

“OK, JUST SEND ME THE BILL”

Seth Price

To Smith it seemed an age since the dejected little group had trooped into this dim, cool sitting room. They surely had been talking for hours, comfortably if aimlessly, for all the world like a bunch of actors forcing themselves through a final and unnecessary reading. He was fine with that. But still... If one could only freeze all moments and keep them flexible, like glass, a viscous solid moving so slowly the eye can't track it... But was that really true, about glass? He wasn't sure what he thought about Jim and his fancy house. Admiration, possibly. He admitted this with chagrin. He was trying to understand his surprise upon entering as he registered the Warhol, the porcelain collectibles, all the tokens of high station, and his own flush of embarrassment. Richard Stark, by contrast, had walked in with a carefully opaque face, barely glancing at his own lead sculpture propped against the wall by the landing. What a place for it! And he pointedly said nothing, like a stubborn boy. On



the other hand, maybe manhood was about such delicate omissions, and rather than stupidity there was a sort of grace to it. If you considered it from the right angle. It wasn't strictly true that girls matured faster, it was that boys didn't actually ever mature. They simply aged. From young boys into old boys.

Lunch had been fine and simple. Bologna sandwiches, potato salad, cold beer, all produced from the kitchen by a serene colored girl in a starched apron. He couldn't quite identify her accent. He considered that hang-up that wealthy people had about separating the kitchen from the dining room. Apparently dinner guests in ye olde France had been nauseated by even the faintest odor of cooking, at least during the reign of Louis Something-or-Other.

Now they were all seated around a low coffee table battered just so, with Jim's children orbiting the room distractedly, made restless by all the chatter, and by the air

of solemnity that people get around someone else's expensive things.

"It would be a different kind of situation they put themselves in," Stark was saying, with a typically aggressive edge to his voice. By contrast, Smith was generally quiet and slow moving. His reticence was often interpreted as aloofness or arrogance. Jim, the dealer, was ten years older than either artist, slightly paunchy, hair maintained at shoulder length and now more or less tucked behind his ears, contentedly settled into his role as host, nodding along: "Yeah."

Smith and Stark had brought their girlfriends, who absorbed it all with resigned smiles: the men are going on and on, jousting, basically, and it may well last all afternoon, ought to sit back. Nora was entirely silent and still. Jill had brought a Portapak video camera, on loan to her from Castelli, which she cradled in her lap, cross-legged, woman and machine folded up in a faded black canvas butterfly chair. Smith was vaguely aware of her switching the camera on, adjusting something on a heavy, floor-bound component connected by cables, pointing the barrel here and there. This made her a welcome center of attention for the kids. Was it the technology, or the fact that she was a woman? And then Nora looking on, perpetually amused. Why did the women hang back like that, hovering above the discussion, were they judging? It made him nervous.

Jim's little girl Janice stalked by, on a mission that brought her right up to the camera lens, brandishing a clenched fist and asking, "Want some gum?" Jill made polite noises of interest, but softly, aware of the microphone inches away.

Jim belched noiselessly. "I'm not saying that's a bad

situation, what I'm saying is, in this particular case we don't have—"

"Honey?" Jim's wife was standing in the doorway to the kitchen with the telephone receiver. The phone cord strained at its full length, tethering her to some point in the other room, as she evidently preferred, for she had disappeared shortly after lunch and seemed loath to reenter. She had on a navy tank top, white shorts, and calfskin flats, and held a delicate pose that was counterbalanced by the taut cord. Smith flashed on ballet slippers, ballerinas, pliés, a line of thinking that ultimately boiled down to abrasive little girls, irritatingly.

"In this particular situation," Jim continued, loudly, like a car unable to halt at the line, and then, without pausing or looking, "Who is it?"

She said a name.

"Oh, just give him the price, and if they have any questions about it..."

Off to the side, the little girl's candy transaction continued. "Here," she said to Jill, "better try one little piece first to see if you like it." Jill took the gum and began unwrapping it with one hand, careful to hold the camera steady.

"He wants to know the front footage," called Jim's wife.

"Tell him... Tell him it's about 155 feet."

"One hundred and fifty-five feet."

"By 305 feet. Roughly."

The others were silent, trying to appear uninterested. The numbers were meaningless, just the back-and-forth of a husband and wife, but they were strings of calculations representing property, reputation, interests: a kind of talk

that demanded respect.

