

BEFORE PICTURES



DOUGLAS CRIMP

Douglas Crimp is the rare art critic whose work profoundly influenced a generation of artists. He is best known for his work with the Pictures Generation—the very name of which Crimp coined to define the work of artists like Robert Longo and Cindy Sherman who appropriated images from mass culture to carry out a subversive critique. But while his influence is widely recognized, we know little about Crimp's own formative experiences before 1977, when he organized the exhibition *Pictures*.

Before Pictures tells the story of Crimp's life as a young gay man and art critic in New York City from the late 1960s through the turbulent 1970s. Crimp participated in all of what made the city so stimulating in that vibrant decade. The details of his professional and personal life are interwoven with the particularly rich history of New York City at that time, producing a vivid portrait of both the critic and his adopted city. The book begins with his escape from his hometown in Idaho, and we quickly find Crimp writing criticism for *Art News* while working at the Guggenheim—where, as a young curatorial assistant, he was one of the few to see Daniel Buren's *Painting–Sculpture* before it was removed amid cries of institutional censorship. We also travel to the Chelsea Hotel (where Crimp helped the down-on-his-luck couturier Charles James organize his papers) through to his days as a cinephile and balletomane to editing the art journal *October*. As he was developing his reputation as a critic, he was also partaking of New York night life, from drugs and late nights alongside the Warhol crowd at Max's Kansas City to discos, roller-skating, and casual sex with famous (and not-so-famous) men. As AIDS began to ravage the closely linked art and gay communities, Crimp turned his attention to activism.

Part autobiography and part cultural history, *Before Pictures* is a courageous account of an exceptional period in both Crimp's life and the life of New York City. At the same time, it offers a deeply personal and engaging point of entry into important issues in contemporary art.



B E F O R E P I C T U R E S

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"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol

Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics

On the Museum's Ruins

BEFORE PICTURES

DOUGLAS CRIMP

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BEFORE PICTURES



Lake Coeur d'Alene from Fernan Hill, Crimp family snapshot

FRONT ROOM, BACK ROOM

GROWING UP IN COEUR D'ALENE, IDAHO, a small town as notorious for its xenophobia as renowned for its natural beauty, made me want to live in a big city even before I'd seen one. An anecdote about a visit to my family in the summer of 1996 might give you some idea of my experience of my hometown—and of just how infinitesimal the small can be in what Freud called the narcissism of small differences. Since a love of cooking was one of the few things my mother and I still had in common, our first day together began with a trip to the supermarket. Sometime after we got back home and put away the groceries, my stepfather opened the refrigerator and, surveying its contents, bellowed, "What is this grapefruit juice doing here? We drink orange juice in this house!" His pronouncement is seared into my memory because I had recently started taking an experimental antiviral medication for HIV that made orange juice taste strange, and, given how tense and distant my relationship with my parents was, I wasn't about to tell them why I'd switched my juice preference.

But I want to be fair. My stepfather was representative only of the most narrow-minded Republican majority in northern Idaho, the people who give the place a bad name. Coeur d'Alene has appeared all too frequently in the national news and rarely in a good light. Nearby Hayden Lake was home to the Aryan Nations, the Christian white-supremacist organization whose nefarious activities were finally brought to a halt when the Southern Poverty Law Center won a \$6.3 million lawsuit against it in 2000. In the 1990s, far-right militia members succeeded in convincing United States representative from Idaho Helen Chenoweth that the state was under threat of a military takeover by the federal government under the pretense of enforcing the Endangered Species Act, and Chenoweth became a national laughingstock when she publicly claimed that the federal government's "black helicopters" were menacing Idaho. Conspiracy theories also swirled around the Ruby Ridge standoff, when US Marshals recklessly opened fire on a compound

of survivalists near Bonners Ferry, killing two of them. None of these things actually happened in Coeur d'Alene, but press reports were usually datelined there because the town is home to a newspaper publishing company.

There is another side of Coeur d'Alene that deserves to be known, though, and in which I take personal pride. In 2002, my sister, Sandi Bloem, was elected the city's mayor and went on to win two more terms. (Unlike New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg, whose twelve-year tenure she shared, she didn't have to repeal a term-limits law to run for a third term, nor did she have to spend \$183 per vote in order to win the election.) Sandi used her office for a number of progressive initiatives and public works: an LGBT antidiscrimination ordinance, a new public library that increased local library use by nearly 100 percent, a spectacular \$80 million community center, and acres of new parkland, including her crowning achievement, McEuen Park. Nestled between Lake Coeur d'Alene, Tubbs Hill, and downtown Coeur d'Alene where there had been an underused baseball field, a parking lot, and a boat launch, there is now a fifteen-acre park that includes basketball and tennis courts, a children's playground and splash pad, seating areas overlooking the lake, a dog run, and even a nesting platform for ospreys. There's more parking than before, but it is below grade and invisible. Still, in a place where private property is sacrosanct and spending tax dollars for anything with the word *public* attached to it is anathema, Sandi had to fight tooth and nail. It might seem a clear improvement to have a park instead of a parking lot next to its main tourist attraction, the lake for which the city is known, but the fact that Sandi was required to break a tie on every vote on the project that came before the city council led to a local Tea Party–organized recall attempt. It fortunately failed but left her scarred by its viciousness.

I escaped Coeur d'Alene in 1962 by going to college as far away as possible in every respect. I went to school in New Orleans, which had a different culture, a different cuisine, a totally different racial mix, and different attitudes about morality. Within a year or two of enrolling at the Tulane School of Architecture, I went to my first gay bar and had my first postpuberty sexual experience. The bars I frequented weren't gay bars as such. They were sailors' bars on Decatur Street, which stretched along the river in the French Quarter. The one I most often patronized was the Acropolis, a Greek bar where sailors danced the hasapiko. The crowd there also included prostitutes,

transvestites, the occasional tourist, and a group of us from the art school at Sophie Newcomb College. (Like those of a lot of universities at that time, Tulane's art department was located in its sister college.) The occasion I remember best at the Acropolis was a conversation I had there with some regulars, a pair of tough-as-nails drag queens—dockworkers who looked the part in every respect but their carefully coiffed DAs and heavy face makeup. I asked them how they managed to get along with the other dockworkers. "No problem, honey," one of them answered. "We work at the gay dock."

The professor who made me realize that I wanted to study art history rather than architecture was Bernard Lemann, who grew up in Donaldsonville, a small town about three-quarters of the way up the Mississippi River to Baton Rouge. Bernie was a Jewish Quaker, a conscientious objector during World War II, and a spectacularly flitty homosexual whose lectures on architectural history were met with ridicule by my fellow architecture students. I loved his lectures. I especially loved seeing the lantern-slide images he used to accompany them. Where I grew up, there were only two historic buildings: Fort Sherman Chapel, built in 1880 and located in Coeur d'Alene City Park (yes, General William Tecumseh Sherman, a distant relative of my maternal grandmother, marched through Coeur d'Alene, too), and, twenty-some miles east of Coeur d'Alene, the Cataldo Mission, Idaho's oldest standing structure, built in the 1850s by Jesuits to bring the Good Word to the Coeur d'Alene Indian tribe.¹ In Dr. Lemann's class I was introduced to the temples of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance palazzi, and more. Surrounding me in the city I was now living in were buildings that referenced them, classical and Gothic revival houses in the Garden District and even an Egyptian revival police station on Rousseau Street.

Bernie was married to Jane, a mustachioed dyke and a Quaker like her husband. The two of them volunteered at Orleans Parish Prison, then as now one of the worst prisons in the US. Because I stayed on in New Orleans for Thanksgiving break when most students went home, Bernie and Jane invited me to dinner, where the other two guests were ex-cons they'd worked with at the prison. One of them, rough-trade handsome, discreetly flirted with me during dinner and then invited me to drive downtown with him to the Café du Monde for after-dinner coffee. In those days, the Café du Monde wasn't only a tourist spot. Open twenty-four hours a day, it was

a local institution, where everybody went to get the best chicory coffee and fresh hot beignets in town. And I do mean everybody. Tulane students on study breaks hobnobbed with French Quarter bohemians and partygoers in formal dress at 2 a.m. And, certainly, the occasional tourist stopped by the Café du Monde in the afternoon, along with the fishmongers from the municipal market closing shop for the day and the Royal Street antiques dealers on coffee break.

On the way down to the French Quarter, my new companion and I stopped at my place on General Pershing Street just off Freret—I guess I'd forgotten my wallet or needed a sweater—and as soon as we got into my bedroom we started making out. My body suddenly rubbed up against something hard but not in the likely place; this was on his left side, just below the chest. I drew back. "Oh, sorry," he said as he opened his jacket, "I should have taken it off. I work as a guard at the prison now, so I wear this." What I'd bumped up against was a pistol in a shoulder holster. He unstrapped the holster and threw it on the bed. I regained my composure . . . and my excitement.

I began reading my first overtly homosexual literature around this time, perhaps not surprisingly that of Jean Genet in the translations by Bernard Frechtman that Grove Press had just begun publishing. It made an indelible impression, or perhaps I should say that Genet's writing organized my experiences of ex-cons, sex, sailors, drag queens, and the seedy district of the city into a usable narrative. My ideal city will always be in some sense an amalgam of the Montmartre of *Our Lady of the Flowers*, the Barrio Chino of *The Thief's Journal*, and the French Quarter of New Orleans during my college years, before it was Disneyfied for tourists thanks to the circumvention of one of our nation's earliest historic-preservation laws.² I don't mean to say that cities for me are just the tough-guy stuff, interesting only for their dockworker queens and guys packing guns in shoulder holsters. They also include that kindly queer art historian, Dr. Lemann, who literally wept as he showed us demolished examples of Louisiana's neoclassical raised cottages and deplored the replacement of the original wrought-iron balconies in the French Quarter with the Victorian cast-iron ones that became such a cliché.

When I moved to New York in 1967, it took me a while to get my bearings. I thought there would be a version of Decatur Street along the Hudson

River, teeming with sailors, prostitutes, and queers. Only much later did I learn that the Port Authority had systematically destroyed the port of New York—and among the many reasons for doing so was that it had indeed been populated by the sorts of people I imagined, along with ordinary industrial workers and their families occupying Manhattan properties whose value real-estate moguls figured had the potential for enormous profits.³ A few reminders of the past remained: the Keller Bar at the west end of Barrow Street, which was New York's first leather bar, and the Eagle at the west end of Twenty-First Street, originally a longshoremen's pub and then New York's principal leather bar until Chelsea was transformed into an art district in the 1990s. But I wouldn't find these bars for several years. I would have to learn how and where to be queer all over again, since being queer is a matter of a world you inhabit, not something you simply are.

I was luckier in connecting with the art world. I arrived in New York in the company of friends from college, a young married couple, Martha and Johann Bultman. At eighteen, Martha had become pregnant, so, in the expression of the day, she and Johann "had to get married." The Bultman family was originally from New Orleans, but Johann grew up in New York and Provincetown, Massachusetts. His father, Fritz, was an Abstract Expressionist painter, a student of Hans Hofmann, in whose studio Fritz met his future wife, Jeanne, a model and former fan dancer, half a foot taller than her husband and very striking. Although not financially successful as an artist, Fritz was wealthy owing to the family business in New Orleans. The House of Bultman was New Orleans's preeminent funeral parlor, famous for burying Jefferson Davis and Jayne Mansfield. Fritz's sister Muriel lived in the family's raised cottage behind the funeral home at the corner of St. Charles and Louisiana Avenues. The house had a solarium that served as the model for Violet Venable's garden in *Suddenly Last Summer*, Tennessee Williams having been a pal of Fritz's from Provincetown who'd become a family friend. Aunt Vi makes it clear in the play's first line that the garden was the creation of her homosexual son. "Yes, this was Sebastian's garden." It is what we encounter when the curtain opens on the play:

The set may be as unrealistic as the decor of a dramatic ballet. It represents part of a mansion of Victorian Gothic style in the Garden District

of New Orleans on a late afternoon, between late summer and early fall. The interior is blended with a fantastic garden which is more like a tropical jungle, or forest, in the prehistoric age of giant fern-forests when living creatures had flippers turning to limbs and scales to skin. The colors of this jungle-garden are violent, especially since it is steaming with heat after rain. There are massive tree-flowers that suggest organs of a body, torn out, still glistening with undried blood; there are harsh cries and sibilant hissings and thrashing sounds in the garden as if it were inhabited by beasts, serpents and birds, all of savage nature.⁴

In New York, the Bultmans lived in a brownstone on East Ninety-Fifth Street that was chock-full of the kind of art I had read about in art magazines in college: works by Joseph Cornell, Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, and Myron Stout. Fritz also collected furniture made of animal horns, which struck me as every bit as creepy as Sebastian Venable's Venus flytraps.

Jeanne knew of a summer sublet right around the corner on Third Avenue that belonged to the painter Bob Moskowitz and his wife, Hermine. Hermine was one of Abstract Expressionist Jack Tworkov's two daughters; Jack's other daughter, Helen, soon became a friend. Indeed, the Tworkovs became something of a New York family to me during my first decade in New York. I jumped at the opportunity to rent the railroad flat and was happy to find myself living in a small art enclave on the far reaches of the Upper East Side. I soon met Fritz and Jeanne's next-door neighbors, Giorgio Cavallon and Linda Lindeberg, and their upstairs tenant, the poet John Ashbery. Giorgio was a shy sweetheart of a man, extremely handsome, a wonderful painter, a famously good cook, and an inveterate tinkerer on his 1950s brown Thunderbird, under which he was nearly always to be found during that summer of 1967. Also an accomplished artist, Linda made a project of turning me into an art-world insider. I spent hours in their kitchen and garden chatting and drinking the first genuine espresso I'd ever tasted. Giorgio owned an espresso machine purchased in his native Italy and bought his dark-roast coffee beans at one of the several coffee importers in the Italian part of Greenwich Village, which in those days were the only places in New York where you could buy whole beans. I learned to make do with a stovetop espresso pot, but it was a big improvement over the percolator and Hills Bros. coffee that was the norm. When I began looking for a job, Linda got me an appointment with her

friend Kynaston McShine, the curator at the Jewish Museum who had organized the landmark *Primary Structures* exhibition a year earlier. I knew nothing of Minimal art at the time, but through Helen Tworkov I soon met a number of artists of that generation who would become important to me in my career as an art critic—Joan Jonas and Richard Serra especially. I grew so attached to Linda and to living in the neighborhood that at summer's end I rented a tenement floor-through of my own a few blocks north in Spanish Harlem.

After a year or two had passed and my ground-floor apartment had been burglarized a second time, I changed my mind about the desirability of that part of town. It wasn't just the danger of the area that propelled me southward, though. I'd come to realize that the Upper East Side was far from where the action was. Helen had recently relocated to West Twenty-Third Street from her fifth-floor walk-up on East Ninety-Second Street, and when the rear loft adjacent to hers became available I jumped again at that opportunity. Our two lofts together had been her father's studio until Jack bought a building two blocks south; befitting the romantic notion of a painter's garret, each of our six-hundred-square-foot spaces had a large north-facing skylight that extended the ceiling height to nearly twenty feet, making the rooms seem considerably larger than they were.

Helen moved away all too soon. Through me, she met my fellow Tulanian the actor and playwright Jim Strahs, married him, and, since he was dodging the draft during the Vietnam War, moved with him to Toronto. I have a sad but hilarious memento of the wedding reception held at Helen's parents' loft. Walker Evans was a longtime Tworkov family friend, and when Hermine and Bob were married some years earlier in Provincetown, his gift to them was to photograph their wedding. The portfolio he made is exquisite, a boxed set of small, matted, square-format photographs, recognizably Evans's in their straightforward precision. Evans offered to do the same for Helen and Jim, but by this point in his life he'd developed a drinking problem. Also a bit of a lecher, he had eyes during the reception only for a statuesque blond friend of Helen's from Seattle. Every photo Evans shot at the reception was of that blonde—save one that shows Helen about to cut the cake, grimacing at the camera. Helen gave the photograph to me, so now I'm the proud possessor of an original Walker Evans. But I don't think you could call the print vintage. It looks to have been printed at the local drugstore.

Helen's departure left the front loft available, and my college friend Paul Issa sublet it. I'd spent a lot of time in Paul's company since we'd both moved to New York, and sharing the floor on Twenty-Third Street drew us closer. We began going every night to Max's Kansas City, the art bar and restaurant on Park Avenue South near Union Square, where Warhol's Factory had relocated by that time.⁵ Max's had two rooms—a long, narrow one in the front along the length of the bar and a square one in the back dominated by a Dan Flavin sculpture hung above a booth in one corner, bathing the room in fluorescent red. The back room where we always went was the haunt of the latter-day Factory crowd. (Warhol himself didn't go there much after Valerie Solanas shot him in 1968.) At Max's, I met the drag queens of Play-House of the Ridiculous and Paul Morrissey film fame—Jackie Curtis, Candy Darling, and Holly Woodlawn—as well as some of the superstars from the earlier Warhol films, notably Ondine and Taylor Mead. To get to the back room, I had to traverse the front one, where I would see and briefly greet some of the artist-regulars I knew by then. I was always a bit self-conscious about not stopping to spend time with them, but the queer goings-on in the back were what drew me to Max's. I had crushes on some of the superstars who occasionally made the scene, such as Eric Emerson and Joe Dallesandro.⁶ But the main thing was that I loved the charged atmosphere of the place, the wacky characters vying with one another for attention, the fact that you could hang out all night for the price of a single drink or cup of coffee, the cruising.

The front and back rooms at Max's mirrored divisions in the art world that were fairly pronounced in those days, divisions between tough-minded Minimal and Conceptual art and the glam performance scene, between real men and swishes, to use Warhol's word. Of course, we now know that the divisions were not hard and fast, but in those days most artists wanted to keep up a front, even at the supposedly anything-goes—and goes-together—Max's. My own life and aesthetic attitudes reflected the ambivalence and fears that were still operative about homosexuality, about whether art could be a manly enough profession and about what kinds of art qualified as most manly. Women were relegated to secondary roles in both scenes, although a few were venerated in each (Agnes Martin and Eva Hesse in the first, for example; Viva and Patti Smith in the second). As I look back now, it occurs to me that one way I dealt with my

quandary about how to be openly gay in the art world was to devote much of my early writing to women artists—Lynda Benglis, Hanne Darboven, Hesse, Jonas, Martin, Dorothea Rockburne, Pat Steir, and Hannah Wilke. The division represented by Max's front and back rooms—between the art world and the queer world—was one that I would negotiate throughout my first decade living in New York City.



SPANISH HARLEM

104 EAST 98TH STREET, 1967-69



BEFORE PICTURES

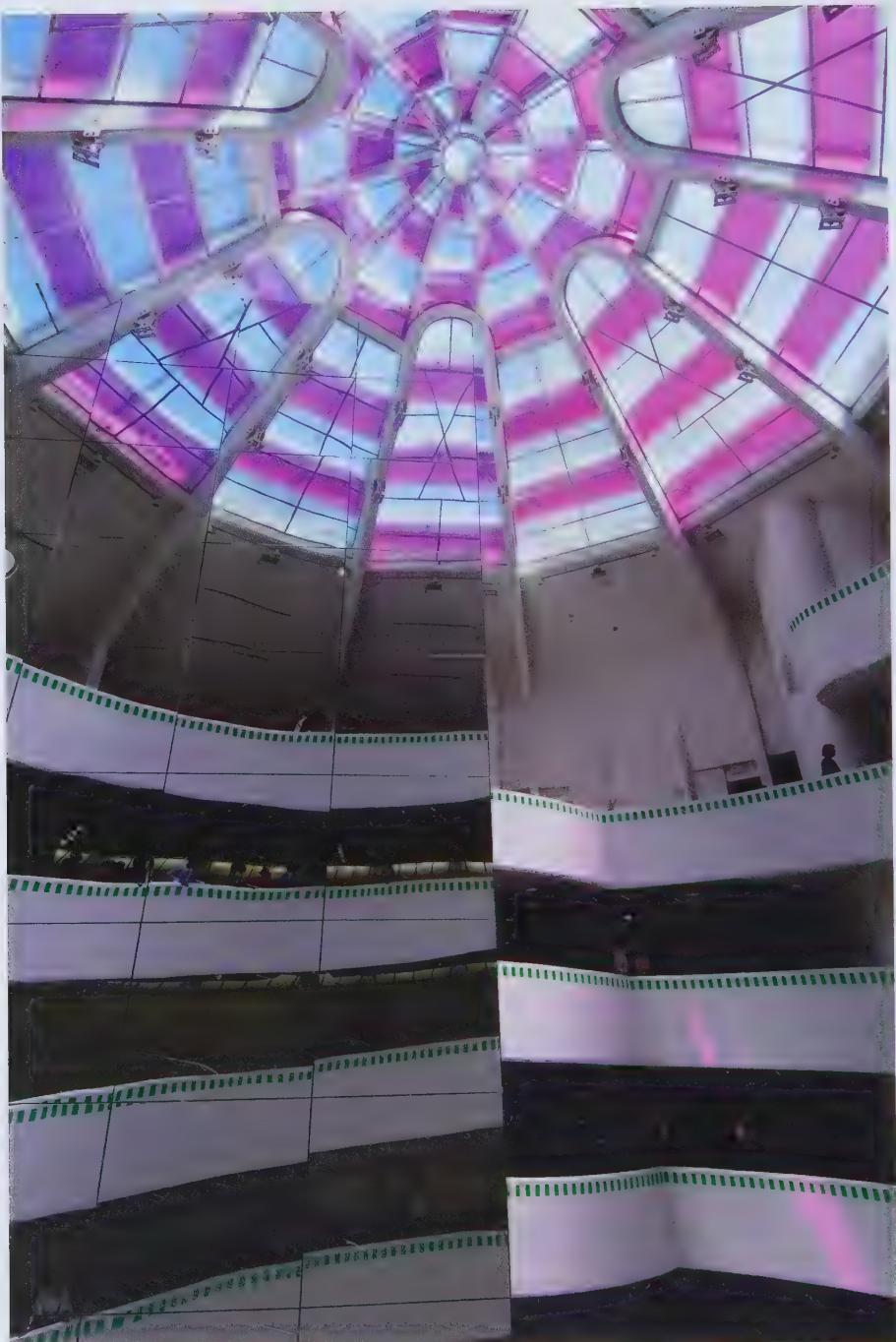


Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Around the Corner* (2000–2005), work in situ, *The Eye of the Storm*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, March 2005. Detail

WAY OUT ON THE NUT

If, by an additional turn of the spiral, some day, most dazzling of all, once every reactive ideology had disappeared, consciousness were finally to become this: the abolition of the manifest and the latent, the appearance and the hidden? If it were asked of analysis not to destroy power (or even to correct or to direct it), but only to decorate it, as an artist?

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, 1977

IN HIS CONVERSATION WITH DANIEL BUREN at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in conjunction with the artist's 2005 exhibition, *The Eye of the Storm: Works in situ by Daniel Buren*, art historian Alexander Alberro raised a question of color: he suggested that Buren's palette seemed very French—related, for example, to Matisse.¹ In his reply, Buren said nothing about Matisse. He did say that color was significant for him, that it directly and purely constitutes the appearance of his work, but he also insisted that the experience of color is subjective and indescribable. "When I say red," he remarked, "I have no idea if the color that I have in my mind is the same as the one that comes to your mind. Even if I say strawberry red or cherry red, I don't know if what I mean means the same to you. Moreover, I don't know if the red I see is the red you see."² Buren also said that, despite how essential color is to his work, he exercises no intentionality or taste in choosing his colors; the particular color he uses in any given situation makes no difference to him. He chose the color of the gels used on the skylight for his work *Around the Corner* (2000–2005), in the Guggenheim's rotunda, simply because that happened to be the color that was available in sufficient quantity when he sought out the material two weeks before the opening of *The Eye of the Storm*.

New York Times art critic Michael Kimmelman described the skylight gels of *Around the Corner* as magenta and the parapet stripes as kelly green.³ I wasn't sure why *kelly* green. Maybe Ellsworth Kelly? I thought: Kelly green,



"Ribbon" evening cape designed by Charles James in 1937. Photo by Horst P. Horst for *Vogue*, March 1, 1940

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Me in an office at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, c. 1970

like International Klein Blue? I looked up *kelly green* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and found that its first recorded appearance in the English language was in 1936, in a *Mademoiselle* magazine ad for sweaters.

So, then, magenta and kelly green. Or just purple and green. A few more examples where this color scheme can be found:

*An ad in *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*.⁴ Buren's green and white stripes translated to limited-edition Illy espresso cups. And a purple Francis Francis espresso machine.

*A photograph of me sitting in an office at the Guggenheim Museum about the time we were preparing the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition of 1970. If you can take your eyes off the gorgeous ass of Ultra Violet on the poster behind me, you can see the colors of my very 1970s fashion choice: purple and green—pale-purple sweater, pale-green corduroy pants.

*And finally, speaking of fashion, a work of couture: a purple and green cabana-striped silk taffeta evening mantle designed in 1937 by Charles James, photographed for *Vogue* by Horst P. Horst.⁵

The question of color and how it matters in the work of Buren raises another, related question—that of design. Classical art history sets color in opposition to design, as, for example, in the contrast between Venetian

and Florentine painting, or the Baroque and the Renaissance. But Buren links color and design through what he calls a “proposition,” or “visual tool,” which consists of, in his words, “a minimum or zero or neutral composition,” and “all colors used, without any order of preference, systematically.”⁶ This reduction—while making it possible to identify “a Buren” by a work’s 8.7-centimeter stripes alternating between a color and white—runs the risk, which Buren openly embraces, of casting the work as decoration. “In all of my *in situ* works,” he writes, “the question of frontier between the decorative and the non-decorative is posed, because the thing that is applied to the wall becomes the wall. Here, one encounters another problem: it would seem to suggest that the wall itself is decorative!”⁷

One aspect of this risk of decoration is revealed as early in Buren’s career as 1971, when Minimalist sculptor Dan Flavin wrote a letter to *Studio International* magazine in an exchange about the last-minute removal of Buren’s work from that year’s Guggenheim International Exhibition, a removal that Flavin is known to have instigated. The final paragraph of Flavin’s letter includes what he would like his readers to believe is an afterthought: “Oh, by the way, weeks after opening day of the International, Bob Morris happened to mention to me that he had heard a curious rumor that *he* had led the artists’ opposition to the French drapery. ‘There will be wars and rumors of wars.’ Ah, but what a beautiful day and the Yankees are winning well in Oakland. It must be a sinister American ‘petit-bourgeois’ ‘imperialist’ plot to please me.”⁸

Thus does Flavin scoff at the Guggenheim’s exclusion of the work by the artist he calls “little Buren” and his own role in it. It is certainly worth highlighting here Flavin’s peculiar means of dismissing Buren’s critique of American imperialism in the International Exhibition in Buren’s own letter to *Studio International* after his work, *Painting–Sculpture*, had been removed.⁹ By inserting the line about “wars and rumors of wars” from the Book of Matthew, Flavin made light of Buren’s charges of imperialism, which seems especially careless at that moment in history; for in doing so Flavin appears to condemn anti-Vietnam War politics as little more than apocalyptic silliness. I am also struck by a different tactic in Flavin’s scornful reproach: his reference to *Painting–Sculpture* as “French drapery.” Curator Alison Gingeras notes, in a contribution to the catalogue of the 2005 Guggenheim exhibition and in a 2002 essay in the journal *Parkett*, the tendency in some

quarters to see Buren's recent work as merely decorative, a critique that fails to recognize an ongoing "decorative strategy" in Buren's work. Such an operation, Gingeras claims, "epitomizes a model of reception . . . that bifurcates artists' careers . . . into an early (pure) phase and a late (decadent) period." (Gingeras cites as an example Benjamin Buchloh's *Artforum* review of the 1997 Skulptur Projekte Münster, in which Buchloh disparages Buren's contribution as "fun-fair decoration.")¹⁰ In Gingeras's view, this critical model holds artists to the terms and standards by which their work was judged in its initial moment of reception, whether or not those terms and standards continue to apply or indeed were even originally appropriate.¹¹ In this, I think Gingeras is right, except that by locating the animus toward Buren's decorativeness only in the work of "moralizing academic critics" that repudiate the artist's later career as decadent, she overlooks the fact that the hostility toward the decorative was as present in his early career as his decorative strategy. And, in my view, Flavin's simultaneous pronouncement of himself a New York Yankees fan secures the precise meaning we are meant to take from his mockery of *Painting–Sculpture*.

Moreover, the vocabulary of scorn for the decorative continues in the present not only by so-called academic critics but also by journalists such as Kimmelman, who wrote in his *New York Times* review of *The Eye of the Storm*, concerning *Around the Corner*:

There is not much to the work, phenomenologically speaking, beyond the initial, mildly kaleidoscopic effect of its mirrors. The museum's ramps are empty. Alternative planes of the circular skylight are colored with magenta gels, making a kind of checkerboard pattern, at certain times of day the sun splashing patches of purple onto the upper part of the Guggenheim's bobbin. This is pretty. Short kelly-green stripes of tape are stuck below the outside rim of the rotunda's parapet. They too reflect in the mirrors, like sprockets of an unspooled film, or like decorative fronds of ivy over the balconies of a hotel atrium. These are not attractive.¹²

Having damned *Around the Corner* as merely producing effects—some pretty, some unattractive—Kimmelman makes his next predictable move: "For years, Mr. Buren has been a particular darling of art theorists, beloved for what is perceived as his conceptualist élan."¹³ Clearly Kimmelman doesn't much keep up with the "art theorists," for, as we've just seen, at

least some of them have abandoned Buren because, it seems, his élan has trumped what they thought were his initial Conceptual art commitments.

As part of their public programming for *The Eye of the Storm*, the Guggenheim Museum invited me to look back at one moment of that early reception because they knew I had experienced the 1971 Guggenheim International Exhibition firsthand.¹⁴ I gladly accepted their invitation, but I was wary of the implied mandate to tell what “really” happened. Because my subject was, broadly, my memory of first encountering “Conceptual art,” one model I looked to in preparing my presentation was Silvia Kolbowski’s *Inadequate History of Conceptual Art*, an artwork—indeed, a Conceptual artwork—of 1998–99 that complicates contemporary accounts of Conceptual art by, as Rosalyn Deutsche writes in her essay on Kolbowski, “introducing memory—and with it, the unconscious mind—into the writing of history.” The “inadequate” of Kolbowski’s title, Deutsche reminds us,

describes the condition of all cultural histories, since history is a representation of—a narrative about—the past and therefore unequal to reality. It does not correspond to things as they were. And narrativity is inadequate for another reason: it arises from desire, a desire, as Hayden White says, introducing the problem of subjectivity into the writing of history, “to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary.”¹⁵

I often tell the story of my first job in New York. I had come to the city in 1968, after graduating from college with a degree in art history. I set out one day from my Spanish Harlem apartment to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where I planned to apply for a job. As I walked down Fifth Avenue from Ninety-Eighth Street near Park Avenue, I came upon the Guggenheim and thought to myself, “Here’s a museum, I might just as well try this one.” I inquired of the first person I encountered in the lobby of what was then the administration wing about applying for a job. His immediate reply, to my surprise, was to ask, “Do you know anything about pre-Columbian Art?” “Yes,” I answered, “I studied it extensively in college.” And so, after little further discussion, I was offered a job. Entirely fortuitously, just at that moment the Guggenheim was getting ready to install a large exhibition of pre-Columbian Peruvian art, but Thomas Messer, the Guggenheim’s director at the time, had quarreled with the show’s guest

WAY OUT ON THE NUT



Opening of *Mastercraftsmen of Ancient Peru*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1968



Garry Winogrand, *Tenth Anniversary Party, Guggenheim Museum, New York*, 1970. Gelatin silver print, 14 x 17 inches

curator, Peruvian textile expert Alan Sawyer, and ordered him out of the museum. Whereupon some eight hundred art objects arrived from Lima, and no one on the Guggenheim staff—all of whom were trained as modernists—knew a Nazca pot from a Moche pot. So it was thought that I might be able to help out with the installation and, afterward, man the visitor-information desk. I subsequently managed to convince the Guggenheim administration that my real field of expertise was modern art, and so I was kept on staff as a curatorial assistant.

