

SCOTT BURTON

**COLLECTED
WRITINGS
ON ART &
PERFORMANCE,
1965–1975**

EDITED BY DAVID J. GETSY

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The Primacy of Sensibility: Scott Burton writing on art and performance, 1965–1975

David J. Getsy

Scott Burton is often narrowly associated with the art of the 1980s, the decade in which his functional and intentionally self-effacing sculpture was widely exhibited and discussed. However, Burton was an active participant in the art world of the 1960s and 1970s—as an art critic, as an editor for *ARTnews* and *Art in America*, as a curator, and as a performance artist. He only turned to sculpture as his primary practice around 1975, after becoming established as an artist with his *Behavior Tableaux* performances, which were shown throughout the 1970s at major venues including the Whitney, the Guggenheim, and Documenta VI. Burton’s identification with the burgeoning field of performance art in the 1970s, too, transformed his earlier reputation; up to that point, he had been known principally as a critic.

This book brings together Burton’s writings on art and performance from these years, tracing his development as an art critic and including his early artist statements. This period, from 1965 to 1975, was foundational for Burton’s later artistic practice and was remarkably varied in the commitments he pursued. After he started making art in 1969 amidst his active engagement with art writing, Burton became a unique and opinionated example of the artist-critic that characterized the contentious period and its heated debates.

Despite the fact that Burton produced a substantial body of art writing—including important texts such as the introduction to the groundbreaking exhibition of Postminimal art *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969—his criticism has rarely been discussed. This is perhaps due

to its eclecticism: Burton championed positions that others held as mutually exclusive and antagonistic. He advocated for reductive abstract art at the same time as he did figuration; he wrote extended evaluations of artists as different as Tony Smith and Alex Katz; and he argued for the urgency of considering time-based and ephemeral artistic practices in the same years that he curated exhibitions of realist painting. Burton also loved the underdogs, and he often chose to write about artists whose work needed articulate spokespersons to differentiate them from dominant tendencies. This was especially the case with Burton's critical relationship to Minimalism. He immersed himself in the ideas surrounding Minimalism and came out on the other side with an appreciation of its emphasis on the viewer but also with a suspicion of its rarefied and homogenizing account of that viewer. By contrast, he came to advocate for artists who used reductive formal vocabularies quite differently than the "methodical cerebrations of a Judd or a Noland."¹ Indeed, when Burton emerged as an artist he became exemplary of "Postminimalism," the term coined by Robert Pincus-Witten to describe the time- and process-based reactions to Minimalism that emerged in the late 1960s.²

I began to be interested in Burton's writing as part of my own research on his early performance art. I was struck by the moments of perspicacity and prescience in the texts and by the unexpected collisions he offered. As I came to realize, most important in these writings is the central role he gave to the theatrical, the temporal, the affective, and the performative. One can find in Burton a critic who argued for the cross-fertilization

1. "Ralph Humphrey: A Different Stripe," p. 101.

2. Pincus-Witten would write two essays on Burton's work in the 1970s: Robert Pincus-Witten, "Scott Burton: Conceptual Performance as Sculpture," *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 1 (September 1976): 112–17 and Robert Pincus-Witten, "Camp Meetin': The Furniture Pieces of Scott Burton," *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 1 (September 1978): 103–05. The former was reprinted in Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977) and both essays were included in the expansion of that book as Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism into Maximalism: American Art, 1966–1986* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987).

of sculpture and performance as a means of understanding how art could be social, personal, and accessible.

Taken together, these texts do reveal Burton's early formulation of a desire to make public and demotic art, his critique of the art world's hermeticism and elitism, and his critical grasp of the implications and exclusions of mainstream narratives of 1960s art. He pursued his writing with humor and purpose, hoping to establish alternative positions from the dominating and normative critical positions. Distinct in the texts is Burton's increasing concern with art's appeal to affects, empathies, and subjective responses. His own Postminimalism involved finding a place for particularity and difference contra the blanked universalism that the Minimalist invocation of the viewer implied. Accessibility was a consistent theme of his artistic and critical practice, up through his development of public art. In these early years, he came to see realism, figuration, and the literalist address to the viewer's co-presence as key terms for moving art away from elitism and as incitements for individual and public engagements.

At the same time, these texts are valuable beyond the ways in which they inform Burton's own art. He was an adroit commentator on art theory, often making wild and perverse connections across party lines. Art criticism became urgent in the 1960s because of its participants' awareness that they were formulating a new canon, and many writers were narrow in their advocacy. Burton, however, remained consistent in his ethics and interests but promiscuous in the styles and positions he defended. Consequently, his voice is distinct from his contemporaries, and readers from many different positions will recognize their own priorities in Burton's texts. This openness is what he intended, so those concerned with the status of figuration or with reductive geometric art will both find Burton making insightful observations. Many of the artists about whom Burton wrote will be unfamiliar to all but

the most specialized of readers, but each of the essays contains discussions of larger themes for the art of the 1960s and 1970s that are relevant to an understanding of this contentious period of artmaking. These are joined by Burton's contributions to the theorization of performance art in the early 1970s—texts that provide important commentary on the status of performance as well as Burton's own varied practices.

Burton always saw himself as a bit of an outsider. Born in Alabama in 1939 and raised by a single mother there and, later in his teen years, in Washington, D.C., he understood his entry into the New York art world as one of the infiltrator. His attachment to the vernacular and the rustic that would emerge in some of his earliest sculptures was an expression of his critical position toward the self-congratulatory culture of New York as cultural center. He did, however, receive a focused education in art, most importantly from the Washington-based abstract painter Leon Berkowitz and his wife Ida Fox, both of whom were important influences on the teenage Burton. In addition to his own teaching, Berkowitz was also instrumental in arranging Burton's study with Hans Hofmann in Hofmann's summer school in Provincetown in the late 1950s. It was there that Burton also found his first sustained engagement with gay culture, and his sexuality grew to become a central theme of much of his work in the 1970s.³ Referring to the small town's historic role as a haven both for artistic and for gay and lesbian communities, Burton recalled, "Hofmann was a very important teacher, and I was one of his last students. I learned something from Hofmann about art, but I learned a great deal more from Provincetown about life—and about art."⁴ For his undergraduate education, he moved through a few colleges starting in 1958

3. I discuss the relation of Burton's sexuality to his artistic priorities at length in the chapter on Burton from the book I am currently completing.

