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[72] Oldenburg, quoted in Rose, p. 100.
[73] Ibid.

In both the Home and Car series, the everyday objects in Oldenburg's sculptures are both real and symbolic. In the next phase of his work, the Proposed Colossal Monuments, discussed in the next chapter, the objects are reconfigured on a colossal scale, and are imagined as a kind of architecture entering into a dialogue with the urban field on its symbolic level.

CHAPTER THREE

Reading Architecture and Landscape: The Proposed Colossal Monuments

ARCHITECTURE, SCULPTURE, MONUMENT

For the last thirty years, large-scale public sculptures have been Oldenburg's bread-and-butter, his "signature style," his public identity and his source of fame in the art world and with the broader public. His earlier monument proposals however, from 1965-1969, were of a different order. These were fantastic proposals consisting of subjects drawn from popular culture and everyday life, but now reconfigured as gigantic forms looming over the urban landscape. Most were conceived as explicitly impossible and all remained unbuilt until Oldenburg began to formulate a new series that he called his "Feasible Monuments" in 1969. Underscoring the distinction, the term was later changed simply to "Large-

Scale Projects" when Oldenburg began working in collaboration with Coosje van Bruggen in 1976.[1]

It is to the earlier "Proposed Colossal Monuments" that I now want to turn. Simultaneously playful and serious, monumental and banal, humorous and pointed; simultaneously architecture, sculpture, and drawing, these works have been notoriously hard to categorize. Their exaggerated manipulations of scale, which conflate sculpture with architecture, and their ambiguity between being fantastic, even surrealist imaginings and being real architectural proposals, give this project its crucial characteristic: the ability to address the city as a site of symbolization as much as real space. The Proposed Colossal Monuments engaged with the city in terms of its capacity for signification rather than as the site of embodied experiences of space such as we saw in his earlier works. Nonetheless they still operate on a model of the city as an open-ended proposition rather than a fixed entity; a discursive field that can be actively re-inscribed and not just passively read.

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[1] The pair married in 1977. See Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994).

In this series, as in his earlier work, Oldenburg maintained the specificity of his project as "art," making no claim to operate within the terms of the disciplines of architecture or urbanism proper, but on the contrary, at odds with them. The Proposed Colossal Monuments nonetheless engaged with crucial questions of architecture in the 1960s; questions of functionalism, autonomy, symbolism, and the use of vernacular and popular forms. First was the trend toward what has been called anti- or post- functionalist.[2] Functionalism, as it manifested in architectural discourse and practice in the inter-war period, was radical and progressive, sweeping aside ingrained academic conceptions of meaning and symbolism with what Peter Eisenman has characterized as the "ethical positivism of form and function."[3] This ethos, heralded in Mies van der Rohe's famous dictum "form follows function," continued to hold sway, to a large extent, well into the 1960s. Since the 1940s, following the "heroic" epoch of modern architecture, a functionalist aesthetic was maintained in the "second

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[2] Peter Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism," *Oppositions Reader*, ed. K. Michael Hays, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 9-12.

[3] Eisenman, "Post-Functionalism," p. 10.

generation" glass and steel skyscrapers of the International Style as well as in the positivist theories of urban planning that underlay scientific approaches to standardized building, especially for reconstruction (in Europe) and housing (in both Europe and the U.S.) after the war.

At the same time, the limitations of these systems and the concomitant triumvirate of the ideals of functionalism, formalism, and rationalism were increasingly felt as a restrictive force and by the sixties, a number of anti-modernist and post-functionalist references had begun to emerge. Symbolism and decoration, for example, along with an embrace of popular culture and irony, would later come to characterize Post-Modernism in architecture.[4] The ingress of art on the field of rational and functional architecture was also having an impact, as Bernard Tschumi pointed out in "Architecture and Transgression":

> The disturbing effects of art, linked to the erotic and play impulses, although seized upon by the Surrealists, were until recently generally eschewed by architects more concerned to develop "machines for living in" than art to wrestle with. The positivistic utopia of modern architecture was in this way based on the

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[4] Ibid.

> repression of death, decay, and the "pleasure principle."[5]

We also have to situate Oldenburg's project within another architectural context, that concerning the monument. Each term of Oldenburg's phrase, "Proposed," "Colossal" and "Monument," is open to questioning. Oldenburg himself has declared the monuments to be sincere as often as he declared them to be ironic; as motivated purely by morphological resemblance to external cues in the environment or as carrying explicitly symbolic content.[6] From the start, he layered multiple levels of meaning and associations, both formal and symbolic, drawing from a multiplicity of sources: personal, social, politcal, and formal.

Where the word monument is defined as something having "an outstanding quality" of "historical, aesthetic, or scientific interest" worthy of memorializing,[7] Oldenburg employed ordinary, insignificant, intentionally banal, sometimes coarse, kitsch, or bawdy subject matter. This

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[5] Bernard Tschumi, "Architecture and Transgresssion," *Oppositions Reader,* ed. K. Michael Hays, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998) p. 355.

[6] With the success of his later large-scale projects over almost thirty years, he today tends to retrospectively collapse the earlier proposals into the intentions and interpretations attributed to the built sculptures although earlier documents and notes attest otherwise. See Oldenburg and Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects.*

strategy intentionally rejected the traditional distinction or separation of monumentality in from the inconsequentiality of everyday life. Or, conversely, Oldenburg's strategy resituated the very inconsequentiality or banality of everyday life on the order of the highest level of importance. Furthermore, where a monument is concerned with memory and permanence, the subjects chosen by Oldenburg are of fleeting significance. Oldenburg generally avoided specific brand names or people, preferring the generic form of the object. Finally, in contrast to the structurally and materially imposing stone or metal of a traditional monument, these "monuments" were entirely ephemeral, existing only as ideas in the form of drawings, collages, prints or even verbal propositions.[8]

But these traditional associations of monumentality had already begun to wane by the 1960s. Monumentality was a particularly loaded term in the period following World War II, having been usurped in the 1930s by the political ideologies of both fascism and communism and the

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[7] Oxford English Dictionary, second edition, (1989).
[8] Many of these are published in the catalogue Claes Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings, 1965-69* (Chicago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1969) and in Barbara Haskell, *Claes Oldenburg: Objects into Monument* (Pasadena, Ca.: Pasadena Art Museum, 1971).

unquestioned authority of totalitarianism.[9] Between 1928 when Alois Riegl's critique of what he identified as the "cult of monuments" was published[10] and by the time Oldenburg began his monuments project in 1965, the monument had become increasingly denigrated and suspect. By the 1950s, many critics were willing to predict its imminent demise as an art form.[11]

Nonetheless, architects and architectural theorists as diverse as Louis Kahn, Sigfried Giedion, and Walter Gropius continued to argue for the ongoing validity of the monument in the post-war period.[12] Two key issues continually emerging within these debates were those of symbolism and of scale. As early as 1943, Sigfried Giedion, José Luis Sert and Fernand Léger – architect, urban planner, and painter, respectively – struggled with how to create forms of large-scale expression free of association with oppressive ideologies of the past. In their treatise "Nine Points on

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[9] A good summary of this response to monumentality can be found in Christiane and George R. Collins, "Monumentality: A Critical Matter in Modern Architecture," *Harvard Architecture Review* 4 (1984).
[10] Alois Riegel, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," in *Oppositions*, pp.621-651, (originally published in Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Augsburg-Vienna: Dr. Benno Filser, 1928).
[11] Collins, "Monumentality."
[12] "In Search of a New Monumentality," a symposium with George Paulsson, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, William Holford, Sigfried Giedion,

Monumentality," they proposed monuments of colorful and mobile forms, using lightweight, naturalistic materials in explicit contrast to the kind of dramatic neo-classical structures erected to the glories of National Socialism with their seriousness, massiveness, permanence, self-importance, and grandeur.[13]

This treatise was only a forerunner to a spate of projects in the 1960s that began to reconceive the idea of the monument and other vast structures – what Dan Graham called "outsized, outside public work" – along totally new lines, as monuments using irony and humor, as utopian proposals, and as forms relating to the scale of the landscape in the form of earth art.[14] The late 1960s was also a period of a public art boom that provided the context for this new interest.[15] Fantastic proposals in the U.S. and Europe during this period

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Walter Gropius, Lucio Costa, and Alfred Roth, *Harvard Architectural Review*, 4 (1984).

[13] "Nine Points on Monumentality," first published in Sigfried Giedion, *Architektur und Gemeinschatt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1956), pp. 40-42; english edition, *Architecture, You and Me* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 48-52.

[14] See Dan Graham, "Models and Monuments: The Plague of Architecture," *Arts Magazine*, (March 1967), pp. 32-35. See also Graham's "Oldenburg's Monuments," *Artforum* 6, no. 5 (Jan. 1968), pp. 30-5

reached in very different directions: from the technological utopianism of Archigram in the U.K. and the Utopie group in France; to the revolutionary praxis of the Situationists; to the pop cultural critique of Fluxus artists; to architectural designs that were intent on reintroducing cultural symbolism, like Alison and Peter Smithson in England or Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in the U. S.

