

The Presence of Mies

Edited by
Detlef Mertins

Princeton Architectural Press

The Presence of Mies

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of this century's most important and influential architects, has alternately been revered and reviled. *The Presence of Mies* is an interdisciplinary collection of essays that take a fresh look at the work of this controversial architect on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Toronto-Dominion Centre. Unexpected perspectives have been brought to bear on Mies, opening up new ways of thinking about his work and new possibilities for extending it into contemporary architecture and cultural theory. *The Presence of Mies* is a timely reevaluation of Mies's buildings, writings, and teaching in relation to issues of technology, image culture, philosophy, art, and education.

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Detlef Mertins

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compiled by Kazys Varnelis



MINIMALISM

THE GRID, THE /CLOUD/, AND THE DETAIL

Rosalind Krauss

As I was reading some of the recent literature on Mies van der Rohe, I encountered a phenomenon I had not known of until then: I came across the politically correct Mies, the poststructuralist Mies, almost, we could say, the postmodernist Mies. Which also means that I began to understand what I had not before, namely, why I had been invited to a conference on the “presence of Mies.”

For it seems that a certain reading of Minimalism — let us call it phenomenological — had been imported into the field of architectural criticism to attack received opinion about Mies’s purported classicism, his formalism, his aloofness. If Minimalist sculpture was initially understood — indeed in certain circles continues to be understood — through a set of classicist and idealist terms, understood, that is, as projecting timeless, unchanging geometries, what we might refer to in shorthand as Platonic solids, this reading was challenged (by myself and others) as entirely inappropriate to work that immersed itself in the actual, contingent particularities of its moment of being experienced, insisting that its very point was to focus its viewer’s attention on how it changed from moment to moment of its perception in real time.¹

What this second reading underscored was the way geometric shape was shown to be entirely context dependent — as in Robert Morris’s three identical but perceptually very different L-beams — and thus open to the cat’s cradle of the interface between viewer and viewed — as in much of Donald Judd’s work; the way it exploits a geometry that exists in and through the flux of tension and gravitational force (Judd, Richard Serra), so that, far from having what we could call the fixed and enduring centers of a kind of formulaic geometry, Minimalism produces the paradox of a centerless because shifting geometry, in objects with no fixed armature, objects that can be rearranged at will (Morris). Because of this demonstrable attack on the idea that works achieve their meaning by becoming

manifestations or expressions of a hidden center, Minimalism was read as lodging meaning in the surface of the object, hence its interest in reflective materials, in exploiting the play of natural light. And hence the analogy that could be formed between conditions of meaning suggested by this work and those being developed in both structuralism and its poststructuralist radicalization.

In the revisionary readings of Mies that I encountered this summer, all of these notions were being put to work to create an anti-formalist, anti-classical Mies, one who — and here I am quoting K. Michael Hays — “insists that an order is immanent [only] in the surface itself and that the order is continuous with and dependent upon the world in which the viewer actually moves. This sense of surface and volume,” he continues, “severed from the knowledge of an internal order or a unifying logic, is enough to wrench the building from the atemporal, idealized realm of autonomous form and install it in a specific situation in the real world of experienced time, open to the chance and uncertainty of life in the metropolis.”²

Indeed, in one description after another of the [Barcelona Pavilion](#) (by Robin Evans and José Quetglas, for example) the emphasis had shifted entirely away from the kind of contrapuntal but nevertheless classical logic of plan and elevation to which I had been introduced back when Mies was seen as the very epitome of the International Style, and instead what I was now being shown was a structure committed to illusionism, with every material assuming, camelion-like, the attributes of something not itself — columns dissolving into bars of light, or glass walls becoming opaque and marble ones appearing transparent due to their reflectivity — but even more importantly, with a mysteriousness built into the plan such that the building is constructed without an approachable or knowable center and is in fact experienced as (to use these authors’ word) a labyrinth.³

This resistance to the spectator’s grasp, to what we might call the building’s making the terms of its production or its function transparent and thus reproducing the technical or economic means of production that structure its social field, is finally seen as having political overtones, as when K. Michael Hays says that although Mies’s work is immersed in the space/time of its viewer, its resistance to meaning constitutes a “critical interpretation of its worldly situation,” critical in so far as it confronts us with a refusal to construct an “efficient representation of pre-existing cultural values.”⁴