4. Audio recording of March 1980 interview with Burton by Edward de Celle, Edward Brooks de Celle Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

(Goddard College, George Washington University, and Harvard University) before moving to New York in 1959, where he would complete his BA magna cum laude at Columbia University in 1962. It was in New York that he became romantically involved with the figurative painter John Button (around 1961), who proved to be a decisive influence during their almost decade-long relationship throughout the 1960s.

Burton's ambition in this decade was to be a writer, and he stopped painting during his undergraduate years. He went on to receive a master's degree in English literature from New York University in 1963, and his first related job was as a reader for the notable New York literary agency Sterling Lord from 1964 to 1965. Theater became his main focus. He wrote a play based on the Ganymede myth titled "The Eagle and the Lamb," and his "Saint George" was produced at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater in Stratford, Connecticut, in 1964, with the support of Lincoln Kirstein. Button, older than Burton by a decade, was instrumental. He introduced his younger partner to the gay social networks that ran throughout the New York artistic and literary scene, and it was in this milieu that Burton spent most of his twenties. It was there that Burton came into contact with and often was befriended by the likes of Kirstein, Jerome Robbins, Frank O'Hara, Edwin Denby, Edward Albee, and his fellow Columbia student Terrence McNally.⁵ (He also became friends with other figurative artists such as Sylvia Sleigh and Philip Pearlstein.) These same circles introduced Burton to the New York School poets, and Burton's earliest professional entrées came from gay men associated with theater, poetry, and criticism.⁶ These years were formative for Burton's

5. See Scott Burton interview with Lewis Kachur, Oral History Project, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Interview I: May 22, 1987.

6. On this milieu, see, for instance, Maggie Nelson, *Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007) and Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham and London: Yale University Press, 2005)

attitudes on art, and his engagement with both figurative art (as in the work of Fairfield Porter, Pearlstein, or Alex Katz) and the more lyrical strain of Abstract Expressionist criticism (exemplified by O'Hara) can be understood to have come from this social network. It was only after his break-up with Button in the late 1960s that Burton made a decisive social break that manifested itself, in part, as an embrace of conceptual art. This artistic education of Burton's set him apart from the largely heterosexual group of Minimalist artists that he came to see as dominating the late 1960s, and his sense of both outsidership and purpose was fueled by it.

Burton was largely unsuccessful as a playwright. His most important theatrical contribution of the 1960s was to write the libretto for an experimental ballet created to accompany an Aaron Copland composition for the New York City Ballet in 1965. The ballet, *Shadow'd Ground*, was based on Copland's *Dance Panels* (composed some years earlier in 1959 and revised in 1962). It premiered on January 21, 1965, and took the unorthodox format of having four screens behind and above the dancers onto which were projected contextual and narrative images. This experiment did not meet with critical approval.⁷ Nevertheless, this was the first manifestation of Burton's interest in tableaux as a means of storytelling, for Burton's libretto was conveyed through the projections of staged photographs of a man and a woman acting out the story. This use of successive still images or tableaux would return in his performance art of the 1970s.

Soon after *Shadow'd Ground*, Burton started writing art criticism. He published his first substantive essay in *Art and Literature* in 1965—the same year that journal republished such heavyweight contributions as Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting" and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Cézanne's

7. Allen Hughes, "Notes on New Ballets," *New York Times* (31 January 1965): X7.

Doubt.”⁸ Also in 1965, he began writing capsule reviews for *ARTnews*, a magazine at that time associated with both Abstract Expressionism and the New York School poets, many of whom worked as reviewers. As Carter Ratcliff recalled,

All the poets I was interested in were writing for *ARTnews* or had written for it at some point. Frank O’Hara had written for the magazine. Barbara Guest, James Schuyler. Ted Berrigan, Peter Schjeldahl a little later. Jill Johnston wrote for them at a certain point. And Scott Burton, who wasn’t a poet but was very much a part of that world. Bill Berkson. Gerrit Henry. Kenward Elmslie. So many on that list of editorial associates were poets. [...] The *ARTnews* review was almost a genre of poetic writing.⁹

Burton joined *ARTnews* as an editorial associate in November 1965, and began writing the short and often unsigned capsule reviews that characterized the magazine’s attempt to cover every exhibition in New York. He would start writing regular feature articles the next year and eventually became an assistant editor at the magazine in 1972. Two years later, he became senior editor at *Art in America*, a position he held until 1976. While working at *ARTnews*, Burton also taught English at the School of Visual Arts for five years (from 1967 to 1972), even co-editing a textbook of writings on art for SVA in 1969.¹⁰

Burton wrote his first major feature article for *ARTnews* in 1966 on Tony Smith. (He had, earlier that year, written an

8. Both in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965). In addition to new pieces like Burton’s, *Art and Literature* (under its editor John Ashbery) sometimes republished important writings such as the 1945 and 1960 essays by Merleau-Ponty and Greenberg, respectively.

9. Carter Ratcliff in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2003), 41.

10. Dorothy Wolfberg, Scott Burton, and John Tarburton, eds., *Exploring the Arts: An Anthology of Basic Readings* (New York: Visual Arts Press, 1969).

essay on his friend Robert Beauchamp for the magazine, but the Smith article was the cover story for the December 1966 issue.) It was an important project for Burton, and it required an extended period of research and interviews. Though it came by way of an assignment from Thomas Hess, the magazine's editor, it grew to be central to Burton's thought.¹¹ Previously, his interests primarily had followed the figurative art identified with his partner Button, but the Smith essay compelled Burton to engage with reductive abstraction. In many ways, Burton's intellectual independence from Button began through the work on Smith, and one can see early formulations of Burton's critical commitments emerging from within his obeisance to the expectations of an *ARTnews* feature article for Hess. After moving through the required biographical and contextual material, Burton turned to a defense of Smith. For Burton, Smith's reductive formal vocabulary and classical monumentality conveyed "eruptive emotional content."¹² He became excited by what he saw in Smith's work as a direct appeal to the viewer's emotions through physical relations and a sense of scale.

Burton understood Smith's avoidance of overt representation and his disavowal of the autographic gestures that underwrote most other expressive abstraction as expanding, rather than limiting, the ways in which the viewer could subjectively relate to the works. He contrasted this to the "Primary Structurists," his term for those artists who would become associated with Minimalism following the pivotal exhibition *Primary Structures* held earlier that year at the Jewish Museum in New York. Discussing Smith's *Die* (1962), the six-foot cube that would become iconic of reductive formal tendencies in the decade, Burton argued:

11. "[T]he first piece of writing [was] on Tony Smith, who I totally fell in love with and who was a big influence in some way on me ever since. I think Smith is one of the great American artists." Scott Burton interview with Lewis Kachur, Oral History Project, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Interview I: May 22, 1987.