In 1969, American and German Fluxus artists Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell compiled a book of examples of "Fantastic Architecture" from the 1960s "as evidence of the new methods and processes that were introduced by Fluxus, Happenings and Pop."[16] Published by Something Else Press in New York, which was responsible for publishing many small Fluxus publications as well as many of Oldenburg's Happenings scripts, the book was put together, as was characteristic of many such publications, like a political pamphlet or manifesto. The artists and the projects they selected did not

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[15] See Harriet Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

comprise a group, collective, movement or style, but did indicate the wide variety of people from different backgrounds that were experimenting with fantastic architectural forms. Several examples of Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monuments were included along with images and texts by such diverse figures as English Pop artist Richard Hamilton, American avant-garde composer John Cage, Futurist engineer and architect Buckminster Fuller, earthworks artist Michael Heizer, performance artist Carolee Schneemann, as well as Dadaist predecessors Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann.[17] [Fig. 3-1]

In their manifesto, the authors wrote, "the accent in all the works in this book lies on *change* – i.e. the expansion of physical surroundings, sensibilities, media, through disturbance of the familiar" in direct contrast to "the repressive architecture of bureaucracy and luxury that imposes restrictions on people."[18] Architecture, they contended, was retrograde relative to

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[16] Dick Higgins and Wolf Vostell, *Fantastic Architecture*, [published in German as *Pop Architektur*] (New York: Something Else Press, 1969).
[17] Although I refer to the Dadaists as predecessors, the volume also included a new text by Hausmann written in 1967, called "An Appeal for Fantasy."

the aesthetic revolutions in other art forms of the 20th century: "We cannot speak of Dada architecture, Tachist architecture, even collage architecture." Innovations in architecture had been defined up to that point by technologies and materials, they argued, "the equivalent, in painting, of introducing a new shade of alizarin crimson or gilt paint and continuing to make the same old Secessionist or Post-Impressionist commodity," but the fundamentals of architecture, understood as the perception and use of space, "had been allowed to remain quagmired in 19th century or pseudo-Marxist assumptions." The authors demanded dispensing with the functionalist assumptions that they called "the drawing board mentality" as "the architectural equivalent of easel painting," along with "oldfashioned building codes, zoning practices, archaic planning systems… and trade union regulations."[19] And they called for artists to restore a spirit of aesthetic research to architecture.

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[18] Higgins and Vostell, *Fantastic Architecture*, (unnumbered).
[19] Ibid.

SCULPTURE AND ARCHITECTURE

At a panel held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and broadcast on local radio station WBAI with sculptor Robert Murray and architects Paul Rudolph and Richard Meier, moderated by art critic and historian Barbara Rose in 1967, Oldenburg articulated his ideas on the relationship between architecture and sculpture in his Proposed Colossal Monuments.[20] Now, as in his earlier work, Oldenburg was concerned with the relationship of the object to that of the space around it: foreground and background, sculpture and environment. He wanted above all to avoid the sculpture having a merely "decorative" role, being *"in front of"* the "real space" that was defined primarily by the architecture. His proposed monuments, he said, "… involve an environment which is both physical and social.… We can't set up rules: this is an environment, this is an object, because the whole world is an

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[20] "Sculpture and Architecture: A Dialogue," panel moderated by art critic Barbara Rose with sculptors Claes Oldenburg and Robert Murray and architects Paul Rudolph and Richard Meier. Broadcast on WBAI-fm, recorded Nov. 21, 1967. Museum of Modern Art Library, New York, sound recording 68.30, 68.31.

object." Reiterating the concerns found in his earlier work, Oldenburg challenged his co-panelists:

> Would anyone care to comment on the fact that a *city* sculpture could be a kind of organization or a use of material there such as people walking or the cars driving or things like that, in other words, the benefit of it would be to call the people's attention – who live in the city – to the fact that sculpture is not just a thing on a base and a building is not just an isolated thing….[21]

Another distinguishing feature of the monument proposals for Oldenburg at this time was their very impossibility, or more precisely, the inconsequence of their feasibility one way or the other. A monument qua monument is, by definition, a purely symbolic form of building; it has no functional qualities or characteristics except for its function as a symbol. Oldenburg's proposed monuments operate primarily as "act[s] of imagination," as he said, in contrast to the concerns of architecture proper, except perhaps for that part of the architectural enterprise that is similarly "purely fantastic or projections that are almost impossible or visionary."[22] Against a reductive

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[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

combination of functionalism, rationalism and formalism, then, Oldenburg offered the remedies of both symbolism and excessive scale.

An immediate triggering event for the Proposed Colossal Monuments had been, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Oldenburg's experience of the urban sprawl, roadside architecture, and commercial billboards that utterly re-inscribed the experience of the urban landscape in Los Angeles. His notebooks and archives from this period are filled with images and artifacts of this phenomenon. [Fig. 3-2] When they were living in Los Angeles, the Oldenburgs' favorite sightseeing activity for their visitors would be to take them to see favorite buildings, such as one shaped like a hot dog in a bun, and the Ugly Dog Records building in the form of a black-and-white spotted dog, with the door between the two front paws and a window in one of the spots.[23] [Fig. 3-3]

Reyner Banham commented on the use of symbolism or iconography taking precedence over functionalism in the "pop" architecture of the new cityscape in his classic

study of Los Angeles.[24] Referring to the proliferation of buildings in Los Angeles made in the shape of a product or logo [Fig. 3-4], Banham said:

> Both fantasy and public symbolism reached their apotheosis in the great commercial signs, … that is, a combination of artificial light and graphic art that can even comprise a whole building… in which [Tom Wolfe] sees, rightly, a move 'from mere lettering to whole structures designed primarily as pictures or representational sculpture.'[25]

For Banham, this new building form followed a new architectural principle; an integrity of design based on the motivation of (commercial) necessity.

Coming from a different set of concerns, architects and theorists Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown were later to describe this roadside vernacular as heralding a new kind of architectural experience in their influential manifesto *Learning from Las Vegas*:

> Each medium has its day, and the rhetorical environmental statements of our time – civic, commercial, or residential – will come from media more purely symbolic, perhaps less static

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[23] Oldenburg made a drawing of this building for a sketch of the poster for his exhibition at the 1963 Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, but another image was used instead.

[24] Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, with an introduction by Anthony Vidler (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001) (originally published in 1971), pp. 114-115.

[25] Ibid.

> and more adaptable to the scale of the environment. The iconography and the mixed media of roadside commercial architecture will point the way, if we look.[26]

In contrast to Banham's understanding of commercial pop as an integral design principle, for Venturi and Scott Brown, the facade was something added on, a kind of ornament following the model of what the authors called the "decorated shed." For them, this model allowed for "a phenomenon of architectural communication" appropriate to spectacle culture.[27]

Both Banham's embrace of Pop Architecture and Venturi and Scott-Brown's attempt to redeem the vernacular in architecture, are related to, but not identical to what later came to be known as Post-Modernism. Banham deplored the academicism of the theoretical underpinnings as well as the historicism of Postmodernist explorations.[28] Venturi and Scott-Brown, more closely linked to Post-Modernism than Banham, themselves later criticized what

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[26] Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1972), p. 87.
[27] Venturi and Scott Brown, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p. 1. See Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future*, (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 223-225 and pp. 271-272, for a discussion of some of the contradictions in the relationship between Pop and Post-Modern architecture.
[28] For more on Banham's relationship to postmodernist architecture, see Whitely, pp. 268-283.

they saw as the superficiality of Postmodernist architecture in contradistinction to their own earlier populist critique of social planners.

In this new cityscape, a "fantastic" architecture of imaginary forms became, for Oldenburg, the next mode of exploration of urban experience. His proposals for images inscribed on a colossal scale directly onto the cityscape followed neither the commercial impulse of the real buildings of Pop Architecture celebrated by Banham, nor did they follow the sign systems of Postmodernist architecture. First and foremost, the signifying functions of the city as explored in Oldenburg's projects were not unidirectional. The idea of the cityscape as a field upon which one could inscribe one's own meaning, which we saw throughout Oldenburg's early work, was now literalized in the drawings and collages of his monuments project.

THE SEMIOTICS OF URBANISM

The warning for "anyone who wants to sketch a semiotics of the city," with which Roland Barthes opens

his 1967 essay "Semiology and Urbanism," could equally apply to those who aim to understand Oldenburg's Proposed Monuments: one "must be at once a semiologist, a geographer, a historian, an urbanist, an architect, and probably a psychoanalyst."[29] What Barthes gives us in this essay is a model of the city as a system of signification above all else, what he describes as the "infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse." Its complex multiplicity and therefore inherent resistance to fixed relations of meaning make the city a privileged semiological context, even "a poem." But the "language of the city," for Barthes, wasn't just an analogy to speech or writing. The city represented for Barthes a concrete inscription of the collective unconscious in space, a structure of signs and their relationships to linguistic analysis.

The "reader," according to this model, was conceived not as a passive inhabitant but as an active participant whose function, intentional or not, was on par with the

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[29] Roland Barthes, "Semiotics and Urbanism," in Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), pp.191-201. Originally from a colloquium at the University of Naples Institute of Architectural History in 1967. Reprinted in Joan Ockman,

more intentionally subversive practitioner of the Situationists' *dérive*. "The city is a discourse," Barthes contends, "and this discourse is actually a language: the city speaks to its inhabitants, we speak to our city… simply by inhabiting it, by traversing it, by looking at it."[30] "Human space in general," Barthes wrote, "has always been a signifying space," and historically, the conception of the city was primarily, indeed almost exclusively a signifying space, with the utilitarian conception of an urban distribution based on functions and usages that we take for granted appearing only much later.[31] By the 1960s, he argued, the elaboration of signification in the city had been neglected by urban planners. "The most important thing is not so much to multiply investigations or functional studies of the city," Barthes exhorts his readers, "as to multiply the readings of the city."[32]

According to Barthes' application of semiology, a degree of functionlessness is a prerequisite for an entity

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ed. *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, pp. 412-418.

[30] Ibid., p. 193.

[31] Ibid., p. 192.

