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THE FILMIC ANOMALY: MOMENTS IN POST-MINIMALISM (1966-1970)

by

ERIC DE BRUYN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2002

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Abstract

THE FILMIC ANOMALY: MOMENTS IN POST-MINIMALISM (1966-1970)

by

Eric de Bruyn

Adviser: Professor Anna Chave

The Filmic Anomaly presents a forgotten chapter in the early history of media art by focusing on the films of five American visual artists: Robert Barry, Mel Bochner, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra. The films by these post-minimalists were intended to be viewed within the institutional framework of the visual arts and, therefore, do not belong to the pre-existing genres of documentary or experimental cinema. It is precisely the anomalous status of filmic projection within the gallery setting that these five artists were determined to exploit.

Post-minimal film represented a hybridic practice that was situated in the charged overlap between different technical procedures, discursive positions and historical moments. Three genealogical strands of art history were interwoven in post-minimal film: modernism, minimalism and pop art. Barry, Bochner, Graham, Nauman, and Serra adopted the medium of film in order to work through this multiple lineage in a critical

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and self-reflective fashion. In their hands, film gained a distinctly serial and performative aspect that worked to decenter the contemplative viewer of modernist aesthetics. At the same time, the post-minimal practice of film raised the issue of the transformed status of the art object within a post-modern society of mass communication. Hence, the underlying paradox of the post-minimal turn to film which referenced the productivist methods of the historical avant-garde but also acknowledged the very obsolescence of film within the present age of television.

The dissertation is organized around a set of specific case studies which are situated within the wider, transformational field of institutional, discursive and technical practices that marked the historical period of the later sixties. Not only does *The Filmic Anomaly* reconstruct the exhibition history of post-minimal film between 1966 and 1970 and analyze the artists's appropriation of such popular inventions as the Super 8 mm camera, but it also brings the conflictual arena of contemporary theory and criticism to bear upon the performative staging of subjectivity in post-minimal film

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In memorian

Hendrik Kamerling (1902-1999)

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INTRODUCTION

> The metahistorian of film generates for himself the problem of deriving a complete tradition from nothing more than the most obvious material limits of the total film machine. It should be possible, he speculates, to pass from *The Flicker* through *Unsere Afrikareise*, or *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*, or *La Région Centrale* and beyond, in finite steps (each step a film), by exercising only one perfectly rational option at each move. The problem is analogous to that of the Knight's tour in chess.
>
> Understood literally, it is insoluble, hopelessly so...The board is a matrix of rows and columns beyond reckoning, whereon no chosen starting point may be defended with confidence.
>
> – Hollis Frampton[1]

My journey across the terrain of contemporary art begins in 1966 and will mostly come to an end by 1970. It will cover a time span of five years during which five visual artists, who were trained as painters and sculptors, became engaged in filmmaking, namely Mel Bochner, Robert Barry, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Dan Graham.[2] All but one of these artists, namely Bruce Nauman, worked in New

---

[1] Hollis Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses," *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 35. In the cited passage, Frampton refers to a series of films from the sixties which belong to the tradition of independent film. Named in their order of appearance, the authors of these films were: Tony Conrad, Peter Kubelka, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow.

[2] I do not wish to create the impression that women did not make a significant contribution to filmmaking during this period. Anyone who is familiar with the history of American independent film knows this not to be the case. My study, however, does not take the form of a survey and my reasons to limit my dissertaton to this group of artists shall become apparent in due course. I should also stress that I am not overly concerned with the question of precedent: I believe that Bochner's films of 1966 were among the first to draw certain (filmic) conclusions from minimalism, but there is no advantage to be gained from stating which film might form the first 'post-minimal' film.

Several women among the post-minimalists, such as Hanne Darboven, Nancy Graves, Nancy Holt, and Eleanor Antin, also turned to film as an alternative practice. Darboven, for instance, constructed a film installation called *Six Films after Six Books* (1968) which primarily functioned in a documentary fashion. Many post-minimalists used film in a similar manner, but in the present context I am not interested in such an instrumental approach to the medium. Darboven's work was most recently exhibited during *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, April 28 – August 29, 1999. Nancy Graves started using film around 1970 in a series of works

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York City during the later sixties, but even in his case, I shall concentrate on those films that were the first to be screened in New York: the so-called *Studio Films*. Nauman and his colleagues were not the only visual artists to pick up a film camera during these years, but I do not aim to write a complete survey of films by visual artists. In fact, my focus will be even more selective, since not every film that was made by Nauman and the others will be discussed by me.

Although several of the films that I shall describe have not received previous attention in the literature on post-minimalism, the significance of my project is not to be measured in archival terms.[3] For sure, the filmic output of my group of artists was

---

that took the figure of the camel as their joint theme: *Goulimine* (16 mm, color, sound, 8 min.) and *Izy Boukir* (16 mm, color, sound, 20 min.) contain live footage, while *Two Hundred Stills at 60 Frames* (16 mm, b & w, silent, 8 min.) forms a more minimalist exercise, which is constructed from two hundred picture postcards. The work of Graves, Holt, and Antin is better discussed, I believe, in relation to the second phase of the post-minimal film.

[3] In the course of the later sixties, film starting making a more regular apprearance in the pages of art magazines. In the United States, one of the most interesting publishing venues to exist at the outset of my period was the cross-disciplinary magazine *Apsen*. This publication worked with guest editors and invited special artist contributions. For instance, the winter issue of 1970-71 (no. 8) was edited by Dan Graham. He collected texts and projects by various conceptual artists, but also sound recordings of the minimal composers Jackson MacLow and La Monte Young. Of greater significance in the present context, however, was *Aspen*'s double issue of winter 1967 (nos. 5-6), which was edited by Brian O'Doherty. It has become famous previously for containing the first English translation of Roland Barthes' "Death of an Author." Lesser known, however, is that this boxed edition also included four films in 8 mm format. Two of the films dated from the period of the historical avant-garde, namely Hans Richter's *Rythm 21* of 1921 and (an excerpt of) Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's *Lightplay: Black-White-Gray* of 1932. The more recent works consisted of a joint film by Robert Morris and Stan Vanderbeek called *Site* from 1964 (also an excerpt) and Robert Rauschenberg's *Linoleum* of 1967. The Fluxkits and Fluxus Yearboxes, which were produced by George Maciunas from 1964 onwards, and which also contained films, might be cited as a precursor. This alternative means of distribution had in both cases only a marginal impact on the art system.

Criticism of independent and artists's films is scattered throughout a variety of art magazines during the early seventies, however through the influence of Annette Michelson, *Artforum* would develop into a prominent forum for the discussion of film within the art world. The most significant accomplishment of Michelson's tenure at *Artforum* was her production of a theme issue of film in September 1971. This edition had the merit of assembling essays on artists's and independent film in one site, which remained a relatively rare approach. No doubt, the film issue was heavily weighed towards the phenomenon of structural film with a contribution by Wenda Bershen on Frampton's *Zorn's Lemma*, the filmmaker's own text "For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and

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not very large. From a merely quantitative standpoint, therefore, the omission of these films from later histories of the sixties might appear to form only a minor oversight. However, the scarcity of objects does not indicate their marginality in this case; to the contrary, as I shall demonstrate. If these artists were not prolific filmmakers, their commitment to the medium varied widely: Bochner shot films intermittently between 1966 and 1970, Barry only worked in film for the extent of several months, whereas Nauman and Serra were the only artists to pursue filmmaking into the seventies. While I shall make reference to such later films by Nauman and Serra, my focus shall remain on the pre-1970 work. Only in the case of Dan Graham shall I venture slightly beyond the general time frame of my dissertation. On the one hand, my reason for making this exception is dictated by the internal structure of Graham's work: the artist conceived of six films in the period between 1969 and 1973 which form one

---

Hypotheses," besides essays by Paul Arthur on George Landow and by Regina Cornwell on Paul Sharits. The task of straddling the institutional spheres of art and cinema was left to Robert Smithson's "A Cinematic Atopia" with its references to Expanded Cinema, Hollis Frampton, and George Landow. Frampton's and Smithson's texts make for an interesting exercise in comparative reading: while the former advances, half-seriously, the quixotic project for a "film that would be a kind of synpotic conjugation...of the infinite film, or of all knowledge," the latter satirizes such an encyclopaedic ideal by proposing "a film based (or debased) on the A section of the index in *Film Culture Reader*." Smithson was of course no stranger to the pages of *Artforum*. His writing had appeared in the magazine almost from its inception, starting in June 1966 with his "Entropy and the New Monuments." Frampton also formed a regular feature of the magazine between 1971 and 1974, after which he migrated with the former *Artforum* editors Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson to the newly founded journal *October*. In their first issue of Spring 1976, Frampton published his "Notes on Composing in Film."

Another informative source on the artist film was the German magazine *Interfunktionen*. Issue no. 4 (March 1970), for instance, carried documentation of films by Birgit Hein, George Landow, Paul Sharits, and Malcolm LeGrice; issue no. 8 (January 1972) carried Dan Graham's "Film Pieces: Visual Field"; and issue no. 12 (1975) formed a special issue on artists's films. The latter contained an invaluable filmography of artist's films that was compiled by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, who was the managing editor of *Interfunktionen*. The filmography was preceded by the following statement: "This filmography is a first, necessarily incomplete attempt to assemple a documentation of the film production of artists and more recent film authors, insofar as they are concerned with comparable formal and epistemological questions and, in particular, have influenced each other's work." The *Filmic*

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continuous series. On the other hand, my discussion of Graham's films shall open onto a set of critical issues that were to dominate a later, post-1970 phase of the artist film (or, in a more inclusive sense, of media art). I shall not develop these themes beyond their immediate relevance to Graham's film production, however it is fitting that the chapter on Graham forms the conclusion of my study.

In short, the engagement of these artists with film varied in intensity, but they all shared a common attitude towards the medium. During the second half of the sixties, all of these artists were to discover film as an available option and they were to experience this new possibility as intensely liberating. Most would credit Andy Warhol's decision in 1963 to start making movies as having set the precedent for their own actions, although the verdict on the form and content of Warhol's cinema would differ from one artist to the next. I shall need to explore, however, what it means to say that film was "discovered" by these artists. The significance of my observation should not be taken to mean that artists had never used the medium before. Such a statement would be patently false, even though it remains to be seen what might separate an "artist" from a "filmmaker": in the recent past of American art, leading up to the moment of 1966, Joseph Cornell, Bruce Conner, and Robert Rauschenberg, to name a few, had all employed the medium of film. Nor should my remark be reduced to a statement of mere empirical fact; namely, that the technical and economic access of non-professionals to the cinematic medium had greatly improved during the sixties. This, in itself, was true, but such developments during the sixties as the introduction

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Anomaly is indebted to such pioneering efforts to structure an otherwise boundless terrain of artists's

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onto the mass market of the cheap and lightweight Super 8 mm camera, constitutes a part but certainly not the entire story. The actual discovery that was made by these artists, ultimately, was that of a specific *potential* of film. How this filmic potential came to be and how these artists seized upon it, is the story I have set myself to tell.

On the face of it, then, my project might seem to deserve the subtitle "a micro history of New York," rather than "moments in post-minimalism." Yet, in the course of my discussion, it will become evident how these few post-minimalist moments shall intersect with a wider terrain of great complexity. The strategic moves performed by these films across the board of history, to paraphrase Frampton, do not follow a rational sequence of finite steps. Yet, the filmic options open to Barry and the others were not incalculable either; the specific possibilities realized in their films were conditioned by a historical matrix of technical, discursive and institutional relationships. Which is not to say that the films were determined by a given set of themes or adopted an existing number of conventions; to the contrary, they showed up certain contradictions within the regularity of the contemporary field of artistic practice. Moreover, these filmic *anomalies* succeeded in extending the perceptual frame of art beyond the autonomous sphere of the studio and the gallery and into the socio-economic realm of publicness.[4]

---

film work.

[4] My title, *The Filmic Anomaly*, contains two historical references: in the first place, to the moment of the historical avant-garde and, in particular, to Dziga Vertov who celebrated the "anomalous" possibilities of the medium (e.g. rapid montage, extreme camera-angles, slow-motion, etc.), over the normative format of narrative cinema, and, in the second place, to the post-minimalist moment and, in particular, to Rosalind Krauss who appreciated the filmic medium as an "anomaly" which could not be accomodated to a modernist sensibility of art. See Rosalind Krauss, "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary," *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (1973): 59-62.

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Let me provide a more detailed glimpse of the strategic space in which these films operated by considering three specific moves which were executed by Bochner, Barry, Nauman, Serra, and Graham across and between the disciplinary fields of art and cinema. Three moves, therefore, but not all performed in succession: the game I am about to reconstruct was played on multiple levels in time and space.

1st Move: Post-Minimalism

> Seeking in his subject some principle of intelligibility [the film historian] is obliged to make himself responsible for every frame of film in existence. For the history of cinema consists precisely of every film that has ever been made, for any purpose whatever.
>
> – Hollis Frampton[5]

The historical moment during which Barry and the other artists discovered and seized upon the filmic option was the moment of post-pop and post-minimalism. I shall, therefore, throughout my text refer to the films by these artists as exponents of "post-minimal film." I have chosen to adopt this phrase for reasons of convenience and expediency; it functions primarily as a historical marker and the reader should be wary of misinterpreting post-minimal film as a formal category or distinct genre of art on to itself.[6] As I shall argue, post-minimal film is not defined by concepts of stylistic

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[5] Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film": 113.

[6] The notion of post-minimalism was authored by Robert Pincus-Witten to put the problem of stylistic identity to rest in the interdisciplinary era of art production that succeeded pop and minimal art. Post-minimalism thus conveniently covers the multitude of practices which go by the names of performance art, body art, earth art, process art, etc., and which are notoriously difficult to separate qua work or artist. This problem of classification (and the attendant trauma of cultural pluralism) is caused by its strictly formal and thematic method of approach. Post-minimalism does not resolve this problem; it merely avoids it. This becomes most apparent when one attempts to define the end of post-

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uniformity or disciplinary competence; rather, it is the material and perceptual situation of these films – their physical and psychical inscription of the viewer within the work – that is relevant. Accordingly, my history will demonstrate how post-minimal film worked through a series of problems that were endemic to the period, such as the dialectic of autonomy versus publicity, spatiality versus temporality, absorption versus performativity. I shall provide a close analysis of a number of the films, but I shall also cast a look at contemporary debates in the field of art criticism. During the later sixties, film had, namely, become that 'other' term through which modernists (e.g. Michael Fried) and their opponents (Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson) most frequently came to define the nature of artistic practice itself.

Another way of stating my approach to the field of post-minimal film is to say that my history is a *medium-specific history* in contrast to a *history of a medium*. Indeed, these films are not objects which fit within the formal development of a discipline or can be classified as a distinct, self-contained genre. As a matter of fact, film cannot even be said to form a single object for these artists. For instance, many of the films make no claim whatsoever to the uniqueness of their existence; that is, they could be reshot without falsifying or defeating their original premise.[7] Arguably, film *in general* never takes the shape of an object nor does it constitute a medium in any

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minimalism. What is required, therefore, is a more structural understanding of the strategic positions that remained open to artists; positions that need to be defined according to their different technical, institutional, discursive, not to mention socio-economic, conditions of possibility.

[7] Many of them, however, have suffered over time because they were not meant to become permanent statements in themselves. Yet, now that these films have become historical, they need to be conserved. What existed as a potential in the sixties – that these films could be remade without changing their meaning – does not necessarily remain a sensible potential today.

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conventional sense of the word.[8] Cinema is nothing but an *assemblage* of technical devices (e.g. camera, projector, filters, lenses, etc.), materials (e.g. sprocket film, photo-sensitive chemicals, etc.), institutional structures (e.g. auditoriums, film studios, production companies, marketing departments, etc.), forms of knowledge (e.g. various notions of cinematic 'truth'), and even psychic topographies (e.g. the specular relation of the spectator to the projected image). That is to say, cinema is not a positive identity – any given thing or medium - but a network of relations or, in other words, an *apparatus*, which can be articulated in various fashions and according to different hierarchical schemes.[9] We might think of the narrative format of classical cinema, the "slice of life" approach of documentary film, or the non-narrative sequences of experimental film. These would be the most obvious examples, but Frampton countered that the actual corpus of cinema is vaster and that our list should include "instructional films, sing-alongs, endoscopic cinematography, and much, much more." Frampton's thesis is that the historian of cinema can only get lost in this labyrinth of film frames; hence, Frampton safely retreats to the more pleasing fiction of a metahistory which only needs to take account of the "most obvious limits of the total

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[8] By medium in the present context, I mean a given set of materials and techniques, which define a specific discipline of art, such as painting. The material base of painting, even in its pre-modernist form, is far more explicit and easily defined than that of cinema. But even then the ontological definition of the medium of painting in modernism is as arbitrary in nature as any attempt to define the "purity" of cinema.

[9] "Broadly speaking, the term *cinematic apparatus* refers to the totality of inderdependent operations that make up the cinema-viewing situation, including (1) the technical base... (2) the conditions of film projection... (3) the film itself... (4) the 'mental machinery' of the spectator...that constitutes the viewer as subject of desire." Robert Stam et al, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics* (London: Routledge, 1992): 143. I shall argue that this concept of the cinematic apparatus is historical in itself.

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film machine."[10] But I believe that it is in the crossing of a metahistorical and a historical methodology; that is, in the tainting of the rational lucidity of the one by the physical dispersions of the other, that the most interesting prospect for writing our history of post-minimal film shall emerge. And, thus, I shall take to heart at least two of Frampton's other possibilities of cinema: instructional film and scientific film.

It follows that the specificity of my approach lies both in my analysis of the technical and formal nature of the films *and* in my description of their discursive context. First of all, it is essential that these works are *films* – and not sculpture, installation, or video.[11] All the films that I have selected manifest, to a varying degree, the material conditions of the medium, which goes to say that the artists did not adopt the medium in a strictly instrumental manner. I shall oppose, therefore, my set of artist films to another model of the artist film, which dominated the contemporary literature on the subject, namely the so-called conceptual film. As Hans Strelow stated in his introduction to an important show of artists's films from 1971, film is the most efficient medium to render the "concepts and processes of thought and experience

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[10] Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film": 115-16.

[11] I shall skirt the issue of the rise of video during these years, although I hope to take up this problem in the near future. There are many points of compatibility and incompatibility between the two media, which also keep shifting over time. In many ways, video and film technology have converged more and more over time, but this was definitely not already the case in the sixties. Their phenomenological condition of viewing are quite different: for instance, the projection of the video image towards the viewer versus the projection of the film image from behind the viewer, the scanning of electronic images on a screen versus the stroboscopic flashing of serial frames, the presence of real time versus the illusion of past time, the blurred flatness of the video screen versus the sharply defined depth of the film image, etc. See, among other places, Eric de Bruyn, "Interview with Dan Graham" [March 1997], in *Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, edited by Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999): 96-120.

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visible."[12] The films of Bochner, Barry, Nauman, Serra, and Graham, on the other hand, do not constitute neutral documents of a performance (should such a thing even be possible). Yet, at the same time, their assertion of certain *filmic* properties of the apparatus does not translate into a purely self-referential concept of the medium. To be sure, Bochner et al. did not propose an ontological model of cinema and their work must be distinguished from those contemporary attempts to extend the formalist ploy of modernism onto a terrain previously left vacant.[13] Indeed, the purity of the filmic medium would be declared elsewhere in the later sixties, for instance, under the aegis of the so-called structural film, to which Frampton's work was reckoned (if not always to his own liking).[14]

The Filmic Anomaly describes a genealogical series which connects the pre-1966 history of painting and sculpture to the films of Bochner and the others. The phenomenon of post-minimal film, in other words, derived from past practices in the visual arts, but this derivation of the artist film from the visual arts did not take the form of a linear succession but followed a logic of inversion, transformation, and displacement. Let me clarify this statement by putting it in slightly different terms. The post-minimal film did not grow, as it were, out of previous forms of painting and sculpture; rather it surfaced onto a fully formed field of discursive practices. This notion of a *discursive field* is not to be confused with the merely empirical fact of a

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[12] Hans Strelow, [Preface], *Prospect 71: Projection* (Düsseldorf: Städtische Kunsthalle, 1971): n.p.

[13] I will employ the term "modernism" as it was defined in a specifically American context by such formalist critics as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried during the fifties and sixties.

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specific historical community who shared a particular set of texts or theories. Certainly, my history shall concern a limited group of players and shall draw upon a relatively restricted body of readings, yet such choices will always remain somewhat arbitrary. Writing history is less about the identification of these individual voices and the ideas they articulate than it concerns an exposition of the underlying conditions of expression. That is to say, the question is not merely 'who was speaking/painting/filming?' or 'what was being said/painted/filmed?.' The more fundamental question to ask is how a specific enunciative field of possibilities was structured in any given time and place. Not every option of speech will be available or appear valid to a subject who is located within the historical horizon of human activity. Hence, one might attempt to characterize the sixties through the recurrence of such themes as "theatricality," "the death of painting," or "the dematerialization of art." Nevertheless, I would argue that such an attempt would remain in arrears if one does not address a more elementary problem at the same time; namely, what might have constituted a *serious speech act* as such in the realm of the visual arts during the sixties.[15] Only then can we consider to what degree the artist film might confound such seriousness.

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[14] P. Adams Sitney, "Structural Film," *Film Culture* 47 (Summer 1969), as reprinted in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Praeger, 1970): 326-48.

[15] That Michel Foucault acts as my guide here will become duly evident. The Foucauldian "statement" is characterized by its "seriousness" as a speech act; it defines what might be said and considered true within a historical formation of knowledge. However, I am also referring to the claim of modernist critics, such as Michael Fried, to the "seriousness" of aesthetic judgement.

To approach film as a speech act means to ask the following questions: Who is speaking/performing/filming? Who is addressed by the utterance and by what means? What texts/films/paintings does the speaker invoke? Who are the experts that determine which speech act is serious? Which institutions validate and legitimate the statement?

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Such a speech act might take the form of a supposition, such as Greenberg's, that "a kind of art nearer the condition of non-art [than minimalism] could not be envisaged or ideated at this moment."[16] Anything, the critic complained, has become *readable* as art at this moment (he was writing in 1967). The immediate context of Greenberg's statement was the catalogue of a major survey of American sculpture. Yet in the same place, a young artist, named Bruce Nauman, asserted that he was already "trying to make a less important thing to look at."[17] "Less important," that is, from the position of a critic like Greenberg, but still, somehow, readable as art from Nauman's viewpoint. The one was not directly conversing with the other, but they were related in the same way that the moves of Frampton's King across the board were. To be sure, Nauman's moves might seem incalculable according to the game plan of Greenberg; nevertheless they shared the same set of rules. What Nauman understood, though, was that these rules did not prevent contradiction; indeed they enabled, what Michel Foucault has called, a discursive space of dissension.[18]

This shift from a formalist to a discursive model of art becomes nowhere clearer than in Dan Graham's magazine piece called *Schema* (1966).[19] [Fig. 1] The content of this printed work is generated from an alphabetical list of typographical and

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[16] Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), as reprinted in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 254.

[17] Bruce Nauman, [Statement], *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967).

[18] See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [1969], translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Colophon, 1972).

[19] For clarity's sake, let me state once more that my discursive model of art is not the same as a linguistic model of art, or, for that matter, a textual model of art. I am not concerned with

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grammatical parameters, such as "(number of) adjectives", "(percentage of) area occupied by type," "(type of) paper stock," and "(number of) words." Entering the required sum in the space between the parentheses produces the poem. *Schema* defines the work "in place only as information."[20] The work is therefore solely determined by the *contingencies of its placement.* No one speaks here, we might say, because with each publication in another place another editor sets the poem in another form. Thus *Schema* did not employ language as a self-contained medium: a misconception of conceptual art that was to emerge in the following years. *Schema* is not tautological in nature: *that* was the shared rationale of modernism and conceptual art. Instead *Schema* has a paradoxical structure since the typesetting process and the entry of information have a retroactive effect on each other. Thus *Schema* institutes a kind of feedback loop: each enunciative instance of the poem states its own material conditions of enunciation. It follows that the enunciative position of the poem remains empty; that is, there is no latent voice of authorial intention nor is the reader granted an illusion of omniscience. *Schema* exhibits the enunciative structure of the speech act as such without organizing it in any hierarchical fashion.

We might conclude that Graham's *Schema* avoided the discursive trappings of an enunciative modality; at least, its open framework avoided a modality of speech in which an intentional subject might gain primacy. Within the field of artistic practice during the sixties, on the other hand, we might identify a set of specific enunciative

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conceptualism's so-called turn to language, nor will I propose a semiotic approach to the image. I am interested, rather, in the performative conditions of the enunciative act (whether it be film or text).

[20] Dan Graham, "Schema," in *Art-Language*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1969): 14.

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modalities that assumed a relatively stable shape, such as the transcendental viewer of modernism or the mobile viewer of minimalism. These discursive modalities inscribe a certain position for a subject within themselves, they are attached to a concrete institutional and technical arrangement, and they reproduce a particular form of knowledge and power. Post-minimal film was to investigate the regularity of such discursive practices and their possibilities of disturbance. To view post-minimal film is not to become absorbed in a spectacle; it is to be immersed within the discursive horizon of the event. One becomes addressee and addressed alike – this type of film is about the performance, not the reproduction.

2nd Move: Independent Film

> If we are indeed doomed to the comically convergent task of dismantling the universe, and fabricating from its stuff an artifact called *The Universe*, it is reasonable to suppose that such an artifact will resemble the vaults of an endless film archive built to house, in eternal cold storage, the infinite film.
>
> — Hollis Frampton[21]

I stated previously that *The Filmic Anomaly* does not present the history of a medium. This statement might sound paradoxical, but what I wish to clarify by this proposition is that, first of all, I have chosen not to write a survey of the artist film after 1966, since that would create a false sense of continuity for a genre that is tenuous at best. Second of all, my history does not add a missing page to the history of avant-garde cinema. Post-minimal film is not the orphan of painting and sculpture,

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nor is it the rejected stepchild of the avant-garde film tradition. I am even hesitant to adopt the term of artist's film, which has frequently been a flashpoint of disagreement, even though this concept forms a bit of a red herring. In the most succinct definition of the term, the artist's film refers to those films that are made by visual artists and, therefore, not by professional filmmakers. However, the limits of such a definition are obvious: it offers no description of the artist's degree of involvement in the making of the film – is the artist cameraman, sound technician, director, editor, performer, or perhaps all of the above? Furthermore, the definition does not indicate the degree of skill or, alternatively, the degree of amateurism, that makes a film into an artist's film. And I have not even begun to raise questions of a genealogical and institutional type: which historical series does an artist's film derive from (e.g. modernist painting or avant-garde film, or possibly both), what is its place of origin (e.g. the artist's studio or the film studio), what is its site of destination (e.g. the gallery or the cinema).

In sum, I shall introduce the term of the artist film purely for purposes of argumentation. My use of the term does not infer that a strictly autonomous entity of artists's films exists. Even the differences between the films of Bochner, Barry, Graham, Nauman, and Serra, stand out more strongly than their similarities; each, I am tempted to say, forms a singular statement of a historical possibility of film. As such they form somewhat intransigent objects which do not comfortably fit within any established institutional or discursive framework of the period.

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[21] Framton, "For a Metahistory of Film": 115.

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For sure, many were quick to dismiss such films at the time and continue to do so today. One of the most often heard complaints about the artist film from the side of independent filmmakers was that artists showed no understanding of the history and the formal nature of the cinematic medium. The artist film after 1966 became equated with the idea of "conceptual film"; that is, as an expedient for demonstrating concepts. That, at least, is how Annabel Nicholson, an English filmmaker, phrased it in relation to one of Graham's films.[22] She was responding to the recent acquisition of Graham's *Two Correlated Rotations* by the Tate Museum in London and she could only see that Graham's film was dealing with concerns arising out of his other work. His purpose, she thought, was "the documentation of concepts" and thus Nicholson accused Graham of having devalued, if not perverted the filmic medium. Indeed, Graham was to pervert film, but in a different fashion than Nicholson might have believed or expected.

Another English filmmaker from the same alternative tradition, Malcolm Le Grice, would discover more value in the work of Graham, calling him one of the gallery artists whose film work gets beyond documentation.[23] Nonetheless, LeGrice was to raise another divisive topic in relation to *Two Correlated Rotations*, namely that "its purchase reveals another significant thread in the pattern of discrimination." Museum curators rely almost entirely on the art dealer network, while LeGrice maintains that avant-garde film was formed in opposition to such commodity structures.

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[22] Annabel Nichelson, "Artist as Filmmaker," *Art & Artists* 7, no. 9 (December 1972).

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We are confronted here with an oft-repeated argument of exclusion: only films made by established artists are exhibited within, and supported by, the museum and gallery circuit. Filmmakers, on the other hand, were not likely to attract the same degree of institutional attention (with its greater economic rewards).[24] This critique cuts both ways: on the one hand, filmmakers desired both the autonomous status and financial rewards that would come with gallery exhibition, while, on the other hand, the art world is indicted by the filmmakers for its commercialism. What such critics did not consider was the possibility of an internal critique of the system – a subversive move that was favored by most post-minimal filmmakers. To be sure, such widespread expressions of discontent as mouthed by LeGrice or Nicholson would not become audible until later in the decade.[25] We shall see that in 1968, for instance, it was more difficult to differentiate between the practices of independent and artist film.

Are we confronted during the later sixties, therefore, with the mere illusion of a joint project between artists and filmmakers? Again the reality is more complicated, with certain alliances being forged and broken off again over time. One should remain wary of reasserting an absolute difference between post-minimal film and, say, the contemporary movement of structural film – there are many formal and social points of overlap. But it is also possible to identify real differences in aim: on the one hand,

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[23] Malcolm Le Grice, "Vision," *Studio International* 187, no. 966 (May 1974).

[24] Frequently this complaint assumes a more personal tone by insinuating that the films of visual artists resemble something of a vanity project. Artists, the reasoning goes, had it too easy since their financial means were so much greater. No wonder, it would seem, that such films remain unworthy of serious consideration. Such arguments, however, collapse on two fronts: the economic reality of the artists I shall discuss was vastly less ample than is suggested, while the aesthetic criteria of judgement, which stem from a formalist tradition of independent film, are misapplied.

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the possibility of film freed visual artists from the modernist tendency towards specialization, while, on the other hand, structural film attempted to emancipate independent film from its underground existence through a formalization of the discipline.

True enough, independent film never received a warm reception in art museums. If shown at all, it was generally relegated to minor spaces as a kind of sideshow. Yet, during the early seventies several exhibitions succeeded, however briefly, in bringing film into the galleries (see the attached Exhibition Chronology). A limited degree of access did exist for a while, but ultimately independent film needed to establish its own system of exhibition, education, and financial support. This schism between the institutional structure of the visual arts and film was replicated within the academia during the same years by the split between art history and cinema studies.

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[25] On this controversy, see Hollis Frampton, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow, "Filmmakers versus the Museum of Modern Art," *Filmmakers' Newsletter*, 2/7 (May 1969): 1-2.

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3rd Move: The New and Old Machine

It is not surprising that something so large could utterly engulf and digest the whole substance of the Age of Machines (machines and all), and finally supplant the entirety with its illusory flesh. Having devoured all else, the film machine is the lone survivor.

— Hollis Frampton[26]

One would be mistaken to situate post-minimal film only within the synchronicity of its immediate, cultural context. There is, namely, a de-synchronized aspect to this phenomenon as well. One of the major contradictions to be posed by post-minimal film was that to some of its contemporaries, it appeared to announce the rebirth of the historical avant-garde with its productivist ethos. Indeed, a series of exhibitions which took place between 1970 and 1972, such as *Information* in New York (1970), *Prospect 71: Projection* in Düsseldorf and *Documenta 5* (1972), might have suggested to an eyewitness that the fate of painting was permanently sealed by the surge of new media such as Super 8 film and video on the art scene. Indeed, in some quarters the artist film became retrofitted to the avant-garde scenario of the democratization of art.

Oddly enough, however, independent film had previously declared its own birth while standing on the very grave of cinema. The potential of independent film came at the end of Hollywood, but this future was also divested of all the "radical aspirations" of the historical avant-garde in so far as the latter's political program was

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[26] Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film": 114.

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concerned.[27] To Frampton, for instance, the era of cinema's great cultural potential was over; it was now left to the filmmaker to work as a scavenger among the ruins of this classical edifice.

The moment of cinema's collapse was located somewhere between the late fifties and the early sixties and it was synchronized to the rise of television. In film criticism of the sixties, such as the work of Stanley Cavell, which shall figure prominently in my history, the theme of cinema's passing was a common one. While this eulogy of Hollywood was being read, the American underground cinema, as represented by such figures of Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith or Andy Warhol, was to undergo a renaissance. In fact this renaissance was engaged in the task of mourning, if not for the same reasons as Cavell was. Anger, Smith and Warhol frequently turned to the past of cinema, but only to achieve a *détournement* of its types and forms. Obviously the pronouncement of Hollywood's death in the sixties was premature; the film industry proved itself to be far more resilient than most expected. By the beginning of the seventies much of the bold inventiveness of the alternative scene was already beginning to cycle back into the mainstream movie industry.

Whatever direction the competition between alternative and Hollywood cinema would take, the reader should be aware that between 1966 and 1970 film functioned in the art world as a simultaneous figure of the new and the obsolete. Post-minimal film did not suppress, but thrived on this paradox. So how avant-garde was

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[27] See Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration," in *Film Culture* 42 (Fall 1966): 34-42. Regarding Michelson's own view of the democratic potential of film, see my Prologue to Chapter One.

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film in 1966? Several artists showed interest in the formal accomplishments of the historical avant-garde; Nauman, for instance, admired Man Ray, while Serra lovingly watched Eisenstein and Vertov. Yet, neither was so naïve as to directly translate the precepts of surrealist or soviet cinema into the present day situation. (Vertov, in any case, had already been transformed into a formalist by independent filmmakers).

There was another manner in which the past of cinema mattered to contemporary artists, namely as a counter-memory to the recent past of modernism. Cinema contained many of those aspects that had been repressed by modernism: perspective, representation, duration, and mechanization. Indeed, modernism and cinema were born around the same time, and, contrary to all appearances, modernism never could quite detach itself from its despised twin. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that art criticism of the sixties would keep circling around the topic of cinema, like a traumatic memory that ceaselessly returns. Post-minimal film, on its part, did not seek to sublate the torn halves of art and industry, art and technology, within a new unity. Such moves of reparation were considered to be doomed from the start and rather left to the exponents of intermedia and expanded cinema.[28]

There is, finally, one more way in which time appeared out of sync in relation to the post-minimal film, yet this aspect has more to do with subsequent events. The

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[28] The project of expanded cinema was driven by the desire to overcome social divisions through the engineering of a technological synthesis within the domain of visual communication. The subcultural origin of this work is clear, as is its political motivation: nominally pitted against the disintegrative forces of specialization within society, expanded cinema predicated a renewal of collective experience on the dual principles of complete, sensory absorption and the formal organization of information. In other words, expanded cinema shied away from awknowledging that consciousness was to be both infinitely expanded and intimately regulated and, as such, it replicated the very logic of mass entertainment as a kind of structured freedom

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writing of *The Filmic Anomaly* placed myself into a curious time-lapse: I was slightly surprised to be overtaken by the current return of film to the galleries. From the standpoint of the late sixties, the present might sometimes seem to suffer from a pervasive amnesia. But, again, the nineties recycled the sixties to no greater extent than the sixties recycled the twenties. The recent revival of the artist film has certainly increased the timeliness of my own history, which does not so much underscore the repetitions of the present, but highlights its difference from the past. Indeed the passage from the artist film of the sixties to that of the nineties is a discontinuous one. Nonetheless, its story cannot be written before the present one is complete.

The Two Phases

As I have indicated, post-minimal film executes three specific moves within the field of contemporary art in relation to the positions of (post-)minimal art, independent film, and the historical avant-garde. We can also speak, however, of two *phases* of post-minimal film. Only the first phase, which lasted roughly from 1966 to 1970, shall be the topic of my dissertation. Without simplifying the historical situation too far, the first phase of post-minimal film occurred mostly in the studio or gallery setting. These films generally took an anti-narrative form, rarely had a soundtrack, and were, for the most part, unscripted in the classical sense of following a written dialogue (which cannot be said of Warhol's contemporary movies). The camera functioned for Bochner and the others as a studio tool, even when this tool was

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transported outdoors, but it was a strangely de-functionalized one; that is, the identity of the camera, as I shall insist, was more akin to a 'scientific toy' than a documentary instrument.[29] Film was not used as a medium to convey the immediacy of an event or the authenticity of a performance. To state the reverse would be truer; the artists exploited the mediating effects of the medium and downplayed such traditional values of personal expression and skillfulness in their films. The actual craft of filmmaking was held dearer by structural filmmakers of the later sixties, with their strong emphasis on the inner consistency and formal perfection of their work. Someone like Frampton, for instance, experimented with palindromic structures in certain of his films. There was one attitude the structural filmmakers and post-minimal artists did hold in common, namely, their rejection of the "personal film" of an earlier generation, among which Stan Brakhage, whose autobiographical work was steeped in religious and literary symbolism and who combined a gestural camera technique with a physical manipulation of the film emulsion by means of scratching and painting.[30] Furthermore, the artist films of the first phase were characterized by their economy of means: the artist is often performer, cameraman, and director rolled into one.

In accordance with this description of the first phase of post-minimal film, one might suggest that the second phase was to substitute the film studio for the artist

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[29] The locus classicus of this term is Charles Baudelaire, "A Philosophy of Toys," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964). The analogy of the camera to a scientific toy has been suggested before in film studies, particularly by Annette Michelson, as I shall point out in the next chapter. In translating this theme into the realm of the visual arts, however, it will undergo a shift in meaning. For my development of this argument, see the final chapter on Dan Graham.

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studio. This historical formula should not be taken too concretely, however. It functions only to situate the artist film within an altered horizon of critical purpose and it is not meant to suggest a total professionalization of the field (that would occur under radically different circumstances in the later eighties with a different generation of visual artists, such as Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Robert Longo, and Cindy Sherman).[31] Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, Yvonne Rainer, David Lamelas, and Marcel Broodthaers – these are some of the artist filmmakers I have in mind when referring to a second phase of post-minimal film. Their movies manifested a more direct engagement with the mediatized sphere of social experience in their mimicry of the standard devices of mainstream cinema: the use of feature-length, narrative formats and refined montage techniques, the underscoring of images by a soundtrack, the preference for large-screen projection, etc. The production of these movies surely required the assembly of a more professional team of cinematographers, sound technicians, and editors – credits start appearing for the first time – however, the production mode is not as organized and hierarchical in structure as industrial cinema.

To many of these artists, Jean-Luc Godard was the main film director against which to measure one's work and not, any longer, Andy Warhol.[32] (Which is not to say that Godard did not provide an important counter-model of production to the first phase as well. The nature of Godard's lesson would read differently in the sixties,

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[30] For a favorable view of Stan Brakhage's filmic method and its mimicry of abstract expressionist painitng, see P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film. The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

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however, than it would in the seventies.) In keeping with Godard's example, the films of the second phase employed complex patterns of intertextuality and counter-narrative strategies, which worked to one concerted effect: to disrupt the recursive, homogenizing function of the mass media within the everyday domain of publicness.[33] The first phase operated in a less interventionist mode when it came to the relation between the gallery and the social sphere. As a final remark, no such catalogue of properties will ever be comprehensive or conclusive in relation to post-minimal film, since, as I have argued, this phenomenon is not one but many; indeed, post-minimal film thrives on contradiction.

So swift as the rise of the artist film was, so quick was also its downfall. The attention for film on the part of artists and institutions alike was to dissipate after 1975 for various reasons, not the least of them grounded in sheer economic fact. Film projections were not only difficult to present in a gallery space, they proved too costly to maintain and were prone to frequent malfunction. However, more importantly, film was not easily marketable and therefore support by galleries for film production proved to be tenuous in the long run. Only the wedding of film to sculpture in the form of film installations presented some respite for both independent filmmakers and artists during the seventies. Yet, one can argue that it was the nineties that would truly discover the potential of film installations, particular in their ability to present a

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[31] One young artist of a conceptualist bent who made the transition into a Hollywood *auteur* much earlier was Kathryn Bigelow, who featured in, and worked, on several of Weiner's videos and films of the mid-seventies.

[32] Smithson would include Roger Corman on this list.

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spatialized equivalent of the narrative structures of cinema (one might think, here, of any number of recent artists, such as Douglas Gordon or Eija-Liisa Ahtila). It might prove fruitful to define such later work in its difference, not merely from the environmental projections of Bruce Nauman's *Spinning Spheres* (1970) [fig. 2] or Paul Sharits' various "location pieces" of the seventies [fig. 3], but also such alternative spaces as Marcel Broodthaers' *Section Cinéma* (1971-72) of the fictional *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles*, which operates on multiple formal and institutional levels of meaning. [34] [Fig. 4] Ultimately, we might surmise that the very process of professional specialization that the post-minimal artists had opposed won out in the end. During the sixties, Bochner and Graham refused to accept the epithet of "film artist." Indeed, they resisted the idea of choosing a single artistic *métier*, yet the disciplinary boundaries that internally divide the museum and academia would again be mirrored in the art world with the emergence during the seventies of the new career path of the "video artist."

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[33] On the recursive system of the mass media, see Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, translated by Kathleen Cross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[34] On Nauman, see Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in Amercan Art 1964-1977* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001).

Sharits' explains that the location pieces "were presented in galleries and museums for long periods of continuous projection, using loop devices on the projectors. Sometimes the images were projected side by side, so that hteir images of filmstrips would 'combine' to effect the sense of being one filmstrip. There were also multiple speakers, usually one to each visual image. In the Locations, the projectors all run a bit out of sync with the others, creating a multititude of variational interactions as the different films loop over and over..." Paul Sharits, [artist's statement], in *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue* no. 7 (New York: Film-Makers' Cooperative, 1989): 439.

I discuss Broodthaers' *Section Cinéma* in the forthcoming "The Museum of Attractions: Marcel Broodthaers and the *Section Cinéma*," in *Another Art – Another Cinema*, ed. Gregor Stemmrich (Jahresring 48: Jahrbuch für moderne Kunst, 2001).

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My dissertation is divided into two main parts. Each of these sections is subdivided into individual chapters, which either describes the first setting in which a post-minimal film was exhibited or takes a more monographic approach by concentrating on the films of one artist. I begin my history by revisiting the *Projected Art* show at Finch College in 1966, which was the first museum exhibition in New York to consist purely of projected images. The exhibition will provide the necessary pretext to explore the various models of alternative film that co-existed at this moment in time and which form one possible background to the rise of post-minimal film. The next chapter discusses the films of Mel Bochner, which were first screened at Finch College. To my knowledge, Bochner's films represent the earliest attempt by an artist to work through the structural premises of minimalism and pop art by means of the filmic medium. Chapter Three switches to the remarkable scene of a film screening at Hunter College in Manhattan, which took place in April 1968, and grouped together four young members from the art world and the nascent structural film movement: Robert Huot, Robert Barry, Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow. My discussion of this event highlights the forms of cohabitation that could exist between the domains of independent film and post-minimal art at this historical moment. The final chapter of Part One concentrates on the films by Barry, which were first shown at Hunter College. In this chapter, I shall also trace the various, strategic alliances that emerged in the art criticism of the sixties between modernism and cinema, on the one hand, and (post-)minimalism and cinema, on the other hand. Barry's own cinematic project

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shall assume greater depth and significance when placed against the background of this critical debate.

Part Two is introduced by an account of the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/ Materials* exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1969. The Whitney exhibition was intended as a showcase for the new movement of process art, but it also brought the films of Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra to prominence. For some of the participating artists, such as Serra, the *Anti-Illusion* show raised specific questions about the status of artistic technique: must technique act as an instrumental force that imprints the artist's will on matter, or can technique and matter operate in a more equivalent manner that enables a formative process of "making itself" (Robert Morris)? If I may paraphrase such questions in terms other than those chosen by the artists themselves, then we may ask whether the relation of a technique (e.g. cinema) to its agent (e.g. the artist-as-cameraman) and its object (e.g. the artist-as-performer) can assume a non-hierarchical character (Merleau-Ponty's problem) or whether modern technology will always operate in a disciplinary fashion (Foucault's problem). As a whole, Part Two develops a genealogy of "body techniques" in post-minimal film, from its first formulation in Nauman's *Studio Films* (1967-68), through the *Hand and Process* series of Serra (1968), to its final statement in Graham's six films of 1969-1973. We shall see how the expressive, habitual space of the body and its gestures gradually breaks down, until with Graham's *Body Press*, we arrive at the threshold of the second phase of the post-minimal film. At this point, I shall draw my

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story to a close with a final look at the *Information* show of 1970, which announced both a culmination and an end to the first phase of the filmic anomaly.

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PART I: THE HORIZONS OF MINIMALISM

Regular space might also become a metric time element, a kind of regular beat or pulse.

—Sol LeWitt[1]

[1] Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 79-84, as reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999): 15.

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1. Prelude: *Projected Art* (1966)

In the annals of contemporary art, 1966 is usually remembered as the year that saw the rise to fame of minimalism with a string of New York exhibitions, such as *Primary Structures*, *Systemic Painting*, and *Ten*.[2] But at the very close of the same year, on December 8, a lesser-known exhibition opened at the Contemporary Study Wing of Finch College in New York City, which was already to announce the move of another generation beyond minimalism. Called *Projected Art*, the show was organized by the director of the gallery, Elayne Varian. The uniqueness of this exhibition was that it only displayed projected works, such as movies and slide pieces.[3] To my knowledge, *Projected Art* represents the first exhibition in an American museum to empty the galleries of objects and to replace them wholly by projections.[4] Among the

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[2] "Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors" took place at the Jewish Museum from April 27 to June 12 and was curated by Kynaston McShine. "Systemic Painting" was organized by Lawrence Alloway at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and was on view from September 21 to November 27. "Ten" was installed at the New York gallery of Virginia Dwan during the month of October. Without doubt, this series of exhibitions was instrumental in firmly establishing minimalism within the public eye (although not all the artists shown were to enter the minimalist canon). To appreciate the pregnancy of this historical moment, we should recall that the clarion call of minimalism, Donald Judd's "Specific Objects," had been published only the previous year, while the famous counter-attack by Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood" would follow in 1967. See Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Arts Yearbook* 8 (1965): 74-82, reprinted in Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), and Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12-23.

[3] The *Projected Art* exhibition closed on January 8, 1967. Varian's activities at Finch College between the years of 1966 and 1970 form a significant footnote to the reception history of post-minimalism. In May 1966 she initiated the exhibition series *Art in Process* and during the fall of 1967 she organized *Art in Series* in collaboration with the artist Mel Bochner. The relative obscurity of Varian's contribution to the period is largely due to the fact that Finch College no longer exists. Luckily the gallery archives have been conserved and can be consulted at the Archives of American Art in Washington D.C..

[4] That is, if we make a partial exception for the contributions of Robert Whitman and Stan Vanderbeek to *Projected Art*. Their works took the form of installations which incorporated ready-made

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multitude of filmmakers and visual artists who participated in the show, there were two young artists in particular who stand out today: Mel Bochner and Dan Graham. I shall examine the work that these two artists submitted to *Projected Art* at a later stage of my history, but let me begin by taking a closer look at this exhibition.

The originality of Varian's curatorial concept becomes all the more striking in hindsight, when we realize the artist film was to have a strong presence on the contemporary art scene in the following years. Her prescience was certainly impressive, yet in looking closer, it also becomes clear that *Projected Art* was not wholly part of the future of post-minimal film either. In many ways the show was directed to a past history of interactions between the visual arts and cinema, and gathered together a set of traditions that shall not dominate the present history. Part of the problem is compounded by the fact that *Projected Art* did little to clarify the already existing, genealogical links between the domain of the visual arts and that of cinema. To the contrary, based on the remaining documentation of the show, Varian did not propose specific criteria by which to define the formal and contextual differences between the shown films and slides.[5] Indeed, the exhibition was based on a somewhat slim premise, namely the emergence of the filmic medium as an alternative to the conventional disciplines of art:

> The idea for this exhibition was first conceived because of the growing awareness of filmmaking as an art form and its importance in

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elements, such as a table in the case of Whitman, and television sets in the case of Vanderbeek. For further details, see my discussion of their work below under the heading "Expanded Cinema."

[5] And that information, frankly, is severly limited. All that apparently remains is the exhibition brochure written by the curator, which also contains the film program. Mel Biochner retains a copy of the brochure in his archive.

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> relationship to the other arts in our culture. More and more artists are using film to express themselves creatively and are tremendously excited by its virtually unlimited possibilities.[6]

To take such a medium-based approach to the writing of history invites the methodological fallacy of drawing merely formal analogies between objects, while blinding oneself to the differences of institutional location and historical derivation, not to mention possible differences of discursive context. This is a fate from which the artist films of the post-minimalist generation have suffered, particularly when they are judged according to the incommensurable formal and technical standards of the American avant-garde film. I hope to rectify this mistake in the following.

The fact is that the criteria of formal quality and technical skill that are applied to experimental or avant-garde film do not apply to the artist film, at least not in general (*pace* Richard Serra, *pace* Lawrence Weiner).[7] The reason for this fundamental difference is that the rationale for the emergence of the artist film during

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[6] Elayne H. Varian, "Foreword and Acknowledgement," *Projected Art* [brochure] (New York: Finch College, 1966): n.p..

[7] A lot of confusion exists around the proper use of the terms "experimental", "independent", "underground" and "avant-garde" film. Often considered as interchangeable, underground or independent cinema applies more directly to non-commercial American film. Underground film, however, is more appropriate to movies that derive from a counter-cultural milieu than more abstract forms of filmmaking. The term has been popularized in the first survey of American independent film, namely Sheldon Renan's *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1967).

Experimental film carries the overtones of a more self-reflective and formal approach to filmmaking, yet in section 2 I shall suggest a more literal reading of the term. I shall apply the term avant-garde only sparingly to avoid confusion with the critical strategies of the historical avant-garde which are not immediately transferable to the sixties. Peter Wollen has drawn a useful distinction between the socio-economic conditions and modes of cultural resistance that determine avant-garde filmmakers in America (e.g. Michael Snow) versus Europe (e.g. Jean-Luc Godard). See his "The Two Avant-Gardes" [1975], in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982): 92-104. But post-minimal film defies his historical scheme by drawing upon both models of film (without fully embracing either one). Another crucial text on this subject from the period itself is Annette Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration" [1966], in *The New American Cinema*, edited by Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1967): 83-102.

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the later sixties is primarily located in the historical and material conditions of artistic practice and not linked to the lineage of experimental film, or for that matter narrative cinema. We shall see that it is not a display of technical skill or expertise that is pursued in the post-minimalist artist film, quite to the contrary.

But perhaps, I might seem to invite the opposite danger: namely, to overstate the distinction between the artist film and independent film, while the boundary separating the artist and filmmaker communities was fairly permeable during the sixties. Anecdotal evidence of this situation is not hard to find. Well-known protagonists of the New York independent film movement of the mid- to later sixties, such as Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton, supported several artist friends in their ambition to take up filmmaking. Snow, of course, also exhibited as a sculptor during these years. And then there is the crucial precedent set by Andy Warhol.

Warhol's cinematic strategy differs from that of the post-minimalist film, however, to the degree that the pop artist deliberately engaged the underground film community, mimicking certain aspects of its formal language, while employing an industrial logic of production. His transgressive relationship to independent film is not unlike the painterly dialectic he developed with abstract expressionism in his earliest paintings.[8] The model of narrative cinema that underlay Warhol's enterprise would become increasingly clear during the later sixties. As I will argue, the artist film will first emerge as a studio tool – although an oddly dysfunctional one at that – and not fully confront its status within the spectacle of mass culture until the early seventies.

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In sum, the history of Warhol's cinema shall remain at a tangent to the present one, yet I shall on occasion need to address the post-minimalist (mis)reading of the precedent he set.

But to return to the example of Frampton and Snow: while widely celebrated in the literature on independent film in America, their active participation in the art world of New York during the sixties is rarely acknowledged today.[9] Yet, that is an oversight that shall receive only minor redress in the present context. As I have limited my focus almost exclusively on New York in order to escape the boundless dimensions of a survey of the artist film, Snow and Frampton will definitely make an appearance, but it will be a mostly brief and intermittent one. The localized framework of my history does not imply, namely, that it must take an anecdotal turn. I shall not minutely plot the shifting social relationships and professional ties that bound together (and occasionally unbound) the series of individuals who show up on the following pages. Instead, I will present a close reading of a number of select moments in the history of post-minimalism and certain institutional and genealogical differences between the gallery and the cinema shall prove significant to these historical moments. It is of no importance, therefore, to determine if an absolute difference exists between the artist film and independent film and on which side of the divide Snow or Frampton resided. Such differences are historically determined and, therefore, fluid in nature. Any such difference, moreover, needs to be articulated in a dialectical manner. That is to say, the

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[8] See Benjamin Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989): 39-62.

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artist film does not and cannot exist in a complete removal from the continuous field of cultural and economic practices, although it can be said, as it were, to perform a cut within this field which reconfigures the dominant order of discursive and non-discursive practices. Post-minimal film, in other words, revels in its anomalous, contradictory status; it plays off the differences between the gallery and the cinema.

Projected Art, however, did not perform the same function of clarifying the meaning of such historical differences. Varian's transformation of the gallery from a white cube into a black box was surely a radical one in 1966, if not anymore today. But *Projected Art* failed to address the more fundamental task of describing the structural differences between the presented films.[10] She opened the galleries to a multitude of projected works that had only their vague status as 'art form' (versus commercialism) in common. Yet, almost hidden in the midst of this surfeit of moving images, we might encounter the beginning of that genealogical series of the artist film I intend to trace up to 1973. And, therefore, I shall need to execute the task that *Projected Art* left undone, that is to outline a set of formal and historical parameters by which we might start to locate the artist film.

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[9] Annette Michelson has done most to alter that situation, first as an editor of *Artforum* and later with *October*.

[10] Again this is not to diminish the extraordinary importance of Varian's brief career as a curator at Finch College. She organized a string of exhibitions throughout the later sixties, such as the *Art in Series* show of 1968 (co-curated with Mel Bochner) and the *Art in Process* series, which greatly increased the visibility of post-minimalism in New York.

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Expanded Cinema

Unfortunately we know little today about the actual installation of the *Projected Art* exhibition since there is no photographic documentation available. A small brochure that Varian published on the occasion of the show indicates, however, that it was divided into two sections. One part consisted of a daily changing schedule of film screenings that ran almost the full gamut of experimental and avant-garde film. I shall return to this section below. The other segment of the exhibition deserves our more immediate attention since it represented the most ambitious attempt to situate film within a museum context. A brief examination of its contents will prove instructive, but not because of its predictive value for future events. The selection of artists was perhaps obvious by contemporary standards, but the individual works put on display in the galleries would not feed into the subsequent development of the artist film, with one exception.

Varian provided five artists with a separate space for the installation of a work that required another mode of presentation than a regular, single-screen film projection. Three of these artists had fairly established careers and although they derived from slightly different backgrounds, certain overlaps in their work can be discerned. These three artists were Andy Warhol, Robert Whitman, and Stan Vanderbeek. The last was perhaps the least known figure in the art world, but had already acquired a reputation as an experimental filmmaker. In addition, two relatively unknown artists were asked by Varian to contribute a piece to *Projected Art*. First of all, Herbert M. Gesner, who remains an obscure name to this day, and

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secondly Dan Graham, who made his debut as a gallery artist with a slide projection at *Projected Art.*[11] It is the presentation of this piece by Graham, along with a film by the Mel Bochner that was included in the general film program, which mark the true inception of my history.

Graham's exhibit was referred to as *Project Transparencies* in the brochure. [fig. 5] The projection consisted of the slides of the New Jersey housing developments that provided the impetus for his photo-essay *Homes for America*, which appeared in the December 1966 - January 1967 issue of *Arts Magazine*. [fig. 6] The artist had already begun taking the architectural photographs in 1965. Bochner made his film together with the painter Robert Moskowitz earlier in 1966. It was called *New York Windows* and presented a series of static shots of shop window displays taken on a daylong itinerary through the city. [fig. 7] For both Bochner and Graham, these pieces constituted a turning point in their still budding careers. Bochner had abandoned painting only the year before, while Graham was re-inventing himself as an artist after previously running the short-lived John Daniels gallery.

The photographic medium came to fulfill a crucial, if temporary, role for both artists in articulating a critical relationship to the current models of advanced art, namely minimalism and pop art. In other words, photography and film did not represent for these artists a mere substitute for the exhausted medium of painting or sculpture, but functioned to work through a critical dialectic of pop art and minimalism. On the one hand, Bochner's and Graham's film work extended the

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[11] Graham had already published several of his magazine pieces by this time. See Part 2.

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critique of modernist painting and sculpture that minimalism and pop art had each initiated on their own grounds. On the other hand, by merging specific features of each practice in the medium of film, certain artistic and social contradictions of this historical moment were driven into the open. If, however, the entwinement of pop and minimalism formed the immediate departure point for the filmic practices of Bochner and Graham, in 1966 a wider scope of possibilities existed to think art and cinema together. While few, if any, of those alternative options seemed appealing to Bochner and Graham at the time, it is important that we briefly identify them. In this manner, we can better gauge the unique significance of Bochner's and Graham's own strategic moves on the filmic stage of contemporary art.

We might consider, then, the contribution of Robert Whitman to *Projected Art*: he displayed one of his so-called "movie pieces" of 1964 called a *Dining Room Table*. The movie pieces are sculptural *tableaux* which combine actual objects with filmed images in order to create an illusional *mise-en-scène*.[12] The only art critic to comment on the exhibition, Jeanne Siegel, gives the following brief description of *Dining Room Table*: "Whitman projects images onto a mirrored table top of girls with food falling in and out of their mouths in a continuous flow."[13] Stan Vanderbeek showed *Movie*

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[12] A similar piece is described by Sheldon Renan in the following manner: "*Shower*, for example, has a real metal shower, a real plastic shower curtain, and real water coming down. The person taking the shower, life-size and real looking, is on film. *Shower* is so real, in fact, that some people seeing it in an art gallery thought they had gone into the wrong room by mistake. They were embarassed to have barged in on someone taking a shower." Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film.*: 240.

[13] Jeanne Siegel, "Projected Art," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 3 (December 1966-January 1967). Siegel seems to have doubted the historical momentum behind the show. She opened her review with a set of questions echoing the sentiments of Varian: "Why are more and more artists turning to film

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Mural No. 2, a rather extravagant installation which required a battery of 8 mm and 16mm film projectors, 21" television sets and various slide carousels. According to the same critic, *Movie Mural No. 2,* "which he calls painting with light, is a series of little episodes projected through a translucent wall onto television sets creating composite montage effects."[14] Andy Warhol's work, finally, was simply referred to as a "Split-Screen Projection" in the brochure. In the Finch College archives the movie is further identified as the "Rape Scene" from an unrealized project for a twenty-five hour movie called **** *(Four Stars).*[15] Warhol had been experimenting with double-screen projection since late 1965 and he probably submitted his mostly recently developed reels for exhibition.[16]

In trying to categorize the dispersed contents of *Projected Art*, we receive some help from a film critic reviewing the show. Judith Shatnoff mentions the exhibition in a review of "short films" in New York and while she completely misses the uniqueness of its gallery setting, she suggests a possible reading of the installation work.[17] Shatnoff summarizes this section of the exhibition as a display of "expanded cinema." While this characterization is patently false (only the pieces of Vanderbeek

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making? Is painting dead? Are films a more viable art form?" Only to conclude her text with the dismissive response: "The question is how much is new in films other than the motion?"

[14] Ibid.

[15] Verbal communication from Callie Angell, adjunct curator of the Andy Warhol Film Project and author of the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of Warhol's movies. She has not as yet identified the actual reel.

[16] See Callie Angell's entry on *Lupe* in Callie Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol: Part II* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994): 25.

[17] The film critic Judith Shatnoff mentioned the show briefly in her column "Short Films: Report from New York," *Film Quarterly* 20:4 (Summer 1967): 73-76. Shatnoff judged the show purely on terms of its selection of films which she called "historically comprehensive" but "'safe'." Besides her comment on the gallery installations as forming an illustration of expanded cinema, she singled out

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and Whitman could be reckoned to this genre) it provides a contemporary notion of how film might be thought to fit within a gallery setting: a notion, moreover, that the artist film will not come to share.

The concept of expanded cinema, as it became popularized around this time, refers to a multimedia practice that uses several projection sources, props, and sometimes live performers, in order to create a sensorial environment of complete immersion. We might describe expanded cinema as an early variant of installation art that sought to confound the separation between the artistic disciplines of sculpture, film, theater and dance:

> *Expanded Cinema* is not the name of a particular style of filmmaking... It is cinema expanded to include many different projectors in the showing of one work. It is cinema expanded to include computer-generated images and the electronic manipulation of images on television. It is cinema expanded to the point at which the effect of film may be produced without the use of film at all. Its work is more spectacular, more technological, and more diverse in form than that of the avant-garde/experimental/underground film so far. But it is less personal. [18]

This description can be found in the concluding chapter to the first history of American independent cinema which appeared in 1967. Expanded cinema was thus envisioned during the mid-sixties to present the future of a 'new media' amalgam of art and technology. As Sheldon Renan points out in the cited passage, the emphasis in expanded cinema lay on the manipulation and mixing of an array of visual effects to be obtained from recent technologies of imaging. What gained it entry into the

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one of the worst excesses of this genre for praise, namely the USCO collaborative, which showed a documentary of a multimedia spectacle.

[18] Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*: 227.

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galleries, however, was its sculptural aspect (although expanded cinema grafted itself with equal ease onto other institutional platforms of display). Forming a highly protean phenomenon, expanded cinema represents a practice that by definition lacked clear boundaries. Nevertheless, two central tenets seem apparent enough: the inducement of a passive attitude in the spectator and the affirmation of a techno-scientific belief in historical progress. Both tenets will be denied in the post-minimalist film.

Projected Art was preceded by two major showcases of expanded cinema in New York: *The New Cinema Festival* at the Film-makers' Cinematheque during November 1965 and, immediately preceding the Finch College show, *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* which took place in October 1966. *The New Cinema Festival* was held in a cinema space and presented various performative pieces such as Ed Emshwiller's *Bodyworks*, which required four dancers, three hand-held projectors, three portable screens, and a fragmentation mirror. [fig. 8] Five individuals were employed to project a film of a dance from different angles onto the stage on which the four live dancers performed the same dance that was already captured on film. Their white costumes functioned therefore as mobile screens for the film and thereby doubled the performance onto itself.[19] The participants in the festival came from a variety of backgrounds, whether these are identified as that of Fluxus, underground cinema, or experimental music.[20] Fluxus was represented, for instance, by Nam June

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[19] David Curtis, *Experimental Cinema: A Fifty Year Evolution* (New York: Delta, 1971): 158.

[20] Of course,all such professional circles were interlooped at the time. I will not take up a discussion of Fluxus film in the present history. Its immediate context was not minimalism, but

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Paik who showed *Zen for Film*, which consisted of thirty minutes of pure transparent leader. [fig. 9] Stan Vanderbeek, who was known in both Fluxus and independent film circles, executed both *Move-Movies*, which used two stationary projectors facing the stage and five portable projectors that projected images onto the audience, and *Feedback #1*, which necessitated an even more complex set-up: three screens were situated at different distances and angles from a battery of six slide and film projectors and during the screening two different sound tracks played simultaneously.[21] [fig. 10] Other participants included Carolee Schneemann, Ken Dewey, and Terry Riley.[22]

American undergound and personal film (e.g. Stan Brakhage) to which Fluxus film, for the most part, maintained a highly ironical distance. Some artists, such as Paul Sharits, who edited their first films for George Maciunas' *Fluxfilm Anthology* would become known as structural filmmakers by the end of the decade. Maciunas, who had designed several issues of *Film Culture*, attacked its editor, P. Adams Sitney, by accusing him of repressing the historical precedent of Fluxus film in the latter's "Structural Film" essay. See George Maciunas, "Some Comments on 'Structural Film' by P. Adams Sitney" [December 5, 1969], in *Film Culture Reader*, edited by P. Adams Sitney (New York: Praeger, 1970): 349. On fluxus film, see the excellent essay by Bruce Jenkins, "Fluxfilms in Three False Starts," in *In The Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993): 124-137.

[21] See Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*: 190, 233.

Paik's 16mm film was both a readymade (1000 feet of clear leader) and an unique object which was meant to be shown over and over again so that each showing will show the accumulated traces of past sceenings (scratches, dust, etc.) and technical flaws (tears and splices). The film assserted a more intimate approach to the medium than standard cinema projection by being shown on a home movie scale without being sized to exactly match the screen. Jenkins has correctly described this strategy of Paik as performative since the film makes itself, as it were, each time anew during the physical event of its screening. See Jenkins, "Fluxfilms in Three False Starts": 136-137.

Several other filmmakers would exploit the same device, most notably George Landow's *Film In Which There Appear Sprocket Holes, Edge Lettering, Dirt Participles, Etc.* (1965-66), which documents the projection of a film loop onto a screen until the original film disintegrated. Landow's film is, therefore, not performative in the concrete sense of Paik's film. Michael Asher, however, has inverted Paik's idea by making a film that could be shown only once, thereby defeating the *reproductive* capacity of cinema in order to exhibit its *productive* side. Asher's *Film (August 18, 1973)* consists of a frameless 16mm film that was made without a camera, using only the processing equipment and chemicals usually employed for development. After some experimentation he achieved the required result: a completely consistent medium-gray tone with a very fine, even texture. He screened the film in a student dormitory, describing the result as follows: "viewers withdrew attention from the projected frame,while the light which was cast back onto them, increased their awareness of themselve as viewers. Without a camera directed point of view located within the film, viewers recorded their own points of view,external to the pictre plane. The light from the cinematic frame was reflected back, as well, to its source of generation—the projector—and onto other material obejects and

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Slightly over a month before *Projected Art* opened, a great deal of excitement had been generated around *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*, which in a highly self-conscious move was held at the location of the historic Armory Show. *9 Evenings* could, at least in part, be considered as a showcase for expanded cinema. Organized by Experiments in Art and Technology, which was founded by Robert Rauschenberg and Billy Klüver, several of the staged events used mixed media projections, collapsing the field of film and dance into each other.[23]

As the example of *The New Cinema Festival* and *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* indicates, a tendency existed in the New York art world towards the merging of the different disciplines of sculpture, dance, and film. The multimedia spectacle of expanded cinema can be placed in the same trajectory as the Judson Dance Theater and the happenings staged by, among others, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and Carolee Schneeman.[24] That trajectory originated in the famous proto-happening staged by John Cage and Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College during the summer of 1952. During this event, slides and film clips were projected. In the environment of the Judson group,

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the room itself." Michael Asher, *Writings 1973-1983 on Works 1969-1979*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983):

[22] Another source on the expanded cinema movement is "Expanded Arts" edition of *Film Culture* 43 (Winter 1966). This issue contains the transcript of an expanded cinema symposium that was held at the New York Film Festival in 1966 and included Ken Dewey, Henry Geldzahler, John Gruen, Stan Vanderbeek, and Robert Whitman on its panel.

[23] Participants in the *9 Evenings* included David Tudor, John Cage, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Robert Whitman, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay and Lucinda Childs.

[24] The personal links between these groups were often quite close. Robert Whitman, for instance, had been married to Simone Forti who was influence on the Judson Dance Theater. The artist film manifests a definite link to the task-oriented dance of the Judson Dance Theater, but it will not form a main topic of my discussion. The history of the Judson group has been extensively documented

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Yvonne Rainer was one of the first around 1965 to start integrating slide and film projections into her dance performances.[25]

Film also entered the field of happenings from an early stage onwards, not merely as a means of documentation but as a structural element in the proceedings. For example, Oldenburg staged a happening in December 1965 that illustrates very well the overlap between the artistic and independent film communities in New York. Asked to organize a benefit show for the Film-Makers Cinematheque of Jonas Mekas, Oldenburg readily agreed. The result was *Moveyhouse* which was performed at the 41st Street Theater, a former Wurlitzer recital hall. *Moveyhouse* displayed the movie audience as a kind of spectacle in its own right. The audience who attended the happening stood in the aisles of the auditorium while the seated performers executed certain scripted gestures. No actual movie was projected: Oldenburg placed a rotating fan before a stage light in order to provide the experience of a flickering projector beam without casting an illusional image on the screen.[26]

As Oldenburg writes in his accompanying notes, he eagerly seized the opportunity to do "a piece on the theme 'expanded cinema'." He wanted, in

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in Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

[25] See Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961-73* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974).

[26] In orchestrating *Moveyhouse* Oldenburg was interested in a collective, rather than individual response to cinematic experience. He also contrasted *Moveyhouse* to the spatial dispersion of the viewer's attention in most happenings and the spectacular relation of viewers to projected images, which is characteristic of expanded cinema. Oldenburg comments: "Normally a happening is fragmentary: movable isolated events ...But *Moveyhouse* was a happening of place (...) incidients grew to larger degree out of *place*... no theatrical interest." See Claes Oldenburg, *Raw Notes*, edited by Kaspar Koenig (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1973): 87. See also Richard Kostelanetz, "Conversations: Claes Oldenburg," in *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (New York: RK Editions, 1980): 133-162.

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particular, to define the difference of his own position versus the "dance happenings" of Rauschenberg, which he summarily characterized as "spawn" and "the cluttered scene," and what he called the "intermedia/happening" approach of Robert Whitman.[27] Oldenburg specifically mentions *Prune. Flat* by Whitman as a work to reckon with [fig. 11]. *Prune. Flat* is indeed a prototypical example of expanded cinema which explored the device of projecting film images onto live performers. The intent of this work, as Whitman has explained, was to intensify the separation between audience and stage.[28] By confusing the real and the illusional in this crossing of theater and cinema, he believed that he could counter the usual, absorptive state of the moviegoer. In fact, Whitman had already begun to combine film with happenings in a work called *The American Moon* from 1969.

In regard to Warhol's credentials as a protagonist of the Expanded Cinema, perhaps the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* would best fit the bill – the multi-projection spectacle that accompanied the concerts of the Velvet Underground. However, the movie that Warhol exhibited during *Projected Art* hardly belongs to that category. Warhol's cinema does not share the characteristics of Expanded Cinema – its multimedia synthesis, its technological optimism, its exploitation of spectacular effects. The complexity of Warhol's movies must be sought elsewhere, that is not in the "cluttered scene" of intermedia to paraphrase Oldenburg.

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[27] Oldenburg, *Raw Notes*: 84.

[28] See the extended discussion of this piece in Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*: 219-242.

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The formal structure of Warhol's early cinema is famously sparse, which has gained it the various labels of being minimalist or primitive.[29] Warhol's procedure is not to construct an elaborate ensemble of equipment, like Vanderbeek, or to conjure an intricate layering of object and image, reality and illusion, as in Whitman's work. The early silent movies of 1963 and 1964 were shot in a simple manner with rudimentary technical means. A static shot of the performer (or performers) was taken with a fixed 16 millimeter [henceforth mm] camera on a tripod. The performers were then left to their own devices or given only the most elementary mode of briefing. Each reel would be shot without any interruptions and then mounted end-to-end in a strictly serial manner, inclusive of the light flares at the end of each roll.[30] Shot at 24 frames per second [henceforth fps], the movies were then projected at a silent speed of 16 fps.

The complexity of Warhol's cinema is not so much the result of formal content as of presentation.[31] We might say that it was not at all clear *where* these movies belonged – to which artistic tradition and to which institutional site. At least that is

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[29] On the denomininationof Warhol's cinema as minimalist, see James Peterson, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-Garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994). The term primitivism is often used in a comparative manner to suggest certain formal similarities between Warhol's silent movies of 1963 and 1964 and so-called primitive cinema which predates the invention of montage as a narrative device (ca. 1906-1907). Here is Jonas Mekas in 1964 recycling the old theme of artistic primitivism in the new field of independent cinema: "Andy Warhol is taking cinema back to its origins, to the days of Lumière, for a rejuvenation and a cleansing." Jonas Mekas, "Sixth Independent Film Award," *Film Culture* 33 (Summer 1964): 1.

[30] Some of the first movies, like *Eat* and *Sleep*, included the use of montage, but Warhol was soon to discontinue this labour-intensive process.

[31] I am fully conscious of repeating a standardized view of the formal nature of Warhol's early cinema which does not fully compute with reality. Callie Angell has exhaustively demonstrated the internal complexities of certain works, like *Sleep*, that required an extensive editing process to be completed. However, this does not alter the main thrust of my argument regarding the widely divergent *reception* of the work. I might even suggest that due to the restoration work on Warhol's movies, *another* Warhol is emerging, one whose production is far more intricate than the one known during the sixties.

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what the critical record lets us believe, for several often contradictory readings of the movies circulated at the same time. And this tendency only increased with his incursion into sound recording and the rudimentary appearance of narrative in his movies of 1965. Warhol, characteristically, did little to stymie this confusion on the part of his audience. The different interpretations of his movies ranged from an experimental focus on the material properties of the medium, to a Cagean or neo-avant-garde attentiveness to the sheer 'being' of things, and from a camp mimicry of the Hollywood star system to a Brechtian technique of defamiliarization. The independent film community in New York, as I mentioned, formed the first audience of Warhol's cinema and his movies immediately gained a highly controversial reputation in these circles.[32] A telling anecdote in this respect is the failure of Brakhage, on first screening, to recognize Warhol's films as being films at all.[33] That is, they failed to register within the conceptual framework of his ideas about cinema because they were shot with what seemed to be an utter disregard for technique. By mistake, however, the movies had been projected at 24 fps instead of being slowed down to silent speed. Only when they were re-shown to Brakhage at 16 fps, could he acknowledge the movies as being worthy of interest.

What I am getting at here is the subversive ability of Warhol's cinema to insinuate itself into different situations, or, in more precise words, to exploit the

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[32] See Angell's account of the first screenings of *Sleep* in Angell *The Films of Andy Warhol: Part II*. Taylor Mead, the famous actor of the American underground cinema called it a fraud. The question of authenticity was to continue to haunt the reception of Warhol's cinema because this ambivalence is, exactly, internal to the work.

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contradictions that underpin both avant-garde and commercial cinema. This propensity of Warhol's movies to vacillate between different models of cinema caused Brakhage's discomfort. And his anxiety was never fully eased despite the dilation of projection time, which to him rendered the movies more contemplative and less quantifiable in quality.

I shall not greatly expand on these introductory remarks in what follows since the history I am concerned with here is as much post-Warhol as it is post-minimal. That is to say, I shall be more concerned with the reception of Warhol's cinema in post-minimalism than with an analysis of the work itself. I do wish to emphasize, though, that it is the hybrid nature of Warhol's early movies which would prove attractive to the post-minimalist generation. Warhol realized a filmic method that could exist in the interstices between the gallery and the cinema (and from which all the confusion stems). This method does not consist of the composition of a total work of art, as in the contemporary practice of the expanded cinema, but in a form of technical decomposition, as Dan Graham would later suggest.[34] And when Richard Serra protests against the label of "sculptural film" being applied to him, it is because he wanted to avoid any association of his work with an intermedia approach.[35] At the same time, the example of Serra and Graham will show that there is another genealogy of the Judson Dance Theater which might be drawn upon, which I will take up later.

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[33] The anecdote is recounted by Jonas Mekas in "Notes after Reseeing the Movies of Andy Warhol," in *Andy Warhol*, edited by John Coplans (New York: The New York Graphic Society, 1970).

[34] On the prefiguration of cinema by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* see Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (London: Verso, 1981).

[35] See Part 2.

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Post-minimalism would contribute its own variants to the reception history of Warhol's cinema. These include an interest in the on-going process or lived present of the filmic performance and a pared-down, conceptualist interpretation of the work that is encapsulated in the dictum that one does not need to *see* Warhol's film *Empire* (1964) in order to *know* its meaning. I have in mind, here, Joseph Kosuth's argument in "Art after Philosophy" that could easily be made to accommodate *Empire* in its genealogy of "*purely* conceptual art."[36] Indeed, he points to the existence of a genre of "conceptual film" by listing the work by a close colleague, Christine Kozlov, who proposed a 'film' called *No Title (Transparent Film)* of 1967, which is just that: a reel of transparent film displayed in a canister *never to be screened.*[37] [fig. 12]

Yet, this tautological model of conceptual film, to paraphrase Kosuth, was rarely to be imitated. In particular, many post-minimal artists perceived the de-skilled method of Warhol as liberating in nature. As Lawrence Weiner has explained, Warhol first established a structure and then allowed whatever happened to happen.[38] He experienced Warhol's gesture as being highly revelatory of new possibilities for

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[36] Joseph Kosuth, "Art after Philosophy" [Parts 1, 2, and 3], *Studio International* 178: 915-917 (October, November, December 1969): 134-137, 160-161, 212-213.

For a later example of this conceptual conception of *Empire* that stems from film criticism, see Paul Arthur, "Structural Film: Revisions, New Versions, and the Artifact," *Millenium Film Journal* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1978): 5-13. Arthur states "The key to *Empire*'s ironic status is its current object/viewer situation. The form and the image-content of the film are so immediatley open to paraphrastic statement that one can construct a distinct impression of what its experience entails – and therefore can respond to, critique or otherwise interact with it – such that its existence as an imagined object in consciousness has become its essential condition, its locus of meaning and influence" (ibid.: 5). Arthur, however, is writing at a time that Warhol had drawn in his early films from circulation. *Empire* was therefore physically inaccessible to an audience after 1971.

[37] A related work by Kozlov is *No Title (Black Film #1)* of 1965. I first discussed this conceptual model of the artist film in a lecture called "David Lamelas: Media Concepts." My paper was delivered on the panel "Conceptualism: International Style or Local Strategy?," organized by Luis Camnitzer, at the 1998 College Art Association Conference in Toronto.

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filmmaking. At the same time, Weiner, like many other conceptual artists, were utterly dismissive of, what they perceived as, the affirmative relation of Warhol's cinema to dominant society. Obviously these artists did not locate the conservative nature of Warhol's cinema on the level of its subcultural content, but rejected the passive mode of perceptual and social experience that Warhol's movies seemed to uphold.[39] It is this spectacular condition of Warhol's cinema that shall be subverted in various ways in the films of Mel Bochner, Bruce Nauman, and Dan Graham.

Structural Film

From her vantage point in 1966, Varian was not at all clear about the interrelationship of film and the gallery setting. Voicing a theme that will recur in most future exhibitions of film, she affirms film's "importance in relationship to the other arts in our culture." But then she views "film-making as an art form" in antithesis to the narrative mode of commercial cinema. The participants in *Projected Art*, she writes, "are reacting against the cinema of personal relationships and the commercial superficial smoothness of the films produced as mass media."[40] Varian construes film as an art form by following the model of autonomy she believed to be provided by modernism. And that is not at all surprising, because the American avant-garde tended to emphasize the gestural, artisanal, and individual process of

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[38]Lawrence Weiner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., May 20, 1997.