12. "Tony Smith: Old Master at the New Frontier," p. 42.

Die, his famous black, 6-foot steel cube, looks close to the “new esthetic.” Andre, Judd, Morris, and others have all made works as simple in form. But theirs seem to be, among other things, reducing the definition of sculpture to simply “that which man makes with the intention of filling real space.” Smith’s cube is far from such an esthetic of intention or concept, and is as interesting to look at as to think about. It has an ambiguous scale, a referential color and a loaded title (which Smith explains as both the imperative form of the verb and the noun meaning matrix or mold). Visually, the work fully equals the intensity of its title. *Die*, with a minimum of form, indelibly gives form to—shapes—its environment. What is around it, outdoors as well as in, begins to “lead up” to it, as to a climax. *Die* is not the elimination or antithesis of expression, but the culmination of expression—like a scream so high it can no longer be heard.¹³

Die, he continued, “demands and provokes affective response.” He saw the possibility for multiple, particular emotional reactions in viewers incited by the confrontational simplicity of Smith’s works, and this realization would characterize Burton’s defense of abstract painting and sculpture, as well as his own development of reductive sculptural objects. Disparaging the bland and ironic stance he saw in the work of the Judd, Morris, and Andre, Burton instead began to see how the physical relationality that underwrote minimal forms of 1960s sculpture could be the pathway to particularized, emotive experiences for the viewer.

Burton considered his Tony Smith article only a partial success, and in the following months he expanded his ideas

13. “Tony Smith: Old Master at the New Frontier,” p. 42–43.

into a lecture for the Walker Art Center in October of 1967. In this remarkable piece of writing, previously unpublished, Burton bared his convictions and expanded his criticism of Minimalism. Demonstrating a solid grasp of the major themes in the sculpture of the 1960s, Burton positioned Smith in a wide field of his peers and took aim, in particular, at the work of Judd, Andre, and Morris. The rhetoric of Minimalism emphasized the activation of the viewer's encounter, but Burton claimed that Judd's work, for instance, "seems to mock us" and exhibited a "parody of rationality."¹⁴ Though Burton saw value in all of these other artists' positions, he nevertheless considered them to lack urgency and to evince a pedantic and condescending stance toward the viewer:

[A] great deal of 'reductive' art has real intensity. But it is always didactic; we are being taught; we must think [...] This is *not* the most important thing about looking at a Tony Smith. His art is expressive of feelings, ideas, attitudes that are about more than sculpture, more than art.¹⁵

Affect, rather than concept, is what Burton valued and what he saw as the promise of Smith's monumental sculpture.

Contained in Burton's writings on Tony Smith are two of the main themes of Burton's subsequent criticism and artistic production: affective response and temporality. Smith's sculpture demanded both, and Burton committed to developing these terms around the work of artists he advocated.

Smith's "art is allusive in a way Minimal art is not," Burton remarked.¹⁶ Allusion, the indirect evocation or reference, became a keyword for his writings on abstraction.

14. "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture," p. 50.

15. "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture," p. 53.

16. "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture," p. 57.

Burton argued against what he saw as pretensions to neutrality, regularity, and objectivity in many artists' justifications for geometric and reductive formal vocabularies. Instead, he believed that simplified form opened up the possibility for individualized and particularized engagements, both emotional and intellectual. That is, abstract art's avoidance of representation had the potential to make space for the viewer's own affective responses and identifications. He was critical of accounts of 1960s abstraction that claimed neutrality, seeing in them a compulsory universalism that suppressed—rather than facilitated—individual or alternative engagements by viewers. This focus on a personal and individual relationship between viewer and artwork would become the foundation for his subsequent furniture sculptures, which create an intimate and direct bodily relation between viewers and objects that is unforeclosed and open (in contrast to what he saw as the generic, impersonally cerebral experience of spatial activation that became a common theme of writings on Minimalism). Such recognition of the need for difference and particularity in the viewers' responses also contributed to the aims of other Postminimalist artists such as Eva Hesse and Jackie Winsor. At the formal level, Hesse and Winsor both rejected the homogenous regularity of Minimalist seriality, creating the conditions for difference and uniqueness within their playing out of repetition and geometry. That is, the aim was to create works that displayed both seriality and variation.

Burton, too, wanted to make space for particularity and for alternatives. He understood that activations of the viewers' experiences will be necessarily as multiple and divergent as the number of viewers themselves. He upheld allusion as a means to sanction viewers' personal histories and emotional responses as well as the differences and variety they produced. He insisted on the ways in which the individual's response could never be wholly subsumed into the generic or universal. I would argue

that it was Burton's own daily experience of difference as an out gay man that contributed to his suspicion of universality and normativity. Indeed, compared to the proclamations of a Judd or an Andre, Burton's appeals to emotions and personalized engagements stand out. In keeping with his belief in openness, however, Burton would not prioritize any one responsive position—even that of his own personal history. His aim, by contrast, was to defend art that allowed for allusion and affect as a means of promoting particularity and possibility.

Burton's article on the painter Ralph Humphrey contained one of his most important statements on the issue of allusion in abstraction. In it, he praised a number of artists such as Agnes Martin, Ronald Bladen, and Doug Ohlson. He argued that their work, as Tony Smith's, evoked emotional and affective engagements through extremely simplified formal vocabularies. He wrote,

they share qualities of feeling, of emotional reference expressed in a vocabulary in no way illustrational. They are "abstract allusionists," sometimes dramatic and grand, like Smith or Held, sometimes quiet and contemplative, like Martin, but all dealing essentially in affect rather than idea. They are image-makers, not art-makers, allowing full expression to the subjective or passionate impulse which has intermittently shown itself in the haunting strangeness of certain Stellas and Robert Morris's, but which is fundamentally counter to the methodical cerebrations of, for example, Judd or Noland.¹⁷

Again, it was this appeal to "affect rather than idea" that was so important to Burton.

17. "Ralph Humphrey: A Different Stripe," p. 101.

The second key theme emerging from Burton's engagement with the work of Smith was the importance of the temporal duration of the viewer's experience. During the summer in which he was expanding his article on Smith into the more opinionated lecture for the Walker Art Center, Michael Fried's game-changing essay "Art and Objecthood" was published in *Artforum*.¹⁸ Burton seized upon Fried's essay and its central term—"theatricality"—and adapted it to his defense of Smith.

