

horizon lines. Seascapes are specifically recalled in the delicately scaled motifs of *Entablatures IV* and *VI*. The whole series may be seen as the mechanical reformulation of the romantic tradition of landscape and seascape, an antinaturalism as appropriately satirical of our technological environment as the antihumanism of the cartoon style was of the traditional heroic subjects of love and war, deprived of affect by mass media, degraded to meaninglessness through repetitious reproduction.

In the subject of ornament—the original form of abstraction—Lichtenstein has found another means as potent as the comic strip for expressing, through mockery and irony, the contradictions of our time. In the series of “temples” painted in 1964, Lichtenstein began thinking of the meaning of antiquity in a contemporary mass society that identified “Parthenon” as a Greek restaurant. Refining the concept to focus on the remnants of classical ornament that confer the pedigree of Athens on our hardly Athenian democracy, he prints the Latin word *JUSTITIA* in *Entablature X* and *Xa*, in mockery of the lapidary inscriptions engraved on the buildings that housed a government which brought the republic Watergate. Ancient law becomes as reduced in meaning as the endlessly reprinted woodcut copy of Gilbert Stuart’s portrait of George Washington, the basis for Lichtenstein’s first “portrait” based on a famous reproduction. In the *Entablature* prints, Lichtenstein continues his ironic commentary on the American scene, but he is gradually shifting his art away from comic-strip imagery in the direction of disguised abstraction.

ABC ART

I AM CURIOUS TO KNOW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ART WERE SUDDENLY SEEN FOR WHAT IT IS, NAMELY, EXACT INFORMATION OF HOW TO REARRANGE ONE'S PSYCHE IN ORDER TO ANTICIPATE THE NEXT BLOW FROM OUR OWN EXTENDED FACULTIES. . . . AT ANY RATE, IN EXPERIMENTAL ART, MEN ARE GIVEN THE EXACT SPECIFICATIONS OF COMING VIOLENCE TO THEIR OWN PSYCHES FROM THEIR OWN COUNTERIRRITANT OR TECHNOLOGY. . . . BUT THE COUNTERIRRITANT USUALLY PROVES A GREATER PLAGUE THAN THE INITIAL IRRITANT, LIKE A DRUG HABIT.

—Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964

HOW DO YOU LIKE WHAT YOU HAVE. THIS IS A QUESTION THAT ANYBODY CAN ASK ANYBODY. ASK IT.

—Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America*, 1935

On the eve of the First World War, two artists, one in Moscow, the other in Paris, made decisions that radically altered the course of art history. Today we are feeling the impact of their decisions in an art whose blank, neutral, mechanical impersonality contrasts so violently with the romantic, biographical abstract expressionist style which preceded it that spectators are chilled by its apparent lack of feeling or content. Critics, attempting to describe this new sensibility, call it Cool Art or Idiot Art or Know-Nothing Nihilism.

That a new sensibility has announced itself is clear, although just what it consists of is not. This is what I hope to establish here. But before taking up specific examples of the new art, not only in painting and

sculpture, but in other arts as well, I would like briefly to trace its genealogy.

In 1913, Kasimir Malevich, placing a black square on a white ground that he identified as the "void," created the first suprematist composition. A year later, Marcel Duchamp exhibited as an original work of art a standard metal bottle rack, which he called a "ready-made." For half a century, these two works marked the limits of visual art. Now, however, it appears that a new generation of artists, who seem not so much inspired as impressed by Malevich and Duchamp (to the extent that they venerate them), are examining in a new context the implications of their radical decisions. Often the results are a curious synthesis of the two men's work. That such a synthesis should be not only possible but likely is clear in retrospect. For although superficially Malevich and Duchamp may appear to represent the polarities of twentieth-century art—that is, on one hand, the search for the transcendent, universal, absolute, and on the other, the blanket denial of the existence of absolute values—the two have more in common than one might suppose at first.

To begin with, both men were precocious geniuses who appreciated the revolutionary element in postimpressionist art, particularly Cézanne's, and both were urban modernists who rejected the possibility of turning back to a naive primitivism in disgusted reaction to the excesses of civilization. Alike, too, was their immediate adoption and equally rapid disenchantment with the mainstream modern style, cubism. Turning away from figurative art, by 1911 both were doing cubist paintings, although the provincial Malevich's were less advanced and "analytic" than Duchamp's; by 1913 both had exhausted cubism's possibilities as far as their art was concerned. Moreover, both were unwilling to resolve some of the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in analytic cubism in terms of the more ordered and logical framework of synthetic cubism, the next mainstream style.

The inevitability of a logical evolution toward a reductive art was obvious to them already. For Malevich, the poetic Slav, this realization forced a turning inward toward an inspirational mysticism, whereas for Duchamp, the rational Frenchman, it meant a fatigue so enervating that finally the wish to paint at all was killed. The yearnings of Malevich's Slavic soul and the deductions of Duchamp's rationalist mind led both men ultimately to reject and exclude from their work many of the most cherished premises of Western art in favor of an art stripped to its bare, irreducible minimum.