Thus, from the poststructuralist, labyrinthine Mies, the one involved in the play of the signifier, we end up with the politically correct Mies, whose resistance to the existing terms of the social field at large includes a resistance as well to the idea of aesthetic autonomy, the notion that art and architecture should be self-enclosed cultural projects unconcerned with and unable to address and thus to offer a critique of the context — political, social, economic — in which they arise. The very title of a recent essay by Ignasi de Solá-Morales Rubió spells this out by demanding that architecture now move “From Autonomy to Untimeliness.”⁵

Now, while I was very interested in the arguments laid out on behalf of this anti-classical Mies, I must say that I was far more riveted by another Mies, to whom I was re-introduced by Franz Schulze's critical biography, the Mies who, in perfect International Style manner continued to insist on architecture and the production of truth as generated by a set of *a priori* and universalizing laws, and who was caught up in the entirely modernist obsession of repeating a very small repertory of structural ideas — namely the prismatic tower and the universal space of the clear-span pavilion — and was, throughout his career, committed to the use of the grid.⁶ It was this Mies who, one chilly day in April 1967, presided over the nine-hour procedure of slowly jacking up the 1000-ton plate of the gridded roof of the [Berlin National Gallery](#) so that it could be lowered onto the pin-joint connections of the eight columns that were to support it — making it seem therefore to float slightly above the columns and the glass of the pavilion's walls like a strangely weightless and buoyant cloud.

It appeared to me that there was a connection here between this Mies and another figure from the recent history of Minimalism, one who also spent an artistic lifetime committed to the problem of the grid but who nonetheless opened that problem to some surprising developments. The figure I have in mind is Agnes Martin; and if I spend the rest of my time here speaking about her work ([figs. 2, 3, 4](#)), it is because the literature on the poststructuralist Mies has shown me that architectural criticism is interested in sophisticated readings of contemporary painting and sculpture, which I am far more capable of producing than such readings of any work of architecture we might wish to name, and because I feel that the door has perhaps been closed a bit too quickly not only on how to think about grids but also on the whole question of autonomy.⁷

The very quintessence of a Minimalist artist, Agnes Martin has spent her entire mature career, from 1960 until the present, painting works that always measure six feet square and are always constructed of penciled lines applied over lightly gessoed canvas grounds, the lines themselves arranged to form grids ([fig. 2](#)) in the first half of her career, and bands ([figs 3, 4](#)) in the second. Nevertheless, no matter how unflinchingly abstract these creations are, there has developed a persistent reading of Martin's work, in all of its luminous silence, as opening onto what came to be known as the "abstract sublime." This reading, initiated by Lawrence Alloway in a 1973 essay, comprehends the canvases as analogues of nature, "both," as Alloway wrote, "by inference from her imagery and from judging her titles."⁸ And indeed, Martin's titles have always held out an invitation to experience her work as an allusion to nature, with names such as *The Beach, Desert, Leaf in the Wind, Milk River, Night Sea, Orange Grove, White Stone, Falling Blue*.

Nonetheless Alloway was careful, in his text, to acknowledge all those admonitions Martin herself had always pronounced against understanding her work as an abstracted nature: "My paintings have neither objects, nor space, nor time, not anything — no forms," he quotes her saying. Or again, he cautions, "Referring to one of

her poems she notes: ‘This poem, like the paintings, is not really about nature. It is not what is seen. It is what is known forever in the mind.’

It is one thing, however, to listen to Martin insisting, “My work is anti-nature,” and it is another to hold this claim steady as one approaches her paintings. Alloway’s reading became the standard for interpreting Martin, as the rubric “abstract sublime” slid into the space between her work and its succession of interpreters/viewers. Characteristically, Carter Ratcliff referred Martin’s work to Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which, in the mid-eighteenth century, laid down a recipe for satisfying the growing taste for “sublime effects.” Burke’s description of a “perfect simplicity, an absolute uniformity in disposition, shape and coloring,” his call for a succession “of uniform parts” that can permit “a comparatively small quantity of matter to produce a grander effect than a much larger quantity disposed in another manner” seemed made for Martin’s work, just as that work — as pared down and simplified as it might appear — could be thought nonetheless to smuggle within it diffused references to the repertory of natural “subjects” that followed from Burke’s analysis: “the sea (Turner), the sky (Constable), foliage (Church) and, simply, light.”⁹

