

Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post '60's Sculpture

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Memories. Every scenario and every mise-en-scène have always been constructed by or on memories. One must chance that—start from affection and new sounds.— Jean-Luc Godard

I am thinking of the terms “post-Minimalism” and “dematerialization”—of how they have become entrenched within the lexicon of contemporary criticism. I am thinking of the extreme disjunction between the strategic value of those terms and their capacity to signify. For, while I understand the politics of their usage, their meaning eludes me insofar as it attaches itself to the art they label.

Operationally, “post-Minimalism” acts to drive a historical wedge between the Minimalist art of Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, Frank Stella, and Carl Andre, and the work of a younger generation which began to achieve prominence by the end of the 1960s. (1) “Post-Minimalism,” by insisting upon the temporal divide between these two generations of artists, signals that it is acting as a conceptual marker as well: asserting a separation of meaning between the two groups, a separation in which the gears of sensibility mesh with the supposed shift in historical time. “Dematerialization” functions similarly as a chronological counter, by scripting as a new act in the historical drama the flight of certain work from the material, concrete arena of the object. The assumption behind the use of both these terms seems to be that the demarcations of historical time carry within themselves the profile of *meaning*—that in themselves they are adequate to characterize or define the deep import of works of art. The same assumption operates when, in answer to a question like, “What does this painting by Stella mean?” the reply comes, “It’s about his relationship to Johns and Newman.” The question asked was about meaning; the answer that is inevitably given is about historical context. The assumption is that they are synonymous. But they are not.

The special irony of that ingrained use of history as meaning, is that it is applied to a tradition which prides itself on an originating act of historical demolition. For sooner or later every account of modern art feels compelled to turn to Manet and tell of his attack on History Painting. With a certain relish those tales relive that moment of subversion, when the very models of academic value—history, classicism—were turned upside-down to become the empty vessels into which could be poured the perceptions of a modern consciousness. Using a strategy of historical reference, the *Olympia* and *the Déjeuner* were erected on Old Master groundplans, structures completely given over to the forms and meanings of the present. And the force of this construction was its power to topple History as the foundation itself of value.

It is a recounting of singular emptiness. For it points to a moment when history was revoked, as the prologue of a story in which history lives on with a particular tenacity. If history *has* been rejected as a source of value, it has certainly been retained within the annals of modern art as a course of meaning, and therefore, of explanation. Each art act in its turn is accounted for insofar as it deepens the logic of a particular formal convention, or as it supplants one convention with another, or as it attempts to transgress the notion of convention altogether. No matter what the stance of a given art toward the acts that preceded it, the description of its meaning is generally entrenched within the hermetic logic of paternity—of the sets of esthetic lineage that make up the history of modern art. Meaning in the present becomes a coefficient

of the past; explanation is circumscribed by the profile of a historicist model.

By continuing to operate within this model, the terms “post-Minimalism” and “dematerialization” are constructions that trap meaning itself within an infinite regress of negation. Neither label really conceives in positive terms the content of the works they characterize. Neither really describes the particular modality of consciousness, or of reality, which is generated by the works they designate. Yet the interesting thing is that cognizance of that modality begins to tear apart the neatness of historical packaging. For, if one considers the paradigm of meaning out of which the art that is called “post-Minimalism” operates, one discovers the deep level at which it is antithetical to the content of a dematerialized form of Conceptualism. And further, one begins to see the absolute continuities of meaning that connect “post-Minimalism” to Minimal Art. (2)

From the outside, of course, a claim for the continuity between Minimalism and post-Minimalism will seem rather obvious. For to the uninitiated observer the strategies of the one have an obdurate similarity to the strategies of the other. Which is to say that from the outside, Mel Bochner’s use of the series of cardinal numbers in order to achieve extension, or Richer Serra’s method of building a form by splashing lead into a corner, pulling the hardened remains away, splashing again, pulling away again . . . , might not appear all that different from Judd’s construction of a row of boxes, or Andre’s placement of bricks in line, or for that matter, Stella’s repetition of stripes across a canvas surface. They all partake of a similar kind of relentlessness; just as they all share in vouching for the utter seriousness for this putting, to use Judd’s words, “one thing after another.” Given the sameness of tone in the mode of construction, it may look from the outside like something of a fine point to say that Stella’s stripes are on a canvas support while Bochner or Dorothea Rockburne mark directly on the wall; and it may seem like an oversubtle distinction that Judd’s and Morris’ and Andre’s constructions involved rational geometric forms while Serra’s are generated through the process of making. The naive observer, feeling this continuity, may not quite see why one group is set off from the other by this prefix “post” on the historical label. And the naive observer has common sense on his side. He is pointing to something that in fact exists—only what he points to is a procedural similarity, rather than to the more crucial one which is also present: a shared notion about the prerequisites for a model of meaning.