"Three hundred and five feet deep?"

"Yeah." Jim was staring into space. He wished simply to sit on his couch, next to Smith, the artist, who was holding a drink and a smoke, across from Stark, the artist, both of them with girlfriends in tow, girlfriends who knew how to act, everybody working together to create a perfect constellation of relevance.

"And that's twenty-five?"

Smith decided to nudge things a little. "But wouldn't you say that—"

"Twenty-five thousand," Jim murmured with an air of finality, and was back.

"—that somebody like Pulitzer is set—in other words, that land that he has there has a particular connotation in terms of *him*? In other words, he's sort of populating his landscape according to his values."

"Yeah, he has been—well, you gotta understand, the type of pieces he's talking about—and I'm not trying to defend Pulitzer—but he's talking, the type of pieces he's talking about putting there... It's a very radical kind of piece."

Meanwhile, Janice's gum offer was still standing. "Like it? You want it?" Jill smiled. "It's quite sweet," she said. Smith observed his attention dividing between the two poles of the room's conversational axis, that of the males and that of the females. The two faces of Janus. Janice? There was a joke there. If one could tell an unborn child that it soon would be forced to leave its only world, the child might struggle frantically against the thought: birth must be a death. But of course it is the other way around.

"It's an object," Jim said. "To quote Pulitzer, 'How can

I possibly put this in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art' is the question he's asking, and the answer was, 'You can't.' And, you know, he never dreamed of owning any sculpture that was anything like that, out there—"

Jim's wife leaned back into the room. She was fiddling with a folded slip of paper. "Are there—" she began.

"Well, this piece, too, has that portability," said Smith, casting his lot with the males.

She raised her voice a little. "Are there any building restrictions, or what size house does one have to put up in this area, on this size lot?"

Jim, distracted and barely looking up, said, "Uh, just check with the city government on that. It's the same restrictions as the city government. And they have to get trustee approval. But there'll be no problems with that."

His wife hurried out, and Smith plowed on: "What I'm saying is that if you take a portable sculpture and put it into a garden setting, that garden setting carries with it a whole set of values that has no benefit to the artist, basically. That in a sense it's, uh, it's repressive to the artist, and, uh, it's like the artist—"

"It's repressive," Jim said quickly, "it's repressive to Richard, it would be repressive to you, right now. However, when he bought that house and when he bought that garden, and he bought those objects, he wasn't being repressive to those artists, and he hasn't been now—"

Stark, across the room, had been absorbed in his own thoughts, but he practically leaped from his chair at the mention of his own name. "Yeah, they were all dead, that's why!"

They all started talking at once. You can only

understand something by fighting it, Smith thought. "Because those artists were making those works," he said, speaking over Stark, "making those works for *that kind of setting*—"

"They were making art for that kind of setting," Jim said encouragingly.

"Yeah, well," said Stark, "I think that that's—"

"And now things have changed," Smith said, and, when he found himself unopposed, said it again: "Now things have changed."

"You've changed the arena," Jim said, "and you've changed the rules."

"What?" said Stark, like an attack dog trained to respond to particular words. Was it the word *rules*?

"You've changed the rules, and you've changed the place—"

"No, we just—"

"—where you want to make art, so that kind of setting doesn't fit, maybe it doesn't fit the place—"

"No," said Stark, "that kind of setting may fit kind of an idea you have, which would accommodate itself to that place, but if you have an idea that *won't* accommodate itself to that place, there's no need to use that place."

"Right," Jim said, raising an open palm.

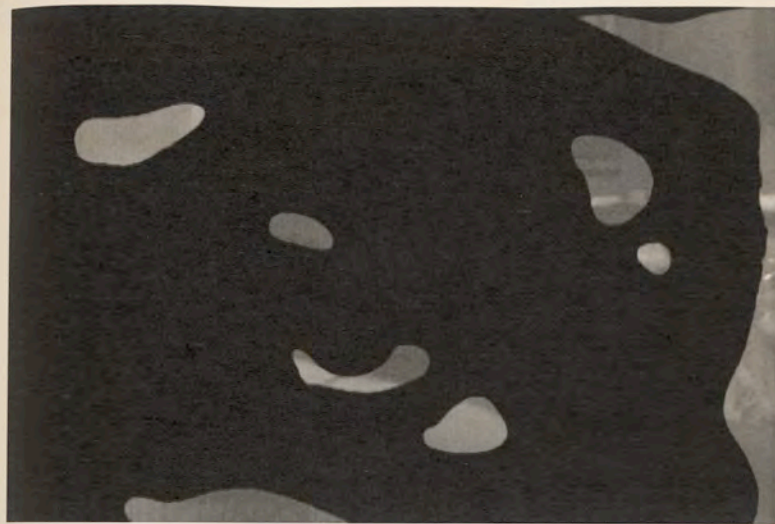
"But also you can say that that place puts—"

"But don't think—"

"—puts a limit on what you can think about."