"Art and Objecthood" had the effect of consolidating a group identity for Minimalism through its critique, despite the fact that the aims of the artists associated with the "movement" were divergent. Such was the case with Smith, whom Fried not only equated with Judd and Morris, but also singled out in his attack. Without a doubt, this spurred Burton to further articulate Smith's difference from the others as he had in his earlier article. More importantly, however, he found in Fried not an ally but another opponent. Fried's famous argument against Minimalism was that it was "theatrical," and that theater was antithetical to art and to modernism.¹⁹ Fried wrote, "The literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art."²⁰ Given Burton's decade-long association with the theater, such a claim could do nothing but enrage him. As he wrote in 1969, "The main inaccuracy of the 'formalist' criticism which calls much recent art 'theatrical' is in the conservative assumption that the adjective is pejorative."²¹ In opposition to Fried and to the Minimalists, Burton espoused theater as a means to differentiate Smith from both positions (even going so far as to conclude by comparing Smith

18. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23

19. On the contours of Fried's use of "theatricality," see especially James Meyer, "The Writing of 'Art and Objecthood,'" in *Refracting Vision: Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*, ed. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, and Toni Ross (Sydney: Power Institute, 2000), 61–96.

20. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 15.

21. "Time on Their Hands," p. 79.

to Eugene O'Neill). With work like Smith's, he argued, the viewer's encounter was spatially activated and became highly particularized precisely because of the works' simple yet dramatic unfolding over time.

Burton developed his interest in temporality throughout this period, and by 1973 he would concisely assert that an expanded definition of theater was "simply art in time."²² For Burton, as with Fried, the temporal dimension of theater was its core trait, and this it fundamentally shared with all sculptural encounters.²³ Experiences occurred in time, necessarily having beginnings, sequences, and endings. "Even in the most radical play ever written, *Waiting for Godot*, there are lines or moments more charged, more revealing than others," he reminded.²⁴ It was the differentiation of moments within a temporal experience that Burton believed was the potential of theater and the key to expressivity. The "psychological structure of theater" was "inescapably one of intensification, climax, and release."²⁵ In championing its temporality and emotive potential, Burton was not only using theater to look beyond modernism, he was also deploying it to argue against the elitism and preciousness he saw in artists such as Judd and Andre. Since he believed that the Minimalist aspirations to uninflected, non-ordered experiences "mocked" viewers with their willful blankness, he saw the narrative and expressive potential in Smith's work to have great potential as a factor of—not despite—his reductive and geometric structures.

Temporality became an important concern for Burton, and it characterized both his art-critical priorities and his own

22. "Sculpture as Theater: The *Lecture on Self*," p. 229.

23. On Fried's opposition to duration and endlessness in "Art and Objecthood," see Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004), 37–51.

24. "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture," p. 60.

25. "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture," p. 60.

development of performance art. It even can be evidenced as a criterion and value in his 1967 essay on Button's figurative paintings, which he said compelled duration in the viewer's experience: "A Button reveals itself gradually, not through multiplicity of incident but through depth of concentration—which takes *time* to filter to the surface."²⁶ He said something similar about time's representation by light in Edward Hopper's paintings in "Generations of Light," but Burton's most important, if concise, statement on temporality was his 1969 essay "Time on Their Hands." (*ARTnews* often assigned its own titles to the articles.) In it, he used an engagement with temporality and duration as the organizing theme through which he discussed what would soon be called Postminimalism.

Burton's interest in temporality in "Time on Their Hands" focused on the ways in which any activation of time or duration served to acknowledge the viewer. As in his writings on Smith, Burton took the concept of theatricality and turned it into a positive value. For Burton, duration and the passage of time served to establish a comparative relation and a commonality between viewer and work of art, connecting them. Richard Serra was a key example:

Serra is as concerned with the results of (human) activities on materials as he is with the properties of those materials; naturally, the two are mutually determinant but Serra's production (including series involving folding, sawing, hanging and balancing also) is as assertively in our time as a Donald Judd-box is in our space, by virtue of its emphasis on both its past (its identity as a result) and its future (its potentialities).²⁷

26. "John Button," p. 164.

27. "Time on Their Hands," p. 82.

Burton saw the acknowledgment of the common ground of time's passage as a means to bridge the separation between artwork and viewer or, more bluntly, between art and life. Burton praised Serra's works such as *Splashing* for their impermanence. The "impermanent" was, for Burton, a condition that was analogous to the allusiveness he argued for in the work of Tony Smith or abstract painters such as Humphrey or Ohlson. The foregrounding of the work of art's lifespan—not just its creation, but its foreseeable disintegration or demise—established a parallel to the viewer's own mortal existence. For Burton, the acknowledgement of time's effects on the work of art humanized it and opened the door to the kind of intimate and personal identifications that he sought to make room for with his criticism. It also eroded the hierarchical distinction between art and life, making art and artworks more like the quotidian world of actions and objects. (This would be a driving force in his development of barely noticeable, but functional and useful public art.) He resoundingly concluded the essay by asserting (with due acknowledgment of the possible impermanence of the value he stressed): "This is the ultimate (at least, the current ultimate) in the idea of art as the 'imitation of life'; not to aspire to an impossible permanence is at once audacious and humble."²⁸

Burton's "Time on Their Hands" was technically a review essay on two major exhibitions in New York (*Nine Young Americans* at the Guggenheim and *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* at the Whitney), both of which helped to establish the more process-based and variable-form work that would signal the emergence of Postminimalism's deformation of Minimalism's rigid geometries. The essay, however, did not really address the exhibitions so much as step above them to discuss these general tendencies. In many ways, the essay is

28. "Time on Their Hands," p. 85.

better understood as a refinement and expansion of the ideas Burton had put forth in the preceding months in his essay for the important exhibition originated by the Kunsthalle Bern, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, which opened in the spring of 1969. Burton was given—by the curator Harald Szeemann—the unenviable position of writing about indeterminate, impermanent, process-oriented, and often site-specific work not only in advance of the exhibition (and ahead of the creation of many of its ephemeral works!) but also from across the Atlantic. Burton's essay "Notes on the New" took the form of a discussion of many of the American artists in the exhibition, based on his familiarity with them from the New York scene. Burton's own priorities were rapidly shifting toward the Postminimal; for him, Minimal art objects were very clearly high art objects, but these new works demanded a new perspective based in time, performance, and lived engagement. As he wrote, "Art has been veritably *invaded* by life, if life means flux, change, chance, time, unpredictability."²⁹

Burton argued that the direct correspondence—if not equivalence—between the everyday and art was the most important new direction in contemporary art. It could be seen in process-based and anti-form work. His essay was almost utopic in its proclamations about the move beyond modernism and its dictates. Discussing the breakdown of distinctions between painting and sculpture, art and idea, the visual and the verbal, and the skilled and the untrained, Burton predicted the rise of performance from an engagement with duration and temporality. For him, performance and its direct relation to everyday life were the payoff of the art of the 1960s. "Literalism has been extended to modes of temporal existence," as he said in his subsequent article.³⁰ Burton saw the distinction between art and life fading through the

29. "When Attitudes Become Form: Notes on the New," p. 76.