It is only a kind of criticism addicted to the pendular logic of a history of alternations that turns away from the objections of the naive observer. Insisting upon the importance of the fact that numbers or pencil marks on the wall involve a rejection of the concrete object, that criticism finds itself embracing the notion of “dematerialization” as the operative tool of distinction. And then it is face with the problem that the cutting edge, rather than appearing too fine, seems too blunt. Because “dematerialization” is a category incapable of distinguishing the work of, say, Sol LeWitt, Bochner, Rockburne, and Richard Tuttle from other types of objectless art—Bob Barry’s for example, or Joseph Kosuth’s, or Douglas Huebler’s. It therefore encourages one to overlook the way in which the meaning of the work in the first group is deeply opposed to the kind of content—to the models of how meaning itself is formulated—proposed by the work in the second. For the type of Conceptualism evinced by the art of the second group grows from the seeds of a deeply planted traditionalism with respect to meaning.

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In connection with the exhibition “Prospect ’69,” Robert Barry was interviewed. “What is your piece for Prospect ’69?” he was asked. “The piece,” he replied, “consists of the ideas that people will have from reading this interview The piece in its entirety is unknowable

because it exists in the minds of so many people. Each person can really know that part which is in his own mind.”

Barry’s answer stands as a verbal equivalent for the Inert Gas Series which he did in the same year. The photographs of sites over which released amounts of invisible gas are presumably expanding demand the same kind of residence within the minds of each of their separate viewers. For the work must be completed by the addition of a mental image of the (invisible) gas to the concrete image of the landscape. Since each of these mental images is private, “*each person can really know that part which is in his own mind.*”

This notion of privacy, and of meaning tied to the private confines of a mental space, permeates Huebler’s thinking as well. Deepening Barry’s view of the separateness of experience, Huebler proceeds to deny to time and space their status as the grounds of a transpersonal reality. “I think,” Huebler declares, “it’s perfectly fair to say that time is what each of us says it is at any given moment.” Or take, for another example, On Kawara’s “I got up” postcards and “I am alive” telegrams, about which Lucy Lippard writes,

The fascination exerted by Kawara’s obsessive and precise notations of his place in the world (time and location) imply a kind of self-reassurance that the artist, does, in fact exist. At the same time, they are totally without pathos, their objectivity establishing the self-imposed isolation which marks his way of life as well as his art.

“Objectivity” is a strange predicate to attach to the utter subjectivism of the notion that we can only know someone is alive (or awake) because he tells us so. Joining Conceptual hands with Barry and Huebler, Kawara places art within the confines of what Logical-Positivism has called the protocol language—the language of sense-impression, mental images, and private sensations. It is a language implying that no outside verification is possible of the meanings of words we use to point to our private experience—that meaning itself is hostage to that separate video of impressions registered across the screen of each individual’s monitor. In the terms of the protocol language, my ‘green’ and my ‘headache’ point to what I see and feel, just as your ‘green’ and your ‘headache’ point to something you possess. The separateness of our ‘greens’ arises from the separateness of our retinas, and thus neither of us has any way of verifying the separate date to which our words point. In the grip of this argument we may feel that we therefore have no way of verifying the meaning of those words—and that ‘time’ or ‘green’ do indeed mean “what each of us says it is at any given moment.”

Because it is over the notion of privacy or private languages that the division between these artists and Minimal/post-Minimal art arises, it is important to explore the various forms private language takes (and has taken); just as it is important to understand the implications of those forms. One of the forms involves the notion of intention.