It is important to keep in mind that both Duchamp's and Malevich's decisions were renunciations—on Duchamp's part, of the notion of the

uniqueness of the art object and its differentiation from common objects, and on Malevich's part, a renunciation of the notion that art must be complex. That the art of our youngest artists resembles theirs in its severe, reduced simplicity, or in its frequent kinship to the world of things, must be taken as some sort of validation of their prophetic reactions.

MORE IS LESS

The concept of "minimal art," which is surely applicable to the empty, repetitious, uninflected art of many young painters, sculptors, dancers, and composers working now, was discussed as an aesthetic problem by Richard Wollheim (*Arts*, January 1965). It is Professor Wollheim's contention that the art content of such works as Duchamp's found objects (that is, the "unassisted ready-mades" to which nothing is done) or Ad Reinhardt's nearly invisible "black" paintings is intentionally low, and that resistance to this kind of art comes mainly from the spectator's sense that the artist has not worked hard enough or put enough effort into his art. But, as Professor Wollheim points out, a decision can represent work. Considering as "minimal art" either art made from common objects that are not unique but mass-produced or art that is not much differentiated from ordinary things, he says that Western artists have aided us to focus on specific objects by setting them apart as the "unique possessors of certain general characteristics." Although they are increasingly being abandoned, working it a lot, making it hard to do, and differentiating it as much as possible from the world of common objects formerly were ways of ensuring the uniqueness and identity of an art object.

Poet and critic John Ashbery has asked if art can be excellent if anybody can do it. He concludes that "what matters is the artist's will to discover rather than the manual skills he may share with hundreds of other artists. Anybody could have discovered America, but only Columbus *did*." Such a downgrading of talent, facility, virtuosity, and technique, with its concomitant elevation of conceptual power, coincides precisely with the attitude of the artists I am discussing.

Some of the artists, such as Darby Bannard, Larry Zox, Robert Huot, Lyman Kipp, Richard Tuttle, Jan Evans, Ronald Bladen, and Anne Truitt, obviously are closer to Malevich than they are to Duchamp, whereas others, such as Richard Artschwager and Andy Warhol, are clearly the reverse. The dancers and composers are all, to a greater or

lesser degree, indebted to John Cage, who is himself an admirer of Duchamp. Several of the artists—Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Dan Flavin—occupy to my eye some kind of intermediate position. One of the issues these artists are attacking is the applicability of generalizations to specific cases. In fact, they are opposed to the very notion that the general and the universal are related. Thus, I want to reserve exceptions to all of the following remarks about their work: in other words, *some of the things I will say apply only in some cases and not in others.*

Though Duchamp and Malevich jumped the gun, so to speak, the avenue toward what Clement Greenberg has called the “modernist reduction,” that is, toward an art that is focused on its essence, was traveled at a steadier pace by others. Michael Fried (in the catalogue for “Three American Painters,” Fogg Art Museum, 1965) points out that there is “a superficial similarity between modernist painting and Dada in one important respect: namely that just as modernist painting has enabled one to see a blank canvas, a sequence of random spatters, or a length of colored fabric as a picture, Dada and Neo-Dada have equipped one to treat virtually any object as a work of art.” The result is that “there is an apparent expansion of the realm of the *artistic* corresponding—ironically, as it were—to the expansion of the pictorial achieved by modernist painting.” I quote this formulation because it demonstrates not only how Yves Klein’s monochrome blue paintings are art, but because it ought finally to make clear the difference in the manner and kind of reductions and simplifications he effected from those made by Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, thus dispelling permanently any notions that Noland’s art and Olitski’s art are in any way, either in spirit or in intention, linked to the Dada outlook.

Although the work of the painters I am discussing is more blatant, less lyrical, and more resistant—in terms of surface, at any rate, insofar as the canvas is not stained or is left with unpainted areas—it has something important in common with that of Noland, Olitski, and others who work with simple shapes and large color areas. Like their paintings, this work is critical of abstract expressionist paint-handling and rejects the brushed record of gesture and drawing along with loose painterliness. Similarly, the sculpture I am talking about appears critical of open, welded sculpture.

That the artist is critic not only of his own work but of art in general and specifically of art of the immediate past is one of the basic tenets of formalist criticism, the context in which Michael Fried and Clement

Greenberg have considered reductive tendencies in modern art. But in this strict sense, to be critical means to be critical only of the formal premises of a style, in this case abstract expressionism. Such an explanation of a critical reaction in the purely formal terms of color, composition, scale, format, and execution seems to me adequate to explain the evolution of Noland’s and Olitski’s work, but it does not fully suffice to describe the reaction of the younger people I am considering, just as an explanation of the rise of neoclassicism which considered only that the forms of the rococo were worn out would hardly give one much of a basis for understanding the complexity of David’s style.

It seems clear that the group of young artists I am speaking of were reacting to more than merely formal chaos when they opted not to fulfill Ad Reinhardt’s prescription for “divine madness” in “third-generation abstract expressionists.” In another light, one might as easily construe the new, reserved impersonality and self-effacing anonymity as a reaction against the self-indulgence of an unbridled subjectivity, as much as one might see it in terms of a formal reaction to the excesses of painterliness. One has the sense that the question of whether or not an emotional state can be communicated (particularly in an abstract work), or worse still, to what degree it can be simulated or staged, must have struck some serious-minded young artists as disturbing. That the spontaneous splashes and drips could be manufactured was demonstrated by Robert Rauschenberg in his identical action paintings *Factum I* and *Factum II*. It was almost as if, toward the *Götterdämmerung* of the late fifties, the trumpets blared with such an apocalyptic and Wagnerian intensity that each moment was a crisis and each “act” a climax. Obviously, such a crisis climate could hardly be sustained; just to be able to hear it at all again, the volume had to be turned down, and the pitch, if not the instrument, changed.