It is this covert allusion to nature that the category “abstract sublime” has come to imply, with the abstract work always able to be decoded by its romantic double: Mark Rothko read out through Caspar David Friedrich; Jackson Pollock by J.M.W. Turner’s storms; Martin by Turner’s skies.¹⁰

But again it has consistently been Martin herself who has cautioned against a romantic context for her work. Repeating that she sees herself joined to an ancient tradition of classicists — “Coptic, Egyptian, Greek, Chinese” — she defines this tradition as something that turns its back on nature. “Classicism forsakes the nature pattern,” she writes. “Classicists are people that look out with their back to the world. It represents something that isn’t possible in the world. It’s as unsubjective as possible.... The point — it doesn’t exist in the world.”¹¹

In the exceedingly superficial and repetitive literature on Agnes Martin there is one arresting exception. It is a careful phenomenological reading by a critic named Kasha Linville, in which, for the first and only time, there is a description of what it is actually like to see the paintings, which, she explains, “are sequences of illusions of textures that change as viewing distance changes.”¹²

First there is the close-to reading, in which one is engaged in the work’s facture and drawing, in the details of its materiality in all their sparse precision: the irregular weave of the linen, the thickness and uniformity of the gesso, the touch in the application of the pencilled lines. “Sometimes,” Linville explains,

her line is sharp, as in an early painting, *Flowers in the Wind*, 1963. Sometimes its own shadow softens it — that is, it is drawn once beneath the pigment or gesso and then redrawn on top, as in *The Beach*. Most often, her line respects the canvas grain, skimming

its surface without filling the low places in the fabric so it becomes almost a dotted or broken line at close range. Sometimes she uses pairs of lines that dematerialize as rapidly as the lighter-drawn single ones. As you move back from a canvas like *Mountain II*, 1966, the pairs become single, gray horizontals and then begin to disappear.

But this “moving back” from the matrix of the grids is a crucial second “moment” in the viewing of the work. For here is where the ambiguities of illusion take over from the earlier materiality of a surface redoubled by the weave of Martin’s grids or bands; and it is at this place that the paintings go atmospheric. Again, Linville’s description of this effect is elegant and precise. “I don’t mean ‘atmosphere’ in the spatially illusionistic sense I associate with color field painting,” she writes. “Rather it is a non-radiating, impermeable … mist. It feels like, rather than looks like atmosphere. Somehow, the red lines [she is writing here of a work called *Red Bird*] dematerialize the canvas, making it hazy, velvety. Then, as you step back even further, the painting closes down entirely, becoming completely opaque.”

That opaqueness of the third “moment,” produced by a fully distant, more objective vantage on the work, brackets the atmospheric interval of the middle-distance view, closing it from behind, so to speak. Wall-like and impenetrable, this view now disperses the earlier “atmosphere.” And this final result, as Linville again writes on Martin, is “to make her paintings impermeable, immovable as stone.”

The “abstract sublime” consideration of Martin’s art, never so careful or accurate as this one, implies that atmosphere or light are a given of the paintings, which, like a certain kind of landscape subject — clouds, sea, fields — can simply be observed from any vantage one might take on them. The landscape subject, no matter how reduced or abstracted, simply defines the work as an objective attribute of it, like the color blue, or red. But Linville’s three distances make it clear that /atmosphere/ is an effect set within a system in which an opposite effect is also at work, and that it both defines and is defined by that opposite.¹³ Linville’s three distances, that is, transform the experience from an intuition into a system, and convert *atmosphere* from a signified (the content of an image) into a signifier — /atmosphere/ — the open members of a differential series: wall/mist; weave/cloud; closed/open; form/formless.

By a curious coincidence, it was just when Linville was noticing Martin’s production of the three distances that Hubert Damisch was completing his study *Théorie du /nuage/*, a book that rewrites the history of Renaissance and Baroque painting according to a system in which the signifier /cloud/ plays a major, foundational role.¹⁴ This role, which is that of a “remainder” — the thing that cannot be fitted into a system but which, nevertheless, the system needs in order to constitute itself as a system — finds its most perfect illustration in the famous demonstration performed by Filippo Brunelleschi at the opening of the fifteenth century ([fig.1](#)), the demonstration that both invented and supplied the complete theory of perspective.

