

In December, Claes Oldenburg opens *The Store* in New York's East Village, an "environment" that mimicked the setting of surrounding cheap shops and from which all the items were for sale: throughout the winter and the following spring, ten different "happenings" would be performed by Oldenburg's Ray Gun Theater in *The Store* locale.

▲ Allan Kaprow's (born 1927) essay "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" was published in the October 1958 issue of *Artnews*, only two years after the painter's tragic death. By that time, the fact that Abstract Expressionism had become academicized had finally dawned on the editor of the journal, which for a decade had been the main promoter of the "10th Street touch," to use Clement Greenberg's disparaging characterization of the art produced by "second-generation" Abstract Expressionists. In January of that year, ■ Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces* had appeared on the cover of *Artnews*, in preview of the painter's first solo exhibition which turned out to be a spectacular success. A year later, Frank Stella's black paintings would mesmerize the New York art world. Pop art and Minimalism would soon follow: the inevitable demise of an already exhausted Abstract Expressionism was well under way. Kaprow's text, however, was the first to address head-on the issue of its legacy, or rather that of its main protagonist. Perhaps because he had been trained as an art historian (Kaprow studied with Meyer Schapiro at Columbia University, where he wrote a master's thesis on Mondrian), and was teaching the discipline (at Rutgers), he felt it was not enough, or too easy, to repudiate—rather, one had to sublimate.

Kaprow's utopia

It is true, Kaprow starts, that Pollock's innovations are "becoming part of textbooks": "The act of painting, the new space, the personal mark that builds its own form and meaning, the endless tangle, the great scale, the new materials are by now clichés of college art departments." But taking something for granted and replicating it is not understanding it, and there is more to Pollock's enterprise than what this stereotypical take suggests. Indeed, "some of the implications inherent in these new values are not as futile as we all began to believe," adds Kaprow, before commenting upon each feature he had just listed in order to demonstrate that, if Pollock "created some magnificent paintings ... he also destroyed painting." The immediacy of the act, the loss of self and identity in the potentially infinite, all-over space of painting, the new scale that undermines the autonomy of the canvas as an art object and transforms it into an environment: all of that, and more, points to Pollock's art as one "that tends to lose itself out of bounds, tends to fill our world with itself." Then, "What do we

do now?" asks Kaprow. "There are two alternatives," he answers. "One is to continue in this vein. Probably many good 'near-paintings' can be done varying this esthetics of Pollock's without departing from it or going further. The other is to give up the making of painting entirely—I mean the single flat rectangle or oval as we know it. It has been seen how Pollock came pretty close to doing so himself." There is, on the one hand, the taming of Pollock's work (and there is little doubt that Kaprow's target, at this juncture, was the school of artists presented by Greenberg as Pollock's true heirs: Helen Frankenthaler, ▲ Morris Louis, etc.); on the other, the dissolution of painting as we know it, and more precisely, its "dissolution into the environment," ● to speak like Mondrian from the mid-twenties on.

Kaprow knew very well that his call had a precedent in Mondrian's utopia, but rather than dwelling on this—which would have forced him to take into account the wedge separating the context of ■ the historical avant-gardes and that of the postwar neo-avant-garde, and perhaps to temper his optimism—he concluded his essay with a blueprint for the immediate future, worth quoting in full:

Pollock ... left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-second Street. Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things that will be discovered by the present generation of artists. Not only will these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard-of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies; seen in store windows and on the streets; and sensed in dreams and horrible accidents. An odor of crushed strawberries, a letter from a friend, or a billboard selling Drano; three taps on the front door, a scratch, a sigh, or a voice lecturing endlessly, a blinding staccato flash, a bowler hat—all will become materials for this new concrete art.

Young artists of today need no longer say, "I am a painter" or "a poet" or "a dancer." They are simply "artists." All of life will be



1 • Claes Oldenburg, interior of *The Store*, 107 East 2nd Street, New York, December 1961

open to them. They will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. They will not try to make them extraordinary but will only state their real meaning. But out of nothing they will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well. People will be delighted or horrified, critics will be confused or amused, but these, I am certain, will be the alchemies of the 1960s.