If sense-impressions are thought of as necessarily private, intention must be thought of that way also. Thus, it is no surprise that artists who immerse themselves in questions of the protocol language are particularly concerned with intention. One thinks of Kosuth in the connection, of his saying that, *Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context—as art—they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist’s intention, that is, he is saying that that particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori.*

The construction of the work of art purely around the notion of intention points directly inward:

to the privacy of mental space. "This is a portrait of Iris Clert," Rauschenberg telegraphed, "if I say it is." And this idea of the art act as circumscribed and defined by intention generally claims its paternity in a particular reading of Duchamp—of *The Fountain* for example, the urinal he placed on a pedestal and signed "R. Mutt/1917." This reading, addressing itself to the question of intention, goes roughly like this.

The finished work of art is the result of a process of forming, or making, or creating. It is in a sense the proof that such a process has gone on, just as the footprint in soft ground is proof that someone has passed by. The work of art is thus the index of an act of creation which has at its roots the intention to make the work. Intention here is understood as some kind of prior mental event which we cannot but for which the work now serves as testimony that it occurred. It is a common enough reading of the Readymades that they represent of hypostatize pure intention: that since the objects in question were not fabricated by the artist but merely chosen by him, the arthood of the object is seen as residing solely in its capacity to register that decision, to render it up as it were into the physical world. Through this reading, the *Fountain* operates as an expression of Duchamp's intention to make a work.

It seems very logical to say "Art is an expression of something," and if asked, "An expression of what?" to answer, "An expression of the artist, of what he had in mind—or an expression of the way he saw something." In the case of Abstract Expressionism this answer seemed particularly compelling; and it largely constituted the initial interpretations of Pollock's painting as well as de Kooning's, although it was subsequently withdrawn from formulations about Pollock's art. The early views of their work proceeded from the very logic of 'expression,' seeing every mark on their canvases as asking to be read in the context of a private self from which the intention to make that mark has been directed. In that sense, the public surface of the work seemed to demand that one sees it as a map from which could be read the privately held crosscurrents of personality—of the artist's inviolable Self.

And this is where that sense of traditionalism which I imputed to certain forms of Conceptual art begins to appear. For a connection might begin to be made at this point between the way in which intention/expression functions as a model in time for the same kind of things for which illusionism in painting serves as a spatial model.

We can think of various kinds of illusionistic spaces: the orthogonal grid of classical perspective; the more nebulous continuum of atmospheric landscape; the undesignated, infinite depth of geometric abstraction. And in each of these pictures of the world, space itself operates as a precondition for the visibility of the pictorial events—the figures, the depicted objects—which appear within it. We consider that the ground (or background) in a painting exists somehow before the figures, and even after the figures are placed on the ground, we understand that the ground "continues" behind them, serving as their support. In illusionistic painting, 'space' functions as a category which exists prior to the knowledge of things within it. It is in that sense a model of a consciousness which is the ground against which objects are constituted. On its most abstract level, traditional picture-making is an argument about the nature of appearance—suggesting that its very possibility depends on a consciousness that is the ground for all relatedness, for all differentiation, for the constitution of perceptual wholes—and that that consciousness operates within the priorness of a mental space. The ground of Western illusionism is an entrenched Cartesianism.

Thus, just as intention can be understood as a necessarily private, internal mental event, which externalizes itself through the selection of objects, the objects which appear within

pictorial space can be seen as issuing from an internalized, prearranged set of coordinates. As one moves within the history of painting to postwar American art—that is, to Abstract Expressionism—these two aspects of priorness fuse and become more nakedly the subject of the pictures themselves.

And clearly, the *meaning* of an attempt to undermine illusionism cannot be dissociated from the baggage that Western picture-making carried along with it. It is a rejection that inherently implies the disavowal of the notion of a constituting consciousness and the protocol language of a private Self. It is a rejection of a space that exists prior to experience, passively waiting to be filled; and of a psychological model in which a self exists replete with its meanings, prior to contact with its world. So if we wish to speak of the anti-illusionism of the art of the '60s, we cannot limit our discourse to an ideology of form.

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It is common enough to say of Stella's painting that it is structured deductively—that all internal differentiations of its surfaces derive from the literal aspects of the canvas edge. (3) Thus in the early black paintings, like *Die Fahne Hoch*, we point to the way Stella begins with the midpoints of the vertical and horizontal sides and forces the stripes into a repetitive, unbroken declaration of the expanse of the painting's four quadrants in a double set of mirror reversals. Or, in the later aluminum paintings where the canvases begin to be shaped, we note that the stripes perform a more self-evident reverberation inward from the shape of the support, and thereby seem even more nakedly dependent upon the literal features of that support. It seems easy enough to say this, and further to add that the effect of this surface, flashed continuously with the sign of its edge, has purged itself of illusionistic space, has achieved flatness. And that flatness, we think, is the flatness of an object—of a nonlinguistic thing. Yet we would be wrong, in the way that half-truths are wrong; for we would not have said enough.