[39] Weiner: "[The world of Warhol's Factory] was a timeless world. The trouble with this world was that [the Factory crowd] had to be made historical very quickly because they became dated after they entered, because they were just really a reflection of this very spaced-out time-space that the entire

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filmmaking above the standardized format and hierarchical structures of Hollywood cinema.[41]

In surveying the checklist for the exhibition it turns out that almost all the works belong to the tradition of American independent film. To a degree, Finch College was moving to occupy the same gap in institutional support for experimental film as Jonas Mekas with his peripatetic Film-Makers' Cinematheque.[42] Varian's film program, however, was less controversial than the contemporary choices of Mekas and included such well-known proponents of the American independent film as Stan Brakhage, Robert Breer, Storm DeHirsch, Marie Menken, Joseph Cornell, Bruce Baille, and Ron Rice (the later generation of structural film is still nowhere in sight), besides members of the historical avant-garde, such as Viking Eggeling, Oskar Fischinger, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Hans Richter. Also included were art documentaries, for instance Hans Namuth's and Paul Falkenberg's *Pollock Painting*.

What this program fails to establish is any distinction between avant-garde and experimental film. I shall not attempt to formalize a vocabulary that is already established and in which avant-garde film and experimental film are usually considered synonymous. However, it is important to understand that the diversity of the avant-garde tradition of the twenties, both formally and politically, tends to become formalized in the American independent cinema. While the foregrounding of

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art world and film world and fashion world was living in. There was a war, and they believed that this might be the end of the world." Weiner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., May 20, 1997.

[40] Varian, "Foreword and Acknowledgement": n.p..

[41] See Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration."

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the technical means of production in Soviet cinema is bound to a politicization of cinema, the American independent film of the later sixties tends to base itself upon an ontological model of the medium. The self-critical procedure of modernist painting, for instance, finds its perfect analogy in the so-called structural film.

P. Adams Sitney first coined the term in the eponymous essay of 1969 printed in *Film Culture*.[43] This text deserves our attention because several of the filmmakers it mentions, e.g. Hollis Frampton and Michael Snow, were closely connected to both the film and the art world.[44] Sitney set out to define a new direction in American

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[42] For more on the central role of Jonas Mekas in the establishment of independent film as an institutional presence, see *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas & the New York Underground*, ed. David E. James (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[43] Sitney, "Structural Film." The original text was revised during the winter of 1969 before inclusion in the *Film Culture Reader*. The revised version makes a briefreference to "a number of distinguished sculptors [who] have begun to make films in the halfway ground between the subversive 'Fluxus' works and the complex structural films." Sitney mentions, for instance the Hand and Process series of Richard Serra and Bruce Nauman's *Studio Films*. He calls Robert Morris's *Gas Station* the most interesting new film comparing it to Ken Jacobs's *Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son*. Jacobs's film will be introduced below, however I have not included a study of Morris's film in the present history [fig. 13]. One in a series of films shot during 1969, *Gas Station* is a double screen movie which couples a wide-angle, stationary shot of a gas station from a second-floor window across the street with a meandering, shot of the same scene which zooms in and out, which causes a sense of disorientation in the viewer: one seems to sink into the image. I take *Gas Station* to be a cinematic exercise in "de-differentiation." Anton Ehrenzweig's concept had recently become popular among New York artists under the asupices of Robert Smithson: "At the low levels of consciousness the artist experiences undifferentiated or unbounded methods of procedure that break with the focused limits of rational technique. Here tools are undifferentiated from the material they operate on, or they seeem to sink back in their primordial condition." Robert Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, edited by Nancy Holt (New York: New York University Press, 1979): 84.

[44] The professional relations between artists and filmmakers in New York during the sixties were quite extensive (as in the field of dance and music as well). While I shall argue that structural film forms an exponent of late modernism (and thus differs from post-minimal film), I would be amiss if I did not note that structural filmmakers on occasion displayed their own discomfort with a formalist model of modernism. Hollis Frampton, for instance, has frequently indicated his own tendency to contradict the seemingly consistent structure of his films. He has spoken, for instance, of his attempt to mimic the "rupture in decorum" he found in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, which he contrasted with the formal wholeness of Frank Stella's paintings. Stella had actually been a friend of Frampton and the subject of one of the latter's first photo series. See Scott MacDonald's interview with Hollis Frampton in Scott MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 29. In the same interview Frampton also remembers seeing Yvonne Rainer's *Three Satie Spoons* during which she starts making "noises: little mewing sounds, squaks, bleats." What was important, Frampton

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independent cinema which formed a partial break with the preceding, "formal" style of Brakhage. Sitney's distinction between "form" and "structure" remains rather specious, but that will not be our immediate concern. It is rather his argument regarding the self-reflective character of the structural film which is significant in the present context. According to Sitney, structural film is characterized by four main properties, namely a fixed camera position, the flicker effect (i.e. rapid alternation of monochrome frames), loop printing and rephotography off the screen. Avoiding the appearance of dogmatism, Sitney is quick to add that "very seldom will one find all four characteristics in a single film, and there are structural films that avoid these usual elements."[45] What is important, however, is that these elements are said to induce a more *meditative* relationship of the viewer to the projected image. Sitney's basic thesis remains open to debate, nevertheless it provides a clear example of the transposition of a modernist aesthetic to the field of experimental film.[46]

It is when Sitney appears to undercut his own argument that things get truly interesting. Seeking a theoretical ground for his stylistic model of structural film, he

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stated, was not the noises in themselves, "but that that single gesture broke open the whole decorum of dance" (ibid. 30).

[45] Sitney, "Structural Film": 1.

[46] Surprisingly even the flicker film is appraised in terms of its contemplative nature despite the physiological effect of the stroboscopic light on the viewer. Tony Conrad's *The Flicker*, for instance, was accompanied by a warning that his film could produce epileptic seizures. Nonetheless, in writing of Sharits's flicker film *N:O:T:H:I:N:G*, Sitney remarks that this work tends towards a mental state of pure equanimity: "The ultimate aspiration of Sharits's cinema must be the synthesis of whiteness..." Sitney, "Structural Film": 9.

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finds it in Russian formalist criticism and he provides the following citation from Viktor Shklovsky's *Art as Technique*[47]:

> The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.*[48]

This well-chosen fragment from Shklovsky's thesis on the formal procedure of de-familiarization seems to fit nicely within a modernist agenda. It is entered in the midst of a discussion of Ken Jacobs' *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son* (1969): a film, which for the duration of seventy minutes reworks an eponymous, silent movie from the primitive stage of film history by means of rephotography, slow-motion, reversal, and close-ups.[49] [fig. 13] Jacobs appears in this context as the Edouard Manet of film: that is to say, the Manet of formalist criticism for whom the whole tradition of painting had become nothing but a grab bag full of empty quotes. Manet demonstrated, according to this modernist viewpoint, that the objective content of painting *is not important*. Or, as Sitney proclaims in regard to *Tom, Tom, The Piper's Son*: "Jacobs's film is didactic in a specifically Modernist tradition."[50] That Shklovsky's procedure of defamiliarization might contain a cognitive moment of ideological demystification as well is not registered by Sitney, which brings me back to my initial problem.[51]

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[47] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" [1917], in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reiss (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965).

[48] This passage does not appear in the original article, but in Sitney's reworked version that appeared in Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader*: 335.

[49] The original film was shot by Billy Bitzer in 1905.

[50] Ibid.: 336.

[51] But the political meaning of defamiliarization was only fully developed by Bertolt Brecht. The Russian formalists were more concerned with the so-called "artfulness of the object" and such

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The difficulty with Sitney's definition of structural film is similar to what Rosalind Krauss has faulted in the term of "post-minimalism."[52] She points out that the latter is used to identify works on strictly *formal* grounds without regard to their more basic *structural* differences (Sitney's 'structure' is not all that different from his 'form'). A precise description of structure must include the viewing subject within its matrix, and not just define the relations internal to the work itself. On the basis of this premise, Krauss has made a strong case that the mode of subjectivity projected by post-minimalist works is not consistent, but split between an idealist and a materialist understanding of the self. Post-minimalism, like expanded cinema, has often been associated with a complete collapse of disciplinary boundaries. Yet, even within the seemingly continuous field of post-minimalism a substantive difference can be discerned between works that are modeled on the inwardness of a private subject and those that exhibit the situated existence of a public subject. And it is this shift towards an understanding of the subject as socially determined that in Krauss's mind constitutes the true break with modernism. For this paradigmatic shift entails a moment of *estrangement* of the self from its own technical possibilities, rather than confirming its own sovereignty. Likewise, we need to look beyond the similarities of Structural Film on a formal level, which hide more significant differences at the

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ideas as the "stoniness" of the stone might be compared to the phenomenological notion of the "occurent" that I shall explore in the chapter on Bruce Nauman. Denaturalization in both cases, of phenomenology and the Russian formalists, seeks a more primal form of experience which is exactly non-political and non-historical.

[52] See Rosalind Kraus, "Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post '60s Sculpture," *Artforum* (November 1973): 40-53.

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material level of the cinematic apparatus: differences, that is, which might counter the notion of a cognitive subject that is celebrated by Sitney.

The Camera as Studio Tool

> The average calculation goes like this:
> To make a film, you must have money.
> – Fernand Léger[53]

It is true that Varian's brief introduction to the *Projected Art* exhibition makes no claims to being an ambitious piece of writing. Still, we need to establish a set of descriptive criteria from the beginning in order to locate the post-minimal film within its proper institutional and discursive horizon. As an early step in the direction, Varian's text is instructive even though her language remains beholden to a series of commonplace ideas. As a matter of fact, it is the apparent difficulty of this inherited language to differentiate between the various modes of cinema present in her show that interests me. Likewise my discussion in the following chapters shall frequently invoke the language of phenomenology as a dominant discourse of the time without assuming a rigorous understanding of its concepts on the part of either artists or critics. It is rather the functional relationship, or set of relationships, between technique, subject and object that phenomenology enables which shall be our point of inquiry. Because if this phenomenological *apparatus* of speech and equipment, of embodied

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subjects and "the logic of their world" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty), somehow answers to the historical conditions of its moment, then it also will begin to show signs of strain after 1966 with the arrival of post-minimal film.

In other words, I draw upon phenomenology not as a theory that is fully adequate to our object, i.e. post-minimal film. To the contrary, the writing of Merleau-Ponty, among others, constitutes a discourse that is historicized in its confrontation with these objects, which assume an anomalous aspect when viewed from within the phenomenological horizon of the world. I will argue, in other words, that post-minimal film should not be understood as a continuation of the phenomenological project initiated by minimalism, but rather as a destabilization of its basic rules of operation.[54] As I shall elaborate below, post-minimal film proved itself highly capable, as Michel Foucault proposed in a different context, "of arousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible to, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games."[55]

In citing Michel Foucault, I am aware that the critical function of post-minimal film is cast in terms that mimics the contemporary shift between the theoretical paradigms of phenomenology and (post-)structuralism. But even so, I am retaining

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[53] Fernad Léger, "The Spectacle" [1924], in *The Functions of Painting*, translated by Alexandra Anderson (New York: Viking, 1973): 43

[54] This program was first enunciated by Robert Morris in his "Notes on Sculpture" of 1966 and disseminated by Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson. See Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture" [Part 1 and 2], *Artforum* 4, no 6 (February 1966) and 5, no. 6 (October 1966): 42-44, 20-23.

In her essay "The Capitalist Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," Rosalind Krauss reveals how a phenomenological model of minimalism contained the seeds of its own undoing. My history shall present a similar argument, if worded differently. See Rosalind Krauss, "The Capitalist Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," *October* 54 (Fall 1990): 3-17.

[55] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 36-37.

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my own historical distance from this second moment of critical theory. In doing so, I am taking Foucault true to his word, since, as he insists, a discursive practice does not exist independently of the objects it describes nor does any technical or institutional practice take shape outside a specific, discursive modality. In other words, it is not the technique or concept that matters, but how it is used, by whom, and to what purpose. Phenomenology is not, therefore, a kind of vernacular speech of (post-)minimal art. Indeed, we might say that post-minimalism spoke many languages, as my chapter on Graham will yet reveal.

In order to situate post-minimal film within this multiplicity of tongues, we need to periodize the sixties as a structural field in which the discursive positions of "structural film," "narrative cinema," "modernist painting," "pop art," "minimalism," but also "phenomenology," appeared as so many strategic options open to the players on the field.[56] But that is not all. One needs, in addition, to point out the range of institutional sites that were available - studio, gallery, museum, theater, cinema (itself divisible between alternative and mainstream venues) – and the whole spectrum of techniques (from Super 8 to 35 mm, black and white to color, silent to sound, edited film to found film, animation to photography, etc.). Which goes to say that by "discursive position," I mean more than just a certain individual's identification with a certain theoretical program: the term holds for me the more performative sense of a *discursive event* in which one directly addresses a situation from *within* the technical,

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[56] One cannot suggest such an approach today, without crediting Frederic Jameson for his pioneering effort. See Frederic Jameson, "Periodizing the Sixties," in *The Sixties Without Apology*, edited by Sohnya Sayres et al, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

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institutional and epistemic horizon of that situation. These different discursive positions, then, function as enunciative markers: a set of possibilities for action. Yet not all these markers are securely anchored in place. Seemingly hemmed in by the one, seeking support in the other, these markers become pawns on a chessboard. My task is to determine which moves were allowed on this board, which moves might make sense under the reigning circumstances.

Varian did not perceive any such historical regularity as hemming in the future of filmmaking; she saw only "unlimited possibilities" in film. This infinite potential for film was itself nonetheless the product of recent advances in technology, which, as she argued, had done away with the need for specialized skills:

> Because technical equipment is constantly being improved and made easier to handle, increasing numbers of non-professionals have been attracted to the medium.[57]

Filmmaking was thus associated by Varian with a quasi-amateur status of the artist who is not beholden to the professional standards of technical competence. Moreover, what struck her as noteworthy is the de-instrumentalized nature of the work being done in film:

> These film-artists break all technical rules and put aside logical development, meaning and purpose, because they are reacting against the cinema of personal relationships and the commercial superficial smoothness of the films produced as mass media.[58]

Varian was certainly correct in linking a change in the artists' attitude towards film to recent technical innovations. Following upon the success of the photo camera, the industry initiated a second technical revolution during the fifties by developing

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[57] Varian, "Foreword and Acknowledgement," n.p..

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film equipment for the mass market. The new cameras were relatively inexpensive and simple in their use, requiring no special expertise, which made the medium not only more accessible but also more individualized in character. Particularly the introduction of the Super-8mm system during the mid-sixties was to leave an indelible imprint on artistic practice. [59] To make a film had become a vastly more reasonable option to anyone with an interest in it.

According to this historical perspective, we have progressed between the fifties to the mid-sixties from a strictly consumerist to a productivist model of cinema. While this perspective was widely held among film critics at the time, the described development was not considered to be a blessing by all. We might gain a more nostalgic glimpse of the past from reading Stanley Cavell; an exercise I shall indulge in frequently in the course of my history. In *The World Viewed*, which first appeared in 1971, Cavell is to mourn a lost time of sharing – "running across lots as Indians, or in formation as biplanes, gradually giving way to sessions in which for hours we reconstructed the movie's score or dialogue or plot."[60] But then Cavell wanted from cinema the fullness of a lived experience which can be regained only by an involuntary act of memory: one *finds* oneself remembering a moment in film, he liked

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[58] Ibid.

[59] The 8mm format was introduced by Kodak in 1932 to open up the home movie market, which only became a true mass cultural phenomenon by the sixties. Jim Hoberman suggests for instance that Super-8mm was launched in 1965 because the market for 8mm cameras had become saturated, however the Kodak sales figures remain confidential. Super-8 sound would have to wait another nine years before it was made availabe. By that time the heyday of artist film-making were past. J. Hoberman, "Home Made Movies: Twenty Years of American 8mm and Super-8 Films" (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1981): 6 n.3.

[60] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, enlarged edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979): 10.

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to observe. Hence, *The World Viewed* reads as a kind of Proustian narrative of the fifties filtered through film: his relation to the screen is an eminently absorptive, yet passive one. Film, as Cavell had it, awakens as much as it enfolds you. But those young Indians of the fifties aping filmic reality had since become transposed into the new myth of young Indians *making* filmic reality or, more appropriately, making science fiction reality, since we are talking about the sixties dream of a new technological future of cinema:

> Within the structure of our culture, ten-year-olds are now filming eight millimeter serials – mostly science-fiction, I am told – in their backyards. This, perhaps is the *single most interesting fact* about cinema in our time, and the real hope for "independent" cinema. Given this new accessibility of the medium, anything can happen.[61]

This comment is from Annette Michelson, who caught up in the heat of the moment, read a paper on "Film and the Radical Aspiration" at the Fourth New York Film Festival in 1966.

Such optimism was certainly a common feature of the historical moment. The expanded cinema movement formed yet another symptom of this belief in the impending democratization of the filmic medium. Yet, the pronounced technophilia of the latter movement, which would assume an increasing futuristic tone in publications such as Marshal McLuhan's *Understanding Media* [1965], *The Medium if the Massage* [1967], and Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* [1970], was not shared by Michelson or the post-minimalist artists.[62] Nevertheless, the basic outline of the

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[61] Michelson, "Film and The Radical Aspiration": 101.

[62] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).; Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967); Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: E.P.

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narrative holds: without immediately endorsing a historical model of technological determinism, we can appreciate how the removal of technical and economic barriers fueled the large output of artist films during the sixties.

By the mid-sixties, filmmaking no longer required special expertise, whereas during the twenties a greater investment of time and money was required as well as professional assistance. Despite the relative paucity of artist films stemming from the twenties, the few movies that were realized succeeded in founding a subsequent tradition of avant-garde film. The canonical truth of this continuous trajectory from the avant-garde artist film (i.e. the non-professional practice of filmmaking during the twenties) to the later independent film was established during the seventies in the writings of several filmmakers and critics who actively participated in the making of this tradition.[63] The result has been, however, to further consolidate the divide between art history and film studies that had already emerged towards the end of the sixties. The films of Fernand Léger or Man Ray are therefore considered supplementary materials at best in the one field, while they assume centralized status in the other. Only recently have some authors begun to redress this imbalance.[64] Yet, I

Dutton, 1970). Youngblood, for instance, predates the current prophets of cyberculture with a chapter on "The Technosphere: Man/Machine Symbiosis." While McLuhan was approached with some skepticism by an artist like Graham, this did not mean that he did not make *use* of McLuhan's ideas in a manner that was not prescribed by the author.

[63] See Curtis, *Experimental Cinema*; Birgit Hein, *Film im Underground. Von seinen Anfängen bis zum Unabhängigen Kino* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1971); Sitney, *Visionary Film*; Peter Kubelka, *Une histoire du cinéma.* (Paris: Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, 1976); Malcolm Le Grice, *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977); *Film als Film. 1910 bis heute*, edited by Birgit Hein and Wulf Herzogenrath (Cologne: Kölnische Kunstverein, 1977); *Film as Film. Formal Experiment in Film (1910-1975)* , edited by David Curtis, Philip Drummond, and Richard Francis (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979).

[64] I can refer to the structural role that film plays in the argument of such recent art historical studies as Rosalind Krauss's *Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), Michal Leja's

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shall refrain providing such a historical background to the present history, which would include everything from Léger's *Ballet Méchanique* to Marcel Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1926), from the early animation work of Viking Eggeling, Oskar Fischinger and Hans Richter to the Surrealist films of Man Ray, Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel. To research such genealogical links, although they are not completely absent, has little explanatory value in the context of post-minimal film. The immediate context of the American independent film, which I have adumbrated above, is more relevant.

The general, historical shift in artists's technical access to cinema, however, is of significance as a topic of comparative analysis. In order to shoot their films Fernand Léger and Marcel Duchamp, for instance, needed to rely on the costly equipment and technical know-how of others. Hence, Léger's *Ballet Méchanique* (1924) was shot with the assistance of the American cinematographer Dudley Murphy, while Duchamp's *Anemic Cinema* (1926) was realized with the help of Man Ray and Marc Allégret.[65] What does this technical dependency of Duchamp or Léger mean, however, for the status of the film camera within the visual arts? Has film become a studio tool for the artist or has the artist become an instrument of the film studio?

Léger happily spoke the language of both the artist studio and the movie studio. On the one hand, the artist would fit the tool of cinema into the context of his own art work. The montage sequences of Léger's *Ballet Méchanique*, for instance,

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Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painitng in the 1940s (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

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which rapidly alternate between abstract and representational scenes without narrative continuity, apply the same structural and formal principles he had explored in his painting, namely contrast, simultaneity, and confrontation.[66] [fig. 14] He sought, for instance, to emphasize patterns of dissonance between the various textures and shapes of objects or between different rhythms and speeds of movement. The use of rapidly alternating frames or the kaleidoscopic faceting of objects, when seen through rotating, angled mirrors, cause multiple images to be superimposed on the eye's retina rather than be seen whole or sequentially. Or, finally, repeated devices such as a bright metal ball swinging towards the camera or the pulsation of animated, geometric shapes, turn the filmic spectacle on the viewers themselves, causing the images to rush out at them. The spatialized, paratactic logic of the *Ballet Méchanique* is more akin to cubist collage than the narrative syntax of classical cinema.[67] And, to this degree, we might hold that *Ballet Méchanique* goes against the grain of cinema; that is, if the latter is strictly conceived as a medium of diegetic continuity.[68]

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[65] See Standish Lawder, *Cubist Cinéma* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

[66] A complete découpage of *Ballet Méchanique* is provided by Lawder, *Cubist Cinéma.*

[67] The term classical cinema refers to movies that are narrative in form and based upon an industrial mode of production.

[68] After Léger states in "The Origins of Painting and its Representational Value" that the new means of mechanical production have radically altered the task of painting, the artist wonders "how all those more or less historical or dramatic pictures shown in the French Salon can compete with the screen of any cinema." Fernand Léger, "The Origins of Painting and its Representational Value" [1913], in *The Function of Painting*: 9.

Obviously, Léger feels that academic painting cannot compete with the new medium of the movies. Hence, painting must accept "an art of dynamic divisionism" (ibid.: 8), which captures the inner essence of the spectacle of modernity without merely mirroring its surface – that is best left to photography. Painting will only succeed, Léger insists, by "isolating and limiting itself to its own domain" (ibid.: 10). Ten years later, however, *Ballet Méchanique* would bring the formal skills of the studio painter to the screen.

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On the other hand, we also know that Léger was not seeking to immure himself from the commercial spectacle of mass culture: he was not adverse to its shock-like intensity, he merely deplored its lack of rationalized "organization."[69] Thus he willingly applied himself to the construction of movie sets.[70] More than Léger, it was Duchamp who flouted the affirmative potential of cinema; not, however, by claiming a model of "pure film" as the pioneers of abstract film did, but by comparing his *Anemic cinema* (1926) to the scientific genre of the experimental film:

> I wasn't interested in making movies as such; it was simply a more practical way of achieving my optical results. [71]

In this manner, Duchamp simultaneously unmade two cinematic forms of specialization, which had only just come into existence: the Hollywood mode of industrial production and the personal mode of the hand-made film. This same conflict would be inherited by the American independent film of the sixties with the artisanal craft and in-camera editing of Stan Brakhage being deliberately countered first by the semi-automatic procedures of Andy Warhol's fixed camera and lack of montage, and then by his slowly developing use of a film crew and actors.

Indeed, to describe the film camera as a studio tool in the sixties can be just as misleading as it was during the twenties. In the first place, one must be wary of overstating the differences between the two periods when it comes to the actual

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[69] "The visual world of a large modern city, that vast spectacle...is badly orchestrated; in fact, not orchestrated at all. The intensity of the street shatters our nerves and drives us crazy. Lets taclke kle the problem in all its scope. Let's organize the exterior spectacle." Fernand Léger, "The Spectacle," in *Functions of Painting*: 46

[70] Léger's work on the décor of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924) is described in Lawder, *Cubist Cinéma.*

[71] Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York, Viking, 1971): 68.

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reliance of post-minimal artists on professional assistance. No doubt the more difficult technical conditions that existed during the twenties not only led to fewer films being made, but also tended to assert a rudimentary division of labor. I know of no films wherein director, performer and cameraman were rolled into one, whereas the sixties saw an increasing confluence of these roles. Nevertheless, one might cite many counter-examples from the sixties and seventies in which the artist, for various reasons, preferred to employ a camera man or editor, or sought to raise the production value through the use of complex equipment. Also teamwork was not completely absent during the sixties and seventies, whether by deliberate choice or of necessity. Several artists engaged cameramen when working with 16mm film or the even more ambitious format of 35mm.[72] The cinematographer Robert Fiore, for instance, filmed the first cinematic works of Richard Serra, although the artist shot such later works as *Railroad Turnbridge* on 16mm himself. Such qualifications do not detract, however, from the general rule that the separation between artists and filmmakers became less apparent during the sixties due to the removal of technical and economic impediments.

Secondly, to call the camera a studio tool implies an instrumentalization of the technique. This, in turn, relates to contemporary ideas concerning new means of distributing art (or information, as many artists preferred to call their product in the later sixties). It needs to be said, however, that the increased access of artists to a new technology or reproduction does not necessarily translate into a democratization of

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[72] I do not know of any New York artists who used 35 mm film. The Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, however, did employ 35 mm on several occasions and would hire a professional cinematographer for the job.

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that medium. Nevertheless, certain more naïve arguments of the functionalist type that were heard in the twenties were repeated in the sixties again. The faith that some artists placed in film as a means of improving access to the public sphere proved to be delusional.[73]

In sum, sheer *expediency* of technique is not a sufficient explanation for the rise of the artist film after 1966, which returns us to Varian's comments about the de-skilled nature of the medium, for it is not just the easy access of artists to film equipment that explains its prominent place on the art scene. Indeed, the sheer availability of a certain tool does not determine its probable use at any given time. The end to which an instrument is directed might well vary with a change in context, i.e. the cinematic medium is not one but possibly several media. In sum, it is the specific *function* that film acquired within the discursive field of post-minimalism that stands in need of explanation. And this function is other than that of either classical or structural cinema.

Varian was not far from identifying one aspect of this filmic function when she referred to the desire of the artist to "break all technical rules." But this principle of

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[73] One example would be the failed project of Gerry Schum's Television Gallery. Two important film projects were funded and executed by Schum, namely *Land Art* and *Identifications*, in which numerous European and American artists participated. The programs were shot on 16mm film but transferred to video for television broadcasting. These programs have been shown on video since, but I have recently been informed by Eugen Blume of the Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin that the original films might still exist. For more on the history of Gerry Schum's enterprise, see *Gerry Schum* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1980).

Another example of more recent making is the tendency to make limited editions of artist films. Original attempts to sell films as multiples in large, cheap editions or to make them available to a wide audience for a low rental fee have generally been disbanded. The film co-operatives in New York and London, among other places, are the only institutions that continue this practice, but visual artists are rarely represented (or want to be represented) by such non-profit organizations.

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de-functionalization is not sufficient to distinguish the artist film from the tradition of avant-garde or independent film. Man Ray, for instance, is known to have constructed a shot in *Emak Bakia* (1927) by throwing his camera into the air, whereas Ken Jacobs has stated that a self-destructive impulse courses through several of his films. His incomplete *Star Spangled to Death* was "to be a film that was constantly breaking."[74] Yet, the point I wish to make is that to misappropriate the camera, that is to divert it from its "logical development, meaning and purpose," means something different in a studio or gallery context than in the institutional framework of independent film. From one disciplinary field to another, a transgressive practice will not have the same set of rules in view. This is not an argument about the qualitative difference between the post-minimal film and independent film, but simply about their different socio-economic conditions of operation.[75]

I have argued in this prelude that we do not explain away the phenomenon of post-minimal film as a mere product of a formal or technological development. I have also insisted that we locate it within the synchronicity of a historical context that includes such practices as "pop art" and "minimalism," but also "structural film" and "expanded cinema." But to do so is also to emphasize the specificity of post-minimal film as a *discursive or performative event*, which restructures the conventional

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[74] Ken Jacobs as quoted in Sitney, *Visionary Film*: 335. The destructive moment, however, was subsumed within a dialectic of structural purity: "Just watching things break, and in their breaking reveal their structure, had the most vibrant moment of life, all the clarity of their being made, like explicitly for their moment of destruction." Jacobs, idem.

[75] One has to wonder, for instance, what it would have meant for Bruce Nauman or Dan Graham to submit their films to an experimental film festival as Michael Snow did. As far as I know, they never did. Snow's films, on the other hand, were shown in the gallery and the cinema and continue to function in that manner.

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relationships between viewer, technique, and object within the situation of exhibition. We might suggest that post-minimal film amounts to a kind of experimental game because the remarkable things about games is that one can know that one is playing without completely agreeing upon the rules. Varian writes about breaking or confounding the rules, but Michelson in the same article proposed a more apt metaphor. After the previously cited comment that "given this new accessibility of the medium, anything can happen," she has this to add: "Astruc's dream of the camera as a fountain pen is transcended, the camera becomes a toy, and the element of play is restored to cinematic enterprise."[76]

The camera of the post-minimalists needs to be considered as a toy rather than a tool: that is the conclusion I shall finally draw in my last chapter. But to gain a preliminary perspective on what this might mean in the present context, I suggest we take one more glimpse into the past. *Anemic Cinema*, namely, is the one film among the historical ensemble of avant-garde films from the twenties that, to my mind, refuses to recede into the background the most [fig. 15]. The reason for this fact is that Duchamp's short film does not let itself be absorbed so easily into the lineage of independent film. It is namely not concerned with the formal rhythms of montage or camera movement, i.e. in developing the fundamental grammar of film, but in diverting this machine from its "logical purpose."

A work that tries it best not to be a "movie," Duchamp's film performs with great exactitude the task of breaking the rules. But the rules that are violated by

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[76] Michelson, "Film and the Radical Aspiration": 102.

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Anemic Cinema do not so much belong to cinema as to modernist painting. It is the optical purity of abstract painting that is invaded by this apparition of pulsating forms and spiraling texts: this swelling and collapsing space is at the same time a sexualized and bodily space, a kind of desiring machine to which the viewer is coupled. *Anemic Cinema* functions, in other words, to insert a kind of disorder within the absorbative structure that characterizes the perceptual space of both modernist painting and narrative cinema. With a quasi-infantile glee, Duchamp considered the therapeutic potential of his rotary discs to restore vision, but another kind of toy is also operative here, as Michelson has demonstrated.

In an essay on *Anemic Cinema* from 1973, Annette Michelson has drawn on the case history of Joey, an autistic child, who was diagnosed by Bruno Bettelheim.[77] Joey had transformed himself into a machine by constructing "a complex apparatus which had fixed to his bed...that would run him (or 'live him') while he slept."[78] To make Joey reenter the symbolical order of society he had to achieve a more instrumental relationship to his tools: "We had created a situation that made him indeed a homo faber, man the tool maker. I started him on the long trek of transforming, first material things to fit them to the needs of his life, and later himself, too, so that he could not only have the things but also the life he wanted."[79] *Anemic Cinema* operates like Joey's machine to engulf the viewer within its hybrid carnal-mechanical space, which bodies forth "a complex and fissured image of the self"

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[77] Annette Michelson, "*Anemic Cinema.* Reflections on an Emblematic Work," *Artforum* 12, no. 2 (October 1973): 64-69.

[78] Bettelheim as cited in ibid.: 67

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(Michelson), rather than offering the viewer a transcendental purchase on visual space as narrative cinema and modernist painting do. *Anemic Cinema*, Michelson concludes, is emblematic of the "autistic" economy of Duchamp's work as a whole.

What this means for us, among other things, is that the decentered subject of *Anemic Cinema* does not prefigure the new sovereign subject of the sixties who unites painting and cinema in the "technosphere" (Gene Youngblood) of expanded cinema. It is the very instrumental notion of the medium – the transparency of the spectacle – that breaks down in *Anemic Cinema* and, as such, Duchamp's film must be understood as part of another genealogy, namely post minimal film. But, once more, it is not necessary to claim that *Anemic Cinema* formed a *direct* influence on post-minimal film; perhaps it was the latter that helped to bring *Anemic Cinéma* back into the limelight.

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[79] Bettelheim as cited in ibid.: 68.

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2. Mel Bochner: De/Serialization

New York Windows (1966)

> *New York Windows* is a spectacle of anonymity, the emptiness that overruns and fills everything.
>
> – Mel Bochner[80]

In 1966, the year of *New York Windows*, Mel Bochner cleaned out his studio completely, ridding himself of all the trappings of a traditional painter. Instead of making objects, his time was now given over to the working out on paper of various numerical systems and permutational schemes. As Brenda Richardson has noted, Bochner was no longer interested in the things themselves, but in the relationships between things and the temporality of these relationships.[81] And Bochner has recently confirmed this shift in his orientation away from the thing in itself:

> I was interested in the ideas. I was interested in the phenomenology of it. I was interested in the conceptual aspect of it, but I wasn't interested in the thing of it.[82]

There was a pragmatic aspect to this decision, which might well function as a detail in a social history of conceptual art:

> I wasn't good at making things. I couldn't make a sculpture living in a little tiny apartment and having no money to hire fabricators.[83]

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[80] Mel Bochner, "New York Windows," unpublished statement (1966/67), archive of the artist, New York, N.Y..

[81] See Brenda Richardson, *Mel Bochner: Number and Shape* (Baltimore, Md.: Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976).

[82] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

[83] Ibid.

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However, more importantly, Bochner had become attached to the 'conceptual' position that Sol LeWitt took up within the emerging generation of minimalists. As LeWitt explained in relation to his *Serial Project No. 1 (ABCD)* (1966), which exhibits all possible permutations within a syntactical scheme consisting of a square grid and the open and closed shape of a cube [fig. 16]:

> The aim of the artist would not be to instruct the viewer but give him information. Whether the viewer understands this information is incidental to the artist; one cannot foresee the understanding of all viewers. One would follow one's predetermined premise to its conclusion, avoiding subjectivity. Chance, taste, or unconsciously remembered forms would play no part in the outcome. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of the premise.[84]

In the same manner, Bochner was to stress the objectivity of his method, its mechanical operation, which would lead him more and more into the realm of photography.

If Bochner had a quarrel with minimalism, then it was mostly with Judd's notion of "specific objects." Such an object need not convince, it need only be interesting, as Judd states. And what is interesting is the 'quality' of the thing as a whole. Things might exist as specific objects because they lack reference to an essential core, they are "alone and more intense, clear and powerful not diluted by an inherited format, variations of a form, mild contrasts and connecting parts and areas." Despite its ostensive objectivity, however, it is clear that Judd's aesthetic of specific objects is not void of an utopian aspect. It is as if the viewer might experience these objects with a freshness and directness never attained before, since they remain free of

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subjective content or historical determination. Indeed, Judd's writing contains an empiricist side which delights in the "obdurate identity of a material."[85]

Bochner would not share Judd's concern with the positivity of things. Against the unique presence of Judd's specific objects, Bochner sets a principle of detachment:

> In a world which is probably not more dehumanized than before, awareness of distance is a principal factor in functioning. Between objects are distances, not separations. That suggests a detachment which more or less excludes a formal approach.[86]

And this primary sense of being set back from the world will come to inform Bochner's impression of minimalism as projecting a technological realm of artifice, rather than opening on to the natural world of a lived present.[87] At the same time, this interpretation of minimalism was inflected by Bochner's equal, negative interest in pop art – he mentions Johns, Rauschenberg and Warhol as influences, but also states his anxiety of "not wanting to be a pop artist."[88] *New York Windows* offered Bochner a way of dealing with both a minimalist and a pop legacy.

After (temporarily) ending his career as a painter in 1966, Bochner began making diagrams of numerical progressions, which sometimes would be plastically realized as cardboard structures hung on the wall. In these works, Bochner followed a process that is quite close to that displayed by Sol LeWitt in the *Serial Projects* of the same year. Both artists allowed a permutational logic to generate by itself the

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[84] Sol LeWitt, "Serial Project No. 1 (ABCD)," *Aspen Magazine* 5-6 (1966): section 17.
[85] Donald Judd, "Specific Objects": 187.
[86] Mel Bochner, "Art in Process – Structures," *Arts Magazine* 40 (September-October 1966): 38.
[87] On the 'naturalist' utopia of a minimalist phenomenology, see Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum."
[88] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

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appearance of the work. Another example of this procedure, was Bochner's custom of constructing a sculpture in his studio each morning with a set of wooden cubes. He would take a photograph of the piece before executing another numerical combination. A selection from among the resultant photographic series was used in *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams* (1966). [fig. 17]

Two things become apparent from this brief preamble to *New York Windows*, namely Bochner's adoption of the serial logic of minimalism and the device of translating a conceptual scheme of spatial organization into a temporal event. In other words, Bochner began to conceive his practice in terms of a projection of a static structure into the mobility of a temporal field. The process of projection, moreover, is fully objective and lacking in subjective content. And it is this precept that has been identified as Bochner's "conceptual art of process."[89]

That the step from photography to film was not a large one for Bochner can be ascertained in relation to the historical source behind the structural format of *36 Photographs and 12 Diagrams*. This work was prompted by his familiarity with the chronophotographs taken by Eadweard Muybridge. This photographer's *Animal Locomotion* was a book that Bochner had encountered upon his arrival in New York during June 1964; he subsequently bought one of its prints.[90] *36 Photographs and 12*

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[89] Thus James Meyer states that Bochner maintains an "uneasy equivalence" between the pure linguistic conceptualism of Joseph Kosuth and the pure materialist process art of Robert Morris. See his "The Second Degree: Working Drawings and Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1995): 102.

[90] Sasha M. Newman discusses Bochner's interest in Eadweard Muybridge in "The Photo Pieces," in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966-1973*: 114-118. This essay also provides a brief account of *New York Windows* linking it to the example of both Andy Warhol and Walker Evans.

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Diagram imitated the visual structure of Muybridge's photo-grids by presenting three different aspects of each sculpture: a horizontal, a vertical, and an oblique angle (paired with the numerical diagram on which it is based). What interested Bochner in this device was the confrontation of two different visual orders within the continuity of the same field: namely the flat space of the diagram and the illusion of perspectival depth. Furthermore, movement itself in Muybridge's series is broken into discontinuous, spatial fragments and it is this disjointedness of the series which Bochner would stress in his experience of minimalism as well as film. As Bochner explains in 1967: "By setting up alternative reading logics within a visually discontinuous sequence [Muybridge] completely fragmented perception into what Stockhausen called, in another context, a 'directionless time-field'."[91] In fact, Muybridge had developed a device called the zoopraxiscope to project photographic images in motion, but Bochner was less fascinated by this synthetic approach than by its reverse logic. *New York Windows*, in fact, counters the viewer's absorption within the spectacle by interrupting the continuous movement of the cinematic apparatus.

The minimalist and pop references in *New York Windows* could not have been apparent on its first showing. The premiere of the film at the *Projected Art* exhibition was slotted for December 21 as part of a lengthy film program, which included several avant-garde and experimental movies besides several art documentaries. *New York Windows* was inserted in the midst of films by Bruce Baille, Hillary Harris and Hans

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[91] Mel Bochner, "The Serial Attitude," *Artforum* 6 (December 1967): 28.

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Richter, besides Hans Namuth's celebrated film of *Pollock Painting*.[92] Only Joseph Cornell, who was represented by a so-called "collage film," might have suggested another context of reception for *New York Windows*.[93] But the films of this artist had already been integrated within the formal lineage of independent film.[94] Furthermore, the surrealist origins of his film aesthetic would not have formed an obvious reference point for Mel Bochner in 1966.[95]

New York Windows consists of a sequence of shop windows that were filmed during one day in late 1965 or early 1966 [fig. 7]. The film was shot on 16mm at 24 fps with a stationary camera placed on a tripod perpendicular to the window plane. The camera was allowed to wind down by itself, providing a continuous take of circa one minute. Subsequently, each shot is slightly distended in time by slowing down the projection speed to 16 fps, a procedure that Bochner adopted from the silent movies of Andy Warhol.[96]

In total there are ten shots of different shop windows. The outer periphery of the camera view is contained by the actual frame of the windows so that in most shots only the glass surface is visible and not the encasement or the adjacent sidewalk. Each

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[92] Although lesser known today than her colleagues Baille and Richter, Harris belonged to the vanguard of American filmmakers who received official awards at the 1958 Experimental Film Festival in Knokke, Belgium. The *Projected Art* program on December 21 further contained the rather obscure names of Warren Forma, Jerry Chalem, Dorothy Beskind, Jules Engel, Nathan Boxer, Harry Hurwitz, and Donald Hyatt.

[93] Cornell's film is not otherwise identified.

[94] Ken Jacobs, for instance, worked briefly for Joseph Cornell and the latter's films have been fully assimilated within the history of American independent film.

[95] Although a surrealist geneaology might be suggested by the depopulated scenes of *New York Windows*, which begins with Eugène Atget, Bochner has not mentioned this possibility.

[96] Bochner describes this dilatory effect as "slowing the procession of disembodied reflections to a funereal pace. An occasional passerby drifts between the camera and the window shattering the

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shot presents a view of a somewhat indeterminate, shallow space consisting of the slight recess of the window display overlaid with multiple reflections cast onto the shop window glass from behind the camera. Generally the camera cannot penetrate into the interior depths due to the placement of screens or the intervening display of objects and posters. However, even when the view remains unobstructed, as in one shot of a bank of escalators in an office foyer, the inner scale of the building remains unfathomable to the viewer, and the metallic gleam of the escalator railing seems etched on the glass surface of the window itself. The design of the individual shop windows tend in each case to emphasize the impression of flatness by dividing the over-all surface into a grid-like pattern, or by retracing the rectangular dimensions of the outer frame.

New York Windows traces a spatial trajectory across the map of Manhattan. Bochner has explained that the edited sequence of the film does not exactly follow the actual path of the two artists while making the film, but it does follow a general uptown to downtown direction. The first three shots, for instance, represent the luxurious style of uptown stores with a display of elegant, silver objects, a mannequin at Bergdorf's carrying a whip surrounded by three leopards, and a third, rather minimal exhibit of valuables in a slim vitrine set against an ornate, marbled background. The fourth image was taken at Radio City Music Hall and shows a film still of a man and a woman running towards the viewer shown from the knees upward. The scale of the photo is abruptly cancelled when a man passes before the camera in

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last believable vestige of space. *New York Windows* is a spectacle of anonymity, the emptiness that

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which case we only see his shoulders and chin in profile. The fifth shot consists of the lobby of the office building with its escalator banks, which I mentioned before, and, then, the successive windows become increasingly bland. The sixth image only presents the vertical white stripes of a closed venetian blind, revealing the tripod with the camera on it in the reflection; the seventh is filled with an arrangement of vaguely erotic literature – the viewer can read the titles *Physique* and *Muscle Boy* – arranged cover to cover; the eighth is, again, empty with only a half-transparent screen blocking our view; the ninth, like the seventh provides a compact, grid-like design consisting in this case of specialty food products; and the film closes with a shot of a decrepit window frame in the Lower East Side shuttered by a closed blind.

In succession the individual shots of *New York Windows* pass by the spectator, just as the eye roams across the grids of Muybridge. Indeed, Bochner's first venture into filmmaking had been formed by an attempt to embody the vector of movement itself. So before continuing the discussion of *New York Windows*, it will be helpful to attend to this preceding work of Bochner and Moskowitz, which was titled *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station.*[97]

The circumstances that led to this original exercise were quite happenstance. Bochner and Moskowitz were visiting a friend, the filmmaker Rudy Wurlitzer, who had just completed a documentary film about Claes Oldenburg. Wurlitzer came with a

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overruns and fills everything." Bochner, "New York Windows": n.p..

[97] Bochner could not recall the exact date of *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station* and *New York Windows*: "I believe it was 1966. It's hard to remember. It could have been late 65. *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station* was made before *New York Windows*." Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

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tantalizing proposal. He had a camera with 72 seconds of film left and said if they could come up with an idea that could be executed in that time, he would let them have the footage. Moskowitz and Bochner decided on the following solution: Moskowitz would walk a straight line through Grand Central Station from the 42nd street entrance, straight through the hall, around the information booth, and up the escalator into the Pan Am building. Bochner would follow Moskowitz while keeping his hat in the corner of the viewfinder. They practiced all afternoon until they got the time down to 72 seconds. Then at the height of the rush hour, at 5:30 p.m., they shot the film, because the "idea of walking the straight line was to bombard it, in a sense, with reality."[98] The hat of Moskowitz keeps Bochner on course, going in and out of the frame, but the viewer was not supposed to be aware of this fact. As Bochner remembers:

> ...all hell is breaking loose, because the commuters are bombarding me from every side while I'm trying to walk the straight line. You don't really see the effect on the camera, it just looks like this unbelievably bad camera work – a kind of jerky, hand-held *cinema verité* style – trying to get through these random particle collisions, and then we go up and out.[99]

In the amusing simplicity of his first film, we might already appreciate the literalist approach of Bochner to the medium. The straight and narrow path across Central Station echoes, of course, that of the film strip as it is threaded through the shutter gate. It states the basic, quantifiable nature of film as a passage from A to B, measured by the exposure of 72 seconds of film stock.

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[98] Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.
[99] Ibid..

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Yet, this passage is not just measured in abstract terms; it is physically embodied in the world. We might appreciate the significance of this gesture in relation to another film that employs a different mode of linear structure. In 1967, Michael Snow would construct his famous *Wavelength* (1966-67) as a purely internal process of the cinematic apparatus [fig. 18]. The movie presents an extended forward zoom of the camera across an interior space that is shot from an elevated vantage point. Any human incident enters the frame from below, but makes no impact on the inexorable progression of the camera. In fact, *Wavelength* was not shot in one take, although it is experienced as one continuous movement. The actual movie forms a compilation of several shots taken over an extensive period.[100]

The difference between *Wavelength* and *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station* is immediately apparent. Bochner's viewer does not experience the same transcendental surge across space as in Snow's film, but is immersed in 72 seconds of actual time while the shaking frame of the film registers the sidelong 'bombardment' by the frantic commuters.[101] *Walking a Straight Line* forms a study in order and disorder similar to the crowd of commuters itself. Inner logic and external accident intersect in this film, while *Wavelength* is self-determining and tautological in structure – after reaching the far end of the room the camera comes to rest on a still photograph of a surface of waves. Snow's camera slowly ingests

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[100] See also my discussion of *Wavelength* in the next chapter.

[101] Annette Michelson has noted the phenomenological analogy between Snow's film and the abstract movement of an intentional consciousness which transcends actual space and time. See Annette Michelson, "Toward Snow," *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971): 30-37.

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depth, takes possession of it; the perspective of Bochner's camera is but one of several, which threaten, continuously, to overrun it.

At the same time, Bochner's reference to *cinéma verité* is significant because *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station* is not the documentary of a performance. While the irregularity of the camera movement might mimic the hand-held style of *cinéma verité*, Bochner's film undercuts the empiricist faith of this cinematic movement in the camera's truth: that is a belief, by the way, that forms the opposite side of the coin of the filmic ontology of Snow. The politics of authenticity represented by *cinéma verité* lies in its presumed presentation of a neutral slice of life. Bochner, however, is more concerned with the differential structure of this 'cut' into the world by the camera – not the self-evident reality of what we are given to see, but our blindness to what lies beyond the frame.

Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station exhibits this difference within perception through the coupling of the performer's body to the camera: "You could not see where you were going while moving with the camera because one eye is closed – which is what really interested me."[102] And evidence of this difference is repeated during the projection of the film. Normally the movie spectator will identify with the circumspective view of the camera, thus suppressing the contingency of his own position within the cinematic apparatus (see my discussion in 1.2.2). But the wavering progress of Bochner shows the camera to be blind to its own place in the

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[102] Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

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world. And it is not the world that is projected in this film, but the spectator who is literally *screened* from it.

The structural procedure that *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station* and *New York Windows* hold in common is that of a doubling of the frame. Bochner seeks, that is, to let a technique graph itself onto itself:

> I was very interested in the idea of the thing charting itself, making itself, and diagramming itself. The diagram of itself becoming the thing, the collapsing of the idea or the plan or the program...but with all those things I wanted to play off the technology of the camera, the one eye of the camera being the closest to what Renaissance perspective imagined. I wanted to conflate the time of Renaissance perspective with the modern camera.[103]

With the diagram of the thing becoming the thing, the diagram loses all its ideality. Likewise when the instrumentality of the camera is turned upon itself – the viewfinder taken literally – suddenly a gap in the field of vision is materialized. To take the perspectival box of the camera and to make the artificiality of this device apparent – *that* is the procedure of Bochner.

The Minimalist Artifice

All the rest is what happened.
– Mel Bochner[104]

If the critical operation of *New York Windows* consists in developing a dialectic between the moments of pop Art and minimalism, then this fits into a general

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[103] Ibid..

[104] Mel Bochner, letter addressed to Elayne H. Varian on the occasion of the *Projected Art* exhibition, archive of the artist, New York, N.Y..

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strategy of Bochner's. Starting around 1966, Bochner will begin to strain one technical or discursive practice through the sieve of another. *New York Windows* follows this procedure, as do his photographic and published works. Through this kind of heteroglossia, he strove to debunk the "artificiality" or "mythological" content of art, i.e. any totalized conception of art. A thread of ambiguity is woven into his work which calls self-defining properties, or what he calls the "tautological" structure of art, into question. In fact, Bochner reserved a pejorative meaning for the term of tautology in his writing, which clearly sets him off from the conceptual methods of Joseph Kosuth.

My motivation in emphasizing the systemic reach of Bochner's procedure across different media is to avoid any misunderstanding about the place of his films within his practice. They do not form a separate body of work and I do not wish to isolate them from their relationship to other pieces, such as his magazine works. This is not the place to investigate the textual complexity of Bochner's work, however that such an inter-textual approach was a prime concept for Bochner could be gathered from the title of a show he curated at the School of Visual Arts during the same month as the Finch College exhibition, namely *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things On Paper Not Necessarily Meant To Be Viewed As Art* [fig. 19]. This exhibition displayed on pedestals a number of binders which compiled various drawings, notes, and letters by artists that pertained to the conception and execution of their work, together with miscellaneous clippings and graphs, including a diagram of the Xerox machine. The S.V.A. show insisted on the possibility of reading rather than viewing

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the collated pages, and on the 'idea' rather than the execution of the work. As such it was highly instrumental in defining the future course of conceptual art, although Bochner has never been comfortable with that epithet.[105]

Bochner's own practice as an art critic begins at the end of 1965 when he started contributing to *Arts Magazine*, thus following in the footsteps of Donald Judd.[106] His career as a writer, therefore, coincided with his abandonment of painting and his move into filmmaking. Between 1966 and 1967 Bochner published an important series of reviews on minimalism in the pages of *Arts Magazine*. In these texts, the artist articulated a critical perspective on the movement, which he preferred to simply call by the name of the "New Art." With increasing intensity, his critical address to minimalism concentrated on the systemic possibilities of seriality.[107] It will be helpful to examine Bochner's writings of this period briefly in order to situate *New York Windows* within the broader context of his artistic practice.

In his first major text, a review of the *Primary Structures* at the Jewish Museum, Bochner formulates two basic characteristics of a minimalist practice,

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[105] On this exhibition and its place in Bochner's work, see James Meyer, "The Second Degree."

[106] I shall not investigate the specific role of writing in Bochner's work. This is nonetheless a subject that deserves more extensive attention. I shall need to touch on it again, if only briefly, in relation to Dan Graham and Robert Smithson. Craig Owens has offered an important clue to the discursive function of artist's writings during the sixties when he noted that it did not serve a simple supplementary or explanatory purpose. Instead, it represented a fundamental shift in artistic methodology away from the strict, Modernist boundaries between the 'temporal art' of poetry and the 'spatial art' of painting and sculpture. As a result, writing has become spatialized, and sculpture temporalized. I provide this comment as a counterbalance to my own emphasis in the following on the analytical side of Bochner's writing. See Craig Owens, "Earthwords," *October* 10 (Fall 1979): 120-30.

[107] The most important texts are "Primary Structures: A Declaration of a New Attitude as Revealed by an Important Current Exhibition." *Arts Magazine* 40 (June 1966): 32-35; "Art in Process – Structures"; "Systemic," *Arts Magazine* 41 (November 1966): 40; "Serial Art Systems: Solipsism." *Arts Magazine* (Summer 1967); and "The Serial Attitude."

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namely its refusal of any idealist or anthropomorphic content and its employment of a serial logic as a means of such a refusal. Minimalism, Bochner reports, is engaged in a denaturalization of prior art forms with their reliance on organic metaphors of style and expression; it voids the "humanistic stammering" and psychologisms that he feels marred not only previous art forms such as abstract expressionism and happenings, but also pop art:

> What these artists have in common is the attitude that Art – from the root artificial – is unreal, constructed, invented, predetermined, intellectual, make-believe, objective, contrived, useless. Their work is dumb in the sense that it does not "speak to you", yet subversive in that it points to the probable end of all Renaissance values.[108]

Stripped of all symbolic and expressive content, the minimalist object, as Bochner maintains, has been reduced to a state of sheer positivism. The artist-critic notes with satisfaction that the practice of minimalism negates the humanistic illusions of psychological depth and inner meaning in the work of art. Bochner thus came to understand that minimalism forced a decisive break with the dominant system of modernist aesthetics, which in the American context of the mid-sixties, was grounded in a *projective* relationship between the viewer and the work of art. Whether the abstractions of modernism were considered to embody an experience of pure opticality, as Greenberg argued, or, in a more regressive fashion, were thought to retain a basic anthropomorphic structure, as Judd claimed, the governing principles of the modernist gaze were those of absorption and identification. Minimalism, on the

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[108] Bochner, "Primary Structures": 34.

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other hand, refused such an idealist core of significance.[109] The "New Art," Bochner felt, is all exteriority, all surface: "unlifelike, not spontaneous, exclusive. It does not move."[110] Minimalism contains none of that thrust and gestural dynamism that Donald Judd had rejected earlier in the sculpture of, say, Mark di Suvero, and it lacks the organic wholeness of the European tradition of part-by-part composition. Instead, the viewer is confronted with the abiding presence of indifferent objects, which are cut off from the intentional grounds of authorship and style.

As I have indicated, detachment is the term Bochner used to describe the perceptual effect of minimalism and that detachment is achieved through the use of serial production. Minimalism is an "art of units" that substitutes an industrial means of production for the individual skills of craftsmanship.[111] Seriality does not reduce the spatio-temporal parameters of art to a single, rationalist idea of formal resolution, as for instance, ingrained within the contemplative achievement of compositional balance; it is "not rationalistic and underlying," in Judd's terms, "but simple order, like that of continuity, one thing after another."[112] While Bochner would balk at certain implications of Judd's reference to the "continuity" within seriality, he finds

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[109] The projective nature of Greenberg's opticality becomes apparent from his famous statement that a Modernist painting "can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye." Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" [1960], as reprinted in John O'Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993): 90. The anthropomorphism and gestural nature of abstract sculpture is denounced by Donald Judd in his programmatic text "Specific Objects" with which Bochner was familiar.

[110] Bochner, "Primary Structures": 34.

[111] Here is Bochner on the subject of the tool: "There is no sense in glorifying technology. Technology is merely a tool...it is not art." "Art in Process—Structures": 39.

[112] Judd, "Specific Objects": 184.

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himself in agreement with the observation that serial logic pre-empts the formal closure of modernist composition.

It is clear that , in the eyes of Bochner, this compositional system had shown itself to be completely exhausted by 1966. Only Frank Stella's black paintings of 1959 had briefly extended the life of painting by employing a serial method which allowed a sense of real difference to appear from one painting to the next. Hence, Stella's paintings are "singular and self-sufficient, but still part of serial logic which predetermined it, yet upon which it was not a mere variant."[113] On the other hand, while Stella acknowledged painting as a permutational system, rather than a linear system of formal innovation, his paintings established their own finite possibilities and did nothing to repair the obsolescence of painting.[114]

Like Judd in his seminal essay on "Specific Objects", Bochner argues that the *technique* of seriality severs objects from any imbrication within the formal continuities of *history*. Serial objects are, as he stated in relation to Stella, singular and self-sufficient, that is beyond reach of the rationalist categories of Greenbergian thought. Seriality, therefore, in its self-generative logic is understood by Bochner to undermine the transcendental position of the modernist viewer. What is at stake here are two diverging conceptions of a series. For the modernist, a successful painting brings a historical series to fruition; it reveals the original purity of the medium. Hence, the painting will be said to *compel* conviction, not because it fits a normative

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[113] Bochner, "Systemic": 40.

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criterion, but because it both affirms and overcomes a whole tradition of painting. Its essential form reveals the ideal cause behind the history of painting considered as a series of objects spread across time.[115]

To a modernist critic, the lucidity of a 'good' painting, its "power to hold and stamp itself out" as Fried wrote of Stella, allows the viewer to grasp the whole continuous history of art as both objectively and subjectively determined.[116] The whole series of the past is contained in the present instance of *that* Stella hanging before me. This presentness of the work, as Fried expressed it, releases the viewer from his or her own contingent position within history. The viewer is, as it were, placed at the origin of temporality, it is his or her consciousness that gives time its orientation and meaning.

On the other hand, Bochner's notion of the series does not offer such a projective capacity to its viewer. Indeed, Stella marks the point where the modernist series tends to break down. Fried could still defend the early paintings, but Greenberg found them too deterministic in their form. The autonomy of the object had been pushed so far that it collapsed into a state of anomie for Greenberg, becoming dangerously similar to a readymade. Such is the manner in which we should understand Bochner's usage of the same term of "autonomy" – the minimalist object

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[114] Bochner was, of course, to return to painting later as several other artists that proclaimed the end of painting during the mid-sixties. See James Meyer, "The Relevance of Painting: A Conversation with Mel Bochner," unpublished typescript.

[115] See Krauss, "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary."

[116] Michael Fried, "Shape as Form" [1966] as reprinted in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: The Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1996): 77.

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has an "autonomous and indifferent" appearance, he insists, for it cannot be subtended within the idealist framework of the modernist beholder.

In other words, the phenomenon of distance which opens up between the embodied, moving spectator and the situated object cannot be reduced and contained by the objective 'measure' of a cognitive subject. Between concept and experience remains a gap that can never be closed. Bochner, for instance, describes the ambiguity that a permutational cube by Sol LeWitt, with its three-dimensional, ribbed structure, will produce as a result of the conflict between two distinct, yet related registers of thought and perception:

> When one encounters a LeWitt, although an order is immediately intuited, how to apprehend or penetrate it is nowhere revealed. Instead one is overwhelmed with a mass of data—lines, joints, angles. The pieces situate in centers usurping most of the common space, yet their total volume (the volume of the bar itself) is negligible. Their immediate presence in reality as separate and unrelated things is asserted by the demand that we go around them. What is most remarkable is that they are seen moment to moment spatially (due to a mental tabulation of the entirety of other views) yet do not cease at every moment to be flat.[117]

Bochner suggests, then, that the serial grids of LeWitt's work constitute a visual device that contain information – "the mass of data" – yet it do not provide information *about* something. They afford the possibility of perception, but not the perception *of* something, exactly as LeWitt expressed it himself in the earlier quote, stating that the work is not to instruct but to provide information. In other words, the

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[117] Bochner, "Serial Art Systems: Solipsism": 42.

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minimalist device of seriality is not referential in nature; it constitutes an order without a center.[118]

Of course, there is a model of minimalism that reinstates a kind of center to the series and to which I have referred above, namely, a phenomenological model which is anchored in the continuity of the lived experience of the body. It is the unity of the body that projects a natural horizon upon the minimalist series; it is the constancy of the body image through time that ties the spatial series together in one transcendental synthesis. As Merleau-Ponty has stated: "if the object is an invariable structure, it is not one in spite of the change of perspective, but in that change or through it."[119] However, Bochner does not share this model: referring to a corner piece by Robert Morris, the artist observes that "it is, more or less, a fact among other phenomenological facts, even if it is a bit uncanny."[120]

To what degree might *New York Windows* be said to share in this sense of the uncanny?

New York Windows forms a concatenation of static frames, passing abruptly from one shot to the next, as if one were observing a series of slides. Nevertheless, movement is not totally absent *within* the image. It is intermittently registered by the

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[118] Compare this comment by Rosalind Krauss: "It was an extraordinary decade in which objects proliferated in a seemingly endless and obsessional chain, each one answering the other—a chain in which everything linked to everything else, but nothing was referential. To get inside the systems of this work, whether LeWitt's or Judd's or Morris's, is precisely to enter a world without a center, a world of substitutions and transpositions nowhere legitimated by the revelations of a transcendental subject." Rosalind Krauss, "LeWitt in Progress" [1977], as reprinted in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986): 258

[119] Maurice Merleau-Ponty as quoted in Rosalind Krauss, "Richard Serra/Sculpture," in *Richard Serra/Sculpture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1986): 31.

[120] Bochner, "Art in Process": 39.

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viewer due to the reflection of passing cars in the window or by the passage of a pedestrian between the camera and the windowpane. Time, however, has been slightly stretched as a result of the retarded projection speed and Bochner describes this dilatory effect as "slowing the procession of disembodied reflections to a funereal pace. An occasional passerby drifts between the camera and the window shattering the last believable vestige of space."[121] *New York Windows* indeed undoes the realistic aspect of cinema, spinning a dialectic between naturalism and artificiality, absorption and detachment. But it also draws on the spatial and temporal parameters of painting, entering them into a filmic structure. The film thus continuously oscillates between a sense of the whole versus the fragment, relief versus flatness, depth versus surface, frame versus field, movement versus stasis, and, ultimately, narrative continuity versus the sheer presentness of a site.

Take, for example, the spatial effect of the passerby already noted by Bochner. The event has the somewhat startling effect of contradicting the apparent flatness of the image. The sudden appearance of the figure, usually cut off by the frame at an arbitrary height, wrenches open a space within the image where none previously seemed to exist. The scale of this fragmented figure, moreover, is generally incomparable to that of the objects or pictures behind the windowpane, forcing the viewers to bestow gigantic proportions on the passerby despite the dictates of common sense.

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[121] Bochner concludes this comment with the motto that heads this chapter section, namely "*New York Windows* is a spectacle of anonymity, the emptiness that overruns and fills everything."

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In phenomenological terms, one might state that *New York Windows* shows up the fallacy of the "constancy hypothesis" of empiricism whereby apparent size is calculated in the mind as real size divided by the distance. This distance of the figure in relation to the background and ourselves cannot be apprehended exactly because the frame interferes. The term that is missing, phenomenology holds, is the living body; the anterior ground that projects all relations of directionality and orientation into the world. The viewer's body remains locked on side of the screen and cannot occupy the same visual field as the represented figure. Since our body cannot transplant itself into the projected space, our sense of depth and proportion is automatically disturbed.

Without doubt Bochner was familiar with Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, but it is not necessary to conclude that *New York Windows* was somehow conceived in relation to this source.[122] The filmic text is more polyvalent than that. Bochner himself offers the following observations on the strangeness of his film images:

> You might see them as stills except for the movement that takes place on that impossible to locate window, the surrogate for the painter's picture plane, or for the occasional interruption of that fictional space by a pedestrian. Interruptions that within the confines of the reality of that film are really brutal. It's almost shocking. When somebody walks between you and the picture, there appears to be no space there. They cannot be there.[123]

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[122] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

Bochner states his interest in phenomenology early on: "It will do no good to call this work anti-art...The definitions are phenomenological. Even the definitions are phenomena." Yet, this phenomenology of the "New Art," in his opinion, does not imply the mutual implication of body and object within the totality of a visual field, but results in the utter defamiliarization of objects: "Their only enigma is their existence." "Primary Structures": 33.

[123] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

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In other words, Bochner employs a strategy of defamiliarization in *New York Windows* that causes a breakdown in our customary perception of space. This is significant because it provides his indication of his closeness to and distance from a phenomenological model of minimalist spatiality. In fact, the source for this filmic device of alienation that he most frequently cites is Bertolt Brecht:

> It was the beginning of publishing, It was around the time I started reading about serial music and getting engaged with that idea, which came out of an interest as a student in Brecht and the mechanisms of separation, of getting away from what one is doing, of separating yourself.[124]

He achieved this mechanism of separation – which operated in a different sense from that offered by Sitney in relation to structural film – through the use of abrupt cuts in the movie:

> The actual nature of film is *discontinuity*. Historically, this only became clear with the invention of the "cut," or "edited", it ceases to have any pretense to continuity. The "cut" breaks time, destroying the illusion of natural sequence between events. The "cut" introduces suddenness of artificiality, into film time. When temporal continuity is broken a Brechtian "alienation effect" takes place. The consequence of shattering causality is to jolt the viewer out of any belief that what they are seeing is "real."[125]

Once more we are cautioned against slipping this work into an avant-garde history of film.

The Russian avant-garde had drawn quite the opposite conclusion about the purpose of montage. According to the famous experiment of Lev Kuleshov, a face will appear to alter its expression according to the content of the shots it is intercut with. In other words, the cut does not establish discontinuity but produces continuity across

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[124] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

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the break.[126] The fullness of meaning within the individual image is predicated upon this preceding difference. By now it is clear, however, that Bochner resisted such a plenitude or intelligibility of the image; he wished, instead, to picture the "spectacle of anonymity."

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[125] Mel Bochner, "New York Windows": n.p..
[126] Rosalind Krauss discusses Kuleshov's experiment in Krauss, "Richard Serra/Sculpture."

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Narrative Endings

> Time is broken at random intervals. There are no transitions. No attempt at naturalism is made. The windows in the film were chosen on the basis of the artificiality of their displays. The surfaces are hard and smooth. Everything is behind glass. Everything has been 'pre-framed.'
>
> – Mel Bochner[127]

"There are no transitions," Bochner writes of *New York Windows* and this disjunctive structure of the film carries over to its relationship to history. When Bochner picked up the film camera in 1966 it was not to establish a link with the past of avant-garde film or the present of structural film, so much is clear. It almost goes without saying, furthermore, that this turn to film displaced the artist from the strict, formalist lineage of modernist painting as defined by Clement Greenberg. *New York Windows* represented a rupture with the past and we are now in the position to determine the exact nature of this historical break.

New York Windows might be mourning the end of painting. However, the result of this funereal procession was not to transform the photographic medium into a new object of fetishism by the artist:

> I think first of all, if you are not killing something you love there is a lot less pleasure in the killing. So part of substituting photography for painting was not to become a photographer, not because I reveled in photography. I had no interest in photography at all. One of my favorite quotes of Duchamp is: "I would like photography to replace painting until something else would come along to make people despise

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[127] Mel Bochner, "New York Windows": n.p..

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> photography." I despised photography from the beginning. I loved paint, but there was nowhere for me to paint, I had no place to paint.[128]

Despite Bochner's dismissal of *art* photography, Bochner and Moskowitz did find a precursor in the work of Walker Evans. Their film can be read as an ode to this photographer's archiving of the commercial vernacular of street facades.[129] However, it would be a mistake to situate this film solely in relation to a history of photography, whether considered in its artistic or documentary vein. As I have argued, *New York Windows* achieves its main significance from its ambiguous position within the genealogy of post-modernist art.[130]

While the film provides a synoptic view of the modernist project in its self-reflective play on the frame and the frontality of space, *New York Windows* stands at an absolute remove from modernism's idealist motivations. The doubling of the frame in *New York Windows*, for instance, with its adjustment of the camera's view to the size of the shop window, does not duplicate a strictly formalist principle of self-containment. The grids and concentric figures that abound on the surface of modernist paintings work to achieve just this sense of self-enclosure through a reinscription of the outer frame within the internal field of the painting. Providing an image of perfect self-enclosure, the painting might appear as a kind of world in itself that is totally

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[128] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

[129] Bochner and Moskowitz both shared an interest in Walker Evans' work. Moskowitz had even been hired briefly as an assistant to Evans. Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

[130] In the present context I use the term postmodern only in a restricted, historical sense to indicate a contemporary break with the formalist aesthetic of modernism initiated in the American context by pop art and minimalism. Mel Bochner has employed the term himself to identify a shift away from the opticality of modernism towards a linguistically inflected practice. He locates this turn in the work of Jasper Johns and thereby finds himself in agreement with the conclusions drawn by Leo Steinberg in his seminal "Other Criteria" essay. Cf. James Meyer, "The Second Degree": 106, n. 36.

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independent of the viewer's, yet therefore also completely manifest to their perception. In the case of *New York Windows*, however, the viewers are not granted this position of sovereignty. Their view is cut from the world itself, making them all too painfully aware of the contingency of their own perspective.

"The windowpane," Bochner observes, "now congruent with the movie screen, becomes the debased counterpart of the picture's plane, simultaneously transparent *and* reflective." [131] The compression of depth onto the flat surface of the window/screen, mimics the modernist reduction of painterly space to the near flatness of the canvas itself, just as the overlayering of multiple reflections in the glass windows imitates the simultaneity of the modernist grid which contains all differences of figure and ground within its own basic structure. Even the protruding body of the passerby which occasionally disrupts the visual impression of flatness can be fitted within this formalist history, for as Clement Greenberg remarked in relation to Cubist collage, pictorial space moved from an illusion of depth towards the material surface of the support only to physically extend beyond it in the shape of the glued on bits of paper and cloth. Bochner's own earlier development as a painter followed this same trajectory, for after working in an abstract expressionist vein, he proceeded to emphasize the materiality of his paintings by gouging into the paint and subsequently by attaching objects to their surfaces.

New York Windows also releases one of the repressed contents of painting's past, namely the troubled relation of the historical avant-garde to the burgeoning

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[131] Bochner, "New York Windows": n.p..

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sphere of a consumer culture. To just sketch this background in passing, I might refer to such differing examples as Fernand Léger's praise of the art of window-dressing or *La Révolution Surréaliste*'s illustration of a dream narrative with Atget's photograph of corseted mannequins in a lingerie shop window.[132] Considering modernism's uneasy relationship to mass culture, it should be taken as highly significant that the concluding image in *New York Windows* is formed by the most blank and most dilapidated instance of the series, namely the blinded window in the Lower East Side. Because the attraction of the commodity spectacle that had been captured in the first shots has faded from this final image, it is also the most indifferent. Void of any human presence, this image acquires the highest quotient of abstractness.

The intrinsic reference of *New York Windows* to modernism is as immediately evident as its debt to minimalism. *New York Windows* shares with minimalism the use of a serial logic of production, however it does not merely constitute a formal continuation of the latter. The actual structure of the film implies a critical distance from minimalism, just as its form imitates the appearance of modernist painting without adopting the idealist conditions of the latter's aesthetic. Similarly *New York Windows* observes the spectacle of the commodity without identifying with it to the degree that pop art did.

Finally, it would seem evident that *New York Windows* attains transitional status as a proto-conceptual work, that is, if conceptual art is equated with the so-

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[132] Atget's photograph of 1912 showing mannequins in a Parisian shopwindow appeared in *La Révolution Surréaliste* 7 (15 June 1926) as accompaniment to a dream narrative by Marcel Noll.

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called dematerialization of the art object and the negation of skilled labor. Nonetheless, such a reading remains inadequate. Already during the late thirties Walter Benjamin had noted the ideological function of film in its destruction of the auratic value of the unique art object. However, his thesis about the politics of such a mass substitution of things by their reproduction, was not separated from a specific analysis of the material conditions of the cinematic medium.[133] To deny the materiality of artistic production is to idealize the nature of art and therefore reinstate the metaphysical tradition of modernism. This is exactly the trap into which a so-called dematerialized practice is likely to fall. Joseph Kosuth's linguistic model of conceptualism forms by now the classical example with its tautological order of "Art as Idea as Idea."[134] At no time, in fact. can Kosuth's linguistic definitions do without some form of material support, even if the object itself remains utterly replaceable. "Language Is Not Transparent" will be Bochner's famous riposte to such an idealist version of conceptual art.[135] This is a subject to which I shall return in the following

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Bochner pointed out to the author that he only later encountered a reference to the shopwindow in Duchamp's notes. Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

[133] The question of skill is perhaps a more complex issue in Benjamin's essay which draws both on psychophysical models of perceptual training and phenomenological models of habituality. This is not to say that a simple good-bad opposition between the auratic value of painting and the exhibition value of film adequately explains the critical theory of Benjamin. Likewise a critique of the political economy of the art market might be superficially equated with the negation of object making and craftmanship (an argument oft-repeated today in relation to the 'fluidity' of digital media), however this provides *in itself* insufficient grounds to resist the intrusion of the spectacular logic of late capitalism into everyday life. For such a critique to be effective, film needs to be apprehended at the more structural level of its technical apparatus, as I shall argue below.

[134] See, for instance, Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 105-143.

[135] On this work see *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible 1966-1973*: 191.

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chapters, but suffice to say, for the moment, that I wish to signal the theoretical inadequacy of the term of dematerialization.[136]

In sum, *New York Windows* might be understood to stand in an ambivalent relationship to the reigning historical narratives of the period. But what about the internal armature of narrative in *New York Windows*?

As a matter of fact the film cannot be said to employ narrative, if by narrative is understood the unfolding of a causal sequence. Such a directionality and finality is not to be gained from the film. Nor does *New York Windows* rearrange narrative logic according to a modernist logic by collapsing its diachronic onto its synchronic axis – that is, by viewing the whole of painting's past summed up in the presentness of, say, Frank Stella's grids or Louis Morris's veils. *New York Windows*, rather, plays on the difference between presence and absence, depth and surface, lucidity and opacity.

Take the basic content of the film – its itinerary from uptown to downtown. Never is the spectator granted a total grasp of the urban environment. In fact, it is difficult to identify at any time where the camera exactly is placed upon the topographic map of the city or, for that matter, to judge the actual distance between the individual shots. While the camera's displacement clearly follows a southward direction, the sequence of shots is not strictly linear and the spectator is provided with few cues regarding the precise location of the separate windows. Instead of providing

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[136] Interestingly enough, the term of "dematerialization" surfaced before in the terminology of the historical avant-garde to indicate a beneficial effect of the implementation of new technologies, such as film, in order to replace old formats, such as the book.

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markers from which one might triangulate the area covered by the film, the images remain attached to a compressed view of space – a linear sequence of flat images like the physical nature of the film strip itself. The effect of this filmic procedure is that the viewer becomes unable to imagine a contiguous background between the shots. Someone who is not familiar with New York would find it impossible to attain a sense of the city's organization and scale from watching the film. The occasional pedestrian who happens to drift by the camera is set on his or her own course through the city, just as the movie itself traverses urban space. But the ambulatory path of the one does not coincide with the sudden jumps of the other. "So, there is an itinerary," Bochner explains, "but the cut makes the artificiality of the movie."[137]

A discussion of *New York Windows* would be incomplete without a comparison to the cinematic enterprise of Andy Warhol. In particular, it is helpful to compare Bochner's film to *Empire*. This infamous eight-hour long celebration of the Empire State Building as an architectural star, compresses the urban environment into a flattened image, just as *New York Windows* does. [138] In its complete distancing from the observed scene, however, Empire differs from *New York Windows*, which appears to alternate between the two poles of a "contemplative" and a "habitual" mode of experience.

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[137] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.

[138] In *Empire* only the upper section of the office tower appears in view and a glimpse of the roofs of some other buildings below. It was shot from the 41st floor of the Time-Life building. For an extensive commentary on *Empire*, see Angell, *The Films of Andy Warhol: Part II.*

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Walter Benjamin suggested those binary terms in order to describe two different modes of spatial apprehension.[139] It will serve us better, however, to replace his "contemplative" with the term "spectacular." For contemplation describes solely a mode of perceptual absorption within an object or scene, while the spectacular refers not only to the visual attraction of the commodity but to its underlying structure of alienation as well. Hence, it is a spectacular, flattened view of the city, both alluring and detached in nature, that is captured in Warhol's iconic figure of the Empire State Building. A habitual knowledge of the urban space, on the other hand, is acquired almost subconsciously in the course of everyday life through one's tactile immersion within the urban environment. Such a habitual mode of experience therefore counters the alienating force of commodification; it seems to assure the existence for us of a truly public space that is not disowned in the name of capital.

New York Windows alternates between these two poles of experience since it originated with the ramblings of these two friends through the city, a kind of indigenous exploration that strays from the path of both daily routine and the tourist guidebook. To a degree, the film records such a process of familiarization, yet it is one that can only proceed from a position of distance. Hence the film's contrast between the grainy texture of the window frames and the glimmer of their glassy expanses, between the collapsed space of the windows and the relief of a passing body

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[139] I am loosely drawing on Walter Benjamin's discussion of the opposition between a habitual or contemplative apprehension of space at the end of the "Work of Art" essay. The notion of habituality he develops is itself clearly derived from phenomenological theory. See Walter Benjamin, "The Wor k of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" [1936], *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968).

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which occupies a depth previously disavowed by the camera, hence also the contrast between human presence and its absence, for nowhere do Bochner and Moskowitz appear in view themselves.[140] Likewise, while this promenade leads the viewer past a series of windows, never is the city as a whole framed as an image. In fact, there is no connecting thread between these windows except the precise functioning of a serial logic.[141] Indeed, the filmic series generates a perceptual experience that is more akin to a feeling of dislocation than of spatial belonging.

Rather than functioning according to a narrative model of film, *New York Windows* adheres more to a performative notion of film.[142] That is to say, the film confronts the viewer directly. In the course of watching the movie, the spectator becomes acutely aware of his or her own physical situation and the actual duration of the movie. Rather than transporting the viewer into a domain of fictional suspense with its temporal elisions, *New York Windows* offers a fully quantified and spatialized experience of time: ten windows pass before the viewer's eye during a time span of approximately twelve minutes.

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[140] Even *Empire* includes a brief glimpse of Andy Warhol's reflection in the window.

[141] In other words, is it possible to construct an authentic portrait of New York's identity through the application of such a systematic, if not archival method? To be sure, I do not believe that this is the object of *New York Windows* although it might be viewed as a parody of such documentary efforts. Significantly, Walter Benjamin would emphasize the "tactile" qualities of that major early nineteenth-century project of urban documentation, namely Atget's photographs of the streets of Paris.

[142] This is a theme that will be further explored in Part 2.

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Bochner's *New York Windows* does not form an isolated incident in the artist's work of the sixties.[143] But Bochner was to use the film camera only sparingly during the following years, as is typical of most artist filmmakers, and would stop completely after 1970.

During the early seventies, it became increasingly apparent to many visual artists that a critical practice of film could no longer be carried on in the gallery. What became apparent was the need to directly address the spectacle of mass culture by developing a more narrative format of film. One needed, that is, to undermine cinema from within. Lawrence Weiner, for instance, would discover such a procedure in Godard's *Au bout de souffle* which he called "the first French pop film."[144] Within this discovery by Weiner, lies a distinct politics of the cinema. We might say, then, that Weiner chose to make a "movie" rather than a "films, when he started working on his feature length *A First Quarter* of 1972-1973.[145] But this forms a later chapter in the history of the artist film which lies beyond the scope of my present project.