[32] Ibid., p. 201.

to operate as a symbol. For Barthes, there exists a contradiction between signification and other orders of phenomena; consequently signification possesses an irreducible specificity. In other words, for a building, neighborhood, or system of roads, traffic patterns, etc., there is a distinction between their symbolic qualities as such as distinct from their function. For Oldenburg's Monuments, too, functionlessness was essential. It enabled him to invent fanciful and humorous juxtapositions without regard to practical constraints or consequences. The Proposed Colossal Monuments existed solely at their level of signification – they did not, unlike the Ugly Dog or Brown Derby buildings mentioned above, also sell records or serve food. Oldenburg observed:

> A friend who is a student of architecture at Yale told me that the kind of objects I choose are the closest thing to symbols available in our time. Architects find it difficult to design monuments today, he said, because they can't find appropriate symbols. Didn't Lewis Mumford say that there's no such thing as a monument in the modern world? The old symbol of the hero has disappeared.[33]

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[33] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 25; Architectural critic and historian Lewis Mumford was a very influential voice in New York City in the 1960s, particularly against the opposing urbanisms of Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses. He had just published *The City in History* in 1961 and was still writing his column "The Sky Line" for the *New Yorker* magazine until 1963 (and had been

In certain cases an explicit conflict can even arise between the function of a part of the city, a neighborhood or a district, and what Barthes' calls its semantic content or its semantic power. The example Barthes gives is the city of Rome, where this conflict between signification and function is played out in a very literal way, as artistic and architectural symbols are often assumed to take precedence over the needs and facilities of modern life.[34] This idea stands in contrast both to Banham's notion that, as in the restaurants or stores described above, "the building and the symbol are one and the same thing," as well as to the proposition of Venturi and Scott Brown's "decorated shed," wherein symbols are merely added on.

There also exists, according to Barthes, a conflict between signification and rationalism or reason,

> ... or at least between signification and that calculating reason which wants all the elements

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since 1931). See Robert Wojtowicz, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

It bears noting here that Yale was an important institution for Oldenburg. He had done his undergraduate work there, and continued his connection with the debates and activities, particularly of the English, Theater, and Architecture departments. Yale would later become the site of Oldenburg's first large-scale commission, the *Lipstick Monument*, to which we shall return later.

[34] Barthes, "Semiotics of Urbanism."

> of a city to be uniformly recuperated by planning, whereas it is increasingly obvious that a city is a fabric formed not of equal elements (we know that the opposition between the sign and the absence of sign, between the measurable degree and zero degree, constitutes one of the major processes in the elaboration of signification).[35]

Two neighborhoods, for example, objectively contiguous, can be radically split in the image of the city, insofar as they receive two different significations. Signification, in this case, is experienced in complete opposition to objective data.

Combining a textual or symbolic reading of the city with the embodied approach to the city from the earlier projects we looked at, Oldenburg addressed precisely how this signification of the city operated at the level of lived experience. In so doing, he could both respond to existing symbolizations and create new ones. Oldenburg's first step when considering any proposal for a new city was precisely to try to understand that city, not in its functions, but in the local meanings for its inhabitants. Harkening back to his earlier explorations of urban space, he studied the everyday life of the city as a physical and

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[35] Ibid., p. 192.

embodied space, walking around, shopping, eating, etc. – exploring it "psychogeographically," to return to the Situationists' term. "I use my body to feel and come to know a city," he later noted:

> During the first two or three weeks in a new city, I try to visit as many places as possible, and be taken around by people who live there and know the city. I listen to what they say about it. Also, I try to read every newspaper and magazine on sale. I sketch a lot. And I observe the food.[36]

Not surprisingly, it was New York, a city that Oldenburg knew well, that was the first to receive monument proposals. The 1960s in New York was a time of sweeping changes to the built urban environment being played out on a grand scale, particularly in arenas fraught with symbolism. There was the erection of iconic skyscrapers such as the Pan Am Building on Park Avenue in 1963 and the World Trade Center in Battery Park (begun 1966; first tower completed 1970); the razing of others, such as the old Penn Station (the demolition began in 1963 and finished in 1965); and the consequent founding of the New York City Landmarks Commission in 1964 and the passing

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[36] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 19

of the Landmarks Law in 1965.[37] There was also a revival of public sculpture in the late 1960s, in part encouraged by the Zoning Ordinance of 1961 that helped create open areas within dense high-rise neighborhoods.[38] The World's Fair in 1964 contributed huge temporary buildings (and a few structures that would remain, such as the giant unisphere) to the cityscape. At the same time as these debates over specific architectural monuments, there were massive projects of urban renewal for slum clearance and for new freeways, parks and office towers.[39] Oldenburg's projects sometimes addressed such forces explicitly and always did so implicitly.

Oldenburg's old neighborhood of the Lower East Side received one of the first proposals, the *Proposed Colossal Monument for Lower East Side, NYC: Ironing Board,* 1965.

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[37] See Gregory F. Gilmartin, *Shaping the City,* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995) for a history of development versus preservation in New York City from 1893 to the present day. This history often came down to just this debate between functionalism and symbolism.

[38] For more on public sculpture in New York in the 1960s, see Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture.*

[39] These kinds of projects were often also seen as a question of functionalism versus symbolism. Robert Moses' proposed Battery Bridge, for example, would surely have been efficient for traffic flow, but it was criticized and indeed ultimately rejected for imposing his "signature across the skyline." Gilmartin, *Shaping the City,* pp. 302-330 and 379-424. For more on Moses and his impact on New York, see Robert A. Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

As with many of Oldenburg's subjects, this proposal existed in several versions.[40] In one version, the landscape is suggested in just a few lines of crayon filled out with brief watercolor marks, giving it a sense of immediacy and spontaneity characteristic of many of Oldenburg's early proposal drawings. [Fig. 3-5] The view is looking up at the underside of the ironing board, with the iron just visible above. The scale is hard to determine, but it appears as though the looming shape follows the coastline just a bit inland with the tip of the board jutting out like a canopy well above even the tallest structures of the landscape below. Trees, buildings, even the smokestacks to the right of the front leg of the board are dwarfed, rising to less than half the height of the monument. A smaller version of the same subject [Fig. 3-6] includes a clearer depiction of the entire skyline, with each building not even as large as the iron perched on top of the ironing board. In contrast

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[40] Oldenburg returned again and again to the same subjects in both the same and different media, some subjects receiving twenty-five drawings or more. For more on Oldenburg's drawings, see Jamie C. Lee, *Claes Oldenburg Drawings in the Whitney Museum of American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002). On the treatment of the same subject across different media, see Haskell, *Object into Monument*.

to Oldenburg's earlier activities that had explored the streets and shops of the same neighborhood as they functioned in relation to embodied experience, this project rises out from the street, removing the viewer to the perspective of the symbolic implications of the neighborhood.

Commemorating the immigrants who lived and worked there, "[t]he ironing board over the Lower East Side echoes the shape of Manhattan island and also 'shields' the vanishing ghetto, commemorating the million miles of devoted ironing," Oldenburg wrote.[41] Indeed the long, narrow shape of the island, narrowing gradually toward the southern tip does perfectly resemble the shape of an ironing board. But this morphological relationship is not the end of its meaning. Throughout its history especially since the mid-19th century, the Lower East Side had been a community of teeming tenements housing mostly Eastern European, Jewish, Italian and later Chinese immigrants.[42] The immigrants, particularly the women, provided a cheap and convenient source of labor for the textile industry

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[41] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings.*
[42] Gilmartin.

and by the late 19th century, textile sweatshops were a dominant feature of the neighborhood. The monument, in this sense, bears the traditional content of commemoration.

Turning his attention uptown, Oldenburg devised a tongue-in-cheek response to the massive urban renewal programs that were destroying long-standing communities in New York and the civil unrest those programs provoked. Harlem in the 1960s had experienced several race riots, paralleling those in cities across America, most notably in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and in downtown Detroit.[43] First, in a verbal proposal, Oldenburg suggested entirely razing Harlem and replacing it with an exact replica. The *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park North: NYC: Teddy Bear*, 1965, and the *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park North: NYC: Teddy Bear (Thrown Version)*, 1965, [Figs. 3-7, 3-8] addressed the same issue. As in Barthes' description of geographically contiguous neighborhoods vastly separated in meaning, the *Teddy Bear* was situated at a symbolic borderline between

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[43] Specifically 1964, the year before the proposals, and 1968. Sharon Zukin, *The Culture of Cities*, p. 234-5.

the posh white Uptown neighborhoods and the troubled, mostly black, Harlem. As Oldenburg recalled:

> In the case of the *Teddy Bear*, an object with eyes was important. Looking up the park [Central Park] from the south, one casts the eyes a long distance in an area surprisingly empty in the midst of city congestion. The Bear's eyes are like a mirror of the huge, free glance, returning it like a tennis ball. I also imagined the staring Bear an incarnation of white conscience; as such, it fixes white New York with an accusing glance from Harlem but also one glassy-eyed from desperation. This may also be why I chose a toy with the "amputated" effect of teddy paws – handlessness signifies society's frustrating lack of tools.[44]

Again, as in the *Ironing Board*, indications of the bear's vast size are provided with a skyline barely sketched in at only a fraction of the Bear's height. The *Thrown Version* includes much more detail of the buildings behind, with the vast expanse of Central Park appearing as nothing more than the doll's bed or pillow. And like the *Ironing Board*, the drawing has the same spontaneous and personal appearance. But here, the reference to a cartoon style of drawing is also clearly evident with the outlines defined in bold black crayon and filled in with cheerful colors. Where the expressionistic quality conveys a sense

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[44] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 15

or fanciful invention, the comic style draws on both the humor and accessibility of the popular art form, contrasting with the political urgency of the subject.