Jim considered this. "Yeah," he said slowly, "it might very well. But don't think that he's a bad guy, simply because his interests don't run, don't—"

Stark hunched forward, lowered his voice. "No, I'm not saying he's a bad guy. But isn't it strange that the artist



finds himself in a position of serving the commodity product-turnover system, without benefiting from it, right? Here we have a guy like Bruce Nauman, right?" He pronounced it *Nawmin*. "Who comes here and makes bad multiples, so he can make some of the money to make his good work, and his good work was sold for eight, nine hundred dollars a couple years ago, is now being sold for, you know, nine thousand, by a guy who never even looked at it. Who made the money? Bruce Nauman? No! Ronnie Greenberg, who never even looked at it. Does that help Bruce Nauman? Hell, no! And does Bruce Nauman make an edition to help Bruce Nauman? Hell, no."

"First of all, it does," Jim replied, ever patient. "First of all, the money that Greenberg gets for that piece *does* help Nauman."

"How?"

"Well, because what it does for Nauman's work is, it

sets a price on it, for Nauman's work."

Smith looked up. "Greenberg has something to do with Nauman's work here?"

"No, *another* Greenberg—"

"He thought Clement Greenberg," Jill said.

Smoothing over the misunderstandings. Though no one heard her, in fact.

"Ronnie Greenberg!" Stark's excitability was almost admirable.

"Oh, I see..."

"... My next door neighbor."

"Not *Clement* Greenberg."

"Ha-ha."

"The fact that his prices are supported as such"—Jim was really laying down the law now: prices, markets, this was his domain—"and artists have been known to go on like that for years, you know: they have a good period at a certain time, and the rest of their life they got fancy prices for their work even though their paintings are bad, simply because of what those early paintings traded at."

Smith placed his drink on the table and raised his hand. "Yeah, but it's no longer a matter of what—it's no longer a matter of *paintings*. Because it's no longer a matter of, uh..."

"No, I'm not saying that in your case or in Richard's case it is."

"No, but I'm—"

"No, but that's a different case—"

"Bruce—"

Stark jumped in at once; was it the word *Bruce*? "No, but that's not Bruce Nauman's case! Bruce Nauman's case is that the works are being higher priced because there

probably won't be any more turnover pieces like that. Bruce Nauman may not make pieces that are going to go on the market. He may start making pieces which are grounded in place, which have to do with interior settings, which don't have to do with moving them around, so what you're paying for is one of a kind, you're paying for a rare thing. So Bruce Nauman may already be stepping off the market in that sense."

"Right, that's quite possible," Jim said.

"So, it's not the same thing as hitting a high period!" Triumphantly, a final-stitch-in-the-fabric tone.

Jim shook his head slightly. "He's not paying that—Bischofberger isn't paying that price because he wants Bruce Nauman to be happier. He's paying that price because he wants the piece, whether he wants the piece to buy it and sell it for a profit, he wants the piece to own it to look at, or he wants the piece to use as a power play to use to get some other piece... I don't know, there's a lot of reasons why you have pieces. And they buy it and sell it like a commodity."

Smith gently rubbed his chin. "Yeah, but why shouldn't the artist have control over the, uh..."

"Then the artist shouldn't have sold it in the first place!"

"Yeah, but that's part of the—"

"Bruce took money for it in the first place!"

"Yes!" This was said in a breathy tone of exasperation. Smith was normally lugubrious in his tone, but now even he was beginning to get *exercised*. "But that's the way the system is set up! I mean—"

"Well, don't sell your pieces that way, nobody says you have to."