Bochner would reach this same fork in the road around 1970. During that year he began work on a silent film called *Passing Time*. This film was partially conceived

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[143] While I am concerned to situate *New York Windows* within the formal logic of Bochner's work, proper credit must be given to Moskowitz's own contribution to the film. He was a painter who had previously shown, with reasonable success, at Leo Castelli. Moskowitz had developed a style of painting that stood mid-way between pop and minimalism, depicting semi-abstract architectural surfaces, such as window frames.

[144] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conversation with Lawrence Weiner," in Lawrence Weiner (London: Phaidon, 1998): 23. In a discussion with the author, Weiner chose to nominate Carl Dreyer's *Gertrud* as the "first pop film." Lawrence Weiner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., May 20, 1997.

[145] *A First Quarter* (16 mm, black and white, 85 min) used kinescope technique (i.e., video transferred to film). The film differs from the first wave of artist films, which are under review here, by carrying full titles which identify the director (Lawrence Weiner), the cinematographer (Andy Mann),

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as an ode to his favorite writer, Michel Butor, who was the author of a novel by the same title. Butor's book, like the artist film, was conceived in a hybrid manner, part diary and part detective novel. Bochner's film was scripted in loose reference to the text and then edited in the camera. But Bochner never completed the project. On asking him the reason for turning his back on the film, the artist replied:

> I closed the door. Because it would have to take me to a place in relationship to my work where I didn't want to be, a place that I had already found in my photo pieces, which was working with other people. One of the boxes I found myself in with the photo pieces was that I was working in, what I call, the "directorial" mode.[146]

Thus in 1970 Bochner had reached an impasse beyond which a more familiar model of cinema pressed itself upon him: the classical movie and its requisite specialization of labor. Not only was Bochner's method of work not equipped to handle such a hierarchical process of production – what is known as the directorial mode – it would have fundamentally shifted the conceptual basis of his practice.

Until that moment, Bochner had explored what he called "the phenomenology, technology and geometry of the camera" in a set of five short films: *Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station*, *New York Windows*, *360° x 3*, *Water*, *Survey* and *Dorothea in Fifteen Positions*. The dominant formal logic that he employed in these films was that of seriality. Yet with *Passing Time* he had to acknowledge that the possibilities of a serial system had been exhausted and he was compelled to articulate another approach to filmmaking. This film he explains was

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the composer (Richard Landry), the cast (Elaine Grove, Mel Kendrick, Bella Obermaier, Tina Girouard), and finally the producer (Leo Castelli).

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intended to be "narrative, metaphorical, autobiographical." The narrative does not take the overt form of a pre-existing story, he explains, but it is "possible to read the relationships between the parts, which is not possible in the other films."[147]

But more than anything, *Passing Time* signifies the completion of a trajectory that had been initiated in 1965 with *New York Windows*. Bochner could see a potential future for himself as filmmaker, but he also saw that this future would lead him further away from the domain of the visual arts. As a result, *Passing Time* in its unfinished state also records the completion of his film activity.

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[146] Mel Bochner, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., July 30, 1997.
[147] Ibid.

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3. Intermezzo: Hunter College (1968)

On April 3, 1968, an extraordinary event took place in the auditorium of Hunter College in New York City. It concerned a film screening organized by Robert Huot, a young painter, which included movies by himself, Robert Barry, Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton and Joyce Wieland. [148] Barry and Huot were both teaching in the art department of Hunter College at the time. During the evening, the following films were shown in this order: Robert Barry's *Squares* and *Scenes*, Hollis Frampton's *Information*, *Process Red*, *Snowblind*, and *Heterodyne*, and Robert Huot's *Loops*. After a short intermission the screening continued with Robert Huot's *Spray*, Michael Snow's *Short Shave*, and two films by Joyce Wieland, namely *Cat Food* and an untitled work, which is only listed on the program sheet as being made in 1968 and lasting five minutes. [149]

As a matter of fact, the April 3 screening was not an isolated occurrence. During the same year other films by the same authors were shown at Hunter College, most importantly Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, which already had its premiere during the preceding year.[150] Nevertheless, the other film evenings appear to have been less

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[148] The source of my information is a letter by Robert Barry, dated November 2000, which was addressed to Chrissie Iles, film curator at the Whitney Museum. Barry's missive also brought to light the original mimeographed sheet which outlined the Hunter College progam. His correspondence took place during the preparations for the exhibition *Flashing into the Shadows: The Artist's Film in America 1966-76*, which I co-curated with Chrissie Iles. For further filmographic details, see the appended filmography. Chrissie Iles suggested to me that Wieland's untitled film might have been her *Hand Tinting*

[149] Chrissie Iles has suggested to me that Joyce Wieland's untitled film might have been her *Hand Tinting*.

[150] *Wavelength* was first shown in May 1967.

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ambitious in scope and the details remain sketchy. The April 3 event shall be my main focus since it functioned as one of the first public manifestations of a crossing between artistic and filmic practices. It is possible to detect a common purpose behind the exhibited films, which concerns a similarity at the level of structural form and their mode of public address. But this specific moment of convergence between artistic and filmic traditions would prove to be transient, which would also be reflected in the future careers of the participating artists and filmmakers.[151]

Huot apparently took the initiative for the April 3 screening at Hunter College. However, the artist has stressed that it formed a collaborative effort. Careful consideration was given to the combination and sequencing of the individual films,

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[151] One of the best indicators of how the art and film world would drift apart is the position of Hollis Frampton on the topic of the 'artist' film towards 1970. Frampton, who actually shot the footage for one of Lawrence Weiner's first films, became severly disillusioned with the lagging access of professional filmmakers to the museum. I have not fully researched this topic, but the contentious atmosphere is registered in such places as the public statement "Filmmakers versus the Museum of Modern Art," published in the *Filmmakers' Newsletter*, 2, no. 7 (May 1969): 1-2, which was signed by Hollis Frampton, Ken Jacobs, and Michael Snow. Or Frampton's remark printed in the *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue no. 5* (New York: 1974) that "Some painters and sculptors approach our art with a kind of chauvinistic arrogance. Their use of film, however interesting as documentation, is fundamentally exploitative" (p. 159). This comment frames Frampton's glowing introducton to the films of Huot who he describes as: "one of the most inventive and rigorous of the younger generation of radical painters." And Frampton continues: "He brings the same attributes to film, along with an inquisitiveness that is by no means cautious. He tries, not to exploit film, but to find out what film *is*." In this passage, Frampton repeats one of the commonplaces about the artist film of the period, namely that it assumes a purely instrumental approach to film. This is a pat notion that not only circulated (and circulates) among filmmakers, but could often be found in the contemporary art world as well. For instance, one of the most important film exhibitions to take place in a museum during the early seventies was *Prospect 71: Projection* at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Dusseldorf (in which Huot participated). In his introduction to the catalogue, the curator Hans Strelow states that artists use film because it forms the most efficient medium to render the "concepts and processes of thought and experience visible." It is this conception of film, namely as a neutral means of communication, that I have identified as the model of "conceptual film." Yet this conceptual model of the artist film, while definitely in operation at the time, does not compute with the films under discussion here. For more on this exhibition, see my "Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma Modèle," *Texte zur Kunst* 8, no. 29 (March 1998): 33-49.

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which as he recalls, implemented a perceptual strategy of confrontation.[152] The group apparently shared an interest in overturning the passive attitude of the audience by inducing a shock-like effect, which Huot, albeit hesitatingly, identified as a gesture of both aesthetic and political value.[153] Huot saw this approach as an attempt to take a similar model of perceptual engagement, if not confrontation, as represented by minimalism and transpose it from the gallery space into the cinema auditorium.

All the films belonging to the first half of the program are indeed typified by their rapid montage with sudden cuts between frames. In watching these films, the viewer becomes immersed in a stroboscopic field of light that pulses off the screen. At one moment the viewer enters the illusion of projective space, only to be thrown back into the actual space of projection by a burst of pure light on screen which lights up the room. And spaced between these disparate moments, there might be long episodes without any images or light whatsoever, plunging the viewer into utter darkness, as in the films by Barry which opened the program. The perceptual vector of narrative cinema is therefore inverted: the eye does not so much assume the ideal position of the projector, as the origin of both light and meaning, but becomes forcefully aware of its recipient status. This effect of inversion, which uproots the sovereign position of the viewer, is underscored by the apparent lack of narrative cohesion in the films – although formal organization is not totally absent – and the

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[152] Robert Huot, telephone conversation with the author on April 2, 1999.

[153] As I shall demonstrate, Huot's position was undergoing a rapid process of radicalization during this period. He was to participate in various collaborative efforts by artists, such as the Art Workers' Coalition during the later sixties. In 1971, he would withdraw (temporarily) from the art word in an overt gesture of negation. In the immediate following years his major work would be in film and

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momentary blindness or after-images that the bright flashes of light of the screen might induce.

The question needs to be addressed, however, whether these filmic works are indeed intended to physically assault the viewer or whether, perhaps, an alternate mode of absorption is achieved on the part of the viewer. In other words, do these films represent an anti-aesthetic impulse, with its total refusal of the pictorial for the literal, or, as I shall argue in relation to Barry, does a basic ambivalence remain in evidence. I shall specifically phrase our problematic, therefore, in terms of a modernist genealogy of painting, which has been fully established by the time of 1967.[154] As before, phenomenology will provide us with the discursive set of terms,

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today he is probably more known as a filmmaker. On the topic of Huot's reception in avant-garde film circles, see Scott MacDonald, "Robert Huot," in MacDonald, *A Critical Cinema*: 98-115.

[154] I am referring to such texts as Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting," which was published in the *Arts Yearbook* of 1961, and Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," which was printed in the June 1967 issue of *Artforum*. Regarding Greenberg's essay, Fried remarks that "(like almost everyone) I didn't read ["Modernist Painting"] until it was reprinted" in 1966. See his "An Introduction to My Art Criticism," in Fried, *Art and Objecthood*: 55 n.10. A slightly revised version of Greenberg's seminal text appeared in Gregory Battcock, ed., *The New Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York, 1966): 66-77.

As I have been arguing all along, I am interested in the synchronicity between different discursive fields – modernist criticism, phenomenology – and artistic practices – modernist painting, minimalism, post-minimal film. I am not suggesting, therefore, that Barry or Huot were particularly well-informed about the full range of textual references I shall draw upon. At times, it will be of interest to know that Barry *did* read Merleau-Ponty, however it is not essential to depart from this fact nor is it, ultimately, of decisive importance. As my frequent use of interviews indicate, I do not dismiss the heuristic value of artists's statements of purpose, however personal *intentions* alone do not determine the operation, and possible critical function, of an art object within the public sphere. Theory is not so much yielded here as a spotlight of illumination, but as a historical horizon of intelligibility against which the anomalous features of a work, such as post-minimal film are registered; somewhat like the blip of an unidentified object on a radar screen. I am, of course, aware that this very discursive figure is reflective of the historicity of my own theoretical horizon – which forms exactly my point. I do not approach the interrelationship of material practice and critical theory as an archival problem; that is, as a determination of this nexus merely *as it once was*. It is the shifting adequacy of the one to the other; the manner in which this hybridic object "post-minimal film" resonates within, or destabilizes, a specific interdisciplinary field of knowledge, that compells my interest. Yet, this interest cannot be separated from our own present condition in which the affinity of (post-structuralist) theory and the art

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such as "situation", which shall assist us in mapping this ambiguity, which concerns the status of the viewing subject as either transcendental – a position common to the visuality of modernism *and* classical cinema – or radically contingent – a position that is contained within, but not openly acknowledged by, minimalist practice.[155] Although my thesis remains to be developed, it remains safe to say that the primary interest of Huot's and Barry's films derives from their uncommon structuring of filmic experience, which alternates between a purely optical and a sheer physical awareness of space. This alternative phenomenology of film will gain relief in relation to the standardized perception of narrative cinema, but also, and perhaps more significantly, in relation to the modernist beholder, which shall prove to be not altogether dissimilar.

It is clear from the start that a clear difference existed in the level of technical expertise and experience between Barry and Huot, on the one hand, and Frampton and Snow, on the other hand. The latter two had come to film at an earlier stage in their careers; Frampton had already assembled a substantial body of work in photography when he first ventured into filmmaking during 1962. In fact, it was Frampton who taught Huot how to splice film and who gave both him and Barry access to editing equipment.[156]

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object is again being placed in doubt. On this topic, see my forthcoming essay on Marcel Broodthaers in *Eine andere Kunst – ein anderes Kino*, ed. Gregor Stemmrich (Berlin: Jahresring, 2001).

[155] This acknowledgement of the decentered status of the viewer can be found in Bochner's remarkable filmic critique of minimalism, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapter. The same point has also been developed by Rosalind Krauss in her numerous, close readings of the perceptual logic of minimalist objects themselves.

[156] Frampton provided Huot with the film for one of his first films of 1966 called *Leader*. Barry has commented that he was not very familiar with the work of Frampton before the Hunter screening and that Huot was on much closer terms with Frampton. Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.

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If a contemporary viewer with a secure knowledge of the formal history of avant-garde film had attended the April 3 screening, then the assembled works might have been judged as worthy of interest, but hardly as being without precedent. Within the annals of avant-garde film the event might add to no more than a footnote. Yet, once more, we should avoid the historiographical pitfall of completely subordinating this event to the chronological development and institutional setting of experimental film: its historical significance must be sought elsewhere, namely in the domain of the visual arts. Indeed it is far more revealing to consider the reception of this event in the art community rather than the film community, since three of the five artists already had established a career as visual artists, namely Michael Snow, Robert Barry and Robert Huot, and Hollis Frampton was well-ensconced in the same milieu, although known as a photographer (and former poet). Nevertheless, it should come as no surprise that the Hunter College screening elicited no critical response whatsoever in the press. Apparently, this event did not find an evident hearing among a film or a painting audience, yet the Hunter College group itself did not identify itself by means of such disciplinary and professional divisions. As a matter of fact, April 3 provides a first glimpse of how closely entwined some parts of the art and film community would become during the later sixties, especially due to the respect that the films of Frampton and Snow garnered among post-minimal artists. But, then again, this was a situation that would not last.

For instance, during the mid-seventies, the foundation of the Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes & Films, Inc. marks a partial separation between the two groups.

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Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes & Films was started at the request of several artists to arrange for the rental and distribution of artist films.[157] Its participants included Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, John Chamberlain, Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier and Lawrence Weiner. Films by Yvonne Rainer and Paul Sharits were also listed, however that represents more an exception than the rule.[158] Most independent filmmakers, including Sharits, would sign up with the New York Film-Makers' Cooperative, which has never carried any of the artist films discussed in these pages. A situation due as much to the internal politics of the avant-garde film community as it is to the deliberate distance the several artists have since established from the alternative film circuit as a forum of presentation. This distance was actually marked from the beginning, both externally, since most artist films were destined for gallery exhibition, and internally, since artist films generally carried no title sequences. It follows that the object status of the artist film was often radically different from, say, that of structural film. The latter's emphasis on technical skill,

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[157] The first edition of the *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films* catalog appeared in 1974 and was edited by Liza Bear. It contains brief descriptions of the films and videos by Lizzie Borden and the artists themselves and remains the best primary source on artist films of the period. The distribution system ceased to function during the mid-nineties.

[158] Sharits probably had the most sustained gallery career, besides Michael Snow, of those filmmakers who were associated with the structural film movement. Sharit's work had moved in the direction of large-scale installations which could only be realized in gallery spaces. On Sharits see Annette Michelson, "Paul Sharits and the Critique of Illusionism: An Introduction," in *Projected Images* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1974), and Rosalind Krauss, "Paul Sharits," in *Paul Sharits: Dream Displacement and Other Projects* (Buffalo: Albright Knox Art Gallery, 1976).

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formal perfection, and professional dedication and do not automatically apply to the former.[159]

While the notions of post-minimal film and structural film are useful in differentiating between various strategies of filmmaking, the Hunter College event reminds us of the always present peril of drawing too strict a boundary between the gallery and the cinema.[160] To acknowledge the existence of such institutional divisions might acquire a critical function at certain moments in history, but such strategic options are not permanent. The artist film, in other words, is not a transhistorical concept – if I have adopted the term of "artist films" in the present context, I do not wish to imply that "films by artists" (another ill-defined notion) always be held hostage to the gallery context, because to do so would only affirm the

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[159] At a symposium on postminimal film that was held at the Whitney Museum on March 31, 2001, organized by the author and Chrissie Iles, Bochner and Snow were both invited to give presentations. While Bochner held forth about the need to counter a "personal" mode of filmmaking during the later sixties, Snow countered by noting a lack of technical finish in post-minimal films, such as those of Dan Graham. While expressing his appreciation of Graham's films, he nonetheless suggested that the "sketch-like" quality of Graham's films differed dramatically from the wholeness of shape he pursued in his own film work during the sixties.

[160] To provide anecdotal proof of Frampton's centrality within the mid-sixties art scene of New York, one could simply list the contributors to his many films. One of his first films, *Manual of Arms* of 1966, for instance, contained portraits of, among others, the artists Carl Andre, Rosmarie Castoro, Robert Huot, Lee Lozano, Larry Poons, and Michael Snow, the dancers Lucinda Childs and Twyla Tharp, and the filmmaker Joyce Wieland. The embedment of Frampton's work within the New York art scene of the sixties deserves further research, not only because his post-sixties reception has largely taken place within film studies and stands in need of correction, but because his early film work is conceived in partial relation to, and reflects upon the structural conditions of contemporary art practice. However, this promising line of investigation, for reasons already explained, will not be pursued in the present context. By the end of the sixties, his profound engagement with the formal and theoretical genealogy of experimental film and his emphasis on the specificity of this tradition, would lead to his gradual disassociation from, if not disaffection with, the field of artist filmmaking. He continued to receive frequent attention in the pages of *Artforum* during the early seventies, however by this time his work was mostly presented and discussed within the institutional and academic framework of independent film, rather than the museum and gallery system. Frampton's active function in charting the overlapping boundaries between the different disciplines of filmmaking, the visual arts and dance-performance can be traced up to a series of film evenings he organized with Robert Huot at the Paula

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problematical entrenchment of independent film in its own disciplinary and institutional field.[161]

During the seventies, for instance, the ambition of such artists as Lawrence Weiner, Marcel Broodthaers, and David Lamelas, was to insert their work in the circuit of commercial cinema. I do not propose that post-minimal film, therefore, either be restricted to or excluded from the history of one discipline versus an other, whether this be the history of contemporary painting, sculpture, film, or, for that matter, dance and performance. For this reason, I do not consider my history to be medium-specific in the strictest sense of the word, even though my primary focus is on film. To put it differently, the specificity of my historical method is not solely defined in terms of the material properties of the cinematic medium, or the institutional conditions of exhibition. I am concerned with describing the position of post-minimal film within a contemporary network of discursive and non-discursive practices. A position, furthermore, that I have named anomalous because it does not take up

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Cooper Gallery in 1969 which included works by Snow, Wieland, Barry, Morris, Rainer, Frampton, and Huot.

[161] Following *Projected Art*, several art exhibitions during the seventies were to include screenings of both artist and independent film, such as *Information* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y., July 2 – September 20, 1970), *Sonsbeek 71: Buiten de Perken* (Sonsbeek Park, Arnhem, June 19 – August 15, 1971), *Prospect 71. Projection* (Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, October 8 – 17, 1971), *Documenta 5.* (Neue Galerie and Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, June 30 – October 8, 1972), *Form and Structure in Recent Film* (Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, October 29 – November 5, 1972), *Options and Alternatives: Some Directions in Recent Art* (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn., April 4 – May 16, 1973), and *Projected Images* (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn., September 21 –November 3, 1974). See the attached Exhibition Chronology for further details.

Most of these exhibitions tended, however, to either re-assert the autonomous category of structural film (and judged the nature of post-minimal film accordingly) or, to the contrary, they effected a complete leveling of different filmic practices.. More often than not, the artist film was identified within the "conceptualist" agenda of exhibitions like *Information* or *Prospect 71: Projection* to perform a simple documentary function. The rise of film installations during the seventies, on the other hand, made a temporary rapprochement possible between filmmakers and the art world.

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permanent residence on this or that side of the fence, but is entered into a shifting field of strategic options.

In the pursuit of such specificity, I shall mainly focus on the work of the two painters in the Hunter group, namely Barry and Huot. In particular, I shall examine the situation of painting in 1967 and how it induced these two artists to start filming. However, before I take up their example, I shall briefly comment on the work of the other two contributors to the Hunter College screening, Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton.[162] One aspect that will emerge from the following discussion is that these four artists manifest a strikingly similar understanding of film in 1968. Nevertheless, certain discrepancies between their methods shall emerge from my analysis of this critical moment which would become increasingly significant over the course of the subsequent years. Furthermore, by the end of the decade these four artists embodied in perfect symmetry the four professional possibilities that exist in the interstice between art and film: while Snow continued to function as both gallery artist and filmmaker, Frampton was becoming fiercely parochial about independent film, and Huot traded in his career as a visual artist for that of a filmmaker.[163] Barry, finally, had already decided in 1967 that film lead him to a dead end and he had since turned his attention elsewhere.

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[162] I refrain from discussing Joyce Wieland in this context as her films hold no relevance to those of Barry or Huot, which is not a comment on the merits of her work in itself.

[163] Actually, Huot's announcement in 1970 that he was withdrawing from the art world proved to be less definite than it first appeared. He continued to contribute to art shows, albeit infrequently, and never gave up painting alltogether. See also my final remarks to this chapter.

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My description of Frampton's work shall remain brief. In fact, I only wish to indicate those salient aspects of his filmic approach at this time which, as we shall see, closely match the methods of Barry and Huot. My discussion of Snow, however, shall be slightly longer as his celebrated film, *Wavelength*, will have a larger role to play in the remainder of my dissertation.

Typical of the kind of film that Frampton showed at Hunter College was his *Heterodyne* (1967).[164] Frampton has described this film as: "geometric animation made entirely by sculptural methods: cutting, punching, welding colored leader."[165] And he adds that it was made in "blissful ignorance" of Paul Sharits.[166] This comment is significant, not so much for revealing his lack of knowledge about Sharits' work, but in regard to the optical nature of his own film. Sharits had constructed so-called "flicker" films since 1966 which consist of rapidly alternating fields of abstract color, occasionally interspersed with images.[167] The result of these films is to create a kind of throbbing perceptual field, which does not merely exist on the screen but appears to spill out off the frame to fill the space itself. In other words, cinema is conceived in physiological terms, as the product of an embodied vision. Indeed the viewer is engaged by the work to the point sometimes of physical intolerance.

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[164] Hollis Frampton's first movies, *Clouds Like White Sheep* (1962), *A Running Man* (1963), *Ten Mile Poem* (1964), *Obelisk Ampersand Encounter* (1965) unfortunately did not survive. The films that predate *Heterodyne* are *Manual of Arms* (1966) and *Information* (1966), which were based on camera footage in contrast to *Heterodyne*. MacDonald, "Interview with Hollis Frampton."

[165] Hollis Frampton, [statement], in *Film-Makers' Cooperative Catalogue* no. 7: 167.

[166] Barry has also confessed his ignorance of both Tony Conrad's and Paul Sharits' work, despite certain formal similarities. Robert Barry, interview with the author, August 25, 1997, New York, N.Y..

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Heterodyne's double corporeal reference – its hand-crafted aesthetic and its leveling of perception at the viewer's nervous system – is pushed a step further in another film shown at Hunter College, namely *Process Red* (1968) [fig. 20]. This film is not constructed from pure leader like *Heterodyne*, but presents a filmic inventory of insignificant, everyday gestures. I happily defer to a more experienced and astute student of Frampton's films, namely Bruce Jenkins, to size up this catalogue of bodily motion assembled from various pairs of human hands: "a rapid succession of manual activities – hands holding cigarettes, raising glasses, lowering coffee cups, peeling hard-boiled eggs, screwing in bolts, wiping down tables, at rest on knees or in pants pockets – is presented through shots which are hand-held, on stock that appears hand-tinted, and in an order so complicated that even the filmmaker described it as 'manhandled.'"[168] Jenkins goes on to note that these gestures do not project a continuous, diegetic space of action. Isolated in succession, detached from the body, and devoid a wider horizon of intentionality, this series of hands indicates nothing so much as the physical nature of the film material itself. Like *Heterodyne*, then, *Process Red* links the optical assault of the viewer to a physical assault of the filmstrip, constituting in the process "a film-specific lexicon composed of the visible signs of editing (tape splices, frame lines, punch lines) and such direct graphic means as scratching, gouging, and tinting the filmstrip."[169] This alternation between an

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[167] Another American proponent of the flicker film during the sixties was Tony Conrad, while the Austrian filmmaker Peter Kubelka had explored the same physiological effects of cinema during the later fifties.

[168] Bruce Jenkins, "The Red and the Green," *October* 32 (Spring 1985): 78.

[169] Ibid.: 86.

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inventory of bodily gestures (of hands or, by extension, of the hand-held camera) and an inventory of the material properties of the medium – that is between, representation and abstraction – is typical of Barry's films as well. But the latter's *Scenes*, as we shall see, will vary Frampton's positivist investigation of the medium in *Heterodyne* and *Process Red* with a more extended investigation of the virtual *and* literal position of the viewer before the screen. An investigation, moreover, that holds more elements in common with Snow's *Wavelength* to which I shall now turn my attention.[170]

Michael Snow was trained as a painter and had moved from Toronto to New York in 1964. He had, however, been involved with filmmaking since the late fifties, besides performing as a jazz musician.[171] At the Hunter College event, Snow was represented by his film *Short Shave* (1965) which he has reported as being "an amusing pause on the threshold" of *Wavelength* (1966-67); a film that I already

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[170] The other two films of Frampton that were shown at Hunter College were *Snowblind* (1968) and *Information* (1966). *Snowblind* records the passage of Michael Snow through his own environmental sculpture called *Blind*, which consists of multiple walls of wire mesh. Different shots were recorded by Frampton under different conditions and angles of light, creating a shifting interplay between translucent and opaque surfaces. *Information* was made by re-exposing film to the same image of a lightbulb moving against a dark background. In the finished film, one sees multiple dots of light, some near and some far, circling around in an apparent random fashion. *Information* plays less on the stroboscopic principles of cinematic projection he later exploited in *Heterodyne* than on another, underlying principleof cinematic illusion, namely apparent movement. This phenomenon can be observed by placing two light bulbs close to each other in a dark room and letting them blink on and off in quick succession. As a result, the viewer will appear to see one luminous point moving back and forth instead of recognizing two alternating flashes of light, which, of course, is what *really* happens during the projection *Information* although we do not perceive it as such.

[171] Michael Snow had already made a short animation film in 1956 called *A to Z*, while his first major film, *New York Eye and Ear Control (A Walking Woman Work)*, which was over a half-hour in length, was completed in 1964. For more details on Snow's early career and his entry into filmmaking, see his autobiography from 1971 which was penned under the pseudonym of Max Knowles: "Michael Snow: A Filmography by Max Knowles," in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilrid Laurier University Press, 1994): 61-65.

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introduced in the context of Bochner's work.[172] And it is to this celebrated film, *Wavelength*, that I now wish to return.

Arguably, *Wavelength* was the best known of Snow's films among post-minimal artists and it will function as a continuous point of reference in my text [fig. 18].[173] In my discussion of other films, it will be instructive to consider *Wavelength* as a comparative term of analysis.[174] In all frankness, my description of the film shall be short and I do not pretend to add to the already impressive mound of scholarship on the subject of Snow's filmic oeuvre. As a result, I might appear to privilege the films of Bochner of Graham over *Wavelength*, however my focus on the former should not be misread as a statement of quality. Nor, would I add, can *Wavelength* be safely stored away in the historical files of structural film. Snow's film manifests all the complexity of the artist film - a practice that intersects with a multitude of institutional and discursive spheres – and I am not convinced that this web of relations that is spun by *Wavelength* has been aptly described as yet. But my first priority of business concerns a correction of the historical record and in this sense I believe I can be

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[172] Snow describes *Short Shave* (4 minutes, black and white, sound, 1965) as containing a brief section from a stage piece titled *Right Reader* in which he created a 'head shot' of himself by framing his face behind a rectangular sheet of plastic. In the performance, Snow also held up cards behind the frame, creating an impression of film transitions such as zooms, fades in and out and changes of focus. The excerpt from the stage piece was "preceded by a twitchily mysterious stop-motion, no-hands, no-razor camera shaving of Snow's then-bearded face." See "Michael Snow: A Filmography by Max Knowles": 62-63. I have been unable to view a copy of *Short Shave*, but in the *Film-Makers Cooperative Catalogue* Snow refers to it with his characteristic candor as "my worst film."

[173] In "Michael Snow: A Filmography by Max Knowles," Snow savors the success of this film among visual artists as well: "Another indication of the film's status amongst major artists is the story that the sculptor Richard Serra has seen it thirteen times" (p. 63).

[174] See, for instance, the preceding chapter on Mel Bochner.

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forgiven for giving short thrift to a film that has already garned much attention elsewhere.

In order to compare *Wavelength* to other artist films, I shall need to place the movie within its original context of reception. Soon after the film grabbed the grand prize at the International Experimental Film Festival of 1967 in Knokke, Belgium, *Wavelength* was to assume a central position in the contemporary debate on the status of avant-garde film. To gain a sense of its specific role in such discussions, we might redefine the discursive field in which *Wavelength* existed in terms more familiar to art historians. Surprisingly, perhaps, we then need to conclude that *Wavelength* lent itself well to a modernist *phenomenology* of art, despite the fact that formalist aesthetics generally did not abide the temporal arts.[175] For instance, *Wavelength* appeared to implement a formal logic that was not dissimilar to the Michael Fried's dialectic of the literal versus the pictorial, of absorption versus theatricality. Indeed, the famous zoom of *Wavelength* holds the viewer's gaze suspended by containing the outward expansion of the camera's field of vision within a frontal series of overlapping planes. And it was the inability of art to "immure" itself from its environment that Fried considered so threatening to its purity.[176]

Wavelength asserts such purity where it might be least expected – in a film that consists, more or less, of a camera shot traveling across a room for 45 minutes. But

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[175] By a modernist phenomenology, I mean both the specific *application* of phenomenological theory by a critic like Michael Fried and the specific *situation* that determines the position of a modernist beholder before a work of art. The latter is both ideological and material in nature and I shall develop this theme in the following.

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we might understand this protracted exercise as a heroic effort by Snow to undo the infinite recession of perspective, i.e. the very basis of photographic illusionism, by collapsing the pyramidical cone of vision inward. "The space starts at the camera's (spectator's) eye," Snow stated, "is in the air, then is on the screen, then is within the screen (the mind)."[177] *Wavelength* telescopes space together and in the course of this process what was formerly arrayed in depth becomes organized on the flat, bounded surface of the screen. To further underscore the film's formal agenda, the camera finally comes to rest on the photographic image of an undulating surface of waves that is tacked to the far wall before the screen fades to white.[178] While Jackson Pollock is not far over the horizon, *Wavelength* was perhaps in direct dialogue with a set of paintings closer in time. I am thinking of Frank Stella's multicolored canvasses from 1962 with their stepped frames, endlessly pulsing inward and outward.[179]

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[176] Michael Fried, *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, Harvard, 1965), as reprinted in Fried, *Art and Objecthood*: 260.

[177] Michael Snow, "A Statement on *Wavelength* for the Experimental Film Festival of Knokke-le-Zoute," *Film Culture* 46 (Autumn 1967, published belatedly October 1968): 1.

[178] A similar connection between the horizontal and the vertical axis of perception, the filmed movement of a wave surface and the optical oscillation of all-over painting, was made by Mel Bochner in the film *Water* (1967-68).

[179] I have in mind a picture like *Sketch for Les Indes Galantes*, particularly since this work has come to mark both the culmination and end of modernism for one of Fried's most brilliant interlocutors. In an essay by Rosalind Krauss called "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary," she bids farewell to her former modernist convictions by taking one last mournful look at Stella's *Sketch for Les Indes Galantes*. This moment is worth quoting at length: "Thus, seeing a picture like *Sketch for Les Indes Galantes* (1962) by Stella is to see a particular conflict which has a history in previous painting, and simultaneously to feel its resolution. The conflict is between, first, designating any part of the pictorial field as a focus for vision, by (for example) having it yield up an object, and second, being able to assert the logical continuity of the field: the fact that it is literally unbroken from edge to edge and from corner to corner. In *Sketch for Les Indes Galantes*, Stella uses diagonal divisions which relate to the system of perspective projection. But in his way of handling their coming together in the center, he unmakes the notion of a vanishing point. And by doing so he converts the means of organizing a virtual, illusionistic space into the means of organizing the givens of a flat and bounded field...So that in the *Sketch for Les Indes Galantes* the image appears to contain an afterimage from the past as the "ground"

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Stella is an interesting case, of course, because his early paintings (like Snow's *Wavelength*) could lend themselves to both a modernist and a minimalist model of interpretation; that is, in a paradoxical fashion, Stella's work could be read as instituting one further step in the formalist dialectic of the literal versus the pictorial, or, to the contrary, as spelling the very defeat of this dialectic. In the long run, the tug of the pictorial pole was to prove the strongest for Stella, as Bochner already seems to suggest in 1966.[180] I believe that there is a strong case for saying the same about *Wavelength*, although the verdict is still out.[181] Without a doubt, the formal structure of *Wavelength* reads as a translation into film of the serial logic of minimalism. The "one thing after another" of Donald Judd becomes in the capable hands of Snow "one frame after another." But the repeated units of Snow's series, the photographic frames, are not juxtaposed in space like Judd's modular objects, but fold inward along the narrowing axis of a horizontal zoom. The depth plumbed by *Wavelength* is that of

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against which its figuration or meaning is understood." Krauss, "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary": 69.

[180] See Mel Bochner's "Systemic" for an appraisal of the "effectively matter-of-fact" nature of Stella's early paintings and the subsequent "exhaustion" of this idea in the painter's later work.

[181] There is a difference and a similarity between the spatio-temporal structure of *Wavelength* and Michael Fried's notion of presentness and I believe the similarity is more profound than the difference. I am sure that Fried would have called the experience of *Wavelength* theatrical, and thus a defeat of presentness. His description of the theatrical notion of duration as "simultaneously approaching and receding as if apprehended in an infinite perspective" (Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 167) might seem apt to a film, which is built around the idea of a continuous zoom. Yet, *Wavelength*'s time which is anticipatory, is not filled with the qualities of "dread, anxiety, presentiment" (ibid.: 171 n.22). Even though a death occurs in the film, the event seems random, and the camera heeds no attention. Anxiety, as Fried points out, derives from a subject's sense of being isolated within the endless expanse of time. But this is not the case in *Wavelength*. Why? Because the perpetual expansion of time and infinite recession of space is grounded within a transcendental subject who seems to stand at the origin of the world; who achieves, that is, presentness as a "perpetual creation of itself" (ibid.: 167). The subject's finitude subtends infinitude: death is thus internalized and ceases to be a threatening obejct existing in the world: "it is certain to me that the world exists anew every moment; that the existence of things every moment ceases and is every moment renewed" (Jonathan Edwards as cited by Fried, ibid.: 148).

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a New York loft and this cubic volume is sliced up and skewered onto the straight shaft of temporal progression, or "crescendo" as Snow prefers:

> The film is a continuous zoom which takes 45 minutes to go from its widest field to its smallest and final field. It was shot with a fixed camera from one end of an 80-foot loft, shooting the other end, a row of windows and the street. This, the setting, and the action which takes place there are cosmically equivalent. The room (and the zoom) are interrupted by 4 human events including a death. The sound on these occasions is sync sound, music and speech, occurring simultaneously with an electronic sound, a sine wave, which goes from its lowest (50 cps) to its highest (12,000 cps) in 40 minutes. It is a total glissando while the film is a crescendo and a dispersed spectrum which attempt to utilize the gifts of both prophecy and memory which only film and music have to offer.[182]

Snow's reference to the "gifts of memory and prophecy" reminds us what the most acute critics of *Wavelength* have pointed out, namely that the film does not actually describe a *continuous* zoom. Although deceptively simple in outline, the film required an elaborate production schedule. The shots were assembled over the course of a week and subjected to a complex editorial process (in contrast to the in-camera editing of most post-minimal films). The film makes use of sudden shifts in stock and lighting conditions (ranging from day to night time), besides employing the means of photographic superimposition and the alternation of illusional images with monochrome frames in order to create a flicker effect. *Wavelength* travels the length of the room to settle on the photographic image of a surface of waves tacked to the back wall, but the viewer does not simply travel along, as if carried along the crest of a spatio-temporal wave. The film occasionally washes back over itself through the

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[182] Snow, "A Statement on *Wavelength*": 1.

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inclusion of flashbacks or it seems to eddy forward by overlayering a stationary view with a moving shot as a kind of undercurrent.

What is essential to the experience of *Wavelength*, however, is that the viewer does not exist *outside* the time of the film nor is he or she simple swept along as if existing *within* the time of the film. We are not viewing time as the juxtaposition of external events, nor as a succession of internal states of consciousness, but as a single thrust forward in which camera and subject, film time and lived time become one. "We are not saying," to appropriate the words of another speculator on time, "that time is *for* someone, which would be a case of arraying it, and immobilizing it." No, "we are saying that time *is* someone, or that the temporal dimensions, in so far as they perpetually overlap, bear each other out and ever confine themselves to making explicit what was implied in each..."[183] Or, we might say that the directionality of the film offers a grand metaphor for the transcendental potentiality of thought itself. *Wavelength* does not represent a truly minimalist sense of duration since *its* time is never truly centered within the viewing subject.[184] What we encounter in *Wavelength* instead is the ideational summation of the series as a movement of supreme consciousness: film conceived as a pure act of intentionality. The beholder of *Wavelength* (or rather *this* beholder who is a product of a historical formation of

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[183] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 422.
[184] See Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum."

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discursive and material practices) is, to conclude, no stranger to the transcendental subject of modernism.[185]

As I said before, I am not developing any new ideas in relation to *Wavelength.* We owe this phenomenological interpretation of *Wavelength* mostly to Annette Michelson who wrote the most commanding essay on the film to stem from the period itself.[186] Her description of *Wavelength* is highly exact and the conclusions she drew from this experience still remain accurate. The wording of her text, however, clearly reveals its debt to phenomenological theory: "The film is the projection of a grand reduction; its 'plot' is the tracing of spatio-temporal *données*, its 'action' the movement of the camera as the movement of consciousness."[187] *Wavelength* could present such a convincing resolution of practice and theory to a spectator like Michelson in 1971 because it eases the identification of the viewing subject with a knowing subject: Snow's film, according to this reading, does not form a collection of empirical data, more or less organized, but displays the basic conditions of the cognitive process itself.[188] Thus the occurrence of events *in the world* (such as the

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[185] While I shall propose Annette Michelson's account of the film as my historical standard, P. Adams Sitney also forwarded a distinctly modernist opinion on *Wavelength.* He emphasized its ontological function by calling it "an axiom of structural film" which revealed a "diminishing area of pure potentiality." Sitney, "Structural Film": 332.

[186] Michelson, "Toward Snow": 32. While Michelson established this phenomenological reading of *Wavelength,* Snow had already remarked in 1968 that his films were intended to suggest "a state of consciousness" to the spectator. See "Letter from Snow [21 August 1968]," *Film Culture* 46 (Autumn 1967), as reprinted in *The Collected Writings of Michael Snow* : 44.

[187] Michelson, "Toward Snow": 32.

[188] Michelson has since criticized the epistemological illusions of such a knowing subject of cinema (and modernism). I do not imply that she would have associated her position in 1971 with the modernism of a Fried, who ignored the work of Michael Snow. I shall argue below, however, that we need to distinguish such personal modes of history from the general organization of the discursive field of art and film criticism during the later sixties. Phenomenological theory will reveal itself, then, not

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death) does not deflect the inexorable forward drive of the movie, because the viewer *is* the thrust of time and does not exist *for* time as in watching a narrative sequence that passes one by.[189] Likewise the various incidents that occur *on the material surface* of the film – filters, colored frames, negative film, and superimposition – reveal the terms of illusion rather than hiding or naturalizing such mechanisms. Just as the negative printing inverts the box-like space of the room (i.e. the windows become black and opaque and the walls translucent), the film runs through a spectrum of colors to finally veer towards a white monochrome (i.e. white light on a white screen). Indeed the master trope *Wavelength* is the internalization of figure - ground relationships, whether conceived in temporal or spatial terms. And like the formal operations of modernist painting, it installs the viewer in a present that subtends both past and future, here and there. At every moment the modernist work is wholly manifest to its viewer, Fried famously stated. *Wavelength* instates the same viewer for whom to perceive is to be convinced by the fullness and immediacy of what is shown (although the *instantaneousness* of complete knowledge that is promised by modernist painting could never be achieved).[190]

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only as a connective tissue within this discusrive formation, but as a slippery terrain that lends itself to the articulation of positions of both a modernist and post-modernist nature.

[189] Compare the following passage of Merleau-Ponty on the anonymity of intentional thought as a kind of death: "I can apprehend my birth and death only as prepersonal horizons...Each sensation, being strictly speaking, the first, last, and only one of its kind, is a birth and a death. The subject who experiences it begins and ends with it...I experience the sensation as a modality of general existence, one already destined for a physical world and which runs through me without my bing the cause of it. Generality." (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 216) In other words, the most profound figure of death in *Wavelength* is not the person (Hollis Frampton) who collapses on the floor of the room, but the automatism of the zoom.

[190] Michael Fried wagered at the end of "Art and Objecthood" that "it is above all to the condition of painting and sculpture – the condition, that is, of existing in, indeed of evoking or constituting, a continuous and perpetual present – that the other contemporary modernist arts, most

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For sure, this sovereign viewer would loose its sure footing in other artist films of the period. When *Wavelength* is perceived in this manner, namely as a projective vector of pure thought, it could not reveal a greater distance from the films of Nauman and Graham which subvert the viewer's ideational possession of space. In their case, film is de-instrumentalized and the viewer no longer inhabits the same continuous world of intentionality. Yet several contemporary artists, among them Richard Serra and Dan Graham, have expressed their admiration for Snow's film. Serra, in fact, was a close friend of Snow and showed *Wavelength* to art audiences while traveling in Europe in 1969.[191] Furthermore, while I have chosen here to concentrate on *Wavelength*, the familiarity of contemporary artists with his other work was more extensive.[192] Graham has spoken to the author on numerous occasions of his admiration for Snow's *Back and Forth* and *Le Région Centrale*, which stretched the elemental devices of panning and rotation to new extremes.[193]

Yet, the disciplinary array of skills displayed in *Wavelength* would rarely be repeated among the first generation of post-minimalist films (which is not to say that their films lack a self-reflective quality). While Snow's film set an important

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notably poetry and mucis, aspire." We would now have to add *Wavelength* to that group of "other contemporary modernist arts." Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 167.

[191] See Annette Michelson, Richard Serra, and Clara Weyergraf, "The Films of Richard Serra: An Interview," *October* 10 (Fall 1979): 71. Serra has mentioned to me that while he screened the film in Amsterdam it created a small riot, which presumably was caused less by the visual structure of the film than by the sound track

[192] Let us also not forget that Snow, who was trained as a painter, continues to exhibit as a sculptor and photographer as well.

[193] One particular filmic series that emerges around 1970 and which cuts across the domains of structural film and post-minimalism, is the genre of the panoramic film to which *Le Région Centrale* of Snow belongs, but also *Hard Core* by Walter de Maria, *Spiral Jetty* by Robert Smithson, and the films of Dan Graham. I shall not develop this theme at present, but I have presented some notes on the

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example, it was not his technical facility that engaged his post-minimalist colleagues who were intent on distancing themselves from a traditional identification of the artist with his or her craft. What registered most strongly in their eyes, was the reductiveness of Snow's approach to cinema: his stretching of a simple repetitive possibility of the medium such as the zoom or a panning (e.g. *Back and Forth* or *Central Region*) to its limits. Alternatively, we might say that Snow's cinema was placed in the unlikely company of Andy Warhol's cinema. At least, in so far as the more 'primitive' phase of Warhol's film production is concerned which lasted from 1963 to 1966.[194] To such artists Bochner, Nauman or Graham, it was less the social content of Warhol's cinema that mattered than the straightforward, performative nature of its production process – the fixed camera recording of real-time events that is linked to the absence of any post-camera work (except the chemical development of the exposed film). For instance, *New York Windows* required a minimal effort of editing to arrange its separate shots, but this film invokes the linearity of narrative only to disrupt the viewer's expectation of continuity. The formal logic of seriality in Bochner's and Moskowitz's film functions as a non-relational structure; that is, it

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subject in a recent lecture called "Shadows of the Spectacle." The lecture was given during the symposium "The Artist's Film After Pop and Minimalism" at the Whitney Museum on March 31, 2001.

[194] I would like to draw attention at this point to Tom Gunning's epochal essay on the "cinema of attractions" which deserves wider readership among art historians. Gunning opposes the refractory public sphere of primitive or early cinema to the passive, homogenized experience of classical cinema. In his opinion, avant-garde film continues within a genealogy of primitive cinema, which has been blocked within the history of commerial cinema. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Cinema, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space Frame Narrative*, edited by Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990).

The implications of Gunning's argument for the position of the artist films of the sixties and seventies within the public sphere of both the museum and the mass media are highly fascinating and I have explore some of these in a recent lecture I delivered at the 2001 Society of Cinema Studies Conference in Washington, D.C, entitled "Film as Installment: The Case of Marcel Broodthaers."

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follows Donald Judd's proscription against the projection of the anthropomorphic gestalt into art.[195] As I have demonstrated, *New York Windows* rejects the humanist values of diegetic unity, whether it is realized through the indirect means of montage or the directness of *cinema verité*.

The lack of montage in the (early) films of Nauman, Serra, and Graham (in contrast to those of Barry), do not resurrect the ontological model of cinematic realism, which we might trace back to André Bazin's highly influential writings of the fifties. I will hold of on developing this issue until the next section. However, let me remind the reader that I have partially circumscribed my primary area of research by differentiating the minimal appearance of the earlier artist films from the use of more complex montage during the seventies. Certainly, the inference of editorial methods that organize individual shots into signifying patterns would be more in evidence after 1970. During the next decade, Robert Smithson, Lawrence Weiner, Marcel Broodthaers and David Lamelas made increasing use of such narrative possibilities of montage. The latter two even employed the same professional film editor, Neil Cronin. But just as the earlier absence of montage did not support a naturalist or instrumental function of film, the subsequent introduction of editing did not mark a full embrace of diegetic continuity in film. Less anti-narrative in nature, the seventies artist film developed a mimetic strategy of counter-narrative.

To return to the five artists I have chosen to discuss in these pages, only Serra would come close to the sixties aesthetic of Snow. But it would take until 1976 and his

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[195] See Donald Judd, "Specific Objects."

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completion of *Railroad Turnbridge*, before this supposition could be made.[196] *Railroad Turnbridge* falls outside the chronological parameters of my study, but it is instructive to devote a brief moment of our attention to Serra's penultimate film [fig. 22]. *Railroad Turnbridge* was actually the first and last film he shot completely by himself. The film is constructed around the framing device of the bridge's tunnel-like superstructure of iron girders and using it to double back on the aperture of the camera: a "machine exposes itself looking at a machine."[197] The effect of this self-reflective act of the camera is to insist on the relativity of the viewer's frame of vision: just as someone who is seated at a train window might mistake the movement of another train for the movement of his or her own, *Railroad Turnbridge* tricks the viewer into perceiving the neatly framed landscape at the end of the bridge's perspective as being in motion while it is the bridge that is rotating on its center axis.[198] But to stick to my previous concern: montage is clearly the key constructive principle of *Railroad Turnbridge*. From a series of shots ranging from three minutes to

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[196] *Railroad Turnbridge* is 19 minutes in length and was shot on 16 mm, b &w stock.

[197] Richard Serra, "Interview by Bernard Lamarche-Vadel" [New York City, May 1980], in *Richard Serra. Writings Interviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 148.

Thus *Railroad Turnbridge* uses a found structure to create a filmic equivalent to such Judd pieces as a 1968 set of cold-rolled steel frames, painted in turquoise enamel, that were placed on the gallery floor in a tight row, as if forming different cross-sections of an elongated box. The frontal dimensions of Judd's piece, in measuring several times wider than it is high, even resemble the late fifties' invention of the cinemascope screen.

[198] *Railroad Turnbridge* exploits a phenomenological fault of cinematic experience that Merleau-Ponty has noted as well. Since the cinema screen cuts the projected image off from the viewer's own realm of bodily existence, such alienating disturbances of scale and movement can emerge even though classical cinema does its outmost to suppress their arrival. It is in this sense that I fail to see the cinematic viewer of *Railroad Turnbridge* as being in league with the embodied viewer of Merleau-Ponty, as Rosalind Krauss has argued in her otherwise brilliant rendition of the phenomenological structure of Serra's sculpture: "In *Railroad Turnbridge*, Serra found access to a space made visible in and of itself by the fact that it is in motion, a space swollen by brilliant luminosity that serves as a metaphor of vision, yet a space traversed by the mutual implication of back and front,

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thirty seconds Serra has composed a compact and highly structured work of nineteen minutes. The film makes an overt reference to the era of Soviet cinema in theme and structure, but it does not outright copy the dialectics of form and meaning that Serra could have learned from watching Sergei Eisenstein.[199] The film mainly plays off a number of dualisms, such as the temporal opposition between the slow, continuous movement of the bridge rotating ninety degrees (i.e. its performative or 'Warholian' aspect) and the rapid intercutting of the center section of the film which reveals the functional mechanism of the bridge's gears (i.e. its dialectical or Eisensteinian' aspect). There is also the difference between the two intersecting series of "elongated, barrel-like" shots and "flattened out," shots, which show close-up details of the bridge or the rhythmic motion of locomotive wheels, or the shifting tonal gradations of dark gray, silver to white, which are caused by the rotation of the turnbridge across the slanting rays of the sun.[200]

Coming at the close of an era of post-minimal film, *Railroad Turnbridge* is in its entire formal splendor, a strangely anachronistic work. On two levels at least, the film forms a dedication to an earlier moment in time. I am not only speaking of the bridge itself which was located in Oregon and formed an industrial relic of a bygone age. Bracketed between the years of 1905-6 and 1925, when engineering moved from welded iron construction to riveting, the bridge also overlaps with the period of

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thus creating a spatial figure for the preobjective space of the body." Krauss, "Richard Serra/Sculpture": 34.

[199] Serra was an intense student of Soviet cinema during the sixties and early seventies as he has told several interviewers, including the author. Richard Serra, interview with the author, New York. N.Y., February 15, 1998.

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Russian constructivism.[201] Yet, *Railroad Turnbridge* is also an ode to structural film, which, as Frampton postulated, created a monument to the last machine of the industrial age, namely cinema itself.[202]

Both Huot and Barry had received their MFA degrees from Hunter College, where they had studied with Tony Smith, and upon graduation Eugene Goossen had hired them as instructors at the school. In the intervening years, between 1963 and 1968, Barry and Huot exhibited frequently and achieved recognition as promising young artists who carried on in the tradition of geometric abstract or so-called hard-edge painting.[203] During the fall of 1964, Eugene Goossen had included Barry and Huot in an exhibition at the Hudson River Museum called *Eight Young Artists* and both were invited for the *Systemic Painting* exhibition organized by Lawrence Alloway at the Guggenheim Museum in 1966. Despite this incipient success, Barry's gesture of trading in his paint brushes for the film camera formed a rather abrupt farewell to his former practice as a painter. In Huot's case, the exit from painting

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Serra would make one more film after *Railroad Turnbridge*, namely *Steelmill/Stahlwerk* (16mm, 30 min., black and white, sound), which was shot with Clara Weyergraf. *Steelmill/Stahlwerk* not only documents the fabrication of his one of his pieces in a German factory, it also records Serra's disillusionment in his former utopian belief that a potential of self-realization could be found in industrial labor. In retrospect, therefore, *Railroad Turnbridge* is not devoid of a certain nostalgic longing for a humanistic version of Marxist aesthetics. See Michelson, "The Films of Richard Serra."

[202] Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film."

[203] While Robert Huot is lesser known today as a visual artist than Robert Barry, Huot's early work was more frequently exhibited and received slightly more critical attention. Between 1964 and 1966, Huot exhibited four times at the Stephen Radich Gallery in New York and each show attracted favorable reviews by, among others, Donald Judd. Barry had a one-person exhibition at Westerly Gallery in 1964 and thereafter appeared in two group shows during 1966, namely at the Stephen Radich Gallery and in *Distillation*, curated by Eugene Goossen for the Tibor de Nagy and Stable Galleries.

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transpired in a more gradual manner during the following years, yet ultimately he proved to be more committed to the new medium than Barry.[204]

The films of Barry and Huot followed the same 'sculptural' method of production described by Hollis Frampton. Barry, for instance, showed *Red Seconds*, a 20 minute film that alternates between red and black leader every second and *Scenes*, which has a more complicated structure, and contains brief flashes of imagery interspersed with long stretches of dark leader. Although I shall reserve a more lengthy discussion of *Scenes* for the next section, a few introductory words are in order.

The motivation behind *Scenes* was two-fold.[205] In the first place, it formed an effort to reintroduce photography into art. Like Bochner, Barry wished to transgress the formalism of his modernist forebears and the devalued nature of photography as a kind of amateurish enterprise seemed an appropriate means to achieve that end. Like Bochner, Barry did not actually admire photographs, that is he could not relate to photography as a 'serious' art form. Even though he was in the habit of taking

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[204] After 1967, Barry adopted the medium of slide projection since it contained the temporal and photographic aspects of film, yet he found it a more durable and structured means of presentation that is better adapted to the format of gallery exhibition. In fact, both artists have returned to painting in the years since, similar to other erstwhile conceptual artists who had renounced painting such as Mel Bochner. This fact does not diminish the radicality and conviction of the moment in the mid-sixties when many artist declared painting to be moribund. Huot and Barry were preceded by similar moves on the part of Nauman and Warhol, who declared in 1965 that he would devote all his time as an artist to filmmaking. Of course, Warhol's forswearing of the medium of painting was even more shortlived than most—his filmmaking enterprise quickly proved to be less profitable than he had anticipated. Huot's most recent work as a painter is reproduced in *Robert Huot: Paintings from the 90s* (New York: Times Square Gallery, Hunter College, 1998).

[205] Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y.m August 25, 1997.

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pictures, he never knew how to use them in his own work. Film helped him to get photography into his work which, at the time, was "minimal and abstract" in character.

Barry considered the establishment of a contradiction between abstraction and representation within the same work to form a compelling prospect. As a matter of fact, this approach to film sets him apart from Bochner, who was more engrossed in the serial nature of the filmic medium. Barry claims not to have been interested in the possibilities of seriality. Instead what marks Barry's films is a principle of alternation between opposites: the manipulation of darkness and light, short and long periods of time, blankness and intensity.

And this brings me to the second function of *Scenes* for Barry, which has to do with a phenomenological awareness of temporality as having the density of a lived-through experience: that is, not the conception of time *from without* as a linear chain of events, but time as seized by consciousness *from within*, which nestles in the open-ended relationship between a before and an after. Time in the latter sense is therefore apprehended as a potential realm of action and not as a given task or necessary course of action. Time exists, that is, as a mere intentional object of consciousness which precedes the determinations of reflective thought. An example of such a state of consciousness would be the mental state of anticipation, since it represents a moment of pause between the activity and passivity of mind, between the retention and interpretation of sensation. This anticipatory state of mind is exactly what Barry attempted to achieve, rather than the reproduction of any definite occurrence or chain of events. The extensive lengths of black leader in *Scenes* induced an experience of

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"waiting" and "expectation" for the spectator. In other words, *Scenes* was about the engagement of the viewer in "the organization of time." *Scenes* was "not just a formal exercise but was about involving the viewer in an emotional way." And this filmic mode of absorption was a far cry from Bochner's spectacle of anonymity. A filmic experience of confrontation, in this case, implies a form of perceptual envelopment of the viewer, not his or her detachment from the projected image.

Huot constructed his films completely from found material. Indeed, he was not to shoot actual film footage himself until 1970. He presented four works at Hunter College, which all took a very minimal form. *From Loops* (1967) consisted of a white dot centered on a black ground which appeared briefly, four times in a row, and then eight more times but twice as fast. The film was to be presented as a looped, double projection, with one projector operating at sound speed and the other slightly slower or faster. The effect of this work is to inject an optical pulsation within the auditorium space, which would gradually go out of synch, becoming more unpredictable as time wears on. The images of the dot that we perceive cannot be clearly localized as appearing on the screen or to float before it. The dot is nowhere since there is no permanent figure against a background, which we can actively observe and reflect upon; there is no thing among other things. The sudden flashes of light are not accessible to a voluntary effort of analysis, but are suddenly there in their entirety, in a single glance. And as such, "we limit ourselves to affirming that, no matter how it

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came about, the image is here before us, that it appeared to us, that it is *in* our eyes..."[206]

Jean-Paul Sartre wrote the preceding words in order to describe the phenomenon of hypnagogic imagery, the abstract patterns that swirl before our closed eyes in that timeless moment between consciousness and sleep, between a voluntary and an involuntary state of mind.[207] Yet, the entoptic quality of these images, which appear to occur within the eye, bear a striking resemblance to the filmic procedures of Barry and Huot.[208] Sartre describes hypnagogic imagery as "a cinematographic representation in color" in which consciousness has not lost all powers of reflection, but has become fascinated by the random procession of figures that flash before its eyes in the dark.[209] Just before we fall asleep, Sartre explains, our consciousness relinquishes its attentive attitude for a more passive or spectacular state of mind. However, to Sartre the delirium of half-sleep does not form the symptom of a consciousness gripped, as it were, from without by some psychological automatism. To the contrary, hypnagogia marks a moment in which consciousness possesses itself

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[206] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991): 53.

[207] Hypnagogic experience is a theme that surfaces frequently in circles of avant-garde film during the sixties. For instance, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, and Annette Michelson have all drawn upon this notion. See, for instance, Michelson, "Toward Snow": 32. The hypnagogic imagery of Brakhage' films with their rapid discontinuity of shots is opposed by Michelson to the continuous, mental structure of "expectation" espoused by Snow's *Wavelength*. The disjunctive quality of Brakhages films strives, in the critic's opinion, to situate film in a (modernist) state of perpetual presentness in contrast to the pure movement of intentional thought captured in *Wavelength*. In my reading of Barry's *Scenes*, these two contrary, temporal structures of anticipation and immediacy become superimposed as both are united in the figure of a transcendental subject of perception.

[208] Entoptic lights are the dancing patterns that appear when one closes one's eyes as a kind of auto-stimulation of the nervous system..

[209] Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*: 52, n.1.

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with even greater intensity due to the collapse of all reflective distance between thought and image:

> Hypnagogic phenomena are not "contemplated by consciousness": *they are of consciousness*. Now, consciousness cannot be an automatism: at the outmost it can ape an automatism, associate itself with automatic forms; that is the case here. But in that case, we must speak of a kind of bondage. This inattentive consciousness is not distracted: it is *fascinated*.[210]

In the auditorium, however, this automatism of the image *is* literalized by Huot and Barry. The question is whether their purpose is to expose the material conditions of this imaginary or to *naturalize* its experience. I will answer this question in full in the following section; but I believe *Scenes* to reflect a phenomenology that is idealist at base, contrary to Bochner's *New York Windows*. The situation with Huot's films is slightly more difficult to decide, some registering an aggressive gesture of visual negation, others opening onto a more absorptive space of opticality.

Huot's *Spray* (1967) was the most literal in its painterly reference and was made by spraying aluminum paint on a twelve minute length of clear leader. A particularly sensitive description of this film is given by Michael Snow, who called it "an extraordinary ebbing and flowing, dotting and pulsing 'abstract' field film."[211] Since the density of the sprayed paint particles varies throughout the film, the viewer alternatively perceives a swirling, atomized space, which creates the illusion of

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[210] Ibid.: 62. And elsewhere: "...a radical distinction must be drawn between the way a face appears in perception and the manner the same face occurs in hypnagogoc vision. In the former case something appears which is then identified as a face...consciousness must focus upon the object—this focusing being as rapid as one desires—and the object is there before the focusing. In hypnagogic vision this discrepancy does not exist. There is no focusing. Suddenly knowledge appears, as vivid as a sensory manifestation: one becomes awareof *being in the act* of seeing a face." (ibid.: 55-56)

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shallow depth, and an almost opaque, frontal surface, which fixes the screen itself as a physical object in literal space. Although this film might remind one of Jules Olitski's desire to spray paint on air, Huot found the "dumbness" of this de-skilled procedure to form its main attraction[212]:

> I wanted to make a film that was just about texture. I tried different spray paints and found that aluminum was the best. I did try to get "dramatic" in it at times, in the sense that some kind of emotion could be evoked by the density or the rarefication or the speed of it. Sometimes it would go into deep space; at other times it would be like a wall of graphic pulsation. These different rhythms would occur simply through this dumb act of spraying the paint thinly or densely on a ribbon of clear plastic.[213]

Scratch (1966-67) consisted of similarly simple gesture, namely a continuous hand-made scratch gouged into black leader. By exerting different degrees of pressure, the scratch will take on a different aspect in projection, either seeming to flow vertically out of the image or, alternatively, to remain fixed in place while oscillating around a horizontal axis.[214] Huot has also provided a more anecdotal

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[211] Michael Snow, [statement on Robert Huot's *Spray*], *Film-Makers' Co-operative Catalogue* 5: 159.

[212]The possible correspondences between *Spray* and the history of both avant-garde film and modern painting are legion. Most obvious, of course, is the connection between the automatism of Jackson Pollock and the automated gesture of Huot, which might be contrasted Stan Brakhage's practice of *hand* painting on film, which preceded *Spray*. The relationship between the mechanical action of spraying and cinema had already been established in 1919 by Man Ray with his painting *Admiration of the Orchestrelle for the Cinematograph*. The existence of such genealogical links does not presuppose, however, that Huot was aware of them himself: it is not a question of their motivation by the artist. *Spray* forms a *discursive event* that is specific to a place and time, and the film's configuration of a network of techniques (i.e. spraying, painting, projecting) does not fully coincide with those historical cases I have cited. As the following quote indicates, *Spray* allowed Huot to visualize the current paradox of artistic practice which was situated between the registers of expressivity and automatism, absorption and direct address, pictorialism and literalism; not by resolving this contradiction, however, but in exposing its conditions *in actual time and space*.

[213] MacDonald, "Robert Huot": 103.

[214] Scott MacDonald has recorded this visual experience in his exhaustive account of Huot's filmography in "Surprise! The Films of Robert Huot, 1967-1972," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 5, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 297-318.

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account of the film, which registers the strong anti-narrative impulse that all four filmmakers shared:

> *Scratch* came right out of looking at commercial films and seeing scratches. I remember seeing a film on 42nd Street. It was not an interesting film, but I got fascinated by a scratch. *Scratch* came out of that experience. It was like saying, well, a scratch can be a hell of a lot more interesting than the superimportant shit that people put into that emulsion.[215]

Finally, Huot showed *Leader* (1966), a 12 minute long film which consisted of an alternation of black, green and clear leader. The first segment of the film changes color every thirty seconds, after which the tempo speeds up, only to slow down again towards the end. Scott MacDonald has provided the most perceptive account of this film:

> When green leader is projected, continual shifts in color density tends to keep the eye attentive to the screen. During passages of black leader, on the other hand, the screen is so dark that it provides almost nothing to look at; as a result, one's attention tends to be drawn to other light sources, especially to the projector, if it is within the screening space. When clear leader is projected, we are aware both of the tiny events occurring on the screen and of the lighted screening space.[216]

MacDonald's description draws out the main principle of the film as one of spatial alteration. The viewer's eye is continuously being cast out of its absorption in the depths of color, by the closing in of darkness or, alternatively, the sudden illumination of the auditorium as if the overhead lights were turned back on. *Leader* projects three different modes of spatiality which are substituted, one for the other, within the confines of the same actual room.

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[215] MacDonald, "Robert Huot": 102.
[216] MacDonald, "Surprise!": 298.

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McDonald tends to stress this phenomenological operation of the film less than its formalist properties. In fact, he suggests a relegation of *Leader* to the essentially formalist status of a Structural Film. As he states, Huot reduces the number of filmic variables to such a minimum in order that the "essential qualities and potentials of the materials of film can be felt." Yet, this is to leave out the connection of the film to painting. Huot himself has emphasized this connection:

> I started playing with film because it happened to coincide with some of the things I was doing in my painting at the time. I had been working with linear grids, with square modules. I was dealing with visual experience in a kind of linear-time way, which fed right into the continuity of one frame after another...Even when I did drawings for single-image paintings of the color-field, hard-edge variety, they often evolved out of a series of drawings that were almost like frames of a film. This sequence of frames or images, in other words, led to the development of a single image, and that single image would just stand there kind of ineffable, with no traces of the process that led to it.[217]

In other words, the structural logic of his painting required a temporal matrix within which to exist. No longer satisfied by the self-enclosed model of modernist painting, Huot displaced the internal figure-ground relation of pictorial space beyond its actual frame. He displaced it, that is, onto the temporalized background of architectural space by creating modular series of canvasses that were spread out across the wall. In other words, Huot implemented an inversion of the modernist dialectic between the optical and the literal.

This dialectic is expounded in the art criticism of Michael Fried, which appeared during the same years as Huot's metamorphosis from a painter into a filmmaker. As Fried argued, the flatness of the picture support could only be

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neutralized by creating a mode of optical illusionism that dissolves or subsumes the actual picture surface. The term "to subsume" as applied by Fried denotes that the de-materialization of the picture surface can never be fully accomplished – for as he explains, the optical dissolution of the *flatness* of the support does not negate the viewer's consciousness of the literal quality of the picture surface (e.g. the properties of the pigment, the weave of the canvas). The two terms of literalness and illusionism are co-dependent; without an awareness of the material surface of the painting, the experience of its optical presence will remain absent: "to be gripped by the one is to be held, and moved, by the other."[218]

In fact, the early paintings of Huot seemed to fit within this perspective. Common features of the paintings up to 1967 were the use of figure-ground reversal and the juxtaposition of intense but closely valued colors. Fried wrote a review of Huot's 1964 exhibition at the Stephen Radich Gallery in which he stated that the term "hard-edge" might be a misnomer for this type of painting. He comes to this conclusion because the color scheme "seems to dissolve the geometrically exact boundaries between different areas in an optical tremor."[219] Yet, despite this slight oscillatory pulse along the painted edges, the literal presence of the surface seems to gain the upper hand. It is above all color, as Fried claimed, that focuses our attention on the literal nature of a picture's surface and it appears that Huot's application of broad, uninflected expanses of opaque paint achieves just that, creating "flat, ungraded

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[217] MacDonald, "Robert Huot": 102.
[218] Michael Fried, "Shape as Form": 79.
[219] Michael Fried, "New York Letter," *Art International* 8, nos. 5-6 (Summer 1964): 82.

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areas of hot, matte and for the most part close-keyed color." This bright, yet lusterless skin of Huot's paintings assumes a curiously emphatic quality for Fried who likens these canvasses to the architectural feature of a door. Hence, an unyielding, almost tactile pressure clamps down on the absorptive space of optical illusionism and these paintings seem to "confront the spectator as a resistant but functionless surface scaled to his size."[220]

Fried's remarks appear quite prescient with the hindsight of *Leader* and its temporal oscillation of colored light, not to mention its shift between different registers of spatiality. Confronting the spectator, as I mentioned at the outset, was exactly what Huot had in mind. The same remark also presages Fried's later disparagement of the theatricality of the Minimalist object in its tendency to isolate and subjectify the spectator.

Huot, however, was not to associate himself with the "literalist" movement attacked by Fried in the "Art and Objecthood" essay. In the years following the Hunter College event, he was to join the ranks of conceptual artists. Lucy Lippard would connect the dots in a telegraphic style, leading from his abandonment of painting, to his naming of existent shadows as works, to the completely de-materialized existence of film:

> Robert Huot. Stephen Radich Gallery, New York, fall, 1966. Exhibition of reductive paintings with conceptual bases. In 1967 Huot worked primarily with Areas in which canvasses of different sizes contained the same area of color in different manners: they were often hung at an extended distance from each other....The play between the two-dimensional surface and the objectness of painting led him to work

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[220] Ibid.

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> in 1968 with lines of tape, attached directly to the wall....the shadows of architectural elements....By the end of 1969, Huot was working anonymously and giving works away while refusing to sell them. By 1970, he was devoting an increasing amount of time to film.[221]

Of course, what is left out of this neat trajectory is the fact that Huot combined a painterly and filmic practice until around 1968. But Lippard did not get it all wrong.

Huot interpreted conceptualism as a movement of ideological negation. After 1967, he refused to produce any more art objects for the market. His last show consisted only of an index of the indexical – the dark traces cast by ready-made objects. "Shadows cast by architectural details and fixtures using available light" took place at Paula Cooper in the spring of 1969. Yet, the paradox of such an extreme position of autonomy, which pushes the object itself into invisibility, was to drive the artist underground.[222]

> My painting had essentially become invisible... In my process of refinement, moving forward (sic) what I considered the essential, I arrived, it seemed, at the everyday. My painting was a skin of paint. I pointed out anonymous works around the city. I did works in gallery spaces that existed only when the gallery was closed. Whatever I did I gave away. There was little of me to see.[223]

Drawing the only conclusion open to him, Huot choose the path of anonymity and withdrew from the art world in 1970. He was aided in this decision by the curator Kynaston McShine who proved unwilling to accept Huot's proposal for the *Information* show in 1970: the artist chose the shadow cast onto the gallery wall by a

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[221] Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973): 17.

[222] I shall leave a further elaboration of this remark to the imagination of the reader. Obviously, Huot's maneuvers call to mind both the epistemic figure of Plato's cave and the counter-cultural model of 'underground' cinema: stating this connection, however, has little new to offer.

[223] Unpublished statement by the artist, dated January 3, 1973.

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ladder left behind by a museum employee. Huot decided to buy a farm and move upstate.

Modernist critics as Fried and Greenberg have stated that the self-alienation of the artist from society was required in order to establish painting on its own grounds. Despite the activist impulse of Huot, who was involved in various protest initiatives during his conceptual period, the self-removal of this artist from the art world by 1970 registers as a curious twist to modernism's quest for autonomy.[224] Few histories of the period, unless written by film historians, even make mention of his name. For on his farm in upstate New York the dialectic of private and public underwent another inversion. Having resisted the objectification of art in the market system, having peeled away the layers of its material shell until only the act of pointing remained, and after even this barely visible trace of the "spectacle of anonymity" (in Bochner's words) faded away. Huot did not halt at the threshold; he pushed through the door to the other side. In other words, in the isolation of his new landscape, he turned the camera on himself and holding himself up to this mirror, he began to create lengthy diaretic movies. That this "door" which Fried first pushed up against in 1964, in fact forms a revolving door, was lost on Huot. However, there was an artist who had already shown this to be the case, namely Bruce Nauman in his *Studio Films* of 1967/68. Before we attend to these films, however, I shall take up the example of

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[224] The story is less dramatic then it might sound. I thank Anna Chave for pointing out that Huot kept teaching at Hunter College and was involved in various activist initiatives such as the "Art and Ecology" show in the late 1970s. Huot also commenced to paint again in the seventies. My point, however, concerns the performative nature of Huot's gesture and not its absolute truth. I am interested

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Robert Barry, whose practice followed a similar logic of development as that of Huot's, only to arrive at a different end.

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how film is related to such acts of denunciation; likewise, Andy Warhol announced in 1965 that he would never paint again and only make movies – a promise he did not keep.

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4. Robert Barry: The Filmic Situation

> It seems to me that the only thing that the artist does is to create a situation and we all kind of participate in it, like a relationship. – Robert Barry[225]

Scenes (1967)

Robert Barry was involved with filmmaking for only the briefest of moments. In 1965, Barry had already acted as a cameraman for the choreographer Twyla Tharp. He had shot footage of the dance *Tank Dive* at Hunter College in which Twyla Tharp, Chris Constance, Robert Huot, Ann McFarland and Anne Severson performed. But he would only become engaged with shooting his own films in 1967. During the summer of 1967 he took up the camera while taking a temporary reprieve from painting that, ultimately, would last into the seventies.[226] His interest in the medium, however, was already on the wane by the end of the year. And after showing his films at Hunter College, he would exhibit *Scenes* only once more during this period, namely at the *Information* show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970.

Due to its infrequent exposure, *Scenes* constitutes a little known part of Barry's oeuvre. Although the film is intended for a theater presentation and not gallery

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[225] Robert Barry, "Interview with Robert Barry," *View* (Oakland) 1, no. 2 (May 1978): 5.

[226] Barry denied in conversation with the author that he intended to lay the paint brush to rest permanently in 1967. (Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.) However his trajectory in the following years would be similar to that of other conceptual artists, such as Mel Bochner and Robert Huot, who foreswore painting as an outmoded practice, only to return to the medium later.

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installation, it has not been circulated in avant-garde film circles. *Scenes* has everything to do with the specific historical impasse that Barry found himself at *as a painter* in 1967. Indeed, *Scenes* rests on the threshold between his earlier studio practice as a painter and his subsequent remake into a conceptual artist.

This transformation took place, at least in the public eye, during the interlude between two important exhibitions. The first event was *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner* organized by Seth Siegelaub at Bradford Junior College in Massachusetts during the winter of 1968.[227] In Bradford Barry presented three untitled paintings all dated between August and December 1967. In other words, Barry had not completely ceased to paint while working on his film the previous fall, but both activities would soon be discontinued. The next moment we catch Barry in the public arena it is two months later and he participated in an outdoor sculpture exhibition at Windham College in Putney, Vermont. Conceived as a follow-up to the Bradford event, *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner* was organized by Chuck Ginnever and Seth Siegelaub and it has acquired something of a landmark status in the literature on the post-minimalist period.[228] At Windham College, the artists were asked to construct a work on site with any materials that were available on hand. Barry's own intervention was limited to stretching a half-inch nylon cord between the facades of two campus buildings.

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[227] *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner*, Laura Knott Gallery, Bradford Junior College, Bradford, Mass., February 4 – March 2, 1968. On the role of Siegelaub as the impresario of the conceptual movement, see Alexander Alberro, *Deprivileging Art, Seth Siegelaub and the Politics of Conceptual Art* (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1997).

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While some historians would like to view the Windham College exhibition as a proto-land art event, it is more appropriate to situate the show within the incipient movement of conceptualism. Indeed, for two of the artists, Weiner and Barry, Windham College would acquire the character of a fortuitous event, which established an end to the viability of painting and prompted the acceptance of language as a medium of presentation.[229]

Yet, the neatness of this history belies the fact that the transformation of Barry from painter to conceptualist is neither one of smooth continuity or sudden rupture. The reality is slightly more complicated, as is the role of film in this process. A set of contradictions course through his work, which were already manifested in his painting, but receive a different inflection in his subsequent practice. At first, Barry's painting was received as an exponent of a hard-edge style, like those of his close friend Robert Huot, but this categorization of the work is inadequate. On first sight, Barry's canvasses do exhibit all the required stylistic traits – flat surface, reductive form, limited palette – yet the ambition of these works cannot be captured in strictly formal terms.[230] Barry's work, namely, was not self-contained; it operated according to an expanded logic of painting which immersed the viewer in an actual setting that extended beyond the individual borders of the canvas. And I shall address this

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[228] *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner*, Windham College, Putney, Vt., April 30 - May 31, 1968.

[229] This transition is discussed by Alberro, *Deprivileging Art*.

[230] According to Lawrence Alloway first definition of the term "forms are few in hard-edge and the surface immaculate...The whole picture becomes the unit; forms extend the length of the painting or are restricted to two or three tones." Alloway, "On the Edge," *Architecural Design*, 30, no. 4 (April 1960), pp. 164-165.

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inclusion of the setting within the work by means of the phenomenological notion of an experiential *situation* following the artist's own lead.

In contrast to the immediacy of the modernist beholder, the situational aspect of Barry's painting of the mid-sixties institutes a temporalized mode of perception which establishes a clear link to his later films, such as *Scenes*. This literalism of Barry's work, its rejection of the abstract visuality of modernism, participated in a much wider shift that was initiated by minimalism. The outcome of this shift has been recorded elsewhere in sufficient detail: from the series of minimalism the radically decentered subject of post-modernism would gradually emerge. But we should not be too quick in short-circuiting this historical logic even though I agree with its general truth. As I shall argue, Barry rejects the transcendental subject of modernism, only to reinstate the idealist conditions of this viewer in another form and shape.

This ambivalence at the base of Barry's work, is not wholly absent from Alloway's notion of hard-edge painting either. I need, therefore, to slightly refine my previous comments before continuing. The critic has noted that the systemic methods of certain hard-edge painters, namely the use of modular sets and serial formats, prompts the viewer to read such recurrent images "in time as well as in space."[231] Alloway further states that this temporal horizon of systemic painting remains intractable from the position of "formalist positivism" that is espoused by Clement Greenberg. Nevertheless, Alloway stops short of acknowledging the full potential of

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[231] Lawrence Alloway, "Systemic Painting," in *Systemic Painting* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966), as reprinted in *Topics in American Art since 1945* (New York: Norton, 1975): 89.

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his own assertions. To put it in different terms: the critic indicates the *literal* level of the work only to subsume it again within the *pictorial* notion of the whole. The spatio-temporal extension of painting is contained by the viewer's prior grasp of a totalized frame of significance: repetition, he states, "returns meaning to the syntax."[232] Others have been erroneous, Alloway claims, in claiming that systemic painting is impersonal in nature. To the contrary, he insists, the appearance of the latter is in perfect accord with the values of humanism.

We have come full circle: Alloway's aesthetic is revealed as no less idealist in status than the formalist criticism of Clement Greenberg or Michael Fried. As a matter of fact, our analysis of Barry's work shall gain more traction from the critical terms of the latter than the former. In particular, I have Fried's dialectic of the literal versus the pictorial in mind. This dialectic is expounded in a series of essays written by that critic during the mid-sixties. Reading through these pages today, I cannot suppress the impression that Fried's rational machine of formal analysis, which was tuned to the conquest of the literal by the pictorial, worked in a halting manner at best. His rational technique of criticism was meant to answer to an artistic technique of differentiation – the meaningfulness of the painterly act bounded by the dimensions of its flat support. In conclusion to an essay on Frank Stella, the critic observed, for instance, that "the expanded realm of the artistic may come into conflict with the pictorial; and when this occurs the former must give way."[233] But to recognize the ever-present grit in the gears as the fundamental element of the machine, was not a

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[232] Alloway, "Systemic Painting": 89.