Choreographer Merce Cunningham, whose work has been of the utmost importance to young choreographers, may have been the first to put this reaction into words (in an article in *trans/formation*, No. 1, 1952): “Now I can’t see that crisis any longer means a climax, unless we are willing to grant that every breath of wind has a climax (which I am), but then that obliterates climax, being a surfeit of such. And since our lives, both by nature and by the newspapers, are so full of crisis that one is no longer aware of it, then it is clear that life goes on regardless, and further that each thing can be and is separate from each and every other, viz: the continuity of the newspaper headlines. Climax is for those who are swept by New Year’s Eve.” In a dance

called *Crises*, Cunningham eliminated any fixed focus or climax in much the way the young artists I am discussing here have banished them from their works as well. Thus Cunningham's activity, too, must be considered as having helped to shape the new sensibility of the post-abstract-expressionist generation.

It goes without saying that sensibility is not transformed overnight. At this point I want to talk about sensibility rather than style, because the artists I'm discussing, who are all roughly just under or just over thirty, are more related in terms of a common sensibility than in terms of a common style. Also, their attitudes, interests, experiences, and stance are much like those of their contemporaries, the pop artists, although stylistically the work is not very similar.

This shift toward a new sensibility came in the late fifties, a time of convulsive transition not only for the art world, but for society at large as well. In these years, for some reasons I've touched on, many young artists found action painting unconvincing. Instead they turned to the static emptiness of Barnett Newman's eloquent chromatic abstractions or to the sharp visual punning of Jasper Johns's objectlike flags and targets.

Obviously, the new sensibility that preferred Newman and Johns to Willem de Kooning or his epigoni was going to produce art that was different, not only in form but in content as well, from the art that it spurned, because it rejected not only the premises but the emotional content of abstract expressionism.

The problem of the subversive content of these works is complicated, though it has to be approached, even if only to define why it is peculiar or corrosive. Often, because they appear to belong to the category of ordinary objects rather than art objects, these works look altogether devoid of art content. This, as it has been pointed out in criticism of the so-called contentless novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet, is quite impossible for a work of art to achieve. The simple denial of content can in itself constitute the content of such a work. That these young artists attempt to suppress or withdraw content from their works is undeniable. That they wish to make art that is as bland, neutral, and as redundant as possible also seems clear. The content, then, if we are to take the work at face value, should be nothing more than the total of the series of assertions that it is this or that shape and takes up so much space and is painted such a color and made of such a material. Statements from the artists involved are frequently couched in these equally factual, matter-of-fact descriptive terms; the work is described but not interpreted

ted and statements with regard to content or meaning or intention are prominent only by their omission.

For the spectator, this is often all very bewildering. In the face of so much nothing, he or she is still experiencing something, and usually a rather unhappy something at that. I have often thought one had a sense of loss looking at these big, empty things, so anxious to cloak their art identity that they were masquerading as objects. Perhaps what one senses is that as opposed to the florid baroque fullness of the *Angst*-ridden older generation, the hollow barrenness of the void has a certain poignant, if strangled, expressiveness.

For the present, however, I prefer to confine myself mostly to describing the new sensibility rather than attempting to interpret an art that, by the terms of its own definition, resists interpretation. However, that there *is* a collective new sensibility among the young by now is self-evident. Looking around for examples, I was struck by the number of coincidences I discovered. For example, I found five painters who quite independently arrived at the identical composition of a large white or light-colored rectangle in a colored border. True, in some ways these were recapitulations of Malevich's *Black Square on White* (or to get closer to home, of Ellsworth Kelly's 1952 pair of a white square on black and black square on white); but there was an element in each example that finally frustrated a purist reading. In some cases (Ralph Humphrey's, for example) a Magritte-like sense of space behind a window-frame was what came across; other times there seemed to be a play on picture (blank) and frame (colored), though again, it was nearly impossible to pin down a specific image or sensation, except for the reaction that they weren't quite what they seemed to be. In the same way, three of the sculptors I'm considering (Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Dan Flavin) have all used standard units interchangeably. Again, the reference is back to the Russians—particularly to Rodchenko in Andre's case—but still, another element has insinuated itself, preventing any real equations with constructivist sculpture.

Rather than guess at intentions or look for meanings I prefer to try to surround the new sensibility, not to pinpoint it. As T. E. Hulme put it, the point is to keep from discussing the new art with a vocabulary derived from the old position. Though my end is simply the isolation of the old-fashioned *Zeitgeist*, I want to go about it impressionistically rather than methodically. I will take up notions now in the air that strike me as relevant to the work. As often as possible I will quote directly from texts that I feel have helped to shape the new sensibility.

MEANING IN THE VISUAL ARTS

LET US, THEN, TRY TO DEFINE THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SUBJECT MATTER OR MEANING ON THE ONE HAND, AND FORM ON THE OTHER.