Smith slowly brought his cigarette to his lips and

suddenly withdrew it. "Well, maybe it's no longer possible. Maybe that's the break between that kind of portability and, uh, and the, uh, working-in-place situation... Uh... Also, I think it has to do with property, and it has to do with filling a, a sector of land with, uh, objects that are portable, and, uh, Pulitzer seems to—I mean, is concerned about whether or not he can get Richard's piece into the Museum of Modern Art, seems to be a factor, and, uh..."

Jim had a gleam in his eye, as if the non sequitur he was about to unleash were a conversational depth charge. "Have you ever thought about Oriental art, and some of these jade carvings?"

Smith looked at him sidelong, apparently repelled by the suggestion. "No, I—I don't think that—"

Jim continued blithely: "It would take a guy a hundred years to do it! And what happens to it—"

"I think that's basically repressive, I think that's like, you know, somebody destroying their eyes over making linen or something like that."

"Yeah, and what happens to that—"

"But that's, that's—"

"And it's in somebody's studio—"

"And he has the ability—he has the *connoisseurship*—"

"It takes two generations of a family to make it!"

Smith's glacial drift of words kept flowing: "He has the connoisseurship to come and select this, to be able to make this decision, in other words, after somebody's worked over, you know, some craft object, and, you know, completely wasted their whole life making this *craft* object, and then somebody who has an economic facility can come and, uh, bid for that... But the, uh, the person who has put the work into that has just *destroyed* themselves... I'm not interested in

that. I'm not interested in that kind of *craft element*."

In his laconic way Smith could be quite cutting.

"I—I—I—don't see any reason for—you know—"

Jim was foundering in the wake, and Stark piled on: "It places a value judgment on the fact that someone took a hundred years to make it. He's—"

"Excuse me," interjected one of the girls. She could only take so much, and she'd been very patient. Jill immediately started whispering with her, as if to shield the conversation.

"It's a luxury item," said Smith firmly, "It's a luxury item. So why—you know, like, why, why should, uh, one, uh..."

"I'm not defending it. I'm not defending it at all.

What I'm saying is that's the way—you know, that's what motivates people, when you're collecting, and that kind of motivation is ultimately going to be the basis—even if it changes—it's going to be the basis for, uh, what sponsors your pieces, and Richard's pieces."

Stark was sitting back now, mellowed by a brief exchange of funny faces with one of the girls. "It *could* turn out," he said brightly, "that the artists sponsor their own pieces, and sell their own work, and that would pretty much, well, change the whole situation, wouldn't it?"

"The artists sponsor their own pieces..." Jim repeated slowly. "They do that, too."

"Who does that?"

"Sponsors their own pieces and sells their own work?"

"Who makes their own work and sells their own work?"

"Uh... Clyfford Still did for a long time, and so did Rothko. A lot of those guys."

"They're still portable commodities," said Smith.
Luxury item, portable commodity: dry terms, well machined.

"You could make your own work," said Stark, "and place—"

"Also a—a myth of those two people—"

Jim looked sharply at Smith and cut him off. "Do you think that your work is a higher order of art, simply because it's not portable, simply because it's not salable?"

"I would say that it challenges the place where it's going to, and what it becomes."

"I don't think that's—I think, you know, that's great if your art is that way, but it doesn't mean it's going to be good. Because you make a piece of art—"

"No, because *you're* making the judgments. I don't—I'm not interested in your judgments about whether or not, you know, this is *good*, or whatever this is, 'good' or 'bad,' that sort of thing. It's the ability—that I have the *right* to make *my* work, and nobody has any right to legislate or judge what I am doing, and I find that this whole idea of aesthetic taste is so much bu—" (he halted, aware of the children) "—baloney, because, uh, it's all done on the basis of economics, economic facility and the economic talent, and it has nothing to do with the right, *my* right, to make *my* work, and I want that full right."

"No," agreed Stark, "I think the economic facility actually *inhibits* work from growing the way it could grow. Because what happens is, work which seems inventive or original reaches a certain status, where the person who is involved in making it then begins to make money, and that means that he keeps turning those—"

In later years, the reel-to-reel videotape would very likely glitch out at this point. Or maybe it was simply

the heat of the moment. Meanwhile, Smith's mind was wandering. Is man so perverse that he would continue to eat acorns long after the discovery of grain? Apparently. The seventeenth century is when music notation came into being, largely for the purpose of ownership of a composition. Up until that time, ownership and control of music was presumably not a crucial matter. And what happens to the excess? Like the nostalgia for communism, signified by a word new to the Russian language in 1989.