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possibility given to the rational critic, as Robert Smithson has ventured.[234] Nevertheless, Fried felt that the modernist machine was beginning to sputter: "modernist painting today is perhaps more desperately involved with aspects of its visual environment than painting has ever been."[235] And he continues with a sentence that might as well have been written in response to Barry's paintings of this period as well: "It as though there isn't the room any more that would be needed to for modernist painting to be pure, to immure itself, even relatively, from its environment."[236]

We shall follow the fortunes of this dialectic as it works its way through the painterly and filmic practice of Barry, not towards a point of resolution, but with sudden inversions and shifts of direction. Thus *Scenes* addressed a specific predicament that Barry was confronted with in painting, but it did not bring the problem to a close. It is not a question of following a path through to the end. While opening onto a seemingly different field of possibilities, *Scenes* also brought new problems in its wake, which caused Barry to abandon film by 1968. Only two years later was he to resolve these issues to his own satisfaction by adopting the medium of slide projection.

Broadly sketched, this is the story that I will present in the following. But it is a story not told from the beginning forward or from its end backwards. I shall tell it,

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[233] Fried, "Three American Painters": 259.

[234] Smithson, "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects": 84. The comment on the "grit in the machine" is attributed to T.E. Hulme by Smithson. Fried has acknowledged that Smithson presented "the most powerful and interesting contemporary response to 'Art and Objecthood'" in Fried, "An Introduction to My Art Criticism" : 73 n.76.

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rather, from the view point of *Scenes*, which does not truly represent the middle of a linear sequence. That is to say, I hope to resist the temptation to make the work, on the one hand, fit a linear logic of development or, on the one hand, represent a clean break. For in either case, the specific tensions that underlie the work itself will be lost from view.

The footage for *Scenes* was shot during the summer of 1967 (the film was edited in New York during the Fall with the assistance of Hollis Frampton). Barry had received a grant to work at the artist colony of Belmont Park in Maryland. While staying at the park, he occupied himself almost completely with filming and photographing. While it was expected that he would paint in the provided studio, Barry was usually to be found outside roaming the grounds with his camera.[237]

Scenes is a silent 16mm film shot on black & white stock. Very short in length, it lasts no more than eight minutes and most of that time is taken up by darkness. Barry has described the film as follows:

> It's made up of about ninety-percent opaque black leader. Spliced between various lengths are scenes that are single frames or may be a few seconds of a shot, even words. When you look at the film, what

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[235] Fried, "Three American Painters": 260.

[236] Ibid.: 260.

[237] While at Belmont Park, Barry did construct so-called environmental sculptures consisting of four red plastic cubes (1' x 1' x 1') which were arranged to cover a 20' x 20' square area. This modular sculpture formed a translation into the horizontal of his preceding modular paintings which, for instance, were hung in the four corners of a wall. Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997

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> you see is mostly darkness and then suddenly an image flashes on the screen for a few seconds.[238]

Let me provide a synopsis of the film. *Scenes* begins with the titles presented in sans-serif letters, white on black: "SCENES Robert Barry 1967."[239] The titles are followed by a lengthy passage of black leader until, abruptly, one red frame flashes on screen, to be followed again by black leader. After a minute has elapsed the first image appears – a black and white shot of a farmhouse yard in Belmont surrounded by trees. Again the shot is held for only a split-second – just one frame – almost too short to be recognized. Then the viewer is plunged back into darkness for another minute, until the next event occurs, namely a strip of green leader which is projected on screen for one second. After the next interval of black leader, the camera shots begin to extend themselves in length, while opening onto a sense of movement. Between each shot, the same black interval appears but becomes inversely shorter as the shots become longer. Yet never do the shots last longer than a minute. The motion in these images is patterned in the following manner: the camera tracks across a vertical pattern of wooden boards; the camera swivels upside down before a set of bushes, while, at the same time, spiraling into depth; the camera is directed downwards at the surface of the lawn, while moving diagonally across to the upper right hand corner of the frame; the camera moves across the yard towards distant trees standing at the perimeter. At the end of this sequence, the film shifts into a mode of animation: a red dot flashes against a black ground. Then two more shots follow that were taken from

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[238] Robert Nickas, "Interview with Robert Barry," *Journal of Contemporary Art* (New York) 5, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 5.

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the vantage point of a traveling car. Each time the camera looks forward, presenting a view of the road's convergence on the horizon, and, then, upon entering a tunnel, the perspective lines appear to be inverted in a string of lights running along the ceiling. Finally, a section of transparent film followed by black leader announces the last shot: a clockwise rotation of the camera around its horizontal axis causing the horizon line to tilt.

The film actually does not end with this last shot. After a few seconds of clear leader is allowed to run out, Barry requires that the projector be kept running for a few more seconds, and then it's turned off. By this means, the artist draws the spectator's attention to the staging of the film. The filmic event is more than the compendium of images passing by the viewer's eye, but concerns the concrete circumstances of viewing as well. The film concerns both an experience of imaginary *scenes*, as well as the actual *mise-en-scène* of the filmic apparatus itself. In drawing attention to the technical conditions of the medium, Barry's approach to filmmaking is clearly antithetical to the projective situation of classical cinema. As such, Barry's film can be favorably compared to both minimalist strategies within the gallery and to various avant-garde tactics within the cinema.[240] But my question is more specific: does Barry's literalist conception of the filmic medium, with its emphasis on the process of perception, fully negate the idealist basis of modernist aesthetics? Again, it seems obvious that *Scenes* is intended to confront its audience – it is projected *at* rather than

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[239] The title might have been added later for the *Information* show.

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strictly *for* the viewer – yet is its visual effect fully alienatory?[241] Indeed, can Barry's film be placed within the same trajectory of Mel Bochner, who aligned his films to a Brechtian politics of de-familiarization?

I postulate that Barry's answer would have been negative: his filmic project carries little affinity to the contemporary endeavors of Bochner. Barry has explained that the function of *Scenes* was to immerse the viewer within a total, sensorial situation and not, that is, to induce a state of detachment of the spectator from the spectacle: "The film itself is meant to deal really with the darkness of the room, the act of looking, the passage of time."[242]

Indeed, the true subject of the film is the interval between light and dark, before and after. Within those brief moments that the screen is filled with images, the spectator is buoyed by the movement of the camera and swept along by its action. Within the virtual space of projection, Barry explores different vectors of displacement: either the camera follows a perspectival axis of movement into depth, carrying the viewer beyond the surface of the screen, or the camera is self-reflexively correlated to the bounded, flat surface of the screen itself. An example of the latter is formed by the camera sliding sideways across the ground, shifting the frame diagonally (the direction of the shot is determined by the internal shape of the frame)

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[240] We might think of correspondences between *Scenes* and a range of avant-garde films, from Soviet cinema to Guy Debord, however *this* tradition of avant-garde film would not have been the most obvious to Robert Barry.

[241] As I noted above, Huot suggested to me that the Hunter College event exploited the confrontational aspect of the assembled films to draw a parallel between aesthetics and politics. When questioned further, however, he was hesitant to expand on this point and it remains unclear whether the other artists shared his sentiment. Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.

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or, alternatively, the tracking shot along the slatted fence, which creates the reverse effect of a moving surface which seems to slide behind the static frame of the camera (i.e. similar to the motion of the film strip passing through the shutter gate). But even in the depth shots, the viewer will encounter a combination of these two moments, for instance, in the spiraling curve of the camera which tends to flatten out space by inverting the horizon.

In short, the moving images do not establish a constant mode of perceptual identity between the viewer and the camera. Sometimes the spectator will seem to penetrate beyond the literal frame of the screen and enter into the represented movement itself, following its pace and direction. At other times, the spectator will be more aware of the framing operation itself and retain a more mediated relationship to the images. And, then, time and time again, the viewer is thrown back into the directionless, inert realm of utter darkness.[243]

What is clear, then, is that *Scenes* is an abstract movie – abstract, that is, in the sense that it does not present an object of narrative interest to the spectator.[244] It is also a performative movie in that it affects the viewer's actual perception of space and time, in the here and now, rather than transporting the viewer to some fictional elsewhere or some documented site. As the viewer, you are literally seated in a

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[242] Nickas, "Interview with Robert Barry": 6.

[243] Under perfect conditions, that is, because *Scenes* proves to be remarkably sensitive to its surroundings in a manner that was not anticpated by Barry. While the effect of the film relies on a complete control of the luminosity within the projetion space, complete darkness is difficult to realize either due to the presence of exit signs or from the lateral seepage of light from the projector itself. This difficulty in regulating the environment of film would discourage the artist to continue in this medium.

[244] The anticipatory structure of the film, nonetheless, is a narrative form *in essence*. This, at least, was Annette Michelson's argument concerning *Wavelength* of Michael Snow.

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viewing apparatus, undergoing its action upon your senses as if you formed the subject of an experimental setup. "Space, architecture, light, movement, change, involvement of the viewer both spatially and conceptually": that is what Barry was after.[245] And if *Scenes* manifests a performative function, then it also contains a theatrical aspect, for what this film insists upon is exhibiting its own conditions of exhibition. And *that* is what both modernist painting and classical cinema at all costs strive to avoid.

I shall place a discussion of the performative function of the artist film on hold until the next chapter, but in introducing a set of other concepts – abstraction, modernism, classical cinema, and theatricality – I have a particular strategy in mind. For a starter, *Scenes* is a hybrid work of art that is situated somewhere between the practices of painting and cinema.[246] In occupying this interstitial position, Barry's film certainly forms a more deliberate attempt to undo the modernist tradition of painting than it aims to make a contribution to the history of independent cinema. However, the transgressive move of *Scenes* is not to supplant one style or substitute one technique by another. If this film implements a strategy of subversion within the field of contemporary art – a working thesis that stands in need of further qualification – then it does not achieve this end by means of a strategy of negation which is encapsulated in a oft-repeated statement like "the death of painting" (perhaps to name his strategy that of delay would be more appropriate). That is to say, Barry's turn to

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[245] Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.

[246] As I shall argue, our standard notion of a "practice" must be expanded beyond its mere technical or institutional sense (e.g. a specific technique of painting or configuration of the studio) to include various discursive practices (e.g. contemporary discourse on painting or the studio). Discursive and non-discursive practices are co-extensive elements, bound together within a historical network of

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film in 1967 does not simply state that painting is outmoded – although it echoes that familiar opinion as well.[247] What this turn signifies, above and beyond a naïve belief in technical determinism, is that the work of art does not exist independently of a complex network of institutional, technical, and discursive relations. Barry's filmmaking participates in the wider shift of the period from the Work to the Frame and film as such is conceived as both a material and social relationship or situation that we enter into.[248]

In short, the medium of film for Barry is not to exist as an object of purely private attention. Indeed *Scenes* opens up a plurality of imaginary and literal scenes to the viewer; it establishes a multiplicity of places for the spectator to inhabit. The possibilities of film are played out against those of painting and in the process Barry confronts his audience with something of an anomaly within the overlapping terrain of painting and film. He presents a phenomenon that fits ill within the classificatory order of either discipline, yet remains closely entwined with the strategic options intrinsic to both fields.

In order to grasp this dialectic at work in *Scenes*, it will be pertinent to return to a central debate of the later sixties which unfolded simultaneously among art critics and film critics. The center of this debate was formed by the question of the ontological status of the artistic medium. And the division of opinion between idealist

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relationships, which determines their possible function and meaningfulness: neither material or conceptual 'tools' are given to us as autonomous instruments of observation or interpretation.

[247] None of the artists that are included in this study would disagree with the accuracy of this obesrvation, at least not in 1967.

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and materialist interpretations of this core issue created some unusual alliances across disciplinary boundaries – unusual, at least, when viewed from the modernist position established by Clement Greenberg which implied a sweeping condemnation of the industrial art of cinema . The fact that his voluminous writings contain only a handful of references to cinema, which are oblique at best, is revealing in itself.[249] But his silence on the issue of cinema was broken by a second generation of critics. Curiously enough, the modernist camp would make common cause with classical cinema in its resistance to what it saw as the rising tide of literalism in the visual arts, i.e. minimalism and pop art. Yet, on the other side, an alternative practice of film, represented by Jean-Luc Godard as well as the artist film, would be used as a critical weapon to undermine the hegemony of Greenbergian aesthetics in art criticism.

We can readily identify the main participants in this debate as consisting of Michael Fried, Stanley Cavell, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson. The most relevant texts by Fried and Cavell are, respectively, "Art and Objecthood" (1967) and *The World Viewed* (1971).[250] Similarly, I can cite a series of essays by Krauss that

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[248] See Craig Owens, "From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After 'The Death of the Author'," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 192): 122-139.

[249] Most entries by Greenberg on the subject of cinema take a negative form, stating, for instance, that the movies suffered a "complete debauching" under advertising culture. It is good to recall that one of his earliest defenses of the autonomy of contemporary art, "Avant-garde and Kitsch," was formulated in the pages of the *Partisan Review* as a rebuttal to an essay by Dwight MacDonald on Soviet cinema. McDonald blamed the Russian public's disdain for more progressive work in film on the general lack of cultural education and support by the government. Greenberg's response to this article suggests that there is something inherently repressive, or at least ideologically suspect, about the form of mass reception required by film.

[250] The best known of these publications in art historical circles is probably Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood." Stanley Cavell's *A World Viewed* appeared in 1971, but its argument began to take form back in 1963 when he started discussing movies while teaching aesthetics. His subsequent discussions with Michael Fried on the subject of painting are clearly reflected in the final text (just as

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were published in *Artforum*, including "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary" (1972) and "Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post 60's Sculpture" (1973). The pertinent writings of Michelson include "Film and the Radical Aspiration" (1966), "Towards Snow" (1971) and "Screen/Surface: The Politics of Illusionism" (1972).[251]

Despite their diametrically opposed stances, these authors have thoroughly informed my own understanding of the various ways in which film was inserted within the context of post-minimalism. Yet, at this stage, I would like to further our comprehension of the different discursive figures that were given to film at this moment, before I address the link between such knowledge claims and actual material practices (a link that is not one of cause and effect). To the critics above, we owe the rigorous description of a set of discursive functions for film within the field of contemporary art criticism. Whether film was marshaled in support of a modernist aesthetic under fire (e.g. Cavell and Fried), or enlisted to join the frontline advance on the modernist position (e.g. Krauss), film became a central referent of discussion even when all the talk seemed to be about painting or sculpture.[252] I wish to emphasize this

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Fried's reference to movies in "Art and Objecthood" might be traced to Cavell). See Cavell's preface to *The World Viewed.*

[251] Rosalind Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post 60's Sculpture," *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 43-53. I have already referred to Michelson's "Film and the Radical Aspiration" and "Toward Snow." "Screen/Surface: The Politics of Illusionism" appeared in *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972): 59-62. She also edited the September 1971 issue of *Artforum* that was entirely devoted to film and included essays on Warhol (by Stephen Koch), the structural filmmakers Hollis Frampton (including his own text "For a Metahistory of Film"), Ken Jacobs, George Landow, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland; and contributions by the artist filmmakers Joan Jonas, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson.

[252] Both Fried and Krauss will define their (opposing) cases by way of the 'other' figure of film; the main difference being that Fried will speak only in terms of an analogy, while Krauss will actually include film within the sphere of artistic practice.

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notion of film as embodying *different* strategic functions within the *same* discursive space. While these options were articulated by the voices, they emerge within an enunciative field which is not personalized but consists of a historical network of relations between words and things, discursive and non-discursive practices, which determined which statements will gain intelligibility, even in dissent. While I shall depart from the series Fried-Cavell-Krauss, the positivity of this enunciative field is not limited to these authors or their texts. It includes other authors and disciplines, such as the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty or the logical positivism of Wittgenstein.[253] But it is not these names in themselves that shall define the meaning of Barry's *Scenes* or Nauman's *Studio Films*. In fact, I shall not pursue the many references by artists to Wittgenstein, while, on the other hand, I shall extend my discussion of phenomenology beyond the immediate knowledge of several of the artists concerned (if not exceed the greater theoretical command of the critics). But if I do so, then it is not to claim the scientificity of its theoretical architecture or to test the compatibility of its conceptual terms to those used by artists and critics (e.g. situation, theatricality, the dialectic of literal versus pictorial). Phenomenology does not serve me as a master theory: that so many critics and artists invoke its language does not mean we need to analyze the precision of their vocabulary. The affinity

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[253] One does not have to sieve through the critical writings (artist statements) of the period to find references to Merleau-Ponty. It is written large on almost every page. But of course, 'Merleau-Ponty' could mean several different things to different people. To describe all these differing perspectives in their individuality is not my aim nor does it necessarily interest me. Michel Foucault has suggested in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that we approach an epistemic system – and the 'filmic anomaly' of post-minimalism can be considered as such a system - as an *anonymous dispersion* of subject positions. While I shall stick very closely to a limited number of authors and texts, Foucault's privileging of the systemic over the personal will suit me fine.

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between these two discourses of art and philosophy is not strictly of terms, themes, or ideas, it is one of practice; that is, there are certain structural conditions of speech, certain enunciative positions they share, but this overlapping space is also one of dissent. Phenomenology can imagine certain relations between the viewer and the object – it establishes a certain horizon of meaning – but it is blind to other possibilities. If I seem to venture far afield at times, in my address of phenomenology, then it is ultimately to circle back to those options it cannot quite visualize or are articulated as abnormal.[254] To a degree, then, I might be said to be kidnapping the language of phenomenology, just as post-minimal film can be said to enact a phenomenological project in ruins. But, again, this is merely a *manner of speaking*: the historicity of the situation is determined by the rules of the game and not only by the pieces on the board. Phenomenology provided some of the coins to play with, and it manifested some of the rules, but the game did not stop there.

In expanding the original series Fried-Cavell-Krauss to include Merleau-Ponty, I am arguing that the various options that the sixties envisioned as a response to the question "what is cinema?" are located within the same *discursive formation.* For, as Michel Foucault explains, a discursive formation is not identified by a specific group of interlocutors or written texts, or even by the concepts or objects they share, but by the rules which determine what counts as a serious speech act. In other words, we need to inquire what modes of distribution between subjects, objects, and concepts

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[254] Strangely enough, the *Phenomenology of Perception* is mostly given over to the analysis of various psychic pathologies and it is from such anomalies that the philosophical basis of perceptual normalcy is derived by Merleau-Ponty.

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could emerge during the later sixties on the both imaginary and material surface stretched between the two poles of cinema and art?[255]

Let me clarify my method by slightly rephrasing the comments above: I am not proposing to write a history of ideas.[256] First of all, I am not tracing the development of a formal or conceptual theme *through time*. But secondly, I am not concerned with tracing the source of ideas or judging the rigor of their application. The history of ideas follows an interdisciplinary method of historical inquiry, as I have engaged upon myself, however the former traces the crystallization of received thoughts and non-articulated experiences into the systems of science, philosophy, or art and follows the migration of themes and notions between these different disciplines. As Foucault has remarked: the history of ideas describes "the knowledge that has served as an empirical, unreflective basis for subsequent formalizations"[257] While I do not fully share the latter's insistence on the autonomous operation of discourse, I do share his

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[255] I find no irony in the fact that it was Rosalind Krauss who introduced a Foucauldian methodology into art history in a period subsequent to the one under review. Furthermore, my argument does not undercut the efficacy of her *strategic* entry of film into a critique of modernism. What I have mind was stated with no greater elegance than by Roland Barthes when he called for a relativization of the observer's frame of reference: "The mutation in which the idea of the work seems to be gripped must not, however, be over-estimated: it is more in the nature of an epistemological slide than of a real break...there is now the requirement of a new object, obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories." Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" [1971], in *Image-Music-Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977): 155-156.

[256] Michel Foucault describes the history of ideas as: "The history of ideas, then, is the discipline of beginnings and ends, the description of obscure continuities and returns, the reconstitution of developments in the linear form of history. But it can also, by that very fact, describe, from one domain to another, the whole interplay of exchanges and intermediaries: it shows how scientific knowledge is diffused, gives rise to philosophical concepts, and take form perhaps in literary works; it shows how problems, notions, themes may emigrate from the philosophical field where they were formulated to scientific or political discourses; it relates work with institutions, social customs or behaviour, techniques, and unrecorded needs and practices; it tries to revive the most elaborate forms of discourse in the concrete landscape, in the midst of the growth and development that witnessed their birth." Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 137.

[257] Ibid.: 137.

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resistance to viewing a work as the condensation of various ideas; that is, to interpret it as a sign for something else, namely the host of representations, images, themes that are concealed in the discourse of a general culture.[258]

The distinction is perhaps a fine one and I do not follow Foucault's method of archaeological analysis to the letter. I am less concerned with the classification or analysis of theoretical concepts which circulate within a discursive formation, than with the possibilities of contradiction that this system might generate. A discursive formation, as Foucault explains, "defines, between concepts, forms of deduction, derivation, and coherence, but also of incompatibility, intersection, substitution, exclusion, mutual alteration, displacement, etc."[259] As historians, Foucault continues, we should attempt to localize the site and extension of such conflicts on their surface of emergence. This, I believe, is exactly what the experience of *Scenes* suggests as well: this film literally projects divergent moments of subjectivity.

Which brings me to a third and final point: the different *positions* of subjectivity within a discursive formation. The nature of these subject positions or enunciative modalities are defined by the authority of the subject of speech, the institutional site from which the subject speaks and the informational networks to which the speaker belongs – a point that is of particular interest to Dan Graham. But this enunciative position also concerns the sovereignty or "perceptual distance" (Michel Foucault) of the observer versus his or her objects and this is where the issue

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[258] On the autonomous function of 'discourse' in Foucault's early work see Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

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of the transcendence or immanence of the viewer, which I have been elaborating upon, becomes paramount. For instance, we might take Foucault's own example of clinical discourse in which the doctor functions as an "observing eye, touching finger" and see the continuance of this figure in the distinctly, non-phenomenological notion of the camera as surgical knife, which is celebrated by Walter Benjamin.[260] But just as Foucault warns against seeing this figure of the doctor as the product of any one given element – a new technique, institution, object, or concept – the subject position of Benjamin's cameraman is no more than a point of integration within a network of relations; he does not transcend but is immanent to a historical system of discursive and non-discursive practices.

It follows that if we do not consider the cinematic medium as a ready-made tool, but as an epistemological system or *apparatus*, then alternative points of integration within the same apparatus will become possible.[261] Or, as Foucault has it, other strategic options become possible. For instance, we might consider Cavell's notion of cinema as letting the world happen on its own accord: "film takes our very distance and powerlessness over the world as the condition of the world's natural appearance...nothing revealed by the world in [the camera's] presence is lost."[262] In celebrating cinema's ability to elicit the viewer's sense of belonging to *this* world, Cavell not only proposed a democratic notion of film that is far different from that of

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[259] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 60.
[260] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 53
[261] The operative term is the French word *dispositif* which does not refer to an individual *technique* – such as the film camera – but a whole situation or arrangement of techniques, institutional

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Benjamin. What is more, he inverted the opposition between Benjamin's auratic and exhibition values. It is filmic projection that is now said to have auratic qualities and to have avoided the "shadowing of seriousness by exhibition."[263]

Cavell's film aesthetic was clearly involved in the same end game strategy as phenomenology, namely a last-ditch effort to outwit the logic of commodification at its own game. Hence, Cavell's attempt to wrest from the very hands of power its choice instrument of subjection: cinema. He enlists cinema in what elsewhere has been described as the losing game of phenomenology: man's ability to transcend all historical limitations based on a prior recognition of his own limitations. Thus, in Cavell's reading the removal of the viewer from the world in the cinema might paradoxically become the condition for the presentness of the world to the viewer and, at the same time, the ground for the viewer's own claim to self-identity. To so many others during the sixties such an option would no longer appear valid. We might say in accordance with the contemporary language of art criticism that film took for them an anti-pictorial turn. Among these others, I would include Godard but also several post-minimal artists, such as Bochner or Graham, and the correspondence between their artistic strategies extends beyond the actual medium of film. Structural film, on the other hand, was not so decisively anti-pictorial in nature and neither was Barry's *Scenes*.

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sites and discourses of knowledge into which a viewer subject is inserted and by which subjectivity itself is constructed.

[262] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 119.

[263] Ibid.: 122.

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In sum, the historical practice that I refer to as the 'filmic anomaly' consists of more than just a set of objects or a set of texts. It concerns the interconnection between discursive and non-discursive domains, between a discursive formation and a material apparatus, which determined the possible functions of film within (and beyond) the conventional boundaries of the visual arts. Within this complex field of strategic options, which is both discursive and material in nature, Barry's *Scenes* can be shown to occupy at least one position, but, perhaps, it actually occupies several conflicting positions at the same time. In the following I shall analyze the regularity of the discursive series Fried/Cavell/Krauss, but not in order to describe the formalization of a critical discourse – whether it is the aesthetics of art or film. To the contrary, I am interested in the gaps within the series, the space for dissension it allows. The means I shall follow to manifest the deviant logic of "substitution, exclusion, mutual alteration, displacement" is by intersecting one series with another, namely that of phenomenology.

My goal is to arrive not only at an archaeological understanding of the filmic anomaly, but also initiate a genealogical analysis of the phenomenon, which raises issues of a more concretely ideological nature. Ultimately, the practice of post-minimal film shall assume shape for us not only against the background of contemporary art, but in its continuity with the socio-economic apparatus of visual production, in which it forms one (barely visible) term, next to avant-garde film, classical cinema, or television. If post-minimal film is not to be regarded as an exclusively artistic phenomenon – and I have stated my reserve regarding such an

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approach - we need to ask how the perceptual conditions of a film by Barry, Bochner, Nauman, etc. connect to or differ from the visual domain of publicity, whether the latter be defined in terms of the panoptic regime of Foucault or the spectacular structure of Guy Debord. I shall not engage this problematic all at once; indeed not until my final chapter on Dan Graham shall I attempt to fully bring it into the open. The fact is that only during the early seventies will artists more directly engage in an explicit mode of media critique, even though *this* strategic possibility is prepared in the works under our present examination.

There is one last piece, however, that I need to put in place before I can proceed. I have already hinted at its existence by referring to the notion of the apparatus as a way of connecting discourse and technique within the regularity of a historically specific practice. What I have in mind is the so-called apparatus theory developed by the French film critics Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, which emerged around 1970, and performed an ideological dissection of the spectator of classical cinema. What their critique revealed was that narrative cinema constructed a particular type of viewer – a transcendental subject – on the basis of a fixed configuration of material and discursive elements which was determined by socio-economical demands. And again it is the lens of phenomenological theory that provides insight into this cinematic topography, even though this lens is held to the critical eye of another theoretical authority, that of the post-structuralist.[264]

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[264] Which is to say that my means of mapping the discursive-material system of post-minimal film is itself fully historical. The subject of apparatus theory, for instance, remains abstract, that is non-gendered. In the field of cinema studies, apparatus theory hardly maintains the status of topicality.

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I shall advance in reverse, therefore, starting in 1970 with an essay by Baudry on the "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," and then make the transition back to the debate on modernism and film of the later sixties.[265]

Framing Modernism

To place Baudry's essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in its historiographical context, we might note that it appeared a year before Cavell's *The World Viewed*, and the same year that Fried published his article "Caro's Abstractness" in *Artforum*. Fried was soon to leave the field of contemporary art criticism altogether to concentrate on the historical project which had been announced the previous year with "Manet's Sources: Aspects of his Art, 1859-65," a lengthy exposition to which the whole March 1969 issue of *Artforum* was given over.

What we might gain from this chronology is that Cavell's *A World Viewed* was published at a moment when its argumentative position had largely lost its topicality. At the same time that the presence of film in the gallery was cresting with a spate of exhibitions across Europe and America (see the chronology in Appendix A), Cavell's book does not even refer to the existence of Warhol, not to mention its near total disregard of avant-garde film (Godard functions as the general fall-guy). The

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However, it is the historicity of practices – both theoretical and material – that I am considering; not their methodological purity.

[265] Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" was originally published as "Cinéma: effects idéologiques produit par l'appareil de base," in *Cinéthique* nos.

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untenable nature of Cavell's views by the early seventies has been sufficiently exposed by Krauss.[266] However, when read as the record of a polemic that stems from the mid-sixties, *A World Viewed* is a little more revealing. Furthermore, all parties involved have one particular source in common, namely André Bazin's 1945 text on "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," which, significantly, was first published in a publication called *Problèmes de la Peinture*.[267]

Of course, Baudry and Cavell could not differ more in their understanding of Bazin's text. While to Baudry, Bazin's "idealist paean" to cinema manifests no more than its hidden ideological beliefs, to Cavell it did not go far enough in shoring up the filmic impression of a "fullness and homogeneity of 'being'."[268] Nonetheless, where Baudry and Cavell agreed was that cinema created a sense of intense realism for the

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7-8 (1970). Reprinted in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, edited by Philip Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986): 286-298.

[266] See her "Dark Glass and Bifocals, A Book Review," *Artforum*. The latter is a joint book review of Cavell's *A World Viewed* and Stephen Koch's *Stargazer: The Life, World & Films of Andy Warhol*.

Krauss has pointed out that the argument of Cavell draws on Ordinary Language Philosophy. It is this premiss that explains why Cavell can rely on his idiosyncratic experience of films (i.e. memory and its mistakes), since Ordinary Language Philosophy posits that the validity of *my* individual statements can always be checked against the shared practice of *our* speech. It is possible, therefore, for the philosopher to generalize from the private realm of language use. That is also why the empiricist's rejoinder – the fact that Cavell omits non-narrative films from his discussion – can easily be dismissed by Cavell. Yet, Cavell hardens the "I" of the individual speaker that is also the "we" of public discourse – "the totality of his natural habitat" - into the permanence of an ontological condition. While Krauss holds that this approach might be applicable to the domain of language and its uses, it is not to the work of art and its uses. For any form of experience that lies beyond the immediate horizon of established speech patterns would automatically become unintelligible, if not unimaginable. Thus Cavell might consider narrativity as an essential property of the filmic medium without realizing that he has merely succeeded in *naturalizing* a historical fact.

[267] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," *What is Cinema?*, translated by Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967): 9-16. Michelson wrote a review on the occasion of the publication of the English translation. See Annette Michelson, "What is Cinema?," *Artforum* 6, no. 10 (Summer 1968), p. 67-71. Bazin shows up in Krauss's work, among other places, in the crucial "Notes on the Index: Part 1," *October* 3 (Spring 1977).

[268] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 289.

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viewer: a 'larger than life' feeling that Cavell described as magical and Baudry as phantasmatic. This imaginary plenitude of the cinematic image was only marginally derived from the system of monocular perspective that was first invented in painting and subsequently perfected in photography. In fact the ontological wording of Cavell – this "fullness of being" – insists on a deeper connection between cinema and painting than the mere technical continuity of perspective suggests; a connection, that is, between cinema and *modernist* painting.[269]

While modernist painting itself had jettisoned the technique of perspective, its projective operation was still operational on a transcendental level of *framing.*[270] To call perspective a projective structure is to call attention to the fact that in mapping space, it also inscribes the viewer within this space. Perspective institutes a sovereign viewer, but this topographical system can be turned against subject. The vanishing point might seem to mirror the viewer's own punctiform existence, but in matching the infinitude of a divine eye, it can also create an alienatory effect. In its instrumentalization of the world, therefore, perspective has also instrumentalized its subject or, as Jacques Lacan famously remarked, the subject is *photo-graphed.* As a counter-measure modernist painting internalized this logic of projection. Cinema projection, of course, still implements perspectival projection, but as Baudry's argues, this fact is merely secondary to a more fundamental mode of subjective projection that

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[269] Baudy's thesis that the system of central perspective constructs a single order of ideological experience has found its later detractors. See, for instance, Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990) and the monumental study by Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, translated by John Goodman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).

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made possible by cinema. In short, the French critic also identified a function of transcendental framing at work in narrative cinema that shall tie his argument in with that of the other critics. Let me attend to this problem first.

The plenitude of the projected image, Baudry maintains, results from a typically phenomenological operation in which the finite conditions of the situated subject of vision are transformed into a transcendental ground of knowledge. To shore up his argument, Baudry refers explicitly to the Edmund Husserl of the *Cartesian Meditations*. But we do not need to scrutinize Husserl's process of phenomenological reduction, which left him transfixed by the sheer existence of things, in order to follow Baudry's argument. Yet the reference is convenient since the philosopher's motto of 'simply letting things be' would be echoed again by none other than Robert Barry.[271]

Instead of following Husserl close to the letter, then, I will offer a more general idea of the basic logic that drives phenomenological theory.[272] Michel Foucault, who was a former student of Merleau-Ponty, dubbed this logic the "analytic of finitude".[273] The function of this analytic is to repair the original rift between the self and other which is always anterior to the self's maturation within the world. In order to pull this off, the human subject must be able to invert the relation of finitude to infinitude: his former limitations will then become the very conditions of transcendence. And how

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[270] See chapter one of Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, especially the graph on page 20.

[271] Although Barry ascribes the thought to Martin Heidegger. See n. 299.

[272] A logic, moreover, that is held in common across the field of phenomenological theory despite the divide between the idealist and existentialist positions that was opened up by Husserl's student Heidegger.

[273] See Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault* on Foucault's critique of phenomenology as instituting an 'analytic of finitude.'

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might this magisterial feat be accomplished according to phenomenology? The subject must appropriate the inherited practices of the body and language, which situated him or her historically, and, by these means, project his own intentions into the world. Thus, a process of self-interpretation is initiated that counters one's alienated state and the contingency of being-in-the-world is overcome.

The subject's techniques of projection (i.e. language, the body and its tools) 'cut' into the world, Foucault explains, setting him or her back from things. But this distanciation also allows the subject to bestow meaning on things, rather than simply letting their anteriority weigh down on him.[274] Through a process of self-alienation, we might conclude, the phenomenological subject ascends to an ontological position of supremacy (or so it dreams). This is a process we can follow in modernist criticism as well, with its typical movement from positivist reduction to idealist certainty: the pictorial overcomes the literal, Fried would say. Yet, the "infinitely brief instant" of the pictorial is dependent on the finite realm of the literal. Without the prior 'cut' of the painter's technique into the world, painting could never attain such immediacy. Indeed, as Fried acknowledges (with Merleau-Ponty as his witness), the meaning of each painterly act depends on the existence of a prior horizon of conventional rules.

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[274] In the unsurpassed words of Foucault: "To man's experience a body has been given, a body which is his body—a fragment of ambiguous space, whose peculiar and irreducible spatiality is nevertheless articulated upon the space of things; desire is given as a primordial appetite on the basis of which all things assume value, and relative value; to this same experience, a language is given in the thread of which all the discourses of all times, all successions and all simultaneities may be given. This is to say that each of these positive forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of its own finitude. Moreover, the latter is not the most completely purified essence of positivity, but that upon the basis of which it is possible for positivity to arise." Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973): 314.

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The "pictorial values" of a Frank Stella, for instance, might otherwise found wanting and his metallic surfaces might seem stuck to the "thingness" of an undifferentiated world.[275] But, as Baudry explains, the subjects of phenomenology and modernism share a third partner: the spectator of classical cinema. As he demonstrates, the cinematic operations of 'cutting' and 'projection' serve the very same aim of the analytic of finitude.

The physical arrangement of the cinematic apparatus, Baudry holds, makes the phenomenological model of the transcendental subject extraordinarily concrete. The spectator enters into a *closed room* which allows "no exchange, no circulation, no communication with any outside,"[276] but once inside, the whole technical ensemble consisting of the spatial relation between the projector and the screen, the screen and its border, and the spectator's own immobile position within this darkened enclosure, will shrink to the dimension of one visual vector, namely the direction of the projection beam that comes from *behind* the viewer's head. The resemblance of this situation to the atavistic scene of idealism, namely Plato's cavern, is not lost on Baudry. But the cinematic apparatus possesses the power to make the restrictions it imposes on the viewer seem to disappear, for this viewer will come to identify with the projected shaft of light.

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[275] The passage I am referring to, runs as follows: "'A man is judged neither by his intention nor by his act,' Merleau-Ponty has written, 'but by whether or not he has been able to infuse his deeds with values.' The values in Stella's case are pictorial values; they are to be found, or found wanting, only in one's firsthand experience of the paintings in question." Fried, "Three American Painters": 256

[276] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 294.

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In short, it is with the *staging* of the spectacle most of all that the viewer identifies and not with any figurative content. The plenitude of the screened spectacle does not result from the coherency of the plot or the viewer's empathy with a certain actor, rather it emerges from what Baudry calls the "formal continuity of negated differences" at the material base of the medium. The cinematic apparatus introduces a cut into the fabric of the real, only to cover this gap again in the process of projection. Indeed, the magical quality of the moving image, celebrated by the likes of Bazin and Cavell, derives from this originary difference which severs the viewer from the world only to make the spectator seem to possess its phantasmatic semblance all the more.

From his seat in the dark the viewer seems to survey the totality of a world.[277] That is, the projected reality seems to be intended and constituted by the viewer's consciousness; it is the very attentiveness of the spectator that seems to guarantee the coherency of this world. Or, to put it even more succinctly, the viewer will identify directly with the camera as such. He becomes, in short, a camera-eye. In *becoming-camera* the spectator seems to yield a power of ubiquity, which makes it possible to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time: "to seize movement is to become movement, to follow a trajectory is to become trajectory, to choose direction is to have the possibility of choosing one, to determine a meaning is to give oneself a meaning."[278]

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[277] I have avoided identifying the gender of my viewer of cinema up to this point. Apparatus theory is notorious for having done the same, but I am not arguing for the objective value of this method of criticism.

[278] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 292.

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Yet, this ubiquitous subject must be provided with a firm ground, for a person who exists everywhere might as well exist nowhere. This is where the phenomenological operation of *framing* assumes its most literal form, for it is the fixed shape and frontal orientation of the screen which provides the necessary constant. The sizing of the projected image to the dimensions of the screen imposes an uniform scale on the world, and thus the physical screen is sublimated into a transcendental frame. The cinematic situation of projection enables the viewer to hold the world at a steady distance; a distance, moreover, that appears to be constituted from the viewer's very own position. As Baudry writes:

> The world is no longer an 'open and indeterminate horizon.' Limited by the framing, lined up, put at the proper distance, the world offers up an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it.[279]

To repeat, the key term is that of *framing*; the phenomenological hinge between the subject and the world. In modernism the operations of framing have led to the progressive emptying of painting of its inherited conventions, until all that remained was the flatness of a canvas of a certain size and shape. And at this point the positivity of the painterly apparatus might appear to be transformed into the ontological condition of optical plenitude; an ambient space that "can only be seen into; can be traveled through, literally or figuratively, only with the eye."[280] This pure realm of visuality resembles nothing more than the illusion provided by the cinematic apparatus, even though *its* content remains representational in nature. Classical

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[279] Ibid.: 292.
[280] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting": 90.

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cinema, like modernism, projects an imaginary space of which, or so it seems, the eye takes effortless possession:

> And if the eye which moves is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no more assignable limits to its displacement—conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and film—the world will be constituted not only by this eye but for it.[281]

This analogy between the viewing subject of painting and of cinema was registered by Michael Fried in "Art and Objecthood," during the same period that Barry was shooting *Scenes*.[282] As Fried states in one of the more surprising, if slightly obscure passages of this essay:

> There is, however, one art that by its very nature, escapes theater entirely—the movies. This helps explain why movies in general, including frankly appalling ones, are acceptable to modernist sensibility, whereas all but the most successful painting, sculpture, music, and poetry is not. Because cinema escapes theater—automatically, as it were—it provides a welcome and absorbing refuge to sensibilities at war with theater and theatricality.[283]

According to Fried's statement, movies seem to emulate the function of modernist painting since they manage to automatically defeat theatricality, regardless of their individual quality. Aesthetic judgment, in fact, is made irrelevant in the cinema, for even the "frankly appalling" species of film become involuntarily acceptable to a modernist sensibility.[284] We might surmise that cinema achieved in one

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[281] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 292.

[282] For an insightful analysis of the historical and discursive context of Fried's argument and its subsequent reception history, see Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

[283] Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 164.

[284] In a "View of Modernism" Rosalind Krauss employs the term "modernist sensibility" to indicate a field of artistic experience that can be more inclusive than that of "formalism", without having to break with the notion of modernism *per se*. Rosalind Krauss, "View of Modernism," *Artforum* 11, no. 11 (Summer 1972): 28-56. In "Sense and Sensibility" "sensibility" is associated with a materialist model of history that comprehends the production of meaning as a public process versus an

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stroke, from its very inception, what the self-critical tradition of modernist painting must incessantly struggle to attain. Yet, Fried warns that this analogy should not be pushed to far. Cinema has not truly defeated modernism at its own game, since he adds:

> At the same time, the automatic, guaranteed character of the refuge—more accurately, the fact that what is provided is a refuge from theater and not a triumph over it, absorption not conviction—means that the cinema, even at its most experimental, is not a modernist art.[285]

This only seems to compound the problem. Leaving the exact meaning of the term 'theatricality' to the side for the moment, we might inquire how the movies can defeat theatricality, yet still fail to be acknowledged as a fully modernist art? It is as if success comes too easily in the cinema. However, Fried himself is far from clear on the issue and delegates the question to a footnote. In this footnote he suggests that the development of a phenomenological model of cinema would go a long way toward providing an answer to the question:

> Exactly how the movies escape theater is a difficult question, and there is no doubt but that a phenomenology of the cinema that concentrated on the similarities and differences between it and stage drama—e.g., that in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected away from us and the screen is not experienced as a kind of object existing in a specific physical relation to us—would be rewarding.[286]

Here we might hear the faint murmur of Fried's friend, Cavell, in the background. For it is Cavell who would develop such a phenomenological model of

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idealist model that views history as a causal sequence of private intentions. Fried seems to use the term in a more loose manner. At the outset of the essay he disparages Minimalism as belonging to the "natural history" of sensibility, while he later proposes that a modernist sensibility *as such* exists that can be exercised in relation to all the different arts and not just to painting and sculpture.

[285] Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 164

[286] Ibid.: 171, n.20.

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the cinema in *The World Viewed* in tandem with a distinctly modernist aesthetic of presentness:

> It could be said further that what painting wanted, in wanting connection with reality, was a sense of *presentness*—not exactly a conviction of the world's presence to us, but of our presence to it...Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well) I do not understand the value of art. Apart from this wish and its achievement, art is exhibition.[287]

Where art becomes mere exhibition, according to Cavell, art becomes theatrical. The transcendental frame of consciousness, as Cavell says, has become unhinged – it has become materialized. As a result the true essence of things or persons is covered up or masked and diverted from the high road of authentic action, one reverts to the low road of mere role-playing. The social practice that is theater, i.e. the conventional relation between audience and actor that it asserts, becomes for Cavell a paradigm of the inauthentic nature of social relations in general. Theatricality connotes a covering up of existence through the acceptance and perpetuation of existing roles: "the [theatrical] proceedings do not have to make good the fact that I do nothing in the face of tragedy, or that I laugh at the follies of others."[288] Cavell is obviously not asking the viewer to storm the theater stage. It is rather the asymmetrical relation between viewer and actor that concerns him – the former is concealed from the latter, yet both exist in the same space - which counters the ontological requirement of mutual recognition between self and other.

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[287] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 22.
[288] Ibid.: 26.

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In the theater, I am the silent witness of dramatic events into which I cannot intervene. Yet, I am not forced to recognize or acknowledge this condition of separation. What is necessary to overcome this situation is to acknowledge the original division between subject and the world. Self-alienation becomes the threshold towards a renewed presence of the subject to the world – that is the phenomenological schema of framing. The abstraction of modernist painting, for instance, first accepted the recession of the world in order that our connection to reality, our presentness to the world, might be maintained. Cinema, on the other hand, does not need to follow the same procedure, according to Cavell, because the physical apparatus of projection acknowledges our displacement from the world as our natural condition. And only because of this displacement, will the world appear as complete within itself to a spectator who is equally self-sufficient.

Such is the astonishing transparency of cinema, according to Cavell, that the world revealed *by* the camera will appear entirely manifest *to* the camera. Indeed, Cavell holds, nothing that is in the presence of the camera can remain concealed to the spectator. Cavell, therefore, readily conflates the camera's position with that of the spectator. Hence, Cavell-the-spectator is not literally present to the world (which only causes authentic existence to be covered under the mantle of subjectivity), but is permitted to view it unseen as a voyeur:

> In viewing films, the sense of invisibility is an expression of modern privacy or anonymity. It is as though the world's projection explains our forms of unknownness and our inability to know. The explanation is not so much that the world is passing us by, as that we are displaced from our natural habitation within it, placed at a distance from it. The

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> screen overcomes our fixed distance; it makes displacement appear as our natural condition.[289]

Viewing a movie makes this condition of displacement automatic, Cavell approvingly observes, takes the responsibility for it out of our hands. That is why movies can seem more natural than reality. The world is wrested from the subject's possession so that he may possess it again on a purer level. In short, cinema grants our wish for a "total intelligibility" of the world (event though this wish is a terrible one, Cavell confesses, since it seals our exclusion from the world).

Incidentally, the automatic mode of self-exhibition that characterizes the movies, Cavell suggests, was coming under strain by the early sixties. Cinema, he holds, is rapidly entering a stage of historicity, similar to modernist painting, in which conviction no longer arrives automatically. We are in danger, Cavell frequently laments, of losing our capacity for amazement. A capacity that he links to the early stage of 'primitive' cinema when narrative conventions had not yet harnessed the shot and the audience did not know what to expect. We need, that is, to re-awaken that ability to "spare our attention wholly for *that* thing *now*, in the frame of nature, the world moving in the branch."[290]

So, once more, the problem of the frame returns. Both Baudry and Cavell, in their separate ways, have insisted that it is the *naturalization* of the visual process of framing which is at stake: in other words, a subjective identification of the viewer with the technical conditions of the apparatus. The apparatus, in short, functions as a

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[289] Ibid.: 40-41.
[290] Ibid.: 122.

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materialization of metaphysics. Cavell restates the idealist position by comparing the frame of painting to that of cinema. First of all, he asserts that the painting *is* a world. The world of a painting is not continuous with its frame; at its frame, rather, a world finds its limits.[291] The cinematic screen, on the other hand, is not a border-frame. The movie screen *is* a frame; the frame is the whole field of the screen. This screen-frame is likened to a kind of ontological mold that in potentiality contains the world. The actual fixed screen thus doubles as a phenomenological frame, which is infinitely extendible and contractible to encompass the whole of visual existence. And like the intentionality of the viewer's gaze described by Baudry, Cavell's viewer is the one in imaginary control of this alterable frame. "The world filmed is all profane, all outside. They and we could have been anywhere, may be anywhere next."[292] But it is the viewer's state of attentiveness that makes a continuum out of the discontinuities that are the environment of a film.

To safeguard against the objectification or theatricalization of the self, Cavell is lead to argue for an increasing autonomy of the cinematic spectacle. While this does not make cinema a modernist art (for its authenticity is automatically guaranteed), Cavell's argument assimilates the basic thrust of the modernist project. For the commodification of the everyday, which prompted the detachment of painting from its former social purpose, also initiated a steady process of objectification within

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[291] With the invention of the shaped-canvas, Cavell is able to announce the paradoxical emergence of a painterly medium grounded in photographic technique: "...cutting, masking, enlarging, predetermine the amount [of view of the world] after the fact [in contrast to the cropping by the camera]...[recent] paintings have found, at the extremest negation of the photographic, media that achieve the condition of photographs." Cavell, ibid.: 24.

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painting. Hence, the modernist dialectic can only end up in the paradoxical situation of affirming what it set out to negate.

But, of course, Fried and Cavell were to attack pop art and minimalism, or literalism for short, as a disruption of this autonomy of the spectacle, as upstaging its idealist logic of the frame:

> The concept of a room is, mostly clandestinely, important to literalist art and theory. In fact, it can often be substituted for the word "space" in the latter: something is said to be in my space if it is in the same room with me (and if it is placed so that I can hardly fail to notice it).[293]

In discussing Huot's painting, we have already encountered Fried's dread of space in the figure of a door. But now this architectural element has expanded to assume the volume of a room. How are we to think of the various figures of the cinema as a *closed room* (Baudry) or a *refuge* (Fried) in contrast to this literalist concept of the room?

Fried's remarks on the "clandestine" concept of the literalist room were actually prompted by Robert Morris's observation that minimalism "takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision."[294] According to this, now, classic view of minimalism, the serial logic of the work immerses the viewer within a field of perceptual relationships that cannot be completely grasped from any one moment in time or position in space. In rejecting the self-referential status of modernist painting and sculpture, however minimalism created a new problem for itself: how to avoid a complete collapse of

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[292] Cavell, ibid.: 156.
[293] Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 170, n.14.

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aesthetic experience as a result of the viewer's dispersion of attention. The solution to this problem was found in the lived constant of the human body which establishes a referential link from one moment to the next. It is the primordial spatiality of this body, as Merleau-Ponty would say, that gives the world with direction and orientation. To be sure, the minimalist viewer is never meant to overcome his position of contingency within the visual field: he is but one, mobile element in a shifting field of relationships. In other words, perception is not provided a transcendental frame in the manner of modernist painting or classical cinema. But the potential unity of experience – the identity of knowing and perceiving subject that is figured in the filmic practice of Snow and the writing of Fried – is retained by minimalism in the naturalized form of the bodily image. The body is the inner horizon of meaningfulness that folds across the outer horizon of objective space, creating a *habitus* for the minimalist subject (*this*, after all, is still a studio art, despite all its mimicking of the industrial).

The phenomenological conception of normative experience is a fully naturalized one: the embodied subject is one with the "flesh" of the world, as Merleau-Ponty was fond of saying. The objective space of geometric dimensions, of measured depth, and of distinct objects, is only secondary to this primordial realm of the subject's incarnation in the world. This anterior realm of pre-objective existence is only exposed to the dissecting gaze of reflective thought in a posterior fashion. Hence, the subject first inhabits space by directing him- or herself at a certain task, not by

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[294] Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2" [1966], as reprinted in Robert Morris, *Continuous*

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drawing a mental map of its topography. Indeed, the contours of any institutional space of culture, according to this view, will always emerge from the more primal, uniform space of nature. "Human spaces present themselves as built on the basis of natural space," Merleau-Ponty observes, "at a stroke existence projects around itself worlds which hide objectivity from me, at the same time fastening upon it as the aim of the teleology of consciousness, by picking out these 'worlds' against the background of one single natural world."[295] And *that*, Foucault quipped, is why phenomenology never amounted to anything else but a kind of anthropology: the human subject only found itself everywhere it looked.

The reason for modernist painting and classical cinema to resist becoming aware of this "natural space" of the body (despite their adoption of other elements of the phenomenological project) is immediately apparent. For it threatens to immerse the privacy of the self in a public realm of shared experience. Rather than furtively looking at the scene from a peephole in the dark, the viewer is now placed center stage, which means that the viewer is now subjectified by the gaze of another. Hidden beneath the industrial look of the literalist object, Fried suggests, a silent presence lies in wait. Fried blames literalism for disavowing its own anthropomorphizing tendency. As a result the physiognomy of the literalist object does not disclose any inner meaning, but becomes a mask of enigmatic recession. And, thus, in the face of the "apparent hollowness" of the literalist object, the viewer's own existence becomes hollowed out:

Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993): 15.

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> Someone had merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one—almost as though the work in question has been waiting for him. And inasmuch as literalist work depends on the beholder, is incomplete without him, it has been waiting for him. And once he is in the room the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone—which is to say, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.[296]

This passage reveals the true scandal of literalism – that the viewer is dramatized on the stage of the gallery. And this drama is fully uncanny (as Bochner already suggested):

> In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another person; the experience of coming upon literalist objects unexpectedly—for example, in somewhat darkened rooms—can be strongly, if momentarily, disquieting in just this way.[297]

Fried's "somewhat darkened room" brings to mind a similar space, namely the darkened auditorium. The difference is that while the audience is already seated in the theater when the lights go down, Fried's viewer is forced to stumble around in the dark upon entering the room, thus becoming an object of unseen eyes. This viewer is startled into the awareness of another presence emerging from the shadows. Thrown off-guard, the viewer's situation seems to invert itself: confidence is replaced by vulnerability, the pleasure of voyeurism by the displeasure of exposure.

This withdrawal of the world from the viewing subject, its becoming alien, is the one common element in the experience of the uncanny that is underlined by both phenomenology and psychoanalysis. It is not necessary to theorize further this moment of anxiety, beyond stating that it signals a kind of malfunction in the

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[295] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 325.
[296] Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 163-64.

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transcendental framing of experience. In itself, this moment of alienation is a precondition of the framing operation itself, as I have pointed out. Cavell also acknowledges this circumstance. He recognizes such experiences of de-familiarization in one's occasional inability to recognize how one arrived in the place that one finds oneself:

> I think everyone knows odd moments in which it seems uncanny that one should have come to this verge of time and place, that one's history should have unwound to this room, this road, this promontory. The uncanny is normal experience of film [sic]. Escape, rescue, the metamorphosis of a life by a chance encounter or juxtaposition—these conditions of contingency and placement, underpin all the genres of film...[298]

Yet, as Cavell goes on to say, the sheer power of attention will always be able to bestow continuity on such disconnected moments, to provide a history to the randomness of events. We can never wander far, it seems, from our intended path, so long, that is, as we do not exit the "closed room" or "refuge" of cinema.

Minimalism would suggest a different paradigm of film. What minimalism called for was a materialization of the "in-between" space, of the physical interval between projector, screen, and viewer. This interstitial realm forms an unlit, darkened zone; it constitutes a kind of cinematic repressed. And this space is first indicated in the work of Dan Flavin (I shall discuss LeWitt's relation to cinema in chapter 5). Flavin's epiphanic moment, which led him to the substitute painted by projected light, is forever embalmed in *The Diagonal of May 25, 1963*; a fluorescent tube tilted at 45

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[297] Ibid.: 155.

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degrees from the vertical. This work achieves a literalization of projective structure: an industrial object casting its own shadow onto the reflective surface of the wall. It is literally from the shade of *The Diagonal* that Flavin's subsequent light installations would emerge in their establishment of an anisotropic space pocketed by shadows. Dan Graham, unwittingly, indicated the cinematic potential of Flavin's installations, when he remarked:

> I liked that as a side effect of Flavin's fluorescents the gallery walls became a 'canvas'. The lights dramatized the people (like spotlights) in a gallery – throwing the content of the exhibition onto the people in the process of perceiving.[299]

And Mel Bochner, characteristically, was to note the alienating quality of the work:

> Light now occurs in long straight lines obliterating shadows. It can, in effect, surround.... It is due to this that he attains such a high degree of artificiality and unnaturalness (what Bertolt Brecht referred to as "the alienation effect").[300]

Barry, by contrast, would return the viewer from the glare of these lights back into the shadows.

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[298] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 156.

[299] See Benjamin Buchloh, "Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham," in *Dan Graham: Articles* (Eindhoven: van Abbe Museum, 1978): 76.

[300] Bochner, "Serial Art Systems": 42.

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Shades of Minimalism

> I try not to manipulate reality, not to impose my preconceived grid or preconceived system onto reality, I – to use Heidegger's phrase, let things be. What will happen, will happen. Let things be themselves.
>
> – Robert Barry[301]

As I have indicated above, *Scenes* constantly alternates between virtual and real space, continuity and discontinuity, motion and stillness, light and dark. Each presence is invaded by an absence and this temporal oscillation is what Barry refers to as the "in-between" quality of *Scenes*. In other words, the film does not so much unfold on screen as if within the spectator. The film represents an already organized sequence of interrelated parts, i.e. a historical narrative, but requires the viewer to dwell within a non-historical zone which is that of a mere potentiality of time. Merleau-Ponty speaks in this sense of a series of possible relations in terms of before and after, of retention and protention, of memory and anticipation. Time is recognition before it is reproduction and in recognition, of course, lays the affirmation of selfhood. In other words, *Scenes* might not provide the kind of refuge that Fried sought, yet the film constructs its own mode of idealism, if a slightly more precarious one that the modernist critic believed was still available to him.

To be sure, *Scenes* exhibits its own material conditions of possibility, yet it does not create an alienation effect in the manner that *New York Windows* did. In fact, the dispersive nature of the work is countered on a more fundamental level. The

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[301] Ursula Meyer, "Conversation with Robert Barry," in *Conceptual Art* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972): 35-36.

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closed room of the cinema is to be *naturalized*, not defamiliarized in Barry's film. The spectator, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, is not "a hole in being," but "a hollow, a fold, which has been made and which can be unmade."[302] To conceive of cinema as a hole in being, as a "cinematic atopia," would be the task of Robert Smithson. Cinema wraps us in uncertainty, he states, "the longer we look through a camera or watch a projected image the remoter the world becomes."[303] But Smithson has inverted the visual logic of *Scenes*: for Smithson the world as a whole has become mediated by the technology of reproduction and so the remoteness of things has taken on an absolute reality. This same de-realized aspect of the spectacle is what Bochner implied with his notion of "artificiality." Barry, on the other hand, envelops cinema within the spectator and the spectator within cinema; his projections, as I have argued, veer towards the quality of an entoptic phenomenon.

How is this process of spatial naturalization constituted? *Scenes* participates in a specific phenomenological model of perception which is often tied into minimalism, and which concerns the grounding of a unity of experience in the spatiality of a lived body.[304] This spatiality is anterior to objective space; it concerns the body's

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[302] Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception: 215. The phrase of the subject as "a hole in being" actually derives from Hegel.

[303] Robert Smithson, "A Cinematic Atopia" [1971], as reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*: 107.

[304] As James Meyer has established, this phenomenological model of minimalism can be traced back to its first formulation in Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" by way of Michael Fried: "In 'Art and Objecthood' (1967), Fried drew much from Morris's account, describing all minimal practice as the bodily encounter of a viewer and a work within a gallery...The influence of this essay was such that Morris's views, rehearsed by Fried, came to be seen as representative of minimlalism as a whole. Whatever they felt about 'Art and Objecthood' subsequent writers – notably Michelson and Krauss – agreed with Fried on one crucial point: minimalism was an art centered on the relationship of a mobile spectator and work within the gallery ambience." James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 166.

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establishment of the pure relatedness of space as such. Let me remind the reader as to the precise character of this primordial depth:

> There is then a depth which does not yet operate between objects, which *a fortiori*, does not yet access the distance between them, and which is simply the opening of perception upon some ghost thing as yet scarcely qualified.[305]

Before there is any objective space of discrete things, in other words, there is a spatiality without things. The *mise-en-scène* of such a phantom space is what happens in Barry's *Scenes*, because it is in the dark that we might become aware of it. Nighttime, as Merleau-Ponty observes, does not exist as an object for the viewer, it "enwraps and infiltrates" consciousness to the point of almost destroying the viewer's sense of self-identity:

> I am no longer withdrawn into my perceptual look-out from which I watch the outlines of objects moving by at a distance. Night has no outlines; it is itself in contact with me....it is from the heart of nocturnal space that I become united with it.[306]

And this loss of objective boundaries, this pure depth without figure or ground, will be the cause of anxiety. Why? Because the night, in revealing the thickness of a primal spatiality returns the subject to an awareness of its own fragile state of finitude. In fact, the viewing and touching subject always exists as a marginal subject; the life of the eyes and hands are just so many natural selves, Merleau-Ponty states, because there is another self, an involuntary mode of existence, which is already sided with the world. Hence, the 'I' is run through with this shadowy automatism or anonymous

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[305] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*: 226.

[306] Ibid.: 283. In her "Richard Serra/Sculpture," Rosalind Krauss has referred to the same passage from *The Phenomenology of Perception.*

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destiny of sensibility, "without my being the cause of it."[307] To internalize this darkness, is to seal a primordial contract with nature: I might have to pay through the incompleteness of any given sensation, but the entirety of a "world" in my own image is now promised to me. But what happens if this pact fails and the darkness is externalized? Then, as Merleau-Ponty admits, nocturnal space will assume a sinister appearance, it will bring "home to us our contingency, the uncaused and tireless impulse which drives us to seek an anchorage and surmount ourselves in things, without any guarantee that we shall always find them."[308]

What causes Fried distress in the darkened and closed room of minimalism is the frustration of his desire to surmount himself in these spectral objects. Yet, darkness provides a highly ambivalent figure of spatiality, because while it might seem to dissolve our identity, it also reveals the very ground of our being-in-the-world prior to any distinction between things. According to Merleau-Ponty, in the dark there might be nothing to see, yet the world is still there and it is there even more obtrusively. And this same thought of the ontological foundation of things, of the emptiness of a spatiality without things, is what Barry seems to hint at:

> I try to paint what I don't know...I try to deal with things that maybe other people haven't thought about, emptiness, making a painting that isn't a painting... ... There is something about void and emptiness which I am personally very concerned with. I guess I can't get it out of my system. Just emptiness. *Nothing* seems to me the most potent thing in the world.[309]

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[307] Ibid.: 216.
[308] Ibid.: 283.
[309] Robert Barry, transcript of symposium held at Bradford Junior College, February 8, 1968, excerpted in Lippard, *Six Years*: 40.

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This remark was actually made during a symposium held at Bradford Junior College on February 8, 1968, during the *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner* exhibition. But let me first establish how Barry's concern with nothingness and darkness became ingrained in his work.

The interest that *Scenes* manifests in interstitial space, in what happens outside the frame, was already announced in Barry's painting. After graduation from Hunter College in 1963, Barry became concerned with the spatial relations between things, rather than with the internal relations of painting. For instance, Barry has described a painting from around 1964:

> There was one painting which was a large square and I just took a magic marker and drew from the corners a big X....So the idea of spanning a space, trying to define the outer limits – somehow bridging that inbetweeness—was something I had been involved with.[310]

Subsequently he was to construct multi-part paintings which were hung in particular configurations on the wall. Alex Alberro has identified three such paintings which were shown at the Bradford Junior College exhibition. The first, dated August 1967, consisted of two blue canvas squares (8 x 8 in.) installed 5 ft. from the ground and 10 ft. apart; the second, dated October 1967, was composed of four yellow canvas squares (3 x 3 in.) hung to form a square field (5 x 5 ft.) with its bottom perimeter 4 ft. from the ground; and the third, dated December 1967, was a green monochrome canvas (48 ½ x 12 in.) affixed to the wall just a few inches from the floor.[311]

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[310] Barry, "Interview with Robert Barry," *View*: 4.
[311] Alberro, *De-Privileging Art.*: 69.

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Barry explains his motivation for these works as wanting to move outside the frame of painting into architectural space:

> For years people have been concerned with what goes on *inside* the frame. Maybe there's something going on *outside* the frame that could be considered an artistic idea. [312]

He wanted to include the viewer within a total environment, to make its interconnections clear. In fact, unlike the effect of defamiliarization that Bochner expected from the 'cut', Barry attempted to draw the phenomenal whole of the 'world' together through his spatial incisions:

> It was meant to totally involve the viewer, and it's not just the wall itself, which I thought is even a painting convention, but to get into the real world, the world around the work of art or the world in which the work of art is articulated, in which it is situated. [313]

Ultimately, however, he came to the conclusion that the transportable painting remained too independent of the place in which it was exhibited. He gave up painting in order to construct site-specific installations by suspending wires between walls or letting them hang from the ceiling with a weight attached. These pieces could not be removed without destroying them. The first example of such work was done at the *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner* show at Windham College in 1968. Barry strung a nylon cord between two buildings so that it covered a 302 x 50 ft. area. Barry has clearly stated that the cord functioned as a kind of syntactical device which framed parts of the world as a definite whole:

> I wanted to use the land, drive something into the land, circle it some way, emphasize it, create something in proportion to the buildings

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[312] Lippard, *The De-Materialization of Art*: 40.

[313] René Denizot, interview with Robert Barry, in *Word for Word: It's about Time* (Paris: Yvon Lambert, 1980): 15.

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> around it, to the piece of land itself....the fact that there were workmen working underneath this, it's all part of it, the sky above and the mud below and the buildings are all sort of tied together by the nylon cord.[314]

In other words, the string draws the different phenomena together just as the filmstrip projects a diegetic continuity into the interruptions of montage. And both string and film strip, therefore, form figures of the very continuity of an attentive consciousness.

The gradual disappearance of the object in Barry's work would be completed around 1969. At this point there is a total negation of visibility. Instead Barry begins to fill the contained space of the gallery with natural phenomena such as ultrasonic sound or carrier waves which remain invisible to the naked eye. Even though these works can only be communicated in language, Barry insists on a certain auratic density to their existence: "The form is changed by the people near it although the people may not be aware of the fact that they are affecting the actual form of the piece, because they cannot feel it."[315] Most important to him was the attitude of passiveness that these pieces required in order to be experienced, which he considered to produce a heightened state of attentiveness: "The thing didn't get in the way—it simply was what was going on."[316] It need hardly be pointed out how close this phenomenological attitude of "letting things be" resembles the core idealism of the cinematic spectacle. Indeed, this idealism is exhibited in a highly contradictory state: split between a linguistic statement of which the truth cannot be verified (e.g.

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[314] Robert Barry, transcript of symposium held at Windham College: 47.
[315] Ursula Meyer, "Conversation with Robert Barry": 38.

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Radiation Piece, Barium-133. Radioactive Barium-133 buried in Central park, New York, January 5, 1969) and the viewer's state of absolute attentiveness without object or image – "it was simply what was going on."[317] Reality, that is, has become transformed into pure spectacle.[318]

Barry was consumed, it appears, by the idealist notion of having the world exhibit itself, not unlike Cavell: "I am using art to draw attention to something...I did not really try to change something, I simply selected."[319] His method is ostensive, like Huot's at the same time, merely pointing somewhere in order to reveal the self-evidence of reality. As a result, the world becomes naturalized, it appears to transcend history, and the perceiving self is recognized in equally transcendental, if not spiritual terms.

One work of 1969 in particular, *There is something very close in place and time, but not yet known to me*, underscores this thesis. Barry describes this work in almost Messianic terms as concerning a subjective mode of expectation: "This was not just a title, but a feeling about something...concerned with something, which was

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[316] Barry, "Interview with Robert Barry," *View.*: 8.

[317] The paradox is further compounded by the fact that the *Radiation Piece, Barium-133* is illustrated by a photograph of Central Park, marking the site, where precisely there is *nothing* to see.

[318] With the removal of the object from sight or touch, there is a detachment of the viewer from historical reality. Perception takes a contemplative cast and time assumes the figure of natural history: the half-life of a radioactive element. Barry's strategy, like so many of his peers, is mounted against the commodification of the art work, but we are reminded of the fact that Guy Debord defined the spectacle as capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* [1967], trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994: 24.

The conceptual notion of de-materialization, in other words, is not foreign to the capitalist process of reification. I do not want to push this point too far, however it is also interesting how Barry continuously overlaps cyclical time with irreversible time. Commodification, as Debord argues, has made irreversible time – the historical time of bourgeois revolution – abstract, transforming it into the "consumable" or "pseudo-cyclical" time of equivalent intervals. To what degree, Barry's projections converge or differ with this spectacular notion of time, is a topic that I shall not pursue in this place.

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searching for me and which needs me to reveal itself, but is unknown to me."[320] In recognizing that which seeks him out, he will also recognize himself. In other words, Barry expounds a phenomenological, if not utopian reciprocity of the shown and the showing, the implied and the implying, the seen and the seer. Pointing at something and being pointed at, are the same according to this perceptual logic. The facticity of things never transcends the self, as in Fried's uncanny experience of literalism. And the self is not only grounded in the world through the medium of the body and pointing gestures, but also through the medium of language itself. To Barry language forms Heidegger's phenomenological "fold," which can be made and unmade:

> Art is located in language. But language at the most fundamental level – we are not talking about linguistics. We live in language. Language is us.[321]

In 1970 Barry starts creating lists of words which are isolated on the page by margins of blankness. His procedure is to resist the symbolic chains of language by objectifying it: "It was more of an attempt to isolate words so that each was so different from everything else, there was no hint of narrative, or anything like that."[322] The lists return language to a mute act of pointing; these are empty words that announce themselves to the same degree that Barry recognizes them:

> If you understand that there are words...not just talk...not reading, but that there are *words*. If you recognize that, then you are watchful for them and the words announce themselves to you...they stand out from

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[319] Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.
[320] Ursula Meyer, "Conversation with Robert Barry": 35.
[321] Denizot, *Word for Word*: 39, 41.
[322] Andrew Renton, "Robert Barry: Word Project," *Flash Art* no.158 (May/June 1991): 123.

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> the other words. They just stand out even when I'm not looking for them.[323]

Language is returned to a state of sheer potentiality, like the primordial ground of a spatiality without things:

> I use words in a sense that makes them meaningless, and of course the only way to make something meaningless is to present it in all of its possible meanings. It's a totally open entity, which makes it an elusive thing.[324]

Let me recapitulate by summing up Barry's development between 1964 and 1970: first, a transgression of the self-enclosed form of modernist painting, opening the work of art onto its literal context (e.g. the wall, the space), subsequently, a negation of the self-sufficient 'thing' in itself, which is replaced by the photographic image and, ultimately, by language. This narrative is not restricted to Barry, but recounts how contemporary art sought to find its place again within the symbolic 'text' of social relations. Film had a crucial role to fulfill in the establishing of this place. But for Barry this place was one of imaginary plenitude, not historical determination; a totally open entity which nonetheless is enclosed in an idealist horizon like the phenomenological screen of Cavell's cinema.

The plot of this narrative is not new to us. It was first told some twenty years ago, in Rosalind Krauss's two-part essay "Notes on the Index" and it was particularly developed in her second installment of the text, which appeared in the Fall 1977 issue of *October*. Writing a review of a show of abstract painting at P.S. 1, Krauss comes to

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[323] Denizot, *Word for Word*: 79.
[324] Renton, "Robert Barry: Word Project,": 123.

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the conclusion that recent painting has adopted the logic of photography. That is to say, both have come to share the semiotic structure of the index. Described as the "mute presence of an uncoded event," the photographic index is said to capture within itself the features of a "natural continuum" without the intervention of subjectivity.

Now, in the case of the paintings at P.S. 1, the works themselves seem to indicate this same natural continuum like an outstretched finger which "isolates a piece of the real world and fills itself with meaning by becoming, for that moment, the transitory label of a natural event."[325] The natural continuum in question is that of the building itself; a referent that must exhibit itself without being translated into a coded message: "The ambition of the works is to capture the presence of the building, to find strategies to force it to the surface into the field of the work." Yet this architectural presence needs to be articulated somehow as a narrative text if it is to be grasped at all by the viewer, just as Barry's photograph of Central Park needed the "sign post" of a caption to be understood as a demonstration of *Radiation Piece, Barium-133.*[326] The subtext that accompanies the wall paintings as P.S. 1, as Krauss explains, is "the unfolding of the building's space which the successive parts of the work in question articulate *into a kind of cinematic narrative*"[327] [my emphasis].

The cinematic narrative of architecture, which is indexed by the paintings of Huot and Barry as well, is also a narrative of the naturalization of space, that is to say,

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[325] Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2," as reprinted in Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde*: 216.

[326] Krauss refers to the discussions of the photographic image in Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin which establish the need for a caption to guide the viewer in interpreting these 'uncoded events.'

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a space devoid of history. The building will appear to the subject as a connected whole through the interrelated sequence of paintings; like Barry's string at Windham College, however, this sequence itself is grounded in the constancy of the lived body. The transcendental frame of consciousness, i.e. the very intelligibility and coherency of the world as such, is determined by the wholeness of the body image. Hence, below all the varieties of human space, as Merleau-Ponty claims, the human subject is always rooted in a natural and non-human space; all projection of a narrative space, therefore, will be based on this primordial spatiality, which it might always dissolve back into, "as the canvas underlies the picture and makes it appear unsubstantial."

I would venture that this objectless form of bodily space, which is entirely without history, is what Barry conjures too:

> I think space would be more frightening if it were found to be very objective, maybe there is too much objective art around. People try to get away from their art, depersonalize it, dehumanize it, have someone else make it, or they try to take away any kind of humanistic elements. In my own work I don't. I try to put myself into it, or I try to realize the fact that art is something that is made by human beings, and when I present it, I present it to other human beings[328]

The function of film for Barry was to immerse the viewer directly within the natural milieu of space. The work did not indicate the homogeneous totality of the surrounding space – like the nylon cord – it filled, as it were, the architectural space, the closed room of cinema, with the density of its temporal dilation between light and

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[327] Ibid.: 219.

[328] "Art without Space: A symposium moderated by Seth Siegelaub, 1969," in *Lawrence Weiner* (London: Phaidon, 1998): 96.

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dark. And in the absence of any fixed framework or object, the whole field of space will appear to vibrate.[329]

What interested Barry was a sense of "moving into the painting."[330] In other words, Barry pursues the dissolution of the objectivity of perspectival space, which constitutes depth as a relation between things or planes, into a depth or thickness of a medium that lacks objects. Not an emphasis on the materiality of surfaces, of the taught 'skin' of painting, therefore, but a pulsating realm of luminosity, which, as we saw in the case of Huot, spreads beyond the edges of things: "different planes are no longer distinguishable, and colors are no longer condensed into surface colors, but are diffused round about objects and become atmospheric colors." [331] Most importantly, however, the viewer does not access this natural state of being-in-depth through the assumption of an active stance, but by delivering oneself to an attitude of passivity. In fact, we experience this state most directly, Merleau-Ponty avows, while suffering from illness.

We might now easily grasp why the two shots from a moving car in *Scenes* duplicate Tony Smith's famous experience of driving down the unfinished New Jersey

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[329] A comparison between *Scenes* and Duchamp's *Anemic Cinéma* is not unwarranted, although the latter does not operate according to the same idealist model as the former. Compare also Merleau-Ponty: "Indeed, if we project the consecutive image of a movement on to a homogeneous field containing no object and having no outline, the movement takes possession of the whole space, and what is shifting is the whole visual field, as in the Haunted House at the fair. If we project on the screen the post-imgae of a spiral revolving round its centre, in the absence of any fixed framework, space itself vibrates and dilates from the centre to the periphery."

[330] Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.

[331] Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*: 266.

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turnpike.[332] Smith provides a cinematic account of the nocturnal landscape as it swept across the windshield of the moving car: "It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings, or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes, and colored lights."[333] Not only is it significant that this experience took place in darkness, but Smith holds that there was no way to frame this experience – "most painting looks pretty pictorial after that."[334] Of course, the experience *was* framed, namely by the windows of the car which establishes the distance necessary to convert the perceptual exercise into a cinematic narrative. However, Smith did acknowledge a highly relevant fact when he observed that "the road and much of the landscape was artificial." In other words, this spectacle is historically determined, which becomes abundantly clear when he adduces another example of such an artificial landscape, namely the Nazi parade grounds at Nuremberg.

I am not about to deliver an argument about the disciplinary power of cinema, although that might seem to be suggested in my preceding remarks. Yet, there is a question concerning the communal state of its audience that will run throughout this history. Obviously, this fact presented a problem to modernism in its emphasis on the individuality of the beholder. Classical cinema, as we have seen, circumvents this

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[332] Samuel Wagstaff, Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968): 381-86.
[333] Ibid.: 386.

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problem by installing the viewer at the center of the apparatus, isolating him from his surroundings, and turning him into a voyeur.

The contradiction resurfaces in Smith's narrative. Indeed, Fried's own discussion of Smith's experience stresses the indistinctness and shared nature of experience: "The experience is clearly regarded by Smith as wholly accessible to everyone, not just in principle but in fact, and the question of whether or not one has really had it does not arise." What this means to Fried, is that the experience necessarily is not complete in itself. Indeed, it wholly envelops the viewer in a situation that seems to be staged just for him and lacks a definite object. The "endlessness, or objectlessness, of the approach or onrush or perspective" as seen through the windshield of a traveling car is sufficient to make one into the subject of objecthood, to become subjectified. The viewer is seized by the experience more than the viewer can be said to dominate it. The ultimate effect is one of distancing and isolation; it functions as a kind of visual trap from which one is unable to free oneself. To Fried the dynamics of this situation are interpreted as a falling away from the identity of the modernist subject, like the anxiety of Merleau-Ponty's neuropath wrapped in darkness.

Scenes converts the artificiality of Smith's landscape into the naturalism of architectural space. It projects the viewer into a pre-objective domain of light and darkness, wherein one does not track the movement of an object against a stable

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[334] "The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it." Ibid: 386.

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background, but becomes enveloped in the phantasmatic sensation of motion itself. The whole visual field is infused with movement. In short, the incessant objectification of art, has in turn led to a total occupation of space itself by the imaginary of *Scenes*.

This process is perfected in the slide projections of 1969, which, as Barry has observed, stem directly from his earlier films.[335] The first slide installations consisted of the projection of his printed works. Barry spelled the words in white against a black ground, while each slide that carried a word or phrase alternated with an empty, black slide. One of the printed works he used for the slide projections was, for instance, the *Psychic Series, 1969*, which included such statements as: "something which is very near to me in place and time, but not yet known to me" and "something which can never be any specific thing." A slide piece could also consist of just a string of words such as the 1970 *Artwork With 20 Qualities:*

> It Is Allusive, Unique, Persistent, Harmonious, Composed, (...) And Influential.

Later slide pieces would include colored gels with the words and abstract figures, such as blue circles, or photographs as in the Four Seasons of 1973. At all times, however, the connection between words – the possibility of narrative -- would be made and unmade: "With the slide piece method I can place a word in some particular context with other words and images, but also isolate the word in its own character and intensity in time and place..."[336]

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[335] Nickas, , "Interview with Robert Barry": 5.
[336] Excerpts from a conversation with students, Hunter College, 1974, in *Art Now '74*: 21.

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The slide projections provided a resolution for certain structural aspects of film that Barry could not regulate: they enabled the construction of an on-going, potentially infinite experience of total visual immersion. He no longer attempted to make the literal aspect of the situation clear (as in letting the projector run on without film), but engulfed the viewer in a steady on-off beat of static projections. The slide images themselves are always on the threshold of dissolving, the artist observes, while making a reference to *the Phenomenology of Perception*:

> I always thought of the projections as basically light and dark images flickering, that is all they are. When you get up close to them they disappear into shadows. The idea of not being able to hold onto something, it slips through your fingers, you can't quite grasp the reality of it, that is something very important in my work. The idea probably comes from looking at the Old Masters or reading Merleau-Ponty: the lucidness of reality when you get right down to it.[337]

Furthermore, the space itself is absent:

> With the projections you go into a very dark room – really you're in the space of the darkness, not the space of the gallery or the room, which the blackness, the darkness hides, so you're only focusing on the piece.[338]

Even more than *Scenes* was able to realize, the viewer dwells in this depth of pure relatedness, of darkness, which occasionally is pierced by the projection of an image, only to fade away again:

> I'd say that my work is about what's going on between things, in between... darkness it's not an object. It's not even anything specific...It's what we are in.[339]

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[337] Robert Barry, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., August 25, 1997.
[338] Barry, "Interview with Robert Barry, *View*: 6.
[339] Denizot, *Word for Word*: 47.