Having painted the image of the baptistery in Florence on a wooden panel into which a tiny peephole had been drilled at the exact vanishing point of the perspective construction, Brunelleschi devised an apparatus for viewing this image. Its reverse side would be placed against the brow of the observer, whose eye, right at the peephole, would gaze through the panel, while in front of the panel, the observer would hold up a mirror at arm's length. The depicted baptistery, reflected in this mirror, would thus be guaranteed a "correct" viewing according to the theory of perspective's legitimate construction, in which the vanishing point and viewing point must be geometrically synonymous. In this sense, the representation is the function not of one but of two constructed planes: that of the "viewer" (stationary, mono-ocular) and that of the display (constructed in terms of measurable bodies deployed in space, thus capable of being submitted to the determination of geometry).

But between those two planes of the perspective apparatus something was necessarily added, slipped into the construction as though it were a measurable, definable body, but which gave the lie, nonetheless, to this very possibility of definition. This something was the /cloud/. For the sky above the baptistery on Brunelleschi's panel was not depicted in paint; rather the area given over to it was executed in silver leaf so that, acting as a mirror, it would capture the reflections of the real sky passing over the head of the viewer staring into the optical box of the perspective construction.

Perspective was thus understood from the first to be a matter of architectonics, of a structure built from delimited bodies standing in a specific space and possessing a contour defined by lines. The immeasurability and ubiquity of the sky, however, and the unanalyzable surfacelessness of the clouds render these things fundamentally unknowable by the perspective order. "The process to which Brunelleschi had recourse for 'showing' the sky," Damisch writes,

this way of mirroring that he inserted into the pictorial field like a piece of marquetry and onto which the sky and its clouds were captured, this mirror is thus much more than a subterfuge. It has the value of an epistemological emblem ... to the extent that it reveals the limitations of the perspective code, for which the demonstration furnishes the complete theory. It makes perspective appear as a structure of exclusions, whose coherence is founded on a series of refusals that nonetheless must make a place, as the background onto which it is printed, for the very thing it excludes from its order.¹⁵

It is in this sense that painting understands its scientific aspirations — toward measurement, toward the probing of bodies, toward exact knowledge — as always being limited or conditioned by the unformed, which is unknowable and unrepresentable. And if the /architectural/ came to symbolize the reach of the artist's "knowledge," the /cloud/ operated as the lack in the center of that knowledge, the outside that joins the inside in order to constitute it as an inside.

Thus, before being a thematic element — functioning in the moral and allegorical sphere as a registration of miraculous vision, or of ascension, or as the opening onto divine space; or in the psychological sphere as an index of desire, fantasy, hallucination; or, for that matter, before being a visual integer, the image of vaporousness, instability, movement — the /cloud/ is a differential marker in a semiological system. This can be seen, for example, in the extent to which cloud elements are interchangeable within the repertory of religious imagery. “The fact that an object can thus be substituted for another in the economy of the sacred visual text,” Damisch writes, “this fact is instructive: the /cloud/ has no meaning that can be properly assigned to it; it has no other value than that which comes to it from those serial relations of opposition and substitution that it entertains with the other elements of the system.”¹⁶

Meaning, according to this argument, is then a function of a system that underpins and produces it, a system — /cloud/ versus /built, definable space/ — with its own autonomy, that of painting, which precedes the specifics of either theme or image.

Autonomy, of course, has come by now to have indescribably bad associations; like formalism, it is thought to be the blinkered product of ideological construction. Yet much art has been produced within this ideology and in relation to a conception of autonomy; and the rush to move beyond the circumscribed aesthetic sphere to the *hors-texte*, the context, the legitimating “real” text, often produces superficial readings, as in the case of leaching out Agnes Martin’s painting into the concealed landscapes of the “abstract sublime.”

But if we allow ourselves for a moment to entertain this transgressive thought of autonomy, we come upon a position, itself the founding moment of art history as a discipline, that sets up, along with Damisch’s, a model for Agnes Martin’s three distances. This is the work Alois Riegl developed over the course of his *Stillfragen* (1893) and *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* (1901), studies that fend off all hypotheses about the putative effect of external factors on art’s development — whether in the material field, as in Gottfried Semper’s theories of art’s genesis out of building practices; or in the field of the “real,” as theories of mimesis would have it; or due to the contingencies of history, as the “barbaric invasions” explanation of the supposed decline in late Roman art would imply. Instead, Riegl posits an entirely internal or autonomous evolution, one that continues without gap or deflection from the most ancient civilizations of the Near East up through Byzantium.