WHEN AN ACQUAINTANCE GREETES ME ON THE STREET BY REMOVING HIS HAT, WHAT I SEE FROM A FORMAL POINT OF VIEW IS NOTHING BUT THE CHANGE OF CERTAIN DETAILS WITHIN A CONFIGURATION THAT FORMS PART OF THE GENERAL PATTERN OF COLOR, LINES AND VOLUMES WHICH CONSTITUTES MY WORLD OF VISION. WHEN I IDENTIFY, AS I AUTOMATICALLY DO, THIS AS AN EVENT (HAT-REMOVING), I HAVE ALREADY OVERSTEPPED THE LIMITS OF PURELY FORMAL PERCEPTION AND ENTERED A FIRST SPHERE OF SUBJECT MATTER OR MEANING . . . WE SHALL CALL . . . THE FACTUAL MEANING.

—Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, 1939

The above text and some of the subsequent passages in which Professor Panofsky further differentiates among levels of meaning in art was read by Robert Morris in a work (I hesitate to call it a dance, although it was presented in a dance concert at the Surplus Theatre in New York) titled *21.3*. Morris is the most overtly didactic of all the artists I am considering; his dances, or more precisely his events, seem to represent a running commentary on his sculpture as well as a running criticism of art interpretation. At the Surplus Theatre concert he stood before a lectern and mouthed the Panofsky text, which was broadcast from a tape simultaneously. From time to time he interrupted himself to pour water from a pitcher into a glass. Each time he poured water, the tape, timed to coincide with his action, produced the sound of water gurgling.

Until recently, in his glass-and-lead pieces, Morris was fairly explicit about putting subject matter (mostly Duchampesque speculations on process and sex or illustrations of Cartesian dualism) into his art. But now that he is making only bloated plywood constructions, which serve mostly to destroy the contour and space of a room by butting off the floor onto the wall, floating from the ceiling, or appearing as pointless obstacles to circulation, he seems to be concentrating on meaning. This victory for modernism has coincided with his retirement from the performing arts in order to concentrate on his role as theoretician. That he chose the passage from Panofsky, which deals with slight changes of detail and the difference between factual and expressive meaning, is significant for the purpose of isolating the kind of matters that preoccupy

many of these artists. For the painters and sculptors whom I am discussing here are aware not only of the cycle of styles but of levels of meaning, of influences, of movements, and of critical judgments. If the art they make is vacant or vacuous, it is intentionally so. In other words, the apparent simplicity of these artists' work was arrived at through a series of complicated, highly informed decisions, each involving the elimination of whatever was felt to be nonessential.

ART FOR AD'S SAKE

NOWHERE IN WORLD ART HAS IT BEEN CLEARER THAN IN ASIA THAT ANYTHING IRRATIONAL, MOMENTARY, SPONTANEOUS, UNCONSCIOUS, PRIMITIVE, EXPRESSIONISTIC, ACCIDENTAL, OR INFORMAL, CANNOT BE CALLED SERIOUS ART. ONLY BLANKNESS, COMPLETE AWARENESS, DISINTERESTEDNESS; THE "ARTIST AS ARTIST" ONLY, OF ONE AND RATIONAL MIND, "VACANT AND SPIRITUAL, EMPTY AND MARVELOUS," IN SYMMETRIES AND REGULARITIES ONLY; THE CHANGELESS "HUMAN CONTENT," THE TIMELESS "SUPREME PRINCIPLE," THE AGELESS "UNIVERSAL FORMULA" OF ART, NOTHING ELSE. . . .

THE FORMS OF ART ARE ALWAYS PERFORMED AND PREMEDITATED. THE CREATIVE PROCESS IS ALWAYS AN ACADEMIC ROUTINE AND SACRED PROCEDURE. EVERYTHING IS PRESCRIBED AND PROSCRIBED. ONLY IN THIS WAY IS THERE NO GRASPING OR CLINGING TO ANYTHING. ONLY A STANDARD FORM CAN BE IMAGELESS, ONLY A STEREOTYPED IMAGE CAN BE FORMLESS, ONLY A FORMULAIZED ART CAN BE FORMULESS.

—Ad Reinhardt, "Timeless in Asia," *ARTnews*, January 1960

FINE ART CAN ONLY BE DEFINED AS EXCLUSIVE, NEGATIVE, ABSOLUTE, AND TIMELESS.

—Ad Reinhardt, "Twelve Rules for a New Academy," *ARTnews*, May 1957

No one, in the mid-fifties, seemed less likely to spawn artistic progeny and admirers than Ad Reinhardt. As abstract painter since the thirties, and a voluble propagandist for abstract art, Reinhardt was always one of the liveliest spirits in the art world, though from time to time he would be chided as the heretical black monk of abstract expressionism, or the

legendary Mr. Pure, who finally created an art so pure it consisted of injecting a clear fluid into foam rubber. His dicta, as arcane as they may have sounded when first handed down from the scriptorium, have become nearly canonical for the young artists. Suddenly, his wry irony, aloofness, independence, and ideas about the proper use and role of art, which he has stubbornly held to be noncommercial and nonutilitarian, are precisely the qualities the young admire. It is hard to say how much Reinhardt's constant theorizing, dogmatizing, and propagandizing actually helped to change the climate and to shift the focus from an overtly romantic style to a covertly romantic style.