I've told this story so many times over the years that I no longer know how much of it is simplified in the interest of narrative design and how much is embellished in the interest of amusement. I certainly remember working on the installation of the exhibition *Mastercraftsmen of Ancient Peru* in fall 1968.¹⁶ More vividly, I remember the black-tie opening, particularly the fact that some of the guests seemed to wish to compete with the exhibit. I was dazzled by socialite Doris Duke's very large ancient Peruvian necklace, and

even more dazzled by seeing art collector Ethel Scull, famous for her portrait by Andy Warhol, who, evidently having no ancient Peruvian jewelry to wear, carried with her a small pillow on which rested a gold jaguar figurine. It was the wrong pre-Columbian culture, but it made an impression—her matching gold-lamé pantaloon jumpsuit all the more so. I remember, too, that Pisco sours, cocktails made with a Peruvian brandy, were served at the opening. Also, the Guggenheim in those days always served giant boiled shrimp as hors d'oeuvres at their gala openings. A year or so into my brief tenure at the museum, a group of us tried unsuccessfully to organize the staff to join a labor union; one of our arguments was that the budget for these private parties was way out of proportion to the budget for the pitifully low staff salaries.

Still, I was pleased to say that I worked at the Guggenheim. It was a famous museum, one of the most famous, because it had a famous building, one of the most famous, and that made my first job seem glamorous. My memory of just how glamorous it felt was rekindled in 1999 when I saw, in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition catalogue for *The Museum as Muse*, a photograph by Garry Winogrand of the Guggenheim's tenth-anniversary party in 1970.¹⁷ You'll have to take it on faith that the blurred fingers on the left edge of Winogrand's picture are mine. I was dancing with the woman in white, whose name is Nicole, and whose port de bras confirms what I remember best about her: that she came to New York from the South of France to study with Martha Graham.

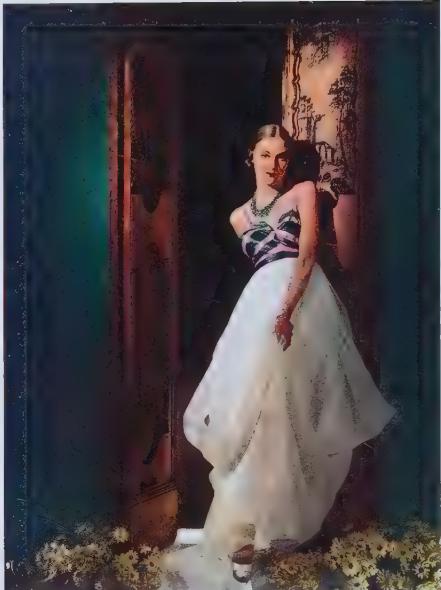
After all these years, I still enjoy telling people the story about my first job in New York, working at the Guggenheim Museum.

But the story isn't true; that is, it isn't true that my first job in New York was working at the Guggenheim. I have another story of my first job in New York, but I tell it more selectively, because it entails a different sort of glamour.

I had left college once before to come to New York—in 1967, before finishing my degree. In what should have been my final semester at Tulane University, I was too worried about being drafted into the military during the Vietnam War to concentrate on my schoolwork. Or, rather, what pre-occupied me was the way I would escape the draft. In order to be classified 4F, "unfit to serve," I told the army at my induction physical that I was gay. That was not so easy in those days. Homosexual acts were still illegal in most



Babe Paley in a 1949 Charles James evening gown
at her home in Long Island, New York. Photo by John Rawlings
for *Vogue*, November 1, 1950



Joan Fontaine in a 1936 Charles James evening dress.
Photo by Horst P. Horst for *Vogue*, June 15, 1937

of the fifty states, and known homosexuals were barred from civil-service jobs of any kind, even working in a post office. Nevertheless, during the war, young men were so desperate to escape the draft that many claimed to be gay whether or not it was true. Consequently, the military required proof in the form of an official letter from a psychiatrist. I thus had to disclose my sexuality to not only the military doctors but also the university psychiatric counselor. Anxiety spoiled what should have been my final semester at Tulane.

So I quit school and moved to New York, where I got my first job. In summer 1967, Charles James hired me to help him organize his papers for the purpose of writing his memoirs.¹⁸ At the time, James was nearly destitute and living in a squalid suite of small rooms at the Chelsea Hotel. My job with him didn't last long at all—in fact, only a couple of weeks. I resented having to do menial tasks like walking his beagle around Chelsea. I wasn't happy that he was slipping amphetamines into my morning coffee. I couldn't tolerate his tantrums. The last straw was his telling me that instead of paying me for my work he would open a charge account for me



Dominique de Menil wearing a 1949 Charles James evening gown, seated on the Butterfly Sofa James designed for her living room. Photo by F. Wilbur Seiders, c. 1951

at Barneys. All told, I just wasn't ready for Charles James. Even so, I love being able to say that my first job in New York was working for him, a story that I tell shamelessly in some circles, circles where it has even greater cachet than saying that my first job in New York was working at the Guggenheim Museum.

But who is Charles James? Charles James is the designer of the purple-and-green evening cape. He is a cult figure in the fashion world, where he is regarded as America's greatest—perhaps only—couturier. He was the subject of the Metropolitan Museum's annual summer Costume Institute exhibition in 2014. James's career spanned the thirties, forties, and fifties. He was the dressmaker of choice for many well-known society women of his era—Babe Paley, Millicent Rogers, Lee Radziwill; for other fashion designers—Coco Chanel, Elsa Schiaparelli; for opera divas Lily Pons and Risë Stevens, ballerinas Alicia Markova and Tamara Karsavina, and movie stars Gloria Swanson, Marlene Dietrich, Jennifer Jones, and even Janet Gaynor, who hardly needed a dress designer, since she was married



Jeanne Bultman modeling her 1959 Charles James coat while Antonio Lopez sketches and Charles James looks on in his Chelsea Hotel studio.
Photo by Bill Cunningham, 1972

to Adrian. James was highly regarded in the art world, which was unusual for a fashion designer; he received praise from Museum of Modern Art director Alfred Barr, and his work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum while he was in his early forties.¹⁹ Artist Lee Krasner and art patron Dominique de Menil were clients. Indeed, James not only made clothes for Mrs. de Menil but also decorated the interior of her modernist house in Houston, designed by Philip Johnson in his early Miesian phase in 1948. James's art-world connections explain my getting a job with him. Another of his clients was my friend Johann's mother, Jeanne Bultman, who knew that James needed an assistant and recommended me.

These people venerated James as both a fashion designer and an artist, a sculptor in cloth. At the beginning of his career, he billed himself as a "sartorial structural architect."²⁰ He was famous for draping fabric directly on his clients' bodies in the initial process of constructing their clothes. Richard Martin, the late curator of the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute, described James's dresses as "monumental sculptures in fabric." A James dress, he wrote, "could very nearly stand on its own, so filled was it with

WAY OUT ON THE NUT



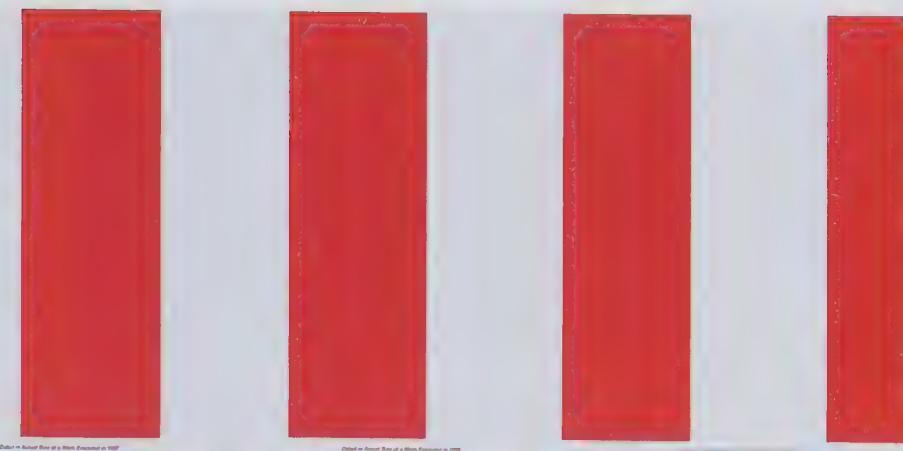
Charles James ball gowns, 1948. Photo by Cecil Beaton for *Vogue*, June 1, 1948

material, but the picturesque effect was that of a dream walking.”²¹ *Bombastic* would be an accurate adjective for many of James’s gowns; the original meaning of its noun form, *bombast*, is “padding for clothes.” In spite of the discrepancy between his work’s bulky structure and gossamer appearance, James was considered by some to be a true modernist; the following recollection from one of James’s clients reads as a wonderful parody of the idea of modernist autonomy in its description of the subject-object relation between a dress and its owner: “He was sometimes so entranced by the shape he was ‘sculpting’ over one’s own shape that when the dress arrived finished it was impossible to get into it. It existed on its own. Much time was then spent in discerning the proper relationship between shapes.”²² I like to picture this scene in the lady’s dressing room: unable to get herself into her new gown, she simply positions herself somewhere near it and contemplates it as the self-reflexive work of art it surely must be. In the face of such transcendent “presentness,” who’s to complain? Or think of oneself? Compare this account with that of Anne, Countess of Rosse, another James client: “But—the wearer if she wanted to enjoy his creations had sometimes to be sacrificed for the designs! To begin with, there could be a mystery as to how to get into the clothes when they arrived! Or which was the front or the back, which he might have altered at the last moment! With some, walking might be difficult—or sitting down tricky! But an appreciative wearer would gladly cooperate.”²³

That modern forms do not necessarily follow function was one of the lessons of the Museum at FIT’s 2004 exhibition *Form Follows Fashion*, which featured James as presiding genius.²⁴ James received the Coty American Fashion Critics Award in 1950, lauded not for the mystery of how—or whether—a dress was to be worn but for the “great mystery of color and artistry of draping.”

With that citation—“great mystery of color and artistry of draping”—I’ll return to Daniel Buren, to the 1971 Guggenheim International, to what Dan Flavin called “French drapery,” to my other first job in New York.

I worked at the Guggenheim Museum from fall 1968 to summer 1971, most of that time as the curatorial assistant to Diane Waldman, one of the two curators of the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition and the curator who decided to remove Buren’s work from the show. As Waldman’s assistant, I dealt with the day-to-day details of many aspects of the exhibition and its catalogue. I remember Buren’s instructions for his contribution to



Daniel Buren, catalogue pages for the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition, 1971

the catalogue, which I carried out. I most likely remember the details well because Buren's contribution was unlike any from the other artists, and it was difficult at first for me to comprehend. The catalogue had a unique design. It was a silver-colored box containing, first, a forty-two-page staple-bound booklet with a preface by Messer; essays by each of the show's curators, Edward Fry and Waldman; a general bibliography; and a number of black-and-white illustrations. Second, it held foldouts, of four, six, or eight pages, for each artist in the show.²⁵ The general scheme for each of these foldouts was a cover page with a brief biography and a photograph of the artist, followed by photographs and drawings of their works, plus an exhibition list and bibliography. The artists had some say in what would be included in their pages. Buren asked the museum to print his usual 8.7-centimeter stripes, red in this case, 8.7 centimeters apart, on the recto and verso of a six-page fold-out. At the bottom of each page, he stipulated that the caption should read: "Detail in Actual Size of a Work Executed in 1966," "Detail in Actual Size of a Work Executed in 1967," and so forth, through 1971. That was all. He wanted no photos or drawings, no biography, exhibition list, or bibliography. Buren's instructions were precise.

I have little doubt that Buren's directives for his work *Painting-Sculpture* were as clear and detailed as were those for his catalogue pages, which would contradict Waldman's allegation in her *Studio International*

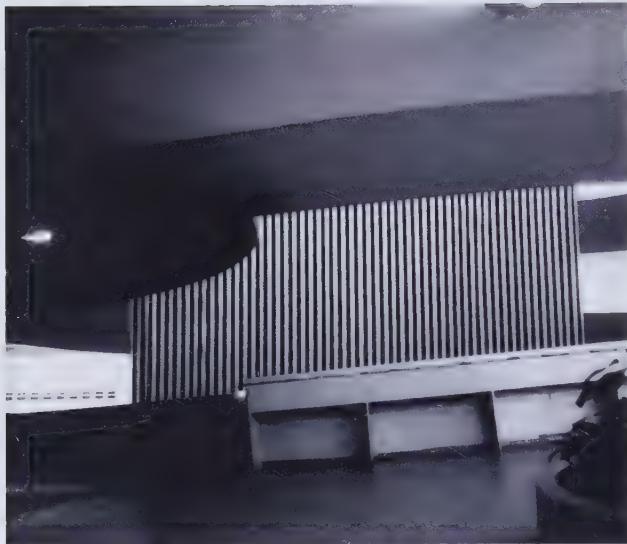


Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Painting-Sculpture*, work in situ,
Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition, Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York, February 1971. Detail

statement, “The Museum Responds,” that Buren had been vague about his intentions until the last minute.²⁶ But I do not have as clear a memory of my dealings with Buren about the work as about his catalogue pages, and I regrettably didn’t take copies of my own files with me when I left the museum the following summer. I do remember the installation of the indoor portion of *Painting–Sculpture* on the day before the opening of the exhibition. (The outdoor portion was never installed.) The complicated rigging that was required to hang the 32-by-64-foot striped canvas from the top of the Frank Lloyd Wright rotunda took almost all day, a day filled with the on-the-spot problem-solving that such large installations entail. But finally in the late afternoon, there it was.

How to describe it? I feel a certain pressure here. I was one of only a few people who actually saw the work. The trouble is, though, that I’ve seen photographs of it, too, over and over again. Buren took a number of what he calls photo-souvenirs on the day the work was installed, and the Guggenheim staff photographers also photographed it; these photographs have been widely published over the years.

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Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Painting-Sculpture*, work in situ, Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, February 1971. Detail. Photo by Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz

Buren's work for the Guggenheim International was what he called a work "in situ," or what we now call site specific. While a number of other artists in the International made or adapted work for particular locations in the museum, only a very few of the works could be characterized as site specific, and none had the site-specific force or meaning that Buren's did. Buren wrote at the time in *Studio International*:

The demonstration I tried to make at the Guggenheim incorporated among other things a certain use of the space which revealed both the place itself and the attraction which diverts attention away from the spiral ramp on which the paintings are hung; the architecture renders what is exhibited obsolete and peripheral. . . . As soon as the architecture appears so powerfully in its own right, the work of art (intended for a cubic, classic, customary setting) disappears. This is what happens with the Guggenheim Museum, and it is for this reason, among others, that any work that brings out this fact . . . creates an unexpected commotion.²⁷

Everyone who saw Buren's banner was astonished by it. Its enormous size and placement in the center of the rotunda exposed—in both senses of the word: it "laid bare" and it "showed off"—Wright's architecture more dramatically than could have been foreseen from drawings and measurements, and in doing so it fully demonstrated what Buren understood as the architecture's subjugation of any work of art that does not contend with it. With Buren's work in place, for example, when you looked down from the museum's upper ramps onto Richard Serra's steel-plate Prop piece *Moe* (1971) on the floor below, it looked like a miniature, a maquette for what, in the context of its more usual placement in a white-cube gallery space, would seem a massive and threateningly precarious work.

The story of what happened next has been often told and is highly contested. No sooner had the work been installed than it was taken down, so that by the time the International opened the following evening, Buren had been ousted from the exhibition. I was sorely disappointed. I had been exhilarated by the work's imposing presence; its absence rendered what was left of the exhibition uninteresting, or perhaps I should say that the loss of Buren's work was all that I could experience. I had worked more directly with Buren than with any other artist in the show, and we had become friends. Without question, my recognition of the implications of this work, delayed and indirect

though it was, reverberated throughout my critical work on contemporary art practices and the institution of the museum during the 1980s.²⁸

Why was the work removed? In his thoroughly researched essay about the event, “The Turn of the Screw,” Alberro locates the censorship of Buren’s work in the context of what he calls a “massive wave of reaction” in American politics in the early 1970s, during which, he argues, the Guggenheim’s administration felt forced to occupy a compromising position within a liberal interpretation of the avant-garde that presented new art as critical only of previous trends in art making, not of the institution of art more broadly. “The museum had erred in interpreting Buren’s proposal,” he claims, because they failed to understand the radical politics that informed his work. This, he continues,

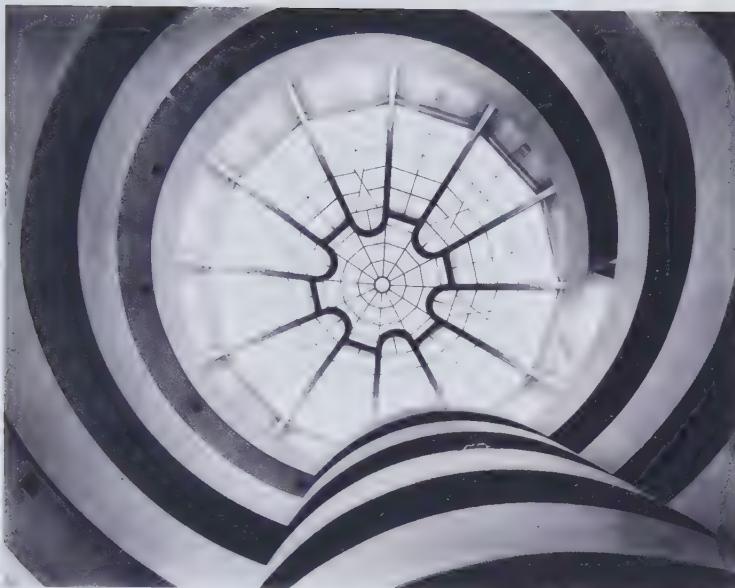
became all too clear when Buren made unequivocal the critique developed by his installation by providing a political language outside of his work. Speaking to *New York Times* reporter Grace Glueck, who had come to preview the International, Buren insisted that he not be referred to as an artist and proclaimed that “both artists and museums in the traditional sense are obsolete.” Inasmuch as in and of themselves the banners at the zero degree of form did not offer any information whatsoever to the viewer, their message was completely overdetermined by the critical metalanguage Buren provided outside the frame of the paintings—a metalanguage that rendered unavoidable not only the installation’s critique of the function of the other works in the show but also its *détournement* of the museum itself. Indeed, it is likely that more than anything else it was this statement, which appeared in the largest daily newspaper in the United States the day before the opening, that led Guggenheim officials to decide that it was in their best interests to censor Buren’s work.²⁹

Alberro’s assertion that it was the political language outside the work that necessitated the Guggenheim’s action separates the meaning of Buren’s work from its material, visual presence and in so doing reduces the meaning of “a zero degree of form” to the purely textual. In this, Alberro repeats the error of many of Buren’s first American critics. In 1973, for example, Roberta Smith wrote, “The work, already nonvisual enough, tends to be a little overwhelmed by [the texts], becoming some kind of illustration for the ideas. . . . Buren is interesting and important for the criticisms he makes, for the discussion he precipitates, but . . . it is a discussion precipitated more by reading than by looking.”³⁰



Rotunda of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1959.
Photo by Ezra Stoller

In “Why Write Texts or The Place from Where I Act,” the preface to his *Five Texts* published in 1973, Buren warned against limiting his work to a concept, or simply to content: “The importance of the texts should not be exaggerated, and the reader should beware of the facility and illusion which they may engender, the facility that would permit one who has read the texts to feel exempt from looking at the painting, thinking them explicit in the texts, and forgetting that the painting explains and inspires the texts.”³¹ In addition to reducing the work to a textual content, Alberro goes much further than Buren when he seeks to amplify the artist’s simple statement, quoted by Glueck in the same *New York Times* story, that the Guggenheim “really kills a piece of art, primarily because it is a work of art itself.”³² Alberro writes that because “the museum is constructed along an extended spiral ramp, the installed works are not spatially distinguished from one another,” which “produces a confusing jumble of signs, resulting in the uniqueness of the spectacular building itself becoming the most



Rotunda of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1959.
Photo by Julius Shulman

significant art work.” Moreover, “the architectural order of the building is essentially authoritarian in nature” because the spiral ramp imposes “sequential perception” that “allows the spectators no real choice as to how they will view the works.” And finally, “The museum is itself a spectacle. The works on exhibit are in constant competition with the grandeur of the omnipresent gaping vortex. This effect is amplified by the Guggenheim’s continually spiraling walls, which, like the curvilinear motion of a whirlpool that is directed toward the center of the axis of rotation, attract the viewer’s eye inward toward the void where the building celebrates itself.”³³

In 1962, during his tenure as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, the beloved New York School poet Frank O’Hara viewed the then relatively new Wright building far more charitably: he wrote,

The other day I was at the Guggenheim Museum to see the Abstract Expressionists and Imagists show again, but before going into the show

itself it may be worthwhile, or at least different, to say something nice about the building itself. From long before construction work started on it, it had been a controversial thing, and it stayed so throughout the work on it, its opening, and its first several shows—every detail of its design was discussed everywhere from the newspaper to The Club, and rumors that its then-director might quit because he hated the floor, or the wall, or the dome, or the lighting, or even the elevator, were circulated. . . . The Museum is, of course, worthy of all this attention, and it has many merits not shared by other institutions of similar or identical nature . . . : it's wonderful looking from the outside, and when you enter the flat exhibition space on the ground floor the effect of the works near at hand, the ramps and over them glimpses of canvases and then the dome, is urbane and charming, like the home of a cultivated and mildly eccentric person.

O'Hara enjoys a downward stroll on the museum's ramp, which for him "is enhanced by the glimpses you've been sneaking . . . at the pictures on the lower ramps, and you get lots of surprises: things that looked especially inviting or dramatic from a partial look turn out to be totally uninteresting and others you hadn't bothered to anticipate are terrific (though the operation isn't invariable)." He also likes the ramp because, in his view, "it almost entirely eliminates the famous gallery-going fatigue." "Anyhow," he concludes this short musing on the museum,

I like the whole experience, the "bins" where you come around a semi-wall and find a masterpiece has had its back to you, the relation between seeing a painting or a sequence of them from across the ramp and then having a decent interval of time and distraction intervene before the close scrutiny: in general my idea is that this may not be (as what is) the ideal museum, but in this instance Frank Lloyd Wright was right in the lovable way that Sophie Tucker was to get her gold tea set, which she described as, "It's way out on the nut for service, but it was my dream!"³⁴

The well-known photographs of Wright's building by such modernist architectural photographers as Ezra Stoller and Julius Shulman seem to want to awaken the architect from his dream by reducing the building to pure, rationalist abstraction. That reduction of modern architecture to abstract iconicity would, in turn, appear to be the subject of Hiroshi Sugimoto's series of photographs of canonical modern buildings, including Wright's Guggenheim Museum. The blur in Sugimoto's pictures makes visible the fact



Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Guggenheim Museum*, 1997.
Gelatin silver print, 58 ¼ x 47 inches

that our images of modern architecture are by now mnemonic, even dreamlike, and in so doing hints at modernist architecture's own unconscious.

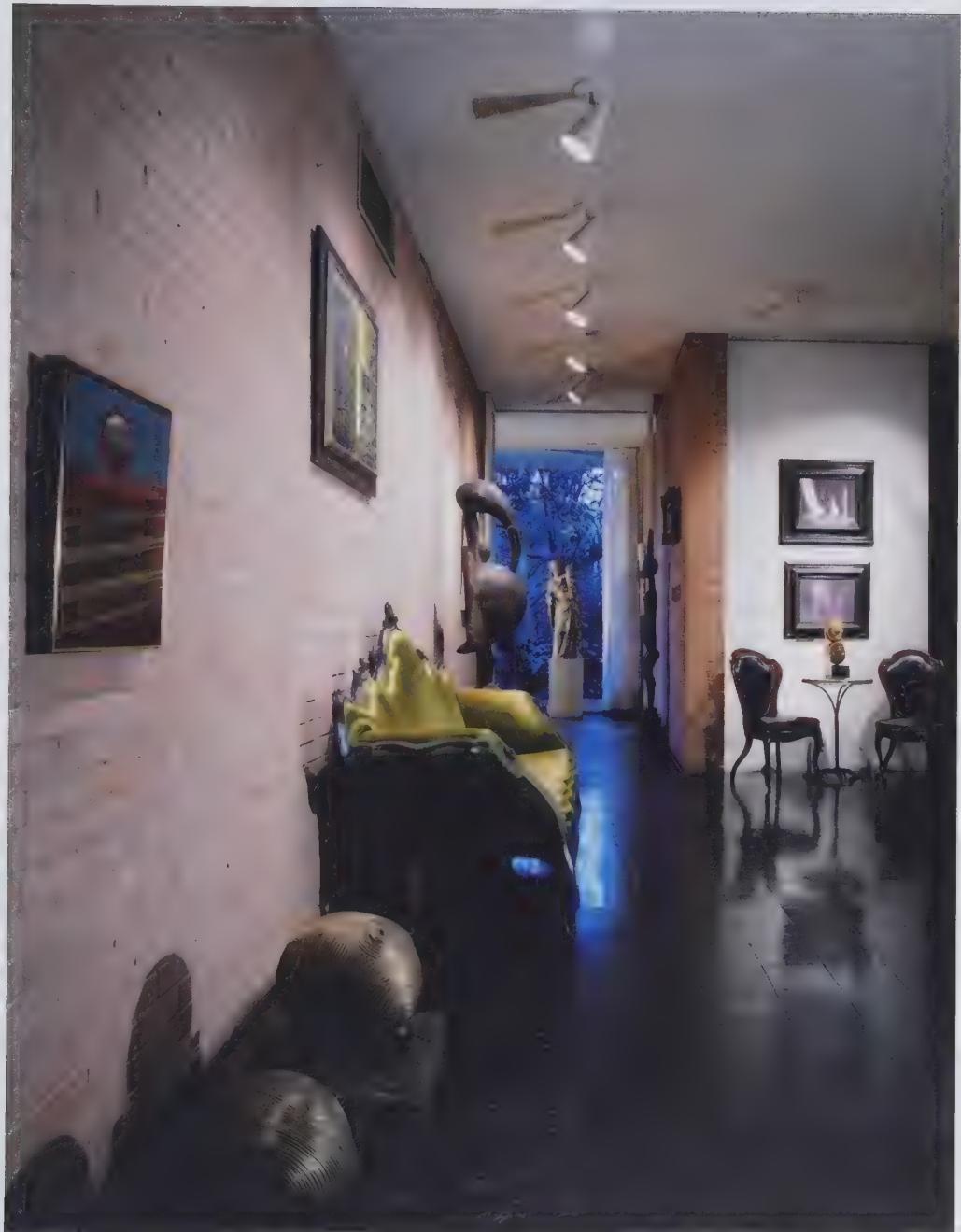
Dare we call it the decorative unconscious? And could this unconscious, produced through a repression of modern architecture's affinity with fashion, as Mark Wigley convincingly shows in his book *White Walls, Designer Dresses*, be what Charles James wished to expose when he undertook the interior decoration of Philip Johnson's residence for the de Menils in 1950?³⁵ James clearly understood the affinity from the other side, having, as noted above, thought of himself as a "sartorial structural architect." Certainly James's design could not have been more perfectly suited to the French-born Houston collectors, whose impeccable taste for the high modern, rooted in their primary devotion to Surrealism, could incorporate a wildly eclectic array of art—from Cycladic figures and Byzantine frescoes

BEFORE PICTURES



Above and right: John and Dominique de Menil's home in Houston with interior design by Charles James

WAY OUT ON THE NUT



to Mark Rothko and Andy Warhol. Johnson's austere modernist house—which appears from the street as a plain cream-colored brick wall punctured only by the small apertures for kitchen windows and the glass-door entrance—is adorned inside with an equivalent eclecticism, but in this case the eclecticism of a flamboyant decorator. As a *New York Times* story on the 2004 restoration of the de Menil house put it,

James swept down from New York prepared to cause a little trouble. He took one look at the plans and insisted that the ceilings be raised 10 inches. He designed and built distinctive new furniture, including an oversize octagonal ottoman and a chaise longue in wrought iron and chartreuse silk.

In an audacious deviation from the white walls prescribed by devout Modernism, James anchored the living room with a striking gray wall and made the hallways vivid pink, crimson, and tobacco.³⁶

The moment you enter you face an acid-green velvet-upholstered Victorian settee, signaling that the furniture throughout will be a hodgepodge of periods, cultures, and styles and include, among James's other creations, his Butterfly Sofa, inspired by Salvador Dalí's 1936 Mae West Lips couch. This is decor gone berserk. If design is crime, as we have been admonished, then this must be a lurid sex crime.³⁷

Of course, Wright was hardly a modernist in the sense that Johnson was at midcentury. Wright polemicized against what he called "the box," never banished ornament, never painted a wall white. The Guggenheim Museum is off-white.³⁸ This great spiral building, commissioned in 1943 from the seventy-six-year-old Wright by what was then the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, capped a long career that began in the nineteenth century. Wright died before the building was completed in 1959.

When Barbara Reise asked Thomas Messer in an interview for *Studio International* following the Buren debacle whether he thought Wright "was possibly forcing some questions upon the character of what a museum, as an institution, could accept or . . . ratify as art," Messer replied, correctly in my estimation, "No. . . . I think he probably had in mind a highly static situation in which a great collection assembled by a particular family would be shown permanently."³⁹

I doubt whether Wright could have understood Reise's question at all, since it is asked from the historical perspective of 1971, a perspective opened



Installation view of Dan Flavin, *untitled (to Tracy, to celebrate the love of a lifetime)*, 1992. Pink, green, blue, yellow, daylight, red, and ultraviolet fluorescent light. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

up by work like Buren's. By 1971, the Guggenheim Museum was rarely used as Wright had expected it would be, as the repository of the "nonobjective" paintings the Baroness Hilla von Rebay, protégé and proponent of Vassily Kandinsky, collected for Solomon Guggenheim. It had subsequently become an exhibition venue for very different kinds of art. For example, in 1970, the spiral ramp was entirely given over to the work of Carl Andre.

Thirty-four years later, in 2005, the ante was upped once again. The lessons of Buren's censored work of 1971 had been learned, even by his antagonist Dan Flavin, who in 1992 remade and extended his Guggenheim International work to occupy the entire museum ramp. In addition, he installed a floor-to-skylight column of pale pink fluorescent light in the center of the rotunda. He titled the work *untitled (to Tracy, to celebrate the love of a lifetime)*, and he and his love were married there. A few years later, in 1998, Guggenheim director Thomas Krens made an exhibition dedicated to his own lifetime love—in



Photo-souvenir: Daniel Buren, *Around the Corner* (2000–2005), work in situ, *The Eye of the Storm*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, March 2005. Detail

this case, motorcycles—and he got the most celebrated of the day’s museum architects, Frank Gehry, to design the installation.