The signs that haunt Stella's early stripe painting are more than signifiers for their literal shapes. *Die Fahne Hoch* is deductively structured; so is *Luis Miguel Dominguin*. But both paintings arrive at a particular configuration, which is the configuration of a cross. We could call this accidental of course. Just as we could conceive it as accidental that the Cross itself relates to that most primitive sign of an object in space: the vertical of the foreground projected against the horizon-line of a nascent ground. But the three-way relationship that fuses along the striped surface of these pictures is a kind of argument for the logical connection between the cruciform of all pictoriality, of all intention to locate a thing within its world, and the way in which the conventional sign—in this case the Cross—arises naturally from a referent in the world. In canvas after canvas one finds oneself in the presence of a particular emblem, drawn from the common repertory of signs—stars, crosses, ring-interlocks, etc.—part of a language that belongs, so to speak, to the world, rather than to the private, originating capacity of Stella to invent shapes. But what Stella convinces us of is an account of the initial genesis of those signs. Because in these paintings we see how they are given birth through a series of natural and logical operations.

The logic of the deductive structure is therefore shown to be inseparable from the logic of the sign. Both seem to sponsor one another and in so doing to ask one to grasp the natural history of pictorial language as such. The real achievement of these paintings is to have fully immersed themselves in meaning, but to have made meaning itself a function of surface—*of the external, the public, or a space that is in no way a signifier of the a priori, or of the privacy of intention.*

The *meaning* of Stella's expurgation of illusionism is unintelligible apart from a will to lodge all meanings within the (semiological) conventions of a public space. And to expose illusionistic space as a model of privacy—of the Self conceived as constituted prior to its contact with the space of the world. (4)

The conception of the Self had by the late 1950s already become an aspect of the literary experience of Beckett and of the *nouveau roman*. And it had emerged as the particularly urgent claim of the late philosophy of Wittgenstein, in which the language game was a therapy aimed at severing the connection (the logical connection) between meaning and mind. In the *Blue Book*, for example, Wittgenstein asks what it means to make the claim that we know a tune: does it mean that before we sing it we have quickly whistled it to ourselves silently; or that we have a picture of the score in our heads—a mental image of the tune—from which we read off the notes as we sing them? Is claiming to know the tune dependent upon having it stored up someplace inside us, like beads already positioned on a string and ready to be pulled out of our mouths? Or is it simply singing the tune, or perhaps hearing many tunes and saying, “that one just then is the right tune.” The tune, and the question of just where it is stored when we claim to know it, widens out in *The Philosophical Investigations* to memory images and to the bases for all claims to know. Again and again Wittgenstein tried to sever the certainty of these claims from a picture of a mental space in which definitions and rules are stored, awaiting application. His work became an attempt to confound our picture of the necessity that there be a private mental space (a space available only to the single self) in which meanings and intentions have to exist *before* they could issue into the space of the world. (5) The model of meaning that Wittgenstein implores us to accept is a model severed from the legitimizing claims of the private self.

The significance of the art which emerged in this country in the early 1960s is that it staked everything on the truth of that model. Therefore, if we read the work of Stella or Morris, or Judd, or Andre, merely as part of a text of formal reordering, we miss the meaning that is most central to that work. Further, we may miss or misconceive the way in which that very notion of meaning persists in certain art of the present.

Bochner's work, for example, has been a consistent attempt to map the linguistic fact onto the perceptual one—not to show the insubstantiality of the one as opposed to the materiality of the other, but to demonstrate the necessity in experience of their mutual fruition. In *Measurements, Group B*, 1967, the walls of a room are printed with the notation of their dimensions, so that the space appears against the image of its own blueprint. But one has no sense of the priorness of the one to the other, of either serving as ground to the other as figure. Illusionism is erased in the experience of the extended object (the wall) as the basis for the very notion of arithmetic extension, and of an abstract geometry being indistinct from those oblique directions through which dimension projects itself into the world.