When image and sound reasserted themselves, Stark was still talking: "—to attaining. And that's why most of our young artists are just ripped off at a very early age. Because they get stuck knocking out the same products. You know, Frank Stella can't go on—"

"I think it's—"

Stark wouldn't be stopped. "It's just not by *coincidence* that Kenneth Noland doesn't do forty-five stripe paintings,



and you've got a guy in your gallery who paints sixty-five paintings in two months and you sell fifteen of them before they're even painted? I mean, what do you think that's about? What do you think that's about? A young painter paints sixty-five paintings in two months, and you unload them. What the hell is that? You think that the difference in degree has anything to do with quality?"

"I'm not saying that," replied Jim. "What I'm really saying is—"

"It has to do with—"

"Look, the fact—the fact that it isn't salable doesn't mean that it's not of—"

Stark hunched forward, counting on his fingers: "No. One: It is salable. Two: The more you sell, the more the price goes up."

"The fact that it *is* salable doesn't mean it's of high quality, either—"

"No, but there *is* a correlation between the money and the quality."

"No."

"That's *true*! You tell me someone who sells for high prices in this country that you don't attribute a certain kind of quality to."

"Someone who sells for high prices..." said Jim.

"That you *don't* attribute a quality to. An abstract painter."

"An abstract painter. Um..." He was thinking, or just trying to create some quiet.

"Right," Stark said impatiently, "tell me an abstract painter who attains high prices that you don't attribute some sort of quality to. What I'm saying is that—"

"Hart Crane."

"Who?"

"Hart Crane."

Stark shook his head impatiently. "No, an American painter who's *alive*! I'm talking about America *now*!" (Implied: "For *Chrissakes*." You could see the steam around his head, very nearly.) And he became aware of death—obsessed with it. As if all friendships are haunted by the specter of the friend's inevitable death... Are all relations similarly haunted? The business of living in a ruined house. Remember that most parts of your body live always in utter darkness and will never see the light of day, at least if you're lucky.

"An American painter who's alive, and whose work I... Andrew Wyeth."

"We said an *abstract* painter!"

"Oh, an abstract painter. All right. Who's an abstract painter..."

"I'll tell you a few. I can tell you a few."

"Marca-Relli? Does he sell?"

"Who's selling for high prices!"

"Uh..."

"I think what happens—" said Smith.

"Matta?"

"Who?"

"Matta."

"He's not an American painter," said Stark dismissively, "he's a Chilean."

"Well, he's, uh..."

"He's a European, French painter, if he's anything, lived in Paris." Sitting back, disgusted at having to keep shooting down these suggestions.

"Well, the more you think about it, there aren't that many Americans who get high prices, anyway. Let me think

of one..."

Stark grimaced. "Okay, what if I just named a few? What if I say I think that it's possible that Rubin—and Rubin is a collusion—like, kind of a collusion of—on the—American capitalistic system, and that, really, if you look at Noland and Olitsky and that whole shuck that they're putting on us, that it *may* contain some sort of quality, in terms of a kind of mannerism boiling down after abstract expressionism, but it has nothing to do with the issues that could attain in abstract painting now." He paused. "*But*: the prices would have you think quite differently!"

"Do you think that—do you think that Stella is money-motivated, now that he's famous?"

"I think every painter living in New York is money-motivated! And you—if you listen to Kenneth Noland, he says he is, and I know Frank Stella is. Yes, I think he is! Money-motivated."

"They wouldn't be painting paintings if they weren't," added Smith. There was an uncomfortable pause during which they listened to distant power mowers in operation. He suspected that he brooded too much. His mind was racing, grasping at far-flung ideas. The core of the Wonder tradition was travels, chronicles, encyclopedias; that is to say, surveillance for the sake of knowledge. Magic and sorcery always use the most advanced technologies at hand, as is well known. In the Bronze Age it may have been fire, fur, bone, blood, metal. In the Middle Ages it was the crucible and alembic, the chalk circles and potion of the alchemist or the diviner. Today it is television, cell phones, the Internet. This is what is used to control people. It may come out that the web of communications technology amounts to a magic circle through which the citizens of this age have passed,

never to return: they have joined the dead.

Jim rubbed his eyes. "Well, I think that there's got to be more to it than that."