One cannot but admire Kaprow's foresight here. Much avant-garde art produced in the sixties does fulfill his prophecy, or at least fits this or that aspect of his prospective description. Three interconnected elements need to be singled out, because they directly concern Kaprow's own art and in particular the form that he was inventing at the time, dubbed the "happening": the availability of the world at large—not only the manifold of its objects, particularly its refuse, but also events unfolding in time—as the new, all-encompassing material of art; the dissolution of all hierarchies and value-systems; the suppression of medium-specificity and the simultaneous inclusion of all realms of perception into the aesthetic sphere.

Kaprow had been exhibiting paintings for several years, but toward the end of 1957 he began to create spatial "environments," which he dubbed "action collages," and which he conceived as direct extensions of Pollock's art—in his *Assemblage, Environments & Happenings* of 1966, he reproduced an aerial view of *Yard*, dating from 1961, for which he famously filled a courtyard with an accumulation of used tires [2], next to a photograph by Hans Namuth of Pollock at work (quietly smoking his pipe and trailed by a child, Kaprow looks less heroic than Pollock, but he was definitively more "in" his work). It was while he was trying to introduce sound in his environments—to open them further to the world, according to his logic of infinite extension—that Kaprow stumbled upon the happening. Dissatisfied with the paucity of effects he could muster, he sought advice from John Cage, who was then giving a course on composition at the New School for Social Research in New York. Fascinated by what he saw of the class on this first visit, he decided to join the ranks of several nonmusicians who were also in attendance, such as George Brecht and Dick Higgins, later to become pillars of Fluxus. It was there, in the spring of 1958, and with the encouragement of Cage, from whom he learned about chance as a compositional, or rather anticompositional, device, that he developed his idea of the happening. Randomness had long been a foundational principle of Cage's musical practice, fostering a genuine interest in the issue of notation. Kaprow's responses to Cage's class assignments were all performed whilst following a score listing objects to be used in noisy actions as well as the duration of each of these actions (which could be simultaneous). The model was obviously musical, but in adding the dimension of space—of the movement and placement of the participants (often hidden from view)—Kaprow emphasized both the theatrical dimension of these events, and their reliance upon a collage tradition derived from Dada.

Between this embryonic stage and the first fully fledged public happening, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, nothing fundamentally changed but the structure got more complex. For this event, which



2 • Allan Kaprow, *Yard*, 1961

Environment in the backyard of the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York

marked the inauguration of the Reuben Gallery—a space that would function for the next two years as the Mecca of the new art form (with happenings by Red Grooms, Robert Whitman, Claes Oldenburg, George Brecht, Jim Dine)—Kaprow had divided the space into three rooms by temporary partitions made of wood, sheets of plastic and canvas, either covered with assemblages of various objects to be used as props by the participants, or, if still blank at the beginning of the performance, destined to be painted over during its unrolling. Sounds—electronic, mechanical, and live—as well as lighting (including slide projections) were constantly altering this multipart environment into which six participants (three women and three men) evolved and executed a whole range of disconnected actions and uttered disconnected sentences while keeping as expressionless as possible. The "happenings" were carried out simultaneously in the three rooms (six in each of them) and the spectators were required to change room twice, during the overall one-hour performance (the seats were numbered and the changes of their occupiers were timed in the score). This modest audience participation (it grew in importance in Kaprow's later happenings and in those of others), as well as the absence of plot and character and the simultaneity of the "three-ring circus" insured that no one among the public could claim to have anything more than a fragmentary grasp of the whole event. Even returning the following days—*18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was performed during six evenings, starting on October 4, 1959—would not have much augmented one's mastery of the performance's overall structure, since the likelihood of obtaining a radically different seating arrangement each time was statistically very small.

The breakdown of the barrier separating performers and audience is what most struck commentators on the first happenings (there

was no stage, no ideal setting: in fact, as they grew more complex and involved more participants, happenings tended to occur outdoors, as would Kaprow's *Household* in 1964 [3]). This breakdown, particularly when it was marked by aggressivity, was what distinguished happenings from pure theater (Oldenburg's happenings would perhaps be the most violent or rather discomfiting of all, but Kaprow did not hesitate to abuse his public—for example in *A Spring Happening*, in March 1961, when the audience was chased out by someone operating a power lawnmower at the end of the performance.) Critics also noted that this collapse of the performer/audience boundary was in keeping with happening's deliberate disregard of any cause-and-effect relations as well as of any principle of constancy. Likening it to the "alogic of dreams" that have "no sense of time," no past, are without "climax or consummation," often repetitive, and "always at the present tense," Susan Sontag remarked that its lack of storyline (particularly, as often, when the sequence of actions had been determined by chance) was at odds with the basic modernist concept of the work of art as an autonomous totality, and troubling even for the small, "loyal, appreciative, and for the most part experienced audience" of happenings who "frequently does not know when they are over, and has to be signalled to leave." Another dissolution of categories noticed by