It is within these changed circumstances that Buren returned to “the eye of the storm,” to present *Around the Corner* and other works. “French drapery” was apparently no longer adequate. This time “the proposition,” “the visual tool” for exposing Wright’s museum as itself a work of art, was, in addition to the purple and green—the magenta gels and kelly-green stripes—an imposing mirrored structure whose corner was dead center in the grand skylit rotunda. As you circled down the ramp, you saw not only the rotunda continuously reflected in that structure but also yourself as a spectator of it, except when, again and again, six times over, you entered into the relative darkness of the mirrored wall’s verso. Unlike a Charles James garment, this was a structure that you could get into. As a visual tool, though, it had all the ostentation of a James evening gown. Like the Guggenheim Museum itself, like Sophie Tucker’s gold tea set, it was way out on the nut for service.



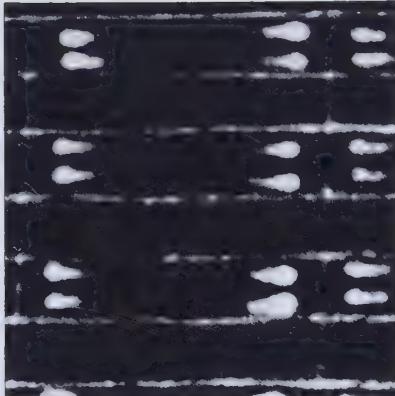
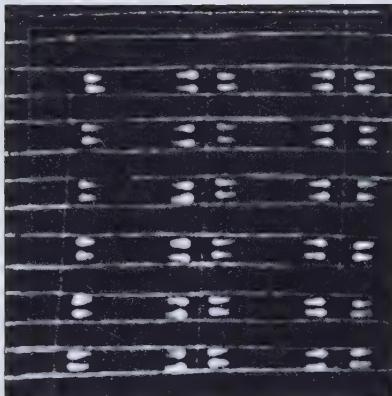
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BEFORE PICTURES

Visual Arts Gallery announces its
first exhibition of works by Agnes Martin.
By Agnes Martin, Guest Director for this
exhibition vs. Douglas Crimp, Curatorial Assistant.
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Dates: April 20 through May 25, 1971
Press Preview: Tuesday, April 19, 1971
from 5:30 to 7:30 P.M. (coffee will be served)
Visual Arts Gallery, Inc., 20 East 23rd Street, N.Y.C.
Gallery hours: Monday through Thursday
10 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.; Friday
11 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. The Gallery
is open to the public.
For further information call
Office of Public Information 679-7350

Poster for an exhibition of works by Agnes Martin at the Visual Arts Gallery, New York, 1971

BACK TO THE TURMOIL

There is an earned innocence, I believe, which is as much to be honored as the innocence of children.

—Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*, 2004

ON A SUNNY JANUARY DAY IN 2005, I took a train with my friend Pat Steir from New York City up the Hudson to Dia:Beacon to see the first installment of Lynne Cooke's five-part Agnes Martin retrospective. I hadn't seen most of the paintings in more than thirty years, not since the first museum exhibition of Martin's work, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, in 1973. So seeing them again was almost like seeing them for the first time, although I nevertheless also felt a proprietary connection to them. My ambivalence intensified when I picked up a copy of the show's accompanying brochure and noticed in a footnote a quotation from an article about Martin I'd written in 1973.¹ I was gratified but apprehensive. What foolish things had I said about Martin in 1973? What would Cooke make of them now?

Martin had played as significant a role in my life in the early 1970s as had Daniel Buren. I organized a Martin exhibition for the School of Visual Arts Gallery that opened in April 1971 and then, during the summer, visited her at her home near Cuba, New Mexico. Upon my return from that trip, I was fired from the Guggenheim, presumably for knowing too much about the cancellation of Buren's participation in the International Exhibition. Two years later, I wrote three essays featuring Martin's work, including, in addition to the one Cooke quoted from in her brochure, a New York Letter for *Art International* about a number of exhibitions that I believed "raise[d] some important questions about drawing."² I began the New York Letter with an extended discussion of Martin on the occasion of the Philadelphia exhibition. The following passage gives the gist of its argument:

To understand the radicalism of Martin's drawing, one must examine the more or less instinctive reaction to her extremely spare works, the reaction which it has most often elicited. This concerns the "personality" of her lines, how in any single line there are changes in pressure as well as subtle quivering. The argument would state that by reducing her lines to the point of not signifying at all and to a near precision, Martin could call attention to the sensitivity, that is, the frailty, of her line all the more forcefully, and still oppose illusionism. . . . But imperfection is so clearly what Martin has attempted to remove from her art that it seems inconceivable that her work should succeed or fail on such tenuous grounds, on a tension which hardly exists perceptually and not at all conceptually.³

For the critical stance I took against what I called the "cliché that drawing is private, intimate, revealing of an artist's true sensibility," James Fitzsimmons, *Art International*'s publisher, fired me from my position as New York correspondent, a position I had held for only five months.

Something far worse befell me in 1971 than being fired from the Guggenheim. In the early spring, I came home one night to find a great number of fire trucks in front of my loft building on West Twenty-Third Street. The fire was under control by the time I arrived, but the top floor of my building was gutted. In fact, it was a gas hot-water-heater explosion in my loft that caused the fire. I lost nearly everything. The water heater was right next to my clothes closet, so my only remaining clothes were the ones on my back. I particularly remember losing my clothes because at the time I was something of a dandy, having cultivated an interest in fashion at Tulane. My art-school friends taught me the pleasures of combing thrift shops for our glad rags. We all aspired to look like members of the Rolling Stones and Jefferson Airplane. We felt especially attracted to the Stones because so many of their early songs were familiar to us from local New Orleans blues singers' versions, such as Irma Thomas's "Time Is on My Side" and "Ruler of My Heart."

I came fairly soon to the liberating realization that I hadn't possessed anything of genuine value, and in consideration of my relative poverty I made an on-the-spot decision not to replace my clothes with anything but the most practical. The gay clone style wasn't far off, and I happily adopted an early version of it—Levis 501s, T-shirts, and sneakers—that served me well for years to come. What *was* a calamity, however, was the loss of my home, a comfortable skylit loft in a convenient, congenial neighborhood. I



Me (far left) and Paul Issa and Fontaine Dunn (center) dancing with fellow Tulane University students, New Orleans, 1967

BEFORE PICTURES



Installation view of works by Agnes Martin, Visual Arts Gallery, New York, 1971

had recently begun street cruising, and Chelsea was plenty active even then, a full decade before the neighborhood became a gay mecca. One memory of cruising from that time stands out. I met a Brazilian boy in front of my building one evening and invited him upstairs. He was staying at the McBurney YMCA, located right across Seventh Avenue. We spent an enjoyable night together, and when we got out of bed the next morning I cooked breakfast for him. As he was about to depart, he did something odd: he asked me how much he owed me. It took me some time to understand what he was talking about, and not only because he had a strong Portuguese accent. It seems he thought he owed me money for having sex with him, even though he was certainly younger than I and, for my taste, gorgeous. Indeed, he was much the type of man I would, from time to time, in the ensuing years take home with me for sex, only to be asked for money when the fun was over. I always refused, unless I felt it might put me in danger. It's not that I have qualms about paying for sex; it's just that the terms have to be specified up front. But in this case I was being taken for . . . taken for what? I couldn't imagine that he took me for a hustler. Maybe we were initially a bit wary of each other on the street. That wouldn't be unusual. But once we got upstairs and relaxed, our time together was sweetly romantic. We slept in each other's arms. And, as I said, I made him breakfast. I always made breakfast for my tricks if I liked them well enough to ask them to stay over. I don't remember how I dealt with this curious situation once I figured out what he meant. I suppose I stuttered something like, "Don't be silly. I enjoyed our time together." I think I'd have even asked him to come back again the next evening if not for this confusing end to our encounter. And I remember distinctly keeping an eye out for him for several nights afterward. I would really have liked to spend more time with him.

The Martin exhibition—my earliest curatorial effort and the only one before the 1977 *Pictures* show at Artists Space—has the distinction of being the first noncommercial exhibition of her work. It was a modest affair, staged in the one-room gallery at the School of Visual Arts on East Twenty-Third Street. Just how modest it was, or how little concerned I was with its historical significance, may be judged from the fact that I kept almost no documentation of the show, no correspondence of any kind, only a few overexposed installation photographs. Luckily, the Visual Arts Gallery has a reasonably complete archive. From their files, I now see that there were six



Peter Hujar, *Stephen Varble, SoHo, Franklin Street (III)*, 1976.

Gelatin silver print, 14½ x 14½ inches

paintings and twelve drawings. The paintings were *Milk River* (1963), lent by the Whitney Museum of American Art; *Flower in the Wind* (1963), from the Harry N. Abrams Family Collection; the Museum of Modern Art's *Red Bird* (1964); *The Beach* (1964), lent by the Lannan Foundation; and *The Lake* (1966) and *Tundra* (1967), lent by Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr. Drawings were lent by MoMA, Donald Judd, Jeffrey F. Byers III (an owner of the Bykert Gallery), Vera List, Charles Cowles, John Wendler, and the Elkon Gallery. Although he lent a number of drawings, Robert Elkon, Martin's dealer at the time, was not readily cooperative with me. He wouldn't provide any paintings for the show, nor would Guggenheim director Thomas Messer lend either of the museum's Martins, the wonderful *White Flower* (1962) and *White Stone* (1964). That was a blow, because I was then still working at the Guggenheim, and it was there that I had first encountered Martin's work. The significance of *White Flower* to me at the time is suggested by the fact that I used four progressively enlarged details of a reproduction of

the painting for the exhibition poster. Of course, now it seems nearly inconceivable that anyone would lend Martin's paintings, fragile and valuable as they are, to a twenty-six-year-old first-time curator arranging a show for a dingy little gallery just off the street entrance of a tumultuous art school. The place had pretty sketchy security and no climate control.⁴

What I remember most clearly about the show is lighting it. The Visual Arts Gallery had no natural light. I was temporarily staying after my loft fire with my friend and neighbor Stephen Varble, a playwright, actor, and performance artist. Stephen knew something about stage lighting, and the two of us spent hours and hours—all night, in fact—placing and adjusting the lights, which I can see from my bad installation views were photographer's spots on tripods, hung upside down from the ceiling. I suspect they were not the gallery's usual lights but rather Stephen's idea, as it was also his idea that we should diffuse the light as much as possible, either by lighting the paintings from the farthest possible distance across the length of the gallery or by bouncing light off the floor onto them. Stephen drove me crazy with his perfectionism, but the end result was miraculous: the scruffy room disappeared, while Martin's pictures took on the luminousness they always have when seen under optimum viewing conditions. I was clearly pleased with the outcome; my one letter of substance in the Visual Arts Gallery file is a note to Patrick Lannan thanking him for lending *The Beach*. “The show is beautiful,” I wrote,

I hope you will have the opportunity to see it sometime during the next month. The response has been extremely heartening; so many young artists have been delighted to see their “favorite painter” resurrected in this small way. Others have so welcomed the opportunity of seeing Martin for the first time. Kasha Linville, who writes for *Artforum*, was so moved by the little exhibition that she has set about writing an article on Martin for the summer issue.

Linville's article “Agnes Martin: An Appreciation,” published in the summer 1971 *Artforum*, contained a one-sentence laudatory mention of the exhibition: “A small show of her work from the 1960s at the School of Visual Arts Gallery in New York this spring moved me more profoundly than any of the stripped-down, Minimalist or lyric color painting of the last decade that I have seen.”⁵ At first, Linville's appreciation seems to argue

just what I objected to in my *Art International* piece two years later: “[Martin] shows such sensitivity to subtle differences in touch that the tactility of her paintings increase [sic] by inference. At close range, you can feel her hand moving, her touch-judgments. She makes touch tangible and visible.”⁶ But Linville is claiming not so much that the quality of Martin’s drawing reveals the artist’s subjectivity as that one must accord its subtleties close scrutiny in order to fully comprehend the paintings’ significance. Linville ended her short essay with a beautiful description of the experience of viewing *Tundra*, which is thought to be the final painting Martin made before leaving New York in 1967:

Tundra is a simple, almost inexplicable canvas. Its surface is divided by three lines into six tall rectangles. The pattern reminds you of a window, but the surface is closed. It suggests the heavy, white jade blankness of a snow sky. The lines that divide it are dominant at close range, but something very peculiar happens as you move back from this canvas. Because the horizontally brushed, grayish wash on the surface stops near but not against the lines, they seem to have halos around them. These halos actually swallow the lines at middle distance, leaving only their white ghosts. Even the ghosts disappear eventually.⁷

When I was preparing the show at the Visual Arts Gallery, I had difficulty locating Martin’s paintings. Elkon was unwilling to provide a list of collectors to whom he’d sold works. Before I spoke to him directly, though, his gallery assistant gave me Martin’s post-office-box number in the tiny town of Cuba. (I don’t think she was supposed to do that.) I wrote to Martin to tell her about my interest in showing her work and to ask for her help. One day she telephoned me at the Guggenheim. She gave me the names of some of the people who owned her paintings, and she asked me to come and see her. When I did visit her that summer, I learned how far she’d had to drive to make that phone call to help me find her paintings. But maybe it didn’t seem like such a big deal to me; after all, by the time I realized it, I’d driven all the way to New Mexico from northern Idaho, where I had been visiting my family.

I drove south through Utah, staying the first night in Moab, and then the next morning I drove to Mesa Verde to see the ancient Pueblo peoples’ cliff dwellings. Later that day I crossed the Colorado–New Mexico border just as the sun was setting, and as I cruised along in my parents’ Oldsmobile

a herd of wild horses galloped alongside the highway. I felt exhilarated, then foolish when I realized that it was a scene straight out of a TV automobile ad. I continued to Albuquerque and the next day met Pat Steir, who'd flown there from New York in order to come along on the visit to Martin.

We had a map of the mesa where Martin lived that she'd drawn and sent to me, but it wasn't at all detailed, and Pat and I found it very difficult to determine, in the dry desert landscape, what was a road and what wasn't. We managed to get up onto the mesa and to follow the first few lines and signposts indicated on the map, but then the road seemed to fork every which way, and none corresponded to the map. We'd make arbitrary decisions about which to take and proceed along until, time and again, we discovered either that we weren't on a road at all or that we were back where we'd been a while before. Eventually we realized we had no idea where we were in relation to Martin's map, or even the way to get back off the mesa, and the sun was beginning to set. Then, as if from out of nowhere, Martin drove up in her pickup. As I recall, she showed little sympathy for our plight; nevertheless, she had become worried enough to come looking for us when we didn't show up at the appointed hour. We followed her back to her compound, and she made us dinner in the beautiful one-room adobe she'd built. Conversation wasn't easy. I became very shy in the presence of someone else who is shy, and Martin was shy indeed. It was also obvious from where we were and how we got there that Martin had no social life; she surely passed days and even weeks with only her own thoughts as company. I still can't figure out where the food she put on the table for us came from—where she could have bought it or how she kept it fresh. She certainly had no electricity up there on the mesa, though perhaps she had propane refrigeration. Apart from her shyness and being unaccustomed to being around people, Martin's conversation was odd, gnomic—assertive and tentative at once. (You can tell this from her interviews, peppered as they are with “don't you see”s.) Of course, Pat and I must have seemed just kids to her—Martin was fifty-nine at the time, and I was turning twenty-seven—so she might have thought we were there to learn from her wisdom. In fact, I'm not sure why we *were* there, except that we both loved her paintings.

Pat slept in the adobe room. Agnes slept in her camper, which seemed to serve as her bedroom even though she had the house. I remember sleeping

in a kind of log shed that I think Martin had built for her first winter on the mesa, before she had time to construct the adobe. Since it was 1971, there was no sign yet of the studio she would build three years later in which to resume painting, which she had so inexplicably abandoned when she left New York in 1967. We spent all the next day hiking around near Martin's compound. It was hot and dry, and there was a canyon close by that we climbed down and then back up. And then in the late afternoon we said good-bye. Martin drove ahead of us in her pickup to lead us to the edge of the mesa.

By the time she returned to painting and exhibiting four years later, I'd pretty much stopped paying attention. Between 1973, when I wrote about her work, and 1976, when I published a piece on Joan Jonas's performances, I wrote little criticism to speak of. Those were my disco years.

Why did I organize that little Martin show? What drew me to Martin's work in 1971 and again in 1973? Why did it cease to interest me for so long? What drew me back to it in 2005?

Almost everything I've read—or, for that matter, written myself—about Martin confronts a tension in her work that is described as constituted by relations of, variously, drawing and painting, nature and abstraction, spiritualism and rationalism, and subjectivity and objectivity. The tension is also seen as historical, or generational. Should we consider Martin's work in relation to artists of her own generation, such as Ad Reinhardt and Barnett Newman? Or of the next—say, Ellsworth Kelly? Or the next—Sol LeWitt, Eva Hesse? The question arises not only because of what Martin's paintings and drawings look like but also because, though the same age as Pollock and Reinhardt, she only began working within a New York milieu—a milieu that included, significantly, Kelly, her friend and neighbor in Coenties Slip—in the late 1950s and didn't begin making the work she acknowledged as truly hers until Minimalism was emerging as a major art movement.⁸ Of course, Reinhardt didn't arrive at his black square paintings until 1960 either; Kelly's work in the late 1950s was, like Martin's, still exploratory (although more assured than hers at that moment); and LeWitt's turn to graphite drawing and Hesse's use of grids surely followed Martin's example, though for different purposes.⁹

I called one essay I wrote in 1973 “Opaque Surfaces”—referring to a term I used as an alternative to “Minimal painting” (because I thought of Minimal art as necessarily three-dimensional). I observed there that



Agnes Martin near her house in Cuba, New Mexico, 1974. Photo by Gianfranco Gorgoni

like Reinhardt, Agnes Martin is an artist closer in spirit to her own generation . . . than her paintings might indicate at first. Perhaps it is a constructive misreading of Martin that makes her so nearly paradigmatic for Opaque painting. Her systems of vertical and horizontal coordinates consisting of graphite lines, her standard six-foot-square format, and her expunging of color can easily be taken as exemplary of conceptual structure, neutral shape, and material surface. One cannot deny the potential of her grids to keep the viewer engaged with the actual surface.

However, both the title references to unitary elements of nature . . . and her statements regarding “representations” of moments of perfection are a clue to a more complicated and ambiguous stance on illusionism. . . . Martin’s work is very much at the center of that juncture where American painting abandoned the spiritual for the logical; they are [sic], as it were, suspended there, which accounts for their extraordinary tension and for the fact that they seem to contain within them a totality of the aspirations of two generations of American painting.¹⁰

But clearly I was of two minds. As Cooke noted, in the last of the three essays I wrote about Martin, a short piece for an Italian art magazine called *Data*, I wanted to claim Martin for Minimal and Conceptual art. I quote from this essay at length here in part because I want to contrast my description of *Tundra* with Linville’s cited above:

With minor exceptions, these paintings are six-foot square canvases whose surfaces are painted evenly off-white and overlayed with horizontal and vertical coordinate lines penciled on with the aid of a straightedge. Regardless of how precise or adequate the preceding sentence is as description, it is of primary significance that one would seek, in fact feel compelled, to describe the entirety of Martin’s late paintings [meaning in this case the mid-1960s paintings] in a single sentence. . . . Further description of the paintings invites the use of numbers (of lines, interstices and rectangular units), units of measurement (between lines), and ratio (of horizontal to vertical lines, of unit rectangle height to width). Thus, if we take *Tundra*, painted in 1967, the simplest and perhaps the last of Martin’s paintings, a description would read as follows: The six-foot square is bisected by one horizontal line and trisected by two vertical lines. There are thus two horizontal and three vertical interstices (for the delineation of these interstices or zones the edges of the canvas must be treated as lines), and the canvas is divided into six units. The horizontal bisecting line is three feet from the top and bottom edges and the vertical trisecting lines are two feet and four feet respectively from either vertical edge. The ratio of horizontal to vertical lines is 1:2, of unit rectangle height to width, 3:2.¹¹

I was certainly closer to my high-school math classes when I wrote this than I am now. How much more evocative is Linville's description! She dispenses with the arithmetic in a sentence and immediately shifts to a useful image (a window) and then another (a snow sky). Next, she clearly and plainly describes her perceptual experience: first the lines dominate, then as you move back from the painting the surface wash swallows the lines in a "halo" effect. From farther back, even this effect disappears. Linville's economical description encompasses technique, perception, and metaphor, all of them open-ended. She even explains why this should be so: "Once you are caught in one of her paintings, it is an almost painful effort to pull back from the private experience she triggers to examine the way the picture is made."¹² Nevertheless—and Linville's careful description of *Tundra* notwithstanding—I was prescient about one aspect of Martin criticism. There is a drive toward a single adequate description that will encompass the entirety of Martin's mature paintings at once: six feet square, thin washes, penciled grids. Throughout the literature on Martin, there are very few attempts to say precisely what we see when we look at one of her paintings and what makes the experience of apprehending one so different from that of looking at another.

Having heard that Martin made a film in 1976, Rosalind Krauss began her essay on the artist, written for the 1992 Whitney Museum retrospective catalogue, wondering what that film might be. It must, she decides, be *Zorns Lemma*, because that film by Hollis Frampton (made in 1970) is "profoundly abstract," and its abstraction is, significantly, dependent on a structural use of landscape:

As its one-second-long shots present us with the regular beat of disjunctive bits of reality, each one bearing a word discovered in the urban landscape beginning with the letter appropriate to its place in the alphabetic organization of the work, a linguistic matrix seems to settle over the visual field. . . . The film gradually replaces each "letter" with a fragment of landscape that in this arbitrary play of substitutions takes on the character of a pure emblem, the insubstantiality of an idea.¹³

From this conceit of imagining Martin as a Structural filmmaker follows Krauss's critique of Lawrence Alloway's linking of Martin's work to the "abstract sublime." Krauss insists instead—detouring through Hubert Damisch's *Théorie du /nuage/* and Alois Rieg'l's *Stilfragen*—on taking seriously



Agnes Martin (right), on the rooftop of her Coenties Slip building in Lower Manhattan, with (left to right) Delphine Seyrig, Robert Indiana, Duncan Pierre Youngerman, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jack Youngerman, in 1958. Photo by Hans Namuth

Martin's claim that she was a classicist.¹⁴ For Krauss, Martin is a *modernist* classicist: the artist's deployment of the grid guarantees her paintings' autonomy through the "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."¹⁵ The grid is, for Krauss, "the transformer that moved painting from the subjective experience of the empirical field to the internal grounds of what could be termed subjectivity as such, subjectivity now construed as a logic."¹⁶

"Classicists," Martin writes in her famous essay-poem "The Untroubled Mind," "are people that look out with their back to the world."¹⁷ The world is ego, desire, frustration, conflict, turmoil. As Martin would have it, though, as a classicist, "You stand with your back to the turmoil." More:

Classicism is not about people
and this work is not about the world . . .
To a detached person the complication of the involved life
is like chaos
If you don't like the chaos you're a classicist
If you like it you're a romanticist
Someone said all human emotion is an idea
Painting is not about ideas or personal emotion
When I was painting in New York I was not so clear about that
Now I am very clear that the object is freedom . . .
These paintings are about freedom from the cares of this world
from worldliness¹⁸

I don't doubt that freedom—and innocence, happiness, perfection (other words that she uses)—is Martin's subject, or that her quite literal detachment from the cares of the world, achieved in a hermitlike solitude, made possible her inspiration (again, her word) to paint that subject. But surely it is the turmoil *away from which Martin turned* (by leaving New York, perhaps) that constitutes the tension so many of us see in her paintings. Without that turmoil, without conflict—which is the only "logic" that subjectivity knows—I doubt that her paintings would have the emotional resonance that so moved Linville when she wrote her appreciation, or that so moves me now. Martin has her own explanation for the tension we see in her work: "You can't make a perfect painting. We can see perfection in our minds. But we can't make a perfect painting."¹⁹ Classical art—her art—is thus only "as unsubjective as possible."²⁰

I'm going to play my own version of Krauss's question upon hearing that Martin made a film. What would that film be? My question stems from my enchantment with the often-reproduced 1958 Hans Namuth photograph of Martin and her friends on a rooftop at Coenties Slip, taken early in the decade Martin lived in New York. Benita Eisler described the photograph in her 1993 *New Yorker* profile of Martin:

The group forms a rough pyramid, with Ellsworth Kelly, taking a drag from his cigarette, standing at the apex. Off to one side, Delphine Seyrig, her delicate features framed by a mop of dark hair, sits dreamily, knees drawn up. At the center, Duncan Pierre Youngerman, not quite two, stares solemnly at the camera, flanked by a crouching Robert Indiana and by his father [Jack Youngerman], looking like a skinny, thatch-haired teen-ager. Agnes Martin, seated above Youngerman on a sloping section of roof, gazes down at the others, hands in her raincoat pockets. At forty-six, she was more than a decade older than the rest, and her elevated position in the photograph suggests both distance and benevolent authority.²¹

I would characterize the photograph somewhat differently.²² The group of men absorbed by the child at the center of the photograph does form a rough pyramid. But the entire group makes a right triangle whose hypotenuse is composed by the gazes toward each other—as if right *through* the group of men—of Seyrig, crouching at the lower left, and Martin, sitting at the upper right. Seyrig would appear a year later (using the name Beltiane) in Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy*; two years after that she would star in Alain Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad*; and subsequently in Joseph Losey's *Accident*, Jacques Demy's *Peu d'âne* (or *Donkey Skin*—as the very campy fairy godmother), Harry Kümel's *Daughters of Darkness* (as the even campier lesbian vampire), Luis Buñuel's *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, Marguerite Duras's *India Song*, Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, and Ulrike Ottinger's *Freak Orlando*, among other well-known films.

Like Martin, Seyrig also directed a film in 1976. If Seyrig—the woman exchanging gazes with Martin in Namuth's photograph—made a film, what film would it be? The answer—and I didn't have to invent this—is *The S.C.U.M. Manifesto*.²³ The film, codirected with Carole Roussopoulos (and starring Seyrig and Roussopoulos), is a twenty-six-minute recitation of

Valerie Solanas's notorious feminist tract, created as a means of keeping the manifesto in circulation after it went out of print in France. Catherine Lord describes the film in an essay on Solanas:

Wearing skirts, the two women face each other across a small table in someone's apartment. Books are everywhere, the air is thick with cigarette smoke. While Roussopoulos clatters away on an old manual typewriter, Seyrig dictates *SCUM*, punctuation and all, demonstrating that a nightmare of French pedagogy cannot incarcerate a feminist polemic. . . . In the background, a small black-and-white television plays news footage of the wars men were conducting in the 1970s, including police violence in Argentina and the suppression of a women's protest march in Belfast.²⁴

But what does this have to do with Agnes Martin?

Two years after my visit to Martin in New Mexico, Jill Johnston also went to see her, and she too wrote about her visit. Her story is in some ways similar to mine—like me, she got lost on the mesa, was shy in Martin's presence (although unlike me she'd known Martin in New York), and wondered why she'd made the trip:

she doesn't know really why people come to see her. i wasn't sure myself, being such a pilgrimage and all. i just know she's important to me. and i was very curious to see how she was living in the desert. and i still wondered why she left new york even though i knew. i didn't know how to ask but she offered a number of hints gratuitously. she said i don't blame people for not being able to see the paintings, goodness knows, i have no idea why i did them myself. she said i had 10 one-man shows and i was discovered in every one of them. finally when i left town i was discovered again—discovered to be missing. she said she didn't know if she had left the world behind or the world had left her. she said that she left new york because of remorse. she said that out at the edge of the canyon after we walked out through the sage to see the sunset.²⁵

On that same walk, Martin asked Johnston a question:

i knew it would be some sort of political question which would mean she would stop liking me having just said out at the canyon that everybody who comes is very conventional except me. i have no idea what she meant by the question all i can say is it concerned domination and i think whether

i hadn't experienced domination or being dominating. i thought possibly she was alluding to women as role players. i had no intention of mentioning the despairing word feminism, agnes was born in 1912 and it doesn't take much ingenuity to see she's better off in the desert throwing mud at her adobe and polishing her green truck than i am going around meeting hundreds of strange women who might have nothing more in common than electricians and philosophers.²⁶

But Johnston raises the issue of feminism in spite of herself:

as i've indicated i was fearful of exposing what could only be a profound political disagreement between us. i had read a hilton kramer review she had there of her retrospective in philadelphia and couldn't help saying the reason she doesn't have the reputation hilton kramer says she should have is because she's a woman. but agnes knows exactly who or what she is or isn't she shot back i'm not a woman and i don't care about reputations.²⁷

Johnston connects the questions addressed by feminism to the turmoil on which Martin had turned her back:

she is also as a classicist as a cool artist a woman who looks out with her back to the world a painter who paints not about ideas or personal emotion but who paints the desert in her head as a classicist she is also eloquently opposed to romance and romanticism. she said she never met anybody who wasn't searching for love. she thinks this is a great mistake. she described a time of her own enslavement in this respect and how she became definitively done with it.²⁸

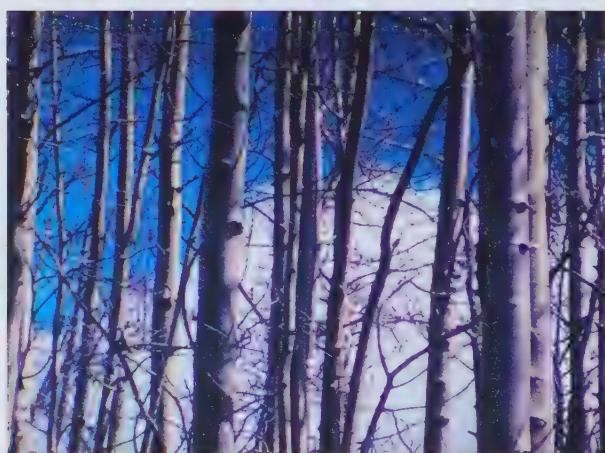
Martin's film is called *Gabriel*. It is a feature-length work depicting a trek by a young boy (Peter Mayne) through a landscape. Throughout, but only occasionally, a selection from Bach's *Goldberg Variations* is heard on the sound track; otherwise the film is silent. At the beginning, after a hand-held-camera shot of a snowcapped mountain framing a desert landscape, followed by shots of waves gently breaking on a beach and of the title superimposed on a close-up of the sand, we hear the *Goldberg* aria, as Gabriel (first in medium shot, then in medium close-up) stands facing the sea with his back to us. The theme is followed by silence and a cut to the boy looking toward the mountain before he starts off on his walk through the landscape. Sometimes the camera follows the boy; more often it appears to show what

he sees. Occasionally there are clear point-of-view shots: he walks toward the camera, looks up—cut to a bright blue sky with a few wispy clouds; he comes up over a rise, stops, looks—cut to the snowcapped mountain with which the film began. Soon Gabriel is seen walking alongside a river; this is followed by close-ups of water rushing, eddying. After a long period of silence, during which he ascends farther along the river, we hear the third *Goldberg Variation* as Gabriel walks, in slow motion, into a grove (the shot's duration matches that of the variation). Gently flowing water, pussy willows, wildflowers caressed by the wind, more flowing water—a tree branch suspended above the river, a boulder jutting out through rushing currents. The thirteenth *Goldberg Variation* plays over close-ups of many varieties of wildflowers—so many varieties! More close-ups of water, flowing gently again, crystal clear, revealing the rocky riverbed; now rushing again, sparkling, churning, foaming. Suddenly the picture is still, as Martin cuts from close-up to long shot. We are in a pond-dotted meadow. Gabriel reappears (he's been absent for a long time), walking through a barren landscape, and the *Goldberg* aria returns. After the completion of the aria, medium shots of a stand of trees (Gabriel walks through them, in our direction); the forest grows dense. The boy comes to a lake. The thirteenth variation repeats as we see more shots of wildflowers. Silence, wildflowers, water lilies, then more flowers to the accompaniment of the twenty-fifth variation, which continues as Gabriel traverses desert terrain in long shot, followed by several medium shots of him facing away from us and toward the vast desert landscape. Wildflowers, grasses blowing in the wind, Gabriel in a rocky terrain, a lake. Gabriel walks along its shore, then stands and beholds it. He picks up his ascent where it left off as the aria theme sounds again; he sits down. (These changes are each time accompanied by cuts—that is, a change in the boy's position is also a change in camera location and angle.) There is a final cut to rising and falling water foaming around a rock, and the film ends with the last strains of the aria. (The return to the aria at the end is, of course, a feature of the *Goldberg Variations* too.) All this lasts nearly eighty minutes.