Of course, Reinhardt's "purity" is a relative matter, too. The loftiness is ultimately only part of the statement; and as he made of impersonality one of the most easily recognized styles in New York, so the new blandness is likely to result in similarly easy identification, despite all the use of standard units and programmatic suppression of individuality. In some way, it might be interesting to compare Reinhardt with the younger artists. To begin with, in Reinhardt's case, there is no doubt that his is classic art (with mystical overtones, perhaps), and there is no doubt that it is abstract, or more precisely that it is abstract painting. Both the concepts of a classical style, toward which an art based on geometry would naturally tend, and that of a genuinely abstract style, are called into question frequently by the ambiguous art of the younger artists. First of all, many use a quirky asymmetry and deliberately bizarre scale to subvert any purist or classical interpretations, whereas others tend to make both paintings and sculptures look so much like plaques or boxes that there is always the possibility that they will be mistaken for something other than art. Their leaving open this possibility is, I think, frequently deliberate.

A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE: REPETITION AS RHYTHMIC STRUCTURING

... THE KIND OF INVENTION THAT IS NECESSARY TO MAKE A GENERAL SCHEME IS LIMITED IN EVERYBODY'S EXPERIENCE, EVERY TIME ONE OF THE HUNDREDS OF TIMES A NEWSPAPER MAN MAKES FUN OF MY WRITING AND OF MY REPETITION HE ALWAYS HAS THE SAME THEME, THAT IS, IF YOU LIKE, REPETITION, THAT IS IF YOU LIKE THE REPEATING THAT IS THE SAME THING, BUT ONCE STARTED EXPRESSING THIS THING, EXPRESSING ANY THING THERE CAN BE NO REPETITION BECAUSE THE ESSENCE OF THAT EXPRESSION IS INSISTENCE, AND IF YOU INSIST YOU MUST

EACH TIME USE EMPHASIS AND IF YOU USE EMPHASIS IT IS NOT POSSIBLE WHILE ANYBODY IS ALIVE THAT THEY SHOULD USE EXACTLY THE SAME EMPHASIS.

—Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Lectures in America*, 1935

FORM CEASES TO BE AN ORDERING IN TIME LIKE ABA AND REDUCES TO A SINGLE, BRIEF IMAGE, AN INSTANTANEOUS WHOLE BOTH FIXED AND MOVING. SATIE'S FORM CAN BE EXTENDED ONLY BY REITERATION OR "ENDURANCE." SATIE FREQUENTLY SCRUTINIZES A VERY SIMPLE MUSICAL OBJECT; A SHORT UNCHANGING OSTINATO ACCOMPANIMENT PLUS A FRAGMENTARY MELODY. OUT OF THIS SAMENESS COMES SUBTLE VARIETY.

—Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, 1955

In painting, the repetition of a single motif (such as Larry Poons's dots or Gene Davis's stripes) over a surface usually means an involvement with Jackson Pollock's all-over paintings. In sculpture, the repetition of standard units may derive partly from practical considerations. But in the case of Judd's, Morris's, Andre's, and Flavin's pieces it seems to have more to do with setting up a measured, rhythmic beat in the work. Judd's latest sculptures, for example, are wall reliefs made of a transverse metal rod from which are suspended, at even intervals, identical bar or box units. For some artists—for example, the West Coast painter Billy Al Bengston, who puts sergeant's stripes in all his paintings—a repeated motif may take on the character of a personal insignia. Morris's four identical mirrored boxes, which were so elusive that they appeared literally transparent, and his recent L-shape plywood pieces were demonstrations of both variability and interchangeability in the use of standard units. To find variety in repetition where only the nuance alters seems more and more to interest artists, perhaps in reaction to the increasing uniformity of the environment and repetitiveness of a circumscribed experience. Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, silk-screen paintings of the same image repeated countless times, and films in which people or things hardly move are illustrations of the kind of life situations many ordinary people will face or face already. In their insistence on repetition both Satie and Gertrude Stein have influenced the young dancers who perform at the Judson Memorial Church Dance Theater in New York.

Yvonne Rainer, the most gifted choreographer of the group (which formed as a result of a course in dance composition taught by the composer Robert Dunn at Merce Cunningham's New York dance studio) has said that repetition was her first idea of form:

"I remember thinking that dance was at a disadvantage in relation to sculpture in that the spectator could spend as much time as he required to examine a sculpture, walk around it, and so forth—but a dance movement—because it happened in time—vanished as soon as it was executed. So in a solo called *The Bells* (performed at the Living Theater in 1961) I repeated the same seven movements for eight minutes. It was not exact repetition, as the sequence of the movements kept changing. They also underwent changes through being repeated in different parts of the space and faced in different directions—in a sense allowing the spectator to 'walk around it.'"