Nora took a sip of her drink, smiled at Jill, pointedly continued to keep her mouth shut.

"No," snapped Stark, "*Obviously* there's more to it than that, but that has a lot to do with—like you said, sales generates—what'd you say, wealth? I'm sure those guys are all into that!"

"If they get wealthy. Yeah, they'd rather be wealthy than poor."

"It would be better if they would rather—if they would face the issues of abstract painting, rather than thinking about making money."

Smith had been mostly sitting this out, and now he felt compelled to say something. "See, what they're doing is, I mean, like, they're taking care of this turnover—"

But Stark was practically frothing with impatience. "Look! It's not—wait a minute, I'll show you—come on, what the hell is this..." He rifled through a trade magazine snatched from the coffee table. "What is it... *Rugs*? Frank Stella making *rugs*? What the hell does that have to do with abstract art? Rugs and tapestries of his paintings? What does that have to do with it? Nothing! What's that about, if it's not about making money?"

"That has to do with a guy making rugs," said Jim tartly, slowly drifting into impatience as if under the effect of Stark's gravity.

"Frank Stella gave his permission to make that thing made into a rug."

"Introduce a painting into a rug."

"Right. Now what's that? Does that have anything to

do with abstract form at all?"

"Maybe he wanted to see his painting as a rug."

"Oh, then I find that—no, I would more or less think that if Frank Stella wanted to make his paintings as a rug, he would find out if dealing with rug material could make an abstract painting. What it really comes down to is, Frank Stella wanting to make some money."

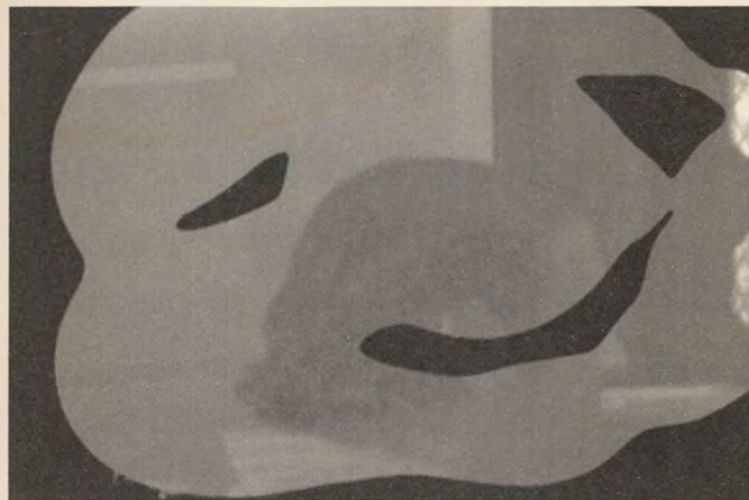
"It's another portable item," said Smith. Calmly lobbing another one in. Submitted completely sanguinely, the cigarette just barely waving between fingertips. Stark immediately agreed: "Right, portable item. You know: 'It could go in the bathroom.'"

"I think he resists more of those items than he takes," Jim cautioned.

"We're not even talking about resisting more items than he takes, what I'm saying is—"

"He also makes paperweights," Smith said. He thought jokes resembled art in their treatment of historical material. Maybe in their treatment of unconscious material as well. It was important to sneak humor into otherwise serious work. For instance, the purpose of this road trip west was to determine a site for the construction of a massive stone sculpture, a jetty (funny term), to which he slyly alluded in a recent science-fiction story, employing the term, with slightly altered spelling, to refer to a race of intergalactic knights. He was actually working it up into a screenplay, and thought he might run it by some people in LA.

"The system is set up to allow things like that to exist," Stark was saying, "and who they hurt is the artist. Who they make feel good is the people out here who live in this subdivision, who are going to buy and sell those rugs. Right?"



They'll jack the prices up on the rugs, right?"

"Look, a Frank Stella rug." Smith peered through his greasy bangs and exhaled. He was channeling that bitchy Warhol murmur, Jim noted with irritation, and said, "Anything that can be collected."

"Anything that can be collected, right. It has nothing to do with—"

"Commodities—"

"It has nothing to do with quality, and then—"

Baited to the breaking point by Stark—chiefly, truth be told, by the insinuation that they were sitting in a provincial subdivision—Jim interrupted, bellowing, "I said it had nothing to do with quality! *You* were the one who was trying to imply that it did!"