30. "Time on Their Hands," p. 79.

incorporation of temporality and impermanence, and it was performance that he held up as exemplary of this shift.

Burton understood that the most direct acknowledgement of the shared passage of time between viewer and artwork occurred, most obviously, in live performance and theater. It is no coincidence, then, that these same months saw Burton's first performance art pieces. At the end of the 1960s, he and Button had split, and Burton developed his own circle of friends, including Eduardo Costa (his then neighbor), Jane Kaufman, Marjorie Strider, John Perreault, Mac McGinnes (then working at the important Fischbach Gallery), and Steve Gianakos. It was within this new, younger milieu that Burton was spurred to turn his interest in theater into the practice of performance.³¹

He was one of the central participants in the *Street Works* events that were organized by Strider, Perreault, and Hannah Weiner and held under the auspices of the Architectural League in New York over the course of 1969. Each *Street Work* event involved a group of heterogeneous performances by disparate artists executed within a set time period and within a defined number of blocks in Manhattan. For these, Burton expanded on this practice to create what he would term *Self-Works*. In this category, he included *Disguise for Street Works II* (in April 1969) and *Ear-Piece for Street Works III* (in May 1969) as well as other works that involved acting on his own body, such as in *Dream* when he drugged himself to sleep at the opening party for the Architectural League's *Street Works IV* held at the American Federation of Arts in October 1969.

Burton discussed these performances in his lecture at the University of Iowa ("Literalist Theater"), his performance text for *Lecture on Self*, and his "Three Street Works" from 1969. This last text is exemplary in that it is composed entirely of

31. A useful memoir of this period of Burton's work can be found in John Perreault, "Scott Burton's Escape from Language," in *Scott Burton*, ed. Ana María Torres (Valencia: Institut Valencià d'art Modern, 2004), 36–42.

quotations from published reviews of the *Street Works* events. This is an important textual move that exemplified Burton's early attitudes toward performance. In what could be considered a practice of critical mimesis, Burton's *Street Works* events all involved a blurring of art and life, reframing (or putting in quotation marks) everyday experience. It was almost as if he were attempting to address the question with which he concluded his essay "Notes on the New," borrowed from Duchamp:

No afunctional act can really be anything but symbolic, but it is compelling to see, at least, the continuing dilation of art's limits, to watch the quotation marks get further and further apart. In 1913, Marcel Duchamp wrote, "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?"³²

Just as he saw temporality and theater as means to break down the hierarchical distinction between art and non-art, art and life, and art and the quotidian, his performances involved either subtle or extreme actions that reframed his experience of the everyday. Whether in the invisibility of his moving through *Street Works II* dressed as a woman or the hyper-visibility of his chemically induced unconsciousness among his friends and colleagues in *Dream*, Burton explored the ways in which performance-as-art was crucial to the performer. That is, even if it went unnoticed by the audience (as in *Ear-Piece* or *Disguise*), Burton's performance practice put quotation marks around "life" for him. He expanded this idea of performance's effect on the performer in his "Literalist Theater" lecture, transforming the idea of the *Self-Works* into a series of instructions that could be executed by his students and, indeed, anyone. These particular *Self-Works* he encouraged them to do involved "just pretending, doing ordinary

32. "When Attitudes Become Form: Notes on the New," p. 78.

actions, but just pretending to in a sense, doing them gratuitously” in order to “imitate ordinary life.”³³ If the year before he had argued that someone like Serra’s acknowledgement of time and contingency established a parallel relation with the viewer’s experience of time, then with “Literalist Theater” he advocated for an artistic practice in which the work of art could only be experienced by doing it—by being both artist and the art. This experience, importantly, would necessarily vary from individual to individual, making each instantiation of the work personal, singular and intimate.

During that same summer Burton would develop a completely different mode of performance art that involved highly structured artificial situations of viewing. At Iowa, he began experimenting with a wide range of performance works intended for the stage, not the street, such as *Ten Tableaux*.³⁴ In 1972, this mode of practice eventually became the *Behavior Tableaux* that I discuss below. Even as he moved from quotations of the quotidian to staged pieces involving other performers, the idea of critical mimesis persisted as a recurring theme in Burton’s work. It would manifest itself in his own parodic reframing of himself in his quotation of the genre of the artist’s talk in *Lecture on Self* and, perhaps more deeply, redouble his long-running engagement with realism.

Concurrent with his attempt to define the “Abstract Allusionists” and his engagement with Postminimal, performative, and conceptual practices, Burton remained committed to the belief that realism and figuration were not just valid options in contemporary art; they were important. By “realism,” Burton often meant an engagement with—as well as a representation of—the actual and the observable. His burgeoning belief that art should be demotic and accessible fueled both his interest in pictorial realism and in conceptual performance, both of

33. “Literalist Theater,” p. 219–20.

34. See also Scott Burton, “[Furniture Works 1970-71],” *TriQuarterly* 32 (Winter 1975): n.p.

which embraced (albeit in different ways) the everyday. That is, Burton did not see a contradiction between representational art and what he heralded in “Notes on the New” as “a new naturalism or realism born of extended collaborations between the artists and nature, chance, material, event, the viewer.”³⁵ Nor was there a mutual exclusivity with abstraction. He addressed both Hopper and de Kooning in the same terms in “Generation of Light,” and he would write in 1967 that “‘Abstract’ and ‘illusionist’ are not antonyms.”³⁶ In doing this, he took a cue from Duchamp, whose work was central to Burton’s thinking.³⁷ Duchamp had once stated,

Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress. Progress is merely an enormous pretension on our part. [...] And ‘abstract’ or ‘naturalistic’ is merely a fashionable form of talking—today. It is no problem: an abstract painting may not look at all ‘abstract’ in 50 years.³⁸

In such a shared attitude, Burton recognized his aims for individuality and the breaking down of hierarchical distinctions.