This evolution, “dialectic” in nature, arises from the desire, externalized via art, to grasp things in the most objective way possible, untainted, that is, by the merely happenstance and contingent vantage point of the viewing subject. But in acknowledging the object in terms of almost any level of sculptural relief (that is, in promoting an experience of its tactility), shadow is necessarily admitted into the confines of the object — shadow which, marking the position of the spectator rela-

tive to the object, is the very index of subjectivity. “The art of antiquity,” Riegl wrote, “which sought as much as possible to enclose the figures in objective, tactile borders, accordingly was bound from the very beginning to include a subjective, optical element; this, however, gave rise to a contradiction, the resolution of which was to pose a problem. Every attempt to solve this problem led in turn to a new problem, which was handed down to the next period, and one might well say that the entire art history of the ancient world consists of a developmental chain made up of such problems and their solutions.”¹⁷

The development Riegl charts goes from what he calls the haptic objectivism of the Greeks — the delineation of the clarity of the object through an appeal to, and a stimulation of, the tactile associations of the viewer — to the optical objectivism of Roman art, in which the need to set the figure up in space as radically free-standing led to the projection of the rear side of the body and hence the use of the drill to excavate the relief plane. It arrives finally at the most extreme moment of this opticalism carried out in the service of the object. When the relief plane itself becomes the “object” whose unity must be preserved, this leads, in examples Riegl drew on from late Roman decorative arts, to the construction of the object itself in terms of a kind of moiré effect, with a constant oscillation between figure and ground depending — and here is where this begins to get interesting for Agnes Martin — on where the viewer happens to be standing. Writing that now “the ground is the interface,” Riegl describes the fully optical play of this phenomenon once what had formerly been background emerges as *object*: “The relationship of the bronze buckle alters with each movement of its wearer; what was just now the light-side can become at the next moment shadow-side.”¹⁸

Since this figure/ground fluctuation varies with the stance of the viewer, one might argue that the object, now fully dependent upon its perceiver, has become entirely subjectivized. And indeed, although Riegl argues that this development ultimately gave rise to the subjective as a newly autonomous problem for the history of art, one that would fulfill itself in the efforts, for example, of seventeenth-century Dutch portraitists to portray something as non-objective as states of attention, he does not read this late Roman moment as itself subjective. Rather, he wants to argue, with this optical glitter organized into the very weft of the object, that it is the subject-viewer who has been fractured, having now been deprived of the security of a unitary vantage. This is still the *Kunstwollen* of objectivism at work, but in the highest throes of its dialectical development. The filigrees of late Roman relief, far from being a regression to a more ancient or barbaric linearism, are the sublation of this aesthetic problem. “The screw of time has seemingly turned all the way back to its old position,” Riegl writes, “yet in reality it has ended up one full turn higher.”¹⁹

Agnes Martin’s claim to be a classical artist — along with the full complement of Egyptians, Greeks, and Copts who make up Riegl’s objectivist *Kunstwollen* — has

been in the main disbelieved by her interpreters. How can her interest in formlessness, it is argued, be reconciled with such a claim, given classicism's complete commitment to form? When Martin observes, approvingly, "You wouldn't think of form by the ocean," or when she says that her work is about "merging, about formlessness, breaking down form," this is thought to underwrite the idea that she has transcended classicism for a newly ardent and romantic attitude toward the sublime.

Yet let us take Martin at her word and allow her her affiliations to a classicism that, in Riegl's terms, would commit her to an objectivist vision, no matter how optimally fractured, and to a place within a development internal to the system of art, a system within which the marker /cloud/ has a foundational role to play.

This objectivism, unfolding within the twentieth century, would itself have to be seamed into the fully subjectivist project that was put in place following the Renaissance, a Cartesian project that has only intensified steadily into the present. Except that at the beginning of the century, modernist painting opened up, within an ever growing dependence of the work on the phenomenology of seeing (and thus on the subject), what we could call an "objectivist opticality," namely, an attempt to discover — at the level of pure abstraction — the objective conditions, or the logical grounds of possibility, for the purely subjective phenomenon of vision itself.