What are we to make of this film?

In his review at the time of the film's debut, Jonas Mekas signals an ambivalence that I feel, too: "Agnes Martin is a great painter and whatever she does has an importance. Her film is no great cinema, that I have to state

BEFORE PICTURES



Stills from Agnes Martin, *Gabriel*, 1976. 16 mm film, color, sound, 79 min.

BACK TO THE TURMOIL



at the outset. But it is a very beautiful film." Even as he becomes quite rapturous, Mekas qualifies his praise:

And then, suddenly, Agnes cuts to fantastically beautiful flowers. She keeps intercutting these beautiful sequences of blooming nature. Bill Moritz told me she worked very hard on her colors, in the laboratory. He said technicians laughed at her, they didn't see any difference. But Agnes saw the difference. And the flowers look like those in no other film. Those are the flowers of the fields of my childhood. I've been looking for them all these years. And here they are again, in Agnes Martin's film.

But what I really wanted to say is this: why is Agnes cutting to the flowers?²⁹

Rosalind Krauss makes little of the film itself; her concern is that, because it is far from being the Structural work she had imagined it should be, it might sanction a misinterpretation of Martin's paintings:

Gabriel constructs a reading of Martin's own work as crypto-landscape, a reading which, since it is produced by the artist herself, tends to carry the weight of interpretive proof. The terrain of the work, in both film and painting, it seems to say, is that of the abstract sublime, behind which, underwriting it as its field of relevance, is the immensity, the endlessness, the ecstasy, the *terribilità* of nature.³⁰

But in fact the film captures none of those things about nature, nor did Martin intend for it to do so. In a 1996 interview with Joan Simon, Martin said of *Gabriel*: "My movie is about happiness, innocence, and beauty. . . . It's about this little boy who climbs a mountain and all the beautiful things he sees. That's all it was about. It was an art movie."³¹ *Gabriel*'s nature is the kind we experience on a hike through meadows and woodlands or beside mountain streams. Far from awe-inspiring, it is fairly commonplace, if perfectly lovely. Nor does the film's structure have discernable sense. Gabriel walks screen left to screen right in one sequence, the reverse in another. He enters the frame from the bottom foreground, and he moves toward us from the distance. A number of shots begin with him standing still, and then, as if in response to the director's "Action," he takes off walking. The choice of the *Goldberg Variations* is hard to fathom; harder still, Martin's decision to use only three of the thirty variations of Bach's great keyboard

cycle and to repeat the aria twice.³² Still, the play of sound and silence feels right, and there are some truly exquisite sequences. A stand of birch trees fills the frame, then a cut shows a denser stand, another a yet-denser stand, until eventually the film frame becomes an abstract, shimmering field of vertical lines. The shots of flowers seem banal, but perhaps this is because the color in the restored print is not as vivid as the print Mekas saw.³³ Many of the shots of flowing water are mesmerizing.

Gabriel suggests just how difficult it is to make a successful landscape film.³⁴ Moreover, it makes obvious the fact that Martin had not spent a lifetime looking at, thinking about, and experimenting with film as she had with painting. (The curious terminology she chose to categorize her film—“It was an art movie”—says as much.)³⁵ *Gabriel* clearly conveys Martin’s profound feeling for nature; what is less clear is her feeling for film. One has only to compare Michael Snow’s *La région centrale* (*The Central Region*, 1971) to see what a major filmmaker might do with the “immensity, the endlessness, the ecstasy, the *terribilità* of nature,” and Babette Mangolte’s *The Sky on Location* (1982) to see how the mythical landscape of the American West can be convincingly portrayed on film (while being simultaneously textually demythologized).³⁶ But, *pace* Krauss, Martin’s subject is not landscape. Rather, as she told Simon, her subject is happiness, innocence, and beauty. She’d already said the same thing to the art critic John Gruen, even before the film was completed: “It’s about happiness—exact thing with my paintings. It’s about happiness and innocence.”³⁷ “Exact thing with my painting”: but Martin’s representation of “innocence” in her paintings is achieved through an abstract equivalent, the grid. The following exchange with Simon is telling in its various slippages between painting and film, nature and abstraction, and different ideas of innocence:

JS: The opening shot of the mountain and then the journey reminds me of the well-known statements where you describe your discovery of the grid in your painting. You talk about coming down from a mountain and seeing . . .

AM: I came down from the mountain and saw the plains. I think it was that I was impressed with space. . . . I looked out over this plain and I felt I was traveling over it. I felt—I think—I responded to the space. I’m not very proud of that quotation.

JS: You're not? How so?

AM: I consider my paintings to be nonobjective. Not about the world, or nature or things like that. That quotation is really before I got on the ball.
[Laughter]

JS: And what would you say now, if you had to describe why you picked the grid?

AM: Why I picked the grid? I didn't pick it; it came to me as an inspiration. I was thinking about innocence, and then I saw it in my mind—that grid. And so I thought, well, I'm supposed to paint what I see in my mind. So I painted it, and sure enough, it was innocent.

JS: Innocent?

AM: The grid expresses innocence.

JS: How? Is it the way you put the line down? What is it that makes you use the word innocence?

AM: Well, it just looks like innocence.

JS: You speak of the film *Gabriel* as being about innocence, as well as happiness and beauty. It seems like what you're looking for in both mediums, though they are so different one from another, is similar.

AM: To think of climbing a mountain is a kind of innocence. You know that you're going to be rewarded by climbing a mountain. I thought the boy in the film was innocent.³⁸

I can't help wondering, innocent of what? The grid first appeared in Martin's work during the time she lived in New York. Which brings us back to the turmoil . . .



GREENWICH VILLAGE

257 WEST 10TH STREET, 1971-74





Still from Joseph Cornell, *Rose Hobart*, c. 1936. 16 mm film, black-and-white with color filter,
silent with separate music track on LP, approx. 20 min.

ART NEWS PARTIES

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SOMETIME in spring 1971, not the first party I went to at John Ashbery's town-house apartment in Chelsea but certainly the most exciting. In New York for his Broadway debut, Peter Allen pulled me into the bathroom for a quickie, ignoring the entreaties of other guests who needed to use the bathroom for more conventional purposes. (Liza wasn't at the party.) Later, I noticed a beautiful woman with an immense mane of dark brown hair standing across from me. She looked familiar enough for me to say, no doubt emboldened by drink, "I know you from somewhere." She didn't think so. Then it struck me: I'd seen her at the movies that week, in a movie, actually—Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970). Hers was a bit part: a seller of Parma violets, she leads a pair of street urchins in singing "The Internationale" in front of the hotel in Paris where Marcello and Giulia (Jean-Louis Trintignant and Stefania Sandrelli) are staying. I imagine Marilyn Goldin was cast not only for her striking looks but also because she was the director's friend and one of his screenwriters. I don't know why she was at the party. Perhaps she knew John from Paris. I don't know why Peter Allen was there either, but I didn't wonder at the time; there were always so many new people at John's parties.

I was there because I had begun writing articles for *Art News*, where John was one of the magazine's executive editors, and he always invited his fellow editors and writers to his frequent weekend parties. Of course, I had met John earlier, when he was the upstairs tenant of my friends Linda and Giorgio. Linda had encouraged me to go see the exhibition that would be my first experience in a New York museum, the survey of Joseph Cornell's boxes and collages at the Guggenheim organized by my future boss Diane Waldman.

For Cornell's boxes embody the substance of dreams so powerfully that it seems that these eminently palpable bits of wood, cloth, glass and metal must vanish the next moment, as when the atmosphere of a dream becomes



Christian Belaygue (top) and Jean-Louis Trintignant and Marilyn Goldin (bottom) in
The Conformist, 1970. Directed by Bernardo Bertolucci

so intensely realistic that you know you are about to wake up. For the moment, however, the dream is on in the vast white hutch of a museum whose softly falling white light and spiraling lines have taken on strong Cornelian overtones; afterward the pieces will return to their niches in public and private collections and to Cornell's famous garage, on a suburban street called Utopia Parkway.¹

That is from Ashbery's article about the show for the summer 1967 issue of *Art News*. (Has anyone ever written about Cornell without mentioning that he lived on Utopia Parkway?)

Marilyn seemed happy to have been recognized from her small role in the film and curious about the shy young man who approached her, so she struck up a conversation. In the course of it, I mentioned that I intended to write a book about transvestites. My meager credentials for such a boast were that Warhol superstar Holly Woodlawn had recently lived with me for a few months; I'd been reading Avery Willard's *Female Impersonation*, C. J. Bulliet's *Venus Castina*, and Bram Stoker's *Famous Imposters*, with its chapter on the Chevalier d'Eon, all of which I'd picked up at the Strand Book Store; and, through her then girlfriend, the painter Louise Fishman, I had met Esther Newton, who really *was* writing a book about transvestites.² In any case, it was a good opener, and it won Marilyn over. We became fast friends for the year she lived in New York before returning to Europe. Marilyn inhabited an Upper East Side fifth-floor walk-up surrounded by a great many books; she even used her refrigerator as a cabinet for books. I owe to her the introduction to my first long-term boyfriend, Christian Belaygue. Although they both lived in Paris, Marilyn and Christian originally met in Rome, where he, too, was friendly with Bertolucci and was given a small part in *The Conformist*. (Even though I'm not a fan of Bertolucci's cinema—I'm far more partial to Bertolucci's early mentor Pier Paolo Pasolini—it is curiously intertwined with my early romantic life: the first guy I ever picked up on the street in New York was Allen Midgette, who appeared in four of Bertolucci's films, most notably *Before the Revolution* [1964]. Midgette also had parts in Andy Warhol's *Nude Restaurant* [1967] and *Lonesome Cowboys* [1968], but he is perhaps best known for impersonating Warhol on a lecture tour of college campuses in 1967. I'm embarrassed to confess that I was too intimidated by his good looks and louche sophistication to go through with sex once we got to my loft.)

Sometime after Marilyn returned to Paris, Christian moved to New York and telephoned me, Marilyn having furnished my phone number and given me a four-star recommendation. Anticipating a “gift” from Marilyn, I invited him to lunch, only to be a bit disappointed when he arrived. He was undeniably attractive, with his dark almond eyes, full lips, and shock of curly black hair, but, as an early adherent of the gay clone style, I wasn’t immediately taken with the pretty boy wearing a quilted beige pantsuit and smelling of sandalwood oil (which he later informed me came from Mecca). Christian grew up in Casablanca, the son of a Pied-Noir father and an Algerian mother. He had the sort of striking exotic beauty that turned heads on the street and stopped conversation in gay bars. Once we got to know each other, I took him to one of John’s parties, where he met and went home with Leonard Bernstein. The following day, he gleefully told me the story of what transpired when they got to their destination: Bernstein sat down at the piano and announced, “I’m going to play you a piece that you bring to mind.” Christian didn’t let on that he knew Maurice Ravel’s *Tzigane* perfectly well or that Bernstein’s taking him for a Gypsy was about as ethnically accurate as Hollywood’s casting Rudolph Valentino as a sheik or Maria Montez as a Pacific Islander. Indeed, Christian never let on that he knew exactly who Bernstein was and had listened to many of his recordings; he just went along with being an exotic pretty boy. It was an aspect of Christian that exasperated me: his willingness to play the part of whatever an admirer projected onto him.

Such projection was also the point of a story he told about *The Conformist*. I was curious about Bertolucci’s sexuality, given the film’s combination of male and female homoeroticism and homophobic politics (i.e., that homosexual seduction in youth leads to an obsession with normality and becoming a Fascist assassin in adulthood—the story is Alberto Moravia’s, not Bertolucci’s). Christian appears only briefly, at the very end of the film. In a scene set in the ruins of the Theater of Marcellus in Rome after the fall of Mussolini, a defeated Marcello stumbles upon Lino (Pierre Clémenti), the homosexual chauffeur who had seduced him as a child, and a homeless young man Lino is propositioning (played by Christian and called “the Gypsy” in the cast list). In his come-on, Lino uses a line about Madame Butterfly that Marcello recognizes from his own seduction years before, which causes him hysterically to denounce as Fascists not only Lino but also

the blind man Italo, Marcello's own close friend who has accompanied him on his walk. After a crowd of anti-Fascists has marched by, Marcello is left alone with the Gypsy, who has undressed and lain down on a makeshift bed in the shadows of the theater's arches. Marcello turns around and stares at him, and the camera holds on his intent gaze for some time until the film ends. (This scene, completely different from the episode of Lino's reappearance that ends Moravia's novel, was Bertolucci's contrivance.) Christian recalled that Bertolucci shot a far-lengthier version of Lino's scene with the Gypsy than the one we see. He explicitly instructed the two actors in what they should do with each other, at one point directing Clémenti to lick Christian's toes. He shot take after take. Not satisfied even then, he summoned them back from Paris to Rome to shoot the scene again weeks later but included none of what he captured on camera in the released film. Bertolucci was not gay, Christian claimed, but enjoyed having others enact his homoerotic fantasies. Christian had become my boyfriend by the time he told me this story, which excited my jealous imagination all the more because Clémenti was one of my screen idols.

Much about my relationship with Christian involved movies. He was not only a Cinecittà actor but also a cinephile in the French mold. For the year or so that we lived together, we went to hundreds of movies, sometimes as many as four or five a day. New York's repertory cinema culture was at its zenith in the early 1970s, with Hollywood classics, foreign art films, experimental cinema, and cult movies shown at the Elgin Theater in Chelsea (now the Joyce, a dance theater), the Bleecker Street Cinema in Greenwich Village, the Festival on West Fifty-Seventh Street, and the New Yorker, the Regency, and the Thalia on the Upper West Side. The old movie palaces on Forty-Second Street showed second-run Hollywood movies in addition to porn films, which had recently been legalized. One of Christian's and my most favored venues, the Theatre 80 St. Marks, had temporarily changed its name to the Movie Musical; it showed double features, changing twice a week, of Hollywood musicals. We caught most of them, four a week for nearly a year—upward of two hundred musicals. Theatre 80 St. Marks was where I belatedly fell in love with Judy Garland and one of her husbands, Vincente Minnelli; where I learned what a great comedian Jeanette MacDonald was (especially in Ernst Lubitsch's *Monte Carlo* [1930]); where I first saw Cecil B. DeMille's *Madam Satan* (1930), a bedroom-farce musical

that ends with everyone parachuting out of a moored dirigible in which a costume ball is taking place; where I discovered the incredible tap-dancing talents of the Nicholas brothers and Eleanor Powell; and, of course, where I saw every movie Fred Astaire danced in. One of my most vivid memories of this movie-musical immersion course is a scene from the pre-Code *Monte Carlo*. MacDonald plays a countess who has fled from her wedding ceremony to the roulette wheel, her preferred pastime. Taken with her golden curls, a count (Jack Buchanan) poses as a hairdresser to get into her hotel room, where his styling session ends with a scalp massage. As the countess moans in pleasure, he strokes and jerks the bobbing head harder and harder, and—well, if you’re as stoned as we were when you watch it, you’ll discover the true meaning of “the Lubitsch touch.”

At the same time, and with the same fervor, Christian and I went once or twice a week to see the films shown at Peter Kubelka’s Invisible Cinema, the innovative movie theater built in Joseph Papp’s Public Theater on Lafayette Street for the newly founded Anthology Film Archives. There we saw a high percentage of Anthology’s Essential Cinema offerings, from D. W. Griffith, Sergei Eisenstein, and F. W. Murnau to Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage, and Maya Deren. We saw Carl Dreyer’s *Gertrud* (1964) in Danish with no subtitles; so rigorous was Anthology’s purist doctrine that something as intrusive as subtitles added to the original image was anathema, even to a movie that is mostly dialogue. The Invisible Cinema, designed in such a way as to keep your eyes glued to the screen, was an architectural realization of that purism. Each seat was enclosed in a cubicle that prevented seeing or touching anyone next to, in front of, or behind you. The only way to find an empty seat was to walk into a row and look into each cubicle, one at a time. God forbid you might need to get to a restroom during a film and then find your seat again. The Invisible Cinema’s effect on me was hypnotic, but not in the way Kubelka intended: within five minutes of any film’s beginning, I began to fall asleep, and I had to hold my eyelids open with my thumb and index finger. You might attribute this to the films themselves, which were hardly engaging in the way a Minnelli musical is. But the films at Anthology excited me, sometimes literally, such as when I first saw Jean Genet’s *Un chant d’amour* (1950) and Kenneth Anger’s *Fireworks* (1949). It was absurd, but I still went back again and again.



Peter Kubelka's Invisible Cinema at Anthology Film Archives, New York, 1970. Photo by Michael Chikiris

Another of those films was *Rose Hobart*, Joseph Cornell's early masterpiece from about 1936. *Rose Hobart* shared characteristics with some of Cornell's haunting shadow boxes I'd seen at the Guggenheim a few years earlier, including its dark blue tint and its obsession with a Hollywood beauty. But it also seemed a world apart, since the material Cornell used for his collage film is a piece of Hollywood Orientalism called *East of Borneo* from 1931 (something of a rather different character than, say, a Medici portrait or the ballerina Tamara Toumanova). Moreover, he jumbled the original movie's exoticism by adding a sound track of sambas from Nestor Amaral's record *Holiday in Brazil* to its jungle setting, complete with palm trees, crocodiles, and a solar eclipse. The moment in *Rose Hobart* that is stuck in my memory is when the Rajah of Marudu pulls back a curtain to reveal a fiery volcano that he, his cockatoo, and Rose Hobart's character appear to admire.³ Looking at the film now, I realize that Cornell only reinforces *East of Borneo*'s Orientalism through his fascination with Hobart's

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Stills from Joseph Cornell's film *Rose Hobart*, c. 1936

delicate beauty. Excising plot and action, Cornell obsessively focuses on the actress, repeatedly cutting from her image in one scene to that in another and back again, such that Hobart's costume changes—from bathrobe to day dress to evening gown in no logical sequence—constitute the most visible differences among juxtaposed shots. Her chic attire, especially her evening wear, is markedly incongruous with the jungle terrain and the rajah's tent—as incongruous as seeing an erupting volcano when the living-room drapes are drawn.

Going to movies every day was both enjoyable and educational, but it didn't leave much time for making a living; and as a foreigner on a tourist visa Christian couldn't be employed at all, so the two of us were always strapped for cash. We barely managed on my meager pay from teaching three art-history courses each semester as an adjunct at the School of Visual Arts, which led to our plotting of get-rich-quick schemes. One of them involved our own Orientalist exploit. We planned to write what would be the first English-language Moroccan cookbook since the nineteenth century (or so Christian's research indicated). The idea was simple: Christian's mother would supply her recipes together with some from her French-Moroccan cookbooks, and we would test the recipes at home and translate them to American tastes. Through Pat Steir, I had met Diane Cleaver, a trade-book editor at Doubleday, who once happened to mention that cookbooks were the most reliable moneymakers in the book business. Christian and I figured we'd learn enough to make a scrumptious meal, invite Diane and her girlfriend to dine with us, and so impress them with our culinary talents and the distinctive cooking of the Maghreb that Diane would want to publish our book.

That part of our plan succeeded. The meal we prepared was both lavish and delicious, and Diane said she'd be happy to look at our cookbook proposal when we had it ready. We set to work writing an introduction to Moroccan cuisine; brief chapter introductions for such categories as bastilla, couscous, and touajen; and, finally, sample recipes. At that time, I had never been to Morocco, nor were there Moroccan restaurants in New York, so I had never so much as tasted the kind of food we were writing about until I cooked it myself. For the introductory discussion of Moroccan culture, culinary and otherwise, I depended entirely on Christian, attempting to put into readable prose what he dictated to me.

(I was so ignorant that I initially wrote that couscous was a kind of grain rather than pasta.) Read today, what I wrote is a bit cringe-worthy. Just as it was impossible in 1972 to find fresh coriander in New York, so had the critique of colonial presumption not yet been articulated. (Edward Said's *Orientalism* was not published until six years later, in 1978.) Our introduction ended with the following paragraphs:

Smen presents a problem akin to the impossibility of finding the meat of a camel's hump in America: that is, we don't feel particularly deprived. Smen is a kind of rancid butter made by combining melted butter with salt and keeping it in jars for . . . well, indefinitely. The preparation was used where we would use fresh butter or cooking oil, such as in the sauce of a tajin. As it was a question of status in the bourgeois Moroccan home to have an oversupply of smen, the longer it was kept the more status it accrued. The mark of distinction in a dinner for especially honored guests was a very old smen, just as if it were a vintage wine. Because very old, rancid butter does not particularly appeal to our sensibilities, we have excluded the recipe for smen. But if we bring it to America as part of Moroccan folklore rather than as a part of Moroccan cuisine, it is because modern Moroccans have outlived their taste for it, too.

Perhaps smen represents the strangeness of a foreign cuisine beyond the point where we can imagine wanting to give it a try. But it is really just an exaggerated example of what makes us seek out new kinds of food: an insatiable curiosity about the exotic nurtured by the diversity of cultures within our midst. Unquestionably, we Americans are voracious for exotica; Hollywood has always known it, and it knew, too, that a place like Casablanca is perfectly suited to that taste. We hope that we can feed that appetite in the American kitchen, just as so many miles of celluloid have fed it in the movie houses and on television. But for our exotic fare, we have traveled a bit farther than Casablanca, which is, after all, a thoroughly twentieth-century city. We have gone instead to Fez, the ancient capital of Morocco and still its culinary capital. For, just as nowhere but Morocco provides truly authentic North African cooking at its best, nowhere in Morocco is the cuisine as steeped in tradition, as refined and perfect, as it is in Fez. And so with just a few specialties from Rabat, where the present king of Morocco has his palace, a taste of Agadir and Marrakech, of Tétouan and Tangier, we give you an introduction to the exotic culinary arts of Fez, of Morocco, of North Africa.

Since I've gone this far, I feel I should supply at least one recipe. The obvious one would be for bastilla, which we refer to in the cookbook project

as the pièce de résistance of Moroccan cuisine. But the chapter introduction and recipe take up six pages, and the bastilla is such an elaborate dish that it's unlikely you'll want to try it, so I'll include the recipe for my favorite tajin instead, although not without first quoting one choice sentence we wrote about bastilla: "Tradition has it that the bastilla is of Andalusian origin, and indeed the adjective *Alhambresque* is appropriate in describing this rich, splendid, and exotic concoction." (It would be nearly a decade before I would see the Alhambra, so I can fairly blame that line on Christian.) So, to the more prosaic tajin:

Tajin (plural *touajen*) is a generic term for a wide variety of culinary concoctions. The word *tajin*, like our *casserole*, refers to a method of cooking, the container used for preparing and serving, and the resulting dish. The preparation is comparable to that of a stew, except that the ingredients are never browned first, the cooking does not begin with a rapid boil, and various foods must be added at different steps along the way. This method is one of the most ancient for making a refined meal; because the Moroccan kitchen has in many cases retained its primitivism, the tajin, which is still simmered over a charcoal fire for hours, is the basic form of cuisine in Morocco.

Through a very wide variation of its contents, a tajin might be sweet, salty, fruit flavored, or spicy, or it might more closely resemble the meat and vegetable stews familiar to the American palate. Different *touajen* exist for different seasons, climates, and tastes. What makes them extraordinary, even exotic, is the often-rare blends that have come from a time-honored tradition. While some of the foods allied in a tajin may seem too strange, we must urge audacity. What has pleased the Moroccan palate for centuries will assuredly not fail to please yours.

Basically, a tajin consists of lamb or chicken and sometimes beef or veal, stewed with fruits or vegetables and spices until a thick, savory sauce has been produced. It is always cooked until the meat is so tender that it begins to fall off the bones and as a consequence will always melt in the mouth. Often ingredients like fruit and honey are added when the meat is nearly cooked and simmered in the sauce just long enough to add their special aromas. The addition of lemons that have been preserved in brine for nearly a month gives a particularly interesting flavor that is common to a number of *touajen*.

In Morocco, the tajin is prepared and served in a glazed earthenware pot with a steep conical cover. There is no real need to have a genuine Moroccan tajin for the American kitchen, but a heavy earthenware or cast-iron casserole is a must. A low flame on an American stove, separated from

the pot by an asbestos plaque, will reproduce almost exactly the charcoal fire. From there on, it's just a matter of stewing all the ingredients for several hours, a simple enough task for an ambrosial meal and particularly convenient for entertaining guests.

Here is one of our sample tajin recipes, a tajin of chicken with lemon and olives, the most typical of all. My copy of the manuscript is food stained from constant use. I consult it still, and I don't use a casserole, I use a tajin that I bought in the souk of Marrakech when I finally visited Morocco in the mid-1970s.

MCHERMEL TAJIN (serves 4–6)

2 chickens, cut in quarters, giblets included
 2 medium onions, chopped
 1 clove garlic, put through a garlic press
 1 teaspoon ginger
 pinch saffron
 salt
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup peanut oil
 2 cups water

2 salted lemons cut in quarters
 15 pitted small green olives
 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
 1 tablespoon finely chopped coriander
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin
 2 teaspoons paprika
 juice of 1 lemon

In a large earthenware or heavy iron casserole, combine all ingredients in first list, cover, and place over a low flame. Simmer, occasionally turning the chicken, and add a little water if necessary. When the chicken is nearly cooked, add the salted lemons, olives, parsley, coriander, cumin, and paprika. Cover and simmer again until the chicken is completely tender and begins to fall off the bones. Add the lemon juice and, if necessary, remove the chicken and reduce the sauce until it is thick. To serve, remove the chicken to a serving platter, pour the sauce over it, and garnish with salted lemon quarters and olives.

Christian and I completed our project—the introduction, chapter introductions for bastilla, harira, and touajen, and eleven sample recipes—and gave it to Diane in June. Sure that we would have a book contract and a substantial advance waiting for us on our return, we borrowed money and took off for a week's vacation on Cape Cod. We rented a tiny dune shack in the Peaked Hill Bars district from Hazel Hawthorne-Werner, a wonderful Provincetown personality whom I'd met through the Tworkov family, in whose summer home in Provincetown I was often a guest. Hazel was a descendent of Nathaniel Hawthorne and the author of *Salt House*, a 1934 novel about life on the Cape Cod dunes. "If I have any value," says the young female narrator of *Salt House*, "it comes out of my relation to the dunes. I've tried to think my way into them."⁴

Hazel was the proprietor of two dune shacks that she could no longer use herself, thanks to the severe palsy she suffered as the result of a degenerative disease. For the week in question, she had rented the larger of the two to Beverly Mailer, Norman Mailer's fourth wife, and the smaller one to us; a friend of Hazel's drove all four of us—Hazel, Beverly, Christian, and me—to the seashore in a pickup truck, since we had to transport all of our provisions for the week out to the shacks, more than an hour's hike across the sand dunes from town. The road came to an end at the large



Walker Evans, portrait of Hazel Hawthorne-Werner, c. 1930-34



Hazel Hawthorne-Werner's dune shack Thalassa, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

shack, so we all piled out, and Christian and I proceeded on foot from Beverly's to ours. We did so with a warning from Beverly: the terns were nesting just then, so it was dangerous to walk on the beach near the nests, as they would surely attack us. Though arduous, it would be safest to walk through the dunes above the beach. She advised us at the very least to hold long sticks above our heads, since the terns would attack only the highest point. Christian scoffed at the notion that we should be concerned about some little seabirds, so as soon as we got out of Beverly's sight, we simply went along our merry way down the beach. Suddenly there came a terrible screeching from above, as the vicious sharp-beaked creatures began to fly toward us. Seeing their advancing attack, we ran as fast as we could, then dove into the sand to escape them at the moment they swooped down on us. We repeated this mad running, dodging, and diving for the half mile or so to our shack, to which Hazel had given the lovely name Thalassa (the Greek word for "sea"). Once safely inside, Christian, out of breath, laughing and crying at the same time, blurted out, "That was like being in two Hitchcock movies at once. I felt like both Tippi Hedren in *The Birds* and Cary Grant in *North by Northwest*, diving to the ground to get out of the way of the crop duster." After that dramatic beginning, our vacation was uneventful. We took long walks on the deserted beach (in the opposite direction of the terns' nests), swam, and washed the salt off by dumping buckets of cold water that we'd pumped from the well behind Thalassa over ourselves. We managed to prepare elaborate dinners on a two-burner Coleman stove, but, unable to read by kerosene light, we snuggled together in the one twin-size bed soon after darkness descended each night and got up when the sun rose over the ocean. An occasional mounted National Seashore ranger was our only company.

We returned from Provincetown to bad news. The very day we had given Diane our cookbook proposal, an editor in Doubleday's cookbook division had accepted someone else's Moroccan cookbook. Not only that, Diane discovered that Harper & Row also had a Moroccan cookbook in the works. Nevertheless, still believing our project to be viable, she forwarded it to an agent. Her name (unpromisingly enough) was Julie Fallowfield. One of the five high-powered partners at McIntosh & Otis, she had been John Steinbeck's literary agent. I have her final rejection letter, dated June 5, 1973, exactly a year after our Provincetown adventure:



Posters for Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, 1959, and *The Birds*, 1963

Dear Mr. Crimp,

The proposal for the Moroccan Cookbook has just been returned to us from the eleventh publisher to consider the material, M. Evans and Company. Evans felt that they could not "successfully handle a cookbook with so narrow a scope." As you know, this has been the feeling of every publisher we have tried and, with very real regret, we must now return the proposal to you. . . . Needless to say, you and Mr. Belaygue may wish to continue [et cetera, et cetera] . . .

Yours,
Julie Fallowfield

By the time I received the letter, Christian had become depressed from being financially dependent on me and decided to move back to Paris, so there was no question of pursuing the cookbook further. I couldn't do it without my informant-collaborator. I was sorry to see the man I have always referred to as "my first boyfriend" go, but his dependence wore on me too, and I was ready and eager to play the field, which had grown increasingly tempting.