35. “When Attitudes Become Form: Notes on the New,” p. 76–77.

36. “George McNeil and the Figure,” p. 187.

37. For instance, Burton designed a special cover for the September 1973 *ARTnews* featuring the Marcel Duchamp retrospective. It is one of the only *ARTnews* covers in which a specific artist/designer for the cover is noted in the credits. Eduardo Costa described the importance of this work for Burton: “Scott liked very much a cover he made for *ARTnews* in the mid-seventies. The cover was a great abstract of Marcel Duchamp portraits, four consecutive photographs of his own head, which Scott distributed simply on the page. The portraits were Duchamp with the star haircut, Duchamp with the hair full of foamy soap in the shape of two small horns, Duchamp as Rrose Selavy, Duchamp at 85 (taken when he was 58). Scott thought of these as very early examples of art photography, and was happy to have been able to lay them out as the cover of an art magazine.” Eduardo Costa, “Scott Burton and Photography” (2004), essay published on his website titled *The Non-Art Photographs of Scott Burton*, <http://www.scottburton.com.ar>, accessed 10 October 2011.

38. Marcel Duchamp, “The Great Trouble with Art in This Country [1946],” in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 123.

Burton wrote about a range of representational art, from precise verisimilitude to gestural and abstracting treatments of the human form. As he had with abstraction and conceptual art, Burton attended closely to the formal dynamics of these varied modes and repeatedly asked about the effects of decisions on the individual viewer's experience and associations. In his writings on representational art, he often urged that there should be no hierarchical parsing of the abstract versus the figurative. In his essay on Alex Katz, for instance, he thought that the painter was exemplary of a move "forward to an open situation in which the formal and the expressive elements of art will once again be understood to be synonymous in figurative as well as in abstract styles."³⁹

Burton's two main statements on representational art were the exhibitions of realist painting he curated in 1969 (*Direct Representation*) and 1972 (*The Realist Revival*). In both, he put forth artists such as Yvonne Jacquette, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, and Philip Pearlstein as exemplary of this tendency. He even went so far as to suggest, in 1969, that because of the dominance of sculpture in the forms of Minimalism and Postminimalism, painting had little choice but to return to representation:

Straight figuration is, I think the only major mode now available to painting adequate for the expression of the fullest individuality. Besides a reinvigorated fidelity to the surface of the perceived world, the new representationalists share an historical situation in which, briefly, three-dimensional work has absorbed the premises of most earlier modernists styles and taken them to extremes where painting cannot follow.⁴⁰

39. "Alex Katz," p. 194.

40. "Direct Representation: Five Younger Realists," p. 195.

Both his 1969 and 1972 texts offer manifesto-like defenses of this “risky embrace of illusionist precision,” as he called it.⁴¹ The latter text even calls realism the “evolution of modernism rather than a retreat from it.”⁴² It should be remembered that Burton’s relationship with Button had brought him into contact with the networks of representational artists and he counted such artists as Pearlstein, Katz, Sleigh, and others as personal friends. Button had painted him as Ganymede, and Pearlstein did an astonishing portrait of him.⁴³ Sleigh famously included Burton, along with the other art critics Lawrence Alloway and Carter Ratcliff, in her important painting *The Turkish Bath* (1973). All of this is evidence of Burton’s sustained engagement with the ideas and key players of figurative painting during these years.

Burton’s advocacy of realism was, in addition, a function of his distaste for narrowly normative and canonical values. He saw the elitism of the art world as a kind of club that enforced a singular developmental narrative at the expense of all divergent positions. Identifying with the outsider and the underdog, Burton would often attack mainstream positions for their suppression of differences and alternatives. In a memoir of Burton, Robert Rosenblum wrote:

He never stopped reading, looking, and learning with the zeal of a new graduate student. From this, he acquired plenty of ammunition for the frequent announcements of his latest enthusiasms and hates, which usually went against the grain of all shared beliefs. In the 1970s, for instance, he would claim that his friend Philip Pearlstein’s neorealist

41. “Direct Representation: Five Younger Realists,” p. 196.

42. “The Realist Revival,” p. 202.

43. Burton discussed sitting for Pearlstein in Scott Burton, “Introduction,” in *Philip Pearlstein* (New York: Hirsch & Adler Modern, 1985), n.p.

canvases of nude models, objectively recorded with scrupulous detail, were far more avant-garde than any of the minimal art (including his own) we were cheering. [. . .] His seemingly perverse opinions were not pronounced for the sake of camp, but because Scott had genuinely been smitten by new enthusiasms and new challenges to inherited prejudices.⁴⁴

The refusal of “inherited prejudices” and the suppression of difference were, after all, the driving forces behind Burton’s attempts to personalize the impersonal tactics of Minimalism—to allow space for the individual, the non-standard, and the marginal.

Burton’s own artistic practice also fed off his interest in realism. Not only was the critical mimesis of the *Self-Works* related to his advocacy of representational art, but it can also be seen as fundamental to his work of the 1970s. His *Bronze Chair* (conceived in 1972, but executed in 1975) was a functional bronze-cast of an abandoned Queen Anne revival-style chair. One of the very first of his sculptures, it was usable as furniture (hence literally a chair) at the same time that it was (through the associations of bronze with figurative sculpture) a realist sculptural rendering of a chair. In this way, *Bronze Chair* combined all of Burton’s interests. It exhibited literality and theatricality just like any Minimalist object while, at the same time, being representational and realist. The *Bronze Chair* asks to be used, and it incites actual bodily contact. To sit in the *Chair* is to bring one’s body into the sculpture’s arms, turning away from it, and backing on to it. Such an experience of the realist sculpture as usable furniture, he learned, was fundamentally more direct and more accessible in its solicitation of and literal bodily engagement with the viewer/sitter.

44. Robert Rosenblum, “Scott Burton,” in *Loss within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Edmund White (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 240.

He subsequently pursued making more such “pragmatic sculpture,” as he called his functional furniture art, to expand on the *Bronze Chair*’s fusion of literality, representation, and implicit figuration.