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The medium that we are in is temporality: not rationalized, linear time, but a lived present, that is suspended between anticipation and memory. And in this medium "you have only yourself, your memories, your anticipations."[340]

And so the slide pieces always circle back to the center of a transcendental self. Hence, the temporality of these slide pieces is distinctly non-historical. They describe a circularity of time that lies outside of history – a temporal horizon that is drawn by the viewer himself:

> Also the circle kept calling attention to the place that we are in. The place of the piece. That was almost like a frame that encircled the word, but also encircled the wall where the word was. It also framed the darkness. And it framed them both spatially and temporally. Also it kept focusing our attention back in that particular situation in which the piece was existing. It gave a tangible frame to the temporal experience.[341]

With the slide pieces, Barry has finally settled into that pure in-between space that exists in the interstices of the frames of cinema. An ontological space, that is, of sheer potentiality that precedes narrative. Yet, this is also a space that exists outside of historical time, outside of the time of production: the piece is always there, endlessly reproducing itself, it is *you* who decide to leave.

Curiously enough, the slide pieces of Barry reinstate a viewing habit that Cavell felt had been lost at the cinema. Cinema, the latter complained, no longer automatically provides the sense of conviction that he seeks because a change has occurred in the *ritual* of movie-going. In the fifties, one could wander into a movie screening at any moment and exit at any moment. However, once attendance became

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[340] Ibid.: 71.

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regulated, he laments, the shared fantasy of cinema began to lose its appeal. As the time spent in the auditorium became standardized, the experience no longer was seamlessly woven into the fabric of life. For a movie to be memorable, Cavell claims, one must come upon the image already up there on the screen, as if it were oblivious to one's presence. Otherwise, the movie loses its self-evident quality, along with its ability to compel our attention. As soon as movies were screened on cue with the viewer's presence, a mode of direct address was instituted that is common to advertising.[342] One is pointed at; one no longer remains concealed in the dark. In other words, the dramatization of reality enters the modernist refuge of the cinema; a socialization of the viewer takes place in the movies. While Fried's example of such a theatricalization of the self is found in Smith's road trip, Cavell offers the example Jean-Luc Godard's *Masculine-Feminine: 15 Precise Facts* (1966), wherein the main character of the movie conducts an actual interview (i.e. not a scripted version of one) with a young woman who was elected Miss Seventeen of France. This interrogative mode, Cavell holds, can only end up affirming its own premise, namely the consumerist replication of "woman as commodity."

But that, Rosalind Krauss suggests in her essay "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary," is exactly the point of such an exercise. The movie interview provides a practical lesson that refutes the transcendental status of the modernist beholder, of the presumed spontaneity of his or her thought. During the

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[341] Ibid.: 27.

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course of the interview, the girl becomes increasingly bewildered by the explicit tenor of the questions, showing herself both unwilling and unable to respond. While trying to assert her right to privacy, Krauss argues, she ends up confirming the opposite, for the psychological integrity of the self – its transparency and lack thereof – is defined in relation to the commercial sphere of publicity. Godard labeled this section of the movie 'A Consumer Product' and thus he "suggests that the contents of what she thinks of as her exclusive psychological space were installed there by the media output of a consumer society." But, she continues, "what makes her an opaque object for us is the obverse of what makes her both opaque and an object for herself."[343] To reveal this opacity in the visual field by means of the camera, i.e. through a kind of technological gaze at the third remove, *that*, I would say, forms the common thread running through this history of the artist film.[344] While it does not fully surface in

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[342] Barry has frequently emphasized that the 'announcement' of words to him on the pages of a newspaper is an experience unlike that of advertising's more emphatic method of calling one's attention.

[343] Krauss, "Pictorial Space and the Question of Documentary": 72.

[344] One might also imagine an essay on the significance of Godard's cinema to post-minimalist art practice which would not be limited to a discussion of artist films. Bochner, Graham and Weiner have repeatedly stated their interest in Godard, unlike the Structural Film adherents. Post-minimalism, therefore, does not neatly fold into the "two avant-gardes" of American independent cinema versus the French new wave. On the subject of the 'two film avant-gardes' of the sixties, see Peter Wollen, "The

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Scenes, this opacity of the visual will emerge with increasing intensity in the following section.

Two Avant-Gardes," *Studio International* (December 1975), as reprinted in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (london: Verso, 1982): 92-104.

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PART 2: BODY TECHNIQUES

> *In this case all that need be said is quite simply that we are dealing with* techniques of the body. *The body is man's first and most natural instrument. Or more accurately, not to speak of instruments, man's first and most natural technical object, and at the same time technical.*
>
> – Marcel Mauss[1]

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[1] Marcel Mauss, "Body Techniques," in *Sociology and Psychology Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979): 104.

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1. Prelude: *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* (1969)

"The process of 'making itself' has hardly been examined."[2] With this programmatic statement, Robert Morris gave public life to a specific breed of post-minimalism, namely process art. The remark can be found in his famous essay "Anti Form" that appeared in the April 1968 issue of *Artforum*. And it is this same essay that was credited by a young curator at the Whitney Museum, namely Marcia Tucker, with providing the impetus for a controversial exhibition of contemporary art called *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* that she organized together with James Monte. This exhibition ran from May 19 to July 6, 1969 and it provided the first showcase for Process and Performance art to be held in a major American museum. Both Bruce Nauman and Richard Serra were well represented in this exhibition and a brief discussion of this exhibition shall set the scene for the discussion of their films.

A sampling of the artists included in the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* provides an indication of the sculptural premise of the exhibition: Carl Andre, Michael Asher, Lynda Benglis, Eva Hesse, Barry LeVa, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, and Richard Serra. Yet, at the same time, the intention of the exhibition was clearly to move beyond the sculptural paradigm, as manifested in the presentation of so-called "Extended Time Pieces"; a series of evening events which included, performances by artists and musicians. Bruce Nauman presented his performance *Bouncing in a Corner*

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together with Meredith Monk. And on May 27, Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music* had its New York premiere with the participation of Richard Serra, Bruce Nauman, Michael Snow and James Tenney.[3] [fig. 23]

Beyond the presentation of performance work, however, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* became the first major museum exhibition to include artist films as part of a visual arts exhibition. Film screenings were both presented in the exhibition space and during the Extended Time Pieces series.[4] Films included in the program were Michael Snow's *Back and Forth* and *One Second in Montreal*, Michael Snow's and Joyce Wieland's *Dripping Water*, and Bruce Nauman's *Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio* and *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*. The exhibition also presented the first films by Richard Serra, which in the program list carried no title but presumably were drawn from the so-called *Hand and Process* series.[5] Furthermore a documentary was screened of the making of Serra's *One Ton Prop: House of Cards*. All of Serra's films were filmed by Robert Fiore who also contributed an interesting series of photos to the catalog that in a cinematic fashion documented the various processes used by the artists to create their installations.

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[2] Robert Morris, "Anti Form" [1968], as reprinted in Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*: 43.

[3] *Pendulum Music* was first performed by William Wiley and Steve Reich at the University of Colorado in August 1968.

[4] It has proven difficult to determine what was shown in the galleries (the Whitney had not yet constructed its film auditorium), but the films of Serra, for instance, were shown both during the special evenings and in the exhibition space. Exhibition checklist, Archives of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y..

[5] The exhibition checklist refers to the films as "5 untitled 2 ½ min. movies (black and white, 16 mm)" & "untitled 5 minute movie (black and white, 16 mm)."

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The films of Serra, Graham, and others of their generation cannot be understood in isolation from this wider contemporary shift towards a process-based rather than object-type of work, a paradigm shift was charted by the curators of *Anti-Illusion* and it cut across the different media of the visual arts, music, dance and film, resulting in various collaborative projects.[6] A fundamental re-organization of the field of artist practice is therefore set in place around 1968. This re-organization might be called post-modernist to the degree that the modernist ontology of the medium has definitely ceased to operate as a structuring term. But we would be mistaken to characterize this moment only as the freeing up of the possibility of intermedia work (a position already occupied by the Happening), or, in a more negative sense, as opening onto a proliferation of formal practices (e.g. performance, body art, earth art, conceptual art, etc.).[7] For we would then lose sight of the basic fact that there is a

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[6] One might evidence of such exchanges on a more personal level by recalling that Steve Reich gave the score of his *Pendulum Music* to Richard Serra as a gift, whereas Serra gave the musician his *Candle Piece* (1968) in return. [fig. 24] Yet, more significantly, these two works share certain basic traits even thought they were executed in different media: they are both durational works that are organized according to a repetitive principle. *Pendulum Music*, as I shall demonstrate, would become an emblematic work for many post-minimalists. *Candle Piece*, on the other hand, is a key work in Serra's career because it transforms the formal dimension of minimalist seriality into a process of actual change (i.e. the burning candles). Process art, therefore, is defined by Buchloh in terms of an expenditure of energy and not of "making itself" (Robert Morris) as on-going action. Finally, as Buchloh claims, *Candle Piece* "can already be seen as an early precursor of the later process sculptures, and even more so of the films that integrate object and process – as well as the link created between them in the viewer's perception..." Benjamin Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serra's Work," in *Richard Serra: Arbeiten 66-77* (Tübingen: Kunsthalle, 1978): 232.

Not all contemporary critics would situate *Candle Piece* in the same genealogy of process art as Buchloh did. Robert Pincus-Witten, for instance, has observed that *Candle Piece* is "illustratively simple-minded – an on-going visually illustrational process which smacks of the permissiveness of Happening and Theater." See Robert Pincus-Witten, "Richard Serra: Slow Information" [1969], in *Post Minimalism* (New York: Out of London press, 1977): 26.

[7] Peter Schjeldahl, for instance, characterized the *Anti-Illusion* show as presenting "a non-style, as refreshingly vulgar and chaotic as contemporary history, filling galleries with grotesque

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common *function* that is carried across from one medium to another, which, quite simply, *is* that of the process or 'making itself.'

At the same time, this functional concept of post-minimalism does not negate the specificity of material practice. In the case of Nauman, Serra, and Graham, the artists under review in this chapter, process art will be shown to foreground the materiality of the technique employed. A film, for instance, that merely records an activity without participating in it, does not fulfill this condition of specificity, the difference is that of a filmic performance versus filmic documentation; a difference, however, that cannot always be clearly drawn and, at this stage of the argument, will have to remain underdeveloped.

What is evident is that not all works grouped under the label of process art attain an equal material specificity. Dennis Oppenheim's films, for instance, lack a uniquely *filmic* function. He considers film more as an impediment to than as a catalyst of the work. And he was the first to admit this:

> ...most of ideas began as sculptural concepts – certainly not from an interest in film – interest in specific perceptual framework for which film was a passive vehicle...I would have to think about where to put the lights, the camera, all that baggage. Which usually ends up distorting the project so badly you can't recognize it. These are all retrograde factors.[8]

Oppenheim could not conceive of film in other than instrumental terms. He wanted to directly show the gesture of the artist to the viewer without any intervention of the filmic equipment.

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shambles composed of every imaginable substance and enlisting every imaginable process, short of murder." Peter Schjeldahl, "New York Letter," *Art International* 13, no. 7 (September 1969): 70.

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Process art is *anti-illusional*, to adopt the phraseology of the Whitney catalog, because it literalized the technical conditions of experience. Process art seeks to make the sculptural dualism of procedure versus material interdependent. Technique must draw out the inherent properties of the material, rather than imposing its 'will to form,' or, as Morris states, the task at hand is to a create a perfect "sympathy" between tool and matter. His famous example is that of Pollock's paint stick since it acknowledges the inherent tendencies and properties of matter (e.g. the fluidity of paint). To conceive of an artistic practice, as Morris proposes, that investigates the material process of making itself is to counter any instrumentalization of the work of art (contrary to Oppenheim's use of film). According to Morris, both abstract expressionist painting, with the exception of Pollock, and minimal art are guilty of subordinating their formal means to a prescribed end.

> The process of "making itself" has hardly been examined. It has only received attention in terms of some kind of mythical, romanticized polarity: the so-called action of the Abstract Expressionists and the so-called conceptualizations of the Minimalists...only Pollock was to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work. Pollock's recovery of process involved a profound rethinking of the role of both material and tools in making. [9]

The second premise of process art, besides the sympathy between means and ends, is the absorption of the viewer within the temporalized performance of producing. Process art must necessarily involve, therefore, a performative aspect. It follows that while the function of process links different works in different media, it

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[8] Willoughby Sharp, "Interview with Dennis Oppenheim," *Studio International* 182, no. 938 (November 1971): 187.

[9] Morris, "Anti Form": 43.

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must be specific in relation to each separate medium. There is, in other words, a *filmic* function that is particular, say, to Dan Graham's *Body Press*, although its performative aspect might in general be likened to his earlier magazine pieces, as I will demonstrate.

These comments might gain greater clarity in relation to the examples provided by *Anti-Illusion*. In particular, Nauman's performance of *Bouncing in a Corner* marks a key-moment in the formation of post-minimal art, a fact which can be gauged from Dan Graham's epochal essay "Subject Matter," which provides ample space for the description of this work.[10] "Subject Matter" was composed in 1969, directly upon witnessing the *Anti-Illusion exhibition*, and it traces with exacting precision the transition of Graham's generation from a minimalist to a process-based practice of art. While partially forming a personal testimonial of the artist, its overall analysis of the period still stands as one of the most accurate and insightful and it shall provide an important guide in the following.

Bouncing in a Corner was executed with three performers at the Whitney.[11] They let themselves fall back against the wall, causing the impact of their bodies to resound throughout the space, after which they rebounded and commenced the same procedure over again. The result was a complex sequence of reverberations moving in and out of phase. It is important, moreover, that not all performers were visible at the

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[10] Dan Graham, "Subject Matter," in *End Moments* (New York: Dan Graham, 1969), as reprinted in Dan Graham, *Rock My Religion*, edited by Brian Wallis (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993): 38-51.

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same time, requiring the audience to shift places. The performance could not be taken in at one glance. The exhaustion of the performers dictated its end.

Graham connects this performance both to a sculptural and a theatrical model of practice. The direct perception of the on-going, serial process supersedes the intermediary object of sculptural experience. By physically 'dropping' the body itself, Nauman counters the need for a precipitation of a sculptural object outside the artist's body. Graham's phrasing might be taken quite literally when we consider *Bouncing in the Corner* in relation to its immediate, sculptural lineage: which is to say that *Bouncing in the Corner* appears to have resolved a specific dilemma of the minimal grid system. While the minimal grid renders the object a function of the shifting position of the viewer's body within the architectural context – there is no ideal viewpoint as in modernist sculpture – it still retains a stable figure-ground relationship between the viewer and the viewed object. As Rosalind Krauss explains: "For the grid is an abstract tool describing a space which always begins at a point just in front of the person who views it. The diorama of analytic sensibility, the grid, forever leaves the viewer outside looking in."[12] To integrate the "abstract tool" of the grid, or rather seriality, within the subjective process of perception itself, is the post-minimal challenge that Graham, Nauman, Serra, Morris, and many others of their generation, set themselves.

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[11] *Bouncing in a Corner* was originally taped as a video piece in 1968.

[12] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture Redrawn," *Artforum* (May 1972): 38, as cited by Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film in Richard Serra's Work": 234. Krauss's text represents an early attempt to differentiate between the spatial conception of Serra's sculpture and minimalism.

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A transitional work would be Carl Andre's *Spill (Scatter Piece)* of 1966, which is often cited as the first attempt to introduce process into minimal sculpture [fig. 25]. Consisting of 800 small plastic blocks that were strewn in a random configuration onto the floor from a canvas bag, each successive installment of the work would reflect the literal procedure of execution. *Spill (Scatter Piecel)* thus extends the formal logic of Jackson Pollock's painting into sculpture by organizing the floor of the gallery as an all-over field. And, of course, it was the 'automatic' process of Pollock's painting that had already revealed its affinity to another serial medium, namely that of Namuth's camera. Yet, in the case of Andre's piece the employment of regular cubic units and the static arrangement of the piece cannot completely escape from more conventional parameters of spatial perception.[13] It is works such as Nauman's *Flour Arrangements on the Floor* (1966) [fig. 26] and Serra's *Scatter Piece* (1967) [fig. 27] and *Splashing* (1968) [fig. 28] that first dissolve the contours of the sculptural body into a truly de-differentiated spatial field.[14] *Bouncing in the Corner* brings this development to its logical conclusion by rendering the sculptural performance of 'dropping' (that is, 'scattering' or 'spilling') the subject matter of the work itself. Nauman uses the physical body both as a serial (and musical) instrument and as an instrumentalized object.

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[13] This conclusion is drawn by Graham in "Subject Matter": "Random distribution by the force of gravity introduces order as an illustration of a general a priori (known) law...Andre's art...treats viewing subject as object-ground; just as the artist, in placing the material grounds for viewing, *is in/places the object in* a prop position to their functioning. The artist and viewer are read out of the picture." Graham, "Subject Matter": 39-40.

[14] See Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film": 232. Ehrenzweig's notion of de-differentiation gained currency among artists such as Serra, Morris and Smithson during the later sixties.

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Furthermore, Nauman does not "drop out of the picture," as Graham remarks, but bounces within the visible and material framework of the architecture. In a theatrical sense he 'played the house' using the walls as kind of a sounding board. The audience is thus immersed in a spatial-aural environment that alters with the viewer's change of position. Sound is materialized as the function of a mobile body of hearing, much like minimalism required a mobile body of sight. However, there is none of the perspectival distance of the viewer placed outside looking in: "there is no inside or outside to the sound-space or in its relation to the instrumentality...thus it is possible for both groups of players (the performers and the audience members) to establish between time as a counting measure and time as a field-time, a relationship that will shift variously in the process of the piece."[15]

It is this dialectic between the sculptural and the theatrical, which shall be played out in the following discussion of films by Nauman, Serra and Graham. I do not intend to be exhaustive in my examples, since that would not necessarily increase the clarity of my argument. Furthermore, certain films that I will not examine, such as Nauman's *Art Make-Up* films (1969), require a different approach [fig. 29]. Nevertheless, if I am able to clarify a specific genealogical sequence between Nauman, Serra, and Graham, and indicate the significant differences in filmic practice on the way, I shall achieve my primary goal. Without question several other histories of the artist film remain to be written.

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[15] Graham, "Subject Matter": 50.

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One last topic needs to be clarified, before I continue with Nauman, namely the chronological sequence of discussion. As Graham explains in "Subject Matter" there are two distinct genealogies of post-minimal art, which towards the end of the sixties come to overlap. First came the minimalist moment of 1965 – for instance, LeWitt, "before his best serial things." This was a moment that had been prepared by the literalist paintings of Jasper Johns and the early Frank Stella. The second moment was constituted by Graham's discovery around 1969 of the original dance performances of Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti from the earlier period of 1960-63 in addition to the process-music of Glass and Reich. While Graham actually never saw Simone Forti in action, in contrast to Serra, both artists have noted the key influence of her "simple exercise things" on their own practice.

Graham has also demonstrated that Nauman's performances fitted in with the second moment of post-minimalist development, despite the fact that the latter lived on the West Coast and had never been close to the Judson Dance group, like Morris, Huot or Barry.[16] Nauman's first contact in the New York dance world would be with Meredith Monk. Nevertheless, Nauman's performances take the same task format that can be found in, say, Rainer's dances of the sixties with their treatment of the body as a physiological object rather than a conveyor of psychological values, and their emphasis on the quantifiable, repetitive nature of the performance. This anti-

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[16] Graham has also suggested a relation between Serra's sculpture and certain dance pieces by Rainer. She gave, for instance, conflicting instructions to two performers without their prior knowledge: one had to remain standing on the ground, while the other had to lift the former off the ground. The body is treated by Rainer as an object; that is, as something to lift. These "physical kind of

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humanistic stance of Rainer's dance work is registered in *Bouncing in the Corner*, with a common origin than in the workshop of Ann Halprin in San Francisco that several members of the Judson group attended:

> Minimal art was non-anthropomorphic, the artist's inner and bodily experience was totally eliminated, similar to John Cage. But in the work that was done in San Francisco in Anne Halprin's dance workshop the performer's and the spectator's physiological response to both the acoustical qualities of the room and their inside brain time became very important. In San Francisco this was the time of La Monte Young, Terry Riley, who influenced Steve Reich, and dancers like Simone Forti and Bruce Nauman, all of whom were doing work in Anne Halprin's workshop. So there was a connection again of music to subject-oriented materiality, in other words, to the spectator's own responses in physiological terms, inside a physiologically activated space.[17]

Anti-Illusion was not the first exhibition of Nauman in New York, but it marks a moment in which an awareness of his work reached a critical mass among other artists, such as Serra, Morris, Graham, Acconci, and Oppenheim. It was Nauman who, for many of his peers, prepared the way to performance art. Furthermore, it was Nauman who provided the medium of film a heightened visibility in the gallery after 1968. Hence, in both a formal and practical sense, Nauman is the appropriate place to begin.

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prop situations," as Graham explains, are very similar to Serra's own prop series. See Simon Field, "An Interview with Dan Graham," *Art and Artists* 7, no. 10 (January 1973): 16.

[17] Dan Graham, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., February 28, 1997. A slightly abridged version of this interview appeared in *Metropolis M* (Utrecht) no. 2 (April 1997): 34-36.

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2. Bruce Nauman: *The Studio Films*

The Empty Studio

Imagine the following scene: it is the summer of 1966 and we are standing in front of a commercial building in San Francisco. From the street we enter directly into a largely vacant ground-floor space. To note the neon advertisement hanging in the window, its lettering read in reverse from our inside position, the site was at one time occupied by a grocery store. A swift survey of the layout and contents of the interior, however, do not immediately explain the current use of the room. The minimal presence of furniture – only a single table and chair are available – indicates that this is not a domestic space. In the far corner we perceive an untidy accumulation of small objects, an indistinct clutter of cans, bags, bottles, and cups, spread along the wall or perched upon a few bare, wooden shelves. The walls are empty of decoration, the floor unswept. From this description, we might rightfully conclude that this gritty interior forms a place of work. Even so, the absence of tools makes it difficult to ascertain what kind of labor could take place here. And the conduct of the sole individual who occupies this room provides no immediate clues. His habitual form of behavior consists of sitting in the one chair while sipping his coffee or pacing back and forth across the floor.

This lone figure in the interior is the young artist Bruce Nauman. The location is a former grocery store in San Francisco which the artist transformed into a studio

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after graduation from art school.[18] For reasons that will become clear, my description draws a picture of Nauman's studio as a kind of 'biotope' or *habitus*; a lived space although the relation of the inhabitant to his environment remains strangely unsettled. This environmental sketch has been assembled from the evidence of photographs that Nauman took in order to document his own works and from the accounts he has provided in several interviews.[19] It will gain further substance in relation to the so-called *Studio Films* that Bruce Nauman shot during the winter of 1967-68 in the vacant atelier of another artist.[20] This set consists of the two 16mm films shown at the *Anti-Illusion* show, namely *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* [fig. 30], *Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio* [fig. 31], plus two other films, namely *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* [fig. 32] and *Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms* [fig. 33].[21] And it is the correlation between this figure of the empty studio and Nauman's move to introduce the film camera into the studio that will be the subject of my subsequent discussion.

These so-called *Studio Films* show a sequence of mundane activities repeated over and over again until the film reel ran out. The artist made all the films alone

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[18] Bruce Nauman received his M.F.A. degree in June of 1966 at the University of California, Davis. Upon graduation he moved to San Francisco.

[19] For Nauman's earliest accounts of his work environment and methods, see Joe Raffaele and Elizabeth Baker, "The Way Out West: Interviews with 4 San Francisco Artists," *Art News*, 66, no. 4 (Summer 1967): 39-40, 75-76, Willoughby Sharp, "Nauman Interview," *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 5 (March 1970): 22-27, and Willoughby Sharp, "Bruce Nauman," *Avalanche*, no. 2 (Winter 1971): 23-31. Another well-documented source is Coosje van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988).

[20] The studio space was lent to Nauman by the artist William T. Wiley.

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before the camera in his studio. The basic procedure Nauman follows in these films is to place the stationary camera at, or slightly above, eye-level, showing a section of an empty wall and floor. The rectangular frame of the camera is reflected by the outline of a square that is fastened to the floor with masking tape.[22] In relation to this geometric boundary, Nauman performs the particular task described by the title of the film.

For instance, in *Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*, Nauman institutes a quasi-athletic game: the artist alternately throws a ball against the floor in an attempt to let it bounce off the ceiling, and tries to catch another other ball that is bouncing back in the next instant. However, Nauman is not displaying his skill at this exercise, but rather the opposite. The game continuously breaks down because the artist is not able to sustain a constant rhythm or because one of the balls skids off in an unexpected direction. He becomes frustrated and at a certain moment he vents his anger by throwing a ball away. This film reveals a flaw on another level as well, namely that of recording technique: the sound track goes out of sync.[23] Yet, these faults caused by a combined lack of technical knowledge, bodily

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[21] The films are all shot on black and white, 16mm stock and they last the length of one 400 foot reel (that is, circa 10 minutes). They all have sync sound except for *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square*.

[22] While Coosje van Bruggen remarks that the framing of the image is accentuated by the cropping of the square in *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square*, oddly enough she maintains that the use of the square is somewhat arbitrary and only serves to formalize and provide direction to the "exercise." She therefore continues to view the film as primarily a 'straight' documentary of a performance-like activity, while I shall maintain that the Studio Films are medium specific works. See Coosje van Bruggen *Bruce Nauman*: 228.

[23] Speaking of *Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*, Nauman remembered that: "[I] started out in sync but there again, it is a wild track, so as the tape stretches and tightens it goes in and out of sync. I more or less wanted it to be in sync but I just didn't have the equipment and the patience to do it." Sharp, "Bruce Nauman": 28.

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coordination, and physical stamina are, as I shall demonstrate, elemental to the films. Which is to say, these films are not merely (deficient) documents of a performance.

In *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* Nauman performs a simple task: he starts in one corner of the square, gingerly stepping along the taped line. At times his body is turned towards the center of the square and at other moments it faces the wall, providing the camera with only an intermittent glance of his face. Again, as in the former film, Nauman's movement is not regulated by the natural flow of an internal rhythm. He treats his body as a clockwork mechanism instead by regulating his step to the even beat of a metronome. *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* shows Nauman, therefore, in the process of forming the habit of a dance, but it is the awkwardness of the "exercise" that counts and not the ideal form of the "dance": spontaneity or ease of execution is not his goal, while the dance is not centered on the expressivity of the body but has become a function of objectified time (the metronome) and space (the taped square).

As previous commentators have noticed, *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square* reveals Nauman's interest in the choreographer Merce Cunningham. [24] For instance, Cunningham would not only mix choreographed moves with everyday gestures, but also combine professional and non-professional performers.[25] Thus

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[24] Here is Bruce Nauman on Cunningham: " I guess I thought of what I was doing as a sort of dance because I was familiar with some of the things Merce Conningham and others had done, where you take a simple movement and make it into a dance just by presenting it as a dance." From an unpublished interview with Lorraine Sciarra (Pomona College: January 1972), as quoted by Jane Livingston in *Bruce Nauman: Works from 1965 to 1972* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art): 16.

[25] Coosje van Bruggen describes a performance at Brandeis University in 1952 where Cunningham used both professional dancers and students. The second group of performers was asked to

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Cunningham downplayed the need for acquired technique in dance, calling it too constrictive, and suggesting that movement in itself is expressive "regardless of intentions of expressivity."[26] This comment by the choreographer raises an important question concerning the (in) difference of intention and performance and it forms a topic to which I shall return shortly. Nauman's take on the issue, namely, does not fully conform to that of Cunningham.

Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square is the only silent film of the group and it shows Nauman in profile while moving around a taped square that is slightly larger than the one in *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*. He first places one foot down on the line of the outer square, then the other foot in front of the first. In doing so he shifts his weight onto his hip, assuming an exaggerated contrapposto position. Again, he proceeds around the square, but now a mirror leaning against the back wall provides us with another view of the studio, occasionally framing Nauman's body, while, at other times, Nauman walks off screen because the camera placement crops off a section of the taped square.

The fourth film, *Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio*, records Nauman attempting to master an instrument he was unfamiliar with. His intention was to play "two notes very close together so that you could hear the beats in the harmonics." On the soundtrack one hears both the footsteps of Nauman while he

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execute simple, ordinary gestures, such as washing their hands, filing their nails, combing their hair, and skipping. Cunningham stated that he did not want "to separate the human being from the action he does, or the actions which surround him, but...[to] see what it is like to break these actions up in different ways, to allow the passion, and it is passion, to appear for each person in his own way." From

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moves about the studio and the tortured noise that the artist manages to wring from his instrument, to the great discomfort of most listeners. And this noise is often all we perceive for he occasionally walks off screen. Towards the end of the film the sound suddenly stops, but Nauman keeps on walking for a minute so that the viewer realizes that the sound was not in sync all along.

If I now summarize what is common to the appearance of the *Studio Films* then it is the deliberate execution of a repetitive task that is situated somewhere in the interstitial range of movement that stretches between a habitual gesture and a technical exercise.[27] Nauman's serial tasks perform one steady function, however: they enact, or seem to enact, a corporeal mode of appropriating the studio space. It is not insignificant in this respect that the studio in which the films were made was *not his* and that it appears to have been exceedingly *empty* except for some scattered debris in the background. This Nauman has intimated the appropriative nature of this act with the following anecdote:

> It's like a woman I saw once in a restaurant. She sat down in a chair, sprawled out in it, dropped a cigarette lighter at one spot on the table, and threw her handbag down in another – in herself, and with all her belongings she took up a huge amount of space.[28]

What this scene illustrates is nothing else than the phenomenological notion of the *habitus*: the dilation of our being-in-the-world through the power of our habits, as

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Merce Cunningham, *Changes: Notes on Choreography* (New York: Something Else Press, 1968): n.p., as quoted by van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 230.

[26] Ibid.: 230.

[27] At least two of Frampton's films from this period deal with similar themes, but in a more oblique fashion, namely *Process Red* (1968) and *Maxwell's Demon* (1968), which uses a found insturctional film of a man performing Canadian Air Force exercises.

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Merleau-Ponty so succinctly defined this notion.[29] The habitus describes a world to which we have familiarized ourselves by means of our habitual customs and techniques. This habitus might just concern those actions necessary for the conservation of life, which posit a biological world around us. Thus the restaurant might be called the habitat or biotope of the woman, as long as it is experienced from her bodily position and she is not viewed as one object among others. When one elaborates on these primary, biological actions, Merleau-Ponty explains, and moves from their literal to their figurative meaning, a core of new significance is manifested to the acting subject and one has invented a dance.

So we might say that the customary gestures of the woman, the scattering of her possessions, establish an expressive space around her. The objects - the handbag, the lighter - do not function so much to set up territorial boundaries, but to expand the active radius of her bodily awareness. The woman pays the handbag and the lighter no conscious heed – she does not compare them to the size, volume and position of other objects in the restaurant – but they have become "potentialities of volume and a demand for free space." The points in space occupied by her objects do not stand out for her as objective positions in relation to the objective position of her body (as if we were to plot her position on the restaurant floor plan), they mark rather the potential scope of her intentions, the expressive range of her body that incorporates its surroundings through her instruments (the handbag, the lighter).

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[28] Coosje van Bruggen, "The true artist is an amazing luminous fountain," in *Bruce Nauman Drawings 1965-1985* (Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1986): 19.

[29] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 143.

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We might say that the expressive space of the woman's body acts as the origin of her world; her habits, as Merleau-Ponty would declare, constitute the essential medium of expressive movement, which allows things to begin to exist under her hands and eyes. When telling his anecdote Nauman looks at the woman, then, as a choreographer might. To learn a dance it is not enough to discover, by analysis, its ideal formula; one must also reconstruct the movement by the use of previously acquired movements such as walking and running (or sprawling and throwing, as in Nauman's example). But working backwards in this manner, according to phenomenology, inverts the primary order of cause and effect. As a matter of fact, the formula of the new dance could only incorporate elements of general motility to begin with, because it had, what Merleau-Ponty calls, "the stamp of movement" set upon it. It is the body that comprehends movement, he maintains, not the intellect. Therefore, our intention - "what we aim at" – and our performance – "what is given" – must be experienced as existing in simultaneous harmony. That is, I do not direct a message at my hand as if it formed a foreign object in space; the intention, the object, and the movement are all grounded in the continuous, expressive space of the body. To appropriate a new instrument, therefore, is also to expand the habitus, to change our existence, to provide a new significance to the world.

But does Nauman truly approach the body and its techniques as a phenomenologist or a choreographer? To Cunningham the body's movement is expressive in itself regardless of the personal intentions of the dancer's, which is to say that the bodily habitus provides meaning to the world even before the self fills it

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with any psychological significance. Hence, Cunningham's return to the "biological" realm of untutored, yet habitual movement during the early fifties; a dance project which would be continued by Ann Halprin, among others. Yet, something has changed in the performances of Nauman. It is not just that his actions are not expressive in the manner of habitual gestures. The performance is executed in a conflicting style: both concentrated and faltering, regimented and unrehearsed. What strikes me the most in the *Studio Films* is that Nauman's intention appears to stand at odds with his performance: his actions have become externalized, that is mechanical and schematic, and they are further subverted by the physiology of the body – Nauman becomes, in the end, fatigued. The habitus of Nauman, in other words, is turned inside out; the phenomenological relation of cause and effect is reversed. But there is more than a personal reason for this inversion. To say that he is just countering the ideas of Cunningham or Merleau-Ponty would be too facile.

The fact is that the performance of Nauman grates against the institutional space, i.e. the studio, that he inhabits. It is the historical condition of the studio that has changed and which both requires and resists appropriation. Indeed there is a third level of the habitus, beyond that of the biological or dance, as Merleau-Ponty has explained, that of the cultural space: "sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body's natural means; it must then build itself an instrument, and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world." The artist has long occupied the habitus of the studio with his equipment in an unquestioned manner. But now the studio has been emptied out and reverted to a blank state. The artist needed to resort to

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other techniques, corporeal and technological, in order to re-posses this domain, but perhaps this domain could no longer be appropriated in a habitual sense. Perhaps *that* is the drama of the *Studio Films*?

We should avoid drawing a psychological plan of this drama. First of all, the figure of the empty studio in Nauman does not represent a metaphor of pure reflectivity or inwardness. It does not, for instance, connect to Yves Klein's exhibition of *Le Vide* (1958) for which the French artist painted the interior of the Galerie Iris Clert white with a house painter's roller. The anonymity of Klein's painting method secured for him the immaterial purity of the pictorial "radiance" he put on display.[30] The empty studio is not a metaphysical space where one could become, as Klein trumpeted, "literally impregnated by the sensitive pictorial state."[31] Nauman's studio is, in a manner of speaking, expropriated; it is in the process of becoming other. Hence, the empty studio is a historical figure, which bespeaks the crisis of the artist in relation to the conventions of his craft. But this is a crisis not totally of Nauman's own doing.

Once more the *Studio Films* contain no psychological drama; not, at least, on the scale of Hans Namuth's *Pollock Painting*. Namuth's famous documentary certainly created the conditions for the irruption such a personal conflict of the artist. The story has often been told how Pollock responded in anger after viewing the documentary and started accusing the filmmaker of being a phony. Irrespective of the

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[30] For more details on Yves Klein's exhibition, see Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

[31] Yves Klein as quoted by Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*: 195.

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accuracy of this legend, the myth of *Pollock Painting* has assumed truth *in effect* (as all social mythologies do) by connecting the "end of painting" with the rising cultural significance of the mass media of film and television. What Nauman's films visualize, in other words, is a post-Pollock world of diminished innocence. Nauman stages his own studio dance before the lens; he has made himself both subject and object of Pollock *Painting*.

The *Studio Films* capture the historical drama, as it occurred, of the dwindling autonomy of the studio; the films represent and stage the battle as it is fought before (and against) the public eye. Soon after the *Studio Films*, Nauman would remove himself from the public space as a performer. His last live performance was to be *Bouncing in a Corner* at the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition. While his work, in a certain sense, was to take a more public shape after the *Studio Films*, such as demonstrated by the *Corridor Installations* which directly involve the viewer as a performer, Nauman was himself to withdraw into a more private world [fig. 34]. Yet, the *Studio Films* were among the first post-minimalist works to acknowledge that the artist could not isolate his work from the spectacular logic of a mass media society.

But this is not all that can be said about the figure of the empty studio. For what does it mean to say that a space is empty? We cannot do more than surmise at this point that the empty studio indicates a finite horizon of possibility for studio practice. At its limits meaningful activity ceases and this boundary condition is connected to the absence of (certain) tools and the skills they require. Instead the tedium of habitual behavior sets in – "If you see yourself as an artist and you function

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in a studio and you're not a painter, if you don't start out with some canvas, you do all kinds of things—you sit in a chair or pace around."[32] It is against this horizon, as well, that we might measure the impact of Nauman's decision to introduce the film camera into the studio.

We know that the *actual* emptiness of Nauman's studio, that is its lack of traditional artist's tools, resulted from his decision during the preceding year to abandon the pursuit of painting. With a series of fiberglass casts begun in 1965, Nauman attempted to disengage himself from the technical proficiency he had acquired as an art student. Suspicious of his own facility as a painter and his absorption by strictly technical problems, he rid the studio of the classical trappings of the artistic profession. In effect, Nauman sought to dislodge the identity of artistic practice with any formal discipline, such as painting and sculpture, in order to conceive of art on a more general level. Increasingly, he would justify the value of his work as simply being the product of someone working professionally as an artist: "Art is what an artist does, just sitting around in the studio. And then the question goes back to what is art? And art is what an artist does, just sitting around in the studio."[33]

The circularity of Nauman's logic might seem rather coy, if not bewildering, yet in its very absurdity Nauman's remark addresses a very precise context. I am referring to the aesthetic model of formalist criticism employed by Clement Greenberg, that evades the question of technics as a specifically social and historical

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[32] Bruce Nauman cited in van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 14.
[33] Ibid.: 14.

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function.[34] To conceive of the modernist project, as Greenberg did, as a return to the material base of the medium, simultaneously formed an attempt to inhabit a timeless moment of pure presence. Ultimately, then, modernist technique must become self-effacing if it is to become the utterly transparent support of optical immediacy. Hence, the seemingly paradoxical terminology practiced by one modernist critic who speaks of an "automatism of canvas and paint" in relation to Morris Louis' *Unfurled* series. Since these canvasses were created "without the trace of hands or wrists or arms, without muscle," it is possible, he claims, to view "the idea realizing itself."[35] But Nauman was not to mimic such a magical "automatism" of the studio, which transforms sensuous human activity into a mere object of contemplation.[36] We shall see that the question posed by the *Studio Films* is quite the reverse: the studio no longer functions for Nauman as the insulated domain of a habitual, bodily activity, which by an almost unseen gesture, invests the art object with an extratemporal fullness of meaning. The *Studio Films*, to the contrary, reveal in a rather excruciating

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[34] On the other hand, I do not wish to advocate an anthropological definition of artistic practice, which on certain occasions does appear to be the case with Nauman: 'I knew this guy in California, an anthropologist, who had a hearing problem in one ear, and so his balance was off. Once he helped one of his sons put a roof on his house, but...[the father's shingles] were not only laid in a zigzag, but also the nails were bent and shingles split. When his son got upset about the mess his father had made, the anthropologist replied: "Well, it's just evidence of human activity."' Nauman cited in van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman.*: 18.

[35] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 113.

[36] I am paraphrasing the early Karl Marx of "Theses on Feuerbach" [1845] who set out to debunk idealism in the name of a properly materialist understanding of human *practices*: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism...is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively." While this comparison serves to underscore the 19th century roots of Greenbergian aesthetics, it does not deny the idealist aspects of Marx's own position. Nauman's practice represents a more radical form of materialism than Marx envisaged in 1845 since it declines the non-alienated, utopian perspective of *self-realization*. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage Books, 1975): 421.

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fashion how the artist's gestures are necessarily submitted to an entropic pull of disintegration within the mediatized environment of the present.

Before I continue, however, let me return to our opening scene. Because already then, in 1966, Nauman was drawn to a token of the internally divided spatiality he inhabited: this division between public and private that had migrated to the interior of the studio.[37] As I have noted, Nauman's studio in 1966 once formed a site of commercial business. Proof of the studio's prior function as a grocery store was visible in the shape of a neon-advertisement for beer which remained suspended in front of the window case.

The irony of this situation was not lost on Nauman. He had his own window sign fabricated which advertises the spiraling, spiritual message *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* [fig. 35].[38] Hung in the window so as to be legible from the outside, the sign appears to condemn the artist to the state of the mythical figure Echo, who incurred Hera's wrath with her incessant babble and as punishment was condemned to repeat the last words said by others. In unrequited love for Narcissus, she pined away until only the repetitions of her disembodied voice

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[37] The studio as a sanctuary of pure inwardness is a common trope of modernist criticism. Yet, it is equally obvious that the twentieth-century has provided ample examples of the studio as a public space, that is, not merely as an educational institution with its hierarchy of master and students, but as a realm of socio-political contestation. In fact, this counter-model of the studio has a history that reaches back, at least, to the eighteenth-century atelier of Jacques-Louis David which functioned as a democratically structured meeting-place for dissident academics. The Factory of Andy Warhol provides us with a more contemporary example, albeit that the theatricality of this glittering decor sheathed in aluminum foil, retains few traces of the burgeoning public sphere of the bourgeoisie of which David's atelier was a symptom.

[38] Philip Glass, a close friend of Nauman during the later sixties, has claimed that the window sign was influenced by Marcel Duchamp's *Rotary Demisphere (Precision Optics)* of 1925. In this object, then, we are already nearing the possibilities of film. See Robert Pincus-Witten, "Bruce Nauman: Another Kind of Reasoning," *Artforum* 10, no. 6 (February 1972): 37, n. 8.

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remained. I have already indicated one manner in which Nauman grounds his artistic project upon a form of circular reasoning. The empty walls of the studio seem in this case to function as a kind of echo chamber. The statement that he voices and leaves to reverberate within this vacant space is not fully his own and begins to assume a slightly mocking tone. Nauman's neon sign hums, as it were, to the idle chatter of the world and in doing so it points to the antinomies of a conventional studio practice that is based on the premises of privacy and autonomy.[39]

On a variety of fronts, it seems, Nauman was drawing near to a kind of phenomenological threshold in the years between 1966-1967; a threshold, that is, that I have indicated by the figure of the empty studio. It is through this figure that the largely unseen background against which the artist's daily actions acquire their significance and coherence might suddenly lose its unobtrusive quality, where a familiar space might, as it were, become inverted and transform into something strangely opaque. To push the fiction of the empty studio all the way to this limit, to eliminate all objects or tools, would take away the artist's ability to continue to occupy this space and to consider it his own. Indeed, there is a tinge of anxiety perceptible in

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[39] Nauman's own request that the neon message be 'read out loud' supports my play on Echo. At the same time, he hints at the dialectic of private vs. public, interior vs. exterior, that will surface in the following discussion: "You could see it from inside or outside. Because the place that I had for a studio had been a small store, a grocery store. So the studio was the store. And there were still some neon signs in the windows, just for food. And so...the idea of using a sign, this kind of standard advertising, but then putting a different kind of information in it. And then formally I liked the idea that from the outside it looked one way and from the inside it looked a different way. You could read it from either side in another way. Because if you're only left with this kind of formal qualities of it, ...and from the outside you tend to not think of any of the formal qualities, because you're reading what it says. Then of course I put in a different kind of information, and putting it out in that way, if you say something, see if you believe it. Say it out loud to see what other people think, to see whether you believe it or not. Just testing." Dieter Koepplin, "Reasoned Drawings," in *Bruce Nauman Drawings*: 35, n.11.

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the voice of Nauman, when he speaks of the need to withdraw himself into the solitude and silence of the studio:

> That's the thing about going into the studio to experience the quiet. All that's there is you, and you have to deal with that. Sometimes it's pretty hard.[40]

In the absence of a conventional set of instruments – the painter's brush, the tubes of paint, the easel – this empty studio has become in a certain sense uninhabitable. In short, Nauman's procedure forces the background into the foreground, the formal issues that were once resolved within the confines of the canvas surface appear to have spread outwards, to have projected themselves into the phenomenological situation of the studio.

37, Rue Victor-Massé

In order to situate the figure of the empty studio within a historical perspective, I propose to draw on a well-known description of a traditional artist's studio, namely a visit recorded by Paul Valéry to Edgar Degas' residence at 37, rue Victor-Massé in Paris:

> He would take me into a long attic room, with a wide bay window (not very clean) where light and dust mingled gaily. The room was pell-mell...[a shelf piled with] all the nameless odds and ends that might come in handy one day...It sometimes seems to me that the labor of the artist is of a very old-fashioned kind; the artist himself a survival, a craftsman or artisan of a disappearing species, working in his own room, following his own homemade empirical methods, living in untidy intimacy with his tools, his eye intent on what is in his mind,

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[40] van Brugggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 18.

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> blind to his surroundings; using broken pots, kitchenware, any castoffs that come to hand....[41]

Valéry explains that this impression of clutter and disarray in the workplace might exist for him, but surely not for the painter himself. The writer concedes that what appears as an inchoate accumulation of stuff to the outsider, must cohere as an organized whole within the intentional realm of experience occupied by the artist. Indeed, Valéry enters the studio as if it were an attic piled high with discarded objects of which the purpose and meaning has been long since forgotten. Yet, if these objects lack a 'name' for the writer they do not for the painter and in this foreign world Valéry feels slightly ill at ease and out of place.

In the painter's *atelier*, the writer might feel uncertain of his gestures for it is a world to which he does not belong and from which he is exiled although he might wax nostalgic about it. I am referring, of course, to Valéry's melancholic vision of the artist as a dying species who works in close proximity to the shards of a vanishing past, those broken objects which only Degas can intimately know in their capacity as tools that come readily to hand. The artist's studio, in other words, appears not only as an intensely private world in contrast to the shared, everyday world of commerce and leisure, but also as a world that is almost past. The studio of Degas symbolizes to Valéry one of the last refuges for an authentic self which is rapidly becoming

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[41] Paul Valéry, "Degas Dance Drawing" [1935], *Degas Manet Morisot*, translated by David Paul, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 19.

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unintelligible, a dark and dusty corner, within an otherwise fully instrumentalized public space.[42]

But Valéry's text also suggests a phenomenological theory of objects which is binary in nature. On the one hand, we have those designated things which stand out from the formlessness of matter: "the broken pots" that interrupt the featureless continuity of nameless odds and ends. And, on the other hand, we have the instrumental object which is situated within a network of equipment: the tool that belongs to the purposeful horizon of human activity. These two objects are actually the same, though they are seen from different intentional angles. Valéry can only see his failure to single out and name the objects, while Degas cannot know of this failure for he does not share the detached attitude of the poet to the objects within his circumspection.[43]

Valéry is blind and he knows it, while Degas' blindness is of a different kind. Degas is blind to his surroundings not only because he willingly treads on the social mores of propriety (his undressing before an open door causes some squeamishness on the part of Valéry), but because his gestures are inattentively geared to the topography

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[42] This is Valéry's dystopic vision of the future of art: "Perhaps conditions are changing, and instead of this spectacle of an eccentric individual using whatever comes his way, there will instead be a picture-making laboratory, with its specialist officially clad in white, rubber-gloved, keeping to a precise schedule, armed with a strictly appropriate apparatus and instruments, each with its appointed place and function." Ibid.: 19.

[43] In an interesting early essay on cinema, Louis Aragon describes his fascination with the camera image as driven by the same procedure of de-familiarization that is used by poets: "Poets without being artists, children sometimes fix their attention on an object to the point where their concentration makes it grow larger, grow so much it completely occupies their visual field, assumes a mysterious aspect and loses all relation to its purpose. Or they repeat a word endlessly, so often it divests itself of meaning and becomes a poignant and pointless sound that makes them cry." Louis Aragon, "On Décor," in *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on Cinema*, ed. Paul Hammond (London: BFI, 1978): 29.

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of a habitual space like the person who without fault traverses a familiar room in the dark. I will have cause to return to the former sense of Degas' blindness since it raises the specter of an encroachment of the public exterior on the private interior or, worse, the permeation of the subject's visual field by the gaze of the other.[44] However, let me first attend to the phenomenological ambiguity of the object which I have intimated above, as it will assist our comprehension of the nature of Nauman's employment and interaction with the film camera.

The Workshop as Habitus

The previous example drawn from Valéry will hopefully facilitate the reader's comprehension of the next stage of my argument, which will be more abstract in nature. I wish to expand on the typology of the two objects I have introduced above and to this purpose I shall resume my discussion of phenomenology. While my exposition shall take a less historical turn, the rewards of this brief tangent shall become evident. A glance at Martin Heidegger's own figure of the workshop, namely, will help clarify Nauman's subversion of the habitual domain of the studio in his *Studio Films.*

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger delineates two ontologies of the object, namely the *zuhanden* – that which is 'available' – and the *vorhanden* – that which is

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[44] A classic description of this existential confrontation of the self by the other and his subsequent sense of dis-empowerment can be found in the passage on "The Look" in Jean-Paul Sartre's

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'occurrent.'[45] Availability refers in principle to the use value of things, that is to the object as a piece of equipment that is always already embedded within a network of purposeful relationships. The available object acquires its identity only within a pre-existing network of possible assignments or tasks. In other words, the human subject does not perceive the available object as an isolated form, standing out against the neutral horizon of the world. The subject is rather absorbed within the realm of availability, and objects only figure within that realm in so far as they answer to his intended project, for instance the tools of the craftsman lying about in the workshop. Hence, availableness refers first of all to the worldliness of everyday existence, that is the subject's involvement in a nexus of significations that is not private but public.

Heidegger's standard example is indeed the pre-industrial workshop, which is not a space of private labor, like Valéry's studio, but rather a communal space in which men are engaged in a single purpose and share certain tools. Within the workshop, the instruments always remain ready at hand, waiting in their assigned place until needed, at which point the hand of the workman quickly reaches for the correct tool without needing to actively look for it in the way we might search for the proper tool in a hardware shop. In other words, while idle the tool forms a near invisible component of the subject's perceptual field, blending into the background of the workshop, or, in Heidegger's terms, into the totality of the equipment-whole. The

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Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956).

[45] I will adopt the terminology suggested by Hubert L. Dreyfus, rather than the more standard, but rather awkward translation as 'ready-to-hand' and 'present-at-hand'. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-*

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tool abides, that is, until the present task calls for its use and is incorporated into the purposeful activity of the worker, who blindly picks it up, being intuitively aware of its location and suitability. Another manner of describing the phenomenological situation of availability is to say that subject and object, worker and tool, exist in a state of transparency for one another. This mode of absorption in one's instrumental space is what Valéry referred to as Degas' blindness (although the equipment-whole of Degas does not participate in the public realm as Heidegger's workshop did).

To introduce the second object-term of the occurrent, Heidegger describes a number of scenarios in which the workman's manner of blindly coping with his everyday environment can become frustrated and its relay of intentionality short-circuited. The tool can detach itself from the transparency of its daily context, for instance, by being misplaced, revealing itself as missing, or, alternatively, by malfunctioning. (The latter possibility shall prove to be of special relevance to the film practice of Nauman.) In this new situation the object is only 'encountered' insofar as it has fallen out of the rhythms and mechanisms of the work process. It has, in short, been bracketed from the realm of lived existence. Transformed from a productive tool into a passive object of contemplation, we might say as well that the temporalizing function of the instrument has been covered up and it has reverted to the ahistorical appearance of a natural thing. It exists, that is, as merely 'occurrent' before the reflective gaze of the human subject, as removed from the historicizing practices of labor.

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in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1 (Cambridges, Mass.: MIT

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Let me give an example. To reflective thought, for instance, a hammer will be apprehended strictly as an object of perception and not directly grasped in its use; the hammer will be considered as consisting of a certain substance that possesses certain properties: size, weight, hardness, and color. This might occur when the worker picks up the wrong hammer by mistake and realizes its too heavy for the task, or when it breaks and he subsequently observes the weakness of the material, or furthermore when he pictures to himself a hammer that he needs and that happens to be misplaced. And, finally, we might think of the example of a stranger who does not belong in the workshop and who might be able to judge the material qualities of the hammer-object, if he is at all able to name and find it, but who does not 'know' its proper use.

The latter was, in fact, the experience of Valéry stepping into the studio of Degas. And we might recall that he declared that Degas could use any castoff objects that come to hand. That is perhaps the most important aspect to realize about the available object, namely that its identity as tool does not exist independently of its assignment, which means that an object can be put to many different uses and thus change its identity. On the one hand, the available object exists within an open horizon of temporality, its meaning is always alterable, on the other hand the occurrent object is disclosed as a permanent and determinate entity.

Degas inhabits workshop as a space of availability, but to Valéry it is merely the domain of the occurrent. He is, thus, excluded, from the expressive space of significance that is immediately open to Degas. But what Valéry signifies in his turn

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Press, 1991).

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is something similar to the intrusion of Namuth's camera on Pollock's studio. His gaze forms an irritant which threatens to disrupt the habitual process of appropriation. Valéry is the carrier of the gaze of the other, which cuts through the habitat from without, and is capable of estranging the subject from his own habitual space. As a result of this gaze, as Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, the world will appear to have a drain hole in its middle through which being is perpetually flowing off.[46] This gaze of otherness shall return once more in the *Studio Films*, but now strangely internalized: it is transported into the studio interior by Bruce Nauman's own film camera.[47] In fact, it is the camera that made the performance possible.

Techniques of Transfer

Having established the basic terms of debate, I must now proceed to demonstrate how the studio practice of Nauman both mimics *and* subverts the phenomenological logic of the habitus (a term that is not Nauman's own).[48] I shall start by examining Nauman's early cast objects of 1965.

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[46] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 343.

[47] In fact, both the studio space and the camera employed in the *Studio Films*, to which I shall turn shortly, were not even *his*. Nauman was temporarily using another artist's workspace and had borrowed the camera to shoot the four films. See also n. 20.

[48] One of the earliest attempts to situate the work of Nauman within a phenomenological framework was undertaken by Marcia Tucker. See Marcia Tucker, "PheNAUMANology," *Artforum* 9, no. 4 (December 1970): 38-44. My own reference to phenomenological theory is not meant to increase the sophistication of critical terms already in place or to advocate a return to the source. I wish to locate the different points of friction within the phenomenological model of (post-)minimalism, not just as moments of theoretical conflict, but as symptoms of an underlying shift in the historical conditions of art practice.

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The fiberglass and polyester resin pieces set up a relationship to the viewer that, at first sight, lend themselves to be described in phenomenological terms. Certainly, other critics have been swift to locate these objects at a corporeal level of perception.[49] The dissymmetry of left and right, back and front, which characterizes the body's situatedness within the world – in contrast to the isotropic space of geometry – is inscribed within the shape of these objects which provide a coherent gestalt-like shape, while providing different perspectives to a mobile viewer in the inversion of convex and concave surfaces, in the irregularity of their surface and 'poise', sometimes turning their back side to the gallery wall as if shielding them from our view, or tracing a gestural arc across the corner of the room.[50] The cast objects use the walls and floor of the gallery as gravitational support, physically occupying or populating its interior. Bruce Nauman has likened these pieces to bodily postures and it is significant in this context that Nauman named a photo book of the fiberglass works *Pictures of Sculpture in a Room.* The reversals of casting and molding, we might say, are made to count in a phenomenological sense.

Yet, there is also counter-impulse that runs through these works. The manner in which Nauman leaves the traces of the casting process clearly visible should have

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[49] See, for instance, Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," *Art International*, 10, no. 9 (November 1966): 28, 34-40 Lippard writes about the "mindless, near-visceral identification with form for which the psychological term 'body ego' or Bachelard's 'muscular consciousness' seem perfectly adaptable" (Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," as reprinted in Lucy R. Lippard, *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1971): 102). This identification with the work might take the ambivalent form of attraction alternating with repulsion.

[50] I am referring in particular to such works as *Untitled* (cat. 23) [fig. 36], and *Untitled* (cat. 27) [fig. 37], both of 1965, but my observations can be extended to cover the structural appearance and display of all casts from this year. All catalogue numbers refer to *Bruce Nauman: Exhibition Catalogue and Catalogue Raisonne* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1994).

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already forewarned us. Not only does he leave the seams of the mold in place, but also the very distinction between what is a cast and what is a mold is not always clear since from object to object they might reverse places in the order of production. Nauman would also employ the same mold to make several different casts. By means of these procedures, Nauman draws attention to the causality of the casting method, that is its grounding in the indexical operation of the imprint or transfer.[51]

The semiotic structure of the index is anchored in a material contiguity, in a causal link in space and time between the signifier and its referent. This structure of the index becomes for Nauman a productive principle that takes on its own life: the casts might be multiplied indefinitely, but any cast might also become a mold and vice versa. And at this point the presence of the original object begins to recede more and more from view. It is this recession of things which phenomenology has most to fear from the index. Let me briefly elaborate on this point.

We have already considered in the previous chapter how phenomenological theory strives to ground thought on the projective structure of intentionality. According to the famous formula of Husserl, "all consciousness is consciousness of something," in other worlds, consciousness does not possess the world as an object, but it is perpetually directed at the world as a pre-objective whole.[52] In this manner, phenomenology attempts to ward off the classical model of the mental image that is based upon the indexical structure of the sign, since this would allow perception to

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[51] The locus classicus on the indexical sign as a structuring element in the field of post-minimalist practice is Krauss, "Notes on the Index."

[52] See Merleau-Ponty's introduction to the *Phenomenology of Perception.*

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become an object to itself causing an endless, internal perspective of viewers to appear: each perception requiring another perceiver to be perceived.

To be a phenomenologist means to remain vigilant against the subversive advances of the indexical sign. To Heidegger, for instance, a signal that *indicates* direction, such as the blinking light of a car, always functions against the technical background of availability which it presupposes and to which it directs our attention. A sign, in other words, function, according to Heidegger, as a kind of tool:

> A sign is not a thing which stands to another thing in the relationship of indicating; it is rather an item of equipment which explicitly raises an equipmental whole into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the available announces itself[53]

A sign does not simply point to other objects occurrent in the same situation, but lights up the situation itself. "Nothing," Heidegger insists, "is to be gained by characterizing [signs] as relations," that is "signs always indicate primarily 'wherein' one lives."[54] The phenomenological sign, in short, forms both part of a referential system and it manifests this system as a whole; it reveals the habitus of subjects for whom the signal holds the same meaning, and it is contained by this totality. Or, we might just say that the phenomenological sign works like a light switch: by flipping it, one brings a room to light.[55] But the splendor of such a brilliant, unified world does not emerge from Nauman's indexical series.

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[53] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927], as cited in Dreyfus, *Being-in-Time*: 101.

[54] Ibid.: 102.

[55] Or, what about Cavell's suggestion that projected images are not indices? "'Shadows are two-dimensional, but they are cast by three-dimensional ovbjects—tracings of opacity, not gradations of it. This suggests that phenomenologically the idea of two-dimensionlaity is an idea of either transparency or outline. *Projected images are not shadows; rather, one might say, they are shades.*" [my emphasis]. Cavell, *The World Viewed*, ibid.: 233 n.13.

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The indexical structure of Nauman's casts, therefore, opposes the phenomenological reading of the work. But there is a second manner in which these objects can be called anti-phenomenological and this brings us back to the question of technique. This second strategy concerns a de-functionalized or de-instrumentalized mode of technique: a concept that will slowly move into view in the course of the ensuing discussion.

To return my example of the cast pieces: Nauman's repetitive methods of fabrication do not polarize space around the unitary gestalt of a body image. For the most part the cast objects are manufactured according to a serial method of addition or layering. Often a piece will consist of a recurrent module which is drawn from a part of the human body. In the process Nauman draws more attention to the additive quality of the 'joints' than to the organic coherency of the whole. Instead of a unified body image, Nauman provides us with an irrational repetition of body parts. The material itself, half transparent and half opaque, seems to exist somewhere between a state of inorganic crystallization and organic deliquescence. Furthermore, consider Nauman's method of applying paint to surfaces that are hidden from the viewer or his custom of mixing pigment in the resin so as to provide the pieces with an uneven coloring. The heterogeneous properties of these objects, then, challenge the synaesthetic sensibility of a Merleau-Ponty who perceives the "woolly blue" of a carpet all at once, before he might reflect on the abstract categories of "wool" and "blue."

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On second thought, therefore, Nauman's cast objects hardly project the wholeness of a perceptual world that phenomenology demands. They do not stand out as occurrent things, because they always seem ready to slide back into the state of formless matter, nor do they exist as available things which light up a situation. They appear on the rim of the instrumental, nearing the status of furniture or forming a kind of decor. Indeed, some sculptures were designed to double as a light fixture.[56] But as "sculpture in a room" they present confusing "pictures," to recall the title of Nauman's brochure. They do not "magically [bring] into view a host of signs which guide action as notices in a museum guide the visitor."[57]

The reason for this state of affairs is largely the result of Nauman's technique. Or should I say his lack thereof? Nauman's avoidance of any display of skill, his negation of technical competence, his refusal to provide his works with the appearance of a finish, all these features have become a commonplace of the literature on his early work. This has led at times to a greater emphasis being placed on the so-called conceptual nature of his work, particularly in the context of his drawings. Nauman uses sketches to develop his ideas for art projects, not all of which have been executed.[58] The drawings function either as a rapid notation of ideas, whose practical application is not readily discernible, or as a kind of instructional diagram providing

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[56] For instance, "Untitled" (cat. 29) of 1965.

[57] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 161.

[58] Lucy Lippard has reffered to Nauman's "careless" surfaces and the "toughness of lost, left-over function." See Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction": 108.

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measurements for the construction of an object or installation.[59] The Duchampian lineage of this kind of work, which runs by way of Jasper Johns, has been fully explored elsewhere.[60] In passing, we might appreciate the "anaesthetic" attitude towards objects that Nauman shared with Duchamp by citing the former's observation that the cast objects were "trying to make a less important thing to look at."[61] Nevertheless any parallel to the strategy of the ready-made ceases to hold beyond this point.

Nauman's conceptual model of drawing falls back on the established traditions of either the more intuitive 'conceit' or the worked up 'cartoon' (not to mention other traditions, such as the architectural ground plan). In this sense, the drawings do not completely break with the past and its techniques. Nauman seems to encourage the contemplation of his drawings as formal objects in their own right by exhibiting them as independently framed works. However, the manner in which he employs the medium of drawing is inherently ambivalent, since the non-aesthetic categories of "notation" or "blueprint" remain equally applicable to these works. But, more significantly, Nauman professes that he guards against allowing the act of drawing to become a pleasurable pursuit as such:

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[59] Coosje van Brugggen remarks that only from 1969 onwards did it become customary for Nauman to add instructions to his drawings. At this time his work was no longer mainly executed in the studio by himself, but increasingly took the form of installations on site constructed by others using his drawings as a guide. See van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 106.

[60] See Fidel A. Danieli, "The Art of Bruce Nauman," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967): 15-19, and Robert Pincus-Witten, "Bruce Nauman: Another Kind of Reasoning." Pincus-Witten makes a direct relationship between Nauman's frequent use of punning in his titles and Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* of 1926.

[61] Bruce Nauman, [Statement], *American Sculpture of the Sixties* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967).

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> When I start thinking about just formal things...that's when there's no point to the drawing. That's when I throw it away. If a drawing works it explains the idea somehow. Sometimes I'm still drawing, and I'm still excited about drawing, but there is no idea left. That's when I get into trouble. [62]

One of the drawings even proposes the construction of a handicap-engendering device, namely the "Brown Crayon Box", which was meant to severely constrict the movements of his hand while drawing [fig. 38]. The contraption would introduce an element of awkwardness, if not frustration, into the activity of drawing which would thwart the easy movement of the crayon across the paper surface.

For Merleau-Ponty there can exist no differentiation between intention, gesture, and perception: "there is not a perception followed by a movement, for both form a system which varies as a whole." In the process of making a habitual gesture, he asserts, the subject plunges into the action; in directing the hand to its final position, the full trajectory of the hand's motion is already contained within its initial position. One does not consciously formulate and send a command to one's body, plotting the trajectory of the arm as a "mechanism of muscles and bones, as a contrivance for bending and stretching, as an articulated object" along a linked series of individual points in determinate space. But this is exactly what the "Brown Crayon Box" will enforce. The hand is estranged from our intentions; it becomes a dysfunctional mechanism as the mind struggles to keep the hand on its proper path.

The box illustrates Nauman's continuous interest in deliberately hampering the habitual behavior of the human body, to resist those bodily functions or techniques, to

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[62] Ibid.: 106.

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use the term of Marcel Mauss, which we have learned to master over time by means of the repetitions of daily experience. By way of an intermediate conclusion it can be stated, then, that Nauman's artistic strategy aims to cause a breakdown of the body's technical facility at more than one level of existence. But to what purpose?

Nauman's negation of technique takes aim at a complex of factors and is achieved by various means. Clearly, the level of technics as such is not erased in Nauman's work – the artist remains a *homo faber* – rather it is a question of the artist extracting himself from an acquired habit. What, for instance, determines a body technique according to Mauss? It is an action which is both *effective* and *traditional*: "there is no technique and no transmission in the absence of tradition."[63] To deliberately foil the routine behavior of the body is a strategy that attempts to sever experience from its adopted social roles and shared customs and to return to a state of 'primitivism' where the natural environment can be encountered as a resistance, not as already appropriated by one's set of skills: "it had to do with doing things that you don't particularly want to do, with putting yourself in unfamiliar situations, following resistances to find out why you're resisting, like therapy."[64] It is likely, therefore, that at this time Nauman considered his work to fulfill a reparative function for the self. A self that clearly was felt to live under a threat of objectification, of being "devoured" by the historicity of existence. The exact nature of this historical reality is left largely

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[63] Mauss, "Body Techniques": 104.

[64] van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 226. One of Nauman's favorite readings during the sixties was Frederick Perl's *Gestalt Therapy* which advised how by making everyday situations deliberately strange for oneself a greater consciousness of one's body and personality might be attained. In an interview with Lorraine Sciarra he claims he only read it after shooting the *Studio Films* but immediately

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undeclared, except as far as it concerns his direct artistic ancestry.[65] But it is not difficult to surmise its outlines and they will loom even larger once the camera enters his studio.

Exhibiting Modernism

Nauman participates in a critique of the normative values of late modernism which was represented by the writings of, among others, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried and the work of the artists they championed. This counter-tradition to which Nauman belongs and which harkens back to the example Marcel Duchamp, was already under way with Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and continued through minimalism and pop art into the various post-minimalisms of process art, conceptual art and land art. It is a story that has been told many times over: let me rehearse its main themes insofar as they will aid in sketching a historical context for the studio practice of Nauman.[66]

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recognized its relevance to his own undertaking. Lorraine Sciarra, unpublished interview, Pomona College, Claremont, Cal. (January 1972).

[65] Nauman has frequently admitted his admiration for de Kooning, Jasper Johns and, particularly, Frank Stella, who, of course, went furthest in whittling painting technique down to an almost zero degree in his "black paintings" of 1959. The direction of his later work and its reclamation for Modernism by Michael Fried is naturally a different story and one not appreciated by Nauman.

[66] This story is not accepted as a valid one by all post-minimalists. Graham, for instance, has insisted that the rediscovery of the functionalist heritage of Constructivsim was far more momentous than any return to the Duchampian ready-made during the sixties. Such a diminuation of the critical stature of Duchamp is not simply a symptom of the anxiety of influence, but must be viewed in the context of the theoretical monopoly that Joseph Kosuth's conceptualism attempted to exert on the Duchampian legacy.

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By withdrawing into the purity of its own medium, modernist painting, as Greenberg has it, completed a process of self-alienation that was initiated in the mid-nineteenth century. Self-alienation is without doubt the *sine qua non* of modernism, its birth cradle. The estrangement of art from its social ends was necessary in order for the self to regain his 'conviction' in the world, albeit a world now tightly constricted by the painting's frame. Michael Fried, for instance, makes no amends for the fact that the birth of modernism begins with the violent excision of the artist from the womb of society. He credits the nineteenth century for realizing "the alienation of the artist from the general preoccupations of the culture in which he is embedded."[67] The process was undoubtedly painful, a psychological act of self-mutilation that severed the organic connection of the artist to the social order and all its "concerns, aims, and ideals." But this cultural environment was swiftly losing its semblance of naturalness due to the invasion of the reifying forces of instrumentality. And the artist would soon follow in the footsteps of the bourgeois who sought refuge in his private parlor, by withdrawing into the inner sanctum of the studio interior.

According to a classical Marxist analysis of industrial society, one that, for instance, Greenberg adhered to in his early writings for the *Partisan Review*, the introduction of the capitalist system divided culture into two halves, one the product of modernity, of the present, that is, while the other half formed a residue of the past. The modern subject has access to two different realms of experience: either the mindless

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[67] Michael Fried, *Three American Painters*: 217.

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distractions of mass culture or the seriousness of genuine culture.[68] Yet, as Greenberg argues in "The Plight of Our Culture," the binary opposition of high versus low is itself subject to another form of doubling, namely work versus leisure.[69] What has become 'high' culture was originally the single, lived domain of the leisure class, the natural horizon of those happy few who were exempt from toil. Genuine culture, then, was more than just a canonical set of texts and objects; it was more the result of social breeding than knowledge acquisition and it was more a naturalized style of living than the imitation of a behavioral role. We might say that pre-industrial culture was both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic basis of the leisure class. That indefinable thing called taste, for instance, was not obtained merely through the study of works of art, but through one's immersion in a cultural milieu from a very early age onwards. The faculty of aesthetic judgment, therefore, contains both a reflective and an ingrained, or unconscious component.[70] In other words, in exercising taste a subject displayed his or her manner of inhabiting the world, similar to the phenomenological concepts of

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[68] The obvious problems with this model are not my present concern, although I would like to remind the reader of the famous adage by Adorno which describes the conflicted state of modern culture as existing of the two "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up." This comment is penned by Adorno in 1936 in a letter addressed to Walter Benjamin. See R. Taylor, ed., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1977): 123.

[69] Greenberg, "The Plight of our Culture," *Commentary* (June and July 1953), as reprinted in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993): 122-152. In this text, Greenberg strikes an uneasy balance between a Marxist understanding of the sub-structural, economic causes of changes in the cultural super-structure and his continuing allegiance to a notion of artistic autonomy. The former premiss will cause him much embarrasment when he is forced to acknowledge the untenable position of the avant-garde in the present, while the latter will remain the source of many misgivings directed at the so-called "ideologues of tradition". In fact, it was the writing of one such traditionalist, namely T.S. Eliot, that prompted Greenberg to compose "The Plight of Our Culture."

[70] "[High culture] being among other things, the expression of unconscious taste and habit, of assumptions that never get stated, of a way of life and an ingrained sense of proprtion, it has as a rule to

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style and *habitus*. Having taste, then, means being truly at home in the world, rather then moving amongst the cardboard scenery of a perhaps admired, but no longer truly felt culture.

This habitus, Greenberg argues, can no longer be fully occupied by the modern subject. It is impossible to truly inhabit the genuine space of culture; at best one might gain a vicarious experience of its former fullness through the somewhat distanced appreciation of a cultural tradition. In modernity the aesthete becomes a tourist among the mass-produced props of his cultural heritage.[71] To exit this end game, Greenberg chooses in this text a different route than that of such later texts as "Modernist Painting", which solidified his position on the autonomy of painting as the final remedy against the encroachments of mass culture. For he is willing to consider the possibility that the opposition of work and leisure might as yet be resolved within one homogenous space wherein culture, yet again, might be experienced as the locus of a true self-realization but now shared by all and not just the privileged few. [72] This

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begin being acquired during childhood, from the immediate and the everyday just as much from books and works of art." Ibid.: 134.

[71] "He feels nostalgia for what he imagines the past to have been, and reads historical novels, but in the spirit of a tourist who enjoys the scenes he visits because of their lack of resemblance to those he has come from and will return to, A sense of continuity with the past, a continuity at least of truth, of enduring relevance, belongs to a genuine culture almost by definition, but that is precisely what the middlebrow does not acquire (the fault is not entirely his own)" (ibid.: 136). The alternative possibility is that high culture survives not in the form of leisurely recreation, but, as a type of work, that is, "as a set of special disciplines practiced during working hours by professionals." However, the two halves of culture again do not meet up and its spiritual depth of vision slips out of focus: "And then high culture, as a department of industrial work—that is, as a thing worked at but not flowing from work—will impose the same strain as every other kind of industrial work, and the mandarins who work at it will have to devote their leisure to recuperation the way the rest of us do" (ibid.: 151).

[72] By conceiving leisurely, purposeless activity as the *realization* of the highest form of life, Greenberg assumes that work had a negative association before the Industrial Revolution. As a result of the modern work ethic of efficiency, the Puritanism of industrialism, the positive-negative valuation of work and leisure becomes transcoded: work becomes productivity pure and simple, leisure is emptied of

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redemption of modernity, again, is not to be expected from the democratization of high culture: the increasing affluence of the population and the demographic trend of upward mobility might establish a more widespread demand for access and participation in the cultural tradition, yet to accommodate this rising demand of the middle class its contents must be leveled and divested of their more authentic qualities. But at least, Greenberg proposes, the tradition will not become totally moribund and it might linger on within the typically nineteenth-century infrastructure of the bourgeois public sphere, namely "the printed word, the concert, lecture, museum, etc."[73] This in contrast to "that complete debauching" of culture under the force of advertising interests which dominates the domain of the new technological media, such as the movies, radio, and television.[74]

From cinema, in other words, little can be expected except the efficient adaptation of the "processing" and "packaging" methods of industry within the cultural sphere, furthering the social process of standardization. Nor, as Greenberg rather mournfully remarks, can culture expect much relief through the continuing activities of the avant-garde. Hand-in-hand with the progressive commodification of high culture, the tactics of resistance and negation employed by the avant-garde become further undermined. The heroic struggle of this "cadre" which, in Greenberg's words, "has led the fight for aesthetic truth, high standards, continuity with tradition,

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any content beyond that of a passive distraction from one's duties. Leisure breeds guilt, not taste. Yet, what Greenberg disallows, despite his reliance on Marxism, is the anthropological position of the young Marx that situates the *self-realization* of man exactly in his productive activity.

[73] Greenberg, "The Plight of Our Culture": 137.

[74] Ibid.: 137.

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and against the utilitarian ethos during the past century," no longer serves a real purpose in an industrial culture that is becoming more homogenous by the minute.[75] The battle of the avant-garde is in danger of becoming a mere skirmish with ghosts.

The historical paradox of modernist painting, nonetheless, was that it could not claim its autonomous status without incorporating a contradiction that contained the seeds of its own undoing. For one, its projection of a disembodied realm of sheer opticality merely mirrors the psychotechnical segmentation and disciplining of the human sensorium that accompanies the industrial division of labor.[76] Furthermore, the suppressed ground of all subjective judgment of painting is, of course, the public stage of exhibition. The modernist understands full well that this is the price one has to pay for the emancipation of painting from its former service to those social powers which might interfere with the free play of the imaginative faculty. Only the self-alienation of the artist allowed modernism to pursue its inner purpose of self-criticism, releasing painting from its former role as the handmaiden of worldly ambitions. Yet, in its removal from "religious and political and class service; from altars and halls and walls," to quote Stanley Cavell, it has also become exposed to an appalling "nakedness" of exhibition.[77]

To stay its course, modernism could only blind itself to this obscenity charge, to its self-exposure to the gaze of the masses, by a veiled act of framing. To maintain

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[75] For instance: "To speak now of modernism as the activity of an avant-garde is as empty as it is in thinking about the modern politics or war, and as comforting: it implies a conflict between a coherent culture and a declared and massed enemy; when in fact the case is more like an effort, along blocked paths and hysterical turnings, to hang on to a thread that leads from a lost center to a world lost." Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 110.

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its cognitive superiority in the field of the visual – "I know what I see" – and hold the objectifying force of the public spectacle at bay, modernism reduces painting to the positive dimensions of its material support and then allows it to expand within the boundless imaginary of an "ambient" space.[78] The absorptive gaze, in other words, seizes hold of a material surface, such as the palpable blue field of Barnett Newman's *Cathedra* and derealizes it.[79] The factual is surpassed towards an immediacy of being which is devoid of the distancing effects of an objectified and objectifying reality. Clearly the literal boundaries of the pictorial field (e.g. *Cathedra*'s stretcher) indicate two particular forms of distance: the separation of painting from the realm of everyday, useful objects (i.e. its *nearness* is not that of availability) and the ideal position of the viewer vis-à-vis the painting (i.e. neither so close that only the material texture of the surface remains nor so far that the painting becomes engulfed by its environment). The world of the painting, *comes to an end* at its boundaries; a boundary, therefore, that demarcates simultaneously a literal and an imaginary limit. The area beyond the frame is blotted out by the gaze of the modernist perceiver; it is displaced to the periphery of the viewer's vision. What is outside the frame forms an

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[76] For more on this subject see Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

[77] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 121.

[78] The reference to Lacan's mirror stage (and its mode of recognition that rests on the exclusion of an other's gaze, namely the mother's) is intended. Yet, we might speak of a regressive course of events since the modernist viewer reverts from an acknowledgement of a bounded, positive shape, i.e. the framed canvas, as reflective of his own bodily identity, to his absorption within the illimited space of opticality where the body is exactly *nowhere*. Greenberg employs the term "ambient" to register the transparency of modernist spatiality in his essay "The New Sculpture" of 1958. Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961): 139-145. I shall take this topic up again in the section on Graham.

[79] "For example, as we gaze at the blue field in *Cathedra* we feel it begin to give way, to yield – palpably, as it were – to the probings of the eye; we have the sensation of entering a medium with a

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indistinct and neutral background to the painting, consisting of the blank expanse of gallery walls. Indeed, the pleasure of the modernist viewer relies on his or her prior success at repressing all awareness of the contiguity of the framed object with its surroundings.

We might venture that the empty studio of Nauman in its absolute negation of painting has adopted the naked state of exhibition. However, exhibition requires an audience. So who is the audience in the empty studio? In writing about minimalism Fried has stated that its theatrical nature demands an audience of a special kind: both a mass audience that lacks qualitative judgment since it is "something everyone can understand" and a singular audience since the Minimalist object addresses itself to the beholder alone.[80] We might suspect therefore that the answer to our question will develop along the following lines: Nauman theatricalizes his own existence before the (mass) audience of the camera lens. To paraphrase Fried, once Nauman installs the camera within the studio it will never stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him.

Since Nauman fails to heed the siren song of modernism and to clear a path towards a renewed *presentness* of the world, he remains beached on the reef of modernism, stranded before the impassive, blank wall of objecthood. However, his disillusionment with the example of Frank Stella was too great to proceed otherwise. Nauman faults Stella for the retrenchment of his practice after the initial gesture of

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certain specific density, a medium that offers an almost measurable degree of resistance to eyesight itself..." Fried, *Three American Painters*: 232.