Other Proposed Monuments were less directly connected to immediate social circumstances and began to play more loosely and more humorously with the levels of meaning inscribed in existing built forms. For Oldenburg, as for Barthes, the signification of his work is never a simple notion of symbolism that presumes a regular correspondence between signifiers and signifieds. By the time he wrote "Semiology and Urbanism," Barthes had begun to celebrate the free play of the signifier and its endless deferrals of meaning:

> It would be an absurd undertaking to attempt to elaborate a lexicon of the significations of the city by putting sites, neighborhoods, functions on one side, and significations on the other, or rather by putting on one side the sites articulated as signifiers and on the other the functions articulated as signifieds.[45]

Signifieds are always the signifiers for others and vice versa. Contemporary urban experience, in fact, according to Barthes, attributes an increasing importance to the *empty signified*. That is, like a grammatical structure,

the elements are understood as signifiers more by their own relative position than by their content. For example, in his famous 1964 essay on the Eiffel Tower, he described the monument as a signifier free of any fixed referent, a pure and empty sign, "ineluctable because it *means everything.*"[46] For Barthes, it was precisely the tower's very functionlessness that made it so powerful as a symbol.

Oldenburg's *Proposed Colossal Monument to Replace the Washington Obelisk, Washington, D.C.: Scissors in Motion,* 1967 (also called *Scissors Obelisk* which is inscribed on the drawing) [Fig. 3-9] takes advantage of this linguistic play of signifiers, replacing one symbolic entity with another. The original structure is already a monument in its most expected sense, a massive edifice, purely and explicitly functionless but for its signifying function. [Fig. 3-10]

Not completed until the end of the 19th century (1885), the obelisk was the end result of a one hundred year debate over what would be an appropriate symbolism

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[45] Barthes, "Semiotics and Urbanism," p. 193.

for the new nation.[47] The earliest proposal, in 1783, was for a more traditional "war hero" commemoration, an equestrian statue with General Washington in Roman robes, and with reliefs depicting his battle victories around the pedestal. This was followed by proposals for a huge outdoor mausoleum in the form of a stepped pyramid in 1799; an obelisk atop a stack of richly ornamented temples reaching 500 feet in 1836; and a Doric colonnade 100 feet high surrounding a rotunda with depictions of revolutionary heroes like a pantheon in 1845, among others.[48] The nature of the debates about the monument's symbolism reflected a fundamental struggle to find an image grand enough to represent the nation without evoking monarchal power or suggesting the worship of an individual over the ideal of a democratic collective.

The final design evolved, ironically, through a kind of absence of design, built by an engineer rather than an artist, and passively approved only due to its apparent

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[46] Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984).

[47] See Kirk Savage, "The Self-Made Monument: George Washington and the Fight to Erect a National Memorial," in *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, eds. Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 5-32.

lack of obvious "artistic" elements.[49] And it was just this withdrawal of explicit content that allows it to signify so many things. The Washington Monument was able to satisfy the desire for might and majesty, glorifying both the man and the nation, while at the same time embodying democratic ideals. As Kirk Savage has observed, the obelisk with its smooth marble exterior "seeems to serve as the perfect expression of union – a great mass coalesced into a single gesture that belies all dissension."[50] Almost immediately upon its completion, it was hailed as "characteristically American," embodying might, progress, and democracy as the tallest structure on earth, using the modern technology of the elevator to transport any and all visitors to the very top of its towering height.[51]

At the same time, the obelisk form establishes a link to the conquests of antiquity and serves to signify the present-day and continuing power and imperial might of the nation. The majestic, towering height, the pure clean

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., p. 22.
[50] Ibid., p. 6.
[51] Ibid., p. 25.

lines, and the gleaming white surface, as with the great tombs of the ancient pharaohs, symbolize a mighty state. And lastly, but never finally, the masculine connotation of the phallic form is undeniable, rising from the manicured lawn, dominating the landscape and view for a great distance.

But the Washington Monument had yet another meaning that interested Oldenburg. Despite its putative serenity, sincerity, and majesty, the Washington Monument had also become, for Oldenburg, a grand piece of what could only be called kitsch; so familiar as to become trite, trivial decoration – reproduced in miniature, as plastic souvenirs, on plates and t-shirts. Oldenburg's interest in this form and its multiple significations was evident in earlier sketches and objects that he collected.[52] In 1963, a porcelain miniature with gold embellishments, 9cm high, made in Japan, found its way into Oldenburg's quixotic object collection, along with several other examples of "patriotic kitsch," like souvenir ashtrays. [Fig. 3-11] Coosje Van Bruggen made this observation in the exhibition catalogue for the Mouse Museum:

> Through their irresistible sentimentality the pictorial ashtrays bring remote patriotic symbols closer to the people. At the same time the process of humanization and popularization devaluates the monuments, as, for example, when a cigarette is stubbed out on the Capitol, framed in a heart-shaped wreath of cherry blossoms.[53]

Oldenburg, in 1967, approached the Washington Monument with all of these meanings, forms, and histories already carried by the object. Rather than the subtle encroachment of kitsch, Oldenburg's giant pair of scissors sliced through all of the obelisk's layers of meanings, destroying them with its absurdity and satire, yet simultaneously maintaining them through the chain of signifiers. As one of his so-called "motion monuments," Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monument entailed having the scissor's blades slicing through the air with the handles sinking into and emerging out of the ground as the pair of scissors continually opened and closed. The juxtaposition of blades with such a phallic form must certainly evoke associations of emasculation. Certainly conceived as unbuildable, the moving blades weren't just humorous or satirical, but aggressive and menacing, even dangerous.

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[52] Van Bruggen, *Mouse Museum*, pp. 50-51.
[53] Ibid., p. 51.

Paralleling Barthes' description of a split between reason, reality, and any kind of functionalism on the one hand, and the symbolism of a structure on the other, if one of Oldenburg's proposals included a potential functional application, any conflict between this function and the symbolic value, as in what he called his "obstacle monuments," was granted to the symbolic value:

> [A]rchitects face the problem that whatever is built today is expected to provide some practical civic service – a place to take the baby buggy. My proposals, in keeping with older traditions, do *not* provide such service.
> ...
> On the contrary, many of my monuments reintroduce the idea of the monument as obstacle or disruption in the city. Many monuments, of course, are exactly that: the Arc de Triomphe, for one, is an aggressive obstacle in that traffic must be rerouted around it.[54]

One of the so-called obstacle monuments, also a motion sculpture, *Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, NYC: Bowling Balls*, 1967, envisioned bowling balls 10 or 12 stories tall rolling down Park Avenue. [Fig. 3-12] They would enter Grand Central Station before being transported back uphill through enlarged underground subway tunnels in a continuous cycle like a fountain.

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[54] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 25

Colored red and green like the traffic lights, or chrome to reflect the street, this monument responded to Oldenburg's direct experience as a user of the city:

> The balls are an attempt to make tangible my feeling that Park Avenue is a dangerous street where you can get run over and killed very easily. The balls intensify and monumentalize this danger. Imagine you're waiting at a cross street; you want to get across Park Avenue. One ball's just rolled by; another is bearing down not too far behind it; ball after ball keeps coming: they don't respect stop lights. You must be very quick and clever if you want to get across. I feel this about New York in general. To survive you must be fast, clever, and learn the rhythm of how to walk the streets, which has nothing to do with traffic lights.[55]

Another immediate association with Park Avenue in 1965 that Oldenburg addressed even more specifically in *The Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, New York: Good Humor Bar*, 1965 was the controversy surrounding the Pan Am building, erected in 1963. [Fig. 3-13] This huge skyscraper designed by Walter Gropius and Pietro Belluschi in the New Brutalist style was seen by many New Yorkers as an "obstacle monument" itself. It was located literally above the New York Central Building, former north building of the Grand Central Terminal (which dates from 1929),

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[55] Ibid., p. 26

completely obscuring the view on Park Avenue and, to many, desecrating a major icon of the city (or in hindsight, replacing one icon with another).[56] [Fig. 3-14]

The Pan Am building draws on the aesthetic of functionalism that so many artists, architects and urban planners had begun resisting, with its clean lines and optimized rentable area. The owners were also very conscious of the symbolic role of their building and intentionally sought a powerful statement of Modernism. The height and majesty of the building were symbols in their own right, but the architect and the ideology he could represent carried another desired association. The design was inspired by a never-built project of Le Corbusier (the unrealized skyscraper for Algiers, 1938-42) and by the Pirelli Tower in Milan, and the owners sought out the top names in High Modernism: "the first choice was Mies, who was my idol, second Corbu. They were followed by Wright, Gropius, Belluschi, Breuer, Goff, et al."[57]

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[56] James Trager, *Park Avenue, Street of Dreams*, (New York: Atheneum, 1990).

[57] Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins and David Fishman, *New York, 1960, Architecture and Urbanism between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (The Monacelli Press, 1995).

The Proposed Colossal Monument for Park Avenue, New York: Good Humor Bar, 1965 was depicted exactly in the Pan Am building's location.[58] In a gesture as aggressive as it was playful, an ice cream popsicle, slightly melted, was shoved upside-down, with the handle end up, stuffed to over-filling the space between the buildings except for a "bite" that was meant to allow for traffic flow. The humor inherent in the absurdity and incongruity of a gigantic obstacle positioned in the middle of a major thoroughfare of a modern metropolis is redoubled in its parodic reference to real events. Linking the piece directly to the architectural controversies surrounding the Pan Am building, Barbara Rose commented, "The point is, of course, that it is no more ridiculous to erect an Oldenburg monument than to build a giant skyscraper on top of Grand Central Terminal or put up a travesty of the Campidoglio at Lincoln Center."[59]

As Oldenburg observed, parody does not necessarily imply satire:

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[58] Oldenburg states that he had made drawings to fill the "gap" in Park Avenue before the Pan Am Buidling was put up. Haskell, *Object into Monument*, p. 18.
[59] Rose, p.108.