For these dancers, and for composers like La Monte Young (who conceives of time as an endless continuum in which the performance of his *Dream Music* is a single, continuous experience interrupted by intervals during which it is not being performed), durations of time much longer than those we are accustomed to are acceptable. Thus, for example, an ordinary movement like walking across a stage may be performed in slow motion, and concerts of *Dream Music* have lasted several days, just as Andy Warhol's first film, *Sleep*, was an eight-hour-long movie of a man sleeping. Again, Satie is at least a partial source. It is not surprising that the only performance of his piano piece *Vexations*, in which the same fragment is ritualistically repeated 840 times, took place two years ago in New York. The performance lasted eighteen hours and forty minutes and required the participation in shifts of a dozen or so pianists, of whom John Cage was one. Shattuck's statement that "Satie seems to combine experiment and inertia" seems applicable to a certain amount of avant-garde activity of the moment.

ART AS A DEMONSTRATION: THE FACTUAL, THE CONCRETE, THE SELF-EVIDENT

BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SAY THAT WE CANNOT DEFINE (THAT IS, DESCRIBE) THESE ELEMENTS, BUT ONLY NAME THEM? THIS MIGHT MEAN, FOR INSTANCE, THAT WHEN IN A LIMITING CASE A COMPLEX CONSISTS OF ONLY ONE SQUARE, ITS DESCRIPTION IS SIMPLY THE NAME OF THE COLORED SQUARE.

THERE ARE, OF COURSE, WHAT CAN BE CALLED "CHARACTERISTIC

EXPERIENCES" OF POINTING TO (E.G.) THE SHAPE. FOR EXAMPLE, FOLLOWING THE OUTLINE WITH ONE'S FINGER OR WITH ONE'S EYES AS ONE POINTS. —BUT THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN IN ALL CASES IN WHICH I "MEAN THE SHAPE," AND NO MORE DOES ANY OTHER ONE CHARACTERISTIC PROCESS OCCUR IN ALL THESE CASES.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 1953

If Jasper Johns's notebooks seem a parody of Wittgenstein, then Judd's and Morris's sculptures often look like illustrations of that philosopher's propositions. Both sculptors use elementary, geometrical forms that depend for their art quality on some sort of presence or concrete thereness, which in turn often seems no more than a literal and emphatic assertion of their existence. There is no wish to transcend the physical for either the metaphysical or the metaphoric. The thing thus is presumably not supposed to "mean" other than what it is; that is, it is not supposed to be suggestive of anything other than itself. Morris's early plywood pieces are all of elementary structures: a door, a windowframe, a platform. He even did a wheel, the most rudimentary structure of all. In a dance he made called *Site*, he mimed what were obviously basic concepts about structure. Dressed as a construction worker, he manipulated flat plywood sheets ("planes," one assumes) until finally he pulled the last one away to reveal behind it a nude girl posed as Manet's *Olympia*. As I've intimated, Morris's dances seem to function more as *explications du texte* of his sculptures than as independent dances or theatrical events. Even their deliberately enigmatic tone is like his sculpture, although he denies that they are related. Rauschenberg, too, has done dances that, not surprisingly, are like three-dimensional, moving equivalents of his combine constructions and are equally littered with objects. But his dance trio called *Pelican* for two men on rollerskates and a girl in toe shoes has that degree of surprise which characterizes his best paintings.

ART AS CONCRETE OBJECT

NOW THE WORLD IS NEITHER MEANINGFUL NOR ABSURD. IT SIMPLY IS. IN PLACE OF THIS UNIVERSE OF "MEANINGS" (PSYCHOLOGICAL, SOCIAL, FUNCTIONAL), ONE SHOULD TRY TO CONSTRUCT A MORE SOLID, MORE IMMEDIATE WORLD. SO THAT FIRST OF ALL IT WILL BE THROUGH THEIR PRESENCE THAT OBJECTS AND GESTURES WILL IMPOSE THEMSELVES, AND SO THAT THIS PRESENCE CONTINUES THEREAFTER TO DOMINATE, BE-

YOND ANY THEORY OF EXPLICATION THAT MIGHT ATTEMPT TO ENCLOSE THEM IN ANY SORT OF A SENTIMENTAL, SOCIOLOGICAL, FREUDIAN, METAPHYSICAL, OR ANY OTHER SYSTEM OF REFERENCE.

—Alain Robbe-Grillet, "Une voix pour le roman futur," 1956, from *Pour un nouveau roman*

Curiously, it is perhaps in the theory of the French objective novel that one most closely approaches the attitude of many of the artists I've been talking about. I am convinced that this is sheer coincidence, since I have no reason to believe there has been any specific point of contact. This is quite the contrary to their knowledge of Wittgenstein, whom I know a number of them have read. But nonetheless the rejection of the personal, the subjective, the tragic, and the narrative in favor of the world of things seems remarkable, even if or even because it is coincidental.

But neither in the new novels nor in the new art is the repudiation of content convincing. The elimination of the narrative element in dance (or at least its suppression to an absolute minimum) has been one of Merce Cunningham's most extraordinary achievements, and in this the best of the young choreographers have followed his lead. Although now, having made dance more abstract than it has ever been, they all (including Cunningham in *Story*) appear to be reintroducing the narrative element precisely in the form of objects, which they carry, pass around, manipulate, and so forth.

ART AS FACT, DOCUMENT, OR CATALOGUE

RESEARCHERS MEASURED HEARTBEAT, RESPIRATION, AND OTHER INTIMATE BODY RESPONSES DURING EVERY STAGE OF THE SEXUAL EXCITATION CYCLE. IN ADDITION, MOTION-PICTURE CAMERAS CAPTURED ON COLOR FILM NOT ONLY SURFACE REACTIONS (DOWN TO THE MOST FLEETING CHANGE OF SKIN COLOR) BUT INTERNAL REACTIONS, THROUGH A TECHNIQUE OF MEDICAL PHOTOGRAPHY.