It is in this context that the grid achieves its historical importance: as the transformer that moved painting from the subjective experience of the empirical field to the internal grounds of what could be called subjectivity as such, subjectivity now construed as a logic. Because the grid not only displays perfectly the conditions of what could be called the *visual* — the simultaneity of vision's grasp of its field dissolving the spatial (tactile) separation of figure against ground into the continuous immediacy of a purely optical spread — but also repeats the original, antique terms of a desire for objectivity and extreme clarity. Like the Egyptian relief, the grid both enforces a shadowless linearity and is projected as though seen from no vantage at all. At least this is so in what could be called the classical period of the modernist grid, for which Piet Mondrian would stand as the prime figure.

Let us say further that this attempt to grasp the logical conditions of vision was, like the dialectic of the ancient drive toward the utterly independent object, continually forced to include its opposite. For as the grid came to coincide more and more closely with its material support and to begin to actually depict the warp and weft of textiles (Anni Albers's work is a case in point), this supposed "logic of vision" became infected by the tactile. Two of the possible outcomes of this tactilization of what I've been calling an "objectivist opticality" are: first, to materialize the grid itself, as when Ellsworth Kelly constructs the network of *Colors for a Large Wall* out of sixty-four separate canvases (nonetheless retaining the optical or the indefinite in the form of chance); or, second, to make the optical a function of the tactile

(kinesthetic) field of its viewer, that is to say, the succession of those viewing distances the observer might assume. This latter is the case with Agnes Martin. And in her work it also remains clear that the optical, here marked as /cloud/ emerges within a system defined by being bracketed by its two materialist and tactile counterterms: the fabric of the grid in the near position and the wall-like stele of the impassive, perfectly square panel in the distant view. It is this closed system, taken as a whole, which preserves — like the moiré belt buckle — the drive toward the “objective,” which is to say the fundamental classicism of its *Kunstwollen*.

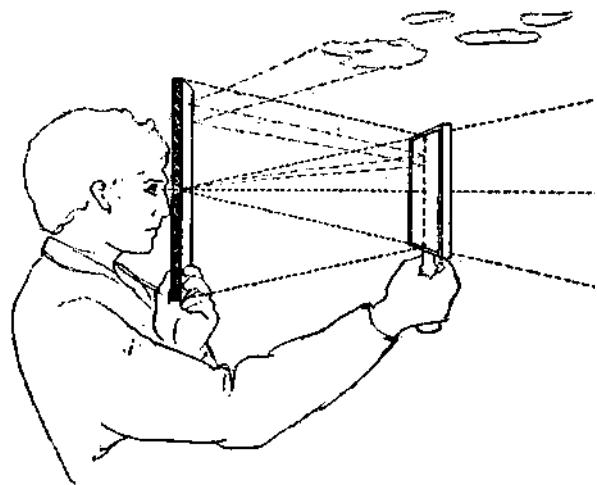
To say all of this is, of course, impossibly outmoded, formalist, determinist, empty. But the /cloud/ remains bracketed within its peculiar system; and it is what Agnes Martin painted for these last thirty years. She destroyed all the rest.

Whether it is accurate or relevant to read the Barcelona Pavilion in terms of the /cloud/, I leave to far more astute analysts of architecture than myself. But should it be, I would say that this interpretation would not necessarily write an end to a conception of the work within the terms of aesthetic autonomy; rather, I would argue, it reinforces it. Untimeliness is not achieved quite so easily.