> Making parody is not the same thing as a satire. Parody in the classical sense is simply a kind of imitation, something like a paraphrase. It is not necessarily making fun of anything, rather it puts the imitated work into a new context.[60]

Linda Hutcheon, in her *Theory of Parody*, makes a similar case, defining parody as "repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity," and which can have a range of intent "from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing."[61] The humor of the parody is underscored in the cartoonish quality of the drawing creating, in essence, a caricature of the Pan Am building and by extension, of the late Modernist urbanism it represents.

Another set of Proposed Monuments relates to Barthes' proposition of an erotic dimension to the signification of the city. "The city," Barthes states, "essentially and semantically, is the site of our encounter with the other" and it is experienced as "the space in which certain subversive forces act and are encountered, forces of

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[60] "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Conversation," Bruce Glaser, *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), pp. 20-24.
[61] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art forms*, (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p. 6.

rupture, ludic forces."[62] For Barthes, this experience is specific to the urban center, constituted by its exclusion of other spaces:

> [the city] center was always experienced semantically as the privileged site where the other is and where we ourselves are the other, and the site where one plays. On the contrary, everything which is not the center is precisely what is not ludic space, everything which is not alterity: family, residence, identity.[63]

Barthes includes among elements of "the metaphorical chain which substitutes for Eros" the favorite subjects of Oldenburg's proposals, "food and shopping," which are "actually erotic activities in a consumer society."[64]

Oldenburg's *Proposed Colossal Monument for Times Square, NYC: Banana*, 1965, would have a giant banana erected in the middle of Times Square.[65] [Fig. 3-15] Times Square was certainly the symbolic center of New York's "ludic forces" as Barthes had envisioned. By the 1960s, the name "Times Square" had become virtually synonymous with a kind of erotic adventure, urban anonymity, and big

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[62] Barthes, "Semiotics and Urbanism," p. 194.
[63] Ibid., p. 195.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Originally drawn for the cover of the architecture magazine *Domus*, several other versions were subsequently produced.

city abandon.[66] Its literal function as both New York's red light district and theater district, housing the range from Broadway musicals to striptease halls to coin-operated peep shows to street prostitution, dated back to at least the 1920s.[67]

Oldenburg's *Banana* itself carries multiple meanings. The reference to a phallus is evident in its shape and position. The half-peeled banana also alluded to a striptease, especially evident in the maquette, which uses a fabric with torn edges for the half-removed peel. [Fig. 3-16] This proposal comes closer to a feasible public sculpture than the others I have discussed, being basically a sculpture on a pedestal destined for the middle of a traffic island. But even so, its colossal scale is flagged, in the drawing, by its base covering more than a third of the boulevard, and the indications of central Manhattan buildings on either side of the street coming to just the same height as the banana.

It is London that receives the preponderance of Oldenburg's sexually suggestive proposals. London struck

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[66] On the culture of Times Square and its impact on the city, see Zukin, pp. 133-142.

Oldenburg as a city characterized by an erotic charge existing side by side with sexual repression. One of Oldenburg's proposals, for example, *Lipsticks in Piccadilly Circus, London*, 1966 replaced the *Fountain of Eros* in Piccadilly Circus with a giant lipstick and later a drill bit that would move up and down. [Figs. 3-17, 3-18] Like the *Washington Monument Proposal*, this was another explicit parody of an existing symbolic structure. In a striking acknowledgement of Barthes' description of the erotic and ludic forces in urban signification at the heart of the city center, a monument to sexual love and the pleasures of life takes pride of place squarely in the middle of a bustling city center, the crossroad that marks the nexus of theater, commerce, traffic, etc. Oldenburg described the *Piccadilly Lipstick* as "a non-idealistic symbol meant to substitute for the old, idealist symbol of love."[68]

Another London project was the *Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River: Thames "Ball"*, 1967. [Fig. 3-19, 3-20] In two versions of this proposal, Oldenburg used

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[67] Ibid.
[68] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 22.

postcard images of London as the urban background over which he drew his monument in crayon and watercolor. A postcard is a particular evocation of the site it depicts, already a fantasy construction, packaging an ideal version of the site for tourists. The London postcards used here depict the majestic Houses of Parliament along the river bank. Directly in front of the buildings obscuring their view, Oldenburg positioned two giant copper balls based on the form of toilet tank floats aloft in the river, affixed by long rods to the center of one of the bridges.

The waterway was another important urban metaphor for Barthes:

> For example, many investigations have emphasized the imaginary function of the watercourse which, in any city, is experienced as a river, a canal, a body of water. …the cities which offer the most resistance to signification, and which moreover often present difficulties of adaptation for their inhabitants, are precisely the cities lacking water, the cities without seaside, without a body of water, without a lake, without a river, without a watercourse; all these cities offer difficulties of life, of legibility.[69]

Not truly a river, but a tidal estuary, the Thames has the unusual feature of rising and falling in its banks daily up

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[69] Barthes, "Semiotics and Urbanism," p. 195

to 16 ft. The motion of the river struck Oldenburg so he suggested a "motion" sculpture in that the float would rise and fall with the ebbing and flowing of the tides. Again, Oldenburg took the symbolism already invested in the river and spun out a chain of signifiers.

Literally, the river was London's ancient reason for settlement – the source of fertile land for agriculture and an important tributary for transport and commerce. Present-day, it is still a busy thoroughfare. And at this level, the *Thames Ball* would also be a so-called "obstacle monument" where "it could be a sport for ships and boats to try and dodge it."[70] But its imaginary function is equally powerful. Metaphorically, the river is the life-blood of the city, its very reason for existence in history. Oldenburg's *Thames "Ball"* uses the motion of natural forces to signify the city as a living being, the rising and falling of the water reconfigured as the city's breathing. "...The going in and coming out of the tide was always on my mind as I walked the streets of London," Oldenburg wrote, "My monuments within the city are keyed to this movement, bringing the movement into the city – like breathing on a

large scale."[71] At the same time, the humor in this piece lies in Oldenburg's transformation of the sentimental metaphor of the city's "life-force" into the base humor of his toilet reference, so that the going in and coming out of the tide is made analogous not to breathing but to flushing.

THE COLOSSAL, THE MOUMENTS, AND ARCHITECTURE

"Scale" was a central trope in the art world of the 60s as well as in architecture. Critics remarked on its appearance in a range of work and museum exhibitions were devoted to the topic.[72] Scale is a quality apprehended in direct relationship to the human body and to space. "Scale," Judith Wechsler noted, "is not just the extent of surface or mass, it is also the interaction with space."[73] This is reminiscent of Tony Smith's anecdote about his six-foot steel cube, recounted by Robert Morris in "Notes

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[70] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 26
[71] Ibid.
[72] For example, Barbara Rose, "Blowup – The Problem of Scale in Sculpture," *Art in America*, 56, no. 4 (July-August, 1968), pp. 83-91; Sidney Tillim, "Scale and the Future of Modernism," *Artforum* (October 1967), pp. 14-18; Lucy Lippard, "Escalation in Washington," *Art International* 12, no. 1 (January 1968), pp. 42-46; Judith Wechsler, "Why Scale?" *Art News* 66, no. 4 (Summer 1967), pp. 32-37; and the exhibition catalogue, Eleanor Green, *Scale as Content* (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1967).
[73] Wechsler, "Why Scale?"

on Sculpture, Part 2": "Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer? A: I was not making a monument. Q: then why didn't you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top? A: I was not making an object."[74] In Oldenburg's soft sculptures, where he takes objects we ordinarily handle and use on a scale greatly subordinate to us and reconfigures them as our equals, we are confronted with these objects and forced to relate to them in as if body to body.

Architectural scale is on another order of relation to the body; defining and constructing spaces as used and occupied by it. The Proposed Colossal Monuments go beyond the scale of the monument, beyond architectural scale, and even beyond "feasible" scale. We might imagine Oldenburg, who is making *both* object *and* monument, paraphrasing Tony Smith, with "I was not making a sculpture," and "I was not making a building."

Here, Jacques Derrida's discussion of the colossal as developed in *Truth in Painting* can be useful to distinguish

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[74] Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part II," *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 2 (October 1966), pp. 20-23; reprinted in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*," (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1993), p. 11.

the scale of the fantasy proposals from built forms. The scale of the colossal, in Derrida's usage, is different from all other kinds of representation. Where the architectural form of the column, the colossus' counterpart both historically and etymologically, is moderate, and measurable, the colossal comes to signify the gigantic, and that which is beyond gigantic, indeed beyond measure. The colossal, for Derrida, is explicitly associated with "the fictional space of representation" rather than with built structures: "The dimension of the effigy would have the fictional effect of de-measuring… It would de-cise, would liberate the excess of cise."[75] That is, the scale of the colossal is such that it is beyond the scale of the real and can exist only in the fictional realm.

Derrida's study is linked to his notion of the parergon, the limiting and framing devices of a work of art. Like Derrida's colossus, Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monuments defy the expectations of parergon. They are in excess of man-made structures, "almost too large for any

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[75] The translator here uses "cise" for the French "taille" to indicate its double meaning of both "size" and "cut" as in cut of cloth or wood. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 121.

presentation," or at least, for which the presentation is always inadequate.[76] As Oldenburg said of his monuments, "they enlarge [objects] so much that they cease to be visible as such…."[77] It is their *excess*, or *in*-visibility that makes them colossal, rather than merely large.