In any case, I was fully absorbed by then in my work as a regular reviewer for *Art News* and *Art International*. I had begun at *Art News* in fall 1972, following our bad luck with the cookbook. Reviewing for an art magazine wouldn't help much with paying the rent, but it would make me feel more like the professional art critic I hoped to become. My connection at *Art News* wasn't Ashbery, it was Elizabeth C. Baker, the magazine's managing editor. I knew Betsy as the close friend of Diane Waldman, the curator I worked with at the Guggenheim. The two of them often went to galleries together on Saturdays, and I sometimes tagged along. Betsy gave me my first commission as a writer, a piece on the Georgia O'Keeffe retrospective at the Whitney Museum in 1970. Not that I was especially interested in O'Keeffe, but I was excited by the prospect of writing a feature article for an art magazine, especially the magazine in my university library that had introduced me to contemporary art in the mid-1960s. My excitement was thoroughly quelled, however, when the issue appeared. The article I labored over had been given the idiotic wordplay title "Georgia Is a State of Mind." The title had nothing to do with the essay I'd written, which located O'Keeffe's work in relation to other art: "She painted gigantic flowers before Warhol and discovered the desert before either the commutarians or the earthworkers. To consider O'Keeffe a prophet is, I think, misleading." "Although at times she virtually reproduced the theatrical, dream-like space of Surrealist painting, and despite the similarity of her subjects to those of the Surrealists—Tanguy's 'boneyards,' for example—O'Keeffe rejected the literary basis of Surrealism." "Although at their most abstract, these late O'Keeffes seem to fall somewhere in the spectrum between [Mark] Rothko and [Kenneth] Noland, their intentions are, in fact, far too conservative to admit any such comparison."⁵ I felt humiliated by the title, which I learned was the work of Ashbery, the brilliant wordsmith; inventing clever titles for articles was evidently what he did to stave off his boredom with being a magazine editor. (Some others: "Cummings Events in Washington" for a piece about the Nathan Cummings collection at the National Gallery; "Hello, Columbus" for one on the *Before Cortes* show at the Met; "Imago Clarkensis, T.V." for an article on Kenneth Clark's television series, *Civilisation*. These title high jinks were picked up by John's poet-acolytes, too; thus, David Shapiro's "Mr. Processionary at the Conceptacle," on the Museum of Modern Art's groundbreaking *Information* show.)



Jack Tworkov, *Idling III*, 1970. Oil on canvas, 80 x 70 inches.
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift of the artist

My second piece for the magazine was on Jack Tworkov. I had to plead the case for the continued importance of Tworkov's work to *Art News* editor Thomas B. Hess, who had been a supporter of Jack's back when Willem De Kooning was the reigning American artist and Jack showed at the Leo Castelli Gallery. Now, apparently, he was old news. I argued, successfully enough to get my piece accepted, that owing to the influence of the younger artists who had been his students at Yale—such as Robert Mangold and Brice Marden—Tworkov was producing work of genuine contemporary relevance. In his new paintings, he ordered his Abstract Expressionist brushstrokes into grid-like configurations and reduced his palette to a near monochrome. John called my article, again to my chagrin, "Quartered and Drawn."⁶ I guess I must not have taken John's titling as personal insults, though, since I continued going to his parties. I also slept with his boyfriends: first, the director of the Fischbach gallery, Aladar Marberger (I think John and Aladar were finished with each other by the time of our



Jane Freilicher, *Loaves and Fishes*, 1972. Oil on canvas,
42 x 38 inches. Private collection

casual fling), then David Kermani. That was a setup: David picked me up on the street in the Village, took me to his apartment for a quick fuck, and then immediately told John. John never spoke to me again. Shortly after David's calculated seduction and tattling, John cut me dead at an opening at the Whitney. I don't know why David was so determined to get me out of John's life; I was never that much in it in the first place.

How could I have been? I wasn't a poet. I didn't talk about poetry. I didn't understand poetry. Eventually I stopped even trying to read poetry. A poetry philistine among the poets is how I remember feeling when I was an editorial associate at *Art News*. Or, more accurately, that's how I remember feeling at John's parties, because it was mostly at those parties that I mingled with other *Art News* critics. (My name first appeared on the *Art News* masthead at precisely the moment that John's disappeared. An unexpected change of the magazine's ownership in fall 1972 resulted in the departure of Hess as editor, Ashbery and Harris Rosenstein as executive editors, and, soon afterward, a number of editorial associates; luckily for me, Betsy Baker stayed



Robert Ryman, *Classico 6*, 1968. Acrylic on six sheets of handmade watermark Classico paper mounted on foam core. Each sheet approximately 30 x 22 ½ inches, approximately 61 x 69 inches overall. Private collection

on as managing editor.)⁷ It wasn't, in fact, so much a question of my lack of connection to poetry as it was of the kind of art I was becoming interested in compared with the art the poet-critics cared about. I remember them venerating the painters Jane Freilicher, Michael Goldberg, and Alex Katz, while I admired Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, and Brice Marden. When I look back at the magazine now, I see that my memory of the situation is somewhat distorted. The poets' tastes were neither so uniform nor so exclusively oriented toward Tenth Street as I remember. (The cooperative galleries around Tenth Street were a thing of the past by then, but the rubric, with mostly negative connotations, remained. My *Art News* colleagues actually favored the uptown galleries Tibor de Nagy and Fischbach; the Fischbach stable was eclectic at the time, including such artists as James Bishop, Mangold, and Ryman, along with Nell Blaine, Joe Brainard, and Katz, who also showed at Tibor.) But certainly the poet-critic ethos was strong at *Art News*.⁸ For the seventieth-anniversary issue, Hess wrote an editorial (his last, as it turned out) in which, rather than boasting of the historic accomplishments of his tenure

at the magazine—notably his early support for Abstract Expressionism—he paid tribute to the lowly monthly reviewers. He spoke of the art historians, the critics (by which he meant journalists), and the practicing artists; then he came to his real point:

Poets, our wordsmiths, often can best perform the difficult job of fitting language to shockingly unfamiliar visual forms, and *Art News* has enlisted many of them who honor the high tradition of Goethe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Eluard, Jacob, Crevel, Queneau, and so many others. Indeed, whoever writes the history of US poetry 1950–70 will have to study the pages of *Art News* for the writings of Frank O’Hara (who left us to become a curator at the Museum of Modern Art), John Ashbery (now our Executive Editor), James Schuyler, Peter Schjeldahl (who now writes regularly for the *NY Times*), Ruthven Todd, Barbara Guest, Ted Berrigan, Ralph Pomeroy and, still on our masthead, David Shapiro, Carter Ratcliff, as well as texts by Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, Randall Jarrell, Paul Goodman, and the first publication of Kenneth Koch’s heroical-tragical-comical pastoral, *The Painter*, which predicted (some believe obviated the necessity for) all Earth Works.⁹

Some lines from Koch’s poem:

October 14th. I want these hills to be striated! How naive the
Magician of Cincinnati was! Though it makes me happy to think of it . . .
 Here, I am plunged into the real earth! Striate, hills! What is this deer’s
 head of green stone? I can’t fabricate anything less than what I think
 should girdle the earth. . . .¹⁰

It is telling that Hess mistitles Koch’s clever and seemingly prescient poem “The Artist” as “The Painter.” When he listed the painters who had been *Art News* reviewers, he included Vito Acconci, whom he could have mentioned among the poets, since Acconci wrote poetry, but Acconci was most certainly not a painter. (Two other Conceptual/performance artists, Bill Beckley and Laurie Anderson, were also writing reviews for *Art News* at the time, but Hess didn’t name them; more surprisingly, he neglected to mention Michael Benedikt and Gerrit Henry, two more poets on the masthead when he wrote the editorial.)

If “painter” was for Hess synonymous with “artist,” no wonder Earthworks, a very recent kind of art, could be taken so lightly. This is the

sort of *Art News* smugness that bewildered and alienated me at a time during which I was intently trying to come to grips with a shift in art practice away from painting and sculpture toward Conceptual art, Earthworks, and artists' film, video, and performance. Moreover, Hess's parenthetical jibe not only slighted Waldman, an occasional writer for the magazine who had published an article on Michael Heizer the previous year, but is also markedly *retardataire* in comparison with *Art News*'s rival journal *Artforum*, which as early as 1966 published "Entropy and the New Monuments" by the theoretician and progenitor of Earthworks, Robert Smithson, and continued with his "Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site" and "The Monuments of Passaic" (1967), "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects" (1968), the cover article "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan" (1969), and "A Cinematic Atopia," illustrated with film stills from *Spiral Jetty*, for its special film issue in 1971.

In an *Art News* review of *Spiral Jetty*, shown at the Dwan Gallery in 1970, Ashbery, though appreciative of Smithson's film, is nevertheless similarly condescending: "By using film as a medium for telling about his experiment he has successfully avoided the boredom overkill that up until now has been one of the chief bugs of Conceptual Art, including Smithson's own previous pseudo-scientific 'exhibits' of geological ephemera carefully dredged up from New Jersey's meadows and forests and transplanted to 57th Street."¹¹ The grudging tone pervades Ashbery's take on the film:

Film is the ideal replacement for the sleazy press kits and maquettes that Earth artists have used to keep the public informed of their excavations and elevations in remote places. Almost anybody will watch a film about anything for a while, and Smithson has made such effective use of the medium that after somewhat reluctantly consenting to play Wedding Guest to his Ancient Mariner one finds oneself abruptly spellbound both by the work itself (the jetty) and its parergon, the film about it. He has not disdained to use a variety of proven cinematic devices from the crudest (a map of the Great Salt Lake fades into a shot of the lake's surface) to the most sophisticated (an Antonioni-ish visit to some fossils in a natural history museum, filmed through a red filter and accompanied by some portentous *musique concrète* and the artist's own eloquently flat voice reciting a Robbe-Grillet-ish monologue). . . . There may also be an in-reference to the crop-dusting episode in Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* at the end, where we watch Smithson from above stumbling along his completed jetty pursued

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Stills from Robert Smithson, *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. 16 mm film, color, sound, 35 min.

by the shadow of the helicopter that is filming him. He has avoided the facile excesses of asceticism that are currently fashionable and instead created a work that is a fully fleshed-out, rounded embodiment of the rational dreams that haunt today's artists, and is even more enigmatic and cruel.¹²

Ashbery leaves clues here about what motivates his antagonism toward new Conceptual art forms: they pay insufficient homage to what for him remained the touchstone of contemporary art, Surrealism. In his review of *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* at the Museum of Modern Art two years earlier, Ashbery wrote, "Surrealism is . . . the connecting link among any number of current styles thought to be mutually exclusive, such as Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism and 'color-field' painting. The art world is so divided into factions that the irrational, oneiric basis shared by these arts is, though obvious, scarcely perceived."¹³

He made a similar point in the piece on Cornell that I previously cited:

Largely through the medium of [Robert] Rauschenberg's influence, one suspects, Cornell's work is having further repercussions today, not only on the whole school of assemblagists, but more recently in the radical simplicity of artists like Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt or Ronald Bladen.

It would be idle to insist too much on the resemblance, say, between one of LeWitt's constructions and Cornell's "Multiple Cubes" (1946–48) or his "Crystal Palace" (1949)—there is physical resemblance, certainly, but it could easily be coincidental. What is not coincidental is the metaphysical similarity linking Cornell with these younger men. (The same holds true for the Abstract Expressionists: the night sky outside Cornell's hotel windows is sometimes spattered with white paint to indicate stars, but the key to the kinship between Cornell and an artist like Pollock lies elsewhere—in the understanding of a work of art as a phenomenon, a presence, of whatever sort.) Cornell's art assumes a romantic universe in which inexplicable events can and must occur. Minimal art, notwithstanding the cartesian disclaimers of some of the artists, draws its being from this charged, romantic atmosphere, which permits an anonymous slab or cube to force us to believe in it as something inevitable. That this climate—marvelous or terrible, depending on how you react to the idea that anything can happen—can exist is largely due to Cornell. We all live in his enchanted forest.¹⁴

This seems to me far-fetched. Not that the unconscious and the irrational have no place in the analysis of Minimal sculpture, or romanticism nothing to



on both European and Canadian law, and studies were at any rate not to be regarded as being of value in the study of their applicable principles of contract. It was also found to have a limited place in the study of the *Code*, especially in the second year, and the European law of obligations held more and more of interest to students in the final year and the main function and purpose of law and the civil law could hardly be understood without some knowledge of the civil law of Germany and France, which by contrast provided a solid basis for study. It was also found that the study of Latin American law helped to suggest the legal and developmental needs of the Americas. It also focused on South America, especially as suggested by Hugo Grotius, who had given birth to the science of International Law, and in 1973 the seminar meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was attended by Hugo Grotius of South America. Professor Hirschberg was also a member of the meeting. Professor Hirschberg may have been instrumental in the planning of the meeting, and the meeting was organized by the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture, the Brazilian Institute of International Law, the Brazilian Society of International Law, the Brazilian Society for the Improvement of the Law, and the Brazilian Association of International Law.

had a hard life since the days in the field we passed most of gathering the experiences of such ardent revolutionaries as John C. Frémont and John Brown. Although many names in the early documents of his life are listed,¹² Mason's chief claim to fame lies in the name of many men, James D. and Montgomery C. Clegg, Luree, George W. Clegg, Charles H. Nichols, Mason, Peter T. and George M. Moore, George P. Johnson, George W. Johnson, George W. Moore, and of the famous General Lew Wallace, very much.¹³ The author has had the privilege of the best sort of access to Mr. Lewis Wallace's papers at the Library of Congress, and has been greatly interested in the records of his life and his contributions to the cause of freedom.



Still from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968. Directed by Stanley Kubrick

an “all-star show” at the Tanager Gallery by calling it a “Mike Todd production.”¹⁹ O’Hara collaborated with Alfred Leslie in 1964 on an experimental film called *The Last Clean Shirt*. And in “5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel,” published not in *Art News* but in the self-styled “magazine for abstract art” *It Is*, O’Hara says:

Ernestine Lassaw told Franz Kline and Tom Young that Bob Rauschenberg told her that Joseph Cornell saw a beautiful girl in a box, a cashier’s box, outside a movie house and he used to ride past the movie house on his bike every day to look at the girl in the box. Then one day, Ernestine said Bob said, he—Cornell—picked a little bouquet of blue wild flowers and carried them up and down on his bicycle in front of the movie house before he finally screwed up his courage and thrust the flowers through the hole in the box at the girl. She screamed for the manager who called the police but the police let Cornell go.²⁰

I guess this isn’t so much about movies as it is an homage to a man who, like the speaker, loved movies (and, in Cornell’s case, young girls). The fact that Cornell also *made* movies is an aspect of his art that finds no mention in the various poet-critics’ responses to his work, something that seems all the stranger given that Cornell’s films of the mid-1950s—*Aviary*, *Angel*,



Still from Michael Snow, *Wavelength*, 1967. 16 mm film, color, sound, 45 min.

Nymphlight, What Mozart Saw on Mulberry Street, A Fable for Fountains—were made with the assistance of the poets' good friend Rudy Burckhardt. Perhaps, like me, though, they simply had no chance to see those works until Anthology Film Archives began showing them in the early 1970s.

Did the *Art News* poets habitually go to Anthology, as Christian and I did? I don't remember seeing them there, but, of course, it was the *Invisible Cinema*; if they were there, they were tucked away in their own cubicles, as we were in ours—perhaps admiring, together with Rose Hobart and a cockatoo and Christian and me, the Rajah's private volcano.

BEFORE PICTURES



Postcard of the Café des Artistes, New York, with Howard Chandler Christy murals

HOTEL DES ARTISTES

“It’s so inspiring,” said Halston. “It’s the height of elegance. It’s the most important statement of the century.”

“It’s like seeing old friends,” said Mollie Parnis. “Everybody was influenced by him, but I’m not sure it’s where we’re going today.”

“Most of it looks out of date,” said Calvin Klein.¹

“It” was *The World of Balenciaga*, Diana Vreeland’s first exhibition for the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I don’t think I would have known it was happening if Christian, who was sure it would be a milestone, hadn’t wanted to see it. He was especially taken with the fact that the Met’s paintings by El Greco, Velázquez, Zurbarán, Goya, and Picasso and the armor of Charles I would serve as decor for Cristóbal Balenciaga’s fashions. I was dazzled by the show. The brief catalogue descriptions of just some of the clothes lent by the Baroness Philippe de Rothschild might suggest why:

39. Long evening coat of bois de rose ribbed silk-satin in the “Kabuki” style, 1954–55
49. Evening dress of Persian blue basket-weave silk, with petal front, back fullness, high waist, slight train, and cut on the bias, 1964
52. Shift dress of black organza completely covered with black ostrich feathers, 1964
53. Long housecoat of pale peach silk shantung worn with apricot silk-satin trousers, 1964–65
55. Long evening coat of beige dotted net completely covered with beige ostrich feathers; yoke and sleeves of shocking pink organza, 1967–68²

There were wedding dresses belonging to several marquesas, Queen Fabiola of Belgium, and the Duchess of Cádiz; baby-doll dresses lent by Mrs. Oscar de la Renta, Mollie Parnis, and Vreeland herself; infanta dresses,



Cover of and interior pages from the exhibition catalogue *The World of Balenciaga*,
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1973

tunic dresses, A-line dresses, amphora dresses, balloon dresses, envelope dresses, no-seam dresses, sheaths, sacks, chemises, and choux; dresses with melon sleeves, bell sleeves, tulip sleeves, kimono sleeves; and all the other extraordinary shapes into which Balenciaga cut, draped, and sewed women's clothing. Even the pillbox hat was a Balenciaga invention.

The catalogue for the show is a modest 7-by-9-inch paperback with black-and-white photographs and a graphically bold cover design credited to the Museum Bellerive in Zurich, which had done its own Balenciaga exhibition two years earlier. A brief appreciation by Vreeland is followed by Father Robert Pieplu's eulogy from the couturier's funeral just one year before and brief texts by Gloria Guinness and Pauline de Rothschild. My copy came with a typed erratum slip: "The photograph on page 49 was printed in error. The suit pictured was designed by Christian Dior. This will be corrected in the reprinting of the catalogue." (There was no reprint.) The error is more than ironic. The caption for the photograph reads, "A new tailoring starts in the early nineteen-fifties. Silhouettes of all sorts start to form, tightly belted wool and the decoration of buttons."³ Dior was credited with "the new look" of the wasp-waisted suit, but it was in fact Balenciaga who came up with it. Balenciaga achieved the shape with the cut and tailoring of carefully chosen fabrics, whereas Dior required stays, bones, and horsehair to get essentially the same silhouette. If anyone should



Alberta Tiburzi in Cristóbal Balenciaga's "four-sided" cocktail dress, 1967.

Photo by Hiro for *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1967



Dovima, tunic by Dior, Paris, August 1950. Photo by Richard Avedon

have known the difference it was Vreeland, who was the fashion editor of *Harper's Bazaar* when the magazine published the Dior ensemble in a photograph by Richard Avedon; moreover, she had covered Balenciaga's collections for thirty years. She gushed about them in her memoir, *D.V.*:

One never knew what one was going to see at a Balenciaga opening. One fainted. It was possible to blow up and die. I remember at one show in the early sixties. . . . Audrey Hepburn turned to me and asked me why I wasn't frothing at the mouth at what I was seeing. I told her I was trying to act calm and detached because, after all, I was a member of the press. Across the way, Gloria Guinness was sliding out of her chair onto the floor. Everyone was going up in foam and thunder. We didn't know what we were *doing*, it was so glorious.⁴

Not long after we saw the Balenciaga show together and shortly before he returned to Paris, Christian came with me on my first excursion to Fire Island, off the coast of New York's Long Island. Our friend Carl D'Aquino and a group of people he knew were planning to rent a house for the summer in Water Island (which is the improbable name of a hamlet near the midpoint of Fire Island's length), and he asked me if I would be interested in taking a share. In those days, there was no direct route to Water Island unless you owned a boat, so you took a ferry either to Fire Island Pines from Sayville or to Davis Park from Patchogue, then walked or traveled by beach taxi about a mile down the beach to Water Island. We went out to survey the scene well before the Memorial Day opening of the summer season, so the Pines, where we disembarked, seemed awfully desolate. I had never seen anything like it before. Just a spit of land between the Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, it was covered with scrub vegetation and a motley collection of beach houses, many raised on stilts, crowded together, and connected by a grid of boardwalks that followed the contours of the sand dunes. A relatively new community, the Pines was nevertheless one of the largest on the island, although it was not nearly as built up or as rich as it has become. It's odd to think back to my impression of the place as so bleak, given how trendy and sexy it was by reputation and how many well-designed modernist beach houses had already been built there, but compared with the charm of Provincetown the Pines looked to me distinctly unlovely. I was consoled, however, when we got to our destination. Water Island was a



Carl D'Aquino on the beach in Water Island, New York, 1973

tiny community of modest cottages, many dating from the early twentieth century and built in the shingle style. There was dense vegetation in a few places, including a bower of thick vines enclosing an enchanting walkway. On top of a ridge looking westward toward the Pines was a simple modernist house that I later learned belonged to Morris Golde. Morris, whom I knew slightly from John's parties, was an arts patron and erstwhile lover of the composer Ned Rorem. It was at this house that Frank O'Hara was spending the weekend in 1966 when he was run over and killed by a jeep on the beach. The nondescript modern house that I would eventually summer in was much like those we'd seen in the Pines; its advantages were that it had three bedrooms and a large deck directly overlooking the ocean.

In spring 1973, I learned that I had been awarded a three-thousand-dollar Art Critics Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. It was only the second round of NEA fellowships for individuals and my third year of writing criticism, so I considered myself incredibly lucky. Three thousand dollars was a lot of money in 1973; my entire annual salary when I started at the Guggenheim Museum in 1968 was forty-two-hundred dollars, and I wasn't making much more than that five years later. So I decided to splurge on the summer share, move to Water Island for the first two months of the summer, and then visit Christian in Europe. I sublet my apartment in Greenwich Village and transferred my unemployment benefits to the



Me at the beach

Patchogue office, which meant that I had to take a ferry across the bay from Davis Park once every two weeks to declare officially that I'd been unable to find work; needless to say, art-history teaching jobs were scarce at the beach.

Water Island was quite unlike other towns on Fire Island. Since there was no electricity, only the soft glow of kerosene lamps emanated from the houses at night; no electricity also meant there were neither televisions nor stereos blaring dance music. Refrigerators ran on propane, which also fueled bright lights to cook by. There were no stores or restaurants; groceries were ordered from a supermarket in Patchogue and sent by ferry and beach taxi directly to the house. I felt like we had the best of both worlds: sufficient convenience and comfort together with a genuine sense of getting away from it all. Water Island wasn't a gay destination like the Pines or, farther west, Cherry Grove, but it was gay enough. Kenneth, the hairdresser famous for creating Jacqueline Kennedy's bouffant hairstyle, had a house there, and so did fashion designer Perry Ellis, who flew by seaplane to and from the city to work each weekday. Though I had heard a rumor that Water Island was where the Zoli Agency's male models summered, the truth, in my experience, was that a lone aging blond, recognizable from Van Heusen shirt ads, could often be seen there. In any case, the little community did include a small gay population in 1973, and, moreover, the Pines wasn't far away. We often walked the hour or so down the beach to the

Pines harbor for tea dance at the Botel and, after watching the sun set over the bay and picking up whatever last-minute groceries we might need at the Pines Pantry, headed back to Water Island to make dinner. Despite our ambitious intention to return later at night to dance at the Ice Palace in the Grove, we never did. It was just too pleasant to stay in our cozy little community and turn in early.

My time in Water Island that summer coincided almost to the day with the first and most important round of the nationally televised Senate Watergate hearings, which opened May 17 and concluded on August 7. The break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters in Washington's Watergate complex had taken place the previous June, and information tying the "third-rate burglary attempt"⁵ to the Nixon White House and its pattern of dirty tricks was revealed piecemeal throughout the ensuing year, even as Nixon was reelected in the largest landslide in the history of the American presidency. I became something of a Watergate junkie, savoring every sordid, bizarre revelation (E. Howard Hunt disguised in a cheap red wig to interview lobbyist Dita Beard; Martha Mitchell, wife of the attorney general, held "political prisoner" in her hotel room at the Newport Inn), and was overjoyed when, in mid-March, convicted burglar James McCord Jr. broke ranks and sent a letter to the Watergate trial judge exposing the White House cover-up. Events then transpired in quick succession: acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray III, himself culpable, told the Senate committee considering his nomination to the permanent position of director that the president's counsel, John W. Dean III (so many Waspies carrying forward their father's and grandfather's names!) had lied during the investigation of the burglary. Unwilling to be made the scapegoat, Dean promised to divulge the whole story, and Jeb Stuart Magruder, second in command at the Committee to Re-Elect the President (whose wonderfully apposite acronym was CREEP), confessed to lying to the grand jury. On April 17, Nixon held a press conference to announce that he had begun "intensive new inquiries into this whole matter" and that "real progress has been made in finding the truth." His press secretary, Ron Ziegler, having either unequivocally or equivocally denied every Watergate revelation that appeared in the media for the better part of a year, then uttered one of the scandal's many memorable lines: "This is the operative statement. The others are inoperative." The new statement didn't stay operative for

long. Within two weeks, former attorney general and Nixon campaign manager John Mitchell and campaign finance chairman Maurice Stans were indicted for obstructing a federal investigation into illegal campaign donations by Nixon pal and fugitive from justice Robert Vesco, Dean was fired, and Nixon announced the resignations of White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman and Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John Ehrlichman, known variously as the Prussians, Hans and Fritz, the Brush and the Brows, the German Shepherds, and the Berlin Wall.

These events immediately preceded hearings presided over by the folksy, contradictory old Southern senator Samuel J. Ervin—an opponent of racial desegregation yet a supporter of civil liberties—who famously declared that the Watergate burglars “were in effect breaking into the home of every citizen of the United States,” seeking to steal “the right to vote in a free election.”⁶ In the two weeks of hearings leading up to Memorial Day, convicted burglars McCord and Bernard Barker, along with a few other minor characters, testified. The real fireworks began in the third week, when I moved to the beach. No longer did Water Island’s lack of electricity, and thus television, seem like such an advantage, but I made do with a transistor radio. Day after day throughout June, I could be found more or less alone on the beach with my ear glued to the little box broadcasting the historic events. Damning facts came out in the testimonies of the disarmingly decent CREEP treasurer, Hugh Sloan, and his far less honorable or forthcoming boss, Nixon fund-raiser Stans. Most had to do with large amounts of cash that CREEP collected and then used to pay the Watergate burglars, first for their services, then for their silence. A new law regulating campaign financing, the Federal Election Campaign Act, had taken effect in the middle of the election season in April 1972; because it required disclosure of contributions to candidates for federal office, there was a mad rush at CREEP to collect contributions before that date in order to keep them secret. Stans vociferously defended the secrecy and the destruction of CREEP fund-raising records immediately following the Watergate break-in, which led to a priceless exchange between Ervin and the one resolute Nixonite committee member, Edward Gurney, Republican of Florida. When Stans justified the use of CREEP money for a relatively minor deceptive purpose by saying, “I am not sure this is the first time this has happened in American politics,” Ervin responded, “You know, there has been murder and



John W. Dean III, testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, June 25, 1973

larceny in every generation, but that hasn't made murder meritorious or larceny legal." Gurney protested "the harassment of this witness," which elicited from Ervin: "I am sorry that my friend from Florida does not approve of my method of examining the witness. I am an old country lawyer and I don't know the finer ways to do it."

Magruder followed Stans on the witness stand. He admitted that he had wrongly justified the wiretaps, the enemies list, and the rest of the sinister shenanigans of the White House's "Plumber's Unit"—so called because its main mission was to plug leaks—by equating them to the antiwar movement's acts of civil disobedience. Magruder studied ethics at Williams College with none other than William Sloane Coffin, whom he claimed to admire. If Coffin could support the illegal act of burning draft cards, why, he reasoned, shouldn't the White House employ illegal means to stamp out dissent? Ervin appeared sympathetic: "You were disturbed at the demonstrations, weren't you, the people at the White House?" "Yes, sir, we were," Magruder replied. Ervin's response:

I am familiar with that kind of atmosphere. I came up here during the Joe McCarthy days when Joe McCarthy saw a Communist hiding under every rose bush and I have been fighting the no-knock laws and preventive detention laws and indiscriminate bugging by people who've found subversives

hiding under every bed. In this nation, we have had a very unfortunate fear. And this fear went to the extent of deplored the exercise of personal rights for those who wanted to assemble and petition the Government for redress of grievances.

When Dean began his five days of testimony on June 25 with a 245-page statement, his very first words confirmed Ervin's assessment: "The Watergate matter was an inevitable outgrowth of a climate of excessive concern over the political impact of demonstrations, excessive concern over leaks, an insatiable appetite for political intelligence, all coupled with a do-it-yourself White House staff, regardless of the law." His detailed narrative of his own and others' involvement in the Watergate cover-up unfolded methodically, ultimately describing a March 21 meeting with Nixon in which, he reported, "I began by telling the President that there was a cancer growing on the Presidency and that if the cancer was not removed the President himself would likely be killed by it." Nixon's response was "that he was very impressed with [Dean's] knowledge of the circumstances but he did not seem particularly concerned with their implications." It's hard to understand why Dean was surprised at Nixon's heedlessness, since he had already reported that when he told Nixon that the convicted Watergate burglars were demanding more and more money—as much as a million dollars or more—to keep quiet, Nixon replied that "that was no problem." Senate committee member Lowell P. Weicker Jr. summarized Dean's testimony describing the criminal acts the White House had engaged in:

conspiracy to obstruct justice, conspiracy to intercept wire or oral communications, subornation of perjury, conspiracy to obstruct a criminal investigation, conspiracy to destroy evidence, conspiracy to file false sworn statements, conspiracy to commit breaking and entering, conspiracy to commit burglary, misprision of a felony, filing of false sworn statements, perjury, breaking and entering, burglary, interception of wire and oral communications, obstruction of criminal investigation, attempted interference with administration of the internal-revenue laws and attempted unauthorized use of internal-revenue information.

Although the fundamental significance of Dean's testimony was its thorough indictment of Nixon and his two closest aides, Haldeman and

Ehrlichman, it was the occasional revelation of pathetic degrees of paranoia and harebrained schemes that made listening to the young lawyer's droning voice addictively entertaining, if also chilling. Right off the bat, Dean told the story of the president seeing a lone antiwar demonstrator across the street in Lafayette Park and ordering his removal. Nixon's appointments secretary, Dwight Chapin, told Dean he would get some thugs to take care of it. More ominously, following the June 1971 publication of the Pentagon Papers in the *New York Times*, Special Council to the President Charles Colson ordered that the Brookings Institution be firebombed so that other leaked documents presumed to be there could be retrieved in the ensuing chaos. Then came the story of Watergate burglar G. Gordon Liddy's first in a series of proposals that eventuated in the Watergate break-in:

Plans called for mugging squads, kidnapping teams, prostitutes to compromise the opposition, and electronic surveillance. He explained that the mugging squad could, for example, rough up demonstrators that were causing problems. The kidnapping teams could remove demonstration leaders and take them below the Mexican border.

The prostitutes could be used at the Democratic convention to get information as well as compromise the person involved. I recall Liddy saying that the girls would be high class and the best in the business.

Liddy turned up next in Dean's testimony posing for a photograph in front of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office before breaking into it. The Plumber's Unit had hoped to dig up dirt in Ellsberg's psychiatric records, but the burglars failed to locate the files. As it happened, just before the Watergate hearings began, espionage charges against Ellsberg and Anthony Russo for leaking the Pentagon Papers were thrown out of court because of the government's illegal evidence gathering. News of the break-in at the psychiatrist's office surfaced during the Ellsberg-Russo trial, and Dean's testimony made it clear that Ehrlichman had ordered it. It was, in fact, the publication of the Pentagon Papers that led to the creation of the Plumber's Unit, but Nixon's siege mentality and the cockamamie schemes hatched by his cronies were well established by the time Dean was invited to become a member of the White House staff in mid-1970.