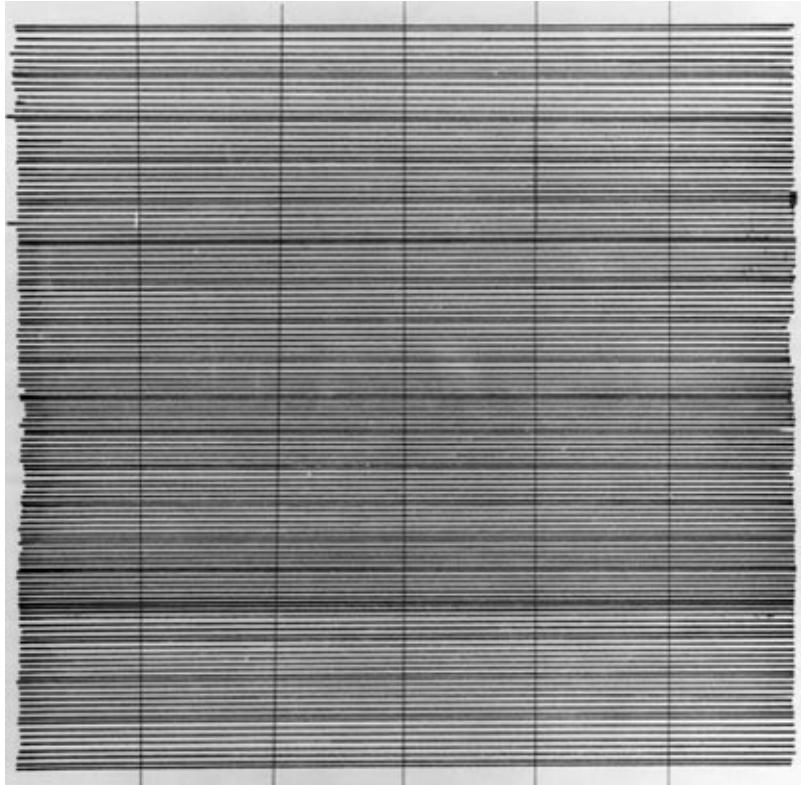
Notes

1. See my analyses of Minimalism in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977) and *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985). Also see Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism," in *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art* (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1986).
2. K. Michael Hays, "Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form," *Perspecta* 21 (1984), p. 20.
3. José Quetglas, "Fear of Glass: The Barcelona Pavilion," ed. Beatriz Colomina, *Architecture Reproduction* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), pp. 130, 135; Quetglas and Hays ("Critical Architecture," p. 24) use the word "labyrinth." See also Robin Evans, "Mies van der Rohe's Paradoxical Symmetries," *AA Files*, vol. 19 (Spring 1990).
4. Hays, p. 15.
5. Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió, "From Autonomy to Untimeliness," *ANYone*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).
6. Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 309.
7. This reading was initially developed for the catalog of the Agnes Martin retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art, November 1992. What follows is adapted from my essay there.
8. Lawrence Alloway, in *Agnes Martin*, exhibition catalog (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1973), reprinted as "'Formlessness Breaking Down Form': The Paintings of Agnes Martin," *Studio International* 85 (February 1973), p. 62.
9. Carter Ratcliff, "Agnes Martin and the 'Artificial Infinite,'" *Art News* 72 (May 1973), pp. 26–27. For other discussions of Martin's work in relation to the abstract sublime, see Thomas McEvilley, "Grey Geese Descending: The Art of Agnes Martin," *Artforum* 25 (Summer 1987), pp. 94–99; and for her general placement within the category see Jean-François Lyotard, "Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime," *Artforum* 20 (April 1982), and "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," *Artforum* 22 (April 1984).
10. Robert Rosenblum's "The Abstract Sublime," *Art News* 59 (February 1961), in which such comparisons are made for Pollock and Rothko, laid the foundation for later discussions in this vein.
11. Dieter Schwarz, ed., *Agnes Martin: Writings/Schriften* (Winterthur: Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 1992), pp. 15, 37.
12. Kasha Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 9 (June 1971), p. 72.
13. In the formal notation of semiological analysis, the placement of a word between slashes indicates that it is being considered in its function as signifier — in terms, that is, of its condition within a differential, oppositional system — and thus bracketed off from its "content" or signified.
14. Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du /nuage/* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1972).
15. Damisch, pp. 170–71.
16. Damisch, p. 69.

17. Alois Riegl, "Late Roman or Oriental?" ed. Gert Schiff, *Readings in German Art History*, (New York: Continuum, 1988), pp. 181–82.
18. Quoted in Barbara Harlow, "Riegl's Image of Late Roman Art Industry," *Glyph*, no. 3 (1978), p. 127.
19. Riegl, p. 187.