The same can be said of the "sublime," a philosophical concept borrowed from Kant that assumed an elevated status in art critical and art historical discourse in the 1960s and 70s, mostly associated with the discussion of earth art.[78] While "there is no good example of the sublime in the products of human art," Derrida writes, "bad" examples include the columns and edifices of traditional monuments.[79] In the unbuilt Monuments, Oldenburg once remarked, "The fantasy of scale has not succumbed to reality."[80] Furthermore, Derrida specifies that the colossal can only be apprehended from a particular distance – we cannot be permitted to approach

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[76] Ibid., p. 125
[77] Oldenburg, "Architecture and Sculpture: A Dialogue."
[78] For example, Henry Sayre, "Open Space: Landscape and the Postmodern Sublime," in *The Object of Performance*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 211-246. See also, John Beardsley, *Earthworks and Beyond* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1984); and Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002).
[79] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 122
[80] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 34

and measure, nor back away to what feels like a safe distance. Since our access to Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monuments is only through the drawing, collage, or models, what Derrida calls its "fictional representation," our perspective is fixed.

Several of Oldenburg's Proposals were what he called obstacle monuments:

> Now that's what I would like to do with a civic sculpture. For example, to have a promenade of some kind, and things happening on the street to the people and traffic jams,... That seems to me might be a good, in the long run that would make people think more about the world as an art object than an art object as separate, put into a museum.[81]

The earliest of the what he called "obstacle monuments," the *Monument to Immigration in New York Harbor*, 1961, existed only as a verbal description.[82] It consisted of a proposed reef to be placed in the center of New York Harbor. The monument would create itself over time according to the principles of entropy, accumulating wreck after wreck as ship after ship sailed in, hit the reef and sank. The final form would be a huge pile of rusty and

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[81] Oldenburg, "Architecture and Sculpture: A Dialogue."
[82] Oldenburg *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 13.

broken ship hulls blocking the harbor and visible from a distance.

The *Monument to Immigration* was also intended as a challenge and a corrective to the already existing giant symbolic structure in the harbor, the classic monument to the idealized American immigrant experience, the Statue of Liberty. "What occurred for most of the immigrants was a disaster," Oldenburg said; "America simply wasn't what they'd expected."[83] The impetus for the proposal was a competition for a monument to Ellis Island in conjunction with the World's Fair to be held in New York in 1964. World's Fairs have been, arguably, the key site historically for monuments, fantasy architecture, and unbuilt proposals. These have been, without exception, affirmative expressions, either of the present culture — national and patriotic — or of a future utopia of technological progress and power. Oldenburg, along with Robert Whitman, Billy Klüver and others, was considering the idea of staging a big anti-fair or, tongue-in-cheek,

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[83] Ibid.

"no-fair".[84] Thus, Oldenburg's proposal became an anti-monument for an anti-fair.

Another category of the Monument Proposals was for ostensibly inhabitable or usable structures, more a project of fantastic architecture than one of monuments. Take, for example, *Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park, NYC: Moving Pool Balls*, 1967. [Fig. 3-21] Another motion sculpture, this one comprised gigantic, brightly-colored pool balls rolling loose around Central Park, bumping against the trees and the buildings at the side of the park. At one stage, Oldenburg proposed that these could house civic offices or residential apartments. They would be motorized "like the gigantic, moving structures at Cape Kennedy" shifting and "crawling all the time" so that everyday the city resident would discover the balls in a different position. One effect would be to transform the park into a pool table. And not just the park. He also suggested that the whole city of Washington, D.C. be built this way, and he commented that "it would be fun to

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[84] Ibid.

have a constant movement of such houseballs back and forth across the whole United States."[85]

Often the proposed inhabitable or usable edifices were "pleasure palaces" or leisure centers like the *Proposed Colossal Monument for Battersea Park, London: Drum Set*, 1966. [Fig. 3-22] The drums were envisioned as auditoriums with the slope of the cymbals serving as observation roofs. "The colossal version of the Drum Set is rationalized as a pleasure palace for concerts, circuses, etc…. The sides (or hides) of the drums could be rolled up in the summer to let in the weather; when down, they would glow with inside light like the drums in old Hawaiian bands."[86] The *Proposed Monument for Oslo: Frozen Ejaculation (Ski Jump)*, 1966 [Fig. 3-23] was another proposed leisure center or "pleasure palace." For this, Oldenburg proposed a "frozen ejaculation," replacing the existing ski-jump with a "saucer-shaped front of a penis set on end like a radar receiver" with an oval hole in the center through which the sky would be visible.[87] At the

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[85] Haskell, *Object into Monument*, p.103.
[86] Ibid., p. 55.
[87] "Some Program Notes About Monuments, Mainly," Chronology and exhibition notes at Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, April 26, 1967.

bottom of the hill an enormous tear-shaped form made of glass would appear, from a distance, as a drop of sperm from the penis ski jump. Oldenburg proposed that the glass form should house a sports arena for skating tournaments and the like. Again, Oldenburg was addressing the signification already inscribed in the Nordic landscape – laden with associations of athletic endeavor, health, masculine sexuality. "There is an obvious connection between winter sports and sex: I mean, the cruelness of the knife action on ice, as well as the ski jump come."[88]

Clearly these were not endeavors with actual functionalist intentions subject to considerations such as feasibility studies, analyses of structural integrity, the impact of weather, etc.. But with these proposed "practical" applications, Oldenburg seems to be entering into the arena of other utopian architectural projects of the late modern period that proposed alternatives for the future, however unlikely, rather than just critiques of the present.

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[88] Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, p. 18.

"Architecture is the simplest means of articulating time and space, of modulating reality, of engendering dreams," Ivan Chtcheglov wrote in his 1953 "Formulary for a New Urbanism."[89] In Constant's utopian *city of tomorrow*, based on the *dérive*, all inhabitants were engaged in a perpetual drift through space. Drawing on pop imagery from science fiction combined with a celebration of consumerist impulses like expendability, the Archigram group in England developed fantastic proposals for housing, clothing, furnishings, appliances, transportation, even whole cities – Living Pods, Drive-in Houses, inflatable furniture.[90] The *Walking City* devised by Ron Herron in 1964, "prefabbed apartments hoisted into position on a skeletal frame, to be plugged into prepared utilities,"[91] was like a high-tech, science fiction version of Oldenburg's *Moving Pool Balls*. [Fig. 3-24]

But the differences between Oldenburg's Proposed Colossal Monuments and the Utopian avant-garde were more

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[89] Ivan Chtcheglov (published under the pen name Gilles Ivain), "Formulary for a New Urbanism" [1953] translated from *Internationale Situationiste*, no. 1, June 1958, in Andreotti and Costas, eds. *Theory of the Dérive*, p. 15.
[90] See Peter Cook, et al., *Archigram*, (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).
[91] Ibid., p. 48.

significant than the similarities. Oldenburg's *Moving Pool Balls*, for example, were more discursive than they were functional, and more disruptive than they were utopian. Oldenburg's Monument Proposals, like his earlier work, only make sense in dialectic relation to the existing symbolic structures of the built environment. In effect, Constant's city of tomorrow turns the premise of the dérive on its head, negating it. The dérive by definition consists of fragmented and chance encounters within the social realities of the existing city, experiences that reveal the city to the practitioner and thereby provide the practitioner the potential to alter it. To create a city of "continuous dérive" is to erase the dialectic and thus any meaning to the event. Similarly, with Oldenburg's Monuments, to build them, as we shall see in the next chapter, is to change their signifying function in relation to the already built and already signifying city.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion: The *Lipstick* and Beyond

Starting in 1969 and continuing to the present, Oldenburg, joined by his partner and wife Coosje Van Bruggen in 1976, began to build large, outdoor public sculpture in earnest along with a series of what he called "feasible" proposals for large, but no longer colossal, public sculptures.[1] Once they were built, the monuments became something qualitatively different from the earlier fantasy proposals. The built sculptures no longer engaged the city as an open proposition, a discursive field that could be both read and re-written, but became objects fitting within the existing built environment.

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[1] Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1994).

To build large sculpture in public spaces is to enter a field of complex considerations and compromises quite different from the studio practice of drawings, watercolor and collages, or even the kinds of "public" installations and performances Oldenburg was mounting in the early 60s. First of all, there are pragmatic demands of designing the physical structure and implementing its technical production. Secondly, "public art," however it is defined, has a civic role, subject to the logistics of patronage, local political sensitivities, access to space, and more.[2]

The most striking difference between the fantasy proposals and the proposals concretely realized was the great reduction in scale and the subsequent relationship with the already built architecture. They were in danger of becoming and often did become what Oldenburg himself had criticized in the 1967 MoMA panel, that is "decorative" sculpture "in front of" the "real" space of the architecture. This reflected a tendency of the public

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[2] The definition of what constitutes "public art" is a contested one: does it mean art sponsored by public funding, art with a "public" content or intention, or does it mean simply that the work occupies a "public" space and if so, how is that defined? For more on this issue, see Harriet F. Senie and Sally Webster, eds. *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context and Controversy*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992)

art revival of the late 1960s that provided a specific context for the development of this new work. As Harriet Senie observed, "by and large… the commission of this new public art in the form of individual object sculptures was based in the old tradition of the monument in the square…,"[3] although the "square" was more likely to be a forecourt in front of an office building, rather than the traditional piazza.