In *Axiom of Indifference*, a group of linguistic propositions are set up in relation to a group of physical facts, each corroborating the other. A wall running down the center of the work splits the eight integers of the work into two groups of four and makes the total configuration of physical shape and verbal proposition invisible from either side. Wholeness of shape as well as wholeness of the propositional entity becomes a matter of reconstruction, which is to say, of memory. And memory is shown to be a function of language, as language is a coefficient of that which is completely external—a presence that is forever possible. “Immediate experience,” Bochner has written, “will not cohere as an independent domain. Memories tend to be remains, not of past sensations, but past verbalizations.” Further, *Axiom of Indifference*,

like *7 Properties of Between*, functions as a composite entity in which verbal proposition and physical facts appear within a single act of perception. Verification is therefore immediate, and the work acts as a kind of model for the public assignment of truth-value to a given statement. But esthetically, these works lodge themselves within a broader aspect of the notion of a model, for what is central to them is their insistence upon the externality, the publicness of space in which verification and meaning reside. They are, one would say, visualizations of a linguistic space that is fully nonpsychological—the attempt to picture a world unmediated by the idea of a protocol language, a kind of necessary purging of the fantasy of privacy from his art.

With Rockburne's work, particularly the series *Drawing Which Makes Itself*, one finds this notion of publicness carried critically into the realm of process. For insofar as Process art can be understood as the generation of a work from a set of rules or procedures instituted prior to the implementation of the work, process is not logically distinct from the arbitrariness of the private language. Part of the effort of *Drawing Which Makes Itself* is to generate the work from qualities inherent in the materials used: the dimensions of the edges of the paper and its diagonal folds; the double-sidedness natural to paper that makes flipping or reversing it possible; etc. And the effect of this insistence is that one feels the creation of a logical distinction between the grammar of this work and the intention-laden grammar of process.

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What I am claiming, then, as continuous over the last decade is the need of certain artists to explore the externality of language and therefore of meaning. During the same time period this need has a parallel project in the work of other sculptors: the discovery of the body as a completely externalization of the Self.

That aspect of the self comes to light in what is termed the paradox of the alter ego—the way in which the picture of the self as a contained whole (transparent only to itself and the truths which it is capable of constituting), crumbles before the act of connection with other selves—with other minds. Merleau-Ponty describes this paradox as the separation of two perspectives, as the fact that for each of us—he and I—there are two perspectives: I for myself and he for himself; and each of us for the other. "Of course these two perspectives, in each one of us, cannot be simply juxtaposed, *for in that case it is not I that the other would see, nor he that I should see. I must be the exterior that I present to others and the body of the other must be the other himself.*" (6) The revelation of this leads away from any notion of consciousness as unified within itself. For the self is understood as completed only after it has surfaced into the world—and the very existence and meaning of the "I" is thus dependent upon its manifestation to the "other." (7)

Part of the meaning of much of Minimal sculpture issues from the way in which it becomes a metaphorical statement of the self understood only in experience. Morris' three *L-Beams* from 1965, for example, serve as a certain kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning upon the body as it surfaces into the world in every external particular of its movements and gestures. For no matter how clearly we understand that the three Ls are identical, it is impossible to really perceive them—the one upended, the second lying on its sides, and the third poised on its two ends—as the same. The *experienced* shape of the individual sections depends, obviously, upon the orientation of the Ls to the space they share

with our bodies—thus, the size of the Ls shifts according to the object's specific relation to the ground, both in terms of the overall scale and in terms of an internal comparison between the two arms of a given L.

The L-Beams have been described as suggesting

a child's manipulation of forms, as though they were huge building blocks. The urge to alter, to see many possibilities inherent in a single shape, is typical of a child's syncretistic vision, whereby learning of one specific form can be transferred to any variations of that form. (8)

But that account seems exactly to violate one's actual experience of the work, to superimpose a mental construct of "sameness" on a world of unlikes. In a sense it is to fall for what Morris refers to as the "known constant"—that ideal Cartesian unity—which the piece holds out as a kind of nostalgic remnant of past forms of explanation. It is to ignore the way this "constant" recedes into the ground of the sculpture as a fiction, crowded by the emergence of absolute difference within the particularity of the actual space. Situating themselves within the space of experience, the space to which one's own body appears, if it is to appear at all, the *L-Beams* suspend the axiomatic coordinates of an ideal space. We explain space in terms of these coordinates when we think of it as absolute grid which seems however to converge in depth because we are badly placed to see it. We imagine clarity to come from thinking ourselves suspended above it in order to defray the distortions of our perspective, in order to recapture the absoluteness of its total parallelism. But the *meaning* of depth is nowhere to be found in the diagrammatic assumptions of this suspension. (9)