I had to wait until 1976, when Dean's memoir, *Blind Ambition*, was published, for my favorite among these stories: on his first day on the job in July



Members of the Cockettes as wedding guests in *Tricia's Wedding*, 1971.
Directed by Sebastian (Milton Miron)

1970, Dean's friend Egil Krogh Jr., aide to Ehrlichman and eventual chief Plumber, took him on a tour of the White House. In the basement of the East Wing was what Krogh referred to as the president's bomb shelter—an ideal place, he said, from which to monitor political demonstrations. Dean found this puzzling. How could the streets of Washington be monitored from a basement bunker? He returned there only once, he said, "for a secret screening of *Tricia's Wedding*, a pornographic movie portraying Tricia Nixon's wedding to Edward Cox, in drag. Haldeman wanted the movie killed, so a very small group of White House officials watched the cavorting transvestites in order to weigh the case for suppression."⁷ Dean was referring to a film by the Cockettes, a San Francisco performance collective. To call the Cockettes transvestites is a bit off the mark. The Cockettes' style was psychedelic gender-fuck—thrift-shop dresses, full beards, and lots of glitter—and there were women and babies in the group. They developed a cult following for their midnight shows at the Palace Theater in North Beach with titles like *Tinsel Tarts in a Hot Coma* and *Journey to the Center of Uranus*. The Cockettes made *Tricia's Wedding* as a spoof of the televised wedding of Nixon's elder daughter, before the fact. Like all of the Cockettes' performances, *Tricia's Wedding* is a good-natured, amateurish, irreverent romp. Its cast of characters is long: Tricia Nixon and Edward Cox, Richard and Pat Nixon (of course), plus Julie Nixon Eisenhower, Mamie Eisenhower, Martha Mitchell, Madame Nu, Billy Graham, Coretta Scott King, Pope Paul . . . My favorite is Rose Kennedy as played by Pristine Condition. For the most part, she is passed out, drunk in her wheelchair, but periodically she's awakened, looking startled and asking, slurring her words, "Is it a funeral?" Eartha Kitt spikes the punch with LSD, and the whole roster of wedding guests—also including B. B. Rebozo, Phyllis Diller, Indira Gandhi, Jackie Onassis, Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, Mahalia Jackson, and Golda Meir—takes part in an orgy. Imagine all those buttoned-up Nixonites huddled together in the basement of the East Wing watching the Cockettes' send-up of the White House wedding—trying to figure out how to put a stop to such dangerously subversive activities!

I don't remember if I was listening to the hearings when the information that would eventually lead to Nixon's downfall was revealed, nor am I sure I would have grasped how momentous that information would prove. It was July 16. Alexander Butterfield explained to the committee that he was the White House deputy "in charge of the smooth running of the President's

day." He had several other administrative duties, among which was supervising the "Office of Presidential Papers and the Office of Special Files." It was in that capacity that Haldeman enlisted him, at Nixon's request, to install tape-recording devices in the Oval Office, throughout the White House, in the president's offices in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, and at Camp David. As Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward put it, "Nixon bugged himself."⁸ "There was no doubt in my mind," Butterfield testified, "that they were installed to record things for posterity." Little did he know!

At the end of July—and the end of my stay in Fire Island—Ehrlichman and Haldeman testified, protesting their innocence and putting the blame on Dean, whose testimony they claimed was self-serving. Buddies from their college days at the University of California, Los Angeles, both of them Eagle Scouts and both Christian Scientists, they took the same tack: there was no paranoia, no climate of fear at the White House, just a healthy concern about matters of national security. Having more important matters of state to deal with, they paid little attention to the Watergate break-in story. They knew it only through Dean's reports to them, and Dean hadn't told them the truth. Ehrlichman's demeanor was contemptuous—and contemptible. He snarled his answers to the committee members. Haldeman was less contemptuous but no less contemptible. I was sure that both were lying but thought they might get away with it, so it was dispiriting to listen to them. Anyway, as the summer wore on, I became more interested in the boys at the beach than in the goings-on in Washington. In the meantime, I had run through a lot of batteries to keep my transistor radio playing day in and day out for more than a month.

As the only one of the summer shareholders who didn't work at a regular job, I had the house to myself on most weeks from Sunday evening until Friday afternoon. I immediately began to take advantage of the situation by inviting friends out to stay with me during the week. My first guest was Ellsworth Kelly, who came, though, not as a friend but as someone with whom I'd recently begun a romance. I wrote a letter to Christian after his return to Paris and just before moving out to Water Island:

Things have been crazy lately—trying to finish all the business here, pack everything away in the apartment, decide what to take with me. Also, in the middle of things, Ellsworth Kelly has been offering tempting proposals to

visit him at his country house. He's been in hot pursuit of me, called almost immediately after you left. Last week I had dinner with him at his city residence—the Hotel des Artistes! I'm a little uncomfortable on this end of the bargain, also with a 50-year-old man, neither of which I've known before. He's attractive, very eccentric but sweet, sexy for his age (that is, I've never before thought of older men as sexy, but I guess I was wrong). He's coming to the island Wednesday and taking me back to the country with him next weekend and then to see Josephine Baker next week. It's very flattering.

I didn't go with Ellsworth to his country place in Spencertown or to see Josephine Baker; his visit to Water Island wasn't a success. I met his ferry at the Pines harbor, and while there we bought steaks to barbecue for dinner. Ellsworth wanted to pay for them, but I put my foot down: I was the host this time. When I'd visited him at his beautiful double-height apartment at the Hotel des Artistes, he took me to dinner at the apartment complex's expensive restaurant, the Café des Artistes, with its fabled Howard Chandler Christy murals of playful nymphs. I remember sex that night with Ellsworth for a particular reason: what Ellsworth seemed to like to do most was what I later learned is called shrimping. This didn't make for great sexual compatibility, since I'm ticklish, but I was generally game to try new things. It was a gay-liberation tenet to be open to new experiences, no matter how unusual or unappealing to your imagination. Though once was enough for many such adventures, I'll be forever thankful for having abided by the ethos. It's surprising how little you know about what turns you on until someone coaxes you to try it. Shrimping wasn't one of those things for me, but it was more amusement than turn-off. Shrimping wasn't the problem with Ellsworth.

We had the Water Island house all to ourselves. (Indeed, we might well have had the entire community to ourselves: as I recall, people didn't begin staying through the week in the other houses until sometime in mid-June.) We had our steak dinner, and conversation turned to people we knew in common: my former boss Diane Waldman and her husband, Paul Waldman, who was effectively my current boss. Although technically just a faculty member at the School of Visual Arts, he had the ear of Silas Rhodes, the for-profit art school's president. At the time, Paul was a curious player in the art world. A worse-than-second-rate figurative painter, he nevertheless showed at the Leo Castelli Gallery, which was then New York's premier contemporary-art gallery. Ellsworth himself had only recently left the Sidney

Janis Gallery to join Castelli's stable. Paul was the éminence grise behind crucial decisions at the Guggenheim, since Diane relied on his advice, and at SVA. It was through Ellsworth that Diane met Paul. Ellsworth was an aficionado of bodybuilding contests, a distinctly minority interest in the 1960s, and he took Diane along with him to some of them. Paul was a competition bodybuilder, and in that context they all met. Like a lot of bodybuilders, Paul was short. And also like a lot of bodybuilders, he was insecure about his masculinity and even more so about the routine association of bodybuilding with homosexuality. Paul intimidated Ellsworth. He teased him because Ellsworth owned a Porsche with an automatic transmission. Who but a sissy would buy a Porsche with an automatic? "For God's sake, Ellsworth," I said when he told me the story, "you're Ellsworth Kelly. You can drive whatever kind of Porsche you want. Who the hell is Paul Waldman?" What I failed to understand was that Ellsworth was susceptible to Paul's bullying because, a generation older, he was far less comfortable with being gay than I was.

Our generational differences came between us more seriously that evening. Ellsworth's idea of courting me was to make extravagant propositions. Within hours of offering to pay for the steaks at the Pines Pantry, he was making plans to take me with him to Europe. My response was to get on my high horse: I could take myself to Europe, thank you very much. Under the sway of sexual-liberation-movement precepts, I believed that partners should be equal in relationships. Never mind that I'd just stopped living with someone whom I'd financially supported. It took years more experience for me to realize that what put me off about Ellsworth was not that he failed to see that partners should be equal but that the part he wanted to play in the partnership was *mine*. Like I said, I was the host, and he the guest. I don't remember how our evening ended. I suppose I was offended enough to refuse sex. In any case, it was decided that Ellsworth would leave the island the next day and that I wouldn't be joining him at his country house. Although I had few regrets at the time, in hindsight I realize I was a fool. If I'd handled the situation differently, I might have remained a friend to one of the greatest artists of my time.

When I told Christian that I was "a little uncomfortable on this end of the bargain," I said a mouthful. As straightforward as it might seem to counterpose pursuer and pursued, lover and beloved, dominant and submissive, top and bottom, we often fail to see that our many differences from each other are variously eroticized. The more powerful partner—or the older, richer, manlier,

more famous, more experienced, more intelligent, prettier, wittier, swarthier, harrier, skinnier, fatter, taller, shorter . . . the list can be endlessly extended—has no natural or guaranteed desirability or erotic position in the relationship. In truth, pleasure often comes from having to figure out your place. Certainly many of us eventually settle into habitual proclivities and roles, but during that brief moment of gay liberation in the 1970s, experimentation reigned. We tried things on for size, discarded them if they didn't fit, then maybe tried them on again with someone else or after we'd gained more experience. The goal was to not limit ourselves, never to say definitively, "I know what I like." Nevertheless, in one respect, I thought I knew: I didn't like being pursued.

A comic version of Ellsworth's manner of wooing me occurred sometime the next year, when I was far more intent on playing around than on finding a boyfriend. Following a pleasant-enough encounter one evening, my trick said to me, "I know someone who would really like you, and I think you'd like him, too. He's a successful interior decorator. Do you want to meet him?"

"Why not?" I said and gave the trick my phone number, even though he had next to nothing on which to base his assessment of me and knew my taste in men only insofar as I had found *him* attractive enough to invite him back to my apartment when we cruised each other on the street. After failing a couple of times to get the three of us together, he gave my number to the man in question so that we might make our own arrangements. On the phone, the decorator was charming enough, agreeing with me that this was a bit of a lark, but why not go through with it? If nothing else, we could have dinner together at a good Chinese restaurant near his place. I should have expected that I wasn't going to meet a man of my type when he gave me his address, which was right off Fifth Avenue in the East Seventies, the city's wealthiest neighborhood, known as the Gold Coast. The address was even more intimidating when I found myself in front of one of the widest privately owned town houses in New York. I was greeted at the door by a short middle-aged man (whose name I wish I had kept track of) and invited into a hallway considerably larger than my entire floor-through railroad flat. He led me to a den lined with books and LPs. We chatted briefly before he offered to show me the living room across the hall. There was no question of our sitting there, since this was a living room not for living but for formal entertaining on a grand scale. It would feel overwhelmingly large with fewer than fifteen people in it; thirty or forty could be accommodated comfortably. Even more distinctive about the room than its

size was the ubiquity of a particular decorative motif: the unicorn. Wherever you looked there were unicorns, paintings of unicorns, needlepoint unicorns and unicorn brocades on chair backs, embroidered unicorns on throw pillows, unicorn carpets, unicorn figurines, and unicorn china. My host was evidently the sort of society decorator whose mode was the thematic, whereas my taste in interiors at the time tended more toward the high-tech style originated by Alan Buchsbaum and Joe D'Urso. One of my boyfriends had a D'Urso-inspired studio apartment with wall-to-wall gray industrial carpeting that covered the built-in bed platform as well as the floor, vertical Levolor blinds on the windows, a functional dining table and chairs, and not much else. It was a style that felt appropriate to the clone look that many of us were then adopting, the decorator equivalent of Levi's 501s.

When we returned to the den, my host put on a record. His sound system was the most impressive I'd ever heard. He played an opera with Joan Sutherland—*Sonnambula?* *Semiramide?* I don't remember—and asked me if I'd heard her at the Met.

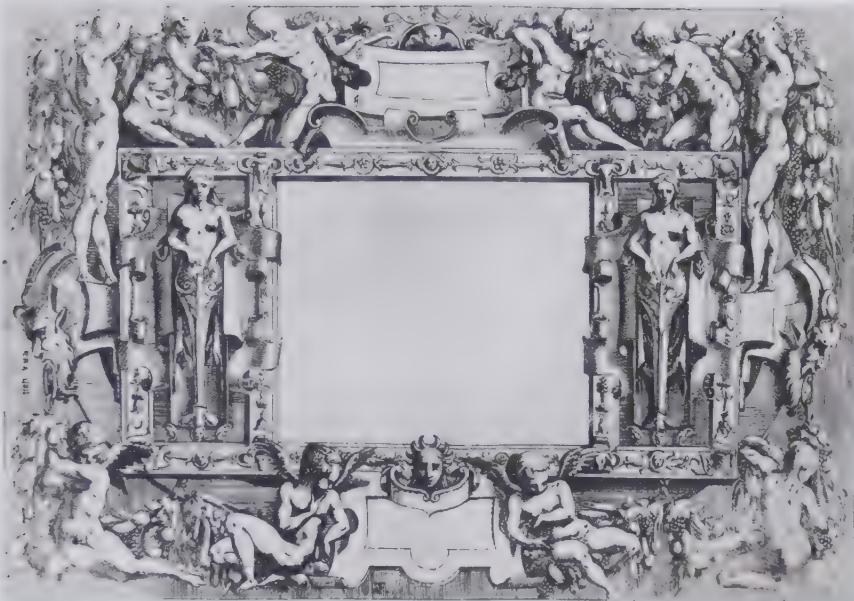
In fact, I'd heard only a single opera live, Verdi's *Otello* with James McCracken and Renata Tebaldi. Christian dreamed of going to the Met, so I bought tickets for his birthday. Acquaintances knowledgeable about opera advised me to get tickets for Sutherland and Marilyn Horne's *Norma*. How I wish I'd been able to! But I wasn't so fortunate. There was a time when hearing McCracken and Tebaldi in *Otello* would have been thrilling, but not as late as January 1973. Well past her prime, Tebaldi would sing her final performance at the Met just a week later. In any case, *Otello* is no beginner's opera. I didn't like it, although I confess, with some shame, that I was impressed by the opening tempest at sea in Franco Zeffirelli's ostentatious production, which was new the year we saw it.

The decorator was aghast that I hadn't heard Madame Sutherland, as he called her. We must rectify the situation at once, he insisted. Realizing that her performances at the Met that season had come to an end, he decided he would simply have to take me to Europe to hear her. Hearing "Madame Sutherland" didn't seem quite so pressing to me, nor was the idea of going off to Europe with this unicorn enthusiast so tempting. But I didn't get on my high horse this time, not having anything at stake.

I retain a treasured souvenir of that evening, however. During our conversation, I told my host about teaching a course at SVA on the School of

Fontainebleau, a subject I knew very little about but about which I wanted to learn more. I was fascinated by a particular painting, the 1594 double portrait of two women together in the bath, presumed to be Gabrielle d'Estrées and one of her sisters. The sister, either the Duchess de Villars or Madame de Balagny, delicately pinches Gabrielle's nipple, probably symbolizing the fact that Gabrielle, mistress of Henry IV, is pregnant with his child. The importation of Italian Mannerism to the French court resulted in a style that had intrigued me since I first discovered it as an undergraduate, and so I took the opportunity to explore the subject in my teaching. It was an unlikely course for SVA students, who were training to be artists, illustrators, and designers, not art historians, but because I taught the required art-history survey course to vast numbers of students each semester I was granted the luxury of teaching specialized courses of my own devising. I imagined the School of Fontainebleau would be bliss to an interior decorator, and sure enough my host knew all about it. He pulled from his bookshelf *Fair Women at Fontainebleau* by Frank Hamel, published in London in 1909, and insisted that I take it home. It was meant to be a loan rather than a gift, but since we didn't see each other again I never returned it.

Ellsworth was among the artists whose work I addressed in "Opaque Surfaces," the 1973 essay in which I wrote about Agnes Martin. I wrote the essay for the catalogue of an exhibition in Milan around the time I met him. Organized by the art dealer Franco Toselli, *Arte come arte* was a show of contemporary American painters. His selection of artists provided a lineage for the painters I was especially interested in, such as Brice Marden and Robert Ryman. It included Barnett Newman, stolen from Greenberg's canon, together with Ad Reinhardt, Martin, Kelly, Jo Baer, and Frank Stella. Dorothea Rockburne and Richard Tuttle, artists whose work stretched the parameters of painting, were also included. Ralph Humphrey, Robert Mangold, and David Novros rounded out the show's checklist. Still contending with Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried's promotion of Color Field painting, I wanted to assert its displacement by work that I saw as being aligned with Minimal sculpture. "The problem," I wrote, "was . . . to give to the painted surface an equivalent literalness to that which Minimalism had imparted to the sculptural object. The specificity of a 'specific surface' is inherent in the quality of opacity, a quality that had been banished from painting when burnished gold surfaces gave way to pictorial spaces in the fourteenth century."⁹



Antonio Fantuzzi (School of Fontainebleau), cartouche with empty rectangle, 1544–45

In some ways, “Opaque Surfaces” might be taken for an early iteration of “The End of Painting,” the polemical essay I published in the journal *October* in 1981. For example, “While it might seem in retrospect to have been thoroughly reckless, there were nevertheless cogent reasons by about 1965 for various artists and critics to proclaim painting dead, or at least momentarily not viable.”¹⁰ “Opaque Surfaces” is, however, an argument that painting could continue to be vital through a self-reflexive grappling with “the end of painting” and a strategic blocking of the illusionism traditionally associated with the medium and still present in Color Field painting. Indeed, I meant opacity to be a direct rebuke to the supremacy of opticality as propounded by Greenberg and Fried. Kelly didn’t play a central role in my argument, but he seemed to me a clear progenitor of the Minimalist painters.

Thus, when I first met Ellsworth at an end-of-the-season *Art News* staff party at Betsy Baker’s apartment, he was much on my mind. In addition to “Opaque Surfaces,” I had just written a review of his latest show at the Castelli Gallery for *Art International*. I was equivocal about him in the former essay, since I was so concerned with whether or not the work was sufficiently anti-illusionist:

BEFORE PICTURES



Brice Marden, *Grove Group II*, 1973. Oil and wax on canvas, three panels: 72 x 108 inches overall

The absolute removal of surface incident in Kelly's color panels made for a fixed identification of color and format. Nevertheless, there are persistent illusionistic references in the latent anthropomorphic readings possible in Kelly's shapes. There is, moreover, a tendency for his color relationships to become optically illusionistic because his colors are often primary and secondary and their extreme value contrast—including even black and white—makes the shapes appear to pop back and forth and leave afterimages.¹¹

Clearly I was giving no quarter, quarter that I was nevertheless willing to give in the very same context in the review of his Castelli exhibition: "One of the problems of color is its tendency to suggest optical illusion. We say, for example, that white pops out, black recedes, when they abut each other. Kelly has eliminated such an illusion by shifting the perception of positive/negative from a spatial reading to one confined to area, thus keeping the perception engaged with the surface."¹²

So which is it? And why did I reverse myself? These texts were written more or less simultaneously.¹³ Some lines are even repeated from one to the other. In the issue of *Art International* in which I reviewed Kelly's Castelli exhibition, I also reviewed an exhibition of Marden's magnificent *Grove Group* at the Bykert Gallery. In that review, I wrote that the sense of the materiality of Marden's encaustic surface "is so strong that I felt compelled to walk right up to it and examine it, even to smell it."¹⁴ I repeated the point when discussing Marden's work in "Opaque Surfaces," putting it this way: "The precise characteristic of this material is opacity, of an extremely dense matte surface; its sense of material *qua* material is so strong that on last seeing an exhibition of Marden's paintings I felt compelled to walk up to a work and smell it."¹⁵ So the review preceded the catalogue text—which means that in Kelly's case I went from giving quarter to giving none.

My insistence that "anti-illusionism" was prerequisite for the continued viability of painting after the advent of Minimal sculpture adhered to the notion—a Greenbergian one, in fact—that art progresses along a teleological path, a view that was no doubt also a product of my undergraduate art-history studies, which were informed by Heinrich Wölfflin's formalist *Principles of Art History*. (I can, in fact, trace a direct line of influence: one of my professors, Caecilia Davis-Weyer, did her PhD under Richard Krautheimer, who was, in turn, a PhD advisee of Wölfflin's.) My art-history

BEFORE PICTURES



Giulio Romano, ceiling fresco of the Camera del Sole e della Luna,
Palazzo del Te, Mantua, Italy, 1527–28



Leon Battista Alberti, Basilica of Sant'Andrea,
Mantua, Italy, 1465–90



Andrea Mantegna, ceiling fresco of the Camera
degli Sposi, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy, 1465–74

training shows itself directly, if superficially, throughout “Opaque Surfaces” in its references to Giotto, Van Eyck, and Alberti:

I think it makes sense to speak of an efficacy of Giotto’s invention of pictorial space, an invention which is fairly embedded in the consciousness of anyone who is used to looking at paintings, or rather looking *into* paintings, which is our habit. “I describe a rectangle of whatever size I please, which I imagine to be an open window through which I view whatever is depicted there.” Alberti’s description of painting in the fifteenth century is a description of our visual habit when confronted by painted rectangles. Although nothing clearly recognizable, nothing namable, has been depicted there for some time, our consciousness is still drawn toward that fictive space through the framing edge, and flatness, as such, is not necessarily a hindrance.¹⁶

Alberti would play a rather different role in my life that summer. In early August, I left Fire Island for Milan. Toselli had promised to pay me four hundred dollars for my essay, which I planned to use to finance a week’s sojourn between Milan and Venice. He had said the money would be waiting for me at the gallery. When I showed up at his address in Via Melzo, the place was closed up tight. Stupid me: it was August. Even New York galleries would have been closed, but in Europe in those days you were hard-pressed during the month of August to find any place open for business that

wasn't explicitly catering to tourists. So there I was, stranded in Italy with barely a hundred dollars in my pocket and a week to spend. I would have to seriously economize. Luckily, traveling in Europe was still cheap.

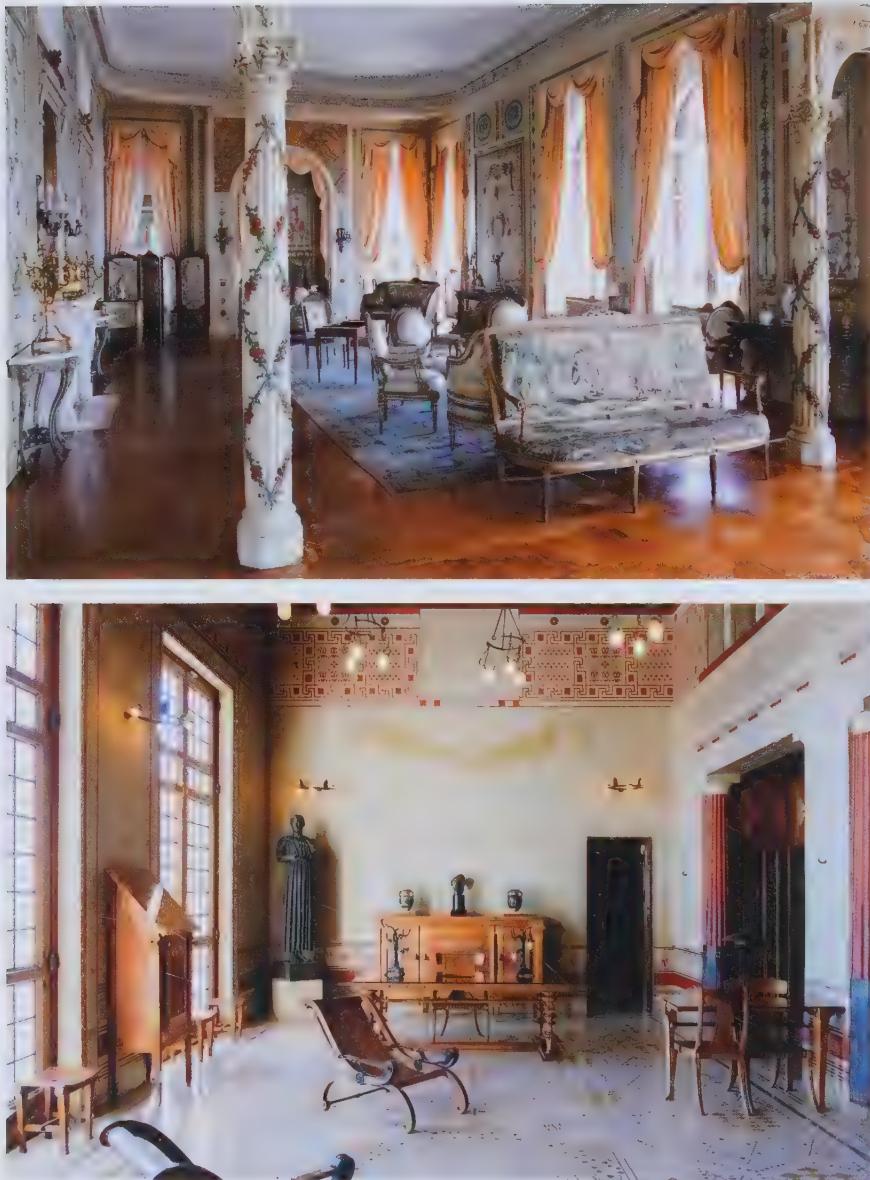
My art-history training served me well when it came to deciding where to go. I set out first for Mantua to see Andrea Mantegna's Camera degli Sposi in the Palazzo Ducale of the Gonzaga family and Giulio Romano's Camera del Sole e della Luna and Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Tè, also built for a Gonzaga. An accomplished architect and painter—yet, in the words of Sir Banister Fletcher, author of my college architectural-history textbook, “primarily a decorator”—Giulio was one of the Italian Mannerists who brought to the court of Francis I at Fontainebleau the decorative style that so fascinated me. I arrived in Mantua on a Sunday evening, not realizing that on Monday everything would be closed. No matter, I would stay through Tuesday. In the meantime, I thought perhaps the churches might be open, including the one I especially wanted to see, Alberti's masterpiece, the Basilica of Sant'Andrea. It was hot at midday, when most Italians would be having their long meal, so the streets of Mantua were quiet, virtually empty. I was sitting on the steps of the basilica in the Piazza Andrea Mantegna when an attractive boy sped by on his Vespa and glanced my way. He soon reappeared, traveling a bit more slowly and looking a bit more intently. I returned his look just as intently. He came back again, and I made whatever sign of interest I could toward the moving target. Finally, on his fourth time around, he stopped in front of the steps and motioned for me to get on his Vespa behind him. He spoke no English, and I spoke no Italian. I had no idea where he would take me, but I knew what we both had in mind. Just across one of Mantua's several artificial lakes from the old city center is the Parco del Mincio, a nature preserve considerably larger than the city itself. It was there that my companion took me, into the surrounding meadows and woods, where we had midafternoon sex alfresco, which remains one of my fondest travel memories.

Apart from the Ramble in Central Park and parts of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, outdoor cruising in New York took place mostly at night in industrial zones of the city, behind parked box trucks or in abandoned piers. In Europe, by contrast, it occurred in some of the most beautiful parts of cities, the Tuileries in Paris, the Villa Borghese Gardens in Rome, and the San Marco Giardinetti boat platforms just off the Giardini Reali in Venice. At the Giardinetti boat platforms during that same trip, I met a young Venetian

who invited me to go with him to his apartment. He told me that he was a chef at the Hotel Danieli and very well known in Venice, so he couldn't risk being seen in my company. (Could being seen with me so obviously mark him as gay?) He said he would set out toward home and after giving him about twenty paces' head start I should follow. Never once did he look back to be sure I was still on his trail. The parts of Venice not frequented by tourists were dark at night, and his path homeward took us into narrow streets, over bridges, and around corners. I sped up so as not to lose him when he turned one corner and then another before I could round the first. I began to wonder if this was some sort of sinister game whose purpose was to lure me into the farthest reaches of the maze-like city and leave me stranded there. (Coincidentally, *Don't Look Now*, Nicholas Roeg's thriller involving fleeting sights of mysterious figures on the streets of Venice at night, was made the same year.) In the end, I managed to follow him right to his doorway. Once inside his apartment, he turned out to be a hopeless romantic, making me promise before I left that I would write to him from New York. I was frankly more concerned with how I would find my way back to my hotel.

Christian's return to Paris became an excuse during the next several years for me to travel often to Europe. One of those visits was at Christmastime. Paris was cold and gray, so we decided to take a train to the Côte d'Azur, where Christian's friend Claude Fournet, having taken the position of director at the Museums of Nice, lived in an enchanting house adjacent to the Musée Masséna. Claude was a classic French *folle*, and his rooms were overstuffed with antique furniture and bibelots, enough to make me feel like a bull in a china shop. I found him affected; moreover, he didn't speak much English or I much French. So it wasn't an easy situation. But Christian and I were luckily offered a convenient means of avoiding him for much of our stay. Claude had a long-term houseguest, a Chinese artist who seemed as keen as we were to escape Claude's company. The artist, who owned a beat-up old Peugeot, said he would be happy to drive us anywhere in the area we might like to go. Christian was an avid—not to say fanatical—tourist and always traveled with the relevant *Guide Bleu*. (He even brought along a *Guide Bleu* when he visited me one summer in Rochester, New York, and, as resolute as usual, persuaded me to take him to nearby Palmyra to see Joseph Smith's birthplace and the Hill Cumorah, where Smith claimed to have received the Mormon revelation from the angel Moroni.)

BEFORE PICTURES



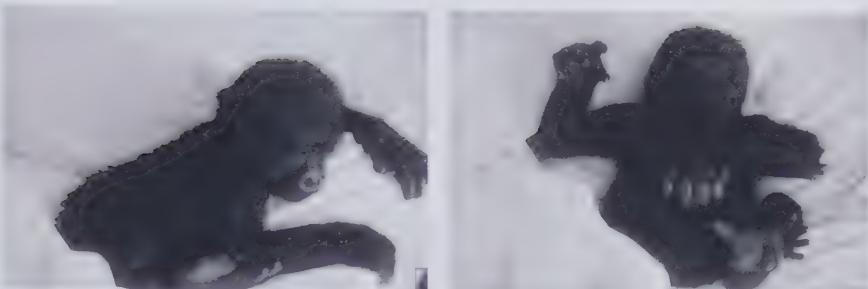
Top: Aaron Messiah, Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France, 1905–12
Bottom: Emmanuel Pontremoli, Villa Kérylos, Beaulieu-sur-Mer, France, 1902–1908

Christian's trusty, thorough blue guide, together with our willing driver, brought us to a number of curious attractions in the region. I remember most vividly the Belle Époque Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat; the faux-Greek Villa Kérylos, built in the same era by the archaeologist Théodore Reinach at Beaulieu-sur-Mer; and the Musée Escoffier de l'Art Culinaire up in the hills at Villeneuve-Loubet. On the frightening drive from Nice to Villeneuve-Loubet—our chauffeur was unfortunately a terrible driver—Christian and I speculated about what might be collected by a museum devoted to the modernizer of French haute cuisine. We knew that the excuse for the museum was that it was the birthplace of Auguste Escoffier, but what would be exhibited there? Cooking utensils? Recipes? Menus? The answer, it turned out, was banquet photographs—banquet photographs of the annual meeting at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York of Les Amis d'Escoffier Society, formed in 1936. By the 1970s, the collection comprised thirty-odd black-and-white photographs of great numbers of American gastronomes arrayed in rows. Perhaps it was a special exhibition, although nothing indicated that it was. The photographs seemed to be the museum's only holdings; evidently, it was the American society that saved the Escoffier house for posterity.