1. Reconstruction of Brunelleschi's
first experience of perspectival
representation.

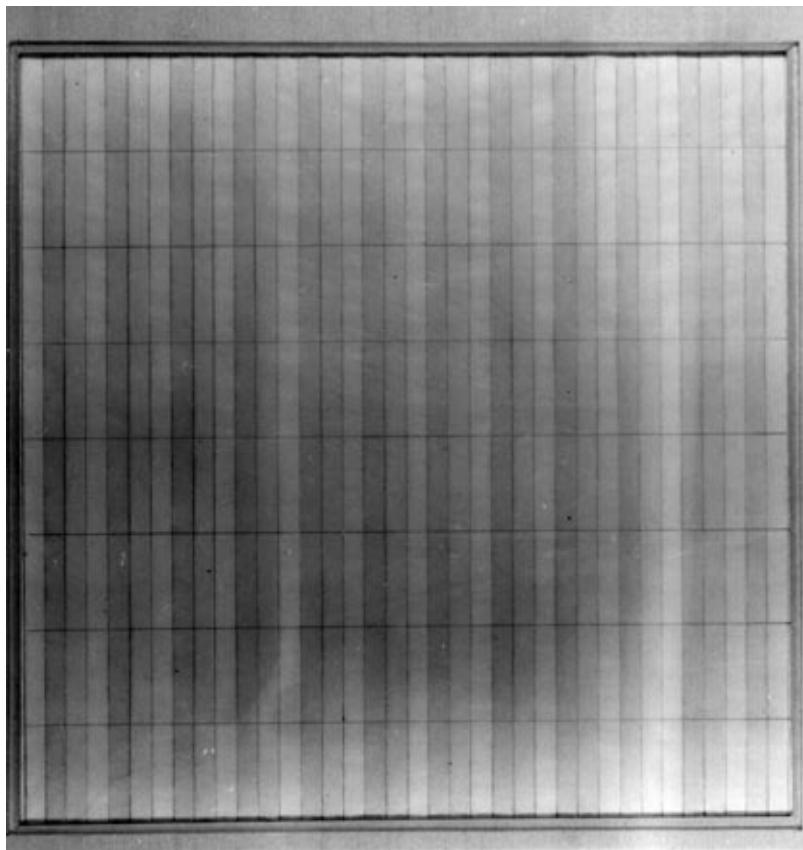


2. Agnes Martin,

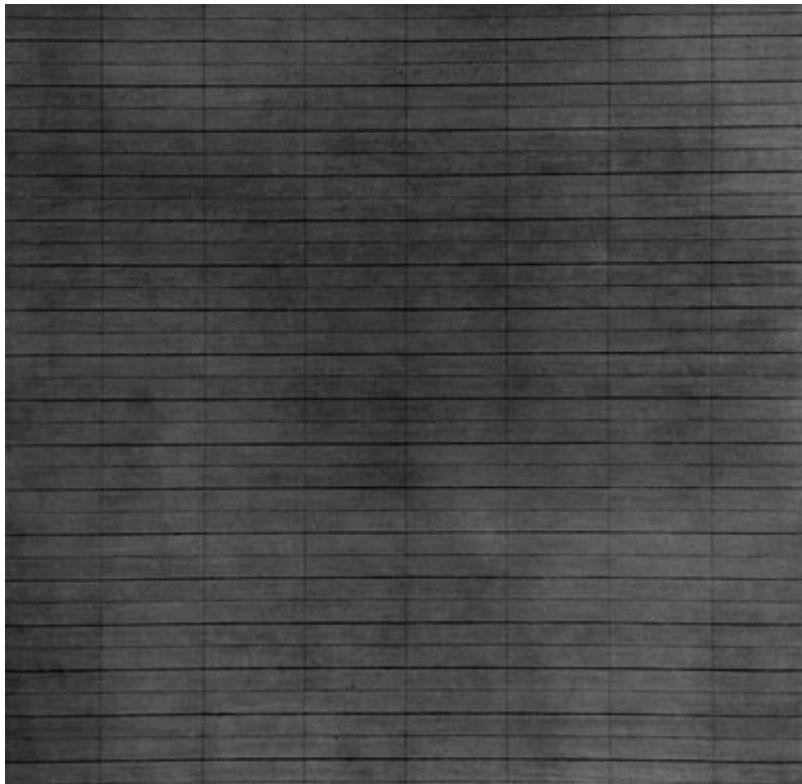
Untitled, 1961.

Black ink on paper.

8½" x 8½".



3. Agnes Martin,
Untitled, 1977.
Watercolor and graphite on paper.
9" x 9".



4. Agnes Martin,
Untitled #4, 1977.
India ink, graphite & gesso on canvas.
6' x 6'.

**George Baird
Brian Boigon
Beatriz Colomina
Rebecca Comay
K. Michael Hays
Dan Hoffman
Rosalind Krauss
Sanford Kwinter
Phyllis Lambert
Detlef Mertins
Fritz Neumeyer
Ben Nicholson
Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió**

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