The project of Morris' sculpture has consistently been to defeat the diagrammatic. In the sectional fiberglass pieces of 1967-68, for example, the specific configuration of the work is not allowed to become a figure seen against the 'ground' of the object's 'real' structure. The notion of a fixed, internal armature that could mirror the viewer's own self, fully formed prior to experience, founders on the capacity of those separable parts to shift or to have shifted, to formulate a notion of the self which exists only at the moment of externality within *that* experience. (10)

Morris has persistently written about the conceptual context of his own work and that of fellow-artists. In one of these earliest essays, "Notes on Sculpture," Morris speaks of his preoccupation with strong three-dimensional gestalts. "Characteristic of a gestalt," he wrote, "is that once it is established all the information about it, *qua* gestalt, is exhausted. (One does not, for example, seek the gestalt of a gestalt)." The body of criticism that has grown up around Minimal Art over the past five or six years has, strangely enough, understood the meaning of that statement, and indeed the meaning of gestalt itself, to be about a latent kind of Cartesianism. The gestalt seems to be interpreted as an immutable, ideal unit that persists beyond the particularities of experience, becoming through its very persistence the *ground* for all experience. Yet this is to ignore the most rudimentary notions of gestalt theory, in which the properties of the "good gestalt" are demonstrated to be entirely context-dependent. The meaning of a trapezoid, for example, and therefore its gestalt formations, changes depending upon whether it must be seen as a two-dimensional figure or as a square oriented in depth—a meaning that can in no way precede experience. Morris himself pointed to this when he said, "it is those aspects of apprehension that are not coexistent with the visual field but rather the result of the experience of the visual field."

With different forms and varying strategies, Judd's and Andre's and Flavin's works are

seemingly involved in discrediting the persistence of Cartesianism and in positing meaning itself as a function of external space.

That sense of coalescing in experience and of a realization of the self as it achieves externality is evident in the Prop Pieces that Serra began to make in 1969. By means of a metaphor of striking abstractness, these works suggested a continual coming into a coherence of the body, in the guise of a form that was consistently seen *in the act* of cohering. The special precariousness of their parts was not *about* imminent collapse or dissolution. Rather it was directed at evoking the tension between a conceptual unity of certain simple shapes and the actual conditions of their physical union. The *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)*, for example, is a cube (therefore an 'ideal' shape) perceived as perpetually dependent upon these conditions. As well, *House of Cards* deals specifically with internal space as something constantly available to external vision, and as something entirely defined by the perpetual act of balance by which its exterior is constituted. Thus, interiority (the "I for myself") is clearly made a function of exteriority (the "I for others").

In assigning to this work and to the rest of the Prop Pieces the problematic of the double-perspective, I am obviously not speaking of any specific text for which the works serve as some kind of sign. Rather I hope to locate a certain ground from which to grasp the meaning of Serra's need to achieve verticality without permanently adhering separate parts of the sculpture. And this meaning, reaching beyond the domain of the purely formal, connects to the sensibility I have been trying to define within this essay—a sensibility which bridges the boundaries of historical labels.

In the past several years Serra's works have tended to adopt a special form of drawing to define the modality of one's experience of them. In this using of material ever more in terms of line, linear vectors, and types of boundaries, Serra shares in the way that recent abstract art in general has posited the importance of line, or of drawing per se. This was true of Robert Rauschenberg's and Michael Heizer's art which related to landscape as a linear unfolding, and in a different way it is clearly true of Bochner and Rockburne.

One explanation for the interest in line—which is at this point quite widespread—might be the inherent closeness between line and language: the formulation of signs both simple and complex, and the assignment of meaning. And line fully externalized is part of a larger strategy. As I have argued, it functions within that metaphorical expression of the Self that has been a concern of a completely post-Expressionist art.