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transgression represented by the *Black Paintings* of 1959. The deductive structures and obdurate surfaces of these *Black Paintings* seemed to spell the end of the modernist tradition; however, to Nauman's chagrin Stella shied away from fulfilling the prophecy of these early works. Rather, his subsequent career forms an attempt to further lengthen the life of modernist painting which Fried painstakingly demonstrates in the above-mentioned essay.[81] Nauman cannot share the modernist's faith in the continuing resourcefulness of painting to re-establish that infinitely acute moment of conviction so eloquently described by Fried. After all, this moment of plenitude can exist only thanks to a disavowal or 'blocking out' of the literal space of exhibition. Isolated from the realm of instrumentality by the viewer's attentive gaze, the object of reflection assumes that 'occurrent' consistency of being which is summarily indicated by the "woolly blue" of Merleau-Ponty's carpet or the "palpable blue" of Newman's *Cathedra*. Hence, in phenomenological terms, Nauman has cut off this mode of perceptual possession of one's object.

Yet, the alternate mode of absorption, namely the subject's involvement in the shared space of availability, remains just as inaccessible to Nauman in the empty

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[80] Michael Fried is referring to a statement made by Tony Smith. See Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 159

[81] The dilemma of Frank Stella's work is couched by Nauman in terms of a split between a specific (i.e. medium-based) and a generic notion of art: "I think where I finally ran into trouble was at Frank Stella, someone a little ahead of me in time. I was very interested in his early paintings, because I saw incredible possibilities in the work of how to proceed as an artist, but then it became clear that he was just going to be a painter. And I was interested in what art can be, not just what painting can be. I don't think he has taken that on at all." Nauman cited in van Bruggen, op. cit.: 8. For more on the shift from the specific to the generic in sixties art and its reliance on the Duchampian lineage of the ready-made, see Thierry de Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964*, edited by Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990): 244-310.

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studio. As a result the former signal of the studio's privacy, its silence, threatens to become oppressive; the situation of isolation turns upon itself and takes on a defamiliarizing effect: "All that's there is you, and you have to deal with that." Nauman is, so to speak, exposed to himself in the emptiness of the studio. He has become, as it were, his own audience. And seated within this empty space, boredom can never be far off. In fact, a feeling of boredom is the most common response to the films and videos of Nauman with their seemingly endless repetition of similar gestures or movements.

Of course, a long lineage of formalist critics had inveighed against this state of affairs since the beginning of the century. Reduced to the mere condition of exhibition, displayed before a mass audience, artistic experience will be cut to the size of a common standard, if not subjected to the withering influence of mass reproduction. The contemplative attitude will then necessarily be subverted by mere "stares of amusement or boredom replacing all acceptance and real rejection."[82] Was it not Horkheimer and Adorno, as well, who observed that the debased pleasures of mass entertainment are but the after-image of the tedious regularity of the work place? The mechanisms driving the culture industry cause the lure of satisfaction to revert back without avail to a sensation of numbing sameness.[83]

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[82] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 120.

[83] Take, for instance, the following passage from Adorno's and Horkheimer's essay on "The Culture Industry": "Amusement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work...mechanization has such power over a man's leisure and happiness, and so profoundly determines the manufacture of amusement goods, that his experiences are inevitably afterimages of the work process itself...Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association." Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972): 137.

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The consumer's enforced passivity is what enforces this experience of tedium. Nauman's films from the sixties, on the other hand, cause the stillness of the studio (and the gallery) to be disrupted by brief spasms of activity. At the same time, this activity is consistently structured according to a non-narrative logic of repetition. This circumstance seems to leave us with two choices: either corporeal repetition serves the projection of the lived space of the *habitus* or it times its movements to the exact revolutions of a machine such as the film camera.[84] In other words, the choice is inhabitation or instrumentalization. Both models have been applied to Nauman.[85] But between the two lies a third possibility namely that of the de-instrumentalized or *de-functionalized*: "I wanted to find out what I would look at in a strange situation, and I decided that with a film and camera I could do that."[86] The moment of defamiliarization is crucial to the option of de-functionalization since it indicates a failure within the instrumental network of assignments: a tool that breaks down shows up in its stubborn otherness.

This third possibility will be fully developed in the later video installations of Nauman in which the spectator becomes the performer [fig. 34].[87] While they do not form the immediate topic of my discussion, they do reflect on his earlier film practice. One might gain an appreciation of Nauman's general procedure of the de-

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[84] "That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film." Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*: 175.

[85] Marcia Tucker and Coosje van Bruggen both draw a comparison between the films and the *Animal Locomotion* studies of Eadweard Muybridge. See Tucker's catalogue essay in *Bruce Nauman: Work from 1965 to 1972* and van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*.

[86] van Bruggen, *Bruce Nauman*: 225.

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functionalized from his comparison of the video pieces to the disorientating experience of climbing stairs in darkness:

> It had to do with going up the stairs in the dark, when you think there is one more step and you take the step, but you are already at the top...It seems that you always have that jolt and it really throws you off. I think that when these pieces work they do that too. Something happens that you didn't expect and it happens every time. You know why, and what's going on but you just keep doing the same thing.[88]

One might offset this experience with Merleau-Ponty's comparison of the space of habituality to the manner in which a person can faultlessly navigate a familiar room in the dark.

Nauman's video installations depart from the primary condition of exhibition. To arrive at the bareness of this condition, Nauman had to implement a procedure of erasure. This is the same procedure that I have been referring to throughout as the empty studio and it is a similar procedure of erasure that Buchloh has characterized as the conceptualist strategy par excellence.

> Paradoxically, then, it would appear that Conceptual Art truly became the most significant paradigmatic change of postwar artistic production at the very moment it mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality in an effort to place its auto-critical investigations at the service of liquidating the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience. In that process it succeeded in purging itself entirely of imaginary and bodily experience, of physical

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[87] See, for instance, the description of Bruce Nauman's *Corridor Installation (Nick Wilder Installation)* of 1970 in *Bruce Nauman: Catalogue Raisonne*: 241.

[88] Willoughby Sharp, "Nauman Interview" 30. Not even the visibility of the technical apparatus prevented this decentering effect: "When you realized that you were on the screen, being in the corridor was like stepping off a cliff or down into a hole...You knew what had happened because you could see all of the equipment and what was going on, yet you had the same experience every time you walked in. There was no way to avoid having it" (ibid.: 30). For a recent discussion of the video installations see Parveen Adams, "Bruce Nauman and the Object of Anxiety," *October* 83 (Winter 1998): 97-114.

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> substance and the space of memory, to the same extent that it effaced all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill.[89]

Nauman is involved in the same effacement of "all residues of representation and style, of individuality and skill." And with the introduction of the camera into his studio, Nauman begins to eliminate physical substance as well, although this step will never be completed. This is significant, for the paradox of the conceptualist strategy of erasure is that taken to its extreme it threatens to succumb to the "operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality." The repetitions of the *habitus* are clearly susceptible to being co-opted by this instrumentality. Indeed, the *habitus* might be said to present the after-image of the late capitalist reality, just as Walter Benjamin once described the Bergsonian *durée* as the after-image of the degradation of experience in industrial society.[90]

Indeed, where and when does the experience of the *habitus* convert from the private space of occurrentness to the public space of availability? And to what degree is the latter but another term for the instrumentalized? One such moment and place is highlighted by Andy Warhol's deceptively simple-minded response to the question 'why did you start painting soup cans?' The reason, he stated, was that he used to have the same lunch every day for twenty years.[91] Habituality is equated with the commodity series – "the same thing over and over again" – however not even Warhol

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[89] Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969": 142-43.

[90] Walter Benjamin: "[Bergson in *Matter and Memory*] thus manages above all to stay clear of that experience from which his own philosophy evolved, or, rather in reaction to which it arose. It was the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism. In shutting out this experience the eye perceives an experience of a complementary nature in the form of its spontaneous afterimage, as it were." Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire": 157.

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perfected his desired approximation to a machine, for while life maintains the machine, existence as a machine would be equivalent to death. Nauman's work, however, wavers on this threshold: it oscillates between the terms of the intentional and the indexical, the habitual and the de-functionalized.

The Studio as Spectacle

It is time that we return to Nauman's studio. Alone in his studio, space and the things it contains appear to have assumed an extraordinary blankness for the artist. Not activated or polarized as the 'equipment-whole' of Degas' studio, the interior can take on the non-temporal aspect of the occurrent as 'that which abides.' We have seen that de-realization forms the first step towards the self's transcendence of the world, yet in Nauman's studio the de-temporalized 'occurrences' are not recuperated and made translucent within the idealist framework of presentness that is shared by the phenomenologist and the modernist alike. That Nauman in 1966 is indeed attempting to extract himself from the grip of history, from the involuntary repetitions of modernism, becomes clear from statements such as the following:

> I was trying to figure out how you make something without having to invent, or pretend to invent, the formal system - circles, squares and spirals. And then also go into the parts of the body, going back to those templates and things like that – that was the old standard drawing proportional system, where the head was supposed to be one seventh of

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[91] G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters" [Part II], *Art News* (February 1964).

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> the body. And so I just divided the body into the same parts and made those templates, using these devices to kind of make reasons.[92]

In other words, he arrests the linear movement of history, the continuous current of formal invention, in the synchronic image of art history as a warehouse filled with ready-made molds. The reasons he mentions do not make things any more transparent to perception than does the self-criticism of modernist painting in its manipulation of figure-ground relationships. Furthermore, it is Nauman's body itself that has become reified as a kind of ready made template, rather than forming the ontological ground of a being situated within the world.

A further twist to this perverse logic is given in *Platform made up of the space between two rectilinear boxes on the floor* [fig. 39] and *A cast of the space under my chair*, two works from 1966 [fig. 40].[93] In casting a negative, objectless space these imprints commit what we might call an act of phenomenological absurdity. On the one hand, the negative imprint operates as a kind of measuring device, but, on the other hand, it creates a measurement without measure. We can appreciate this ambivalence when we realize that the embodied viewer of phenomenology does not reduce the relationship between things to one constant, rational principle, that is to an invariable measure, in order to orient himself and achieve an awareness of distance. When I am sensing depth, Merleau-Ponty explains, I do not see the space that lies *in between* things, because this would cause my world to appear disjointed: "I can (...) see an object insofar as objects form a system or a world, and insofar as each one treats the

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[92] Dieter Koepplin, "Reasoned Drawings": 35, n.10.

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others around it as spectators of its hidden aspects which guarantee the permanence of those aspects by their presence."[94] In this habitus, therefore, the perspective of the other is but a stand-in for the viewpoint of the self; there is no transcendence of the world in itself, no hidden aspects that, at least potentially, cannot be revealed to the viewer. This is not a space that is seen from *nowhere* – such is the topographical illusion of geometry – but from *everywhere*.

In contrast to this organized system of space, to this permanent ground of visuality, the *Platform* by Nauman presents us with a shard of reified space: the actual distance between two things. But what does it measure? The distance between the two boxes is wholly accidental and insignificant, which is quite the opposite from the sense of distance that holds between a subject and the subject's tools within the meaningful horizon of the 'equipment-whole.' Furthermore the distance has been lifted out of its original context and placed against a foreign background. The *Platform*, itself a pedestal or base with nothing to support, represents 'occurrence' as an absence. In a kind of perversion or misdirection of the phenomenological gaze, it is the frame surrounding things, objectless space, that has taken on the blankness of thinghood; a lived space that literally has become impenetrable. Before the 'platform' we might feel like the schizophrenic patient who no longer is able to align the inner

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[93] If the question were that of artistic precedent, then we do not need to look further than Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns. Nauman himself has repeatedly acknowledged Johns as a precursor for his cast objects, while confessing his scant knowledge of Duchamp at the time.

[94] Merleau-Ponty as cited by Rosalind Krauss in "Richard Serra/Sculpture": 32. The materialization of the 'in-between' will be a favourite strategy of many post-minimalists, besides Bruce Nauman. I have already discussed the example of Robert Barry . A recent discussion of this phenomenon in Mel Bochner can be found in Yve-Alain Bois, "The Measurement Pieces: From Index to Implex", in *Mel Bochner: Thought Made Visible*: 167-77.

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and outer horizon, to establish a balance between the projective space of intentionality and the external space of objectivity. This patient finds himself alone and forlorn in an empty space, 'he complains that all he can see is the space between things, and that this space is empty.'[95] The cast fragment of negative space, in short, presents us with a *phenomenological project in ruins.*

It is but a short step from the model of the imprint to taking the daily routines of studio life as one's filmic subject; to record, in other words, the repetitions of the *habitus*. The end of object making was announced by the quotidian series of *Flour Arrangements*: "I did those to see what would happen in an unfamiliar situation. I took everything out of my studio so that *Flour Arrangements* became an activity which I could do every day, and it was all I would allow myself to do for about a month."[96] Each day he would take a photograph of the result and at the end of the month he selected seven images which he cropped in order to create a "beautiful aesthetic photograph." Although the irony of this procedure is apparent, he would be prompted to further empty his work of formal qualities in *Composite Photo of Two Messes on the Studio Floor* of 1967 which merely mapped the refuse on the floor as he found it [fig. 41]. Again, Nauman seems to be overlaying the position of the artist with that of Valéry in his estranged yet mesmerized glance into the studio environment where 'dust and sunlight mingle gaily."[97]

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[95] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception.*: 282

[96] Sharp, "Nauman Interview": 24.

[97] The relevance of Marcel Duchamp's and Man Ray's photograph *Dust Breeding* to Nauman's own practice is obvious. It will be remembered that Duchamp let the dust settle on his

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The method displayed in *Composite Photo* of simply photographing studio "occurrences" led up to the *Studio Films* shot by Nauman during the winter of 1967-68. Nauman's obsessive repetition of mundane tasks in these films, as I started out to say, mimic on one level the daily iterations of the subject who incorporates cultural space within his private habitus (public and private, self and other, not being at odds according to this phenomenological system). Yet in thwarting the attentive stare of the camera, Nauman also acknowledges that the introduction of this new instrument, the camera, has punctured the private shell of the studio. Even though there was no one actually present behind the camera, Nauman's gestures are performed to another's gaze, their significance never completely his own.[98] He is objectified before the lens, his movements imprinted on film. On the other hand, withdrawing behind the scenes into the off-screen space, he resists the camera's grip on his habitus; that is, its tendency to make it other.[99]

In other ways, as well, Nauman both accedes to and negates the specularization of his private studio world and in doing so the *Studio Films* present the paradox of an

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Large Glass for a month before inviting Man Ray to take the photograph. While the film was being exposed in the camera, the two left the studio to have a meal outdoors.

[98] In fact the *Studio Films* were originally intended as performances, but Nauman had no audience. He was turned down by numerous museums, so he decided to film them instead. He has noted that while he knew many filmmaker in the Bay Area at the time he felt that these films were unique in the fact that they only recorded an activity. Other filmmakers were interested in making either narrative or abstract films.

[99] Already in 1965, Nauman had presented a performance at the University of California, Davis which shares a similar dialectic of individualization versus objectification: "I did a piece at Davis which involved standing with my back to the wall for about forty-five seconds or a minute, leaning out from the wall, then bending at the waist, squatting, sitting, and finally lying down. There were seven different positions in relation to the wall and floor. Then I did the whole sequence again standing away from the wall, facing the wall, the facing left and facing right. There were twenty-eight positions and the whole presentation lasted for about half an hour...(they were related to) the fibreglass pieces that

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homeless artist within an habitus no longer his own. A paradox, as I have argued, that is not merely a private trauma in the making, but due to a range of historical factors that Nauman's filmic performance forced into view. The naturalism of the studio (and gallery) space is revealed in all its historical artificiality in the process.

But we can also register a sense of hesitance on the part of the artist as to what the exact significance of his enterprise was. That is to say, a wavering of Nauman between the phenomenological option of authenticity and the literalist strategy of theatricality. Nauman had originally intended, for instance, to present the films as endless loops, thereby sublimating the finite nature of the exercise and masking the concrete, material circumstances of production:

> My idea at the time was that the film should have no beginning or end: one should be able to come in at any time and nothing would change. All the films were supposed to be like that, because they all dealt with ongoing activities...I would prefer that it went on forever.[100]

During the preceding year, in 1966, Nauman had already made a number of films in collaboration with other artists, such as William Allan and Robert Nelson.[101] Typical of these films was the choice of a task which would dictate if not predict the length of the film. For instance, *Fishing for Asian Carp* "began with a given process and continued until it was over," namely when the fish was caught. However, Nauman realized that this method did not avoid the trappings of narrative film.[102] And it was

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were inside and outside, in which two parts of the same mold were put together....I was using my body as a piece of material and manipulating it." Sharp, "Nauman Interview": 26.

[100] Nauman as cited in Sharp, "Bruce Nauman": 29.

[101] See the attached Filmography.

[102] "The first film I made, Fishing for Asian Carp, began when a given process started and continued until it was over. Then that became too much like making movies, which I wanted to avoid,

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the developmental structure of narrative time, the causal sequences of history, that Nauman all along had sought to negate through his (de-) naturing of the studio and by putting in play those (de-functionalized) repetitions of the 'occurrent' first represented by the cast objects and now by his filmed performances.

The repetitious nature of the filmed tasks clearly raises the specter of instrumentalized behavior, that is the historical context of industrial labor and its quantification of human experience.[103] The loop, on the other hand, appears as an attempt to remove the action onto the non-historical plane of a perpetual present.[104] Yet, then again the unmistakable signs of exhaustion, his faltering motions, internally cancel this very procedure of transcendence. In relation to *Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*, Nauman recalls:

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so I decided to record an on-going process and make a loop that could continue all day or all week." Sharp, "Nauman Interview": 26.

[103] Several artistic sources have been suggested in the literature for the technical procedures that Nauman employs in these films. They include the movies of Andy Warhol which he greatly admired and the context of so-called minimalist dance and music. The employment of task-like processes was initiated by the choreography of Merce Cunningham and Ann Halprin, who was an influential teacher living in San Francisco. Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti transported her teachings to New York where they gained influence among visual artists. Nauman knew the work of Cunningham, but claims he was first introduced to the ideas circulating among minimalist dancers in New York through Meredith Monk whom he met during the summer of 1968. Nauman also knew the 'drone' music of La Monte Young and Terry Riley who were active in San Francisco during the beginning of the sixties. During the summer of 1968 he met Steve Reich through the offices of William Wiley, whose studio Nauman used to shoot the *Studio Films*. He had also met Philip Glass in New York during the preceding winter.

Whatever the influence of these dancers and musicians might have been on Nauman, as Dan Graham has pointed out to me, it was the perception that Nauman's work fitted into this 'second' genealogy of Minimalist music and dance versus the 'first' genealogy of Minimalist art that caused its enthusiastic reception by several artists in New York such as Richard Serra, Dennis Oppenheim, Vito Acconci and Graham mimself. The most important, early showcases for Nauman in New York were his one-man exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (27 January - 17 February 1968) and the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* exhibition the following year. At Castelli Nauman showed the films *Thighing* and (possibly) *Playing the Violin*.

[104] Video would able Nauman to achieve his goal of a perfect loop: "video tape was really nice because it was a full hour, and that seemed to still imply you could get this same effect without having

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> At a certain point I had two balls going and I was running around all the time trying to catch them. Sometimes they would hit something on the floor or the ceiling and go off into the corner and hit together. Finally I lost track of them both. I picked up one of the balls and just threw it against the wall. I was really mad...There was a rhythm going and when I lost it that ended the film.[105]

Another example of Nauman's simultaneous submission and resistance to the disciplinary eye of the camera is provided by his violin playing. To Merleau-Ponty, the function of habitual actions, as I stated at the outset of the chapter, is to express our power to dilate our being-in-the-world, that is to reach beyond ourselves into the world and to inhabit space by incorporating objects as our instruments. A musician who plays an organ with which he or she is unfamiliar will, after a moment of adjustment, display a perfect harmony of intention and performance. In a telling synthesis of domestic and corporeal metaphors, the musician is said to "settle into the organ as one settles into a house." But Nauman chose the violin precisely because he lacked the technical facility to play it.[106] In other words, his method is one of de-familiarization: a fact that is humorously underlined by the asynchronous soundtrack of the film. The temporal delay of sound to image forms a perfect example of a technical malfunction in the Heideggerian sense, which resulted from Nauman's own ineptitude as an amateur filmmaker. It is essential, I would argue, that Nauman did not retroactively disguise the mishap but allowed it to persist.[107]

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to make a loop." Jan Butterfield, "Bruce Nauman: The Center of Yourself," *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 6 (february 1974): 54.

[105] Sharp, "Bruce Nauman": 28-29.

[106] Nauman was not inept as a musician. He studied classical guitar and piano and took composition courses while studying at the University of Wisconsin from 1960 to 1964.

[107] Since then, however, Nauman has transferred his films to video which he projects with the recorded sound of a projector running.

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After the *Studio Films* Nauman would continue to make several films until 1975, while also working in the medium of video. I will not follow this trajectory further as that would require the writing of another kind of history, such as that of the relation of film to installation art. For instance, Nauman's *Rotating Glass Walls* and *Spinning Spheres*, both of 1970, were formed by projections onto four walls, filling a room. These works participate in a wider trend towards film installation both in structural film circles (e.g. Paul Sharits) and among artists (e.g. Jan Dibbets or Dennis Oppenheim). The issue of installation will partially return in the discussion of Dan Graham, however the model of installation art is not this artist's primary reference. What I propose instead is to follow the dialectic between body and technique already introduced in Nauman's *Studio Films*. To this purpose I shall now turn to Richard Serra's *Hand and Process* series.

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3. Richard Serra: Grasping/Showing

> For Serra all in-forming, technological or otherwise, begins with the hand. – Dan Graham, "Subject Matter"

Hand and Process Series (1968)

At the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition Richard Serra exhibited his *Hand and Process* films for the first time.[108] The full set consists of four films, all shot in one take with a stationary camera on black and white, silent film and lasting between three to four minutes. The actions shown on these films are similar to the *Studio Films* in being task-oriented. Only one film, however, represents a repetitive gesture similar to that of Nauman, namely *Hand Catching Lead* [fig. 42] This movie presents Serra's extended hand trying to grasp a series of lead pieces as they fall from above. Unlike Nauman's films, however, the space in this film has been collapsed and cannot be identified as occupying any specific locale. Due to the similarity and difference of *Hand Catching Lead* to the *Studio Films*, most of the following discussion will concentrate on the former work.

Besides *Hand Catching Lead*, the series includes *Hand Lead Fulcrum* which shows Serra's horizontally extended arm acting as a fulcrum by holding a roll of lead

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[108] The *Hand and Process* Films are generally dated 1968, but their circumstances of production suggests early 1969 as more likely. There is also some confusion about Serra's early films

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in his hand [fig. 43]. As fatigue sets in the arm begins to shake and slowly descends towards the bottom of the frame. Once the lower frame is reached, the film comes to an end. *Hands Scraping* shows two pairs of hands (Serra's and Philip Glass's) clearing a pile of steel shavings off the floor [fig. 44]. And, finally, *Hands Tied* consists of a shot of Serra's hands tied together with rope [fig. 45]. He gradually manages to loosen the rope and free his hands. The last three films, we might say, follow a slightly more narrative structure than *Hand Catching Lead*, but even the latter reaches a kind of *dénouement* due to the hand being overcome by a state of sheer exhaustion.

The immediate impetus behind the *Hand and Process* films was Serra's dissatisfaction with a documentary that had been shot of the construction of his sculpture *One Ton Prop: House of Cards* [fig. 46]. The sculpture consists of four lead plates of five hundred pounds each that are propped against each other so that they provide support for each other at their upper corners. The result of this operation is a cubic structure standing in free space that is held together by the force of gravity alone. In order to erect the piece a concerted effort was needed by several persons to match their gestures of lifting and handling. And this moment of complete coordination of bodily movement continues to register in the precarious balance of the piece. This is no self-sufficient object which transcends time, but a set of material relations suspended within a temporalized force field. A presentation of "arrested motion" is the phrase Serra suggests:

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since they originally went without titles. Many "untitled" films of varying length show up on various

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> The perception of the work in its state of suspended animation, arrested motion, does not give one calculable truths like geometry, but a sense of presence, an isolated time. The apparent potential for disorder, for movement endows the structure with a quality outside of its physical or relational definition.[109]

And the arrested motion of the artist's past relation to the material carries over into the viewer's actual time-field. Time is, as it were, released again by the viewer's presence to *One Ton Prop: House of Cards*; that is, time has not come to an end in its making nor does the sculpture reproduce a completed sequence of events to the viewer.[110]

One Ton Prop: House of Cards was to be installed during the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition; preceding the opening Robert Fiore filmed footage of Serra and Philip Glass in the process of constructing the work. The documentary approach was in keeping with the format of the catalog for which Fiore had shot photographic sequences of the artists at work in the vein of Namuth's photographs depicting Jackson Pollock in the process of painting, which led in a quite logical manner to the filming of *Pollock Painting*. We know how the inauthenticity of that filmic portrait troubled Pollock, leading many biographers to see it as the precipitating cause of the subsequent downturn in his career. Obviously Serra's dislike of the documentary was not caused by the same anxiety as Pollock had about the mediation of his subjectivity by the camera. For an artist who has expressed his captivation by Nauman's *Studio*

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exhibition lists around 1969-70 and it has proven difficult to exactly identify each film separately.

[109] Richard Serra, "Play it Again, Sam,"*Arts Magazine* (February 1970): 25.

[110] Compare Dan Graham on Serra's prop pieces: "So, if there is a time, it is hidden in the object itself and it allows itself to reveal itself as you try to deal with the false possibility of reducing it to sequences..." Graham as cited in Richard Serra, "Statements,"*Artforum*, 10, no. 1 (September 1971): 64. The quote is drawn from Graham's text "Subject Matter." And also Rosalind Krauss: "...Serra's aim is to defeat the very idea of this idealism or this timelessness, and to make the sculpture visibly dependent on each passing moment for its very experience...In place of the cube as an idea—

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Films, shown the year before at Castelli, that would surely not be the problem. Serra was not concerned about the encroachment of publicity on the private domain of the studio, for his work was predicated on the anteriority of the public domain to private meaning. If *One Ton Prop* 'expresses' anything at all, then it is, in the words of Rosalind Krauss, that:

> ...we are the sum of our visible gestures. We are as available to others as to ourselves. Our gestures are themselves formed by the public world, by its conventions, its language, the repertory of its emotions, from which we learn our own.[111]

Thus *One Ton Prop* brings the shared realm of availability into view, it signals an equipmental-whole to which it belongs and from which it derives meaning. And this milieu of inhabitation is no longer that of the studio, which still caused a conflict in Nauman's films.

Hence, Serra's problem differs slightly from even that of Nauman. The function of the 'tool', i.e. the 'hand' or the 'camera', must be made explicit in the work. Technology should not disappear behind the work. And, in fact, to speak of technology in the case of Serra reveals a new contradiction, for the notion of technology embedded in his work is both pre-industrial and industrial (never *post*-industrial). That is, he considers technique mostly in the phenomenological sense as a bodily technique, an extension of the body's motor system, and thus part of an artisanal system of relations. And, at the same time, he clearly is interested in working with industrial materials and modes of production (and, increasingly, on an industrial

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determined a prioiri—he substitutes the cube as an existent—creating itself in time." Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977): 269.

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scale as well); however, some degree of *manipulation* is always required. I shall need to expand on these preliminary comments, however I have already established that an instrumental or documentary use of the camera did not form an option for Serra:

> The potential of the camera as an active device (*tool*), is being considered not only for its perceptual possibilities, but as an element in the structure. Means and ends are being made explicit.[112]

Serra's conception of the camera as an *active device* produces a further complication within the discursive field of the sixties, which is marked by its continuous questioning of the relation between art and technology. In particular, Serra's comment can be understood to harken back to my earlier discussions of the notion of automatism in the work of Cavell and Fried and I shall now proceed to compare these dichotomous terms of photographic 'automatism' and photographic 'activity.'

"A succession of automatic world projections"—that is Stanley Cavell's essential definition of the cinematic medium.[113] Cavell and Fried, as I have previously demonstrated, rationalized the phenomenological conditions of cinema in such a fashion that the spectator was virtually compelled to acknowledge the self-sufficiency of the screened image *irrespective of what was actually being shown*. This autonomy of the filmic image acquires the status of an absolute principle in Cavell's account, which seeks to neutralize even Jean-Luc Godard's cinematic tactics of defamiliarization as a mere exception that strengthens the rule. The viewer's conviction by the image was, in short, of an automatic nature, even in the case of

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[111] Krauss, *Passages*: 270
[112] Serra, "Play it Again, Sam": 27.
[113] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 72.

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"frankly appalling" movies, as Fried begrudgingly admits. Likewise, as Cavell asserts in *The World Viewed*, one always has "*something* to like, in no matter what yards of junk."[114] While these comments by Fried and Cavell remain fairly marginal within the main body of their texts, they deserve our attention because they point to an underlying contradiction in the critics' argument: how can one's freedom in the exercise of aesthetic judgment be reconciled with the automatism of a medium that leaves the viewer no choice but to be 'convinced'?[115]

Cavell stresses again and again that it is the helplessness of the viewer that allows the world's "natural appearance" on screen. The viewer is, as it were, mechanically assured of the immediacy of his perception. Cinema achieves *de jure* what modernist painting must wrest from its materials, namely the presentness of the image to the beholder. The viewer's conviction as to the immediacy of the projected image is absolute, that is automatic, but so is the conviction felt by the modernist critic before a successful painting. All affirmation of artistic value must be involuntary to be authentic, otherwise it will only reflect a relative norm. So the free will exercised in the act of judgment seems on closer observation not so obvious at all.

And how could it be otherwise? The ultimate purpose of the modernist project, in the eyes of Cavell and Fried, is not to pursue a formal standard of purity for

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[114] Ibid.: 7.

[115] Since I first wrote this chapter, Rosalind Krauss has indicated a similar interest in Cavell's notion of automatism. Yet, I believe that the strategic advantage she finds in Cavell's term – its opening of an "improvisatory" space in the relation between the technical support and the conventions of a genre – differs vastly from how I put the term into play within the historical context of phenomenology and post-minimal film. At the same time, this note forms an acknowledgement that Krauss's argument deserves a more extended response at a later date. See Rosalind Krauss's "Preface"

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its own sake but to overcome the modern subject's sense of unsettledness in the world. What is required of art is to repair this state of exile, if not through a return *to* nature (for that possibility had been annulled with the rise of industrial society) then in a return *of* nature. That is, the world must exhibit itself, as Cavell states, not be placed on exhibit. And such a form of self-revelation may only be secured when the artist's subjectivity is removed from the work of art. That is, when the image is literally taken out of his or her hands. Hence, to acknowledge the primary alienation between the self and the world – the powerlessness of the subject – is to prepare the immediate presence of the world.

Cinema, Cavell argues, lets the world *happen of itself* (and here the closeness and distance of *New York Windows* to such a statement should be obvious). Painting, therefore, must assimilate this same condition of automatism. Take, for instance, the *Unfurled* series of Morris Louis as Cavell suggests that we do. In this case, Louis adopts a fairly systematic approach. Refusing the gestural sweep of brushwork, he let the paint stream down in separate rivulets along the margins of the canvas. Since his hand does not enter into the image, the paintings appear to be concluded without his direct interference. All the artist can do after the process has been completed is to affirm that the result is *good*; the issue of finish has been made spurious. In short, the art object has acquired a fully autonomous existence. Furthermore, the material process of making itself is reflected in the strict separation of the individual colors

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to *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

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against the white expanse of the canvas. As a result the painting is unveiled as absolutely other, as an "overpowering" presence:

> In achieving these works without the trace of hands or wrists or arms, without muscle—the idea realizing itself—an automatism of canvas and paint (by means of those echoed rills, spanning those corners, in that scale...) is set in motion, admitting an overpowering beauty... [and] to speak of an automatism which admits a sometimes overpowering beauty is a way of characterizing nature.[116]

The modernist thesis of automatism might be summed up as a response to André Bazin who claimed the ontological priority of cinema over painting. Bazin had already noted that "The fact that a human hand intervened cast a shadow of doubt over the image"[117] But we should be able to appreciate its inner contradiction: nature will return only after a complete alienation from the world through the removal of all trace of human relations from the work. What we perceive in modernist painting is, then, "an idea realizing itself" – pure nature, pure presence without history. And this phantasmatic space of modernism will strangely resemble the very commodity image from which it is fleeing.

To return to Serra, we can now appreciate the connection his work makes between pre-industrial and industrial technology. The modernist removal of the hand from the realm of technique, its automatism, reflects the basic conditions of social alienation. Serra's corporeal concept of the tool is linked to the phenomenological notion of the "workshop" as a collective and not a private space in contrast to the

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[116] Ibid.: 113.
[117] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image": 12.

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privacy of the studio. Hence, his emphasis on the need for a mutual, physical coordination, for exactly choreographed gestures, to construct *One Ton Prop*:

> When I started, we were hand-manipulating pieces. These pieces were not joined in any permanent manner. The only possible way of erecting them was with the help of other people who were choreographed in relation to the material. We had to stand in a certain relation to each other and in definite relation to the construction, and lean the construction in...All technology is hand extension.[118]

Clearly, technology considered as hand extension opposes the tyranny of mechanized production, which dictates its rhythm to the producer. At the same time, the impermanent stasis of the leaning slabs creates a dialectic between the wholeness of its form and the downward pull of gravity which threatens to collapse this form. In this manner, Serra refuses to stamp his objects with a finality of form.

The notion of formal finality might be read in two ways: in an idealist and a materialist manner. In the first place, Serra abstains from creating the appearance that his work is preconditioned by the projection of an interior *intention*. Form is not imposed on matter, but allowed to reveal its own will, as it were, through a process of "experimentation"[119]:

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[118] Richard Serra, "Rigging," *Cover* (January 1980), as reprinted in Richard Serra, *Writings Interviews* (Chicago: Chicago University Presss, 1994): 120.

[119] Robert Pincus-Witten speaks of Fiore's documentary of *One Ton Prop* as recording "the first studio experiments." The film was not available to me for viewing; however, Pincus-Witten provides the following description: "The film shows Serra and his team dollying the quarter-ton plates across the studio floor and leaning them one into the other until the final aperture was produced. The film records the extra-visual sensation and recalcitrance of the heavy lead, as registered in the physical gestures and responses of the artist and his team." The critic notes that the film was shown at the Whitney despite Serra's objection. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Richard Serra: Slow Information": 31.

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> The structures are the result of experimentation. I never make sketches or drawings for sculptures. I don't work from an a priori concept or image.[120]

Through this kind of experimentation, through one's physical immersion in the handling of material, one acquires a special brand of knowledge, a kind of 'body intelligence,' which can only be grasped through the actions of the body: "You must rely on your experience in handling materials, knowing weight loads and leverage principles." And this knowledge, he insists, cannot be learned out of a book. [121] This habitual coordination between hand and object excavates what Merleau-Ponty calls the scope of our gestures. It establishes both a tactile and visual hold of the phenomenal body on its surroundings, enabling Serra to interact with and organize a physical environment through the simultaneously physical and linguistic means of the gesture. For instance, in the *Skullcracker* series (1969) Serra worked in a steel yard propping and stacking steel slabs to the point of collapse [fig. 47]. In order to construct this work he did not handle the slabs themselves, but needed to learn a hand language so that he could communicate with a crane operator.

In the second place, Serra is wary of exploiting the standardized, modular forms of industrial production, such as were applied by Donald Judd. In other words, Serra seeks not to impose an abstract form on matter which would cancel all sense of resistance by the material to its manipulation. Not only in minimalism, but also in modernism dwells a desire to approach the pristine perfection of mechanical

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[120] Bernard Lamarche-Vadel, "Interview with Richard Serra" [1980], as reprinted in *Writings Interviews*: 146.

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production. Fried, for instance, speaks of the viability of Frank Stella's paintings in terms of their "power to hold, to stamp themselves out" as if referring to a die-cutting process.[122] The material properties of Serra's sculpture never resemble the finish of 'stamped out' commodities.[123] His sculptural procedures always derive from the realm of industrial manufacturing, but emphasize the inner qualities of the material, such as pliability, density and weight, rather than imposing an exterior form onto the material by means of an imprinting or casting process.

In fact, in a much later work, *Berlin Block for Charlie Chaplin* (1978), we can appreciate how far Serra would push this logic [fig. 48]. In discussing this piece he explained his interest in forging metal rather than casting it. Forging a perfect cube depends on knowledge about the density of the material, in this case, magnesium and carbon steel which, when heated to 1280 degrees, acquires a cubic molecular structure. Thus the pure matter already contained the final form of the sculpture:

> In not relying on an industrial module (buying a product from a warehouse, for example, which in a sense is very alienating, distancing from the material) I was able to work on a level of immediacy and direct the procedure of production. In effect, I was making and forming material from its molecular structure on up.[124]

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[121] The general availability of such body intelligence does not preclude that the construction of a work requires a specialization of labor. At least, in the case of the installation of his later work that calls for a competent engineer to oversee a 'professional crew.' See Serra, "Rigging": 121.

[122] Fried, "Shape as Form" [1966]: 18. Caroline Jones makes a similar point in her discussion of, what she calls, the industrial aesthetic of Stella's early paintings. See Jones, *The Machine in the Studio*.

[123] Douglas Crimp stresses the 'raw' state of Serra's materials: "Serra's materials, unlike those of the Minimalist sculptors, are materials used only for the means of production. They normally appear to us transformed into finished products, or, more, rarely, into the luxury goods that are works of art." Douglas Crimp, "Serra's Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity," in *Richard Serra/Sculpture*: 45.

[124] Serra, "Rigging": 127-128.

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Following the discussion in chapter one of Barry's process of naturalizing space, we might identify Serra's procedure as a *naturalization* of the process of fabrication, which might be understood in equally phenomenological terms.[125] In other words, not only is Serra engaged in the productive process as a kind of on-going experience (this fact has been stated often enough in the past), but that process is understood to establish a relationship of interdependence and co-determination between the (bodily) technique and the material, between means and ends.

At the same time, it is significant that Serra prefers fairly unrefined and raw materials, such as leather, felt, lead, and steel, that are pliable but stem from an early if not pre-industrial era, unlike minimalism's use of 'artificial' materials such as formica and plexiglas. To gain further insight in Serra's naturalization of process, we might compare his choice in materials to the most typical product of post-war consumer culture, namely plastic. Roland Barthes has commented that while plastic is eminently susceptible to manipulation, it symbolizes a loss of any "natural" connection between matter and form.[126] "Less a thing than a trace of a movement," plastic forms a miraculous matter of endless transformation. Plastic will fit itself perfectly to any use and as such the material is wholly "swallowed up" by its purpose. Due to this extreme malleability, plastic lacks all intrinsic qualities as a material, and it "figures as a

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[125] In this context, I would like to remind the reader of the contents of the famous "Verb List" of Serra from 1967-68. The list presents a compendium of possible tasks to be fulfilled by the sculptor with all the verbs written in the infinitive to connote the endlessness of a transitive action. For instance, we encounter such sculptural actions as "to roll," "to crease," "to bend," or those which have a more fluid character, such as "to spill," "to flow," "to flood." But towards the end, he has written: "of nature."

[126] Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1972): 97-99.

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disgraced material, lost between the effusiveness of rubber and the flat hardness of metal" (both materials used by Serra).[127] Yet as a result of this debased state of plastic, it also abolishes the traditional hierarchy of substances. Now, Barthes claims, the whole world *can* be plasticized; a statement that could have been authored by Andy Warhol.[128]

Against the protean substance that is plastic, one might contrast Serra's concept of the inner potentiality of a substance, of its intrinsic ability to acquire specific shapes or usages. I have considered examples of this phenomenology of materials in *One Ton Prop*, with its tension between tensile strength and gravitational force, and *Berlin Block*, with its harmonization of the exterior force of compression (e.g. the hammers of the forge) and the actual density of the steel. In both cases, the problem is to achieve a state of equilibrium between opposing forces without one mastering the other – "it is knowing where the fulcrum is."[129] And only then are means and ends made explicit, as Serra requests of the filmic medium itself.

In short, Serra appears intent on developing an 'industrial' technique of the body which is exempt from the structure of reification. In Serra, then, the lost utopia of Lukacs might be said to return, reverting to the historical dialectic whereby "time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'...in short, it becomes

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[127] Ibid.: 98.

[128] Serra was not interested in pop art except for Claes Oldenburg: "for [Oldenburg] had not distanced himself from a direct involvement with material (hand-manipulation) and his use of gravity as a building component affected me." Lamarche-Vadel: 134.

[129] Serra, "Rigging": 121.

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space."[130] Serra's work does not constitute such an accumulative space of one thing next to another, but opens onto a shifting, temporal horizon that is constituted in relation to an ambulatory viewer.[131]

Indeed, considering Serra's phenomenological conception of process art, one might expect him to be wary of any photographic means of 'grasping' a sculpture: particularly in regard to his later works which are site-specific and, generally, cannot even by encompassed by the frame of a camera, unless one were to take a bird's eye-view. But then, of course, one is objectifying space, making a map, rather than inhabiting the shifting spatial-temporal horizon of the work itself. Here is Serra on photography:

> ...if you reduce sculpture to the flat plane of the photograph, you're passing on only a residue of your concerns. You're denying the temporal experience of your work...But it could be that most people want to consume sculpture like they consume paintings – through photographs. Most photographs take their cues from advertising, where the priority is high image content for an easy Gestalt reading. I'm interested in the experience of the sculpture in the place where it resides.[132]

Serra's ideal is clearly to establish the conditions for an experience that cannot be framed, such as Tony Smith's famous auto trip on the New Jersey turnpike.[133]

Interestingly, though, cinema has frequently surfaced as a metaphor in discussions of Serra's sculpture. The artist himself has used the term in describing his

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[130] Lukacs: 90.

[131] See for instance, Rosalind Krauss, "Richard Serra, a Translation," in *The Originality of the Avnat-Garde*: 260-275.

[132] Douglas Crimp, "Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture," as reprinted in *Writings Interviews*: 129.

[133] "There was, he seems to have felt, no way to 'frame' his experience on the road..." Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 158.

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St. John's Rotary Arc (1980), which was installed in the center of the traffic circle leading out of the Holland Tunnel in lower Manhattan [fig. 49]. In fact, the only likely way to view the work was from a car swinging around the curved steel plate:

> Driving around the Rotary, both the Arc's convexity and concavity foreshorten, then compress, overlap and elongate. The abrupt but continuous succession of views is highly transitive, akin to cinematic experience.[134]

St. John's Rorary Arc performs a dynamic cut in space. Seen from different angles, the piece will have no singular identity. The constancy of the work is created only by the movement of the viewer around it: it is he who creates the narrative in passing by. Hence, the sculptural *mise-en-scène* of Serra approaches that of the cinema spectator, with the single difference that in the latter case it is the viewer who is immobile and the world (i.e. the camera) that moves. As Cavell noted it is the viewer's attentiveness that strings along the fragmented scenes into the seamless whole of a world view.

The cinematic analogy of Serra's sculpture has been fully developed by Rosalind Krauss.[135] She has pointed out the function of the cut in the 1969 works of Serra as establishing, what she calls, a marker of continuity across the break. While this might appear to form a somewhat contradictory expression, Krauss explains herself in relation to the famous film experiment of Lev Kuleshov, to which I have referred before. The cut establishes a primary difference, which by means of montage enters into a syntactical whole. For instance, the viewer's interpretation of the expression on an actor's face will be determined by the content of the following

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[134] Richard Serra, "'St. John's Rotary Arc" [1980], as reprinted in *Writings Interviews*: 121-22.
[135] Krauss, "Richard Serra/Sculpture."

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shots.[136] The shot, in semiotic terms, forms a paradigmatic element that is entered into a syntagmatic chain. Such, for instance, is the function of the cut in *Cutting Device: Base Plate Measure* (1969): a pile of lead pipes, a wood block, and steel plates of irregular size which have been cut to the measurement of a rectangular template [fig. 50]. The sawn-off end pieces are scattered in random order around the base plate. As Krauss notes, *Cutting Device* implements a linear device that "paradoxically forges the wholeness of the work."[137]

Yet in *Cutting Device*, we are still dealing with a static figure-ground relationship. It is the cut into the continuity of matter that makes the whole stand out against a formless background. Or, in semiotic terms: without the prior inscription of a difference, no positive identity can be made to appear. The cinematic aspect of Serra's sculpture will only come to fruition in pieces like *Strike* (1969-71), which consists of a steel plate eight feet high and twenty-four feet long wedged into the corner of a room. While the viewer walks past the plate, the plane will contract to a line and then expand back into a plane. The space is thus severed – 'cut' into – but it

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[136] Kuleshov explains his montage experiment as follows. First he shot two scenes: one of a convict seeing his jail door open, the other of a starving man eyeing a bowl of soup. "We shot two such scenes, exchanged the close-ups from one scene to the other, and it became obvious that the actor's performance, his reaction of joy at the soup and joy at freedom (the open cell door) were rendered completely unnoticeable by montage." Lev Kuleshov, *Kuleshov on Film*, translated by Ronald Levaco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974): 192.

See also Yve-Alain Bois on Richard Serra's sculpture as an "art of montage, an art that is not satisfied to interrupt continuity temporarily, but produces continuity by a double negation, by destroying the pictorial recovery of continuity through discontinuity, dissociation, and the loss of identity within the fragment." Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around *Clara-Clara*" [1983], in *Richard Serra* edited by Hal Foster and Gordon Hughes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000): 79.

[137] Krauss, "Richard Serra/Sculpture": 26.

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is the continuity of the viewer's lived experience that assures the constancy of the work. The viewer is the *operator of the cut*, as Krauss explains.

We might conclude, then, that Serra's sculptural method consists of an attempt to adapt (pre-)industrial technology to a phenomenological model of lived experience. As such, his artistic project fits within the phenomenological project of countering the alienatory effects of history through a naturalization of experience and process. In other words, his project contains an utopian aspect; it employs the humanistic essence of the *habitus* if not the transcendental idealism of modernism. What is absent in these works, then, is a "historical index," to use Benjamin's phrase.[138] However, the decision of Serra to literalize the process of sculpture in film, rather than illustrate a metaphorical link between the two, will make such an index appear. But this will not occur all at once.

To Film

Following the preceding sketch of Serra's phenomenology of process, there should be no difficulty in understanding why the documentary of *One Ton Prop* made no sense to him. If means and ends are to be made explicit, then the work itself needs to become a tool as well – the 'showing' must simultaneously be a 'grasping,' similar

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[138] "What differentiates images from the "essences" of phenomenology is their *historical index*. [my emphasis] (Heidegger seeks in vain to rescue history for phenomenology abstractly, through "historicity.") These images must be thoroughly marked off from "humanistic" categories, such as the so-called habitus, style, etc. For the historical index of the images doesn't simply say that they belong to a specific time, it says above all that they only enter into legibility at a specific time." Walter

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to the sign language that Serra employed in constructing the *Skullcracker* series. Only then will film form a medium of perceptual engagement for both performer and viewer. One is not presented with a detached view of the past – the world as a factual given – but the camera-tool is handled as a corporeal means of transplanting oneself into the world, that is of informing material reality.[139] Serra's goal is to make the equipmental nature of film an intrinsic element in the very process of production, to co-determine the process, rather than presenting the framed whole of an 'equipment-free' world.[140]

This premise does not result in a Brechtian tactic of defamiliarization, as employed by Jean-Luc Godard, or Mel Bochner for that matter. Serra will not actually show the film equipment as such. Rather the means of 'showing' – the camera – must appear to overlap with the means of 'grasping' – the body. In other words, Serra's *Hand and Process* series are concerned to harmonize the double horizon of bodily or habitual spatiality and objective or external space. The habitual is the domain of availability, that of the hand and its tools. The activities of showing, naming, or indicating things in the world, as the phenomenological argument goes, all proceed

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Benjamin, "N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, edited by Gary Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989): 50.

[139] Compare Dan Graham: "Serra's works can be described by a simple verb action performed on the material by the artist, for instance: *to fold, to tear, to throw*, etc. A specific activity performed upon a specific material is available to the viewer as residue of an in-formation time (the stage of the process described in applying the verb action to the material). The viewer's time-field is as much part of the process (reading) as the artist's former relation to the same material and the material's process in the former time" Graham, "Subject Matter": 43-44.

[140] The reference here is to Walter Benjamin: "[Cinema's] illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the shooting of the specially adjusted camera and the mounting of the shot together with similar ones." Benjamin, "The Work of Art": 233.

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based on the prior establishment of a public field of availability, or the 'equipment-whole' of Heidegger.

Greenberg famously complained that "minimal works are readable as art, as almost anything is today—including a door, a table or a blank sheet of paper."[141] However, to single out objects for contemplation in this manner is to project a transcendental frame onto them, isolating them as 'occurrent' objects with all the wonder "for *that* thing *now*, in the frame of nature, the world moving in the branch."[142] Yet before anything can be observed as an occurrent thing it must first be disclosed within a shared horizon of intelligibility. A table first shows up as a 'tool' within the contextual whole of equipment before one can proceed to analyze its distinct properties. It is inconceivable, Heidegger states, that one picks out, or frees a thing such as a table from the background of the world without a prior understanding of its purposefulness to us. For instance, one will not be able to identify a table by blindly posting a list of properties (e.g. "wood") or set of predicates (e.g. "for writing on") which are presumed to be germane to tables.

As noted before, the sign functions for the phenomenologist as a kind of tool, which "explicitly raises an equipmental whole into our circumspection" (Heidegger).[143] In short, the act of showing is predicated on the act of grasping. And that, in brief, would be the filmic formula of the *Hand and Process* series. As a result

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[141] Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture": 253.
[142] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 122
[143] See Part Two, n. 53.

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the viewer will not stand at a remove from the object, but will become involved in the temporal process itself[144]:

> A shift in the interest in recent films is from subject matter, qua literature which utilizes a narrative time, to that of those films in which time can be equated with "live time" or with procedural time: the time of the film in its making. This refocus of time is not merely a subject matter allusion; i.e., the viewer does not simply become a subject in relation to the object (the form of most on-going theatre) but instead, experiences the time and place of subject and object simultaneously.[145]

Before I continue with a more detailed discussion of *Hand Catching Lead*, I should provide a brief sketch of the historical background against which film emerged as a possibility for Serra. Upon his arrival in New York in 1966, Serra would frequent film screenings at the Film-maker's Cinematheque. He remembers, for instance, having seen the work of Bruce Conner, Ron Rice, and Jack Smith. However, three filmmakers, in particular, had an impact on him. The first was Warhol. For Serra the experience of *Chelsea Girls*, as for many other artists of his generation, was something of a catharsis; as a result he lost all sense of intimidation by the camera.[146] He appreciated the "great freedom to pick up the camera the way [Warhol] did, with the detachment that he had."[147] The second was Yvonne Rainer. Serra was particularly struck by her *Hand Movie* which was part of her dance performance *Mind*

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[144] On the idea of a 'physiological' transposition between performer and viewer, see Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film."

[145] Serra, "Play it Again Sam": 9.

[146] Although it would not be until the film *Railroad Turnbridge* of 1976 before he actually shot his own material.

[147] Michelson, "Serra's Films: An Interview": 74.

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is a Muscle, which was first performed at the Anderson Theater in New York during 1968:[148]

> A five-minute blow-up of a hand, seen vertically. The fingers rub each other, move around. Two or three times the hand turns over and the camera follows it. Otherwise the camera is very still. Very erotic film.[149]

And to complete the circle, on June 13, 1969, Rainer's *Hand Movie* was screened together with Serra's own *Hand and Process* series at Paula Cooper gallery during *Coulisse* which assembled various artists, dancers, and musicians for a historic evening of film, sound, and performance works.[150]

As Rainer explains, her short films of this period were not meant to be viewed as independent works: "I didn't make movies: I made filmed choreographic exercises that were meant to be viewed with one's peripheral vision."[151] She then goes on to say that "the camera must participate, become a collaborator rather than a voyeur." This remark applies equally, I believe, to the filmic structure of Serra's *Hand and Process* films. These films establish a 'system of experience' (Merleau-Ponty) in which the

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[148] Serra has stated to the author his interest in the work of Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer.. He mentioned, for instance, the task-oriented nature of Rainer's dance performances and the frequent adoption of propping techniques with one performer supporting another. For Serra a direct connection between dance and film was made apparent in a performance by Forti in which bodies dropped behind a window before which an audience was seated. Richard Serra, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., February 15, 1998.

During our conversation, Serra was presumably referring to Forti's *Fallers*. The dancer has described this piece as follows: "The concert took place in a seventeenth-floor penthouse. The terrace of the penthouse was illuminated. The audience was indoors, the lights out. Past the windows fell the performers, dropping twelve feet from the penthouse roof to the terrace below, providing a glimpse of free-fall." Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax: The Press of of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, 1974), 86.

[149] Yvonne Rainer, "Films," in *Work 1961-73*: 210.

[150] See the attached Exhibition Chronology for a complete listing of the program. A copy of the program with floorplan is conserved in the archive of Dan Graham.

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body is linked with the filmed phenomenon. But the system of experience is not arrayed before the viewer as a hidden voyeur, it is 'lived' by the viewer from a specific point of view. The phenomenology of these films states that "I am not the spectator, I am involved." And this entails, furthermore, that my body (i.e. the body of both performer and viewer) cannot form an object in the world (in contrast to Nauman's performance in the *Studio Films*).

The third filmmaker of influence was Michael Snow. In the *October* interview with Serra, Snow's *Wavelength* prompts an interesting discussion on the concept of "sculptural film."[152] Serra denies the applicability of this term to his films:

> When someone...progressively moves into a foreshortened space, it still seems to me that you are dealing with an illusion on a flat plane which you can enter into. The way it is understood denies the progressive movement of your body in time. It's from a fixed viewpoint. It takes into consideration the very flatness of the screen. I've always thought that the basic assumptions of film could never be sculptural in any way...[153]

In fact, what Serra points to here is a phenomenological limit of the cinematic medium. A limit, moreover which does not sit well with the filmic model described above, the mutual implication of grasping and showing, perception and indication. I propose to unravel this contradiction in the following discussion.

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[151] Rainer wrote this text in the summer of 1971 while she was rethinking her relationship to filmmaking. The next year she was to shoot her first feature-length movie called *The Lives of Performers*, which marks her transition from choreographer to film director.

[152] This phrase was coined by Buchloh in order to identify a determinate historical dialectic between sculptural process and the more advanced technology of film. Buchloh's thesis also concerns the overcoming of the alienatory aspects of technological (re)production through the conjoining of viewer and filmic performance, yet it is argued in materialist rather than phenomenological terms. See Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film."

[153] Michelson, "The Films of Richard Serra": 73.

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Without a doubt, the best-known of Serra's *Hand and Process* quartet is *Hand Catching Lead.* Through the writing of Rosalind Krauss, in particular, this film acquired canonical status as the quintessential example of process art. In a way similar to the other films in the *Hand and Process* set, the static camera of *Hand Catching Lead* isolates the hand of the sculptor against a shallow, blank background as it engages in a repetitive, muscular task. In *Hand Catching Lead* this manual action concerns Serra's effort to grasp a piece of lead that is dropped from above by Philip Glass, who remains out of sight. Serra must seize the lead before it passes out of the camera's frame: an assignment that he succeeds intermittently in fulfilling, only to let the piece go again. There is no victor in this game of hit-or-miss. The viewer only sees Serra's gritty hand, the fingers outstretched and outlined against a white, brick wall. And, for a brief second, the spectator also witnesses the pieces of lead as they plunge downwards through the visual field of the screen.

The lead pieces fall with great rapidity and frequency, but not at regular intervals. Therefore, the viewer is kept in a state of continual tension that is as much psychological as it is physiological. The film's structure causes its audience to react in an empathetic manner to the spasmodic contractions of Serra's hand, or to use the favored terminology of the period, *Hand Catching Lead* functions on a kinesthetic level.[154] In short, a kind of feedback loop is set up between the filmed hand and the viewer's consciousness:

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[154] Compare Dan Graham: "Spatial behaviour and spatial perception are co-ordinate with each other in the process of time, guiding mainpulation and use of tools (including the base tool – the hand locomotively directed by muscular action...Kineasthesia is actually part of a larger group of integrated

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> As a telecommunications tool, it informs the viewer in an area of kinesics abstraction. The interacting, sequential flow of a complex kinemorphic construction (film) reveals a communication system derived from body motion.[155]

The viewer is, as it were, being tested as much as Serra appears to be testing his own reaction time. And he is testing his physical endurance, because the exhaustion of the hand becomes all the more apparent towards the end of this short film. This is fatigue that is not only caused by the clutching movement of the fingers, but also by the necessity of keeping the arm outstretched in a horizontal manner. Serra has stated that this internal physiological limit to the film was crucial; it was not intended to picture a perpetual present that was open-ended towards the future.[156]

Serra differs therefore from the stated intention of Nauman to loop his films (even though Nauman never actually executed this idea). Instead, Serra's entropic method is more like that of Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music*, which was also presented during the *Anti-Illusion* show [fig. 23].[157] Reich describes the piece *Pendulum Music for Microphones, Amplifiers Speakers and Performers* (8/68) as follows:

> Three, four, or more microphones are suspended from the ceiling or from microphone boom stands by their cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion. Each microphone's cable is plugged into an amplifier which is

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stimulus-correlates for perception of oneself." The quote is from "Subject Matter" but it is cited in Richard Serra, [Documents], *Avalanche* 2 (Winter 1971): 20. Graham's source on kinaesthesia was James J. Gibson's *The Perception of the Visual World.*

[155] Serra, [Documents], *Avalanche*: 20. The source of this quote is not given, but it might derive from Gibson who was involved in the research of perceptual psychology using the tool of cinema. Gibson began his career by using film to develop flight simulation programs during the Second World War

[156] Richard Serra, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., February 15, 1998.

[157] *Pendulum Music* was first performed by William Wiley and Steve Reich at the University of Colorado in August 1968. The New York premiere occurred during the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* exhibition on May 27, 1969, with Richard Serra, Bruce Nauman, Michael Snow, and James Tenney as the performers.

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> connected to a loudspeaker... The performance begins with performers taking each mike, pulling it back like a swing...Performers then release all the microphones in unison. Thus, a series of feedback pulses are heard which will either be all in unison or not depending on the gradually changing phase relations of the different mike pendulums. Performers then sit down to watch and listen to the process along with the rest of the audience. [158]

The movement of *Pendulum Music* or *Hand Catching Lead* does not project the empty continuum of metronomic time (Nauman's "dance" was timed to a metronome), or the measured time of industrial production, for that matter. There is no playing *against* time, as Dan Graham said, only the "natural" time of an entropic process. The performers and the audience inhabit the same machine environment, until the process winds down and the microphone plugs are pulled. At this moment the machine returns to the temporal condition of non-art, to its place within an equipmental whole, to the state of a useful tool that is substitutable.

The experience is that of lived time, which has a material quality to it. Speaking of the minimal music of both Reich and LaMonte Young, for instance, Graham has observed that:

> ...the sound is bouncing off the side of the walls and the architecture as you move around. You are actually inside the production of sound by the architecture, as well as by your own perceptual process. The sound is material. La Monte Young has the materiality that John Cage wanted to go for. It just adds time. I think the critique of minimalism through San Francisco music – it also came from Michael Snow – was based on the introduction of the spectator's perceptual process. But the materiality of that experience merged with the materiality of the surface of the art work and the surface of the music experience. One was aware

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[158] Steve Reich, "Pendulum Music" [8/68, revised 5/73], *Writings about* Music (New York: New York University Press, 1974): 12-13.

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> not only of one's own perceptual process, but also that of the audience.[159]

The materiality of *that* experience, which is not that of an abstract movement in time, is also embedded in the gestural series of *Hand Catching Lead*, and in the high-pitched crescendo of electronic sound that accompanies *Wavelength*. Yet, Serra also referred to the artificiality of Snow's film: the illusion of flatness which denies the progressive movement of the body in time. How is this illusional quality of film to be paired with its materiality?

Krauss has summed up the defining traits of *Hand Catching Lead*.[160] These traits are three in total, which situate the film within a specific genealogy of modern art but also clarify its difference from the past. First of all, *Hand Catching Lead* employs a modernist device of self-reflectivity. The vertical movement of the lead through the frame echoes the vertical passage of the filmstrip through the projector, just as the periodic clenching of Serra's hand mimics the stroboscopic mechanism of the shutter gate. However, this is a reflection of the material *function* of the medium and not of its ontological boundaries. The medium of film is not defined in an essential manner as modernist painting, or structural film, did. *Hand Catching Lead* certainly traces the shape of its literal support – the film screen – within the projected image, just as the modernist canvas conjoins literal shape with pictorial shape, but it does not *sublate* the one within the other. Serra's film represents space as frontal and almost depthless: the horizontal arm of the artist, poised before an indistinct

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[159] Dan Graham, interview with the author, New York, N.Y., February 1997.
[160] Krauss, *Passages*: 243-45.

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background, bisects the image into a symmetrical pattern of horizontal and vertical lines. But this flattening of the image is determined more by the nature of the performance itself and its address to the viewer than by thoughts on the formal arrangement of image alone. Indeed the frame of Serra's image acquires a distinct sense of relativism from the position of the viewer: it is just as important what remains hidden from view as what is revealed. In the vocabulary of Fried, *Hand Catching Lead* realizes a theatrical staging of the spectator who is both inscribed within and elided from the work.

As with Bruce Nauman's *Studio Films*, our inquiry into the genealogical link between Serra's *Hand Catching Lead* and painting leads us to Frank Stella, whose work had become a critical site of contestation between modernism and literalism by the mid-sixties.[161] We might consider, in particular, Stella's black paintings of 1959, which first articulated the topos of a "self-deductive procedure" in painting.[162] These

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[161] The loci classici are Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" and Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood."

[162] It was Michael Fried who proposed this concept of self-deductive structure a propos of Frank Stella's black painting series: "Stella is concerned with deriving or deducing pictorial structure from the literal character of the picture support; but his work differs from [Barnett Newman and Kenneth Noland] in its exaltation of deductive structure as sufficient in itself to provide the substance, and not just the scaffolding or syntax, of major art. As early as 1958-59, partly in reaction to Abstract Expressionist painting...Stella began to make paintings in which parallel stripes of black paint, each roughly 2 ½ inches wide, echo and reecho the rectangular shape of the picture support until the canvas is filled. Those first black paintings...amounted to the most extreme statement yet made advocating the importance of the literal character of the picture support for the determination of pictorial structure." Fried, "Three American Painters": 251.

Fried argues, of course, unlike his detractors, that the deductive structure of Stella's paintings does not lock these works (and the viewer) into a unreprieved state of objecthood; indeed, they pull the viewer back from the brink of this literalist abyss. He points oput the fact that the relation between framing edge and stripe pattern is not strictly causal; a slight opening remains for formal play, which is characterized by "variation and inversion rather than of strict reiteration." This dialectical openness between frame and picture constitutes that "improvisatory" space within the "automatism" of the medium, which has been described by Rosalind Krauss in "A Voyage on the North Sea" (see Part Two, n. 133). It also secures the foundation for the transcendental viewer of Fried to stand upon.

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paintings, which were first shown during the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition of *Sixteen Americans* in 1960, treated the formal problem of composition not as a part-to-part relationship within the pictorial field, but as an almost mechanical function of tracing the shape of the physical support within the pictorial field. The stark combination of the symmetrical design and opaque, black enamel paint, appeared to some early viewers, such as Donald Judd, to have executed a post-mortem of modernist painting. Judd would hail the black paintings as a depersonalized mode of abstract painting that was shorn of its humanist underpinnings. Fried, of course, could not have disagreed more and thus the black paintings became a famous litmus test of modernism's chance for survival in the sixties.

The debate on the black paintings can be boiled down to two opposing conceptions of the series. On the one hand, each of Stella's black paintings can be considered as one term which is bracketed within the closed series of a permutational order. One might propose that the self-deductive structure of the black paintings allows only so many variants (if the shape of the support remains unchanged) and that these possibilities could be thought out beforehand, as in the later example of Sol LeWitt's *Serial Project No. 1 (ABCD)* (1966). [Fig. 16] Modernist criticism, on the other hand, militated against such a systemic and finite approach to the medium; it took up this challenge by defining not just the individual painting, but also the series itself as an ontological medium. Here, for instance, is Cavell on the problem of the series:

> Nothing but our acceptance of an instance determines whether its series is worth realizing, or how far it is worth going on generating its

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> instances; when we find that that a series is exhausted, it's absolutely past, over.[163]

The presentness to the beholder of each instance of the series is gained, as it were, against the *potential* horizon of the whole series. In other words, the series is temporalized within the viewer; one does not stand across from the series as extended in space[164]: "Acceptance of such objects achieve the acceptance of the moment, by defeating the sway of the momentous."[165] The significance of this instance of the series is not dictated from without; the viewer is not objectified by the spatio-temporal series in the quantifiable manner of Nauman whose "dance" was dictated by the regular beat of the metronome. By declaring the permanent beauty of any moment of a series, Cavell opinions, the viewer has simultaneously claimed his or her autonomy. The timelessness of this moment is all the more remarkable since each instance of the series is formed by an automatism; that is, the object carries no trace of labor and seems to be fabricated in an instantaneous manner, nevertheless the pictorial value of this object transcends the literal value of instant use.

But to bracket the object of the series in such a manner, we might counter, requires an inversion of the object's exhibition value and Cavell acknowledges that this fact will always come back to haunt the modernist viewer.[166] It is unavoidable, in

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[163] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 116

[164] Compare my remarks in Part One on Michael Snow's *Wavelength*.

[165] Cavell, *The World Viewed* : 116-117.

[166] What Cavell descrbes is none other than the famous *Augenblick* of phenomenology in which a moment might appear to last an eternity for an unchanging, transcendental subject: "There is a temporaly style of the world, and time remains the same...[because] each dimension of time is treated or aimed at as something other than itself and because, finally, there is at the core of time a gaze, or, as Heidegger puts it, an Augen-blick, someone through whom the word as can have a meaning." (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 422.

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Cavell's opinion, that the conventions of the medium as a series (or automatism) will become too apparent over time and when a painting in a series seems to depend too strongly on the others for its existence, its former plenitude for the beholder will be lost.[167] At this point in time, we might say, that all instances revert to the status of mere instants. An impression of equivalence replaces the viewer's sense of conviction and each and every work in the series will pass irretrievably into the archival sameness of history.

From the standpoint of Serra (or Nauman) in the later sixties, however, it might appear that Stella's black paintings had nothing to lose. From a (post-)minimalist perspective the black paintings were ahead of the game by acknowledging the closed nature of the pictorial series from the beginning. This permutational model of the painting series is not reflected directly in *Hand Catching Lead*, however it does inform another film by Serra, namely *Color Aid* (1971); a color film of 36 minutes that was shot by Robert Fiore as well [fig. 51]:

> A stack of color-aid swatches is filmed close-up, centered, and overhead. The color fills the frame. The frame changes continuously every five to thirty seconds by a single hand wipe. This device, the hand-manipulated frame change of saturated color, alters consecutively the light, space, depth, and color of each image. Color changes and afterimages occur. The screen is received somewhat as an object, in as much as the surface and space of each frame is holistic. The sync sound is that of the swatches swiping.[168]

Color Aid is a brand name for packs of color cards that are used in art making and teaching. The film clearly establishes a systemic of painting in its inversion of

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[167] Krauss underwent such a moment of historical awakening during Frank Stella's exhibition of the *Wolfboro* series at Castelli Gallery in 1966. See her "Pictorial Space and the Question of

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depth (i.e. the hand entering the image) and surface (i.e. the projection of pure color on screen), frame and field, optical illusion and factitious presence, chance and order. In this film, painting is indeed structured as a symbolic system: the vertical stack of swatches provides a paradigmatic axis of possibilities that is inserted into the syntagmatic series of the succession of film images. *Color Aid* alternates between the singularity of the image (the serial instance) and the standardized set of colors (the serial medium). Each moment, however, does not remain pure onto itself: "Within the randomness of the wipes there are occasional abrupt changes of saturation and some subtle transitions of value."[169] In other words, the uniqueness of the single image is predicated on its difference from the rest (and, once more, we return to the scene of Kuleshov's experiment).

This brings us to the second artistic moment referenced by *Hand Catching Lead*, namely minimalism. The serial logic of minimalism negated the self-enclosed unity of the sculptural object, opening perception, rather, onto a temporal field of embodied experience. The repetitions of Serra's film resist the finality of narrative structure, just as minimal art refuses the formal resolutions of compositional order. To paraphrase the celebrated words of Donald Judd, *Hand Catching Lead* is just "one thing after another." Yet, the phenomenon of repetition in *Hand Catching Lead* is not realized with the precision and regularity of the factory-made objects of minimalism. There is an element of the accidental and contingent that is quite fundamental to the

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Documentary": 68.

[168] Serra, "Statements": 64.

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work, as I have shown. The body-machine of *Hand Catching Lead* does not just continue on and on. This exhaustion of the series is *of* the body. In other words, the task sets its own temporal limits which coincide, roughly, with the length of a 16mm film reel.

Finally, as Krauss has argued, *Hand Catching Lead* presents the logic of the 'sculptural' *process* pure and simple: i.e., an action that is stripped of its object and not directed towards a final end. The task Serra sets himself is not one of mastery – each piece of lead that Serra succeeds in grasping is merely released again in order to continue the movement. Those pieces that are briefly clutched are molded by the grip of the hand. However, the action is not channeled towards the formation of any singular object. In this respect, the film is not unlike a game of chance where the point is not to win but to keep playing. It is clear, therefore, that *Hand Catching Lead* materializes a fundamental principle of process art, namely, the de-instrumentalization of technical procedure.

The literalization of process is expressed on a number of levels. First of all, the artist's presence is de-psychologized by focusing all attention on the physiological performance of his body. That concentration is mirrored in the fragmentation of the body – only the pumping hand is visible – and this kinesthetic mode of concentration is shared by the audience. But what manner of attentiveness is this? There is no projective consciousness at work in *Hand Catching Lead*, since the material is not

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[169] Lizzie Borden, [catalogue entry on *Color Aid*], *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films* (New York: Castelli Gallery, 1974): 193.

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shaped by the artist and there is no expressive intent behind his gestures.[170] What we might say is that the consciousness of both performer and spectator alternates constantly between an active and passive state, between anticipation and memory. In other words, there is no static relationship of sender to receiver (unless the invisible Philip Glass, who drops the lead, is considered the ultimate sender). The filmic medium is not used to convey an objective message, but opens onto a field of joint experience. As a result the audience participates directly in the time and place of making. As Krauss explains:

> As one watches, one shares the real time of the sculptor's concentration on his task and one has a sense that during this time, the artist's body *is* that task: his very being is represented by this outward show of behavior contracted down to a single extremity.... the film presents an image of the self as something arrived at, something defined in and through experience....the fragmentation of the body is one way of freeing the meaning of a particular gesture from a sense that it is preconditioned by the underlying structure of the body understood as a coherent whole.[171]

The viewer does not follow the thread backwards, from the movement of the hand, to the originating 'idea' in the artist's mind. There is only a looping of object and subject positions, of inner and outer horizons.

That, at least, is the phenomenological argument on which process art bases itself, since the lived body is a neutral slot that can be occupied by all. The body exists as the interface between consciousness and the realm of shared social practice. In other words the grasping hand becomes a gesture that is interchangeable between self

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[170] See Buchloh, "Process Sculpture and Film,"on the tendency of some critics to read 'expression' back into *Hand Catching Lead.*

[171] Krauss, *Passages*: 278-79.

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and other. And it is the camera that allows that exchange; it grasps, as it were, into the depth of the visual field.

Yet, the interesting thing about Krauss's use of the term fragmentation is that it also suggests that a split exists within the visual field. There is no coherent body image to mirror the completeness of the world. The gesture also resembles, therefore, a form of groping in a shadowy world; it is "defined in and through experience." In other words, in as much as *Hand Catching Lead* puts the viewer in the place of the performer, and matches past time to present time, it also reveals a doubleness within the perceptual structure. A doubleness, that is, between the phenomenological functions of pointing and grasping.

The Filmic Pathology

The appearance of such a disconnection between the skills of grasping and showing, has been associated by Merleau-Ponty with a pathological breakdown in the habitual space of embodiment. The vaunted transparency of the indicative gesture – the world that shows itself within the subject's act of showing – will be infected with ambiguity when the subject either loses his natural ability to point things out or senses that he is being pointed *at* by an unseen, transcendent other (as in the literalist scenario of Fried).

Phenomenology has identified both cases as a fundamental disorder of the visual field wherein the familiar background of availability, wherein things have their

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place, has become clouded over. The daily environment appears dispossessed of the coherency it formerly held for the subject, causing objects in turn to be divested of their clarity of outline. Accordingly a peculiar form of 'psychic blindness' can be said to settle into the subject's visual field that derails its attempt to orient itself within the world.

Whether this perturbation of a subject's consciousness of spatiality and, in particular, of his consciousness of place, originates from within or without might be said to be largely equivalent. The inability of a subject to 'make sense' of space can arrive from both an internal process of psychological blockage as well as an outward process of expropriation. Fried, for instance, experiences literalism very much under the sign of an exterior dispossession of his visual powers of perspicuity, while Merleau-Ponty provides an example of a mental disturbance in a discussion of the clinical case of a patient who is incapable of organizing space into a meaningful and objective pattern.

Yet, common to both examples is an overwhelming sense of the density of reality that weighs down on consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty's patient explains:

> I experience the movements as being a result of the situation, of the sequence of events themselves; myself and the movements are, so to speak, merely a link in the whole process and I am scarcely aware of any voluntary initiative...It all happens independently of me.[172]

For this patient objects in the world appear as amorphous patches lacking a definite configuration or structure. This perceptual disturbance does not limit itself to the

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[172] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 105. Merleau-Ponty based his information on a series of studies by Gelb and Goldstein concerning a patient named Schneider. This particular

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visual domain but extends itself at the same time into the realm of the tactile. His sensation of touch remains "opaque and sealed up," as Merleau-Ponty observes, and even though the patient's grasping hand might be drawn towards a particular object, he cannot point at it as something standing across from him and having its place among other things. What he recognizes in the patient's experience, then, is a peculiar dissociation between the "intention to grasp" and the "intention to know."

This pathological condition is revealed by the consistent inability of the patient to perform 'abstract' movements with the eyes closed (i.e. movements, such as flexing a limb, which do not correspond to a concrete task or situation), to describe the position of the body and its separate members, or to identify a point on the body that is touched. Only through the activation of his whole body does the patient gradually manage to execute the ordered abstract gesture of a limb or does he finally localize the application point of a stimulus after a deductive process of elimination.[173]

The patient can certainly pretend to perform an act that is customary to him, such as striking a match and lighting a lamp, however he must first seem to place himself within the concrete situation and follow through the full sequence of requisite movements, like a clockwork mechanism unwinding itself. He actually holds a manufacturing job and when placed in front of his tools, there is no delay or hesitance in his actions, his gestures are swift and precise. However, the patient cannot dwell in

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quote can be found in Goldstein, "Über die Abhängigkeit der Bewegungen von optischen Vorgängen," *Monatschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, Festschrift Liepmann (1923): 175-6.

[173] "If a part of his body is touched and he is asked to locate the point of contact, he first sets his whole body in motion and thus narrows down the problem of location, then he comes still nearer by

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the realm of possibility. Attending his failure to point out things in the present world is his incapacity to intend a meaningful and coherent world. The environment of the patient "exists only as one readymade or congealed, whereas for the normal person his projects polarize the world, bring magically to view a host of signs which guide action, as notices in a museum guide a visitor."[174]

In *Hand Catching Lead*, as in any film, the camera performs the function of pointing. But grasping has become an isolated function. Any object-relation in cinema needs to be clarified against the totality of a diegetic background from which the viewer is physically excluded. [175] Yet, it is the continuity of the viewer's consciousness that provides Cavell's "automatic succession of images" with its ontological ground.[176] In other words, an imaginary bridge is built between the habitual space of the body and the perspectival space of cinema by means of an identification with the camera.

Yet, Serra literalized this process of identification. Hence, the tension between the diegetic function of pointing and the tactility of the object-relation is intensified. The fragmented body appears to be both *here* and *there*, both within and without the image. The viewer cannot both frame the image from without and be displaced from within the image. And this answers my earlier question about how technological

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moving the limb in question, nd the process is completed in the forms of quiverings of the skin in the neighbourhood of the point touched." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 107.

[174] Ibid.: 112.

[175] Diegesis in cinema "refers to the posited events and characters of a narrative, i.e. the signified of narrative content, the characters and actions taken in themselves without reference to their discursive mediation...The diegesis is thus an imaginary construction, the fictive time and space in which the film operates, the assumed univers in which the narrative takes place." Stam, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*: 38.

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mediation, i.e. the cinematic apparatus, will tend to disrupt a phenomenology of process. But *Hand Catching Lead* does not follow this inverted logic through to the end; it forms a self-contradictory element within a basically phenomenological project. For a veritable pathology of film we need to look elsewhere.

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[176] See Part Two, n. 112.

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Bruce Nauman, *Thighing* (1967)

> Naming appears as a queer connection of a word with an object.—And you really get such a queer connection when the philosopher tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times. – Ludwig Wittgenstein[177]

The division between pointing and grasping that occurs in *Hand Catching Lead*, takes on just such a 'pathological' dimension in the Bruce Nauman film *Thighing* [fig. 52]. This film plays on a conflict between the experience of a fragmentation of the body and the localization of its parts.

Thighing was first shown during his one-man exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery. Shot in color and sound during the preceding year, it was presented on a projection box in the gallery.[178] Through a greenish haze, *Thighing* shows a close-up of the artist's thigh, tightly cropped by the frame, while his hand continuously kneads the flesh of his leg. Other than the thigh and the hand, which appears to be detached from the body, no other parts of the body appear in frame. On the soundtrack, the viewer hears a disembodied voice, presumably that of the artist, making a sighing

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[177] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1958): paragraph 38. By introducing this quote, I wish to point to another possible theoretical context for the present material. Nauman claims to have read this book while studying at the University of Wisconsin, Madison from 1960 to 1964. (See the chronology in *Bruce Nauman: Catalogue Raisonne.*) However, it is Rosalind Krauss that has provided Wittgenstein with a definite use value within the historiography of contemporary art through the series of texts I have already quoted. I will not further develop this line of inquiry, but it should also be remembered that Stanley Cavell is a Wittgenstein scholar. In other words, ordinary language philosophy was put to different critical *uses* during the sixties and seventies, just as phenomenology was.

[178] John Perreault mentions the projection box in the "The Act of Seeing," *The Village Voice* 13, no. 17 (February 8, 1968): 19-21. He also possibly identifies a fifth film in the *Studio Film* series by the title *Playing The Violin Even Though I Don't Know How To Play.*

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sound, thus revealing the cryptic title to be a *double-entendre* in the tradition of Duchamp.[179]

The flesh of the thigh is brought up close to the lens and depending on the scale of projection, might take on magnified proportions (this was obviously not the case at the Castelli exhibition). The body seen from such close quarters, in combination with the dislocative effect of the framing, produces an effect of estrangement. To the spectator, the image might briefly appear to be formless and lacking identifiable shape. The body in its fragmented state lacks the kind of profound lucidity of presence that classical cinema offers.