—Newspaper ad for *The Sexually Responsive Woman*

I could have picked any number of statistical quotations about the population explosion, or the number of college graduates in Wilming-

ton, Delaware, but the above quotation illustrates better how we can now treat all matters statistically, factually, scientifically, and objectively. One could bring up in this context not only the flood of art with sexual themes and explicit images, but Warhol's *Kiss* and *Couch* movies as well. Morris's *I* box, in which he exposes himself behind an L-shaped flesh-colored door, or his nude dance might also be brought up here. Mainly the point is that what we are seeing everywhere is the inversion of the personal and the public. What was once private (nudity, sex) is now public, and what was once the public face of art at least (emotions, opinions, intentions) is now private. And as the catalogue, of things again mainly, has become part of poetry and literature, so the document is part of art. As an example I might use Lucas Samaras's documentation of his years in a tiny, cell-like bedroom in West New York, New Jersey, transplanted in its entirety to the Green Gallery, or George Segal's quite literal plaster replicas of real people in familiar situations. In a similar inversion, whereas the unusual and the exotic used to interest artists, now they tend to seek out the banal, the common, and the everyday. This seems a consequence of the attitude that among young artists today, nothing is more suspect than "artiness," self-consciousness, or posturing. Not only do painters paint common objects, and sculptors enshrine them, but poets seek the ordinary word. Carl Andre has said that in his poetry he avoids obscene language because it calls attention to itself too much, and because it is not yet sufficiently common. Along these same lines, one of the most interesting things the young dancers are doing is incorporating nondance movements into their work.

BLACK HUMOR, IRONY, AND THE MEMENTO MORI

I COULD DIE TODAY, IF I WISHED, MERELY BY MAKING A LITTLE EFFORT,
IF I COULD WISH, IF I COULD MAKE AN EFFORT.

—Samuel Beckett, *Malone Dies*

IL N'Y A PAS DE SOLUTION PARCE QU'IL N'Y A PAS DE PROBLÈME.

—Marcel Duchamp

It is part of the irony of the works I'm discussing—and irony plays a large part in them—that they blatantly assert their unsalability and functionlessness. Some, like Artschwager's pseudofurniture or Warhol's Brillo boxes, are not too unwieldy to be sold, but since they approximate real

objects with actual uses, they begin to raise questions about the utility of art, and its ambiguous role in our culture. On the one hand, art as a form of free expression is seen as a weapon in the Cold War, yet on the other there appears no hope for any organic role for art in the life of the country. The artists, scarcely unaware of the provisional nature of their status, are responding in innumerable peculiar ways, some of which I've mentioned. Now, besides making difficult, hostile, awkward, and oversize art, an increasing number of artists seem involved in making art too large to fit into existing museums. There is no conceivable use in our society as it exists for such work, although it may endure as a monumental *j'accuse* in the case of any future rapprochement. Thus, part of what the new art is about is a subversion of the existing value structure through simple erosion. Usually these acts of subversion are personal rather than social, since it seems to be the person rather than the society that is in danger of extinction at this point.

Using irony as a means, the artists are calling bluffs right and left. For example, when Yvonne Rainer, using dramatic speeches in her dances as she has been, says one thing while she is doing another, she is making a statement about how people behave as well as performing a dance. In fact, the use of taped narratives that either do not correspond with or contradict the action is becoming more frequent among the dancers. The morbidity of the text Rainer chose as "musical accompaniment" for *Parts of Some Sextets*, with its endless deaths and illnesses and poxes and plagues (it was the diary of an eighteenth-century New England minister), provided an ironic contrast to the banality of the dance action, which consisted in part of transporting, one by one, a stack of mattresses from one place to another. Such a setting up of equations between totally dissimilar phenomena (death and play, for example) can be seen in a number of cases. Dan Flavin describes several commemorative sculptures he made this way: "*Icon IV. The Pure Land* is entirely white. The surmounting light is 'daylight' that has a slight blue tint. I built the structure in 1962, finishing it late in the fall. I believe that the conception dates from the previous year. *The Pure Land* is dedicated to my twin brother, David, who died October 8, 1962. The face of the structure is forty-five inches square. It was made of a prefabricated acrylic plastic sheeting that John Anderson cut to size for me." The factual tone does not alter when he describes (in a lecture given in Columbus, Ohio) his marriage: "After I left *Juan Gris in Paris* unfinished in 1960, there was a pause of many months when I made no work. During this period I married Sonja Severdija, who happens to be a strong carpenter."

Or consider Carl Andre's solution for war: "Let them eat what they

kill." Andy Warhol, whose morbid interest in death scenes has led him to paint innumerable Marilyn Monroes, electric chairs, and car crashes, claims that "when you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect." Dan Flavin, in a journal entry of August 18, 1962, makes it clear that sentimental notions of immortality are to be ignored as motivations: "I can take the ordinary lamp out of use and into a magic that touches ancient mysteries. And yet it is still a lamp that burns to death like any other of its kind. In time the whole electrical system will pass into inactive history. My lamps will no longer be operative; but it must be remembered that they once gave light."