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Godard once said that he thought most films turned out to be a form of remembering, that almost all of them seemed peculiarly to inhabit the past tense. He did not, he said, want that for his own work. For that reason, he explained, he did not prewrite his films. He would wait until the night before shooting a given scene to block it out, and during the shooting itself he would force the actors to improvise their lines. He courted the disarray, the mistakes even, of a lived present. In describing this, he was outlining a sensibility to which history, in the form of a narrative past seemed simply not to apply.

This essay began with another example of history rejected—that of Manet. I realize now that it was a bad example. For his was a procedure that was intensely historical; it was a disavowal

of the content of a particular history, but not of history's form. Because in order to criticize or outmode or even outdistance the past, Manet had to incorporate it within a given work. The Old-Master prototype had to serve as a ground against which the forms of the present could stand in relief. Couched within that juxtaposition was history itself, like an outworn garment used to line the fold of a new cloak. The meaning of the present was articulated against the residue of the past.

If I have tried to account for anything in this essay, it is something about why that very procedure has become unacceptable to certain artists of the past ten years. Some of these artists I have named; there are, of course, many others. For all of them there is no longer any question of proceeding by holding out an alternative to a past position. For to make art out of a reply to a formulation from the historical past is to immure oneself within the solipsistic space of memory itself. So they are not, for example, offering a new account of intention, because to do so would leave them trapped within the privacy of a mental space which the old one entailed. The space in which they exist, and for which they must vouch, is precisely one in which meaning is present as it maps itself onto reality, and in which the art they create must do the same.

Endnotes

(1) The composition of this group fluctuates in the various accounts of the period. Among the names generally included are Eve Hesse, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Bruce Nauman, Dorothea Rockburne, and Mel Bochner. For some writers, Sol LeWitt belongs properly to post-Minimalism, even though the generation through which his art emerged was that of Minimalism.

(2) I hope it is clear that my intention is not to draw up specific lines of influence, but rather to circumscribe a sensibility and a determination that seems to characterize certain art of the last ten years.

(3) See Michael Fried, *Three American Painters*, Cambridge, The Fogg Museum, 1965; and Fried's subsequent essays on Stella.

(4) If we consider that Stella's painting was involved, early on, in the work of Johns, then Johns' interpretation of Duchamp and the Readymade—an interpretation diametrically opposed to that of the Conceptualist group outlined above—has some relevance to this connection. For Johns' reading clearly saw the Readymade as pointing to the fact that there need be *no* connection between the final art object and the psychological matrix from which it issued, since in the case of the Readymade this possibility is precluded from the start. *The Fountain* was not made (fabricated) by Duchamp, only selected by him. Therefore, there is no way in which the urinal can 'express' the artist. It is like a sentence which is put into the world unsanctioned by the voice of a speaker standing behind it. Because maker and artist are evidently separate, there is no way for the urinal to serve as the externalization of the state or states of mind of the artist as he made it. And by not functioning within the grammar of the esthetic personality, the *Fountain* can be seen as putting distance between itself and the notion of personality per se. The relationship between Johns' American Flag and his reading of the *Fountain* is just this: the arthood of the *Fountain* is not legitimized by its having issued stroke by stroke from the private psyche of the artist; indeed it could not. So it is like a man absentmindedly humming and being dumbfounded if asked if he had meant that tune rather than another. This is a case in which it is not clear how the grammar of intention might apply.

(5) In an important recent article, Kenneth Baker discusses sculptural space—mainly that of Caro—in relation to issues defined by Wittgenstein. See *Arts*, September, 1973.

(6) Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, London, 1962, p. xii.

(7) “At the very moment,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “when I experience my existence. . . I fall short of the ultimate density which would place me outside time, and I discover within myself a kind of internal weakness standing in the way of my being totally individualized: a weakness which exposes me to the gaze of others as a man among men” (Ibid.).

(8) Marcia, Tucker, *Robert Morris*, New York, The Whitney Museum, 1970, p.25.

(9) Describing the meaning of depth, Merleau-Ponty writes, “when I look at a road which sweeps before me toward the horizon, I must not say either that the sides of the road are given to me as convergent or that they are given to me as parallel: *they are parallel in depth*. The perspective appearance is not posited, but neither is parallelism. *I am engrossed in the road itself*, and I cling to it through its virtual distortion, and depth is this intention itself which posits neither the perspective projection of the road, nor the ‘real’ road” (*The Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 261).

(10) When these pieces were first exhibited in 1967, they were rearranged every day by the artist into different configurations.