We might recognize, then, in *Thighing* a further disruption of the phenomenological model of perception explored in the *Studio Films*, yet not in the relation of the body to its outer horizon, i.e. its spatial habitat. *Thighing*, rather, concerns a disruption of the integrity of the body image itself and, therefore, the collapse of the inner horizon of lived experience. The hand's gesture enters the frame, not to project the body's spatiality into the world, as in the (frustrated) attempts of, say, *Bouncing a Ball*, but in order to establish an internal loop between the sensation of touch and being touched, or so it seems. Should this phenomenological loop actually be realized then the body image of the subject would be complete. However, the viewer can experience the leg only as an individual object due to the cut of the frame. There remains, in other words, a definite disconnection between the members of the body.

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[179] This play on the sound and meaning of words was also a favorite device of artists in

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The manual gesture performs both the physical function of grasping and the function of pointing or naming. As such the hand establishes a link between /thighing/ (i.e. the doing) and /sighing/ (i.e. the saying). We have a kind of primitive pantomime of the word, for nothing is truly spoken; or a kind of primitive dance. According to Merleau-Ponty, the activity of dancing displays an abstracted kind of motion that is turned onto itself; it lacks an external object of intention and unfolds only in the expressive space of the body itself. The direction of gestures in dance is centripetal; it unfolds only within the habitual range of a body that is not actively involved in a world of public concern. The instrumental gestures of work, on the other hand, are habitual and centrifugal, i.e. they extend the inner horizon of the body outwards, connecting it to the outer horizon of the world. Yet, in any case, the prior coherency of this inner horizon of the body is what determines the potential continuity of a world for the phenomenological subject. The bodily image or habitus provides an anchorage for the subject in the world, "it persists on the horizon of my life as the distant roar of a great city provides the background to everything we do in it."[180] Nauman, however, appears to assert the reverse. It is only from a prior state of differentiation from and not incorporation within the world that meaning might appear.

Hence, the ambiguity of the soundtrack which slips from the mere aural to the verbal, but never halts at one definite meaning. Through its repetition the inarticulate sound of /sighing/ might assume signification as an element within a language system. It might, for instance, indicate sadness or boredom, yet in the context of Nauman's

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Nauman's immediate environment such as William T. Wiley.

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film it also assumes the character of a verb through its near perfect homonymy with /thighing/. Yet, the arbitrariness of this link remains apparent – there is no rational connection between the act of sighing and that of pinching one's leg – besides the mere material resemblance of the sounds.

Language itself, therefore, is continuously led back to an undifferentiated level of mere substance, yet never to remain totally immersed at that level. For there is always the 'cut' which introduces the possibility of meaning, whether the spatial cut of the camera frame, the intermittent gesture of the hand, or the repetitive release of breath. The hand casts doubt on the truth of the image, Bazin might write, but here it is the camera that releases doubt.

Frame (1969)

> Richard Serra's film *Frame* exposes the contradictions of the measured unit. The problem that once attended painting, namely locating the "framing edge," is parodied in this film... Measurable lengths are reduced to a joke, and towards the end of the film Serra himself is caught in an illusion. It has also been brought to my attention that this film would not fit on the carefully constructed screen at the Film Archive. – Robert Smithson[181]

We might conclude that Nauman's *Thighing* operates in a pre-symbolic, amorphous space wherein the object-relations of the viewer and the linguistic system

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[180] Merlaeu-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 327-28.

[181] Robert Smithson, "Art through the Camera's Eye," in *Robert Smithson: Unearthed*, edited by Eugenie Tsai (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991): 90.

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of communication have not (yet) gained transparency to one another.[182] The film *Frame* by Serra, on the other hand, is about the exposure of the symbolic realm of social relations, or what phenomenology calls the technical domain of availability, as a *non*-natural space [fig. 53]. We might contrast Serra's film, therefore, to Barry's naturalization of the filmic space of projection, i.e. to his darkened realm of a spatiality without things. Serra's *Frame* does not dissolve the outline of things within the featureless grounds of depth as such, but stubbornly attempts to reveal the very act of framing, to demonstrate, that is, the inner contradictions of the analytic of finitude. To this purpose, *Frame* occupies a fully cognitive space of reflection – its theme is 'measurement' – but in presenting an almost didactic attempt to think the relation between things, the center of thought is continuously displaced by the camera's lens. There is no exterior perspective on this space that is available to the viewing subject; there is no place outside the symbolic system. Therefore, the film does not project the spatio-temporal 'in-between' as being immanent to thought itself, as in *Scenes*, but as exteriorized by the apparatus of communication. What *Frame* demonstrates is that the viewer is always caught within the framework of mediation: pointing and grasping never coincide.

Frame differs as well, then, from the relentless, forward surge of *Wavelength*, which starts and ends from behind the camera. *Wavelength* symbolizes nothing less

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[182] See, for instance, Krauss, "Notes on the Index, Part 1." In the background of my discussion, one might see the figure of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage looming. However, it is not necessary to extend my discussion in that direction in order to establish the point where a phenomenological notion of "process" begins to break down in post-minimal film. On Lacan's mirror stage as a critique of the phenomenological notion of the body image, see Joan Copjec, "Flavit and

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than the self's transcendence of historicity – "the uncaused and tireless impulse which drives us to seek an anchorage and to surmount ourselves in things."[183] As I have noted in Part One, the film is interrupted by four human events, including a death. Nonetheless the zooming action remains unchecked; it continues forward over the prostrate body towards the photograph of a surface of waves on the opposite wall: its motion is automatic, disinterested, and abstract. Such is the intentional drive of the movie which not only registers as an analogy of a projective consciousness, as Michelson has argued, but also telescopes within its forty minute time-span the whole narrative space of modernist painting[184]:

> It was up to the artist to measure out the exact space for a person to die in or to be dead already. The exactness of the space was determined, or rather, inspired by whatever reason the person was dying or being killed for. The space thus measured out on the original plane of the canvas surface became a 'place' somewhere on the floor.[185]

The most fascinating aspect of *Wavelength* is how it disavows this external limit to its inner logic; a limit that is nonetheless marked within the film by the cursory event of death.

Nothing so dramatic occurs in *Frame*. But then Serra's film also does not need to 'kill off' the narrative space of cinema since it does not situate itself within the genealogy of independent film. *Frame* also occupies an interior, but the language of the film is predominantly that of the studio. It deals with the pictorial space of

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Dissipati Sunt," *October* 18 (Fall 1981). Copjec's argument has contributed in ways not immediately visible to my own discussion.

[183] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 283. See also the section on *Scenes* in Part One.

[184] Michelson, "Towards Snow."

[185] Willem de Kooning as cited by Krauss, "View of Modernism": 50

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painting and the perspectival metaphor of the window, and in the process it gives pause to the historical argument shared by Baudry and Cavell that cinema forms the direct descendant of the 'science' of painting.[186]

As I mentioned, *Frame* takes a fairly didactic form in manifesting the perceptual disparity between the viewpoint of the cameraman (Robert Fiore) and the performer (Richard Serra), who inhabits the visual field of the camera frame. The procedure of demonstration is divided into four parts. First we observe a blank screen. Serra's hands enter the image holding a ruler, whereupon we realize that we have been looking at a white board that is placed more or less parallel to the camera lens. Following the directions of the cameraman, Serra traces and measures the dimensions of the inside of the camera frame as they are projected onto the board. He is, therefore, already caught in an illusion since he is measuring a space that is invisible to him. At the end of this exercise he comes to the conclusion:

> The edge of the frame is not a rectangle. On the screen it will be right.
> The frame isn't going to change.

The second section of the film reveals a view through an open window which is filmed from an angle. The window frame forms a trapezoid that is truncated at the top. Next, the white board is slid across the window. Again Serra measures the projected dimensions of the camera frame and, of course, produces a trapezoid although the spectator perceives it as a rectangle. In the third section, Serra measures the actual window frame as a rectangle, but the spectator perceives *his* rectangle as a trapezoid.

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[186] Note my use of the qualifying terms "primarily" and "predominantly": *Wavelength* obviously deals with the pictorial space of painting as well, however the critical operation of *Frame* is

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And, finally, in the fourth section the filmed image of the window frame is actually projected onto the white board. The image is measured as a trapezoid but perceived by the spectator as a rectangle.

Frame pushes the difference between pointing and grasping to the point of breakdown. The performer grasps his ruler and the cameraman points. But a fundamental divide has now settled into the visual domain between self and other. As a result the actions of Serra have been expropriated by the camera lens. He continues to dwell within his own equipmental realm. Yet, to paraphrase Sartre, he is now alienated from his own possibilities, which are associated with objects in the world, far from him in the midst of the world.[187] The situation escapes him, because his 'instrument-possibility' has become organized into a world by another (i.e. the camera). As a result, a sense of impatience, even anger emerges in the exchange between Serra and Fiore. The former continuously asks – 'are you sure? – and challenges Fiore's observations. However, this constitutes a futile effort to exert his authority because he remains dependent on the other's perception of him. Only through language, through dialogue, can this gap between self and other be bridged, but there is no exit from its labyrinthine passages:

> Objective physical measurement of real and physical depth, points to the basic contradiction posed in the perception of a film or photo. The device of the ruler which functions as a stabilizing or compensating system in the film is the subject of its own contradiction. This contradiction is reinforced as a continuous *direction* and *dialogue*

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more linked to the institutional space of the visual arts. Serra's *Railroad Turnbridge* (1976) represents a movie that straddles the domain of artist and independent film more easily, as does *Wavelength*.

[187] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 354. See also my Afterword.

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> between the performer and the cameraman points to the illusion of the frame space.[188]

The dialogue does not plug the gap between practice and knowledge; there is no reciprocity of viewpoints. Serra is placed in a permanent position of indeterminacy versus the certainty of the camera to which he can gain no access. Far from exhibiting the world as it is, the filmic apparatus appears to interrogate the subject. Sartre has written the scenario of such a dialogue between self and other, wherein the self's alienation from his own realm of availability is highlighted:

> I swear to you that I will do it.
>
> Maybe so. You tell me so. I want to believe you. It is indeed possible that you will do it.[189]

Suspicion and doubt have burrowed deeply into this dialogue in which the performance is always taken out of the subject's own hands, becomes *alien* before the camera. But the viewer, on his or her side, also has trouble grasping this film; while deceptively simple in outline, the experience of the film is highly perplexing. The screen reveals itself as double-sided, but these two sides are not equivalent. The predicament of the situation is marvelously summed up in the infinite regress of reflection that marks the self who is caught by the gaze of an other: "...I do not cease to assume myself as such. Yet I assume myself in blindness since *I do not know* what I assume."[190] And with the appearance of this endless inversion of the private and public image of the self, we find ourselves back at the scene of that former dialogue, namely the interview in Godard's *Masculine-Feminine*.

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[188] Richard Serra, "Statements": 64.
[189] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 355.
[190] Ibid.

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"A New Theatricalizing"

> The world's presence to me is no longer mechanically assured, for the screen no longer holds a coherent world *from* which I am absent. I feel the screen has darkened, as if in fury at its lost power to enclose its content.
>
> – Stanley Cavell[191]

We have come full circle since I first introduced the frame as that idealist figure that provides an ontological ground of stability for the modernist spectator. The movie screen and the canvas each possess a literal frame of a particular size and proportion, yet their factual dimension is subsumed by modernism within the overriding concept of a transcendental frame of perception. The beholder is granted the illusion of grasping a "world" in its totality – whether exhibited on canvas or on the screen – since nothing appears to escape his all-seeing eye.

Already towards the close of the nineteenth-century, George Seurat announced the problem of the frame by designing the border of his paintings in a contrapuntal manner. He addressed the problem of the ambiguous status of the literal frame as being both intrinsic and extrinsic to the image. However, in acknowledging the doubleness of the frame Seurat did little to put the problem to rest. The literal presence of the frame continued therefore to undercut the autonomy of the work of art and late modernism would go to extraordinary lengths to absorb the frame into the picture itself. In relation to Frank Stella, for instance, Fried develops the argument

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[191] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 130-131.

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that the artist's shaped canvasses annul the exteriority of the picture's frame by means of their invagination of the painting's edge. Instead of a strict division between inside and outside, the shaped canvas institutes a more permeable "directionality" of open and closed. Literal shape no longer reads as the exclusive property of the material support but seems to suffuse the painting as form; literalness, that is, has been rendered immaterial.

Thus late modernism performed a radical, last ditch move of sealing the painting within itself by stating that the frame *is* the ground.[192] And, once more, painting will seem to repeal the historical force of objectification in becoming *nature*. As Cavell sums up, in Stella's paintings shape has been freed of its objective properties, it "*pervades*, like gravity, or energy, or air."[193] He is quick to add, however, that this does not form a possibility – "as far as we yet know" – of the movie screen. Yet, cinema is not worse off for being denied this painterly strategy for its possibility is infinitely more variable, a possibility that we have already identified by the name of the phenomenological frame.[194] While Stella's painting manifests an optical impression of wholeness that subsumes all material differences of space and time, the white screen of cinema constitutes a formal matrix into which the entire

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[192] This observation is substantiated in Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*.

[193] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 232, n.13. See also Fried, "Shape as Form."

[194] "The fact that in a moving picture successive film frames are fit flush into the fixed screen results in a phenomenological frame that is infinitely extendible and contractible, limited in the smallness of the object it can grasp only by the state of its technology, and in largeness only by the span of the world. Drawing the camera back, and panning it, are two ways of extending the frame; a close-up is of a part of the body, or of one object or small set of objects, supported by and reverberating the whole frame of nature" (ibid.: 25).

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world fits. Thus, in deference to modernist painting the ontological formula of cinema might be worded as follows: 'the screen *is* a frame.'[195]

The movie spectator, according to Cavell's thesis, will not be troubled by what remains off-screen, because *in principle* nothing escapes the phenomenological frame of cinema. Hence, the spectator might revel in the plenitude of *this* image projected *now* which might fully absorbs us for it is so utterly independent of our will:

> The altering frame is the image of perfect attention...but it is equally possible of the medium not to call attention to them but, rather, to let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight.[196]

This kind of argument clearly lends itself best to a style of filmmaking that emphasizes the predominance of a static frame, long shots and a relatively limited use of parallel montage or rapid intercutting. In fact, Cavell barely discusses the technique of montage (the model of Soviet cinema is glaringly absent from the book), and he refuses to consult a découpage or scenario to back up the details of his descriptions. If there is a basic technique that he relies upon, then it is that of memory. Cinema, for him, provides the imagery of a lived-through experience and is not the object of analytic reflection. His text is of a fundamentally Proustian nature; he dwells within a space of remembrance filled with the fullness of images which might be indicated, but not completely spoken, replete with a "contentment in simply naming moments, with the pure unwanting for more than small syllables of joy or disgust or the creeps."[197]

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[195] And this is exactly what Cavell does: "The screen *is* a frame; the frame is the whole field of the screen—as a frame of film is the whole field of a photograph, like the frame of a loom or a house. In this sense, the screen-frame is a mold, or form" (ibid.: 25).

[196] Ibid.: 25.

[197] Ibid.: 9-10.

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Cavell suggests that the vividness of a memory image is linked to the drawn-out attentiveness, the lingering hold of the camera on a certain scene of landscape. However, this passive, contemplative mode of perception and remembrance holds it dangers for Cavell. When pushed beyond a certain extreme, fascination will revert to boredom or alienation. At one point, Cavell refers to a remark by René Clair that a viewer who is forced to watch a film that records every minute of his own life would be driven to madness. In other words, by holding a shot for too long, the frame itself will begin to assert itself, not the presentness of the world, and a sense of disassociation will settle in. We might say that the frame seems to eclipse the world.

I introduce the word "eclipse" mindful that Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* of 1962 provides something of test case for Cavell. Antonioni's films of the early sixties were infamous for their distended passages, the so-called *temps morts*, wherein nothing happens except, perhaps, the rustle of leaves. The camera will, for instance, hold steady on scenery that is devoid of a human presence such as a seven-minute long stretch at the end of *L'eclisse*, during which the protagonists of the movie have left the screen, never to reappear. It is, as if, the diegetic background suddenly asserts itself as a material fact or a documentary reality, swallowing the fictive characters in the process. As Antonioni notes: "These are seven minutes where only the objects remain of the adventure; the town, material life, has devoured the living beings."[198] But, typically, Cavell will not register this sequence as alienatory, as presenting an image

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[198] Michelangelo Antonioni as cited in Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni or, The Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985): 80.

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of objectification. To him, the motionlessness of Antonioni's camera is simply the mirror of "nature's own patience."[199]

Another major absentee in *The World Viewed* is Warhol, which is not surprising considering that he has pushed the envelope of Antonioni's *temps morts* beyond any limit acceptable to Cavell. While the modernist beholder dwells in a qualitative moment in time, wherein the present, as it were, is stretched out, Warhol has fully quantified the viewer's stretch of attention. We might say that he has clocked the time of looking by fixating the camera on a certain object or person. The effect of the camera's stare is to cause an alternation in the spectator between an attitude of fascination and boredom. In Warhol's cinema the separate moments of absorption and defamiliarization have come to exist side-by-side.

On the one hand, the fixed camera of Warhol, its non-emotive stare, tends to invert the phenomenological effect of the camera's remove from the image, as described by Cavell. Rather than asserting the primary recession of the viewer from the world which *automatically* assures the coherency of the projected image, the image now appears to be set even further back than the viewer. Alternatively, we might say, that the camera does not offer up "an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it."[200] The frequent glances of Warhol's performers *at* the camera only intensify this effect of disconnection. The voyeuristic identification of the viewer with the camera

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[199] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 142.
[200] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 292.

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is thus thwarted. As Warhol has noted: "the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel."[201]

As Stephen Koch has observed, Warhol's persona is similar to the appearance of his objects: "Absolutely noticeable, yet apparently absolutely meaningless."[202] Warhol, thus, appears to present us with a kind of phenomenological paradox: a thing is shown up, pointed out, yet this object lacks meaning or interest to us. We are present to an object, but this object is displaced from our framework of intention. What we experience, then, is an immobilization of our circumspective gaze, of our altering frame of attention:

> The sighting, darting vivacity of the gaze becomes a stare. It is a stare of distance, indifference, of mechanically complete attention and absolute contactlessness.[203]

The world, in other words, is placed at such a remove that the seeming naturalism of a mediated reality exhibits its own artificiality. Like Bochner's phrase concerning the anonymity of the spectacle, Warhol transposes existence "into the lush velvet of a kind of *décor*."[204]

Yet the interest of Warhol's movies resides in the fact that he always keeps the opposite poles in circulation. Alienation is not fully split-off from the phantasmatic appearance of the commodity. The boredom of repetition, mingles with the attraction of the new. Hence, the bracketing of reality by Warhol's camera will, at times, cause

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[201] Andy Warhol, as cited in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989).

[202] Stephen Koch, *Stargazer: The Life, World and Films of Andy Warhol* [1973], revised edition (New York: Marion Boyars, 1985): 25. Without doubt this remains one of the best studies of Warhol's film production.

[203] Ibid.: 31.

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a heightening of the visual presence of objects; they acquire a preciosity as a result of having been displaced from their utilitarian context. What comes into view at such moments is a "lost childhood world of new things," and objects are "made to glow like a phenomenologist's dream."[205] Nevertheless, the viewer remains aware that this radiance is created as an internal effect of the apparatus, as a mere amplification and diffraction of the spectacle within its own mirror, like the sparkling light that reflects off the crumpled aluminum foil covering the walls of the Factory. What this dream does not imitate is the waking dream of Cavell who discerns the lucidity of the world itself in the cast shadows of the cinema.

Warhol announced a new theatricalizing of cinema. The camera, as a result, has itself become prey to a process of objectification. No longer constituting a subjective medium of identification, the camera is placed, as it were, at a third remove. The performer in Warhol's movies who talks to the camera or stares into its lens never affirms the presence of the artist behind it. The camera, it seems, has itself become an object of attention, and a 'dumb' one at that. Nauman further developed this logic by placing himself before the lens, while absenting himself from behind it. The habitual domain of the studio, as a result, was turned inside out. Serra, on his part, dramatized this de-naturing of artistic practice by means of his dialogue with the camera in *Frame*. Dan Graham would carry this logic to its next and final stage, by not only placing the camera and performer in circulation, but the viewer as well. The camera assumes an objective independence in Graham's films, which no longer is attached to

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[204] Ibid.: 28.

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the body of the performer or to the eye of the viewer. These films, as we will see, cannot be fitted within the parentheses of a modernist gaze.

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[205] Ibid.: 31.

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4. Dan Graham: Film as Topology

Film as Event

Exhibit A

> The film is not exhibitionist. I watch it, but it doesn't watch me, watching it. Nevertheless, it knows that I am watching it. But it doesn't want to know.
>
> – Christian Metz[206]

On taking one's place in the movie auditorium one enters into a curious scenario of disavowal and a strange game of hide-and-seek ensues. What is this charade that the viewer willingly succumb to in classical cinema?[207] 'I'm here and I'm present. I watch and assist at the birth of the film. Only in my gaze does the film exist, it lives within me.' The story of the movie does not simply happen of its own accord; it does not narrate itself. It is the viewer who assumes the empty place of the narrator. The viewer becomes, as it were, the apparatus of exhibition. That is why the filmed scene might be caught unaware – it remains oblivious to the viewer's presence, because the viewer appropriates the function of mediation for him- or herself. The

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[206] Christian Metz, "Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)" [1975], in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, translated by Celia Brittan and Annwyl Williams (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982): 94. This text by Christian Metz rewrites the narrative or 'classical' model of cinema according to the linguistic terms of Emile Benveniste's *histoire/discours*. The 'history' is an utterance (written, verbal, or otherwise) which erases all traces of its enunciative situation. As Benveniste states "no one speaks here, the events seem to narrate themselves." Benveniste opposes 'history' to the 'discursive event' as an utterance that calls attention to its own enunciative conditions (usually by organizing its verb tenses around the present and the use of pronouns like "I", "You", "this" and "that."). The source for Benveniste is "The Correlations of Tense in the French Verb," in *Problems in General Linguistics* (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1971).

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spectator does the showing without showing him- or herself. And that is also why the viewer rests comfortable in the perceptual loop of exhibitionism, because the viewer is removed from its tautological structure. The exhibitionist knows that the voyeur looks, derives pleasure from this look, and thus, at the same time, identifies with the other's look. But in the cinema the viewer does all the looking while remaining impervious to the look of the other. It is not just the actor who never acknowledges the spectator's stare; it is the projective apparatus itself that is never caught in the act; it is the apparatus which never shows up.

Exhibit B

> A camera's identity, in relation to the spectator's perception, may be part of him, or not part of him (a separate mechanical object). Its image may be read as inside the performer or outside of him, or can be seen as both inside and outside of the performer, appearing as simultaneously subject and object.
>
> – Dan Graham[208]

The confidence of the spectator of classical cinema – 'I'm here and I'm present' – crumbles on entering the filmic theater of Graham. There is no story anywhere in sight, only the filmic event itself which keeps repeating itself. Graham does not erase the actual traces of the filmic performance, either at the level of production or projection, and therefore the spectator is revealed in the glare of the projector's light to be a performer who is not substantially different from the

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[207] Metz's discussion relies strongly on Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects."

[208] Dan Graham, "Film and Performance/Six Films", in *Films* (Geneva: Éditions Centre d'Art Contemporain/Écart publications, 1977): 8.

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performers on screen. The discursive structure of this filmic event has not disappeared behind the object of exhibition, it has been put on display as well. That is to say, the subject of this cinema is simply revealed in its anonymity or, better still, its multiplicity: I am no longer incarnated in the camera/projector for it is not one.

Accordingly, I am led in a dizzying dance across the mirrored stage of Graham's cinema. We might be inclined to say that he returns to the "frenzy of the visible" that convulsed an earlier epoch of capitalism.[209] But he returns with a difference. If he can be said to restage such a historical moment then it is exactly not to retrieve it as an imaginary scene or as curiosity worth saving, like the *laterna magica*, *zoogyscope*, *stereoscopes*, and other optical inventions of the nineteenth century that are placed on view in film museums the world over.[210] On the contrary, the past returns in these films only in order to convulse the present, to disrupt the endlessness of its horizon. If this dance of film celebrates anything, it is the commemoration of such a critical task. This history, then, is also a politics and, most specifically, a practical politics of the present. Defining this filmic mediation of the past *in* the present will form our topic.

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[209] Jean-Louis Comolli, "Machines of the Visible," in *The Cinematic Apparatus*, edited by Teresa de Lauretis and Stephen Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980): 122.

[210] These devices are mentioned by Graham in the essay "Photographs of Motion," *End Moments*.

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Six Films (1969-1973)

While they are rarely mentioned, Graham produced a small but distinctive group of six films between 1969 and 1973, alongside his other activities in the area of performance, video, and writing. Listed in chronological sequence the films are: *Sunset to Sunrise* (1969), *Binocular Zoom* (1969), *Two Correlated Rotations* (1969), *Roll* (1970), *Body Press* (1970-72), and *Helix/Spiral* (1973). After 1973 Graham did not return to the actual practice of making films, but the cinematic mode of experience that was first developed in these films would remain a reference point throughout the later pavilion projects and his writing.[211] My discussion shall not take us beyond the point of 1973, however the relevance of the earlier period to the later work should be evident by the time I conclude.[212]

Before I continue, I need to insert a note on the quality of the cinematic experience projected by Graham's work. First of all, this experience, as mediated by

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[211] The adjective 'cinematic' crops up frequently in Graham's phenomenological descriptions of the multiple surfaces of the pavilions which alter their aspect under the changing conditions of atmosphere, light and the position of the viewer.

[212] A clear link between the films and the pavilions is established in the *Cinema* project. I consider *Cinema* to be one of Graham's most brilliant, and sadly unrealized, designs. The present text is concerned with locating the films in their historical context; a main oversight in the existing literature on the artist. My story will, therefore, end around 1973. Were I to include *Cinema* then I would need to give careful attention to the gap between 1973 and 1981 in which Graham develops his mirrored video installations and pavilion structures, which is not possible in the current space of my text. I hope to return to this 'post-history' of the films in the near future.

In an interview with the author, Graham has offered some useful suggestions regarding the connection between *Body Press* and his *Rooftop Urban Park Project: Two Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube* at the Dia Center for the Arts: "The Dia piece has all the things that the films have: there is the relation to the body of the spectator, the spectator's relation between a rectilinear form and the curved form. The film's rectilinear form was the box of the camera. There is the relation to the surrounding horizon line (...) the projection situation, the walls of the interior." Eric de Bruyn, "Interview with Dan Graham" [March 1997], in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 106.

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the filmic apparatus, needs to be defined both in terms of the phenomenological *situation* of the observer versus the work of art and of the historical *condition* of this relationship. The exhibition of this perceptual situation alongside its socio-economic conditions constitutes the actual 'subject matter' of Graham's films, which implies that the experience they have to offer is not aimed to please the self-identical spectator of classical cinema. In fact, to speak of 'an' experience at all is somewhat misleading, for Graham's films do not present a coherent, symbolic message to the spectator, let alone any central point of view. His films unravel the perspectival field of vision that narrative cinema projects. Their space of projection is differentiated between the mobile, overlapping planes of observer, performer and apparatus. Therefore, I prefer to speak of these films less in terms of a specific experience than in terms of their exhibition of a performative event. I shall clarify this contention in due course, but let me stress at the outset that this filmic function entails a certain indeterminacy of the image itself. While narrative cinema basks its spectators in the glow of its radiant scene, there is an aspect to Graham's films that always exceeds the symbolic framework of representation. These films, in a manner of speaking, are unknowable, not only in a descriptive but also in an existential sense, as we shill see.

We might describe Graham's films as operating in the bipolar region between what Foucault identified as the *physics* and *phylum* of social identity. Physics refers to the historical regularity that underpins a social order, the phylum, which appears to its natives as a natural habitat, a cultural organization of genetic inheritance. Yet this physics of society is not a static structure, it concerns a relational and multiple power

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that is perpetually in motion. It consists of a technology that is not localized, but mobilized as a disciplinary force within the social economy. The phylum might be called the imaginary horizon of totality aimed at by this physics. The former cannot form more than an ideological compromise as long as the latter remains at grips with the primary inertia of matter. To be sure, the mechanisms of power have a material field of application, but this field is not immediately apprehensible. The regularity of the social order must be extracted from a "region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations."[213] The combinations and identities that are established within this homogenous order will therefore also include many gaps and discontinuities. Graham's films can be understood to show this physics of technology at work. They depict the spectacle of a body poised between a state of lucidity and dispersal. The films do not replicate this physics but neither do they simply negate it. What the films do achieve is a momentary suspension of the 'natural' progress of this disciplinary force. And in this interim, they indicate the historical threshold of its first appearance.

To return to the six films, what is immediately apparent is the rarity of this series. They manifest a stringent economy of structure and means. Graham has observed that there was no reason to continue beyond this limited group because the logical possibilities on which the set was based had been exhausted.[214] The six films constituted a permutational series that ran its full course. From the beginning, then, it

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[213] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1978): 208.

[214] *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 105-106.

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is clear that Graham was not in the business of stocking the image banks of film history. He was not invested in the medium of film as such, for reasons that we shall come to explore.

Perhaps there will seem to be a contradictiion, in the simultaneous fact of the differential state of these films and their constitution as a closed series. But this contradiction is only apparent. The regularity of Graham's permutational series concerns the spatial and temporal deployment of their variables: camera, screen, performer, observer, etc. However, this regularity is not plotted according to the code of monocular space that governs narrative cinema. While these films might demarcate the boundaries of a logical space, it is not one that is geared to the position of an ideal spectator. Space is composed and decomposed before our eyes as we watch these films. To track these filmic interruptions of continuity is what deserves our close attention.

What are the empirical facts in so far as they can be established?

According to Graham's own notes, the first film, *Sunset to Sunrise*, was shot according to the following procedure [fig. 54]:

> The film is made by continuously moving a 16 mm movie camera from a position oriented toward the sun on the horizon line at the moment of sunset, and proceeding in a slow spiral with gradual upward inclination toward the top of the sky...The next morning at sunrise...a reverse spiral downward in opposite right-to-left rotation is filmed, ending on the sun rising above the horizon.[215]

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[215] Graham, *Films*: 11.

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Leaving a discussion of the temporal hiatus within this movie aside for the moment, the fundamental gesture of *Sunset to Sunrise* is to instate a spiraling motion of the camera within the visual field. The film traces the outline of the viewer's visual hemisphere from the horizon to the zenith and back and this rotating pattern will appear in all films but *Binocular Zoom*.

Binocular Zoom, like *Sunset to Sunrise*, is shot directly against the light of the sun which, in this case, remains partially obscured by clouds rather than sunken behind the rim of the horizon [fig. 55]. Yet, the film applies another method from *Sunset to Sunrise* in order to map the interstitial space between the perceiver and the perceived object.[216] Instead of the spiraling motion of the camera, *Binocular Zoom* traverses the distance between the sun and the eye by zooming outwards. The sun, thus, appears to move further away from the viewer. It diminishes in size to a "distance," as Graham puts it. But there is an even more striking difference between *Sunset to Sunrise* and *Binocular Zoom*. The latter requires the simultaneous use of *two* cameras, as will be the case with all subsequent films made by Graham. In fact, *Sunset to Sunrise* was shot with a 16 mm camera, while *Binocular Zoom* uses lightweight Super 8 cameras which are placed flush to the eye. The manipulative quality of these cameras, which had only recently made it onto the market, forms a technical condition of Graham's film performances. The use of two cameras in

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[216] This same procedure had already been followed in *March 31, 1966*, a piece that mapped in a series of decreasing steps the distance between the outer "edge of known universe" to the "retinal wall" of the eye. Dan Graham referred to this work as a "(solipsistic) insight represented as a one-dimensional point-of-view extension making up a perspective from (at) my (its) limits of inception (...) the 'interior' plane inverted 'outside' as it is 'inside'." See "Information," in *End Moments*: 54.

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Binocular Zoom necessitates also the synchronized projection of the two films. To this purpose, Graham has stipulated that *Binocular Zoom* be shown on a split screen.

Binocular Zoom is followed by *Two Correlated Rotations* and *Roll*. These films return to the concentric movement described by *Sunset to Sunrise*, but the rotation is now executed by two cameras in tandem. In the case of *Roll*, one camera is placed on the ground facing the performer, who rolls slowly toward the right of the framing edge of the camera's view [fig. 56]. The other camera is attached to the performer's eye while he rolls in an attempt to keep it centered on the stationary camera opposite from him. The film is not destined for a split screen viewing as in the case of *Binocular Zoom*, but is projected on distant opposite walls. The exhibition of the film, therefore, reflects the original situation of the film shoot which opposed two cameras and performers in space. *Two Correlated Rotations* introduces a further duplication of a filmic 'unit': besides two cameras, this film also requires two performers [fig. 57]. Graham describes the shooting procedure of *Two Correlated Rotations* in the following manner:

> The two cameramen each hold cameras so that their viewfinders are extensions of their eyes and visual fields. They begin facing each other one foot away. They walk in counter spirals, the outside performer moving gradually outward while the inside performer walks inward approaching the center.[217]

The installation of the film is again different from the preceding cases: *Two Correlated Rotations* is projected into the corner with each reel screened onto a separate, yet adjacent wall.

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[217] Graham, *Films*: 15.

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Two more films remain to be described, namely *Helix/Spiral* and *Body Press.* In these works, Graham adds yet another factor into the cinematic equation – the camera is not only treated as a 'viewfinder,' it also acquires tactile properties. In *Helix/Spiral*, for instance, the spiraling choreography of the camera harks back to the camera movement in *Sunset to Sunrise*, but it maps the outer surface of the body rather than tracing the inner surface of the celestial dome [fig. 58]. *Helix/Spiral* calls for a stationary performer who slides the back end of the camera downward across his body, describing a gradually descending helix in space. A second performer places the camera's viewfinder before the eye and spirals inward towards the center axis occupied by the first performer. The second performer attempts to keep his camera centered on the first performer's camera while remaining within the field of vision of the latter's camera. The resultant films are to be projected simultaneously on opposite walls, as in the case of *Roll.*

The performative structure of *Body Press* is similar to *Helix/Spiral* except for the fact that neither camera is permanently attached to the eye or even the body of one performer [fig. 59]. Furthermore, placing the performers inside a mirrorized cylinder doubles the reflective relationship between one performer and the other (and between one camera and the other). Let me draw once more on Graham's own lapidary style of description:

> Two filmmakers stand within a surrounding and completely mirrorized cylinder, body trunk stationary, hands holding and pressing a camera's back-end flush to, while slowly rotating it about, the surface cylinder of their individual bodies. One rotation circumscribes the body's contour, spiraling slightly upward with the next turn. With successive rotations, the body surface areas are completely covered as a template by the

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> back of the camera(s) until eye-level (view through cameraman's eyes) is reached; then reverse mapping downward begins until the original starting point is reached. The rotations are at correlated speed; when each camera is rotated to each body's rear it is then facing and filming the other where they are exchanged so the camera's "identity" "changes hands," each performer handling a new camera.[218]

The films are projected as loops on two opposite walls that stand close to each other. The tight compartment in which the original performers stood is therefore replicated in the compact space of projection. As a result, the loop projectors assume the nature of a physical barrier, acting like proxies of the original performers. The spectator must navigate these mechanical objects while straining to follow the orbital path of the cameras, which cross in virtual space from one bodily horizon to another, while remaining literally attached to one screen in the gallery space.

The preceding description has established in sufficient detail the permutational logic of Graham's artist film. I have demonstrated the different combinations and series based upon the variables of camera and body, place and movement, recorded and reflected image, which are gathered together within the framework of a 'binocular' schema of film. Within this structural scheme, the artist subjects filmic space to a constant principle of temporal inversion between the inner and outer horizon of subjective perception. There is a truism of classical cinema that Graham likes to repeat: the spectator tends to identify with the camera's viewpoint: "A movie camera's view finder is placed on the performer's eye to identify the image seen on the screen by the spectator with the performer's perception of the world at the moment

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[218] Ibid.: 21.

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of performance."[219] Yet this perceptual process of identification is simultaneously disrupted in Graham's films by foregrounding the alterity of the camera as an object. He radicalizes the 'freedom' of the camera, so often celebrated in avant-garde cinema, to such an extent that it no longer will submit to the authority of an ideal eye. The result of this procedure is to split asunder the visual field, literally, through the use of a double screen, but also in a phenomenological sense, for the spectator is dissociated from the 'objective' world projected on screen. To summarize, the effect of Graham's serial method is not to institute the continuity of a medium; not, that is, to establish the continuity of the modernist series wherein every instance manifests a complete *idea* of the medium as such. To the contrary, Graham's films release a surfeit of differential energy within the economy of perception that cannot be contained. These films stage, as it were, the downfall of the idealist subject of modernism. To be at all times and everywhere, they seem to state, is to be at no time and nowhere.

There is another context, though, that might seem more relevant to Graham than modernism, namely minimalism. Indeed continuity exists between the films and minimalism, however there is also an important difference, to consider the films as a 'cinematized' version of the minimalist series would be a mistake. To see this, let us arrive at Graham's reception of minimalism by way of his earlier work in publishing. The period in question begins around 1966 and leads up to 1969 and is usually considered Graham's 'conceptual' phase, though I shall apply this term in a circumspect manner. The discursive procedure that Graham unfolds in these writings,

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[219] Graham, *Films*: 7.

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advertisements and data grids will directly inform the filmic work. And this discursive field is itself informed by the *topos* of minimalism. What shall emerge from my analysis of the publications is their fundamental principle of bivalency; a principle put to critical advantage by the artist.

A similar hybridity courses through the film notes that I have quoted from. Less than a varying style of writing, this hybridity concerns a variance of enunciative positions which range from the descriptive and the instructional, to the interpretive and annotative. On the one hand, these texts formalize a kind of experimental method, provide it with a script of sorts, while, on the other hand, they propose a quasi-scientific mode of analysis. In a later section, I shall expand on this imitation of scientific procedures in Graham's writing and films. For now, what is significant about this shifting range of enunciative registers is that it points to the evasive aspect of the filmic experience, which happens somewhere inbetween the self and its objects. The films, I might suggest, are experiments that happen to us.

Again, these considerations raise the problem of the mode of spatiality that is portrayed by Graham's films. Since I shall briefly retreat from the territory of the films to the earlier period of the publications, let me summarize the differences between the space of classical cinema and Graham's film in so far as they have appeared thus far. It will be helpful to bear this difference in mind while looking at the field of publications because a similar opposition will appear there as well. This opposition will be phrased in terms of a distinction between topographical and topological space.

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The basic topography of the apparatus of classical cinema is quickly sketched: the projector beam originates from behind the immobile viewer and is directed at a screen rimmed in blackness. The phenomenological effect of cinema is to transform these limiting conditions of the apparatus into a spectacle of empowerment. The captive moviegoers, shackled to their seats in the dark of the auditorium, believe themselves nonetheless in total control through their primary identification with the apparatus of restriction. They experience the projected image to be more intense than reality itself because the world seems to exhibit itself, without reserve, on the screen. And this screen is not placed at an external distance, but seems to exist within some virtual depth; the viewer has internalized its physical limitations. There is no one who challenges the spectator's fusion with this projection, no other who threatens to divest this horizon of its subjective meaning: "Limited by the framing, lined up, put at the proper distance, the world offers up an object endowed with meaning, an intentional object, implied by and implying the action of the 'subject' which sights it."[220] Such is the viewer's pleasure of self-confirmation in the space of narrative cinema.

This topography does not survive in Graham's cinema. By distributing the viewer's attention across the room and catching this subject in the crossbeams of projected light, Graham disrupts the central perspective of classical cinema. Through this logic of duplication, he cancels out the viewer's illusion of supremacy. The screen does not repress its properties as a physical object but stands in a very real relationship to us, denying the transcendental operation of the frame in classical

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[220] Baudry, "Ideological Effects": 292.

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cinema. Moreover, Graham institutes a dynamic within the visual field, a mobility of reversible surfaces or "switching termini" as he calls them. He uncovers a screen, that is, that has more than one side – "topologically, an optical 'skin,' both reflective and transparent inside and outside."[221] To define this topological skin as it first appears in the magazine pieces of Graham is our next task.

A Topology of the Page

> The message is united with the schema (the schema being) used being its own definition so that the structure, in effect, structures itself (in place) as the '*language*,' in-forming an intermediate object between *concept* and *material*; the *process* consists in uniting both while simultaneously decomposing them.
>
> – Dan Graham[222]

Graham initiates his filmic practice in 1969, around the same time that he discontinues the 'conceptual' strategy of the magazine pieces. I am not referring to the artist's writing in general – Graham would continue to be prolific in this area – but to such works as the 'data grids,' the drawings and 'poems,' and other hybrid adaptations of the typophoto essay and the magazine advertisement.[223] Without

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[221] Dan Graham, "Cinema" [1981], in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 95. I deliberately cite this passage out of context, to emphasize the structural relation between Graham's films and the *Cinema* project.

[222] Graham, *End Moments*: n.p.

[223] Examples of the data grid are formed by *Scheme* (1965), *Schema* (1966), *Side Effects/Common Drugs* (1966), *March 31, 1966* (1966) and *Extended Distance/Extended Time* (1969). Instances of the poem are *Figurative* (1965) and *I-They* (1967), while advertisement category is represented by *Likes* (1967-69), *Income (Outflow)* (1969).

I refer to *Homes for America* (1966) as an updated version of the avant-garde typophoto essay, but its case is obviously far more complex. *Homes for America* renders obsolete the avant-garde concept of the 'typophoto' as a perfect, technological medium for the transmission of knowledge. In 1925, for instance, Moholy-Nagy answered the question 'What is typophoto?' by stating: "Typophoto is the visually most exact rendering of communication." He concludes the same essay by suggesting that

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question the hybrid character of these pieces is key. Graham has suggested this typology of the data-grid, poem, etc., but never insisted on the absolute status of these categories. Quite the opposite, in fact. The magazine works do not comfortably fit within the conventional genres of mass publication. These works are designed to transgress the spatial 'architecture' of the magazine: the authorial perspective and the editorial and typographical framework that supports it. "There is no composition," as the artist observes. A data grid, like *Schema*, or a poem, like *I-They*, "subverts value" rather than expressing an artistic or authorial insight [fig. 60].[224]

This principle of de-composition makes for at least one similarity between the magazine pieces and the films. They share a definite lack of conformity to established categories of the 'work.' Furthermore, the magazine pieces deny the authenticity of the art object that henceforth exists by sheer grace of exhibition alone.[225] The 'object' exists, that is, by virtue of its publicity and not despite of it, as modernism was prone to argue. This object, i.e. the publication, assumes a discrete existence but only in the disposable form of printed matter. Hence, the magazine pieces acknowledge the basic modality of the art work, its exhibition value, which had been a constant subject of disavowal under modernism. Graham's procedure does not so much show the gallery

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"this mode of synoptic communication may be broadly pursued on another plane by means of the kinetic process, the film." Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *Painting Photography Film:* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), 39.

[224] Graham, "Other Observations" [1969/73], in *For Publication*, (Los Angeles: Otis Art Gallery, 1975): n.p.. *I-They* exemplifies the argument I will present in the following concerning the shift from a narrative to a performative mode of address in Graham's work. In this 'poem', Graham has mapped the personal pronouns into a grid. The pronouns of direct speech, 'I' and 'We,' are entered into separate boxes at the top, while 'You' has been doubly inscribed in the two boxes below. The remaining two boxes contain on the left the series 'He-She-It' and on the right 'They.'

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in its naked state as it reveals that the exhibition is always already 'covered' elsewhere. The procedure of de-composition enters into Graham's critical strategy, as it were, to exhibit the exhibition. To materialize this socio-economic condition of the art work, to sight its mediatized structure, is the prime point of overlap between the magazine and the film works.

How, then, is this moral of de-composition applied in the magazine pieces? First of all, it is achieved through a spatial inversion of the self-reflective principle of modernism. The subject matter of *Schema* (1966), for instance, consists of the statistical information created in the course of its own typesetting. The typographical event records itself in a potentially endless loop. Structuring itself in place, *Schema* "defines the limits and contingencies of placement."[226] It takes its own measure as place. But to structure itself does not mean to create a self-enclosed, autonomous object. To the contrary, *Schema* is contingent upon placement and therefore will exhibit the material conditions of enunciation that underpin this place, by which I mean to say that there is no individual subject of speech – any editor can fulfill the role – and there is no subjective message being relayed. *Schema* suspends all criteria concerning the legitimacy of who speaks and the validity of what is said for it lacks a modernist seriousness. Accordingly we might say that Graham puts his status as 'amateur' and 'autodidact' to good use here.

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[225] See Graham's own illuminating commentary on this period in "My Works for Magazine Pages: A History of Conceptual Art" [1985], in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 10-13.

[226] Graham, "Other Observations": n.p. *Schema* can actually induce an infinite spiral of feedback rather than simply reflecting its own material base. See Graham's "Thoughts on Schema (March 1966)," *For Publication*: n.p.

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To clarify the discursive structure of *Schema* a slight detour will be in order. What I propose is that this work functions as a kind of performative event or speech act that in its *anonymity* bears comparison to Michel Foucault's notion of the statement (*enoncé*) that is expounded in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.[227] Obviously, I do not hold that Graham explicitly followed this theoretical model, only that it offers a tactical advantage in the present context.

Foucault's archaeological method disinters speech acts of a special kind. Foucault is not concerned with those everyday utterances that are pronounced within a local, pragmatic context and form the ordinary object of speech act theory.[228] He is exclusively interested in those 'serious' speech acts that can reveal the historical regularity of an epistemic formation. These utterances do not constitute a kind of topographical atlas of this discursive field, but indicate its structural rules of operation. The discursive rules are therefore not the mental property of individuals, but organize a discursive space as a "uniform anonymity."[229] It follows that within such a linguistic domain of performance only certain utterances will 'make sense.' In fact, serious speech acts are exceedingly rare, as Foucault observes (a fact already ascertained in relation to the filmic 'statement' of Graham). On the other hand, the regularity of the discursive formation does not exclude the appearance of contradiction and conflict.

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[227] All subsequent discussions of Michel Foucault's thought are indebted to Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault*.

[228] A speech act forms a type of discursive event that involves a speaker and a listener and, more importantly, concerns a speaker who intends to influence the latter in some manner. The speech act, therefore, holds a 'performative' aspect. For more on this subject, see Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

[229] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 63.

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The statement functions in the logical space of a permutational series that allows the potential "of arousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games."[230] To get at this performative *function* of the statement one must therefore suspend belief in the seriousness of any specific utterance. The Foucauldian statement, namely, does not concern the truth value of any proposition, but refers to the very possibility of meaning that is conferred upon an utterance within a given historical formation of knowledge.

Where does this leave us in relation to *Schema*? I contend that Graham's piece exhibits exactly the performative function of the statement. It constitutes a statement, that is, of the exhibition as such. *Schema* does not locate us within the truth game of modernist art. *Schema* does not assume the same seriousness of tone, demand the same kind of aesthetic conviction. Rather it manifests and subverts the rules of the game as it was played during the sixties. This means, furthermore, that *Schema* does not take the tautological form of a proposition. A proposition has an apodictic character that remains ignorant of its historical field of use. Joseph Kosuth's "art as idea as idea" forms a contemporary example of such a proposition. A statement like *Schema*, on the other hand, depends on a specific, material set of conditions for its realization. Accordingly, there is no ideal version of *Schema:* "a specific variant, in a sense, does not actually exist, but under certain conditions can be made to *appear*."[231] Indeed, Graham seized any opportunity that emerged to publish *Schema* in order to make its contingent value apparent.

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[230] Ibid.: 36-37.

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I would like to add one more comment regarding the performative structure of the magazine pieces before taking up a discussion of *Homes for America*, which in due course shall lead us back to the films. Graham was quick to realize that he was not just dealing with the anonymous rules of a discursive field, but also with the question of power. Foucault makes an important remark that resonates strongly in the context of Graham's work. His remark concerns the truth claims of scientific language. Science desires to speak a context-free truth, but to speak truth in a void is impossible, Foucault observes, as long as one wants to be heard and understood. To speak, in short, is to invite a 'policing' of speech. Graham's earliest work suffered from this fact. They were not accepted in magazines because they seemed to lack *sense* in the combined game of art and publishing. He decided, therefore, to mimic the language of publicity more closely by designing advertisements. An additional advantage was that he could play off the direct mode of address employed by advertising.

The basic statement of the advertisement, as Graham explains, takes the discursive form of tautological speech: "You like it. It likes you." His tactic is to decompose this play of mirrors. By emptying the enunciative place of the subject, he throws the discursive axis of speech into a kind of tailspin that incessantly alternates between private and public, inner and outer space: "There is a relation of a *public* figure's *private* piece to *public* exposure or the reverse."[232] This reversibility of intent was programmed to sidestep the magazine's insertion of the reader into a predetermined framework of reference. Rather than the editorial content acting upon

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[231] Dan Graham, "Information," in *End Moments*, op. cit.: 45.

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the reader, Graham sought to activate the reader and offer him new possibilities of use. Through means of this discursive feedback, an alternative network or collectivity might take shape. To that end, he would place the same ad in different magazines irrespective of their editorial identity (e.g. news, sports, fashion, science, and art). Furthermore, the advertisement would allow a multiplicity of messages: "it's art and it's science and it's the sociology of art (no history) or none of these definitions."[233] With the ads he remains poised, then, between an utopian moment of communality and a counter-moment of individual dispersion. He develops, that is, a kind of dialectic in suspension, which informs the films as well and to which we shall return.

The discursive function of Graham's magazine pieces is now sufficiently established in order to consider his *Homes for America*. This essay first appeared in the December 1966-January 1967 issue of *Arts Magazine* and has since received an almost canonical status. I do not presume to add to this rich field of historical interpretation, however it deserves our attention since it is the hinge on which his later films will turn.[234] The referential content of the page is not our primary concern – it is there to be read and not insignificant as such. Instead, I want to scan the temporal

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[232] Graham, *For Publication*: n.p.

[233] Dan Graham, "*Aspen*: One Proposal," in *Rock My Religion*: 40. The advertisement *Likes*, for instance, is subtitled *A Computer-Astrological Dating-Placement Service*. The questions are addressed to 'you' and are arranged under the following categories: "Defining what you are like", "Defining what would you like your date to be like," "Defining what relationship you like." The ad is structured as a multiple-choice questionnaire and the receiver is asked to check off the appropriate boxes. The "feedback" yields multiple benefits: each participant receives the names of three dates, knowledge is gained about astrology as a social science, and the expression of the participants' needs can be incorporated in a new questionnaire.

[234] See Buchloh, "Moments of History" and Alex Alberro, "Reductivism in Reverse," in *Tracing Cultures: Art History, Criticism, Critical Fiction* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994): 7-27.

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surface of this discursive event. What *Homes for America* presents is, as it were, a switchboard of information:

> This was the first published appearance of art ("minimal" in this case) as place conceived, however, solely in terms of information to be construed by the reader in a mass-readable-then-disposable context-document in place of the fact (neither before the fact as a Judd or after the fact as in current "Concept" art). Place in my article is decomposed into multiple and overlapping points of reference – mapped "points of interest" – in a two-dimensional point to point "grid". There is a "shell" present placed between the external "empty" material of place and the interior "empty" material of language; a complex, interlocking network of systems whose variants take place as information present (and) as (like) the medium – information – (in) itself.[235]

Leaving the question of minimalism aside for now, it is Graham's concept of 'place' that deserves elaboration. Graham resists thinking about space in topographic terms or what he likes to call an 'architecture' of information. A proposition supposes exactly such a neutral support of communication, but Graham prefers the more confounding notion of a 'shell,' which even registers in the parenthetic style of the quote above. In doing so, he disrupts the binary logic of container and contained, inside and outside, figure and ground. This space is not the Cartesian extension but a malleable, shifting surface; a surface that is susceptible to the transformative processes of bending, stretching, and twisting (but not, and that is essential, of cutting).[236] In other words, Graham projects a mode of spatiality that is described by that branch of mathematics popularly known as "rubber-sheet geometry" or topology: I am following

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[235] Graham, *End Moments*: 34.

[236] I only know one occasion in Graham's films where the editorial technique of 'cutting' forms an essential element in the film, namely *Sunset to Sunrise*. *Body Press* is mounted from separate takes but all transitions are masked.

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the cue of Graham himself in suggesting this spatial figure as a basic model in his early work.[237]

Homes for America demonstrates how such a topological space might be conceived in print. This shell binds the surface of things to that of language but not to make the one transparent to the other. If anything, *Homes for America* parodies an idealist model of language which considers the sign as standing in a motivated relation to its referent. *Homes for America* forces the arbitrary structure of the sign into the foreground; it is entered into a permutational series. Hence, the several lists of *names* which just as easily could have been substituted by others or could have been chosen to designate something else, such as the series of housing developments (e.g. Belleplain, Brooklawn, Colonia, etc.), the standard house plans (e.g. The Sonata, The Concerto, The Overture, etc.), or the pre-programmed color schemes (Moonstone Grey, Lawn Green, Coral Pink, etc.).

Most importantly, this dispersion of the sign entails a dispersion of subject positions. *Homes for America* does not establish a single point of view, but juxtaposes an array of intersecting perspectives. It does not present so much a static tabulation of information as it places in motion a series of discursive transformations and combinations. If this photo-essay recycles the figure of the grid *ad nauseam* then it is not to survey a static, unified 'architecture' of place. Graham dismantles the totality

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[237] See my exchange with Graham on the subject of topology in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 114-115. Topology represented for him the idea that "the inside and the outside were the same surface and that you could make a loop, like a Möbius strip, identifying inside and outside." He also calls it the "dominant mathematical metaphor" of the sixties. In the interview, he lists the magazine *Radical Software*, edited by Paul Ryan, as his most important source on the topic of topology.

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into its variable units, releasing them to a performative function of distribution: "Thus the art's in-formational structure upholds the breakdown (collapse, decomposed parts, deposition) of its 'architecture' in terms of the base constituents of place."[238] This ruinous topology of *Homes for America* is a far cry from the ambient space of modernism, which knew no distinction between occupied space and space at large. For the modernist viewer was offered a transcendental framework into a transparent continuum, while the subject of *Homes for America* threatens to dissolve into an atopic space where each point might exist anywhere and everywhere at the same time.

The subject threatens to dissolve, but does not completely do so. We should not be too hasty to claim that *Homes for America* collapses all difference into a simulacral realm of equivalence. Certainly, its recipient is placed within a rhythm of repetition, but there is always a factual difference that reappears from one moment to the next. What *Homes for America* literalized is the enunciative function of the topological screen, if only in the *process* of reading, for this differential surface can never be completely grasped in isolation. We do not survey the total discursive field of "coordination and coexistence," but embody certain stations within its "space of use and repetition."[239] Space is thus constituted as a reversible 'shell,' but there is no perfect symmetry of interior to exterior. Placed within this medium of "in-formation" the subject will be both the subject and object of performance.

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[238]Graham, *End Moments*: 45.
[239] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: 106.

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This same paradox is contained, for instance, in the objective procedures of the social sciences, which would take their own background practice for granted.[240] The problem is compounded by the fact that social-science skills, e.g. the use of statistics, are internal to the disciplinary field to a degree that laboratory skills are not. Hence, the systematic grid of socio-economic categories employed by political science threatens to replicate the very reified, calculable order of late capitalism that forms its object of study. This was the problem of Max Weber who attempted to give an objective account of the administrative regulation of everyday life, while he realized that his own theorizing could not escape from this dominant mode of self-realization. This is also the political question of Foucault (and Jean-Luc Godard who Graham greatly admired) who argues that to render society visible, to analyze its distributions and series, is also to police it.[241] Such is the contradiction that is so brilliantly exhibited in *Homes for America.*

There is perhaps one alternative to the self-objectifying approach of the human sciences: namely, the observer who adopts the actor's point of view within the social game and considers what these background practices *mean* to him, rather than silently imposing the objective grid of rationality. For the generalizing methods of social science could not foresee or explain the emergence of countercultural practices during the sixties. The hippies, for instance, were to contest the contractual relationship of individuals in capitalist society by establishing other forms of collective existence.

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[240] See Dreyfus, *Michel Foucault*: 163-65.

[241] In several conversations with the author, Graham has compared *Homes for America* to the essayistic film method of Godard.

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But if these social actors understood for themselves the significance of their counter-practice, they could not be clear about its place within the progressive administration and rationalization of society. Such was the losing game of the late sixties and it is one that Graham mimics with equal duplicity in his contemporary performances, just as he parodied the disciplinary matrix of sociology in *Homes for America.* I shall address the ambivalent structure of Graham's performance in the last section, but first I need to establish the genealogical link between the page and the filmstrip.

Photographs of Motion

> One way to fight the dogmatism was to take a completely empty area that was undefined and then to give it definition in terms of itself, but looking at it from a very peripheral point of view, like photography. I always liked it because the work was sort of art but it wasn't art; it had pretensions of being art but it was really very empty, it was really a technological thing.
>
> – Dan Graham[242]

The foregoing raises a host of questions, but I shall stick to only one. What I am essentially getting at is the coupling of visuality and technology in Graham's work. In *Homes for America* the material apparatus, i.e. the grid of the printed page, is what both implements and manifests the shifting topology of "multiple and overlapping points of reference." While a full explication of this discursive logic would benefit from a further consideration of the printed medium, a task already initiated by Graham's *Information* essay, I prefer to switch my approach at this moment. Actually,

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[242] Field, "An Interview with Dan Graham": 19.

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we have been shunted onto a sidetrack by a retroactive act of history. I introduced *Homes for America* in its printed format since that is how it is primarily known today. However, this was not the first version of the work. Graham first conceived of the piece as a slide projection. He started shooting the slides of the New Jersey housing developments in 1965, after the demise of the John Daniels gallery he had worked for. They receive their first public presentation during the *Projected Art* exhibition at the Finch College Museum of Art in 1966.[243] The Finch College projection thus initiated a trajectory that would lead Graham from the serialized space of minimalism via the rotating mechanism of the slide projector to the spiraling loops of film.

The slide projection was intended to adopt the basic technical procedures of minimalism, namely mechanical production and serial logic, without the need of fabricating objects. The 35 mm slide literalized the spatial structure of minimalism, what Graham called its "transparent 'flat,' serialized space."[244] The artist suggests, in other words, an isomorphism between the translucent, colored surface of the slide and the semi-transparent, planar constructions of minimalism. One might think, as Graham obviously did, of the Donald Judd box of 1965 that was assembled from sheets of pink plexiglas so that the inner suspension wires that held the structure together were revealed on the outside [fig. 61].[245] In this manner, Graham develops a topological series from the plexiglas planes of Judd, to the 'shells' of tract housing, to

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[243] The piece was listed as *Project Transparencies* in the brochure that accompanied the exhibition. The *Projected Art* show ran from December 8, 1966 to January 8, 1967.

[244] Graham, *End Moments*: 34.

[245] Rhea Anastas has brought it to my attention that Judd's work was exhibited during the "Plastics" show (March 16-April 3, 1965) at the John Daniels gallery where Graham was director.

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the celluloid support of the slide. And this is a planar series that can easily be added to or subtracted from, as he writes of the structure of the housing developments.

In December 1966, during the *Projected Art* exhibition, Graham conceived of a second piece for a slide projector that introduced a more direct form of self-mediation than the slides of housing developments allowed. A structure structuring itself in terms of place, to adopt Graham's terminology, this work superimposes the function of decomposition onto the material apparatus of the slide projector and projects it into the gallery space. As a result, the viewer is situated *within* the time and place of production. What this procedure emphasizes, above all, is the inability of the viewer to fully identify with the projective apparatus. The rotary movement of the carousel (and the camera) occurs, namely, outside the representational frame of the static slides.

Graham's instructions for the construction of the piece, as always, are exceedingly precise:

> A structure is built utilizing 4 rectangular panes of glass joined to form a box with 4 sides. The top is open and the base is a mirror. A 35 mm camera takes a shot on a parallel plane directed dead on focused on that plane and including nothing more than that plane in its periphery. Shot #2 is made similarly but of the next side of the box rotating clockwise and the lens focused further back – on a point inside the box. Shot # 3 is focused still nearer the center of the box and an equal distance from the first to the second one as the camera is aimed as the third side. #4 follows the same scheme, the focused point now at dead center of the box's interior. Next, 4 new planes are added to form a box within a box, building up a mirroring perspective within a perspective.[246]

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[246] Graham, *End Moments*: 35.

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And so forth, until twenty shots have been taken. The slides are copied four times and then inserted into the carousel first in proper sequence, then flipped over and placed in reverse sequence; this disposition is then repeated with the remaining forty slides.

We might now comprehend how this work implants the architectural theme of *Homes for America* within the medium itself and its physical context of exhibition. The work constructs and deconstructs itself *in time*, while the superimposed planes of glass endlessly shift on the screen from a state of transparency to opacity and back again. In doing so, Graham pushes a specific modernist logic of ambient space to a point of breakdown. Ambient space refers to a crossing of sculpture and architecture in what Greenberg called the "new construction-sculpture." He located its properties in an appearance of openness and weightlessness and notes the use of translucent, industrial materials, such as glass, plastics, and celluloid that are handled as architectural units to be assembled and arranged.[247] The new sculpture, he proposes, is characterized by its preoccupation with "surface as skin" alone. While this skin metaphor might echo the discursive terms of Graham, the comparison clearly does not hold at a structural level. For Greenberg assumes the existence of a projective self who can provide a transcendental frame of reference for this optical space which dissolves thinghood into a modality of light. Graham, on the other hand, materializes the dispersed modality of the viewer who can never fully identify with the projective apparatus, just as the intervals of 'negative space' are made absurdly palpable by

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[247] Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture": 142.

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focusing the camera on an empty point in space.[248] In the process, Graham addresses the modernist disavowal in America of the functionalist strategy of Russian Constructivism, without necessarily subscribing to its utopian figure of the glass house.[249]

The glass house underwent a series of transformations from expressionism through constructivism to the modern office building (and minimalism), but its relevance to the later pavilions of Graham is abundantly clear.[250] What I want to draw attention to in the slide projection, is the making and unmaking of this narrative series before our very eyes. This discontinuity of the narrative axis, i.e. the projected slides, is offset by the emphatic presence of the discursive axis, i.e. the projector, in the gallery space.[251] The obsessive repetition of its clicking mechanism patiently constructs the flat, serialized space, like a stack of cards, only to dismantle it again and again. What this exhibition underscores is an insurmountable difference between the narrative and discursive axis, the two never quite aligning themselves with the position of the spectator, as in cinema, or falling together, as in the absorptive space of

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[248] Both *Sunset to Sunrise* and *Binocular Zoom* make a similar play on the materialization of this empty, in between space. There is a tradition in Modernism of being mesmerized by the distance between things, or so-called negative space, which reaches from Georges Braque to Willem de Kooning. Bruce Nauman relates his decision to cast *Platform Made Up of the Space between Two Rectilinear Boxes on the Floor* and *A Cast of the Space under My Chair*, both of 1966, to de Kooning's remark about painting the space *between* rungs of a chair rather than the chair itself.

[249] Both Christina Lodder and Benjamin Buchloh have done much to counter this formalist 'cover up' of the history of productivism. See Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983) and Benjamin Buchloh, "Cold War Constructivism," in *Reconstructing Modernism*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

[250] See Jeff Wall, "Dan Graham's Kammerspiel," in *Dan Graham* (Perth: Art Gallery of Eastern Australia, 1985).

[251] On the application of these terms in pictorial space, see Louis Marin, "Towards a Theory of Reading in the Visual Arts: Poussin's The Arcadian Shepherds," in *Calligram*, edited by Norman Bryson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

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modernist opticality. To get at this difference, we need another historical figure, one that is placed between the static photograph and the mobile image and which was introduced by minimalism.

On more than one occasion, Sol LeWitt has advised us that his serial method of production was prefigured by a specific technological device, to wit cinematography. The artist, in fact, has likened the systemic logic that drives his artistic practice to the narrative structure of cinema. However this parallel is not drawn so much in the present but in relation to the prehistory of cinema:

> A man running in Muybridge was the inspiration for making all the transformations of a cube within a cube, a square within a square, cube within a square, etc...it led to the motion picture that was the great narrative idea of our time. I thought that narration was a means of getting away from formalism: to get away from the idea of form as an end and rather to use form as a means. [252]

Such is the curious twist that LeWitt gives to the primitivist legacy of modernism. Not only does he stake out a difference from the recent past of formalism through his embrace of the present of serial production and industrial materials, such as baked enamel and steel. The artist registers this difference, as well, in an archaic trace of nineteenth-century technology. Graham will repeat this archaeological discovery, with the help of LeWitt, but we shall see that Graham arrives at another conclusion. By which I mean to say more than the simple fact that LeWitt did not make films.

LeWitt's interest in Muybridge is made explicit in such early works as *RUN I-IV* (1962) and *Muybridge II* (1964) [fig. 62]. One might easily observe how the

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[252] Andrew Wilson, "Sol LeWitt Interviewed," in *Sol LeWitt Critical Texts*, edited by Adachiara Zevi (Rome: I Libri di AEIUO, 1995): 124.

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example of Muybridge's sequential photographs enabled LeWitt to break with the self-contained logic of modernist painting. These two works even introduce a rare imagery into his work, *Muybridge II* being the most cinematic in its use of photography and blinking lights. Consisting of a rectangular box with ten separate compartments, the viewer must draw near in order to view a photographic sequence of a seated, female nude shown at an increasing closer range of focus. LeWitt thus shifted Muybridge's vector of movement from the viewed body to the camera and from the lateral, or narrative axis, into the perpendicular, or discursive axis (if still requiring a lateral shift of the spectator's body).[253] This displacement in depth is literally mirrored in the contemporary *Wall Structures* that project physical shapes beyond the frontal plane of the painting. But this shift of the visual axis does something more than just change direction in an otherwise neutral and objective space. There is a phenomenological difference in that the work now points directly at the viewer. It addresses itself towards the viewer and physically engages him. In other words, we are dealing with a performance of sorts, which is staged for the viewer's body in relation to a kind of proto-cinematic apparatus. We will need to sort out this spatial disposition of the seen versus the seeing body and the body versus the viewing apparatus itself, in order to define Graham's own overlap and discontinuity with minimalism.

Narrative, as we know, suppresses the enunciative conditions of speech. 'No one speaks here,' linguistics explains. The narrated events seem to happen by

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[253] Rosalind Krauss presents a careful analysis of this work in "The LeWitt Matrix," in *Sol*

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themselves, which is how one might be tempted to describe the appearance of Muybridge's photographs, as Graham in fact does. The empty spatial continuum that Muybridge's series portray forms an exact precondition for the thematic development of narrative. Yet these photographs are also performed, which is to say, there is an observed performer – the running man – and there is the discursive performance of the camera. The 'no one' who is here, is the camera. To identify with this empty place clears a narrative horizon of plenitude before the subject by suppressing the physical conditions, the irruptive force of the discursive event itself. LeWitt, of course, did not actually propose a narrative art since that would invoke the authorial presence of the artist. Nonetheless, one might argue that his modular series provide the support for a more abstract mode of narrative, not biographic but ontogenetic: a narrative, that is, of the formation of subjectivity itself.

As I mentioned, LeWitt's "narrative idea" of seriality does not inscribe an authorial position within itself. The number systems function as anonymous rules along the lines of a Foucauldian statement. They simply serve a logic of spatial distribution. Not a proposition, therefore, the idea bears no claim to seriousness and does not illustrate a mathematical or philosophical truth.[254] Indeed, in this respect we might adopt the motto of Graham's *Schema*, namely that a specific variant does not exist, but can be made to appear. LeWitt's idea can take various discursive and material forms: "scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts,

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LeWitt – Structures 1962-1993 (Oxford: The Museum of Modern Art, 1993).

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conversations." But, as the statement of a certain series of permutational possibilities, all are equally acceptable – even without the fabrication of an actual object, as the artist asserts.[255] Thus LeWitt opened the door to a conceptual strategy of art, as the 1967 *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* confidently announces. But this essay did not condone a theoretical method which was to read the reader out of the text, as Graham came to deplore in some contemporary examples of Conceptualism.

Still, minimalism never completely bracketed the seriousness of art that was its modernist legacy, at least, not to the extent of *Schema* or *Homes for America*. Let us not confuse, by the way, Graham's suspension of seriousness with a lack of criticality. What the magazine pieces refuse is a referential order of the sign, while minimalism retained a lodestone in the authentic experience of the lived body, which is to say, such is the phenomenological reading of minimalism which, by now, has become well established.[256] According to this perceptual model, the embodied existence of the viewer, in the organic wholeness of his or her image, provides the world with an inner horizon of meaningfulness. This anterior depth of the body, as Merleau-Ponty writes, is "the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance, the background of somnolence or reserve of vague power against which the gesture and its aim stand out."[257] In sum, if there is a narrative in minimalism then it is formed by the gradual

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[254] "Conceptual art doesn't really have much to do with mathematics, philosophy or any other mental discipline...The philosophy of the work is implicit in the work and it is not an illustration of any system of philosophy." Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art": 14.

[255] Sol LeWitt, "Sentences on Conceptual Art," *0-9*, no. 5 (January 1969): 3-5, as reprinted in Alberro, *Conceptual Art*: 106-108.

[256] See Part One, n. 301.

[257] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 100-1.

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exploration of this inner threshold as it is projected outwards, opening an intentional clearing within the world.

Graham's take on minimalism, however, is slightly different. And this difference is highly pertinent to our discussion. The artist distinguishes two separate moments in the perception of a minimalist work. The first moment is static in nature. In this immobile space, the passive observer receives the minimalist 'idea' as a mere representation of itself. As a result, the viewer is distanced from the work of art: "the artist and the viewer are read out of the picture," while, Graham adds, "both *concepts* (first definitions) and *objects* are either before the fact—as *in fact* is the viewer in relation to viewing the art object—or *after the fact* (re-presentations), thus defining an a priori (static) "architecture" between what is sent and what is received."[258] However, once the spectator is placed in movement this conceptual edifice crumbles before our eyes:

> As the viewer moves from point to point about the art object, the physical continuity of the walk is translated into illusive, self-representing depth: the visual complication of representations 'develops' a discrete, non-progressive space and time. *There is no distinction between subject and object.* [259]

And with a sudden leap we have entered the domain of performativity. This leap occurs 'in depth' – like *Muybridge II* – for it involves the discursive axis of enunciation, but the subject does not determine this situation, the subject is also modified by it. In other words, the discursive axis has been placed in alternation. Subject and object, self and other become interchangeable: "object and subject are not

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[258] Graham, "Subject Matter.": 40.

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dialectical oppositions, but one self-contained identity: reversible interior and exterior termini."[260] In this topological space, there is no center to occupy, no interior perspective, only an infinite regress of self-reflectivity. Here, we are not in the presence of seriousness, i.e. the intentional 'depth' of a minimalist phenomenology, but instead we face the sophistry of an artist who revels in the antinomies of reason spun by Epidemes the Cretan who stated that "all Cretans are liars."[261]

The slide piece of 1966 was not fully successful in entering this reversibility into the visual field, although it already caused a visual disparity between the narrative and discursive axis (which repeats the transition from the static to the dynamic moment in Graham's reading of minimalism). A further doubling of the mechanism was required, which was achieved by the introduction of a binocular structure in another slide projection piece from 1967. Graham provides the following instructions for the piece:

> The device to be used is a square fence constructed with rectangular slats spaced at regular intervals coming to neck height.... There is a walker (me) with a camera at dead center *inside* the enclosure and a second walker with a camera at one of the corners *outside* the device and maybe 3 feet away from its sides. The exact distance is determined by having both performers aim their respective cameras at each other so as to locate the top of the slats with the top of each other's headlines...They walk when the piece commences counter-directionally to each other, spiraling.... They walk at the same speed, aiming the camera at each other.[262]

Graham has made it clear that the idea for this work derived from an optical device of the nineteenth-century, namely the stereoscope. The stereoscope is an

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[259] Dan Graham, "Two Structures/Sol LeWitt," in *End Moments*: 66.
[260] Graham, *End Moments*: 66.

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apparatus that employs two separate eyepieces or lenses to impart a three-dimensional effect to two photographs of the same scene that are taken at slightly different angles. The work also makes a reference to Peter Mark Roget's accidental discovery of the stroboscopic principle of apparent motion. The British physician and compiler of the *Thesaurus* happened to notice that the spokes of the wheel on a passing cart seemed to stand still while he looked through the bars of a slatted fence. This experience led Roget to the realization that periodic movement can be decomposed into static units and then recomposed again, a realization that would greatly contribute to the invention of cinema.

The motives behind Graham's archaeology of technique will be examined in the next section, but there is another historical figure which has already been adduced, namely the photographic series or chronophotography of Muybridge, which can further clarify the structure of the slide installations, and can moreover help to explain illuminate why Graham could afford to eliminate the "discontinuous aspect" of the slide projects at the formal level of their narrative axis. That elimination was the result of his taking up a Super 8 camera.[263] In doing so, he discovered a more fundamental principle of disruption at the technical level of the discursive event.

Graham is the first to admit that the figure of chronophotography provides a genealogical link between his films and minimalism:

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[261] Ibid.: 67.
[262] Ibid.: 37.
[263] Dan Graham, "Two Related Projects for Slide Projectors," in *Two Parallel Essays* (New York: Multiples, Inc., 1969): 7.

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> Ironically it wasn't the new medium of cinema which devolved from Edison's invention, but the steps along its path – the analysis of motion – which first 'moved' artists. Marey's work is recalled by the Futurists and most notably by Marcel Duchamp's paintings...Léger, Moholy-Nagy and others did utilize the motion picture (also Duchamp at a later date), but only as an available tool and not in terms of its structural underpinnings. It wasn't until recently, with the 'minimalist' reduction of the medium to its structural support in itself considered as an 'object' that photography could find its own subject matter.[264]

What Graham admired in serial photography was the disjunctive appearance of its spatiality which subjects the body to a process of multiplication – the one repeated as many. "Each image is always in the present," Graham explains, "No moment is created: things – moments – are sufficient unto themselves." What presents itself is a spatial juxtaposition of moments where "things don't happen; they merely replace themselves relative to the framing edge and to each other." It follows that the series of Marey lacks a transcendent subject, for there is no single, fixed point of view. All changes from one frame to the next are strictly positional, Graham remarks, and "only involve the motion of the reader's eye (not the artist's 'I')."[265] The eye is moved by the rhythm of the photographic device, rather than intending a visual depth of field. There is no perspectival presence of the world to the viewer, but only a succession of locomotive phases against a flat, black ground. Before this lateral shift of planes, the viewer becomes disassociated from the object.

The chronophotograph does nothing so well as picture the spatialized time of commodified experience. No moment is created, each moment is sufficient unto

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[264] Benjamin Buchloh was the first to identify the importance of this passage in "Process Sculpture and Film,"

[265] Graham, *Two Parallel Essays*: 2.

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itself: that is a perfect definition of the commodity image. Seemingly always lodged in the present, nothing ever truly 'happens' to the subject placed before this screen of perpetual return. Faced by this spectacle of shifting planes, the subject is transformed into the Baudelairean figure of a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, but for one major difference: the chronophotograph does not completely conceal the structural underpinnings of its display.[266] Likewise, to use the camera not as an available tool but to disclose its material conditions of performance is the difficulty posed by Graham's 'subject matter.' To do otherwise is to condemn oneself to the losing game of phenomenology.

How is this game of phenomenology played? A two-fold tactic is required. First, the contingency of the body needs to be rendered into a condition of transcendence, as in the 'vague power' of Merleau-Ponty. Secondly, this inversion must be accompanied by the identification of the body as a projective apparatus. The techniques of the body, therefore, are given a more metaphorical than literal sense. The lived body incorporates depth through its tools, it settles within the complex of instrumental practices as within a house. The alternative would be to face an 'unsettling' dispersion of the body. And this alternative of a metonymic contiguity between body and machine has been presented by Merleau-Ponty's former student, Michel Foucault, in his genealogy of the corporeal techniques of disciplinary power. Somewhere in the interstice between the two, resides a marvelous movie by Buster Keaton called the *Electric House* (1922) in which the actor becomes the slave of a set

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[266] See Crary's discussion of the kaleidoscope as a composite figure of the modern spectacle in

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of domestic appliances which increasingly spin out of control. *Homes for America* presents a less acrobatic if not less humorous version of the house as machine: an architecture not of place but of decomposition.

We might now comprehend the motive behind LeWitt's shift into depth with *Muybridge II*. We can, that is, provide a phenomenological rationale for this shift. The lateral series of Muybridge presents a model of subjectivity that exists *within* time, precipitating the need for another observer at the back of consciousness to string along this succession for the first, and then a third to do the same for the second, etc. To preempt such a scattering of the self, Merleau-Ponty insists, we must understand time as the subject and the subject as time. In other words, subjectivity must fall together with the apparatus of projection. At this moment, the inward collapse of consciousness halts and reverses itself. And subjectivity itself becomes the producer of a difference: a temporality that temporalizes itself. Rather than the decomposition of the bird's flight into static instants, we have the "grayish power of flight...this flurry of plumage still here, which is already there in a kind of ubiquity, like the comet with its tail."[267] Better still, we have the phenomenon of a 'pure transition' in which the temporal dimensions of past, present and future perpetually overlap, each destined and implied by the other, "aimed at *as* something other than itself." Aimed at, that is, by the gaze of the subject who stands at the center of time.[268]

Techniques of the Observer: 113-116.

[267] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 275.

[268] Ibid.: 422.

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Muybridge II suggests but does not fully implement this 'pure transition' of time. However, a filmic analogy exists of such a projective self that was well known to Graham. I am referring to Michael Snow's *Wavelength.*[269] This movie consists of a continuous zoom across a loft interior, yet the backwash of past moments lap against the stem of the camera as it continues to plow a passage through depth. Within the span of its attentive gesture, *Wavelength* presents the temporal pulsation of a lived present through a superimposition of frames. The film objectifies, so to speak, the intentionality of a gaze that "holds a past and a present within its thickness."[270] And the directionality of this gaze becomes a headlong, 'ecstatic' rush into the future, a kind of ingestion of space, which makes even the event of death that momentarily intrudes before the camera seem irrelevant.

And, then, there is Graham's *Binocular Zoom...*

A Topology of Skin

> The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself a projection of a surface.
>
> – Sigmund Freud[271]

A photograph exists of Graham that could form an illustration to an instructional manual on cinematography, were it not that Graham's mode of instruction is utterly deviant [fig. 55]. The image is quite unassuming in quality, a mere document of the artist at work. Yet, the camera is not handled in accordance

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[269] See Michelson, "Toward Snow."
[270] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 275.