Beyond his belief in the potential of illusionistic or representational image-making, Burton was particularly interested in the human figure. For him, the critical mimesis of the *Self-Works* and the *Bronze Chair* were, significantly, also figurative in their incorporation of the body of the performer or the viewer/sitter (as well as the *Bronze Chair*’s blatantly anthropomorphic associations as a bronze statue). He saw the presence of the live body of the performer in relation to the representation of the human form in figurative art. In his brief survey of performance art in his *Lecture on Self*, he stated that performance was “however transformed, an art essentially of the human figure.”⁴⁵ Both figuration and performance, he believed, opened avenues of identification and empathy for the viewer. Crystallized through his opposition to the impersonal coldness of Minimal sculpture, Burton came to see any incorporation of the human body (whether live or represented) as a means for art to become more accessible and to directly engage the viewer. Consequently, figuration (like realism) became an expansive and inclusive category for Burton, as he attempted to bridge modes of artistic practice that had previously been opposed in mainstream narratives of modernism’s progress.

The fusion of his ideas led him to develop the performances he would call *Behavior Tableaux*. As he explained about his own work in the text for his *Lecture on Self*, these works would “herald a large-scale art of the human figure.”⁴⁶ Unlike his *Self-Works* and his *Lecture on Self*, Burton stepped back from using his own body and instead created elaborate

45. “Sculpture as Theater: The *Lecture on Self*,” p. 232.

46. “Sculpture as Theater: The *Lecture on Self*,” p. 238.

living pictures (tableaux vivants) with groups of performers he would direct and rehearse. At the University of Iowa and Finch College, Burton showed different types of such performance works (many of which are detailed in the text for *Lecture on Self*), but settled on a practice (starting with his 1972 *Group Behavior Tableaux*) that used slowly moving tableaux vivants to address the bodily and social relations between people. On a stage, these works would contain individual scenes separated by blackouts in which a group of performers would move extremely slowly to adopt poses that illustrated various social relations to each other. Burton's interest in these works was to address the codes whereby the body spoke to and exercised power over others. He further hoped to evoke each viewer's own particularized history of the acquisition and experience of this spatial, bodily communication. As he explained in *Lecture on Self*:

The achievement of this piece is to have found the exact location where human psychology and visual art meet: in the non-verbal language of the body. [The *Behavior Tableaux*'s] placement, posture, and gesture and its observations and violations of personal-space and body-surrounding territories reveal the unconscious attitudes literally shaping and deploying [body language].⁴⁷

These were complex performances, and each manifestation explored different sets of meanings.⁴⁸ His aim with them was to bring art, via live figuration, back into dialogue with viewers' daily experience by activating their personal histories of power in social relations—here figured through the staging of

47. "Sculpture as Theater: The *Lecture on Self*," p. 241.

48. Again, I discuss the *Behavior Tableaux* in more detail in my analysis in my forthcoming chapter on Burton in the 1970s.

body language and its coercions. Like his earlier advocacy of Smith and the Abstract Allusionists, Burton hoped that these performances could be understandable and affective for audiences from outside the specialized language of the New York art world despite their reductive and unorthodox formats. The works' development extends beyond the chronological frame of this book, through to 1980, but I have included here some early texts that describe his initial formulations. Taken with the detailed discussion of his work that Burton incorporated into the *Lecture on Self*, these early texts help to show how these performances emerged out of Burton's commitments to performance, duration, realism, painting, and figuration. As with his other work and his criticism, they derived from his unique conjunction of these often disparate concerns.

One of the most remarkable texts included in this volume is the lecture script for Burton's performance *Lecture on Self*, to which I have given the title "Sculpture as Theater," appropriated from the opening line of the text. As I explain in the editor's notes to the text, Burton engaged in an extended quotation of himself by presenting a lecture lasting over an hour on his own work at Oberlin College in 1973. Speaking in the third person, he offered an assessment of the state of performance art and detailed descriptions of his work. In essence, he put himself in quotation marks and offered a figurative performance of "the artist." This should be understood as an extension of his *Self-Works* from 1969, as his selective resumé "Odd Years" indicates. This text, reconstructed in its entirety, serves as one of the most important statements of Burton's attitude toward performance and provides a key documentation of his ephemeral works. It was this unpublished manuscript (and "Tony Smith and Minimalist Sculpture") that first made me realize how important it was to undertake work on this collection.

Elizabeth Baker, the former editor of *Art in America*, recalled that "As a critic [Burton's] enthusiasms were passionate, his

dislikes were categorical. He wrote as he would later cut granite, with high style, great clarity of form, and a very sharp edge.”⁴⁹ Burton’s perspective was unique among his peers, both artists and critics alike. The texts contained here help to show the development of the attitudes that would lead him to make public, functional art as well as provide a rogue commentary on the art of the late 1960s and early 1970s. There is no doubt that these texts move in very different directions, but they nevertheless cumulatively demonstrate Burton’s perspicacious attention to the effects of formal and conceptual decisions. More than that, they show a writer and an artist who engaged a critical stance against conformity, arguing for the distinctly personal, eclectic, and individual potential of many different modes of making art.

As Burton started to gain recognition as a public artist in the early 1980s, he came to downplay much of his earlier work. Burton did not want the heterogeneous practice he had pursued in the 1970s to distract from the critical stance he was pursuing by making his demotic, albeit nearly anonymous, public art. This self-abnegation was the point, however, as it allowed his public art to find a place in the everyday, even if its users did not know it was art at all. This is not to say that Burton did not have a sense of purpose (or ego). Rather, he opted for relative simplicity as the tactic of his work in the 1980s, in order to develop an accessible mode of artistic practice.

The texts in this collection reveal how many of the issues in his 1980s practice have their origins in his participation in the debates of the late 1960s. Burton disregarded his own work as a critic, and his lack of recognition in this arena is due in part to this. Speaking to Lewis Kachur in 1987, Burton stated “There’s nothing of mine from that period that I would wish

49. Elizabeth Baker quoted in Roberta Smith, “Scott Burton, Sculptor Whose Art Verged on Furniture, Is Dead at 50,” *New York Times*, 1 January 1990.

to reprint—nothing at all. So I'm a failed critic." About his work from this period, he said in the same interview, "It's not a thing I'd put into a retrospective—this whole period of the late 1960s to early 1970s."⁵⁰ Clearly, I disagree. Such statements from the end of the 1980s arose from Burton's relentless self-critical stance, which was heightened as he saw his social and professional worlds devastated by AIDS. A sense of urgency about his projects, about their completion, and about his agenda to make a new kind of public, accessible art pervaded the interviews he gave in these years. Burton died of AIDS-related complications in 1989, and I take Burton's selective self-editing as a retrospective attempt to clarify and to control the message he wanted his work and his legacy to make. Despite such dismissals of his own early work and criticism, he kept vast amounts of material from these years and donated it to the Museum of Modern Art archives. All of the work and criticism he would disavow he nevertheless made sure was preserved. Because of this—and because of my belief in the importance and distinctiveness of Burton's early work—I have been emboldened to assemble what he (perhaps too modestly) said he did not want, a collection of his writings.