Sontag concerns the materials used in the happenings: "one cannot distinguish among set, props, and costumes in a Happening, as one can in the theater." One cannot even distinguish among people and objects (all the more since people were "often made to look like objects, by enclosing them in burlap sacks, elaborate paper wrappings, shrouds, and masks," or stay as immobile as the props around them). There is only a global environment, often deliberately messy, in which mostly fragile materials are used and often destroyed in the course of a series of non-sequential acts. "One cannot hold on to a Happening, and one can only cherish it as one cherishes a firecracker going off dangerously close to one's face," concludes Sontag.

Such impermanence became a key element of Kaprow's concept (after the initial experience of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, he often stated that happenings should never be repeated in order to preserve what he deemed their most important quality, their immediacy, their "suchness," as he called it). This has little to do with any interest in spontaneity (happenings were scripted and rehearsed, no matter how aleatory their structure), but with a somewhat naive belief, derived from Cage's Zen-like philosophy, that uniqueness as such was a guarantee of "presence," and that "presence" as such, when thought of as a natural process, was a guarantee against the blatant commodification of all things that characterized the postwar consumerist society.



3 • Allan Kaprow, *Household*, 1964
Happening

(Kaprow's disdain for the art market and the "white walls, tasteful aluminum frames, lovely lighting, fawn—gray rugs, cocktails and polite conversation" pertaining to the modernist gallery had been one of the motivations for his environments.) While he misunderstood Cage, for whom repetition was properly impossible (since no two performances could ever be alike), which made its proscription senseless, Kaprow perhaps inadvertently touched a nerve whose sensitivity among his audience at this time of history might explain more than any other factor the shock value of the happening. This nerve was the economic one, which he irritated, as art historian Robert Haywood pointed out, by enacting the corporate strategy of "planned obsolescence" destined to quicken commodity production and consumption (Haywood's prime example is the 1967 multipart happening *Fluids*, which consisted of erecting and then letting melt fifteen large geometric ice formations spread throughout diverse locations in Pasadena and Los Angeles). Yet though it was intended as a critique of instrumental labor—a critique that his mentor Meyer Schapiro had deemed to be at the core, if not the purpose, of modern art since Impressionism—Kaprow's superlatively gratuitous recourse to a capitalist trick did not really hold as strategy and slowly devolved into an inoffensive spectacle that, as such, only extended further the alienation it pretended to reveal.

Asked by arts critic Richard Kostelanetz "Are not most of us opposed to planned obsolescence? I would prefer more permanent cars. Is it bad for me to want things that would last longer?", Kaprow offered a reply that could have been undersigned by any corporate mogul: "I suggest that this is a myth of the wrong kind—that you really don't want a permanent car; for if you and the public did, you wouldn't buy cars that are made impermanently. Planned obsolescence may have its bad sides.... It also is a very clear indication of America's springtime philosophy—make it new is *renew*; and that's why we have a cult of youth in this country." Those words, uttered in 1968, could not have clashed more dramatically with what the rebelling youth demonstrating in the streets was thinking at the time. In the end, it might have been Kaprow's incapacity to reflect and seize upon the politico-economical meaning of the art form that he had invented that led to its oblivion: in light of the 1968 "real-life" events, far more violent than his own and often as festive, the happening suddenly looked irrelevant and rapidly faded away.

Art for dime stores

But while Kaprow might have been too indirect in his wish to underscore the hold of market forces on our lives and on our consumption of art in particular, Oldenburg addressed this issue head on. Though ▲ his starting-point was not Pollock but rather Jean Dubuffet's "rehabilitation of mud," Oldenburg's early take was quite similar to that of Kaprow, particularly in his glorification of refuse as the prime material of art. But things began to shift right from Oldenburg's first mature manifestation, the "Ray Gun Show" at the Judson Gallery between January and March 1960 (the gallery was administered by the Judson Memorial Church, soon to host the Judson Dance