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with any industrial standard. The photograph in question accompanies Graham's notes on the film *Binocular Zoom* of 1969. The illustration is not a still culled from the film, but a *mise-en-scène* of the film performance, which requires that the cinematographer zoom into the sun with two Super-8 mm cameras placed against the eyes. Looking downwards, the photograph projects the foreshortened contours of the filmmaker's body against the pebbly ground. Graham's head strains backward in order to stare into the sun. Or is it the look of the camera he returns? We cannot be sure, because instead of looking into his eyes, we only see the diaphragms of the Super 8 camera boxes. Two black holes rimmed in white like two strangely dilated pupils, which do not acknowledge our look so much as point at us with their wide, blank stare.

In staging this photograph, Graham accomplishes a number of things at once. First of all, he indicates how the filmic experience itself exceeds representation. The two filmstrips are aligned next to his portrait but this procedure does not unite cause and event within the 'architecture' of the whole. We do not survey a topographical scene in all its spatio-temporal dimensions at once, because the perspective of Graham, which itself is internally split, never matches up with our own. We strain to locate ourselves within this space in which we are replaced by the sun 'behind our heads' like the projector beam in the cinema. The photograph does not illustrate the film. It cannot because the mediation of one gaze by another produces a series of

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[271] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, edited by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1960): 20.

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infinite regress, as Graham acutely observed in relation to the serialized space of minimalism.

And then there is an additional aspect to the photograph that hardly bears representation, namely its humorous quality. Graham handles the Super 8 cameras in an improper fashion, at least when judged against their marketed use. He diverts the instrument towards another end. He re-invents, as it were, the device as a *scientific toy*.[272] What this strategy attests to, first of all, is the utter familiarity of the speech act it transgresses. We might encounter this statement on our daily trips to the store: "Please read the instructions. This device might cause you harm if used improperly." In its welding of pleasure and reason, science and entertainment, the notion of the scientific toy is also a figure of the past. What the photographic *mise-en-scène* of *Binocular Zoom* seems to recreate most of all is the mythical event of the birth of cinema, which began, precisely, with a blinding of vision: not in 1896, that is, but in the summer of 1829 during which Jacques Plateau could be encountered staring into the sun. The Belgian physiologist was studying the temporal effect of the after-images that were burned into his retina. In the course of these observations he was to lay the groundwork for the principle of the persistence of vision. Whether possessing scientific validity or not, this principle was to enable the later nineteenth century to conceive of a cinematographic synthesis of movement. Plateau lost his eyesight in the end, but not before he helped one phantasm beget another. The Belgian, in fact, constructed his own device to replicate his scientific findings, the *phenakistiscope*.

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This device consists of a slotted wheel, which the observer holds close to his eye while standing before a mirror. When turned, an image sequence depicted on the other side of the wheel is transformed into the animated illusion of, for instance, a horse galloping in place. And this scientific invention was also to enjoy a commercial success.

What the case of Plateau exemplifies is the performative nature of the observer in modernity; that is, the observer's historical construction within a specific modality of perception. Graham's portrait superimposes this past on the present. What Graham's snapshot resembles most strongly, therefore, is Walter Benjamin's dialectical image of the past that, like "a flash of lightning" suddenly disrupts the empty continuum of the eternal present.[273] In this spacing of past and present, in its superimposition of two moments, the myth of progress is shown to be a sham. Indeed, cinema did not simply improve upon the earlier devices such as *phenakistiscope*, but submitted this earlier moment to a dialectical process of inversion and concealment. To stop the dialectic in its tracks, to produce an image of the dialectic at a standstill, is to conduct a politics of history demanded by both Benjamin and Graham alike.

But what is it that cinema must conceal? That is what the 'instructional' image of Graham truly demonstrates. For the photograph indicates both the archaeology of knowledge and the genealogy of power that cinema suppresses. The optical techniques of physiology established the subject's body as the combined site of the

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[272] See Baudelaire, "A Philosophy of Toys," in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*: 201.

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production and consumption of images. And here we approach the true lesson of the past as it figured in the physiological experiment of the nineteenth century as defined by Jonathan Crary in his *Techniques of the Observer*: the spectator combines successively the sites of viewing subject, object of observation and optical apparatus.[274] And within this institutionalized field of visuality there is no permanent synthesis, only a temporal spacing of subject positions in depth.

What is striking about the optical devices of the 1830's and 1840's, such as the *phenakistiscope* or the stereoscope, first of all, is the exposure of their structural mechanism. The observer is fully aware of his physical contiguity with an apparatus of vision, which, in its turn, openly displays its material procedure of subjectification. This lack of mediation between body and technique is of the metonymic order of the machine not the metaphorical order of the available tool. In short, the apparatus both enforces and exhibits the passivity of the observer who is captivated by the spectacle conjured within the coupling of body and machine. Secondly, these devices materialize a temporal differential within the domain of perception. Rather than affirming the presentness of the world to an ideal eye, this transcendent point of view is severed from its moorings. As Crary notes, the stereoscope in particular attests to this eradication of an external point of reference in the knowing subject. The perception of depth in stereoscopic vision does not permanently coalesce, as in normal, binocular vision, but appears as a temporal effect of the spatial distanciation

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[273] Walter Benjamin as quoted in Eduardo Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997): 64.

[274] The following discussion draws extensively on Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

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between the binary images. Moreover, this material difference irrupts within the perceptual field, which assumes an ambiguous, disjunctive quality.[275] Depth is arranged as a visual succession of planes, yet the intermediate space is difficult to comprehend and becomes strangely tangible in quality. In other words, the scenic relationship of the viewer to the world has been disturbed in this coition of flesh and machine. And that, we might say, forms the Copernican reversal of the nineteenth-century, an age that established the body as part of a mechanical assemblage.

The physiological gaze reconfigured the body as a skin-like topology of "permeable, overlapping screens of planar space," but it also reproduced the world in its own image through its optical techniques.[276] But this organization of the body as a mobile and multiple network was not restricted to science, but also operative in the realm of industrial production which implemented its own disciplinary techniques of corporeal inscription, admired by the likes of both Frederick Winslow Taylor and Sergei Eisenstein. Where this technical subjectification of the body was suppressed, however, was in the institutional domain of cultural production. Nevertheless, the autonomy of the modernist beholder and the voyeurism of the cinematic spectator are both predicated on such a physiology of vision. From the hallucinatory presence of Greenberg's optical space, to the phantasmatization of reality in the cinema, we might continue to dream ourselves into the center of the world.

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[275] Although I will not further develop the argument here, any discussion of the 'differential' function of the medium needs to engage the work of Rosalind Krauss as well. See, in particular, her *A Voyage on the North Sea.*

[276] Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medecine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995): 92.

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Of course, modernism and science did not need to be enemies (as modernism and industry did). After all, they share the same cognitive subject who confirms its self-identity by testing the laws of the discipline. But the complicity of the experimentalist in the experiment must not be spoken, for to pronounce this disavowal would cause a rude awakening. And, of course, this is exactly the scandal performed by Graham's films. If he returns to the prehistory of cinema, then it is precisely to underscore the corrective function of scientific technique that this toy was to repress. "Learning exercises," he calls his performances, and not totally in jest. In fact, his films might be called experimental, but not in an artistic sense of formal investigation. Graham mimics the procedural approach of scientific research, yet this does not entail projecting the methodological ground plan of science onto the gallery floor. Although the spectator of his films and performances seems submitted to a kind of psychophysical training or behavioral test, this does not make the museum into a laboratory. What Graham's procedure does state is his ambivalence concerning the disciplinary nature of these institutional spaces.

The films also emphasize Graham's ambivalent response to the productivist strategies of the historical avant-garde. The artist was attracted to the possibilities opened up by new technology but not to the point of succumbing to a utopian enthusiasm. For the avant-garde replicated the metaphorical relationship of the body to the available tool. Its favorite figure of the camera-eye, returns in an uncanny sense in Graham's films. There is almost something grotesque about the mingling of flesh and camera, which underscores the weight of the historical trauma he exposes.

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The suspended dialectic of past and present in Graham's cinema is also a pause between a utopian and lapsarian moment of time. In order to comprehend the nature of this pause, we must realize what it means to perform an archaeology of the cinema in the sixties, which is not the same thing as performing it today: a fact that often is occluded in the current resurgence of the artist film. The dialectical image of these films appears in a space marked by the passing of minimalism and pop art and the emergence of the expanded field of post-minimalist practices, such as conceptual, process and performance art. Within this already divided space of the present, the filmic 'shell' of Graham was wedged. And within this series a 'new' possibility was entered, that of the Super 8 camera:

> A great thing happened when the Super 8 camera came in, or a particular one which had a fixed focus, which made possible all the film pieces I did really. First that it was very small so I could put it right on my eye, so that it was an extension of my eye...And secondly being fixed focus you could have both the periphery of your body...and also the horizon line. Also as you moved you didn't have to change focus. If it wasn't for that I wouldn't have been able to do *Two Correlated Rotations* or the *Roll* film...[277]

The introduction of the Super 8 film camera during the mid-sixties made it possible for Graham to return to the historical figure of the camera-eye, not simply to repeat it but to transform it under the varying circumstances of the current context. The Super 8 camera brought movie making home to a mass audience of producers; the industrial response to the revolutionary hopes of the twenties. But in this expansion of a do-it-yourself spectacle, the former ideal of productivism has been all but extinguished.

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[277] Field, "An Interview with Dan Graham": 19.

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The notion of everyone a filmmaker did not quite live up to the promise of its original statement.

During the late Fifties, experimental filmmakers could take heart in the transfiguration of suburban yards into movie sets. Graham's films do not regress to such a state of naïveté, but neither do they cancel the essence of utopian thought: to disrupt the continuum of time. In the raking light of the twin projectors, endlessly repeated, endlessly decomposed, Graham catches the shadow of another time flitting across the seamless surface of the image: "I was interested in that same surface appearance...which is a kind of optical surface somewhere...the spectator, the thing itself – the camera, the lens, the mechanism, the time relationship in the mechanism being recorded and then played back...the performance."[278] This performance is the malfunction of the machine; the differential that interrupts the perpetual present of the spectacle.

The Super 8 camera no longer formed the prop of a 'free' subject in the hands of Graham. Ordinarily, a camera conceals the differential effect of those earlier optical devices, such as the stereoscope, which was immediately apparent from the material structure of the apparatus and its mode of usage. The lightweight automatic camera releases us from our passivity while we take snapshots of our tour around the world. Improved shutter speed and sharpness of focus divest the visual field of its more ambiguous qualities. But little is needed to turn this relation around, to materialize the

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[278] Ibid.: 19.

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difference it conceals, to show, that is, the neutrality of the instrument as a skin-like "interface":

> A camera on the eye or on the body is the interface between the visual world ("outside") and the body's cylindrical perimeter bounding its own ("interior") 360° space.[279]

This interface is not a ground against which things stand out for me. It is a constantly shifting, reversible screen of consciousness. When Graham speaks of the phenomenology of his cinema, it is not one in which Merleau-Ponty would recognize himself:

> Phenomenologically, the camera, its representations, and the spectator's view are the meeting point between, and can be seen to be any of, the elements of visual *consciousness*—if consciousness is partly external (situated in the object simulated in what is seen), partly internal (situated in the eye or camera), and partly cybernetic or *interpretive* (situated in the central nervous system or the process of attention which, with the body's muscle/skeletal systems, achieves orientations in the world).[280]

These switching termini of Graham's cinema, consciousness as both internal and external, present a kind of phenomenological project in ruins. The camera posited as an "interface" does not just subtend a subjective vector of projection. The camera will take on a material aspect, and it will exist not only as an object for the self but as an object for a possible other as well. It will, in short, manifest an "unpredictable but still very real *reverse side*."[281] To capture this reversibility of the visual axis, Jean-Paul Sartre has spoken of a drain hole in the middle of the world through which being

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[279] Graham, *Films*: 9.

[280] Ibid.: 7.

[281] "The appearance of the Other, on the contrary, causes the appearance in the situation of an aspect which I did not wish, of which I am not master, and which on principle escapes me since it is *for the Other*... It is the unpredictable but still very real *reverse side*." Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 355.

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is continually flowing off.[282] Likewise Graham suggests that the body forms nothing but a cylindrical "hole" within the 360-degree environment of outside space, although a more familiar source of this thought would be a statement by Carl Andre: "A thing is a hole in a thing it is not."[283]

The phenomenological horizon of meaning has been thoroughly debased by the filmic function of Graham. *Sunset to Sunrise* of 1969 was the only film that was not shot according to a binocular schema of two cameras.[284] But it also rests on a structural principle of doubling which turns the horizon, as it were, inside out. We believe that we experience one extended pan, mirroring our own continuity in space, but it contains a temporal elision – the gap between sunset and sunrise. But there is a further disturbance of our implantation in space. As Graham remarks, we observe "the inside 'dome' of the sky as if the observer were situated outside the spherical surface; so the earth rotates about itself and about the sun, the viewer rotates in relation to the sky."[285] The viewing subject is not the center of this filmic universe.

Body Press presents an altogether more complex experience to the spectator. However, I hesitate to call it a culmination of Graham's series (which, chronologically, it definitely is not). I am not suggesting that Graham's method

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[282] "But *the Other* is still an object *for me*. He belongs to *my distances*... hence the disintegration of my universe is contained within the limits of this same universe; we are not dealing here with a flight of the world toward nothingness or outside itself. Rather it appears that the world has a kind of drainhole in the middle of its being and that it is perpetually flowing off through this hole." Ibid.: 343.

[283] Graham's remark can be found in *Film*: 9. Andre's comment was made during a symposium held at Bradford Junior College, Bradford, Mass. (February 8. 1968). An excerpt of the transcript was published in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years*: 40.

[284] *Sunset to Sunrise* was first executed as a photographic sequence.

[285] Graham, *End Moments*: 38.

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undergoes a formal development with its most mature moment being *Body Press*. If, following Foucault, we are to define Graham's cinema as a kind of statement then it is contained in the film series as a whole, which is to say, not in the discrete identity of the individual films, but in their temporal dispersal of the structural elements of the camera and the body. The films are to be used and repeated, not to be collected as things. This discursive function is contained as well in Graham's film notes with their combination of descriptive and interpretative, instructional and demonstrative language. The same function, furthermore, is enacted in Graham's alternation between the roles of artist and scientist, performer and observer, self and other.

Perhaps we are now able to fully appreciate the fact that the actual experience of these films remains beyond representation. The projective space of the film is not homogenous, but an aggregate, visual field split between the two screens, like the two images of the stereoscope, and this field never completely converges in one point. The viewer as a result enters into a chiasmic loop of endless transposition and exchange. The spiraling movement of the camera, its lens never coinciding with the performer's eyes, makes the viewer's identification with the mechanical eye problematic, at times even impossible:

> A camera placed on another part of the performer's body or within his field of vision may be part of the performer's body feedback system. A camera's identity, in relation to the spectator's perception, may be part of the performer, one part of him but not another part of him, or not part of him (a separate mechanical object). Its image may be read inside and outside the performer, appearing as simultaneously subject and object.[286]

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[286] Graham, *Films*: 7.

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No longer the exhibitor of an objective space, the camera becomes a phantasmatic object in its own right. The camera appears to belong both to me and to an other, therefore I am forced to acknowledge that the other knows that I know that the other knows, etc., in an endless falling away of self from self.

Placed in an eccentric orbit in space, the gaze of the camera is continuously turned around and set upon the spectator. *Body Press*, for instance, submits the viewer to an incessant inversion of active and passive subject positions similar to the nude male and female performers placed in their tight spot of confinement. Furthermore, the visual field alternates between a perspectival clarity and an anamorphic distortion of boundaries, casting the subject, as it were, again and again from its center. This split within the visual field opens and closes again, yielding a brief glimpse of an undistorted reflection of camera and body. Yet, only seconds later, the image flows off along the curved surface of the mirror in a boundless mass of flesh, glass, and metal while the camera continues its helical path, slipping from one horizon to another. *Body Press*, like Graham's other films, places the phenomenological loop of seeing/seen, touching/touched, in a kind of 'anonymous' space, its axis revolving outside the center of the subject. A constant confusion of tactile and visual cues is the result, a lack of distinction between subject and object that derives from the physical proximity of the camera to the body.

In sum, *Body Press* appears as a literal pun on the French *pellicule* with its double meaning of skin and film. The film's visual structure indeed resembles that of

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a skin stretched between inner and outer space, both concave and convex, a scroll endlessly twisted inside out.

> To the spectator the camera's optical vantage is the skin. (An exception is when the performer's eyes are also seen reflected or when the cameras are seen filming the other.) The performer's musculature is also "seen" pressing into the surface of the body (pulling inside out). At the same time, kinesthetically, the handling of the camera can be "felt" by the spectator as surface tension – as the hidden side of the camera presses and slides against the skin it covers at a particular moment.[287]

The filmic topology of Graham projects consciousness as a surface or, as Freud suggested, a 'skin-ego.' An ego, that is, which always remains on the verge of dispersal for it can never fall together in a founding act of self-reflection. We can draw a topographical chart of this skin-ego, as Freud has done on several occasions, however he also warned against the misleading aspect of such diagrams. The psychic economy of differentiation cannot be reduced to the spatial terms of representation; there is no external, atemporal perspective.

In a similar fashion, Graham likes to dose his texts with several diagrams, illustrations and demonstrative photographs. Yet, these supplementary figures cannot graph the filmic event as such, unless, perhaps, it comes in the distorted version of Ernst Mach's drawing which was featured on a flier for a performance at 98 Greene Street in 1971 and again on the cover of the 1977 *Films* catalog [fig. 63]. This image shows a skewed perspective of space seen from one eye, framed by the distinct arch of the brow, nose, and moustache on the right and a foreshortened bookcase on the left that dissolves into the periphery of vision. Jutting into the center of this space, the

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[287] Ibid.: 21.

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prone, lower body of the scientist is shown, resting on a sofa. This body, however, has no spatial connection to the curved facial segment of brow, nose and moustache. And then from the right comes a disjointed hand holding a pencil as a kind of measuring device. This index of scale and distance might analytically draw the contours of this disjunctive field but not project its unity from the beginning.

This self is a projection of a surface – but located on which side of this curving screen?[288] Graham's films do not draw the lineaments of a place, they do not establish a definite locale that we might inhabit. This self-evidence of location, the very possibility of locating ourselves in space, is called into doubt. This filmic topology could not stand at a greater remove from the topography of modernist painting. What Modernism states is that the painting "faces me, draws my limits, and discovers my scale; it fronts me, with whatever wall at my back, and gives me horizon and gravity." In short, it "reasserts that, in whatever locale I find myself, I am to locate myself."[289] Modernism proposes the presentness of the 'performance' of art, a proposition that Graham does not share. Let me place the word performance in a more specific historical context, in order to establish in what sense the 'performative' nature of Graham's films is not to be confused with performance at large.

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[288] Obviously, Jacques Lacan's model of the image-screen is highly relevant to the films and Graham was certainly aware of the mirror essay (although not until the mid-seventies). I will leave this topic mostly aside, however, although it clearly operates in the background of my text. A discussion of Lacan in the context of Graham's video performances and installations is taken up by Thierry de Duve in "Dan Graham et la critique de l'autonomie artistique, " in *Dan Graham: Pavilions* (Bern: Kunsthalle, 1983) and by Birgit Pelzer in "Vision in Process," *October* 10 (Fall 1979).

[289] Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 114.

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Film as Performance

> They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play the game, of not seeing I see the game.
>
> – R.D. Laing[290]

Film and Performance is the prosaic title that Graham gave to his collection of film notes published in 1976. In light of the foregoing, we might rewrite this title to spell *Performance as Film*.[291] The performance does not consist of some gesture in space that exists prior to its filmic mediation; it is *developed* on film in a quite literal sense. Likewise, the screening does not take place after the fact as in the case of a narrative of documentary film. The screening is an exhibition *and* a performative event. The viewer is enveloped in the folds of its 'skin.'

But Graham's reception of contemporary performance art needs further elaboration. As always, Graham was wary of identifying himself completely with a particular medium and, therefore, his role as performer was to take an ambivalent form.[292] He resisted any specialization as a performance artist, just as he refused to obey the preceding division of labor under Modernism. Hence, when Graham states that he organized performances "because many other artists then also did," this

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[290] R.D. Laing, *Knots* (New York: Random House, 1970): 1.

[291] "Performance as film" should not be confused with a "filmic performance." I would reserve the latter term for intermedia practices that combine film projection and live performance as, for instance, in the work of Carolee Schneeman or Robert Whitman.

[292] Graham refers to the 'medium' in both a literal sense – performance as a specific technique or discipline of art – and a 'meta-psychological' sense – the artist as a kind of "art-guru" which, Graham, explains, became "enhanced by media reproduction and occupied by artists such as Joseph Beuys, politicians such as the Kennedys, rock figures such as the Beatles." Dan Graham, "Performance: End of the '60s," in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 142.

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statement should not to be interpreted as a self-disparaging comment, but as an indication of the underlying strategy of 'de-composition' that provides his work with such a remarkable critical strength.

Graham's interest in performance art was incited after becoming acquainted with the work of Bruce Nauman. As I noted above, Graham attended in 1969 a live performance of Nauman for the first time. It was *Bouncing in a Corner* that he witnessed at the Whitney Museum during the landmark exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*. As performed at the Whitney Museum, *Bouncing in a Corner* consisted of three performers with arms held slack to their sides, who repeatedly fell with their backs against the walls of the stage, causing a thumping sound to reverberate throughout the auditorium space. The performance lasted until bodily fatigue set in. In Graham's crucial essay *Subject Matter*, which describes his formation as an artist, he provides ample space for the description of *Bouncing in a Corner.*[293] Graham would have had an earlier opportunity to see Nauman's work during his one-man exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery in early 1968.[294] In the Castelli

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[293] Graham offered "Subject Matter" to both *Artforum* and *Arts Magazine* but both magazines rejected it. He then published it on his own in *End Moments*, which had an edition of circa 150 copies.

[294] The pieces Nauman exhibited at Castelli Gallery, such as *Flour Arrangements* and various body casts, manifested several areas of overlap with Graham's preoccupations. For instance, the use of mechanical media of reproduction, the exploration of serial procedures and metonymic relationships, the literalism of execution, not to mention the undercurrent of humor. The model of space employed by Nauman at this time, however, is still predominantly topographical in kind with some major exceptions, such as the casts of negative space. But even though these objects present a kind of phenomenological paradox, they do not completely remove the gaze from the viewer's hold. His later video installations would completely change the nature of the game.

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exhibition, Nauman used a projection box to show two of his own films, namely *Thighing* and *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk around the Studio.*[295]

The precedent set by Nauman's films is unmistakable, particularly the *Studio Film* quartet to which *Playing a Note on the Violin* belongs and which was shot during the winter of 1967-68. Graham has certainly never downplayed the importance of Nauman's filmic practice to his own work. What the films of Nauman and Graham hold in common is the interrelation of the performer's body and the camera that produces a doubled surface, or interface, of mutual reflection. But there is also a significant distinction between the two filmic methods, which I can only briefly indicate at present.

Nauman's *Studio Film* series employs a static camera to depict the artist, alone in the studio, while performing a repetitive task. The movements of his body are correlated to a taped square on the floor, which is tightly framed by the camera aperture. But this is not strictly a documentary device. Contrary to common opinion, Nauman did not create a neutral record of the performance, although that might have been the original plan. Nor I should add, do these films indulge the same mode of self-dramatization that motivated Graham's colleagues Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim who shared his interest in Nauman's work. Nauman revels in the execution of a 'bad' performance, both on the level of his motor skills and of his technical knowledge of film. A dysfunctional method is structural to the work. Nauman exhibits a deskilled notion of 'training' that counters the habituality of the

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[295] See my previous discussion of Bruce Nauman.

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phenomenological self who embodies space by means of his 'tools.' What registers most strongly in viewing Nauman's films is a sense of disassociation; an awareness, that is, of the artist's losing game of inhabiting the empty studio which is invaded by the camera. And together with this dispossession of the self who incessantly alternates between private and public space, comes an impression of physiological fatigue, of a faltering rhythm of the body, that is echoed in a breakdown of the filmic apparatus itself.

In turning the camera on the performer, Nauman and Graham situate the subject in the space of the gaze, rather than placing the subject at its core (as in the case with *Wavelength*). As a result, the subject's involvement in his or her own projects becomes marked by ambivalence; the connection between the subjects' possibility and the instrument is objectified. In the gaze of the other, Sartre would say, my possibilities appear alien to me. They appear, that is, as no more than a probability that resides outside of me and "the ensemble 'instrument-possibility' made up of myself confronting the instrument, appears to me as surpassed and organized into a world by the Other."[296] Hence the wavering concentration of Nauman, the intermittent loss of control and occasional sense of frustration played out before the camera, which implants a similar discomfort in the viewer.

But for all the similarities between the films of Nauman and Graham, Nauman's work does not alter the scenic relationship of the viewer to the projected situation. The camera in the *Studio Films* remains outside the space so that the viewer

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[296] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 355.

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can master the situation to a degree that Nauman cannot. Nauman will sometimes make a vain gesture of defiance by walking off-screen, but this only succeeds in acknowledging the primacy of the camera's gaze. Even my possibility of hiding in the dark corner, Sartre writes, is surpassed by the other who always already casts its light there before I can make my move. As a result, the spectator in Nauman's cinema retains the furtive position of a voyeur (Nauman never looks directly at the camera), unlike the discursive conditions of Graham's cinema. The viewer, as well as the performer, in Graham's work is placed in a literal state of perpetual revolution within the material context of the gallery/film apparatus. In short, the situation escapes the spectator as much as the performer on screen; he is situated in the space of the gaze at a third remove.[297]

This voyeuristic quality of Nauman's films prompts a return to Metz's theory of the cinema, for Metz opposes the voyeuristic gaze of cinema to the look supported by another medium, namely theater. Metz maintains that the theater almost automatically manifests the reversibility of the exhibitionist relationship that is suppressed in classical cinema. There is a different economy of desire (and money) at work in the theater, he claims. In this space the actor and the spectator enter into an active form of mutual complicity. Neither actor nor spectator are isolated, but are the participants in a collective event. The theater retains, that is, an archaic trace of its origin in a Greek ceremony of civic proportions, a public festival during which a

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[297] See de Duve, Dan Graham et la critique de l'autonomie artistique."

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whole population "put itself on display for its own enjoyment."[298] The present-day audience of the theater, of course, carries little memory of this celebration of the 'we', of being-together, a fact that would lead to the ambivalent appraisal of the theater in Sartre who would both detect a possibility of reprieve from the other's gaze – in the dark we all become co-spectators – and a possibility of its institutionalization – the spectators who offer themselves up as a spectacle during the intermission.[299] That ambivalence was already contained in Metz's words and it speaks directly to the concerns that Graham manifested in his performance work. For he is to become interested in the political possibilities (and probabilities) of collective activity. We might find a way into this problem through the dialectic of theater and cinema, but we shall also find that this leads beyond film into video, at which point my story comes to an end.

Michael Fried acclaimed cinema as a "welcome and absorbing refuge to sensibilities at war with theater and theatricality."[300] But we immediately note that the valuation of the binary terms of cinema and theater has been reversed. Cinema forms here the positive term, in contrast to Metz (and, to a certain extent, Sartre). In Fried's eyes, minimalism constitutes a realm of shadows in which, like the dark corner of Sartre, there is no escape from the other's gaze. There is, Fried implies, something uncanny about the manner in which the minimalist object haunts its viewer. And

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[298] Metz, "'Story/Discourse": 94.

[299] See on this subject Denis Hollier, *The Politics of Prose: Essay on Sartre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 176-80.

[300] Fried, "Art and Objecthood": 164.

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Fried claims that this experience is most pronounced when the viewer happens upon a minimalist object in a darkened room.

It has been established that Fried's argument took its cue from Cavell's notion of theatricality. The minimalist object projects a presence, like the light that streams off the stage during a theater performance (and *not*, that is, the light projected from behind us, as in the cinema). But we cannot fathom this presence for it is removed from the center of our gaze; its instrumentality is not our own. Likewise in the theater, Cavell argues, I am present *at* a world, but not *to* it. There is no reciprocity between seer and seen because the actors might be present to me but they cannot acknowledge my presence. Thus on the stage of minimalism, there is a strange mingling of actors and audience wherein the subject is estranged from its objects. Cavell faults modern rationality for having transformed society at large into such a drama, a mere décor of fire and fury. Scientific knowledge and administrative reason, he holds, have imposed a false grid onto reality that demands we all perform inauthentic roles.

To end the performance, however, requires an even greater isolation of the self. Cavell states that in order to claim its authenticity the self must stand at a fundamental remove from the world. Only an acknowledgement of this prior condition of alienation will allow the world as such to present itself: a self-identical subject mirroring the autonomous spectacle of nature. But in acknowledging this, Cavell has only succeeded in further internalizing the logic of reification. It is revealing, in this respect, that he discerns in the institution of narrative cinema an automatic realization of such a mutual structure of self-enclosure.

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What Cavell argues is a very subtle version of the voyeuristic model. The cinema acknowledges the subject's absence from the projected scene, but due to this prior acknowledgement the subject can take possession of the image. The world appears to exhibit itself without reserve on screen, to exhibit itself, that is, in all its plenitude to the spectator. Exhibitionism, once more, is defeated and the transcendental self is safely returned to the shadows, concealed from the other's gaze.

Indeed, *to act without performing*, Cavell asserts, represents the triumph of the cinematic gaze. To fill the screen with such a fullness of presence is "to allow action all and only the significance of its specific traces, the wound embracing the arrow and no self-consciousness to blunt or disperse that knowledge."[301] Cinema, in his view, does not harden an individual style into a repertoire of standard gestures, but reveals the unexpected within the everyday. Movies do not demonstrate a rationalization of the body's techniques, therefore, but the infinite possibility of improvisation within the realm of the habitual. A profound lucidity of the body is exposed in the spontaneous act of walking across a new room, lifting a cup in an unfamiliar locale or looking in a shop window (these examples are Cavell's). Once emptied of self-consciousness before the camera the gesture gains in significance:

> The ontological fact that actions move within a dark and shifting circle of intention and consequence, that their limits are our own, that the individual significance of an act (like that of a word) arises in its being this one rather than every other that might have been said or done here and now, that their fate is to be taken out of their control—this is the natural vision of film.[302]

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[301] Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 154.
[302] Ibid.: 154.

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That a 'natural vision' of film might appropriate the destiny of an act, is perhaps the subtlest formulation of the cinematic disavowal yet.

Cavell's thought of a filmic lucidity of the body unwittingly attaches itself to the disciplinary apparatus of the gaze. To shake this self-alienating dream of the subject from its moorings, one needs another motto that I would like to ascribe to Graham, namely *to perform without acting.* The movements of his performers are deliberate but meaningless, they are studied and therefore repeatable.

If we can shed the phenomenological fear of shadows, we might see that Graham's performance-as-film combines the antithetical terms of theater and cinema. His films, after all, take place as much on the darkened floor of the gallery as on the reflective screen mounted to the wall. And I say this not only because their installation makes it impossible for the viewer not to step in front of the light. Graham's films combine cinema and theater because they are not concerned with preserving a unique performance within time, as in the case of cinema, or with conducting a perfect performance over time, as in the case of theater.[303]

But for all that, these films cannot materialize Metz's 'festivities' of collective performance. The projective structure of cinema and its idealist subject might be subverted by Graham's performance as film, yet the subject of the filmic apparatus will always remain confined to the epistemic situation of the physiological gaze. Classical cinema attempts to transform this limiting condition of the embodied viewer

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[303] "An exemplary stage performance is one which, for a time, most fully creates a character...An exemplary screen performance is one in which, at a time, a star is born." Cavell, *The World Viewed*: 28.

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into the illusion of transcendence, only to exact the further isolation of the viewer from the social body. The question that performance art posed to Graham, however, was less concerned with the socio-economic process of individuation than with the emergence of an alternative politics of the group during the sixties.

The rise of performance art, as Graham notes, relied on the organization of alternative art spaces where the rules that governed access to the traditional art world could be ignored. But this institutional shift participated in the broader social phenomenon of countercultural practices represented by, for instance, the antipsychiatry movement of Gregory Bateson and R.D. Laing, the foundation of collectives, the popularity of meditation exercises, consciousness-raising sessions and encounter groups. Performance, by embedding itself within this context, presented a combination of social therapy and political activity that promised to transform the very structure of the art world. And Graham was to 'quote' freely from these sources. In this respect Performance art offered the opportunity of exploring a more democratic practice of art, that could replace the "hermetic, anonymous information quality" of early conceptualism.

But in quoting, Graham was not completely embracing a countercultural role because he was also very clear about its susceptibility to cooption. We confront here the issue of the mode of self-understanding that is ingrained in the act of cultural resistance, a topic I have raised before. While alternative forms of 'being-together' might have emerged from the shadowy margins of society, they were also being increasingly circulated in the mass media channels, as Graham was quick to grasp.

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The phenomenon of marginality, the artist suggests, never exists in a pure state. In becoming visible a counterculture is necessarily marked by its relationship to the dominant spectacle, even if this relationship takes a negative form.

A heteronomy of the group necessarily flows from the perceptual structure of the collective space itself. A collective space is not binocular in the sense of Graham's films, but requires three looks. For two to feel as one, they must be placed under the surveillance of a third. Of course, film intrinsically prepares for such a triangulation of the visual field in its tri-partite structure of performer, observer, and apparatus, but the performer and observer do not occupy the same physical space. The medium of video, on the other hand, offers just this possibility of co-existence:

> Unlike film, where both sound and visual tracks are of necessity in the past and constructed from discontinuous segments, edited and reordered according to the conventional rules of syntax, video is assumed to correspond/be congruent to the real, present-time/space continuum...shared by the producers and receivers of the video.[304]

To exhibit the collective of producers and receivers is to materialize this third look as it penetrates within the real, present-time/space continuum. While resistance to the instrumentality of this other gaze forms the collective's common cause, it also remains outside and in view of a 'televised' end that escapes the 'we.'

To submit this dialectic of the gaze to an entropic pull is again the favored tactic of Graham. An early performance, such as *TV Camera/Monitor Performance* of 1970, for instance, consists of the artist rolling back-and-forth on a stage while holding a video camera directed at a monitor that is installed at the back of the audience. The

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monitor transmits the live image from the camera that reflects parts of Graham's body and members of the audience, besides the video camera itself. As a result the audience, performer, and the technical apparatus differentiate themselves out into three separate, yet overlapping surfaces: "the machine to itself, I to my task, and the audience to its bodies in place are all closed feedback systems or 'learning' loops."[305] Only in this incessant coming together and falling apart of the collective can the possibility of a future politics reside. To seek a permanent status of the group is to disavow the reifying properties of this panoptic gaze. And, once more, Graham would underscore this double bind by holding the utopian promise of performance art in suspension.

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[304] Dan Graham, "Notes on 'Yesterday/Today'," in *Video Architecture Television* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1979): 44.

[305] Dan Graham, "TV Camera/Monitor Performance (1970)," *Interfunktionen* 7 (1971): 88.

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EPILOGUE

> I think it will be the growing issue, of the seventies: the investigation of the apparatus the artist is threaded through.
>
> – Robert Smithson[1]

Smithson made this prediction in 1972. By this time the spaces of the studio and the gallery appeared completely de-natured to the post-minimalist generation. For Smithson and his peers, these habitual spaces of art no longer existed as a neutral ground of artistic experience or, in phenomenological parlance, we might say that the gallery ceased to function as an intentional horizon of meaning. There is a universal law, Friedrich Nietzsche once intimated, if a living being is unable to draw a horizon around itself it will waste away or hasten to a timely decline. Phenomenology would live by the same maxim: the habitus, I have quoted Merleau-Ponty as saying, "persists on the horizon of my life as the distant roar of a great city provides the background to everything we do in it."[2]. Yet, by 1970, the roar of the city (and the media) had become all too audible within the inner sanctum of the white cube; its space, as Robert Smithson told his interviewer, has become "shot through with all kinds of social, economic, political implications."[3] Smithson made sure that he was understood correctly; he was not registering a complaint. Quite the opposite, he acknowledged the need for artists to reveal their own, contradictory position within the socio-economic apparatus of the art

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[1] Bruce Kurtz, "Conversation with Robert Smithson on April 22nd 1972," in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*: 200.

[2] Merlaeu-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*: 327-28.

[3] Robert Smithson, ibid. The "roar of the city" refers to the earlier quote of Merleau-Ponty in Part Two, n.179.

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world.[4] To point up such possibilities of dissension in the institutional domain of art formed, so to speak, the post-phenomenological project of art. We have seen how certain elements of this project were articulated in the first wave of post-minimal film. Smithson was to continue this work in a film like "Spiral Jetty" and several other artists, such as Lawrence Weiner, Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, and David Lamelas joined his company during the early seventies.[5]

These artists all contributed to, what I have identified as, the second phase of post-minimal film. But we have seen how the first phase of post-minimal film already began to mine the subterranean sites of contradiction within the discursive domain of contemporary art. If post-minimal film can be said to have gone underground in any proper sense of the word than it was not to excavate an *alternative* site of production. The latter was the option pursued by the so-called underground cinema of the early sixties with its cultivation of an oppositional public to mainstream culture. Post-minimal film, on the other hand, exhibited the conditions underpinning the dominant system of artistic practice. The second, post-1970 phase of post-minimal film would drag the full range of Smithson's "implications" between the apparatuses of art and cinema into the open. It would do so by subverting the conventional devices of narrative film, among other methods. And when it comes to the idea of an alternative community of cinema, Smithson would just as happily catch a Roger Corman flick on Times Square as attend a screening at the Film-Maker's Cinematheque.

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[4] I will not speculate to what degree Smithson could have been familiar with "apparatus theory," but the historical conditions that enabled Baudry's analytic work were of course shared by Smithson. At the same time, Baudry was able to theorize classical cinema because its historical moment of dominance was waning. See Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema."

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In these few remaining pages I cannot explore how sudden or how complete the transition between the pre-70 and the post-70 phase of post-minimal film was. However, I should note that we are not dealing with a complete rupture from one moment to the next. On the one hand, the first phase was rapidly becoming historical by 1970, and I shall conclude my epilogue with a particularly symptomatic example of this process. On the other hand, it should also be apparent how the filmic genealogy of Nauman-Serra-Graham prepared the way for the second moment of post-minimal film. I do not wish to exaggerate the degree of discontinuity between both phases. In fact, Graham's six films, which were conceived and produced between 1969 and 1973, fully straddle the two historical moments of the artist film.

But let me briefly return to the beginning of the genealogical series I have adumbrated as "Nauman-Serra-Graham." The empty studio of Nauman did not figure a return to that objectless, primordial space of phenomenology, which as Merleau-Ponty maintained, underlies all cultural space. "My body," the latter contended, "which through my habits ensures my insertion into the human world, does so only by projecting me in the first place into a natural world which can always be discerned underlying the other, as the canvas underlies the picture and makes it appear unsubstantial."[6] I have argued that Nauman's empty studio functioned in the reverse manner; it revealed that beneath the myth of the private studio lay yet another historical figure: a realm of publicness that was in the process of becoming objectified. The stage onto which Nauman walked in his *Studio Films* was not fully his own. In other words,

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[5] Cleary, Broodthaers and Lamelas had come to film earlier than Smithson, whereas the *mode* in which each artist 'exhibited' the apparatus of the art world would vary vastly.

[6] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception: 293.

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his intentions did not match his performance and *that*, strangely enough, was the strength, not the weakness, of his work. Nauman, we might say, starred in the drama of an actor in the social realm who could not rest assured in the identity between his actions and himself. In short, the apparatus of the studio had been transformed into an alien space or, to switch back into a phenomenological terminology, the modernist project and its 'equipmental-whole' (i.e. the studio tools) had become externalized.

During the seventies, performance and body art would frequently (but not always) seek a newly charged sense of authenticity, leap frogging back over pop and minimalism in the process, but the *Studio Films* was never part of such a regressive move. What Nauman's films staged was not a return of the alienated self to the natural space of the body, but the entry of the artist into a spectacular space which was also a space of homelessness. What I mean to say is that Nauman's filmed performances represented a kind of exhibitionist structure in which the gestures of the artist have become estranged from the expressive space of the lived body, which was described so well by Merleau-Ponty. In a phenomenological sense, the scenario of *Studio Films* was that of a subject who was gripped by a state of anxiety. This scenario runs along the following lines: exposed to the gaze of a transcendent other (e.g. the anonymity of Nauman's camera), the self is estranged from his or her habitual shell of existence. Sartre spoke of the shock that accompanies such awareness:

> Thus in the shock that seizes me when I apprehend the Other's look, this happens—that suddenly I experience a subtle alienation of all my possibilities, which are now associated with objects of the world, far from me in the midst of the world.[7]

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[7] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*: 354-55.

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It appears that such an existential state of homelessness appeared less threatening to Nauman in 1967 than it did to Sartre in 1956. Could it be that Nauman's mediatized mode of experience was rapidly becoming a more *natural* state of being?

At least, one contemporary critic would have concurred at the time, although he probably would not have known of Nauman's existence. 1967, namely, was also the year that saw the publication of Guy Debord's *Society of The Spectacle*. As Debord's aphoristic text argues, although not in these exact terms, Sartre's notion of self-alienation had become the very condition of experience in a post-industrial society. The inhabitants of a spectacular society, according to the dire vision of Debord, are held captive or rather *hold themselves captive* by remaining in an endless state of rapture before the commodified image of the world. There is a center of gravity to this world, but it is a center that divides and separates: "spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from each other."[8] The denizens of this spectacular realm – distant relatives of the cave dwellers of Plato and the moviegoers of Baudry – are thus destined to live in a vicarious manner. They are linked only in their contemplation of the commodity image, rather than acquiring an understanding of their own experience and desires. I would venture that Nauman's lonely encounter with the camera in the *Studio Films* seems to carry both an aspect of prediction and resistance when viewed from Debord's perspective.

We would be mistaken to take Debord's hegemonic view of the information society as a concrete state of affairs.[9] *The Society of the Spectacle* has a greater appeal

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[8] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*: 22.

[9] I defer to Crary for more acute analyses of Debords work. See Jonathan Crary, "Eclipse of the Spectacle." In *Art after Modernism: Rethinking* Representation, edited by Brian Wallis (Boston: David

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as a kind of manifesto for the sixties and seventies than it does as a sociological study of an empirical reality. Debord writes, for instance, that "the spectacle's externality with respect to the acting subject is demonstrated by the fact that the individual's own gestures are no longer his own, but rather those of someone else who represents them to him."[10] What he describes in this passage is a specific position of enunciation that is endemic to a media society; a position, that is, of blocked access to a meaningful form of communicative exchange. As such, Debord's thought connects to the internal split within Nauman's own discursive position in the *Studio Films*, that is to say, its imbalance between the two enunciatory centers of the body and the camera. Indeed, I have suggested that we need to ask whether Nauman's gestures can be truly called his own.

Debord's own theory might have led him to condemn the very possibility of art: nothing can escape commodification; everything will end up affirming the spectacle. Nevertheless, the advantage we might acquire from reading Debord in the present context is to expand the cultural stage on which the *Studio Films* operate beyond the narrow perimeters of modernism or structural film. As a result both statements on the mediated nature of the gesture, namely Nauman's film and Debord's text, can be related to a series of other statements by artists and filmmakers on the same subject. Take Hollis Frampton, for instance:

> The cinema was the typical survival-form of the Age of Machines. Together with its subset of still photographs, it performed prize worthy functions: it taught and reminded us (after what then seemed a bearable

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Godine, 1984): 283-94, and Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory," *October* 50 (Fall 1988): 97-107.

[10] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*: 23.

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> delay) how things looked, how things worked, how to do things...and of course (by example), how to feel and think.[11]

Or, Lawrence Weiner:

> There is no hierarchy between what you see in a film and what you see in your mind's eye as the way to do something. When you find yourself in a social circumstance that you cannot manage, cannot figure out, at least for myself as a North American, my first reference is to a movie. How I saw that being done. This was our parent, this was our role model... And that's without empathy. That is only because it is the only way you know how to light a cigarette, the only way you know how to walk across the room. We learn by imitating.[12]

The theoretical notion of the apparatus allows us to examine how post-minimal film, wittingly or unwittingly, explores the social, material and psychic processes whereby subjects negotiate various discursive positions within a changing, historical space. The spectacle defines one possible position, which is a kind of limit case; but post-minimal film does not simply reflect this position, which would be one of impotence and stalled options. Yet, post-minimal film also did not reach back to an avant-garde tactic of "defiant publicity."[13] If post-minimal film was threaded through the cultural apparatus, as Smithson suggested, then such films caused, at the very least, a temporary interruption in the beam of light.

But let me go back to the moment of 1970. At this moment, the anomalies of the first wave of post-minimal film already seemed less resistant to acculturation. Certainly the performative model of the post-minimal film that I have championed was not the predominant one at the time. I started out in the introduction to differentiate the work of Barry, Bochner, Nauman, Serra, and Graham from the notion of conceptual

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[11] Frampton, "For a Metahistory of Film": 112-113.

[12] Bartommeu Marí and Lawrence Weiner, "Interview Show (&) Tell," in *Show (&) Tell. The Films and Videos of Lawrence Weiner. A Catalague Raisonne* (Ghent: Imschoot, 1992): 42.

[13] The term is Caroline Jones's. See her *Machine in the Studio.*

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film. Neither a performative nor a phenomenological model of film supports an instrumentalized reading of the medium in the manner that conceptual film does. The distinction between these different models of film hinges on the placement of the spectator within the discursive apparatus of film; that is, the viewer's ability to transcend his or her positioning before the reproduced object or event. According to phenomenology, the situated existence of the spectator must be transcended through experience. One will always approach an event along a certain path; the event is not immediately given (i.e. the camera is located within the world). Yet, there is a saving clause to this binding contract with the world: by acknowledging one's placement before an object or event, one can overcome the contingency of one's position (i.e. the literal screen is transformed into a transcendental frame). The performative model that I have described in relation to the post-minimal film rejects such a transcendent option shared by modernism and narrative cinema alike, as my discussion of Cavell has abundantly proven. However, the third model of conceptual film would write the viewer out of the picture all-together. Transcendence, in other words, comes *before the fact* in conceptual film. What we encounter, in this case is the utopian vision of a free circulation and exchange of ideas through a neutral apparatus of distribution. The vision of conceptual film, in short, is the vision of 'film as information.'

Here, condensed into three brief passages, is how such a conception of film as information was articulated in 1970:

> The activity of these artists is to think of concepts that are broader and more cerebral than the expected "product" of the studio. With the sense of mobility and change that pervades their time, they are interested in ways of rapidly changing exchanging ideas, rather than embalming the idea in an "object"....

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> Inevitably for art film and videotape are growing in importance. It is quite obvious at this point they are major mass media. Their influence has meant that the general audience is beginning to be unwilling to give the delicate responses needed for looking at a painting....
>
> The films and videotapes in this exhibition and listed in this book have often been described as "minimally structured," which means that the content is non-narrative and that the style, while being almost an extension of *cinéma verité*, is like so much of the other work in the show. simply a method of distributing the visual information that interests the artist.[14]

These quotes are derived from Kynaston McShine's introduction to the catalogue of the *Information* show. This exhibition ran at the Museum of Modern Art from July 2 to September 20, 1970 and it proved to be an ill-starred attempt on the part of the curator to repeat the success of European surveys of post-minimal art, such as *Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostrukturen* and *When Attitudes Become Form*. The MoMA's *Information* show was accompanied by internal rumblings within the museum and received a fairly negative reception in the press.[15] The fallout was to restrain the museum from venturing so deep into the field of conceptual art for a long time. However, I mention *Information* for another reason: it was the first show in New York after *Projected Art* to include film projections on a truly massive scale. The lengthy filmography that is printed in the catalog includes an impressive number of visual artists and constitutes one of the best indicators of the contemporary spread of filmmaking. Several of the artists would exhibited their films to a large audience for the first, and as it turned out, last time: Barry showed *Scenes*, Bochner was present with *Walking a Straight Line Through Grand Central Station*, *New York Windows*, and *Dorothea in*

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[14] Kynaston L. McShine, [Preface], *Information* (New York: MOMA, 1970), 140-41.

[15] For a brief summary of the show and its reception, see Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

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Fifteen Positions, Nauman had the *Slo-Mo Films* (1969) screened [fig. 64], Serra sent *Tina Turning* (1969) [fig. 65] and two untitled works (probably *Hand Catching Lead* and *Frame*), and Graham, finally, provided *From Sunset to Sunrise* to the exhibition.[16] One might suggest, therefore, that *Information* marked the apogee of the first phase of post-minimal film. Yet, to certain degree, the MoMA show also co-opted this anomaly. Of course, I am not referring to the mere fact that the films were shown in *this* or *that* particular museum; it is the specific *manner* in which they were shown during *Information* that concerns me. And one might argue that the failure of post-minimal film to resist the new conditions to which they were subjected, suggested the need to develop a different strategy of critique.[17]

It used to be that the naturalist painter could not compete with nature. In the twentieth-century this argument was adjusted to say that the naturalist painter could not compete with cinema (as Fernand Léger proposed in 1913).[18] But in 1970 McShine would write that painters could not compete with the television. The example he cites

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[16] The *Slo-Mo* films of Nauman were shot with an industrial camera using an extreme close-up view of various body parts. The rame speed varied from a thousand frames a second and four thousand frames a second. Nauman: "They took from six to twelve seconds to shoot, depending on the frame speed. The action is really slowed down a lot. Sometimes it is so slow that you don't really see any motion but you sort of notice the thing is defferent from time to time." (Nauman as cited in *Castelli-Sonnabend Videotapes and Films* (New York: Castelli-Sonnabend Tapes and Films, 1974): 174.) In *Black Balls*, Nauman puts black make-up on his testicles, in *Bouncing balls* he bounces his testicles with one hand, in *Pulling Mouth* he pulls his mouth out of shape, and in *Gauze* he pulls gauze of his mouth.

Richard Serra's *Tina Turning* needs to be situated within the filmic genealogy of body techniques I have discussed in Part Two. Serra describes the film as follows: "head center framed, body pivoted to allow image to rotate and spin continuosly. Behaviour and self-awareness submerged in the action. The movement endows the subject with a quality that it lacks etirely when at rest. Movement both carries physiognomic properties of the face under stress, and at a moderate rate of speed is important in making the subject perceptually clear. A truly static object cannont be seen at all for more than a fraction of a second. The film ends when the subject loses balance (nausea sets in, producing dizziness) and falls out of the frame. Viewer's relation to spinning sunject is one of an empathetic participatory reaction." Richard Serra, [Documents], *Avalanche* 2 (Winter 1971): 20.

[17] I am not implying a simple cause-and-effect chain of events: I am discussing the Information show as emblematic of a specific situation and not as the direct impetus for artists to work in a more narrative mode of film.

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being that of the live transmission of an astronaut walking on the moon. It follows, he continues, that contemporary artists increasingly seek to command new technologies of transmission and documentation in order to inform a mass audience about their activity. For McShine the rationale behind these methods of conceptual art is self-evident: the stepping up of the speed of the communication process. Yet, what goes unexamined is that this embrace of the information age by artists might also cause a leveling of their messages.

The presentation of the films during *Information* assumed the spectacular aspect of a continuous stream of images. In order to show the films, the curator had installed an unusual, circular machine in the entrance hall to the exhibition galleries which was dubbed the "Audio-Visual Jukebox"[fig. 66]. It might be described as a hybrid of two proto-cinematic machines, namely Thomas Edison's kinetoscope and the panorama but, at the same time, it resembled a futuristic kind of amusement arcade.[19] A dark, gleaming disc which seemed to hover above a recessed and highly reflective pedestal formed the central body of the apparatus. Visitors to the show could gather around the forty, hooded windows that were sunken into the sides of the disc and resembled a cross between a telephone booth and a television screen. Standing within this partially isolated, viewing cell the spectator could watch a looped sequence of films with headphones on. With one film program to every four slots, there were ten different programs in total.

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[18] See the Prelude to Part One.

[19] The kinetoscope was invented in 1889 and functioned in the manner of a peepshow allowing only one person at at time to view a film.

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The drawbacks of this projection apparatus should be obvious, but let me enumerate them nonetheless.[20] First of all, many of the shown films were not meant to be projected as loops. Secondly, the audio-visual jukebox fundamentally altered the physical conditions of cinematic projection and thereby effectively cancelled the performative aspect of certain films. Indeed, the basic properties of film as such were masked and transformed into something more akin to a televisual spectacle (in accordance with McShine's earlier comment on art's competition with the phenomenon of live television).[21] Shown in succession through the means of back projection and detached from the viewer's own viewing space, the artist films might have looked like nothing so much as a series of clips or publicity material to a contemporary viewer. My choice of words is not random, because the "Audio-Visual Juke-Box" had been designed by Ettore Sottsass for the Olivetti company and its purpose was to present promotional films at trade fairs. The Museum of Modern Art was able to borrow the machine because of the long-standing relationship between the two institutions and it certainly formed an expedient solution to the problem of showing so many films. In doing so, however, the *Information* exhibition also neutralized the performative model of post-minimal film and filtered it back into the spectacular system it first resisted. Indeed, post-minimal film was not cast back into the modernist realm of absorption – a notion that might be prompted by the individualized viewing stations of the audio-visual juke -box – but assimilated to a new televisual realm of distraction. But, then,

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[20] Some of the films were also screened in the galleries.

[21] Frans Haks observed three faults in the "Audio-Visual Juke-Box: (1) bad image quality due to the use of back projection onto mat glas which was accompanied by an uneven distribution of light (2) the standard height od the screens,which being over 170 cm high could not be seen by kids (3) one had to

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Information celebrated this shift in strongly utopian terms. Clearly, no harm was perceived in this form of cooperation with the Olivetti corporation; a company that prided itself on organizing the workplace of an information society to a degree that Léger had only dreamed about in the twenties.[22]

As I have mentioned, Sottsass' cinema juke-box collapses different ages of the machine together: it functions as kind of inverted panorama that herds the viewers into a circle, which turns their gaze inwards towards a central focal point and away from their collective space of existence. This center is never actually seen, however, because it acts as a hidden point of projection for the films. At the same time, the audio-visual jukebox resembles Edison's kinetoscope which allowed only one person to view a film at a time and thus enforces a close proximity between the viewer and the screen. The jukebox thereby illustrates what phenomenology dreaded most about modern technology, namely that it tended to make everything appear physically near to the viewer. The problem of this placement of the viewer, as it were, on top of the image

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stand in order to look. See Frans Haks, "Enkele Aantekeningen bij het Filmprogramma Sonsbeek '71, *Verslag Sonsbeek '71* (Arnhem: 1971).

[22] The history of the Olivetti company (and its relation to the MoMA) is extremely interesting, but I have no room to fully expand on this topic here. The design department of the MoMA had organized "Olivetti: Design in Industry" in 1952, allowing the Italians to become the first European company to display its products and graphic design in the museum. Olivetti was acclaimed for its "patronage in architecture, product design and advertising", the high aesthetic quality of its products, but, most importantly, its "organization of all the visual aspects of an industry, unified under a single high standard of taste" (See Jonathan M. Woodham, *Twentieth-Century Design* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)). Olivetti pioneered the notion of corporate identity and corporate sponsorship since the thirties. It developed a design philosophy that attempted to create a balance between a functionalist aesthetic, demands of economic efficiency, and a social welfare policy. The governing idea was that a well-ordered, standardized work environment, decorated according to a pleasing color scheme, would contribute to the office workers' psychological well-being and improve the quality of their labor. Sottsass, for instance, in speaking of his Sistema 45, a co-ordinated office environment of 1969, commented that a design company "cannot limit itself to the responsibility of the functioning of the machine for what it is, but must pledge itself to asssume the responsibility for all the reactions that can arise when machines invade the environmnent, men and their lives... We thought we should exercise 'yoga' on design, liberating shape... stripping from it every attribute, sex-appeal, deception." (Ettore Sottsass as quoted in John Heskett, *Industrial Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980): 140).

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was that it pre-empted the option of transcendence. In bringing the world closer to the viewer, Heidegger was to argue, technology paradoxically enforces an insurmountable distance between self and other, rather than allowing a process of *dis-tancing* which subordinates the relations of far and near to the subject's own structure of intentionality.[23] What might be physically far, for instance, can be held close in thought, as long as the object belongs to the subject's habitual realm of "availability."[24] Heidegger's critique is of relevance in the present context in so far as the image in the audio-visual jukebox is projected *at* the viewer like on a television screen.[25] As a result, the viewers were not only presented with a homogenized experience (all films were reduced to the same format), but they were made subject to a fundamental division in space. Debord has identified this spatial division as the operational principle of the spectacle, which establishes a one-way relationship between the spectators and a center that does not unite but maintains them in their isolation. In conclusion, the Olivetti juke-box provides another variation on Sartre's scenario of the voyeur who is caught in the act: all the time, while peering into the viewing slots, the spectators have their backs turned to the surrounding audience. Here, the voyeur knew, without a doubt, that he or

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[23] "Distancing [*Entfernung*] amounts to making the farness vanish – that is, making the remoteness of something disappear, bring it near. Dasein is essentially dis-tancial: it lets any being be encountered nearby as the being which it is." Martin Heidegger as cited by Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being- in-the- World*: 131.

[24] Walter Banjamin's famous decription of the aura of a natural object "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be" qualifies more as an example of an "occurent" than an "available" thing, yet it partakes of the same phenomenological logic that casts spatial relations as a function of intentional thought and not disciplinary power. Benjamin's subsequent remark about the "desire of the masses to bring things 'closer spatially and humanly" would also qualify as a classic Heideggerian idea, if it did not lack the latter's censure of such a desire. Benjamin, "The Work of Art": 222-23.

[25] The kinetoscope should not be confused with a "kinescope" which can mean two things: a cathode-ray picture tube in a television or a film made of a transmitted television program. Nonetheless, the kinescope is also operational as a technical figure in this context. I find it of immense interest that

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she was exposed to an other's gaze while watching *New York Windows* or *Scenes*, but this fact went largely unacknowledged because the spectator and the film were, once more, playing their own private game of hide-and-seek: the viewer watched the film, but the film didn't watch the viewer, watching it, nevertheless the film knew that the viewer was watching it, but the film didn't want to know...

I would wager, finally, that this missed encounter between the museum and the artist film, that is, between two terms in the social apparatus of art – and more examples could be given – provides a historical background for those quasi-utopian blueprints of the museum-as-cinema, which artists were to develop in the seventies. I might mention, for instance, Smithson's two designs for projection rooms that were, literally, to be placed underground, namely: *Towards the Development of a Cinema Cavern* (1971) [fig. 67], which would project a movie of the excavation of the cinema, and *Plan for a Museum Concerning Spiral Jetty* (1971), which was to be located at the actual site of the *Spiral Jetty* along the shore of the Great Salt Lake and "near the Golden Spike Monument" [fig. 68]. The *Plan for a Museum* would thus mediate the viewer's actual experience of the landscape in a quasi-historical and, I might add, quasi-geological manner, just as the cinemas constructed by the National Park Service inform visitors about the site they are about to visit, which goes to prove that landscapes only exist in a historical fashion.[26]

Lawrence Weiner's first feature-length film, *A First Quarter* (1973), was realized as a kinescope by shooting a video off the television screen.

[26] Walter Benjamin suggested that the invention of the panorama provided an early glimpse of this inversion between the relation of nature and culture which is registered in the modern attitute towards the landscape: "In the panoramas the city dilates to become landscape." Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Reflections*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978): 150.

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I might also draw our attention to Marcel Broodthaers' *Section Cinéma* (1971-72), which I mentioned in my introduction. The *Section Cinéma* represented another 'underground' projection room, which was installed by the artist in the cellar of a house in Düsseldorf. It represented a combination of film studio, artist's studio and screening room. The public was invited to watch a program consisting of Broodthaers' own films, besides the movie *Charlie as Film Star* and various publicity reels [fig. 4]. But finally my attention comes to rest on Dan Graham's *Cinema* design of 1981 [fig. 69]. *Cinema* was to be located at the street level of an office building and constructed of two-way mirrored glass. To my mind, this work established one of the most brilliant possibilities in the genealogical sequence of post-minimal film. I would not venture that Graham brought the historical game to a complete close or, to adopt the opening metaphor of Hollis Frampton, Graham's move on the chessboard did not achieve checkmate, but perhaps it did force an open-ended draw. The strength of his move resided in the fact that it was executed without needing to make a new movie. Instead, Graham's *Cinema* formed the only proper answer to the issues I have raised in relation to the *Information* show. The *Cinema*, namely, re-structured *all* movies according to a performative model of experience:

> In this *Cinema*, unlike the cinema which must conceal from the spectators their own looks and projections, the architecture allows inside and outside spectators to perceive their positions, projections, bodies, and identifications. Topologically, an optical "skin" both reflective and transparent inside and outside, functions simultaneously as a screen for the film's projection. Dialectically, it is seen in the outside environment

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The themes of the landscape, whether located in a primeval or a suburban setting, and the historicity of nature, was to be frequented by many artist filmmakers and very often their films would assume a panoramic structure. I have discussed the genre of the "panoramic film" in a lecture that I delivered at the symposium "The Artist's Film after Pop and Minimalism," which was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York on March 31, 2001.

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> as well as the normal cinema context as a point of transfer for the gazes of the inner and outer spectators, in relation to each other and the film image.[27]

Unfortunately, Graham's *Cinema* was never realized. But what better place, I might ask, but here, on the mirrored screen of this cinema, to project those fragments of Frampton's infinite film that we have collected on our way through the film archives of post-minimalism?

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[27] Dan Graham, "Cinema," in *Two-Way Mirror Power*: 95.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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EXHIBITION CHRONOLOGY

This chronology lists all the gallery and museum exhibitions between 1966 and 1975 in America and Europe that, to my knowledge, included film screenings. However, the list is not exhaustive and more research remains to be done in this area. Where possible, I have included the artists and films that were part of the show between brackets. In some cases the filmography was to extensive to include in its entirety and I have either abbreviated the information or referred the reader to the original catalogue.

1966

Projected Art. Contemporary Study Wing, Finch College, New York, N.Y.. December 8, 1966 – January 8, 1967. [Dan Graham, *Transparencies Project*; Mel Bochner & Robert Moskowitz, *New York Windows*]

1968

Hunter College Auditorium, City University of New York, New York, N.Y.. April 3. [Robert Barry, *Squares* and *Scenes*; Robert Huot, *Loops* and *Spray*; Hollis Frampton, *Information*, *Process Red*, *Snowblind*, and *Heterodyne*; Michael Snow, *Short Shave*; Joyce Wieland, *Catfood* and "Untitled"]

12 Environments. Kunsthalle, Bern. July 20 – September 28. [Lutz Monmartz, Andy Warhol]

1969

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Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostrukturen. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. March 15 – April 27. Traveled to Museum Folkwang, Essen.

When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information: Live in Your Head. Kunsthalle, Bern. March 22 – April 27. Traveled to Museum Folkwang, Essen and Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld and the ICA, London.

Television-Exhibition I. Fernshegalerie Gerry Schum and Sender Freies Berlin, Berlin. April 15. [Transmission of Gerry Schum, *Land Art*[1]]

Intermedia 69. Heidelberg. May 16 – June 22. [Claus Böhmler; K.P. Brehmer; IMI Knoebel; Lutz Monmartz; Tony Morgan; Daniel Spoerri]

Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials. Whitney Museum, New York, N.Y.. May 19 –July 6. [Richard Serra, "5 untitled 2 ½ min. movies (black and white, 16 mm)," "untitled 5 minute movie (black and white, 16 mm)"; Richard Serra & Robert Fiore, documentary of *One Ton Prop: House of Cards*; Michael Snow, *Back and Forth, One Second in Montreal*; Michael Snow & Joyce Wieland, *Dripping Water*; Bruce Nauman, *Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio & Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*]

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[1] *Land Art* was produced by the "television-gallery Gerry Schum" (film transferred to black and white videotape, sound, 35 min.). *Land Art* consisted of separate segments conceived by the following artists: Marinus Boezem, Barry Flanagan, Richard Long, Walter de Maria, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert

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Coulisse. Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, N.Y.. June 13. [Vito Acconci, *Points, Blanks* (performance); Dan Graham, *Relax/Lax*, 1969 (tape performance) and *Jesus Smiles* (performance); Bruce Nauman, *Black Balls*; Denis Oppenheim, *Sound Track for Self-Enclosed Land Area* (sound piece); Steve Reich, *Pendulum Music* (music performance); Yvonne Rainer, *Line* and *Hand Movie*; Richard Serra, "Four Films" (probably the *Hand and Process* series)]

557.087. Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Wash.. September 5 – October 5. Traveled to Vancouver Art Gallery. [Robert Barry; Hollis Frampton; Ernie Gehr; Robert Huot; Ken Jacobs; George Landow; Richard Serra; Paul Sharits; Michael Snow; Joyce Wieland; Gerry Schum, *Land Art*]

Art by Telephone. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Ill.. November 1 – December 14. [Robert Morris, *Slow Motion*; Richard Serra, "Untitled"]

Prospekt 69. Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf. September 30 – October 12. [Gerry Schum, *Land Art*]

TV as a Fireplace. Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum and WDR III, Cologne. December 25 – 31. [Transmission of Jan Dibbets, *TV as a Fireplace*]

Smithson, and Michael Heizer, who withdrew after the first broadcast. See *Gerry Schum* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1980) for more details.

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Art in Process IV. Finch College Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.. December 11 –January 26. [Robert Morris, *Finch Project*]

1970

Evidence on the Flight of Six Fugitives. Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Ill.. March 28 – May 10. [Photographic and cinematic documentation of projects by Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer, Peter Hutchinson, Richard Long, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson]

Information. Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.. July 2 – September 20. [See exhibition catalogue for details]

Television-Exhibition II. Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum and Südwestfunk, Baden-Baden. November 15. [Transmission of Gerry Schum, *Identifications*][2]

Recorded Activities. Moore College of Art, Philadelphia, Penn.. October 16 – November 19.

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[2] *Identifications* was produced by the "television-gallery Gerry Schum" (film transferred to black and white videotape, sound, 50 min.). *Identifications* consisted of separate segments conceived by the following artists: Giovanni Anselmo, Joseph Beuys, Alghiero Boetti, Stanley Brown, Daniel Buren, Piero Clazolari, Gino de Dominicus, Ger van Elk, Hamish Fulton, Gilbert & George, Gary Kuehn, Mario Merz, Klaus Rinke, Ullrich Rückriem, Reiner Ruthenbeck, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Franz Erhard Walther, Lawrence Weiner, Gilbert Zorio. Buren and Fulton withdrew after the first broadcast. The Serra and Sonnier contributions were not produced by Schum. See *Gerry Schum* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1980) for more details.

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"Dan Graham. Performance, Film, Television, & Tape." *Performances & Activities* series, produced by John Gibson. Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York, N.Y.. December 14. [*Like* (tape piece), *Lax/Relax* (tape performance), *Two Correlated Rotations, Roll, TV Camera/Monitor Performance* (live video performance), *From Sunset to Sunrise, Binocular Zoom*]

1971

"Body." *Performances & Activities* series, produced by John Gibson. Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York, N.Y.. January 20 & February 22. [Vito Acconci (performance); Terry Fox (performance?); Dan Graham (film); Dennis Oppenheim (performance?)]

"Body." *Performances & Activities* series, produced by John Gibson. Loeb Student Center, New York University, New York, N.Y.. February 23. [Bruce Nauman, *Gauze* and *Black Balls* (films); Richard Serra *Color Aid* and *Frame*; Michael Snow, *Section de La Region Centrale* (12 min. excerpt), *One Second in Montreal* (film), *A Casing Shelved* (slide projection); Dennis Oppenheim, *Video Performance, Lead Sink for Sebastian* (film); Vito Acconci, *Channel* (performance); Dan Graham, *TV Camera/Monitor Performance*]

Sonsbeek 71: Buiten de Perken. Sonsbeek Park, Arnhem. June 19 – August 15. [Vito Acconci, *Blindfolded Catching Piece* and *Hand and Mouth Piece*; Dan Graham,

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From Sunset to Sunrise; Gerry Schum, *Land Art & Identifications*; Robert Morris, *Gas Station*; Bruce Nauman, *Black Balls, Bouncing Balls, Gauze & Pulling Mouth*; Dennis Oppenheim, *Arm and Asphalt, Arm and Wire, Back Track, Rocked Stomach & Wrist*; Richard Serra, *Color Aid, Frame, Hand Catching Lead & Hands Scraping*; Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*; Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, *Swamp*; Keith Sonnier, *Rub Down*. Also included were: Bas Jan Ader, Bruce Baillie, Marinus Boezem, Stanley Brouwn, Tony Conrad, Christo, Jan Dibbets, Ger van Elk, Fluxfilm Anthology, Hollis Frampton Ernie Gehr, Ken Jacobs, Peter Kubelka, George Landow, Standish Lawder, Robert Nelson, Peter Roehr, Wim T. Schippers & Wim van der Linden, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, and Joyce Wieland.]

7e Biennale de Paris. Parc Floral de Paris, Paris. September 24 – November 1. [Vito Acconci, Christian Boltanski, Robert Breer, K.P. Brehmer, Gino De Dominicis, Dan Graham, Nancy Graves, K.H. Hodicke, Jannis Kounellis, David Lamelas, Jean Le Gac, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Gerry Schum, *Land Art & Identifications*, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Lawrence Weiner]

Group Film Exhibition. Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, N.Y.. September 25 – October 9. Joan Jonas, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier]

Prospect 71. Projection. Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf. October 8 – 17. [See catalogue for details]

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1972

Documenta 5. Neue Galerie and Museum Fridericianum, Kassel. June 30 – October 8. [Vito Acconci, *Three Films (Trappings, Seedbed, Transference Zone)*; Dan Graham, *Body Press*; Bruce Nauman; Richard Serra, *Hands Catching Lead, Hands Tied, Hands Scraping*; Michael Snow, *Back and Forth*; Andy Warhol, *Empire*; Lawrence Weiner, *Broken Off, Beached.* Also included were: Christian Boltanski; Ger van Elk; Rebecca Horn; Christof Kohlhöfer & Sigmar Polke; David Lamelas; Alfred Leslie; Lucas Samaras; Katherina Sieverding; Gordon Matta-Clark; Marcel Broodthaers; Günter Brus; Hermann Nitsch; Otto Penck; Peter Roehr; Ben Vautier; William Wegman; George Landow; Birgit Hein; Paul Sharits; Kenneth Anger; Jack Smith; Stan Brakhage; Terry Fox; Howard Fried; Walther; Ono; Barry Le Va; Herman Nitsch.]

Projection. Ursula Wevers Gallery, Cologne. Opened September 1. [Keith Sonnier (films, videos, photos); Richard Serra (films); Barry Le Va (films, photos). Bruce Nauman (films); Klaus Rinke (photos, slides)]

Form and Structure in Recent Film. Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver. October 29 –November 5. [Hollis Frampton, Ernie Gehr, Barry Gerson, Ken Jacobs, George Landow, David Rimmer, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, Joyce Wieland]

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1973

Bilder-Objekte-Filme-Konzepte. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. April 3 – May 13.

Options and Alternatives: Some Directions in Recent Art. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn. April 4 – May 16. [Yvonne Rainer, *Lives of Performers*; Michael Snow *Wavelength*, *One Second in Montreal*, *A Casing Shelved*; Hollis Frampton, *Poetic Justic*, *Zorns Lemma*. Also included were: Paul Sharits, Robert Breer, Ernie Gehr, George Landow, Joyce Wieland, Ken Jacobs]

Projekt '74: Kunst Bleibt Kunst. Kunsthalle, Cologne. July 6 –September 8. [Alice Aycock, Rebecca Horn, Joan Jonas, David Lamelas, Klaus Rinke, Jack Smith, Lawrence Weiner, Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow]

1974

Projected Images. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minn.. September 21 – November 3. [Peter Campus, Rockene Krebs, Paul Sharits, Michael Snow, Ted Victoria, Robert Whitman]

Artists as Filmmakers Series. Artists Space, New York, N.Y.. February 16. [Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*]

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Films by Artists. Film Forum, New York, N.Y.. April 25-28, May 2-5. [Joan Jonas, *Song Delay*; Robert Morris, *Wisconsin*; Bruce Nauman, *Art Makeup: Black*; Charles Ross, *Sunlight Dispersion* and *Eclipse*; Richard Serra, *Hand Catching Lead*]

Persona. Artists Space, New York, N.Y.. April 23 – 26. [Peter Hutchinson, *Foraging*; Dennis Oppenheim; Jack Smith, *Life with Mekas* (performance)]

Artists as Filmmakers Series. Artists Space, New York, N.Y.. December 2. [Anthony McCall, *Partial Cone, Cone of Variable Volume, Partial Cone, Conical Solid*]

1975

Artists as Filmmakers Series. Artists Space, New York, N.Y.. March 22. [Nancy Graves, *Izy Boukir, Aves: Magnificent Bird, Great Flamingo, Reflections on the Moon*]

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FILMOGRAPHY

The filmography lists all the films by the artists that I have been able to locate and screen. I have specified the *original* gauge on which the films were shot. All Super 8 mm films have been transferred to 16 mm film (or videotape in the case of Bruce Nauman) in subsequent years.

Robert Barry

Tank Dive; excerpts. 1965. 16 mm, 9 min., black and white, silent.
Filmed by Robert Barry at Hunter College, NYC. Choreography: Twyla Tharp. Performed by Twyla Tharp, Chris Constance, Robert Huot, Ann McFarland and Anne Severson.

Red Seconds. 1968. 16 mm, 20 min., color, silent.

Scenes. 1967. 16 mm, 8 min., black and white, silent

Squares. 1967. 16 mm, 4 min., black and white, silent.

Mel Bochner

Walking a Straight Line through Grand Central Station, 1966 [with Robert Moskowitz]. 1966. 16 mm, 72 sec., black and white, silent.

New York Windows [with Robert Moskowitz]. 1966. 16 mm, 12 min., black and white, silent.

360° x 3. 1967-68. Super 8 mm, 3:10 min., color, silent.

Water. 1967-68. Super 8 mm, 3:10 min., color, silent.

Survey. 1968. Super 8 mm, 3:10 min., color, silent.

Dorothea in Fifteen Positions (presumed lost).1970. Two Super 8 mm films, 2 min. each, color, silent.

Passing Time (unfinished). 1970. Super 8 mm (?), 3:14 min., black and white, silent.

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Dan Graham

Sunset to sunrise. 1969. 16 mm, 5 min., color, silent.

Binocular zoom. 1969. Two Super 8 mm films, silent, color, synchronous projection as a split-screen image.

Two correlated rotations. 1969. Two Super 8 mm loops, silent, synchronous loop projection onto two right-angle walls.

Body Press. 1970-72. Two 16 mm films, color, silent, synchronous loop projection onto two parallel and opposite walls.

Roll. 1970. Two Super 8 mm films, black and white, silent, synchronized projection on parallel and opposite walls.

Helix/Spiral. 1973. Two 8 mm films, color, silent, synchronous loop projection on opposite walls.

Bruce Nauman

Manipulating the T-Bar (lost). 1965-66. 16 mm, ca. 10 min (400 feet), black and white, silent.

Opening and Closing (lost). 1965-66. 16 mm, ca. 10 min (400 feet), black and white, silent.

Revolving Landscape (lost). 1965-66. 16 mm, ca. 10 min (400 feet), black and white, silent.

Abstracting the Shoe [with William Allan]. 1966. 16mm, 2: 41 min., color, silent.

Building a New Slant Step (unfinished) [with William Allan]. 1966. 16 mm, ca. 8 min., black and white, silent.

Fishing for Asian Carp [with William Alan and Robert Nelson]. 1966. 16mm, 2:44 min., color, sound.

Legal Size [with William Allan]. 1966. 16 mm, 3:47 min., color, silent.

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Span [with William Allan]. 1966. 16 mm, 10: 37 min. (400 feet), color. silent.

Thighing. 1967. 16mm, ca. 10 min. (400 feet), color, sound.

The *Art Make-Up Films*:

Art Make-Up, No. 1: White. 1967. 16 mm, color, silent, ca. 10 min (400 feet).

Art Make-Up, No. 2: Pink. 1967-68. 16 mmcolor. silent. . ca. 10 min. (400 feet).

Art Make-Up, No. 3: Green. 1967-68. 16 mm, color, silent, ca. 10 min. (400 feet).

Art Make-Up, No. 4: Black. 1967-68. 16 mm, color, silent, ca. 10 min. (400 feet).

The *Studio Films*

Bouncing Two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rythms. 1967-68. 16 mm, ca. 10 min. (400 feet), black and white. sound.

Dance or Excercise on the Perimeter of a Square. 1967-68. 16 mm, ca. 10 min. (400 feet), black and white, sound.

Playing a Note on the Violin while I Walk around the Studio. 1967-68. 16 mm, ca. 10 min. (400 feet), black and white, sound.

Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square. 1967-68. 16 mm, ca. 10 min. (400 feet), black and white, silent.

Pinch Neck. 1968. 16 mm, 2 min., color, silent.

The *Slo Mo Films*:

Black Balls. 1969. 16 mm, 8 min., black and white, silent.

Bouncing Balls. 1969. 16 mm, 9 min., black and white, silent.

Gauze. 1969. 16 mm, 8 min., black and white, silent.

Pulling Mouth. 1969. 16mm, 8 min., black and white, silent.

Rotating Glass Walls. 1970. 16 mm (transferred to Super 8 mm loop cartridges), black and white, silent, loop projection onto four adjacent walls.

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Spinning Spheres. 1970. 16 mm (transferred to Super 8 mm loop cartridges), color, silent, loop projection onto four adjacent walls.

Pursuit or *Pursuit (Truth)*, with Frank Owen . 1975. 16 mm, 28 min., color, sound. Cinematography and Editor: Bryan Heath. Assistant Cameraman: John Quinn. Sound: Michael Pretainger. Production Assistant: Susan Haller.

Richard Serra

The *Hand and Process* Series:

Hand Catching Lead. 1968. 16 mm, 3½ min., black and white, silent.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Hand Lead Fulcrum. 1968. 16 mm, 3 min., black and white, silent.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Hands Scraping. 1968. 16 mm, 4½ min., black and white, silent.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Hands Tied. 1968. 16 mm, 3½ min., black and white, silent.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Frame. 1969. 16 mm, 22 min.,black and white, sound.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Tina Turning. 1969. 16 mm, 2 min., black and white, silent.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore. Performer: Tina Girouard.

Color Aid. 1971. 16 mm, 36 min., color, sound.
Cinematography: Robert Fiore.

Paul Revere [with Joan Jonas]. 1971. 16 mm, black and white, sound, 9 min.
Cinematography: John Knopp

Railroad Turnbridge. 1976. 16 mm, 19min., black and white, silent.

Steelmill/Stahlwerk [with Clara Weyergraf]. 1979. 16 mm, 30 min., black and white, sound.

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