The present volume collects the majority, but not all, of Burton's writings. Excluded from this book are the many capsule reviews (ranging from a single line to perhaps a paragraph) from *ARTnews* in the early years, as well as scattered very short reviews.⁵¹ By and large, I have focused on

50. Scott Burton interview with Lewis Kachur, Oral History Project, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Interview I: May 22, 1987.

51. A standout among Burton's many such capsule reviews was his three-sentence account of Robert Smithson's 1968 exhibition at Dwan Gallery, in which he remarked that the artist's *Nonsites* were "geological samples in handsome Minimal containers from places (sites) which Smithson has chosen to visit, plus documents (maps, photographs, and verbal descriptions) of the site and, therefore, of the visit itself. The many differences between the sites and the *Nonsites* ultimately become, in Smithson's compulsively dialectical mind, the very distinction between art and nature. Smithson is brilliant because he makes art out of what art cannot be." Scott Burton, "Robert Smithson's 'Nonsites,'" *Art Scene* (April 1968): 22.

more extended texts. Even though some of these, too, were assigned by an editor, they nevertheless show the development of Burton's perspective. There are a small number of *ARTnews* articles I have not included because they seemed too perfunctory.⁵² Similarly, I have not included texts that I considered to be largely repetitive.⁵³ Burton was a prolific critic, and it is possible that there are additional published writings out there, but I have done my best to include (or cite in this Introduction) all of the essays and articles I have found in my research in the archives. After the early 1970s, Burton largely stopped writing art criticism, but he did write some important historical essays in the 1980s to which I would point the reader, despite the fact that they fall out of the chronological range of this volume.⁵⁴

I chose to end the collection in 1975 because the year seemed to mark a decisive change in his work. That year, he had his first one-person exhibition (at Artists Space), where he showed his *Bronze Chair*. By this time, he had stopped writing criticism and devoted himself to being an artist. I include "Odd Years" (1975) because it is retrospective of his work to that point. Overall, the decade from 1965 to 1975 reflects a coherent phase of Burton's production, even as it foreshadows later developments. His work shifts a great deal in the mid-1970s, and he became more forthright about the importance of sexuality as part of his practice after 1974 (first hinted at in his "Make a Political Statement"). The archives and published interviews of the late 1970s and 1980s are rich. It was tempting to consider including his writings and statements of

52. "Two for May: Dunn, Hendler," *ARTnews* 66.3 (May 1967): 55, 71–72; and "Cool and Concrete from the 'Thirties," *ARTnews* 66.2 (April 1967): 34, 69–71.

53. As with his short essay on Robert Beauchamp for the exhibition pamphlet for the painter's one person exhibition at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, in 1968.

54. Most important are his "Furniture Journal: Gerrit Rietveld," *Art in America* 68.9 (November 1980): 102–108; and "My Brancusi," exhibition brochure for Burton's exhibition *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi* at the Museum of Modern Art, April 7 to June 28, 1989, revised and republished posthumously as Scott Burton, "My Brancusi," *Art in America* 78.3 (March 1990): 148.

the 1980s, but I felt that this volume would speak louder by revealing the forgotten Burton of the late 1960s and 1970s, which the work of the 1980s often overshadows.

In organizing the book, I have separated the texts into four broad groupings that follow a more-or-less chronological development of Burton's writing and art in this decade. As would be expected from Burton's stance, many of the essays could easily be put into different sections. Nevertheless, I think these general themes can aid readers in following the main threads of Burton's thinking in these years. Within each section, writings are organized chronologically, with the exception of Burton's 1967 essay on his partner John Button, to which I give precedence in the "Realisms" section in light of Button's formative influence on Burton. From the archival materials, I have selected writings that provide concise accounts of Burton's art activities during these years. He was a prodigious note-taker, and it would be infeasible to include them all. Instead, I have relied on the synthetic statement made with the *Lecture on Self* and augmented it with a few short writings, published and unpublished, in which he characterized his own performances. These are meant to stand in for the active process of conceptualizing his own practice through writing in which Burton was engaged in these years.

A small amount of the archival materials have been published previously in partial form in the catalogue to the retrospective at the Institut Valencià d'art Modern (2004). Unfortunately, the research for that exhibition was undertaken before Burton's bequest had been processed by the archivists at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Consequently, that publication did not benefit from the meticulous research and organization of Burton's voluminous materials by MoMA, and it contains historical errors and flawed transcriptions. For instance, that catalogue reprints only the first two pages of the *Lecture on Self*. (At one point, Burton had begun to type

out the manuscript he had written by hand, but accomplished only two pages even though the handwritten text runs continuously for many pages more.) Hence there are substantial discrepancies with those few texts it shares with this volume because I have endeavored to provide accurate and comprehensive versions of Burton's important unpublished manuscripts. For consistency's sake, some minor changes have been made across the texts (such as the capitalization of such terms as "Primary Structurists" that Burton sometimes capitalized and sometimes did not.) Editorial notes (*E.N.*) are included at the heads of some texts to indicate more specific editorial approaches and to provide background to the texts.

I first encountered Burton's work as an undergraduate at Oberlin College, where the Allen Memorial Art Museum had in its collection a 1979 replica of the *Bronze Chair* that Burton made for his friend, the dealer Donald Droll. This strange and unexpected sculpture has stuck with me for two decades, shadowing my scholarly work on a range of different topics and periods. Once Burton's archives were opened by MoMA, I decided to investigate Burton's early work which was, then and now, still difficult to learn about from the published record. In the archives I encountered a perceptive and independent critic as well as a wide-ranging artist with convictions about facilitating marginal perspectives. Burton proposed unlikely alliances between the artists about whom he wrote, and he tried to make room for difference and individuality in the viewer's affective responses. Such a form of criticism, he wrote in 1968, demands "the primacy of sensibility over formal techniques,"⁵⁵ and it is in his committed appeal to sensibility that these texts seem to me not just current but useful—the trait, after all, he valued most in his work.

55. "Ralph Humphrey: A Different Stripe," p. 102.