As a final example, I cite Robert Morris's project for his own mausoleum. It is to consist of a sealed aluminum tube three miles long, inside which he wishes to be put, housed in an iron coffin suspended from pulleys. Every three months, the position of the coffin is to be changed by an attendant who will move along the outside of the tube holding a magnet. On a gravel walk leading to the entrance are swooning maidens, carved in marble in the style of Canova. This opposition, of the sentimental to the ice-cold, is similar to the effect he produced in a dance in which two nude figures inch solemnly across the stage on a track to the accompaniment of a particularly lush aria from *Simon Boccanegra*.

THE INFINITE: NEGATION AND VOID

I HAVE BROKEN THE BLUE BOUNDARY OF COLOR LIMITS, COME OUT INTO THE WHITE, BESIDE ME COMRADE-PILOTS SWIM IN THIS INFINITY. I HAVE ESTABLISHED THE SEMAPHORE OF SUPREMATISM. I HAVE BEATEN THE LINING OF THE COLORED SKY, TORN IT AWAY AND IN THE SACK THAT FORMED ITSELF, I HAVE PUT COLOR AND KNOTTED IT. SWIM! THE FREE WHITE SEA, INFINITY, LIES BEFORE YOU.

—Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematism*, 1919

The art I have been talking about is obviously a negative art of denial and renunciation. Such protracted asceticism is normally the activity of contemplatives or mystics. Speaking of the state of blankness and stagnation preceding illumination, usually known (after St. John of the Cross) as the mystic's Dark Night, Evelyn Underhill says that the Dark Night is an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical

activity. How better to describe the inertia most of these works convey, or their sense of passivity, which seems nonetheless resistant rather than yielding. Like the mystic, in their work these artists deny the ego and the individual personality, seeking to evoke, it would seem, that semihypnotic state of blank consciousness, of meaningless tranquillity and anonymity that both Eastern monks and yogis and Western mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Miguel de Molinos, sought. The equilibrium of a passionless nirvana or the negative perfection of the mystical silence of quietism requires precisely the kind of detachment, renunciation, and annihilation of ego and personality we have been observing. Certain specific correlations may be pointed out to substantiate such allusions. The "continuum" of La Monte Young's *Dream Music* is analogous in its endlessness to the *maya* of Hindu cosmology; titles of many of Flavin's works are explicitly religious (*William of Ockham, Via Crucis*). In fact, Flavin calls his works "icons," and it is not surprising to learn that he left a Catholic seminary on the verge of being ordained.

Of course, it is not novel to have mystical abstract art. Mondrian was certainly as much a mystic as Malevich. But it does seem unusual in America, where our art has always been so level-headed and purposeful. That all this new art is so low-key, and so often concerned with little more than nuances of differentiation and executed in the *pianissimo* we associate with, for example, Morton Feldman's music, makes it rather out of step with the screeching, blaring, spangled carnival of American life. But if pop art is the reflection of our environment, perhaps the art I have been describing is its antidote, even if it is a hard one to swallow. In its oversized, awkward, uncompromising, sometimes brutal directness, and in its refusal to participate, either as entertainment or as whimsical, ingratiating commodity (being simply too big or too graceless or too empty or too boring to appeal), this new art is surely hard to assimilate with ease. And it is almost as hard to talk about as it is to have around. Of the art that is being made now, it is clearly the most ambivalent and the most elusive. For the moment one has made a statement, or more hopeless still, attempted a generality, the precise opposite then appears to be true, sometimes simultaneously with the original thought one had. Roger Shattuck says of Satie's music, "The simplest pieces, some of the humoristic works, and children's pieces built out of a handful of notes and rhythms are the most enigmatic for this very reason: they have no beginning middle and end. They exist simultaneously." So with the multiple levels of an art not so simple as it looks.

COLOR-FIELD PAINTING: THE WASHINGTON SCHOOL



By this time, the early history of the Washington School is a matter of undisputed record. Important events include the founding of the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1947, the year Morris Louis moved to Washington, D.C. and Leon Berkowitz became the director of the Washington Workshop Center. Directed by Robert Richman, the Institute of Contemporary Art filled a function somewhat like that of the Artists Club in New York by sponsoring lectures, talks, and readings. Hayter, Gabo, and Albers as well as other avant-garde figures were invited to speak there. Studio classes, some taught by Kenneth Noland after his arrival in Washington in 1949, were held at the ICA as well. Classes and exhibitions were also conducted at the Washington Workshop Center, where Jacob Kainen, Morris Louis, and later Kenneth Noland taught. As informal meeting places, the ICA and the Workshop were the hub of the small circle of serious modern artists active in Washington.

Information reached Washington painters through reproduction, but there were also firsthand contacts with New York art and New York artists. Jack Tworkov, for example, taught at The American University in the early fifties, and de Kooning also lectured there. The art department of The American University was an active center. Later Catholic University, where Kenneth Noland taught and arranged exhibitions, became important. Clement Greenberg had met Noland at Black Mountain College; he was in Washington often to visit relatives.

Greenberg obviously played an important role in informing Washington artists regarding developments in New York. But Greenberg's view