Theater, including performances by Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneemann, and the Minimalist sculptor Robert Morris). For this show, Oldenburg constructed his first environment, *The Street*, which became the disheveled setting of his first happening, *Snapshot from the City* [4]. It consisted of an accumulation of silhouettes made from torn or torched rubbish collected in the streets (lots of corrugated cardboard, of burlap, of old newspapers), and of more garbage spread on the floor. Foremost and recurrent among these silhouettes was that of the "Ray Gun," a parodic sci-fi toy (between a hair-dryer and a gun) devised by Oldenburg as the emblem of all commodities. To enhance the market metaphor, Oldenburg offered the audience of *Snapshot from the City* large sums of "money" in Ray Gun currency (bills ranged from 1,000 figures to 7,000) with which to buy stuff from *The Street* and other junk that he and his fellow artist Jim Dine had been adding to it for the occasion.

What was left over from this fake yardsale was installed as a much sparser version of *The Street* in the Reuben Gallery in May 1960, after which Oldenburg retreated to the country for the summer. It is there, while reflecting upon his dissatisfaction with the second, clean, version of *The Street* in a typical modernist "white cube," that he fully elaborated his concept of the Ray Gun, particularly its ubiquity: any object shaped in a right angle, even a blunt one, can be a Ray Gun, which, in a humorous appropriation of Mondrian's phrase, Oldenburg crowned with the title of "universal angle." "Examples: Legs, Sevens, Pistols, Arms, Phalli—simple Ray Guns. Double Ray Guns: Cross, Airplanes. Absurd Ray Guns: Ice Cream Sodas. Complex Ray Guns: Chairs, Beds." In short, just as gold had for long functioned as the standard of monetary circulation, the Ray Gun was a "general equivalent," the empty sign through which all kinds of things could be compared and exchanged. Although it



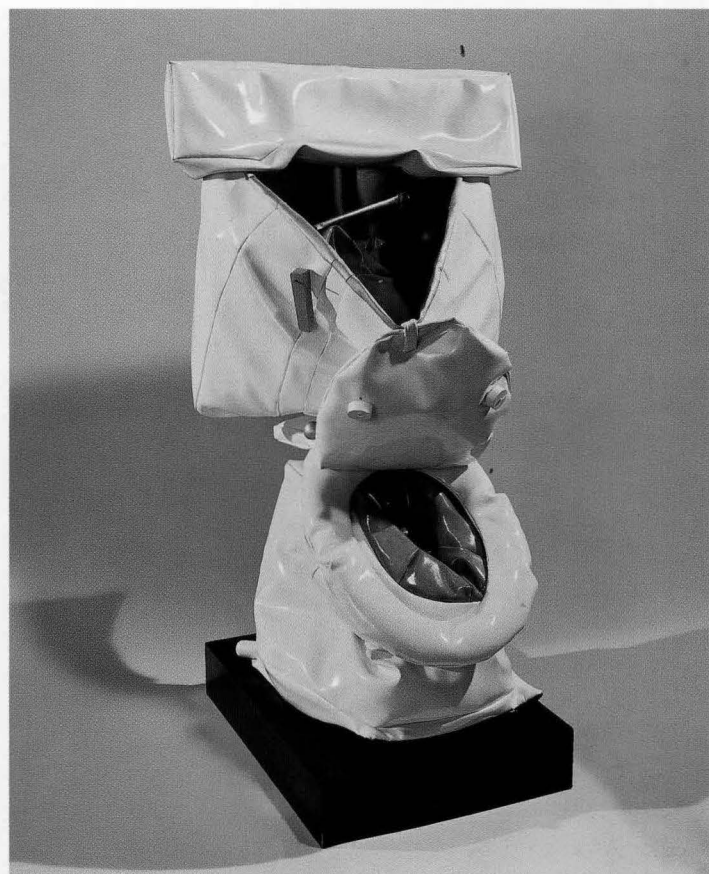
4 • Claes Oldenburg, *Snapshots from the City*, 1960
Performance at Judson Gallery, Judson Memorial Church, New York

would be far-fetched to imagine that Oldenburg spent his summer musing about political economy, his next project, *The Store* [1], indicates that his ruminations led him to discount his earlier, Kaprowesque aestheticization of refuse as irrelevant. In what seems in retrospect like a direct allusion to his Reuben show, he wrote: "These things [art objects] are displayed in galleries, but that is not the place for them. A store would be better (Store—place full of objects). Museum in b[ourgeois] concept equals store in mine."