"No—oh, you just—" Stark was tripping over his words with vengeful eagerness. *Blood*. He gestured at the video camera in a moment of inspiration: "Let's play the

whole thing back and let's hear who said that! *I* said it had nothing to do with quality! *I* said—"

"That's what *I* said!"

"Look, I said that high-priced paintings had nothing to do with quality. I said name me a painter who gives high prices who has—that—I said in this country, if you get high prices, people think it has nothing to do with quality, and I'm saying that's not true."

"Right, and there's no argument!"

"Oh, there's no argument."

"No."

"I think there's a *big* argument," Smith said out of the corner of his mouth. Lackadaisically tossing yet another faggot on the hearth.

"There's no argument with me!"

There was a small pause. Predictably Jim seemed to relish the prospect of agreement, while Stark was disappointed, even flustered: "You—you think that there isn't a correlation between quality and price—"

"No."

"That there *is* an inflated market, and that we're being—that people are letting things out and calling them high abstract art, and it's just a bunch of baloney. Because they really aren't facing the crucial issues of painting or sculpture."

"I think there are a lot of things that—"

"Baloney?" remarked Smith to himself. People here weren't cursing much. Was it because of the children, or something about them all, about the times. For Stark, meanwhile, it all was getting a bit confusing; someone needed to take things to the next level and force some clarity. "Look, I'll tell you, I think Don Judd is a sellout, a certain

sellout! A materialistic sellout. I really think that's true!"

Jill had been moving her camera back and forth between them, but at this outburst it settled on her boyfriend.

"Don Judd..." began Jim, but trailed off.

"I think that in Judd's early work he really faced the problems of 'How do I make form?', 'How do I make abstract sculpture?', he was very hard and very clear and very firm about it. Then he started making those baubles, he starts selling them, so then it's just stamp 'em out, change the size, change the scale, put a new material on it, and just ran 'em right all out! And the fact that you can sell fourteen or fifteen in the subdivision out here, it just has something to do with the whole—"

"It's a city in the Middle West, it's not just a subdivision."

Middle West? Drifting vaguely through Smith's head was the notion that cattle were the first capital. An arc, from cows to some abstract representation of cows. But weren't the first words supposedly to do with money? Did that just mean that the first words were words for cattle? He wasn't sure.

Stark brushed off Jim's correction. "No, it has to do with Judd's pieces fitting into that kind of *society*. And that's why he's doing them, it's all in the same. The fact that—"

"No, Judd makes a lot of different pieces. And some of them—"

"No, he *doesn't* make a lot of different pieces, Judd's made about six different pieces in his life! He makes variations on the themes, that can find their place in this kind of system!"

"Don Judd spends a lot of money to make pieces that

he knows he'll never sell."

"Oh, come on!"

"Oh, *you* come on." Jim pretended to rearrange something on the coffee table. What was he defending, really, "this system," or "that kind of society," or subdivisions?

"How many, one?"

"No, he's done more than one. There's an awful lot more than one."

"Name one," interjected Smith. Jim resisted the impulse to look at the artist, and momentarily imagined smacking him.

"Name one? Those bins."

"That's one," Stark conceded. "That's the only one I know."

"Well, what about spaces to warehouse that? That's the—"

"That's the bin—"

"No, it was the gallery that—"

"He'll sell that."

"Sell all the pieces? He didn't sell all the work."

"The wall peg?"

"Well, that still doesn't justify that fact that he turns out forty-five progressions and fifty-two stacks, of different colors, with different plastics inside. I mean, if you really want to talk about it, 'What is Judd doing?' he's taking—"

"What about that piece—"

"—aluminum and plastic that go in corners in people's houses—what the hell is that if it isn't, what, architectural decor!"

"What about the pieces that—"

"And you're telling me it's the greatest sculpture in America? Architectural decor is the greatest sculpture? How

can that be anything?"

The girl had just about had it. "Mommy, mommy!"

"You're saying he's never made a piece—"

[click]

History as a narrative of progress points to the future, and History as a memory or memorial points to the past. Well, is the Golden Age ahead of us, or behind us? I'll tell you, to those who decry Utopia as a futile project, or worse, one whose failures brought us the horrors of the last century, we say: We are in a Utopian moment. Each moment is a Golden Age.