Take, for example, Oldenburg and Van Bruggen's 1994 *Inverted Collar and Tie* in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. [Fig. 4-1] This piece was explicitly intended to take its place as the sculpture "usually placed in front of each building," as Oldenburg acknowledges, in the practice of "the skyscrapers as an emblem of power."[4] Far from disrupting the spaces of the city or engaging with the discourse of the existing urban organization in an active way, the sculpture "fits in", both institutionally and physically, to the existing built environment. The subject of collar and tie is an affirmative reference to the standard uniform of male bank and office workers

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[3] Harriet Senie, *Contemporary Public Sculpture: Tradition, Transformation, and Controversy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford

typically using the neighborhood and also represented some of the people participating in the decision to approve the sculpture.[5] The bird's eye view, selected for publication in Oldenburg and Van Bruggen's own "definitive" catalogue of the large-scale projects stikingly reveals the relationship between the existing built forms and the proportionally tiny sculpture nestled politely in the forecourt of the Deutsche Genossenschaftsbank building. The *Inverted Collar and Tie* is hard to even locate amidst the towering forms of the modern skyline – a striking contrast to the kind of scale indicated in the Colossal Proposals. [Fig. 4-2] No longer colossal, the sculpture takes its place in a clearly passive role in relation to the existing built forms of the urban landscape and the meanings inscribed therein.

Many of the large-scale projects were located in sculpture parks, an intentionally neutral space relative to the organization of everyday activities, thus even further removing them from any active engagement with

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University Press, 1992), p. 93.

[4] Oldenburg and Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, p. 551.

[5] More on the submission and approval process as well as the technical process of the construction can be found in *Large-scale Projects*, pp. 536-551.

their context. The *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, 1988, [Fig. 4-3] for example, was built for the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden between the Walker Art Center and the Guthrie Theater, a site described by Martin Friedman then director of the Walker Art Center as "spacious areas for works of art, a reflecting pool, a conservatory for permanent and temporary horticulrual displays, and a pedestrian bridge that would like the garden to Loring Park…."[6]

In 1969, however, it was still possible to make a radical reading of the unbuilt Proposed Colossal Monuments. Social critic Herbert Marcuse saw the monuments as a "truly subversive" gesture with the potential to radically disrupt the system.[7] The use of objects from popular culture and everyday life, for Marcuse, was not just seen as a convenient source of subject matter or shapes sharing formal parallels with their surroundings. On the contrary, monumentalizing the banal was seen as a serious intrusion on the Modernist values of rational architecture and the relations of power

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[6] Martin Friedman, *Design Quarterly* p. 141, 1988, cited in Oldenburg and Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, p. 434.

[7] Herbert Marcuse, "Commenting on Claes Oldenburg's Proposed Monuments for New York City," *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* (New Haven), no. 12 (1969), p. 75-76.

inscribed in urban organization. "If you could ever imagine a situation in which this could be done," Marcuse famously commented, regarding the realization of any of the Proposed Colossal Monuments, the year before the first large sculpture was erected,

> you would have the revolution. If you could really envisage a situation where at the end of Park Avenue there would be a huge Good Humor ice cream bar and in the middle of Times Square a huge banana, I would say...this society had come to an end. ...There is a way in which this kind of satire, of humor, can indeed kill. I think it would be one of the most bloodless means to achieve a radical change.[8]

Marcuse described the High Art and Mass Culture dialectic in his essay "The Affirmative Character of Culture," where he formulated his conception of what he called the "cultural sphere." Here Marcuse draws on the paradoxical dialectic of the classical (German) aesthetic, which projects a utopian realm of art and culture beyond the empirical world of economic and social activity. From such a position, art can establish a powerful critical and negative value through

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[8] Herbert Marcuse in an interview at Cambridge in 1968, quoted in Alan Shestack, *The Lipstick Comes Back,* essay by Susan P. Casteras, exhibition catalogue, Yale University Art Gallery, Oct. 17-Nov. 30, 1974, published on the occasion of the re-installation of the Lipstick Monument at the university.

its capacity to condemn existing conditions. At the same time, however, it forfeits any possibility of direct social or political intervention by virtue of its disjunction or autonomy from society and history.[9] Marcuse recognized this paradox as inherent in Oldenburg's proposals themselves: "But the trouble is," he wrote, "you must already have the radical change in order to get it built and I don't see any evidence of that. And the mere drawing wouldn't hurt and that makes it harmless. But just imagine that overnight it would suddenly be there."[10]

To a certain extent, Marcuse was instrumental in testing this assessment. Triggered by Marcuse's comments, a group of students at Yale School of Architecture formed the Colossal Keepsake Foundation to commission the *Lipstick (Ascending) On Caterpillar Tracks*, 1969, (also called *The Lipstick Monument*). [Fig. 4-4] The *Lipstick* becomes not only a testing ground for the Monuments project, but, inadvertently, a kind of model for the shift from the "Colossal

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[9] Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in *The Sixties Without Apology*, edited by Sohnya Sayres et al, (Minneaplois: University of

Proposals" to the "Large-Scale Projects." For the original installation, the students organized in deliberate secrecy in order to create an absolute surprise: Marcuse's "overnight it would suddenly be there." On May 15, 1969 a group of students from the University, along with Oldenburg, transported the pieces of the 3500 pound, 24 ft. high object in a procession reminiscent of a Happening. Erected in the Bienecke Plaza surrounded by the the rare books library, the president's office, and a World War I memorial building, the *Lipstick* drew crowds of spectators. A large parchment scroll of a Deed of Gift was ceremoniously presented by Oldenburg to the Secretary of the University.[11] The event was a Happening, a political act, and a social activity, all recorded in a documentary film.[12] [Fig. 4-5]

The sculpture consisted of a giant lipstick in a bright orange color emblematic of contemporary pop fashion. It was made of stuffed and sewn vinyl that could

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Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 196.
[10] Marcuse, quoted in Casteras, *The Lipstick Comes Back*.
[11] Vincent Scully, "The Lipstick at Yale: A Memoir," in Oldenburg and Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*, pp. 205-208.

inflate and deflate out the top of the tube and affixed atop wooden caterpillar tracks of the sort used in tractors, military tanks, or (more to the point) transport vehicles for missiles and rockets. In the context of anti-Vietnam War sentiment on campus, and the impending co-education of the campus, the double themes of violence and sex, ever present in Oldenburg's work, were brought to the fore.[13] The large phallic shape and reference to military machinery conveyed the masculine associations of violence and war, while the lipstick at the same time entailed cosmetic associations with the feminine. It was to be an active monument as well: the original *Lipstick* model included a hand pump that spectators could operate, inflating and deflating the lipstick on demand (although this was never successfully implemented.)

While Barbara Rose, for example, among others have emphasized the literal reading of protest against the Vietnam war, the attitude of defiance and satire in the

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[12] Colossal Keepsake, No. 1, 1969. Documentary film by Peter Hentschel and Bill Richardsom, May 1969, New Haven. 16mm, black and white.
[13] See Oldenburg "America: War and Sex, Etc." *Arts Magazine*, v. 41, No. 8 (Summer 1967) pp. 33-34.

work was probably more generalized than that.[14] Architectural historian Vincent Scully, who was a member of the original Colossal Keepsake Corporation, insisted later that this was not a central preoccupation of those involved.[15] This was a period of great student activity and protest at the university, in part over the war but also over issues including various internal policies, the lack of student financial support, university facilities, and more, amidst a general attitude of change and self-analysis. There was also a ludic, even carnivalesque dimension to campus protest at this time, lending a sense of immediacy, freedom, and play to the event of the sculpture's installation.

Oldenburg's notebook pages from that time give dozens of other associations for the *Lipstick*: from the notation "TATLIN," a reference to Vladimir Tatlin's monument to the Third International in Moscow, 1920; to the Harkness Tower and the Soldiers and Sailors monument, two prominent architectural memorials already existing not far from the

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[14] Barbara Rose, "Oldenburg Joins the Revolution," *New York Magazine* (June 2, 1969), p. 54.

[15] Scully, "The Lipstick at Yale: A Memoir." Oldenburg also denies a direct anti-Vietnam war content, but acknowledges a general atmosphere of protest. Conversation with the author, June 15 2002.

location of the *Lipstick*; to "weekend," implying festive release and sexuality (Yale was at the time still an all-male campus); and "cat" for the caterpillar treads.[16] In a small pamphlet, "Notes on the Lipstick Monument," produced in conjunction with the installation, Oldenburg also noted:

> It also suggests an Ionic column (upside down), a Chicago fireplug, a drainpipe or the famous tower of Tatlin for Red Square... In its changes, rising, the Lipstick imitates the male and female organ — it is a bisexual object. The cat track need not be read as a reference to war machinery — the piece was originally conceived to crawl its way down stairs to the site.[17]

Another notation described it as "a monument for Yale or at odds with it." But the reality of building a monument "at odds with" its site, its sponsors, or its intitutions, eventually proved unsustainable. The original *Lipstick Monument* stood for less than a year. The soft vinyl tube was replaced with a metal version within a week. [Fig. 4-6] Within months, paint, layers of campus posters, weather conditions, student use and vandalism brought the sculpture to the verge of collapse and disintegration. By the spring of 1970, Oldenburg had

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[16] Casteras, *The Lipstick Comes Back*.

to arrange for its removal. The first of the "feasible" monuments, though an unqualified success as an art project, turned out not to be, in fact, all that feasible.