Though a partial realization of *The Store* took place in the group show "Environments, Situations, Spaces" at the Martha Jackson Gallery in May–June 1961, it was only in December of that year that Oldenburg opened the outlet of his "Ray Gun Manufacturing Company" on 107 East Second Street, in an area of Manhattan replete with "dime stores" selling cheap or secondhand goods. In this new location *The Store* was conceived as a duplicate of the neighboring shops, where ill-assorted items endlessly succeeded each other on the shelves—with this difference: Oldenburg's shelves were filled with obvious replicas of perishable foodstuffs or tiny objects of mass consumption. Often oversized, made of cloth soaked in plaster and clumsily painted in garish colors applied with broad brush-strokes (in overt parody of Abstract Expressionism), these baked potatoes, sausages, ice-cream cones or blue shirts were never intended to pass for the real thing (though their price was a far cry from those commanded by art works in even the least prestigious gallery—they ran from twenty-five dollars to over eight hundred). Rather, their purpose was to demonstrate that since there was no fundamental difference between the rarefied commerce of art and the trade of a thrift-store, as both art works and bibelots were nothing but commodities, one might as well skip the pretense and drop the fig-leaf.

If Oldenburg's assault on the institutions of art as sheer marketplace went much further than that of his predecessor, it is because, through the symbol of the Ray Gun (and he displayed countless "Ray Guns" for sale in *The Store*), he had understood that the status of the work of art as commodity rested on its exchangeability. To his delight, a visitor trying to identify one of these poorly shaped objects exclaimed: "It's a lady's handbag.... No, it's an iron. No, a typewriter. No, a toaster. No, it's a piece of pie." But once this metaphoric structure of the art work as exchangeable good had been identified, there was no stopping it from looming everywhere, making of any object the equivalent of at least another one. *Store Days*, a book in which Oldenburg has assembled all the notes pertaining to this ongoing installation and the events that took place in it, abounds in lists of comparisons: "cock and balls equals tie and collar>equals leg and bra>equals stars and stripes/flag equals cigarette package and cigarettes/heart equals balls and triangle>equals (upside down) girdle and stockings>equals (sidewise) cigarette package equals flag."

This potentially infinite chain of associations would hardly pass for economic analysis (foremost because it rests on the deliberate disregard of any opposition between use- and exchange-value). In the end, Oldenburg knew full well that his replicas would end up marketed as art and be given the special care that luxury goods enjoy. But combining with his longstanding interest in psychoanalysis, the



5 • Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Toilet*, 1966

Wood, vinyl, kapok, wire, Plexiglas on metal stand and painted wood base, 144.9 x 70.2 x 71.3 (57½ x 27¾ x 28½)

parody propelled him into the next stage of his production, with which he has been engaged ever since. It was in his subsequent solo exhibition at the Green Gallery, in September–October 1963, that he presented for the first time his large-scale "soft" objects sprawled on the floor (*Floor-Burger*, *Floor-Cone*, *Floor-Cake*, etc.): with the unescapable eroticism of these mock edible items (as well as that of the more scatological objects that would follow, such as his *Soft Toilet* [5]), Oldenburg was further aiming his pan-metaphoricity at American mass culture and declaring that if its fixation on consumption was an open secret, its covert obsession was with the body.

FURTHER READING

- Robert Haywood, "Critique of Instrumental Labor: Meyer Schapiro's and Allan Kaprow's Theory of Avant-Garde Art," in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Judith Rodenbeck, *Experiments in the Everyday: Allan Kaprow and Robert Watts* (New York: Columbia University, 1999)
- Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993)
- Michael Kirby, *Happenings* (New York: Dutton & Co. 1966)
- Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1969)
- Susan Sontag, "Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1966)

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modernism antimodernism postmodernism

To Nikos Stangos (1936–2004), in memoriam

With love, admiration, and grief, we dedicate this book to Nikos Stangos, great editor, poet, and friend, whose belief in this project both instigated and sustained it through the course of its development.

We would like to thank Thomas Neurath and Peter Warner for their patient support, and Nikos Stangos and Andrew Brown for their editorial expertise. The book would not have been begun without Nikos; it would not have been completed without Andrew.