While we were staying with Claude, he invited to dinner the Baroness Bich, a friend he'd been bragging about since we'd arrived in Nice. Baron Bich was the founder and principal owner of the Bic company, famous for its pens and lighters. His wife—if that is indeed what she was—arrived in floor-length ermine, worn over jeans, and immediately pulled from her handbag a jar of Beluga caviar. She was American—an American showgirl, in fact, which we learned during the course of a conversation in which Christian relayed the story of a trip he made to California during his time in the States. He had been most impressed, he said, by the San Diego Zoo, mention of which sent the baroness into a frenzy. "My Joe, my Joe, that's where my Joe is!" she squealed. Her Joe, it turned out, was a pet gorilla that she had acquired while living in Africa, the gorilla that became Mighty Joe Young in the film of that title made by Merian Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, the same team that had earlier made *King Kong* (1933). Christian and I had seen *Mighty Joe Young* in New York. (So, I learned later, had Frank O'Hara on the night he met the painter Jane Freilicher through John Ashbery; that would have been when the film was originally released in 1949.) The baroness was overjoyed



Ellsworth Kelly, *Red Yellow Blue I*, 1963. Acrylic on canvas, three panels: 90 x 90 inches.
Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul de Vence, Gift of Aimé and Marguerite Maeght



Stills from *Mighty Joe Young*, 1949. Directed by Ernest B. Schoedsack

to learn that we had seen her Joe's screen appearance and, moreover, in effect seen hers. She had worked behind the scenes in Africa with the baby gorilla, since only she could make the animal behave as the filmmakers wished.

I wonder now why Christian and I didn't take the opportunity to go to the Fondation Maeght at Saint-Paul de Vence. Could it possibly have been closed for the holiday season? From my current perspective, I wish we had seen, more than anything we did see on the Côte d'Azur, Josep Lluís Sert's museum building and the foundation's collections, including Ellsworth Kelly's *Red Yellow Blue I*, painted in 1963, the year before the museum opened. The Maeghts were early supporters of Kelly's work, which had been selected by their gallery director Louis Clayeux as early as 1951 and 1952 for his annual *Tendance* exhibitions in the Paris gallery; Kelly had solo shows at the Galerie Maeght in 1958 and 1964 and was included in the exhibition *L'art vivant aux États-Unis* at the museum in Saint-Paul de Vence in 1970. I suppose it didn't occur to me when I was in my early thirties that I would never return to the Côte d'Azur.

The first retrospective exhibition of Kelly's work opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in September 1973, just a few months after my brief liaison with Ellsworth. E. C. Goossen, who had written the catalogue for Kelly's 1958 show at the Galerie Maeght, organized the retrospective. The simple, handsome design for the catalogue's cover divides it into two segments with a gently curving diagonal. The top is black, the bottom white with "ELLSWORTH KELLY" in black. If not for the artist's name, it could be a detail of one of Kelly's paintings in the Castelli show I reviewed the previous spring:



Cover of the exhibition catalogue for *Ellsworth Kelly*,
Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1973

Ellsworth Kelly showed six paintings from his new *Curved Series*. With the exception of a triangular shaped canvas, each of these paintings is a rhombus divided on its long diagonal by an arc which is tangent to the sides of the rhombus at its vertices. The curve itself is delineated by the abutment of two areas, one of which is always white, the other black, red, yellow, blue or green. These areas read as positive or negative depending on their being inside or outside the arc; this is undoubtedly due to our imaginary completion of the arc into a circle. . . [This] tendency to posit a full circle . . . [gives] the illusion of a sextuplicate extendibility of each rhombus shape. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Geometric Abstraction's aspiration to hold to its actual surface against the enormous potential of illusionist spatial readings is the extent to which each solution suggests a new problem. It has been enough to engage Kelly in some decades of highly intelligent and accomplished painting.¹⁷

Little of what I wrote in my twenties is quite as embarrassing to me as this. First of all, Kelly had been engaged by questions of color and area, or color and shape, only since 1950–51. “Some decades” suggests that he’d been at it for considerably longer. Just how old—at fifty—did Ellsworth seem to me? Second, *Geometric Abstraction* is a term that pertains to early-twentieth-century movements, such as Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism,



Ellsworth Kelly, *White Curve III*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 70 x 118 inches.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Bequest of Solomon B. Smith

Abstraction-Création, and the American Abstract Artists group, the last founded by such artists as Josef Albers, Ilya Bolotowsky, and Burgoyne Diller. Kelly belongs, obviously, to a much younger generation, whose interest in both geometry and abstraction is of an entirely different order. When he met Georges Vantongerloo in Paris in 1950 and the older artist explained to him the mathematical theories underlying his work, Kelly famously remarked, "He made me understand that *bis* kind of paintings had to have reasons. I was glad that mine didn't."¹⁸ Third, only someone as determined as I was to ferret out "illusionist spatial readings" could imagine in a curve inscribed in a rhombus a full circle inscribed in six rhombuses. Just try to work that out geometrically! I suppose I might be excused for this determination, since it was fairly endemic to art criticism still trying to overcome Greenbergian orthodoxy. Here, for example, is John Elderfield, writing about Kelly in *Artforum* in 1971:

Kelly . . . has followed the certainly riskier course of working with combinations of highly saturated color where sharp contrasts of hue and tone inevitably created difficulties in defying flatness. It has been, of course, his special and practical solution to this dilemma to position each color on (or

rather, as) a separate physical unit within the painting. By juxtaposing not colors but colored panels he is able to defy, or at least accommodate, the otherwise blatant spatial illusionism.¹⁹

This is the sort of thing I would have been reading at the time I reviewed Ellsworth's show.

I wish I'd had access to other critical models, including those that were to appear soon after I wrote my review, like Goossen's cogent essay for the MoMA retrospective catalogue or, even better, the review of that exhibition by my own editor at *Art News*, Betsy Baker. Following a consideration of Kelly's abstraction of motifs seen in nature (or, more often, in culture), Baker writes:

In choosing to be faithful to his source-motifs—whose idiosyncrasies, even though he adjusts them endlessly, he follows closely—he continues to accept a large dosage of “given” from what are essentially “found” subjects. Kelly’s art sometimes comes perilously close to excess grace; but the resistance of a perceived form, especially one chosen for its oddness, can be awkward; the admission of the awkwardness dictated by his fragments of reality stiffens his art.²⁰

I love the idea of odd fragments of reality “stiffening” otherwise too-graceful abstract art. When I wrote about Kelly in 1973, I knew nothing of real-world motifs for his paintings, even though Goossen had revealed, in the catalogue for *The Art of the Real* some five years earlier, the sources of two of the Paris-period paintings (*Window, Museum of Modern Art, Paris* [1949] and *White Plaque: Bridge Arch and Reflection* [1952–55]). Now, of course, we take it for granted that much of Kelly’s early work “derived from direct observation of forms in his environment,” as Goossen claimed.²¹ In the finest essay on Kelly’s work to date, Yve-Alain Bois writes of *Window, Museum of Modern Art, Paris*:

Like [Marcel Duchamp’s] *Fresh Widow*, isn’t *Window* a scale model of a window made absurd by its opacity, and thus transformed into a commentary on pictorial esthetics since the Renaissance (contrary to what Alberti thought, a window doesn’t need to open onto a world for it to be a picture in itself)? Certainly, there is no play on words in Kelly’s title (either in the original—*Construction: Relief en blanc, gris et noir* or in the current title), but the object itself is a “play on things,” so to speak, a metaphor (the window as a picture)

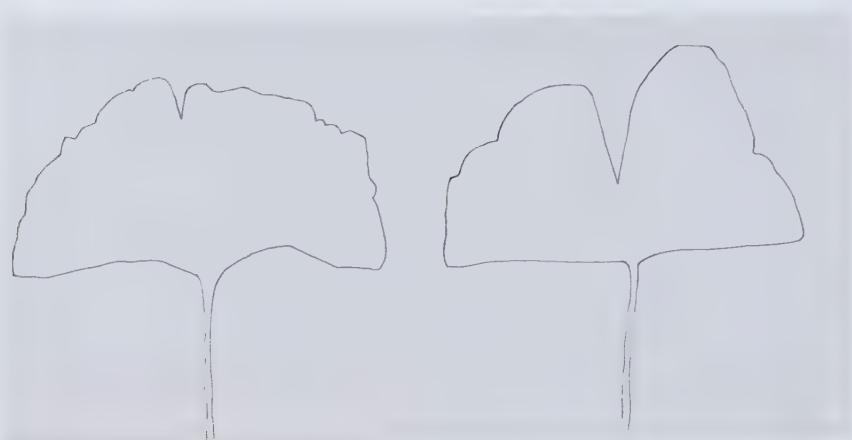
that in spite of its non-linguistic nature, nevertheless loses none of its rigorous effectiveness. Indeed, the metaphor could be considered even more effective, more overdetermined than that of Duchamp, as Kelly's work constantly oscillates between three contradictory semantic poles (scale model, "abstract painting," meta-painting), thus marking a kind of aporia.²²

"Contrary to what Alberti thought, a window doesn't need to open onto a world for it to be a picture in itself"—Bois's single, parenthetical sentence says everything I wanted to say with "Opaque Surfaces." If I had known more about the development of Kelly's art, perhaps I would have realized how much it was to him that we owed this understanding. Would I then have given him quarter, as I put it before?

Perhaps surprisingly, the works by Ellsworth that I most cared about at the time that I knew him were his plant drawings. I saw them in their very first public exhibition, in 1969 at the Metropolitan Museum in what was known as "Henry's show." Henry was the thirty-four-year-old Henry Geldzahler, and his show was the Met's centennial exhibition *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940–1970*. Thirty-five of the museum's European painting galleries at the top of the grand staircase were cleared of their usual pictures and remodeled to make way for the show's four-hundred-odd works by forty-three artists. The exhibition was controversial, to say the least. In 1969, contemporary art did not command anything like the high regard it does now, and Geldzahler was much better known for hanging out at Warhol's Factory than for his art-historical scholarship or expertise. Hilton Kramer wrote a scathing review in the *New York Times* titled "A Modish Revision of History." His assessment of the inclusion of Kelly's drawings is representative of his overall response:

It apparently did not occur to Mr. Geldzahler that if an entire gallery of Ellsworth Kelly's drawings required a place in this exhibition, then Willem de Kooning's drawings—and Arshile Gorky's too—required something similar. Not that the selection of Mr. Kelly's work gives anything like a coherent account of his career—far from it. Mr. Geldzahler simply has no eye for the way this artist's work has developed—nor for many another.²³

But whether or not the exhibition was the work of a dilettante, Geldzahler's inclusion of Kelly's plant drawings turned out to be prescient. In 2012, the Met showed them again, this time in a comprehensive exhibition,



Ellsworth Kelly, *Ginkgo*, 1973. Ink on paper, 11 ¾ x 23 ½ inches. Private collection

organized with the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich, of more than one hundred works. The exhibition made clear not only that plants have been a lifelong preoccupation of the artist and the subject of some of the most exquisite drawings ever made but also that Kelly's observation of them is that of a serious amateur botanist. Seeing such a large selection of the drawings, it becomes less surprising that one of Kelly's youthful passions was John James Audubon's *Birds of America* (1827–38); for Kelly, too, seems to have sought out species after species. Among my favorite drawings in the Met's show was *Ginkgo*, which coincidentally dates from 1973. It is unlike most of Kelly's plant drawings insofar as two leaves are drawn side by side as if to suggest comparison. All of the plant drawings consist solely of pencil or ink outlines (and in exceptional cases watercolor renderings) of leaves, stalks, flowers, and fruits. There are a few other drawings that suggest a comparative purpose, but these depict a complex flower, such as a sweet pea or a calla lily, seen from different angles. In other cases where there are two or more leaves, they appear to grow from the same branch; even when the branch or stem goes unrendered in the drawing, the leaves are configured as they would be when growing together. But the ginkgo leaves stand on the page not as they might grow on a tree but simply one next to the other, two similar but distinct individuals. Moreover, the difference between them has significance beyond the interesting variation of shape. Ginkgo trees have long shoots from which grow short shoots, the tree's characteristic

spikes. The long shoots account for the tree's size, the short ones for its fullness. As the paleobotanist Peter Crane writes in his book *Ginkgo*:

The leaves on long and short shoots are slightly different. On short shoots they have fan-shaped blades that are rarely deeply divided. The upper edge is usually more or less smooth, or at the most only shallowly notched. The same is true of the first few leaves that burst from the tip of the long shoot at the beginning of the season. However, leaves formed on long shoots later in the growing season have a deep central notch that may be up to two-thirds of the leaf blade. These are the leaves that served Goethe's poetic purpose and that Linnaeus had in mind when he coined the epithet *biloba*.²⁴

Linnaeus named the tree *Ginkgo biloba* in 1771 after receiving a specimen of a long shoot from the British horticulturist James Gordon. In 1815, Goethe wrote his poem "Ginkgo biloba," which includes the lines:

Is it one living being?
That divides itself into itself
Are there two who have chosen each other,
So that they are known as one?

If you know the plant, you will recognize it in Kelly's plant drawings, in spite of their simplicity and abstraction. The two leaves in the 1973 drawing are distinctly ginkgo-tree leaves. No other leaves are shaped quite like them. And they wouldn't be, since the ginkgo, the oldest surviving kind of plant, the lone survivor from two hundred million years ago, is genetically unrelated to any other living species.

No doubt one reason that I am so attracted to this drawing is that I love the ginkgo, a tree that I first encountered in New York City, where it is quite common, as it is in many cities around the world. It is, in the West, to which it was brought from China and Japan in the eighteenth century, a city tree. It is a robust tree, resistant to extremes of weather, pests, diseases, and air pollution. It is a pungent, funky-smelling tree when it drops its fruit. And it is a dazzling-looking tree when after an autumn cold snap its leaves turn brilliant yellow all at once. Judging from this drawing, Ellsworth loved the ginkgo tree too, and perhaps for the same reason: after all, he drew it when he still kept a home in the city—at the Hotel des Artistes.

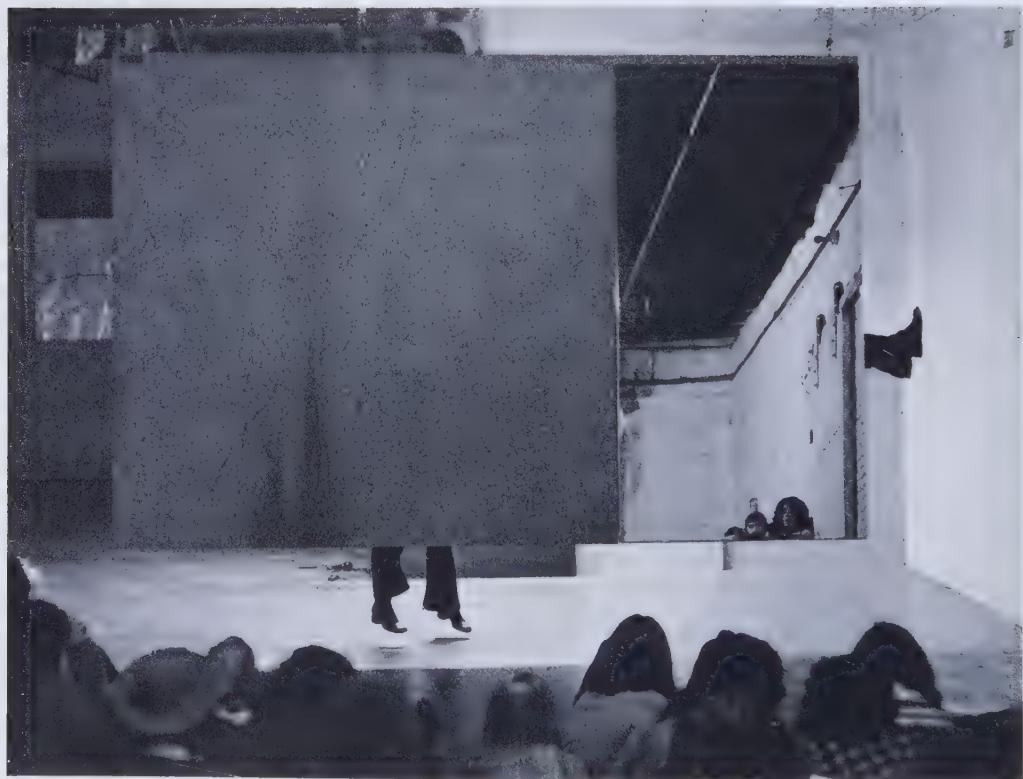


TRIBECA

152 CHAMBERS STREET, 1974-76



BEFORE PICTURES



Joan Jonas, *Choreomania*, 1971. Photo by Carol Mersereau

ACTION AROUND THE EDGES

I should start with how it happened. I mean, what it's like to wander for months around New York trying to find a space to do a piece of work, and especially something to the scale that I have been able to do in other places but not in New York City. . . . Originally what I had sighted on were the facades because as you go down the Pier; driving down the pier along that empty highway in front, the facades are an incredible, animated grouping of different eras and different personalities. And I wanted to deal with one of the earlier ones, which this is—a turn of the century facade. There's a classic sort of tin classicism. And to cut at the facade. So the ones that I found originally were all completely overrun by the gays. And S&M, you know, that whole S&M shadows of waterfront . . .

—Gordon Matta-Clark to Liza Baer, March 11, 1976

THE DAY IN AUGUST I moved from Greenwich Village to Tribeca was one of the hottest of summer 1974. I rented a van and got my on-again, off-again boyfriend Richard Cook to help out. My apartment on Tenth Street just west of Hudson Street was a fourth-floor railroad flat; my new place was a spacious skylit loft on Chambers Street, also west of Hudson. I'd arranged to use the freight elevator in the loft building for the day, a rickety old contraption operated by pulling down hard on the hoist cable of a pulley system and stopped by yanking the other cable. It was a challenge to bring it level with the floor. After piling all of my belongings on the elevator's platform, Richard and I, along with the artist next door from whom I was subletting the loft, managed to get the overloaded elevator to start its ascent. By the time we'd reached the third floor, though, it came to a grinding halt and began sliding back downward. We all grabbed the cable to slow the elevator's plunge and did manage to prevent a free fall, but it crashed onto the basement floor nevertheless. After recovering our wits and finding ourselves luckily unharmed, we had to lug my belongings through the old industrial building's dank basement and up the back stairs, make our way with them

through a jam-packed hardware store on the ground floor, and then haul them up four more flights of stairs.

My new loft had some amenities besides the skylight, one of them with a classy provenance. The set designer Robert Israel had previously rented the space, and from him I bought its fixtures (appurtenances necessary to convert a commercial loft into a residence—plumbing and appliances for kitchen and bathroom, space heaters, and so forth). Among these was a stage-like platform about ten-foot square and standing two feet above the floor, which Robert must have used to mock up designs. I positioned it underneath the skylight and used it to demarcate my bedroom. I didn't pay much attention to the symbolism of bedroom-as-brightly-lit-stage, but I guess it was apt for that moment of my life. The fixture with the provenance was a large refrigerator-freezer that had been given to Jasper Johns by Marion Javits, the art collector and socialite wife of New York State's famous liberal Republican senator. Johns had given it to Robert. It stopped working the summer after I bought it from Robert, so I found a thirty-five-dollar replacement at a used-appliance store on Kenmare Street, just east of SoHo. This one was a General Electric model from the 1940s with a freezer compartment just big enough for ice-cube trays. I kept it for the next twenty years, and it still worked fine when I finally replaced it.

My move from the Village to Tribeca came about as a result of my decision to get serious about being an art critic, to replace the gay scene with the art scene. I'd come to feel myself adrift, not accomplishing enough, not spending enough time with the crowd to which I "rightly" belonged. My exchange of one scene for another was destined to fail, but my attempt to achieve it with a geographic implementation interests me now. The immediate impulse is not easy for me to reconstruct, but it had something to do with the sometime boyfriend who helped me move and crashed with me in the elevator. A friend had told me that Richard was "inappropriate" for me, something that has been said more than once about the objects of my sexual interest. But in this case I took the opinion more or less to heart, because Richard had become my tormentor. The on-again, off-again character of the affair was in fact quite brutal; as soon as I became really hooked on him, he'd abruptly ditch me, and just as I was getting over being jilted he'd come back pleading that he couldn't live without me, and I'd get hooked again. This emotional S&M had its physical side too, which is no doubt what



Me in my Chambers Street loft, c. 1975



Meg Harper and Merce Cunningham in Cunningham's *RainForest*, 1968. Photo by James Klosty

enthralled me in the first place. But beyond these commonplace facts of what's called a "relationship," Richard was indeed very different from me, intellectually, politically. I came most fully to realize this when he informed me in the summer of 1975 that he was going to work for Jimmy Carter's election. I was horrified: a born-again Christian from the South? The man who famously proclaimed that he had sinned in his heart because he'd had impure sexual thoughts? But I'm getting ahead of the story, because by the time Carter's campaign was under way, I was about to move out of the Chambers Street loft farther downtown to Nassau Street; this time I had the good sense to hire professional movers.

The emotional turmoil of my affair with Richard had come to symbolize for me my participation in the gay scene more generally—unjustly, of course. An event that represented a substitute love object determined my sense that I'd be better off living in Tribeca. Sometime in spring 1974, I saw the Grand Union perform. The Grand Union was an improvisational dance group that grew out of Yvonne Rainer's late-1960s Performance Demonstrations, especially *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* (1969). Its members included, in addition to Rainer, Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Nancy Green, and Steve Paxton, most of whom were dancers who had participated in the Judson Dance Theater. By the time I saw the Grand Union perform, Rainer had already left the group. I'd seen very little dance since my first ecstatic exposure to it in winter 1970 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where Merce Cunningham's company performed *RainForest* (1968), with Andy Warhol's helium-filled *Silver Clouds* as the set and music by David Tudor; *Walkaround Time* (1968), with Jasper Johns's clear plastic rectangular elements printed with images from Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*, to the music of David Behrman; *Tread* (1970), with a set by Bruce Nauman of industrial pedestal fans evenly spaced across the proscenium, half of them blowing toward the audience, and music by Christian Wolff; and *Canfield* (1969), whose set by Robert Morris was a gray columnar light box that moved back and forth on a track, also across the proscenium, illuminating the stage as it moved, with music by Pauline Oliveros.

I saw Martha Graham dance *Cortege of Eagles* (1967) that same season, but I wasn't nearly as moved by Graham's expressionism as by Cunningham's repudiation of it, and in her final stage performances at the age of seventy-six,



Yvonne Rainer, *This Is the Story of a Woman Who . . .*, 1973. Photo by Babette Mangolte

Graham had become a self-parody. Cunningham was something else, something that thrilled me as much as anything I'd ever seen. I date my love of dance to that moment, so looking back I cannot understand why I didn't continue to pursue it. By the time I first saw Rainer's work, she had already turned to filmmaking. I did see *This Is the Story of a Woman Who . . .*, presented at the Theater for the New City in the West Village in 1973, in which Rainer performed *Three Satie Spoons* (1961), *Trio A* (1966), and *Walk, She Said* (1972), but otherwise the closest she came to dancing in that performance piece was vacuuming the stage while wearing a green eyeshade.

It was, in fact, more the performance art than the dance in the improvisational antics of the Grand Union dancers that I was drawn to. And, in truth, it was performance art that beckoned as a substitute object for my libido. By this time, I had seen early works by Joan Jonas, who acknowledges a debt to Judson. In 1971, I sat with other audience members on the floor of Jonas's loft on Grand Street in SoHo to watch her *Choreomania*, performed on a swinging, partially mirrored wall constructed by Richard

Serra. Here is a description of the performance space that Jonas and I wrote together ten years later for her Berkeley Art Museum exhibition catalogue:

A twelve-by-eight-foot wall of wood hangs by chains from the ceiling two-and-a-half feet from the ground. Ropes and handles are attached to the back so that the five performers can climb the wall unseen by the spectators. The right-hand third of the front of the wall is mirrored. The wall can be swung back and forth and sideways by the performers, and their movements are choreographed in relation to the wall's motion. The swinging of the wall on its chains, hung from the ceiling beams, creates the sound of the piece, a rhythmic creaking like that of a ship moving through the ocean's wake.

The wall is hung so that it bisects the long narrow space of the loft. The spectators sit in the front half of the loft, facing the prop. The spectators' space and the spectators themselves are reflected in the mirrored portion of the wall as it swings from side to side. Because this wall is also the fourth wall of the spectators' space, the illusion is created that their space is swaying.

The main function of the wall is to fragment the performance in such a way that much of the performance action is seen only around the wall's four edges. The appearing/disappearing actions recall a magic show.¹

The few surviving photographs that document *Choreomania* provide a good sense of what downtown New York performance spaces were like at the moment of performance art's birth. Often they were artists' private living and work spaces, large compared with typical working- and middle-class New Yorkers' apartments, but small compared with public performance venues, even makeshift ones like the Judson Memorial Church sanctuary. Seating was on the floor, usually in an uncomfortable jumble of fellow audience members.

Artists' resourceful uses of the forsaken spaces of Manhattan's light industry in this era are now legendary. The deindustrialization of New York in the postwar period had reached its most wrenching condition by the early 1970s, but some of us were unintended, temporary beneficiaries of the financial crisis, even as others lost their jobs and homes when social services were slashed. Some of the refashioned industrial spaces are now well-known, such as 112 Greene Street, the alternative exhibition venue founded by Jeffrey Lew,² and the Kitchen, a performance space founded by Woody and Steina Vasulka, both of which predate by a year or so the relocation of

many commercial galleries from uptown to SoHo. Less well-documented is the fact that artists with large and relatively accessible lofts would open their spaces to guests for performances and concerts. I remember, for example, hearing Philip Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971–74) at an informal artist-loft gathering on a Sunday afternoon in SoHo. To enhance the experience, joints were freely passed among the listeners.

Equally legendary, but rarely considered in this context, is the significance of these loft spaces for the birth of a different kind of music and performance scene.³ In his SoHo loft in 1970, David Mancuso started throwing the rent parties that came to represent the pinnacle of disco for a generation and spawned a dance-club scene that persisted until Mayor Rudolph Giuliani destroyed it with his “quality-of-life” policy in the early nineties. Mancuso’s clubs were at the center of New York nightlife throughout the seventies. In 1974, just down the street from the Loft at the corner of Broadway and Houston Street, Michael Fesco opened the private gay disco Flamingo on the second floor of a building that extended all the way to Mercer Street. A year later, 12 West opened in an old plant nursery at Twelfth and West Streets on the northwestern edge of Greenwich Village. Toward the end of the decade, what some consider the greatest of all discos opened in a former truck garage on King Street, west of Varick Street. It was called, appropriately enough, the Paradise Garage.

But before the gay discos came into being, there was another place for post-Stonewall liberated gay men and women to dance, an unused firehouse on Wooster Street in SoHo that had been taken over in spring 1971 by the Gay Activists Alliance. On Saturday nights, the old fire-engine garage became a dance hall, while up on the second floor, where once firefighters whiled away their time, dancers rested, drank beer, and cruised one another. In 1974, the firehouse was gutted in a fire probably set by neighborhood kids angry that fags and dykes invaded their territory every Saturday night. One of the perils of going to the Firehouse dances was the possibility of running into gangs of baseball-bat-wielding Italian-American kids. SoHo is commonly thought of as having been an industrial area before it became a gallery district, but what is now called SoHo was in fact a mixed-use neighborhood. The South Houston Industrial District overlapped with an Italian residential neighborhood known as the South Village. The Feast of Saint Anthony, an Italian street fair, is still held every summer in front of the

church of St. Anthony of Padua on Sullivan Street just below Houston. When I was searching for my first New York apartment in the early fall of 1967, I looked at a railroad flat on that very street but was frightened away by how rough the area seemed. I rented the place uptown in Spanish Harlem instead. Later, around the time I started going to the Firehouse dances, I spent one summer house-sitting at my friend Pat Steir's loft on Mulberry Street in Little Italy, east of SoHo, and again I remember feeling distinctly like an outsider and being afraid that the neighborhood toughs would figure out that I was gay. I loved buying prosciutto and fresh mozzarella at the local markets, but the framed photographs of Mussolini in many of the shop windows certainly gave me pause. Paradoxically—or maybe not—my sometime sex buddy and lifelong friend Carl D'Aquino, the interior designer I met at the Firehouse dances and with whom I'd rented the Fire Island house, was one of those working-class New York Italians. He grew up in the projects on the Lower East Side, but when I met him in 1971 he lived a block northeast of St. Anthony of Padua and then later, for years, a block southwest of it in a garret apartment rented from family friends who'd bought their house in the old Italian neighborhood.

The one place to find a bite to eat in SoHo in the earliest years of artists living in the area was Fanelli's Cafe, also a remnant of the area's Italian American heritage. It got some competition from a different kind of eatery in the fall of 1971, when dancer and choreographer Carol Gooden, artist Gordon Matta-Clark, and a group of their friends opened Food just up the street from the GAA Firehouse. Although Food survived as a SoHo restaurant into the early 1980s, it is remembered best for its first two years of operation and is regarded as a long-running Matta-Clark performance piece. The documentary film that Matta-Clark made with Robert Frank and others during Food's first year of operation reveals something of the communitarian feel of the place, but it doesn't suggest performance art nearly as much as it does the hard daily labor of operating a restaurant. The film begins with before-dawn shopping at the Fulton Fish Market and ends after the restaurant has closed for the night, the chairs have been stacked on the tabletops, and a great many loaves of bread for the next day have been loaded into the ovens by a solitary baker, presumably, like most of Food's staff, an artist.

Matta-Clark is the figure most identified with the spirit of 1970s downtown Manhattan as a utopian artists' community and site of artistic

experimentation. His status no doubt derives in part from the fact that he died so young; his youth is all we know of him, and his youthful career coincided with a moment of particularly intense artistic ferment. The identification also certainly has to do with the fact that the subject and site of Matta-Clark's art was the city itself, the city experienced as simultaneously neglected and usable, dilapidated and beautiful, loss and possibility. Matta-Clark wrote,

Work with abandoned structures began with my concern for the life of the city of which a major side effect is the metabolization of old buildings. Here as in many urban centers the availability of empty and neglected structures was a prime textural reminder of the ongoing fallacy of renewal through modernization. The omnipresence of emptiness, of abandoned housing and imminent demolition gave me the freedom to experiment with the multiple alternatives to one's life in a box as well as popular attitudes about the need for enclosure. . . .