In 1974, however, an altered version of the monument was reinstalled at Yale on permanent loan. The acquisition was prompted by Alan Shestack, a new director of the Yale Art Gallery, and backed by the administration under new conditions. This time, it was to be installed in a much less public part of the campus, in a plaza of a gated residential college, eventually chosen to be Morse College where Vincent Scully was Master. The wooden tracks and other parts made of fragile materials were replaced with more long-lasting, substantial and expensive materials: Cor-Ten steel, aluminum, and cast resin, and painted with polyeurethane enamel. And Oldenburg donated a limited edition of Lipstick lithographs for a permanent fund for the monument's upkeep and repair. [Fig. 4-7] As Scully observed, "the whole thing look[ed]… more fixed in place, less likely to move, less like a fiesty little vehicle and more like an Ionic column upside down."[18]

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[17] Claes Oldenburg, "Notes on the Lipstick Monument," back page.
[18] Scully, "The Lisptick at Yale: A Memoir," p. 208.

Oldenburg even admonished those gathered at the dedication to remove their shoes if using the base as a podium from which to speak,[19] which was in any case unlikely given the sculptures new location and relationship to its surroundings.

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The new model for Oldenburg's work evidenced in the shift between the two versions of the *Lipstick Monument* had far-reaching consequences for Oldenburg's work and marked a change in the fundamental relationship of his art to the spaces of the city and their organization of everyday life. This shift corresponded to broader changes in the art world, in the social and political climate, and in Oldenburg's personal and professional life, all seeming to pivot around 1969. Socially, 1969 marked a sea change in an era of social and political unrest and change. After the uprisings in Paris and around Europe in 1968, social ideals became less optimistic and utopian and more cynical. In Oldenburg's personal life, 1969 was also the year he separated from Pat Mucha, (divorcing the following

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[19] Ibid.

year.) In terms of Oldenburg's professional life, the Museum of Modern Art in New York mounted a comprehensive "retrospective" of his work in 1969, though he was just 40 years old. This institutional recognition and fame engendered more commissions for built monuments from cities and corporate headquarters. Indeed, to continue to build later sculptures would necessitate substantial institutional and popular support.[20] Modified and compromised, these proved not to be threatening to society as Marcuse had predicted. On the contrary, rather than attempting to address their context with the possibility of effecting change, the later work adapted itself to the social and political constraints of its surroundings.

While many artists took up the more radical implications of the exploration of space in the 1970s, from Earth Art to installation, Oldenburg moved away from the kinds of explorations inherent in his earlier work. His later work tended to take the city as a given, a fixed entity rather than a space actively produced by its inhabitants as in Lefebvre's formulation, or as a semiotic

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[20] Specific information on issues such as the approval process, funding, and technical implementation of several examples of the later

field upon which new meanings could be inscribed as suggested in Barthes' analysis. Oldenburg's sculptures now aimed to fit in to their surroundings rather than responding to their context and activating it. Even as the familiarity of the subject contrasted incongruously with its unfamiliar scale and texture was still humorous, the spatial impact of these works tended to be fundamentally more traditional. They either occupied a space clearly separate from the viewer, as in a classic sculpture, or, on the contrary, were available to the viewer for resting, providing shade, climbing or playing, etc.

As history is always inscribed in the present, the new work has tended to rewrite its predecessors retroactively, positioning them as mere precursors to later developments. To return to this work and reestablish its relationship to the real spaces of everyday life in the 1960s is to reexamine our assumptions about Pop Art and its role in later explorations of space and everyday life.

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work are given in Oldenburg and Van Bruggen, *Large-Scale Projects*.

Appendix I

Claes Oldenburg, *Statement on Art*, 1961

First published for the exhibition catalogue, *Environments, Situations, Spaces*, Martha Jackson Gallery, May-June 1961. Revised for publication in Oldenburg's own *Store Days: Documents from the Store (1961) and Ray Gun Theater (1962)*, New York: Something Else Press, 1967.

I am for an art that is political-erotical-mystical, that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.

I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all, an art given the chance of having a starting point of zero.

I am for an art that embroils itself with the everyday crap & still comes out on top.

I am for an art that imitates the human, that is comic, if necessary, or violent, or whatever is necessary.

I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.

I am for an artist who vanishes, turning up in a white cap painting signs or hallways.

I am for an art that comes out of a chimney like black hair and scatters in the sky.

I am for an art that spills out of an old man's purse when he is bounced off a passing fender.

I am for the art out of a doggy's mouth, falling five stories from the roof.

I am for the art that a kid licks after peeling away the wrapper.

I am for an art that joggles like everyones knees, when the bus traverses an excavation.

I am for art that is smoked, like a cigarette, smells, like a pair of shoes.

I am for art that flaps, like a flag, or helps blow noses, like a handkerchief.

I am for art that is put on and taken off, like pants, which develops holes, like socks, which is eaten, like a piece of pie, or abandoned with great contempt, like a piece of shit.

I am for art covered with bandages. I am for art that limps and rolls and runs and jumps. I am for art that comes in a can or washes up on the shore.

I am for art that coils and grunts like a wrestler. I am for art that sheds hair.

I am for art you can sit on. I am for art you can pick your nose with or stub your toes on.

I am for art from a pocket, from deep channels of the ear, from the edge of a knife, from the corners of the mouth, stuck in the eye or worn on the wrist.

I am for art under the skirts, and the art of pinching cockroaches.

I am for the art of conversation between the sidewalk and a blind mans metal stick.

I am for the art that grows in a pot, that comes down out of the skies at night, like lightning, that hides in the clouds and growls. I am for art that is flipped on and off with a switch.

I am for art that unfolds like a map, that you can squeeze, like your sweetys arm, or kiss, like a pet dog. Which expands and squeaks, like an accordion, which you can spill your dinner on, like an old tablecloth.

I am for an art that you can hammer with, stitch with, sew with, paste with, file with.

I am for an art that tells you the time of day, or where such and such a street is.

I am for an art that helps old ladies across the street.

I am for an art of the washing machine. I am for the art of a government check. I am for the art of last wars raincoat.

I am for the art that comes up in fogs from sewer-holes in winter. I am for the art that splits when you step on a frozen puddle. I am for the worms art inside the apple. I am for the art of sweat that develops between crossed legs.

I am for the art of neck-hair and caked tea-cups, for the art between the tines of restaurant forks, for the odor of boiling dishwater.

I am for the art of sailing on Sunday, and the art of red and white gasoline pumps.

I am for the art of bright blue factory columns and blinking biscuit signs.

I am for the art of cheap plaster and enamel. I am for the art of worn marble and smashed slate. I am for the art of rolling cobblestones and sliding sand. I am for the art of slag and black coal. I am for the art of dead birds.

I am for the art of scratchings in the asphalt, daubing at the walls, I am for the art of bending and kicking metal and breaking glass, and pulling at things to make them fall down.

I am for the art of punching and skinned knees and sat-on bananas. I am for the art of kids' smells. I am for the art of mama-babble.

I am for the art of bar-babble, tooth-picking, beerdrinking, egg-salting, in-sulting. I am for the art of falling off a barstool.

I am for the art of underwear and the art of taxicabs. I am for the art of ice-cream cones dropped on concrete. I am for the majestic art of dog-turds, rising like cathedrals.

I am for be blinking arts, lighting up the night. I am for art falling, splashing, wiggling, jumping, going on and off.

I am for the art of fat truck-tires and black eyes.

I am for Kool-art, 7-UP art, Pepsi art, Sunshine art, 39 cents art, 15 cents art, Vatronol art, Dro-bomb art, Vam art, Menthol art, L & M art, Ex-lax art, Venida art, Heaven Hill art, Pamryl art, San-o-med art, Rx art, 9.99 art, Now art, New art, How art, Fire sale art, Last Chance art, Only art, Diamond

art, Tomorrow art, Franks art, Ducks art, Meat-o-rama art.

I am for the art of bread wet by rain. I am for the rats' dance between floors. I am for the art of flies walking on a slick pear in the electric light. I am for the art of soggy onions and firm green shoots. I am for the art of clicking among the nuts when the roaches come and go. I am for the brown sad art of rotting apples.

I am for the art of meows and clatter of cats and for the art of their dumb electric eyes.

I am for the white art of refrigerators and their muscular openings and closings.

I am for the art of rust and mold. I am for the art of the hearts, funeral hearts or sweetheart hearts, full of nougat. I am for the art of worn meathooks and singing barrels of red, white, blue and yellow meat.

I am for the art of things lost or thrown away, coming home from school. I am for the art of cock-and-ball trees and flying cows and the noise of rectangles and squares. I am for the art of crayons and weak grey pencil-lead, and grainy wash and sticky oil paint, and the art of windshield wipers and the art of the finger on a cold window, on dusty steel or in the bubbles on the sides of a bathtub.

I am for the art of teddy-bears and guns and decapitated rabbits, exploded umbrellas and raped beds, chairs with their bones broken, burning trees, firecracker ends, chicken bones, pigeon bones and boxes with men sleeping in them.

I am for the art of slightly rotten funeral flowers, hung bloody rabbits and wrinkly yellow chickens, bass drums & tambourines, and plastic phonographs.

I am for the art of abandoned boxes, tied like pharaohs. I am for an art of watertanks and speeding clouds and flapping shades.

I am for U.S. government Inspected Art, Grade A art, Regular Price art, Yellow Ripe art, Extra Fancy art, Ready-to-eat art, Best-for-less art, Ready-to-

cook art, Fully cleaned art, Spend Less art, Eat Better art, Ham art, pork art, chicken art, tomato art, banana art, apple art, turkey art, cake art, cookie art.

Add:

I am for an art that is combed down, that is hung from each ear, that is laid on the lips and under the eyes, that is shaved from the legs, that is brushed on the teeth, that is fixed on the thighs, that is slipped on the foot.

Square which becomes blobby

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