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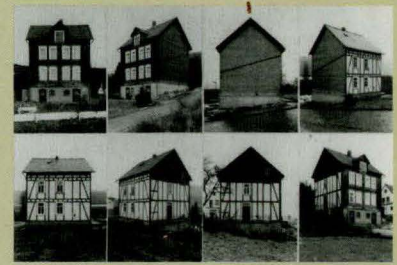
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1960–1969

- 434 **1960a** Critic Pierre Restany organizes a group of diverse artists in Paris to form *Nouveau Réalisme*, redefining the paradigms of collage, the readymade, and the monochrome.
box: The neo-avant-garde
- 439 **1960b** Clement Greenberg publishes "Modernist Painting": his criticism reorients itself and in its new guise shapes the debates of the sixties.
box • Leo Steinberg: the flatbed picture plane
- 445 **1960c** Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol start to use cartoons and advertisements as sources for paintings, followed by James Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha, and others: American Pop art is born.
- 450 **1961** In December, Claes Oldenburg opens *The Store* in New York's East Village, an "environment" that mimicked the setting of surrounding cheap shops and from which all the items were for sale: throughout the winter and the following spring, ten different "happenings" would be performed by Oldenburg's Ray Gun Theater in *The Store* locale.
- 456 **1962a** In Wiesbaden, West Germany, George Maciunas organizes the first of a series of international events that mark the formation of the Fluxus movement.
- 464 **1962b** In Vienna, a group of artists including Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, and Hermann Nitsch come together to form Viennese Actionism.
- 470 **1962c** Spurred by the publication of *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922* by Camilla Gray, Western interest revives in the Constructivist principles of Vladimir Tatlin and Aleksandr Rodchenko, which are elaborated in different ways by younger artists such as Dan Flavin, Carl Andre, Sol LeWitt, and others.
box • *Artforum*
- 475 **1963** After publishing two manifestos with the painter Eugen Schönebeck, Georg Baselitz exhibits *Die Grosse Nacht im Eimer* (Great Night Down the Drain) in Berlin.
- 480 **1964a** On July 20, the twentieth anniversary of the failed Stauffenberg coup against Hitler, Joseph Beuys publishes his fictitious autobiography and generates an outbreak of public violence at the "Festival of New Art" in Aachen, West Germany.
- 486 **1964b** *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* by Andy Warhol is installed, momentarily, on the facade of the State Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York.
- 492 **1965** Donald Judd publishes "Specific Objects": Minimalism receives its theorization at the hands of its major practitioners, Judd and Robert Morris.
box • Maurice Merleau-Ponty
- 496 **1966a** Marcel Duchamp completes his installation *Etant Donnés* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art: his mounting influence on younger artists climaxes with the posthumous revelation of this new work.
- 500 **1966b** The exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction" opens in New York: the work of Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse, Yayoi Kusama, and others points to an expressive alternative to the sculptural language of Minimalism.
- 505 **1967a** Publishing "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," Robert Smithson marks "entropy" as a generative concept of artistic practice in the late sixties.
- 509 **1967b** The Italian critic Germano Celant mounts the first *Arte Povera* exhibition.
- 515 **1967c** For their first manifestation, the four artists of the French group *BMPT* paint in public, each artist repeating exactly from canvas to canvas a simple configuration of his choice: their form of Conceptualist painting is the latest in a line of attacks against "official" abstraction in postwar France.

- 521 **1968a** Two major museums committed to the most advanced European and American art of the sixties—the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven and the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach—exhibit the work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, placing them at the forefront of an interest in Conceptual art and photography.

- 527 **1968b** Conceptual art manifests itself in publications by Sol LeWitt, Dan Graham, and Lawrence Weiner, while Seth Siegelaub organizes its first exhibitions.
box • Artists' journals
box • Deskillung

- 534 **1969** The exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" in Bern and London surveys Postminimalist developments, while "Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials" in New York focuses on Process art, the three principal aspects of which are elaborated by Richard Serra, Robert Morris, and Eva Hesse.

1970–1979

- 540 **1970** Michael Asher installs his Pomona College Project: the rise of site-specific work opens up a logical field between modernist sculpture and Conceptual art.
- 545 **1971** The Guggenheim Museum in New York cancels Hans Haacke's show and suppresses Daniel Buren's contribution to the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition: practices of institutional critique encounter the resistance of the Minimalist generation.
box • Michel Foucault
- 549 **1972a** Marcel Broodthaers installs his "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures," in Düsseldorf, West Germany.
- 554 **1972b** The international exhibition "Documenta 5," held in Kassel, West Germany, marks the institutional acceptance of Conceptual art in Europe.