The earliest works were also a foray into a city that still was evolving for me. It was an exploration of New York's least remembered parts of the space between the walls of views inside out. I would drive around in my pick-up hunting for emptiness, for a quiet abandoned spot on which to concentrate my piercing attention.⁴

Hunting for emptiness in a dense urban fabric like Manhattan might seem incongruous, and indeed today it would be well-nigh futile there. But New York was a very different city four decades ago. I offer as evidence a group of photographs by Peter Hujar dating from 1975–76, taken on the far west side of Manhattan moving south from the Meatpacking District toward the Battery Park City landfill and around the Financial District and Civic Center. The photographs are of two kinds, one showing desolate, fading industrial areas and the other, downtown Manhattan emptied out at night. Among the latter is one of Nassau Street that includes, in the middle ground, the building I moved into the year after Hujar took this picture. All of them are, to my mind, cruising pictures—cruising pictures with no people in them: this too must seem incongruous. But the point of cruising, or at least *one* point of cruising, is feeling yourself alone and anonymous in the city, feeling that the city belongs to you, to you and maybe a chanced-upon someone like you—at least, like you in your exploration of the empty city. Is there by chance someone else wandering these deserted streets? Might that



Peter Hujar, *Loading Dock at Night*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, $14\frac{1}{2} \times 14\frac{1}{2}$ inches

BEFORE PICTURES

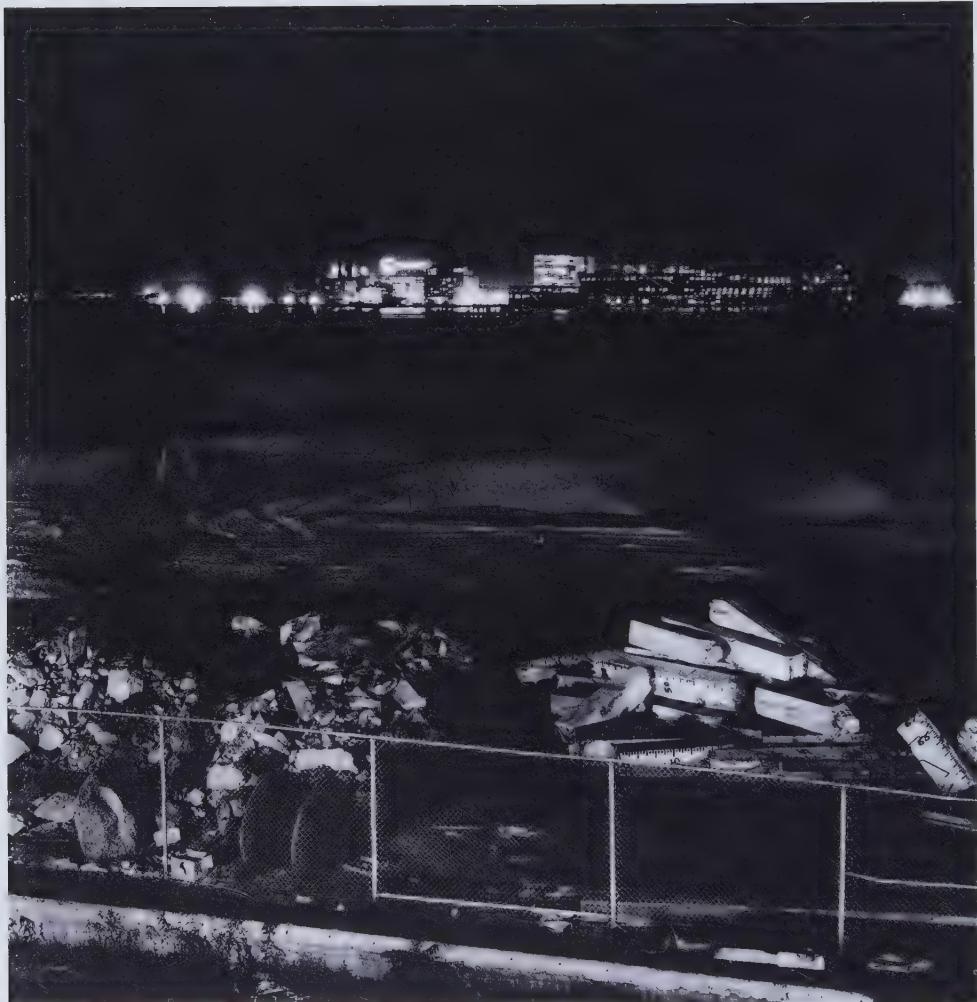


Peter Hujar, *Leroy Street*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 14 ½ x 14 ¾ inches



Peter Hujar, *West Side Parking Lots*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 14 ½ x 14 ½ inches

BEFORE PICTURES



Peter Hujar, *Land Fill, Hudson River, and New Jersey Skyline*, 1976. Gelatin silver print, 14 ¼ x 14 ¼ inches



Peter Hujar, *Nassau Street*, 1975. Gelatin silver print, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #54*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

someone else be on the prowl? Could the two of us find a dark corner where we could get together? Can the city become just *ours* for this moment?

Of course, not everyone experiences urban emptiness this way. A year after Hujar made these pictures, Cindy Sherman began shooting her famous series of Untitled Film Stills also on the deserted streets of Lower Manhattan. Hers are a very different kind of picture, not least because most are taken during the daytime. (Lower Manhattan was deserted even during the day on weekends then.) They are also different because they always include a lone female character played by Sherman herself and are staged in such a way as to suggest an incident in that character's story. The few of them taken on the streets at night are noirish images of threatened femininity, showing an apprehensive woman walking down a dark, forlorn street. But the city in Sherman's pictures is not New York; it is a generic city, like a film location, and the city is not a good place for the woman in the pictures to be. (Of course, the notion that a city street at night is no place for a woman is also belied by Sherman's use of this very street to make her photographs.)



John Baldessari, *Hands Framing New York Harbor* (from *Projects: Pier 18*), 1971. Photo by Shunk-Kender

Another work that suggests—and simultaneously pokes fun at—the dangers facing women on desolate Manhattan streets was made in response to artists' use of the abandoned city in the early 1970s. The work is Louise Lawler's sound piece *Birdcalls* (1972/1981), in which Lawler “squeals, squawks, chirps, twitters, croaks, squeaks, and occasionally warbles the names—primarily the surnames—of twenty-eight contemporary male artists, from Vito Acconci to Lawrence Weiner” (I borrow Rosalyn Deutsche's concise description).⁵ Lawler explains that the work

originated in the early 1970s when my friend Martha Kite and I were helping some artists on one of the Hudson River pier projects. The women involved were doing tons of work, but the work being shown was only by male artists. Walking home at night in New York, one way to feel safe is to pretend you're crazy or at least be really loud. Martha and I called ourselves the *dewey chantoosies*, and we'd sing off-key and make other noises. Willoughby Sharp was the impresario of the project, so we'd make a “Willoughby Willoughby” sound, trying to sound like birds. This developed into a series of bird calls based on artists' names.⁶



The show in question was *Projects: Pier 18*, an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art of photographs by the art-world team Shunk-Kender that documented a succession of artists' projects by twenty-seven artists, all male.⁷ While the projects were situated on the pier, several taking it as their subject, many also provide intriguing views of the city in 1971. For example, John Baldessari's *Hands Framing New York Harbor* is a single image of a freighter moored at the pier framed by a foreground rectangle Baldessari made by pressing together his thumbs and index fingers. Above and to the right of his hands, we see the downtown skyline, including the Woolworth Building on Broadway, the top of the US Courthouse in Foley Square, and the New York Telephone Company building on West Street. Looming in front of the Woolworth Building is the huge New York World-Telegram sign. Dan Graham's description of his work for *Projects: Pier 18* reads: "Still camera pressed to body—Beginning at my feet, each shot progressively spirals to top of my head—Lens faces out—back of camera side pressed flush



Dan Graham, *Dan Graham—Pier 18* (from *Projects: Pier 18*), 1971. Photos by Shunk-Kender and Dan Graham



to contour of skin.” The photographs Graham took as he moved the camera around his body capture oblique views of the pier, the river, and the skyline. In some, we see fragments of the towers of the World Trade Center, whose summit is not yet complete.

Most of the old industrial piers along the West Side of Manhattan on the Hudson River, including Pier 18, stood abandoned and in partial or near ruin at that time, so when you walked on them you were in constant danger of falling through the floor or falling off the rotting timbered edges into the river six to eight feet below. In those piers that retained their superstructures, the upper rooms might also be hazardous. *Security Zone*, Vito Acconci’s work for *Projects: Pier 18*, implicitly referred to the sense of remoteness and danger of Lower Manhattan’s west-side piers. Acconci, with hands bound behind his back, blindfolded, and wearing earplugs, entrusted his safety to fellow artist Lee Jaffe as he walked around the far end of the pier. The piece was, Acconci said, “designed to affect an everyday relationship” in that it





Vito Acconci, *Security Zone* (from *Projects: Pier 18*), 1971. Photo by Shunk-Kender

forced him to develop trust in someone about whom he had “ambiguous” feelings.⁸ It’s hard to tell in some of the photographs whether Jaffe is about to push Acconci off the edge of the pier or is saving him from falling off.

A month later, Acconci made explicit the sense of danger on the piers in an untitled project at Pier 17. He posted a notice at the John Gibson Gallery during his exhibition there, announcing that he would wait at the end of the pier at 1 a.m. every night for an hour, from March 27 to April 24, and that anyone who came to meet him there would be rewarded by being told a secret that Acconci had never before divulged, something about which he felt ashamed and which could be used against him. In addition to having to make himself vulnerable by revealing a dirty secret, Acconci had to confront the perils of the deserted pier. On the first night, he writes, “I’m waiting outside, afraid to go in (inside I’ll be on unfamiliar ground—I could be taken unawares—outside I can get a view of the whole—if anyone comes, I’ll have to go in after him, overtake him before he stakes out a position).”⁹ One night, a visitor showed up, and “someone shouts my name at the entrance,” Acconci recalled. “I don’t answer him: he has to be willing

to throw himself into it, he has to come and get me (I'm in the position of prey—I have to be stalked).”¹⁰

Matta-Clark, too, made a project for *Pier 18*, but his reference to endangerment was, as in so much of his work, one of bravura, of physical derring-do rather than psychological vulnerability. At Pier 18, he planted an evergreen tree in what he called “a parked island barge” and suspended himself by rope upside down above it. But this was only an easy rehearsal for what would be Matta-Clark’s most audacious act and certainly one of his most magnificent works, *Day’s End* (1975), his summerlong transformation of the dilapidated Pier 52, which stood at the end of Gansevoort Street in New York’s Meatpacking District.

Like most people, I know *Day’s End* only from photographs, written descriptions, and the film that documents its making. Regrettably, I didn’t see it. Matta-Clark talked about the work in a number of interviews; the one he gave in Antwerp at the time he made *Office Baroque*, a couple of years after he completed *Day’s End*, is the most evocative:

Pier 52 is an intact nineteenth-century industrial relic of steel and corrugated tin looking like an enormous Christian basilica whose dim interior was barely lit by the clerestory windows fifty feet overhead.

The initial cuts were made through the pier floor across the center forming a tidal channel nine feet wide by seventy feet long. A sail-shaped opening provides access to the river. A similar shape through the roof directly above this channel allows a patch of light to enter which arches over the floor until it’s captured at noon within the watery slot. During the afternoon the sun shines through a cat’s-eye-like “rose window” in the west wall. At first a sliver and then a strongly defined shape of light continues to wander into the wharf until the whole pier is fully illuminated at dusk. Below the rear “wall-hole” is another large quarter circular cut opening the floor of the south-west corner to a turbulent view of the Hudson water. The water and sun move constantly in the pier throughout the day in what I see as an indoor park.¹¹

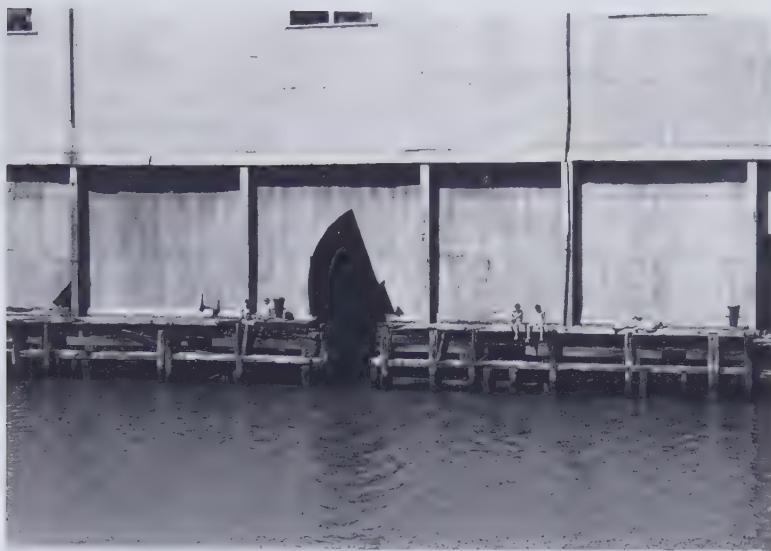
Matta-Clark referred to the three months of work on *Day’s End* as his summer vacation by the water.¹² Judging from the film that Betsy Sussler and Jack Kruger shot of it, it wasn’t a restful vacation. Working with his friend Gerry Hovagimyan, Matta-Clark used such heavy tools as a chain saw and a blowtorch to cut through the timbers of the pier’s floor and the corrugated-tin roof and facade. The most dramatic moments of the film



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled* (from the series *Pier Photographs*), 1975–86. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

show Matta-Clark wielding the blowtorch as he dangles on a small platform strung up by rope pulley about twenty feet above the pier's floor. Often shirtless but wearing protective goggles, Matta-Clark, in a performance that is equal parts Harold Lloyd and Douglas Fairbanks, cuts the west-end oculus through the tin siding as sparks fly around him. Matta-Clark acknowledged the "absurdity of the whole activity,"¹³ even as he sacralized it through his references to the basilica-like structure and "rose window." Some of those who had the good fortune to see *Day's End* relate a sense of awe enhanced by fear. Sculptor Joel Shapiro recalls that "the piece was dangerous," that Matta-Clark "was creating some kind of edge—flirting with some sort of abyss."¹⁴ But Matta-Clark intended the opposite sort of experience:

The one thing that I wanted was to make it possible for people to see it . . . in a peaceful enclosure totally enclosed in an un-menacing kind of way. That when they went in there, they wouldn't feel like every squeak or every shadow was a potential threat. I know in lots of the earlier works that I did, the kind of paranoia of being in a space where you didn't know who was there, what was happening or whether there were menacing people lurking around, was just distracting. And I just wanted it to be more of a joyous situation.¹⁵



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled* (from the series *Pier Photographs*), 1975–86. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

An indoor park, joyous, dangerous, absurd, flirting with the abyss: reading Matta-Clark's and others' descriptions of *Day's End*, it's impossible for me not to think of the experiences of those other pier occupants, the ones from whom Matta-Clark seems, in nearly all his statements about the work, to want to differentiate himself—"you know, that whole S&M," as he put it.¹⁶ Although in many instances he aligns his work with that of others who take over or otherwise make their mark on abandoned parts of cities, particularly workers, homeless people, and disenfranchised youth, in the case of Pier 52 Matta-Clark not only disavowed any bond with the gay men who were using the piers as cruising grounds but went so far as to lock them out:

After looking up and down the waterfront for a pier, I just happened on this one. And of all of them, it was the one least trafficked. It had been broken into and was continuing to be broken into when I was there. But it remained a kind of side step from their general haunt. So I went in and realized without much effort I could secure it. And it then occurred to me that while I was closing up holes and barb-wiring various parts, I would also change the lock and have my own lock. It would make it so much easier.¹⁷

It may be that Matta-Clark had no particular animus toward the gay men who were using the pier but simply wanted to be able to go about his work undisturbed, to protect himself from intruders of any kind. He might even have worried about liability should someone get hurt as a result of his cutting away sections of the pier's floor. It's difficult to say, because Matta-Clark wasn't careful to differentiate among the various dangers that journalists, in their writings about the piers, often conflated: hazardous, disintegrating structures; threatening, perverse sexuality; and criminals who preyed on, robbed, and sometimes even murdered the piers' clandestine users.

Besides my personal feelings of base mismanagement of the dying harbor and its ghost-like terminals, is the inextricable evidence of a new criminal situation of alarming proportions. The waterfront was probably never anything but tough and dangerous but now with this long slow transition period, it has become a veritable muggers' playground, both for people who go only to enjoy walking there and for a recently popularized sado-masochistic fringe.¹⁸

Gay men were acutely aware of the piers' dangers; in fact, they posted signs warning fellow cruisers to watch their wallets. Moreover, Matta-Clark wasn't the only one who took to the piers for a summer vacation by the water. Shielded from public view by the warehouse structure, gay men used one pier's end that jutted far out into the river as a place to sunbathe. It doesn't, I think, diminish the accomplishment of *Day's End* to say that a romantic grandeur was perceptible in the ruined piers before Matta-Clark ever wrought a single change on Pier 52 and that much of the pleasure gay men took in being at the piers was what drew artists to them as well. It's not just that they were there and available; they were also vast and hauntingly beautiful. Nor was the sex play in the piers only of the rough and kinky variety, unless you think that any kind of sex outside a domestic setting is kinky.

The entire range of pleasures and dangers at the piers was captured by the too-little-known African-American photographer Alvin Baltrop, who documented the goings-on there during the seventies, up to and including the piers' demolition in the mid-to-late eighties. A number of Baltrop's photographs show gay men at Pier 52, taking in the beauty of *Day's End* along with whatever other beauties they might have been pursuing. Indeed, these photographs wonderfully portray the "peaceful enclosure" and "joyous

situation” that Matta-Clark said he wanted to achieve.¹⁹ Like Matta-Clark, Baltrop also hoisted himself in a harness to make his work. In the preface for a book that he worked unsuccessfully to complete before dying of cancer in 2004, Baltrop wrote:

Although initially terrified of the Piers, I began to take these photos as a voyeur, but soon grew determined to preserve the frightening, mad, unbelievable, violent, and beautiful things that were going on at that time. To get certain shots, I hung from the ceilings of several warehouses utilizing a makeshift harness, watching and waiting for hours to record the lives that these people led (friends, acquaintances, and strangers), and the unfortunate ends that they sometimes met. The casual sex and nonchalant narcotizing, the creation of artwork and music, sunbathing, dancing, merrymaking and the like habitually gave way to muggings, callous yet detached violence, rape, suicide, and in some instances, murder. The rapid emergence and expansion of AIDS in the 1980s further reduced the number of people going to and living at the Piers, and the sporadic joys that could be found there.²⁰

Baltrop photographed obsessively: men engaged in sex, shot from the distance of a neighboring pier or clandestinely through a doorway or happy to become exhibitionists for the camera at close range; men and women Baltrop came to know at the piers, including some who had no place else to live; guys cruising for sex, sometimes as naked as the nearby sunbathers; people just strolling around, transfixed by the rays of sunlight streaming through disintegrating roof structures; graffiti and vernacular artworks, some of it the skillful handiwork of an artist known as Tava, who painted in a style that amalgamates Greek vase painting with Tom of Finland; gruesome corpses dredged up from the river and surrounded by the police and onlookers. Most of all, Baltrop photographed the piers themselves. The phantoms of New York’s bustling industrial past appear in Baltrop’s pictures as vast heaps of trusses, buckled tin siding, rotting pilings and floors, rickety staircases, broken windows, sometimes with a ragged curtain still flapping in the river breezes. Baltrop’s camera often zeros in on a just-discernable scene of butt fucking or cock sucking amid the rubble, but even when the sex is absent, the piers can be recognized as the sexual playground they were.

Unlike Baltrop, I wasn’t consciously afraid of the piers. They were part of my neighborhood cityscape and one of many nearby places to play

BEFORE PICTURES



ACTION AROUND THE EDGES



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled* (from the series *Pier Photographs*), 1975–86. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled* (from the series *Pier Photographs*), 1975–86.
Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

outdoors. Located a short walk from my apartment on Tenth Street, Pier 42, which no longer had a structure on it, was a local place to hang out and be cooled by the Hudson River's breezes on hot summer days and watch the sun set over New Jersey in the evening. Even closer was Pier 45, the main gay-cruising pier. Along its West Street end, the upper-floor warren of rooms functioned day and night like a sex club with no cover charge. Pier 45 was only one of many nearby places for outdoor sex play. Another Greenwich Village haunt of men seeking other men was known simply as "the trucks," a designation for the empty lots along Washington Street north of Christopher Street, where delivery trucks were parked at night. After 4 a.m., when the bars closed, gay men gathered in the spaces behind

the trucks and often up inside the back of them for group sex. If you lived in the Village, this was an efficient way to bring your night out to a satisfying end without having to repair to a bathhouse in another neighborhood. I remember a short period in about 1973, before I first discovered the scene at the piers, when, late at night and into the morning, gay men took over the half-completed structures of the West Village Houses going up along Washington Street across from the trucks. The West Village Houses were a long-debated, underfinanced, and therefore architecturally diminished project of 420 units of low-rise, middle-income housing that indirectly resulted from Jane Jacobs's 1961 classic critique of modern urbanism, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, in which she heralded short blocks, dense concentrations of people, mixed-use neighborhoods, and aged buildings as proper city values.²¹ Although Jacobs's ideas about what made cities great grew out of her love of her own neighborhood, Greenwich Village, I don't think she was thinking of men meeting for sex in construction sites, parking lots, and waterfront warehouses—but this was part of the life of the Village I knew a decade after she wrote her book.

Come to think of it, maybe I *was* afraid of the piers—afraid not only of their very real dangers, which I tended stupidly to dismiss, but also of their easy proximity and constant promise. I was struggling to write about art professionally as a freelancer then, which took more discipline than I could usually muster since the frustrations of being unable to find a good subject, devise a sound argument, even choose a word that rang true or compose a sentence I was happy with could be easily if only momentarily alleviated just by walking out my door into the playground that was my immediate neighborhood. This is why, I think, seeing the Grand Union perform stays in my mind as such a momentous event, why it propelled me to another part of the city and another world. Apart from monthly reviewing for *Art News* and *Art International*, the most ambitious writing I managed during the several years I lived in the Village were a monographic essay on Agnes Martin titled “Number, Measure, Ratio” and “Opaque Surfaces.” In both essays, I struggled to think beyond the formalism that still held sway in so much American art criticism. What would finally free me from its grip was not painting but performance art.

The block in Tribeca to which I moved in 1974 bordered the site of what had been perhaps the most ambitious and imaginative use of the

deindustrializing city as the stage for an artwork, Joan Jonas's performance *Delay Delay* of 1972.²² A year later, Jonas translated the performance into the language of film for *Songdelay*, as compelling an aesthetic document of New York in the seventies as Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's 1921 city-symphony film *Manhatta* is of the city half a century earlier. Jonas and I describe the performance space of *Delay Delay* in our 1983 book:

The spectators view the performance from the roof of a five-story loft building facing west, located at 319 Greenwich Street in lower Manhattan. The performing area is a ten-block grid of city streets bounding vacant lots and leveled buildings. Beyond these lots are the elevated West Side Highway, the docks and piers along the Hudson River, and the factories of the New Jersey skyline across the river. Directly in front of the spectators at the back of the performance area is the Erie Lackawanna Pier building painted with large numbers 20 and 21. These indicate the old pier numbers.²³

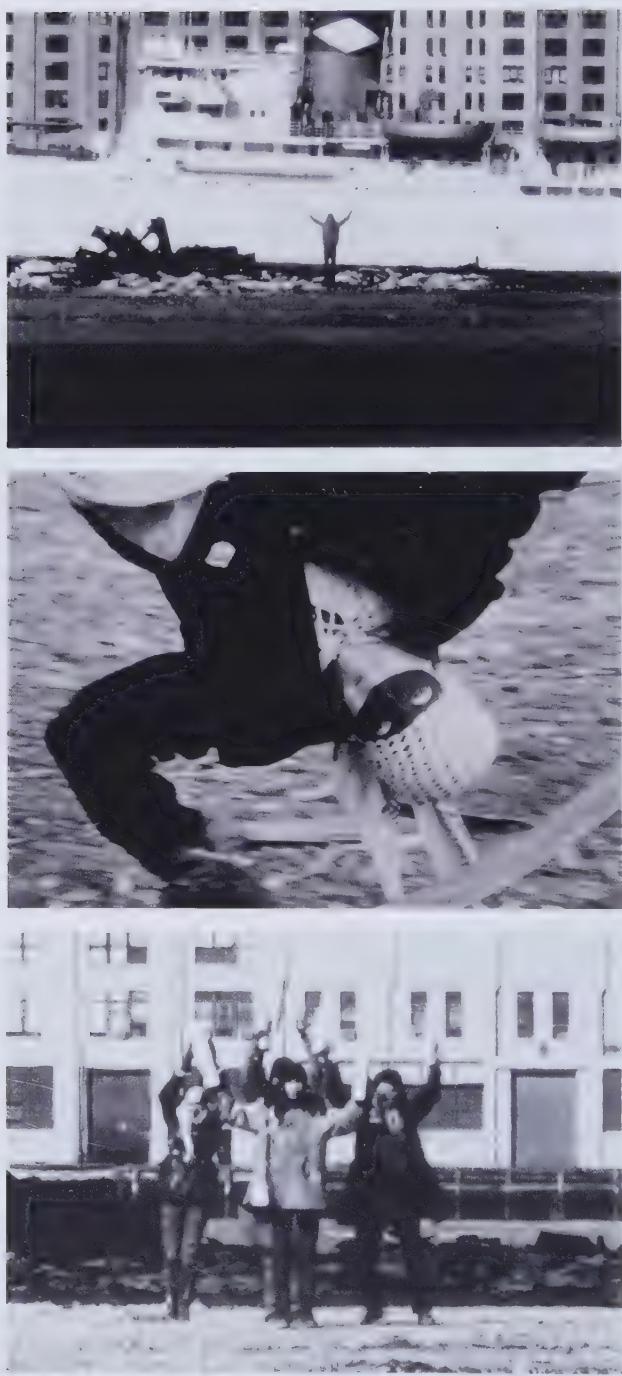
By the time I moved to Tribeca, these downtown piers had been torn down to make way for Battery Park City, which then had been put on hold during the city's fiscal crisis. New York was going bankrupt, and its infrastructure was badly deteriorating, conspicuously epitomized in late 1973 by the collapse of a section of the elevated West Side Highway under the weight of an asphalt-laden repair truck. Just half a block down the street from the loft I moved into, the city trailed off into vacant lots. Beyond the razed blocks that had once been part of the Washington Market was the elevated highway, now empty too, and beyond that, where the piers had been, a barren landfill that Lower Manhattan residents christened "the beach." A few years later, the newly founded arts organization Creative Time began its series of outdoor exhibitions there called Art on the Beach.²⁴ An era of officially sponsored public art was under way, with commissioning entities, panels of experts, permits, contracts, and eventually controversies and court cases.

I didn't manage to change worlds by moving to Tribeca. I still spent nearly every evening in the Village, but now most of them ended with a long walk down the west side to my new neighborhood, through the empty streets that Hujar photographed at just this time. It was a time when I could cherish the illusion that these Manhattan streets belonged to me—to me and others who were discovering them and using them for our own purposes. But I did manage to become an art critic. The first article I wrote

after moving downtown was “Joan Jonas’s Performance Works,” published in a special issue of *Studio International* devoted to performance art. Jonas was more clear-sighted than I about the possibility of appropriating city spaces. I quote her in my essay as saying: “My own thinking and production has focused on issues of space—ways of dislocating it, attenuating it, flattening it, turning it inside out, always attempting to explore it without ever giving to myself or to others the permission to penetrate it.”²⁵

I was still preoccupied enough with painting in the mid-1970s that I misinterpreted Jonas’s explorations of spatial illusionism as reflecting her continuing involvement with the history of painting.²⁶ I overlooked what her statement foretold about the actual spaces Jonas was performing in: just how provisional was their availability for experimental uses. This is what her film *Songdelay* captures so well about the New York of its moment. Robert Fiore’s use of a telephoto lens in shooting Jonas’s film collapses onto a single plane the vista that opened out in front of the spectators beyond the rooftop from which they watched *Delay Delay*. A performer who appears to be in the near foreground claps blocks of wood together; a sound delay tells us that in fact he stands a great distance from us. A warehouse in Jersey City appears to be right behind him, but the sudden, uncanny arrival of a huge freighter between him and the building tells us otherwise—that in between lies the great expanse of the Hudson River.²⁷ A cut to a slow-motion, tight close-up of Jonas, limbs outstretched and rotating in a large hoop, makes clear how limited and fragmented is our perspective on the overall location, for beyond Jonas’s torso we see only the street’s cobblestones, a curb, a bit of sidewalk, and some rubble. Behind another figure, whose movements are rendered puppetlike by bamboo poles held in her outstretched arms and thrust into the opposite pants legs, we glimpse a chain-link fence and background automobile traffic. Only one sequence grants us sufficient distance to make the location comprehensible: at the top left of a scene that shows several performers moving back and forth across a vacant lot, the back of the Federal Office Building on Church and Barclay Streets is visible, and just below it at the frame’s right edge we can make out the sole survivor of the wrecking balls of a decade earlier, a nineteenth-century building that stood alone and forlorn at the corner of West and Warren Streets until 2003.²⁸ This means that the streets we see bordering the vacant lot’s south and west sides must be Warren and Greenwich Streets—right around the

BEFORE PICTURES



Stills from Joan Jonas, *Songdelzy*, 1973. 16 mm film,
black-and-white, sound, 18:35 min.

ACTION AROUND THE EDGES



BEFORE PICTURES



Stills from Gordon Matta-Clark, *City Slivers*, 1976.
Super 8 film, color, silent, 15 min.

corner from where I lived between 1974 and 1976.²⁹ But just as we begin to be able to orient ourselves, Jonas cuts to another close-up of herself rotating in the hoop, and this time not only is she upside down but the film frames are also printed upside down.

Throughout *Songdelay*, sequences of action are interrupted by quick inserts—so quick they are nearly subliminal—of Jonas in the hoop, the puppetlike figure, flashes of light from a mirror that Jonas holds up to reflect the sun into the lens, and a pair of wooden blocks that, clacking together, provide much of the film's sound. Together with the telephoto-lens shots, extreme close-ups of individual performers' bodies, and bird's-eye views of two people in the role of a slider-crank mechanism walking along a line and circle painted on the cobblestone pavement, these elements make us fully aware of the filmic mediation of the performance events. But that is far from the sole function of *Songdelay*'s varied techniques. The film also uses these techniques to thwart our desire to know or possess the city beyond our immediate experience of it in the moment of use. We see the city in fragments, not unlike those that Gordon Matta-Clark—one of *Songdelay*'s performers—gave us a few years later in his film *City Slivers* (1976), in which New York appears as a series of vertical striations made by masking the camera's anamorphic lens and shooting multiple exposures. We glimpse the city in pieces, in the background, in our peripheral vision—and in recollection.

BEFORE PICTURES



491 WEST STREET, NYC
TELEPHONE 924-6855

12 West membership card

DISSS-CO (A FRAGMENT)

AMONG THE PAPERS FROM THE MID-1970s that I've kept all these years are a few pages of something I'd begun writing about disco. They remain in a dog-eared folder marked "projects." Everything else in the folder is art-related, including a proposal for a book on contemporary art. I'm amazed now at the hubris of believing I could write a full-scale book about "art from Minimal sculpture forward," but pleasantly surprised to see evidence that I was thinking about contemporary art under the rubric of postmodernism as early as 1976. "The starting point," I wrote, "is to discuss the important shift from Modernism to Post-Modernism."¹

The few pages on disco are the only ones in this folder that I'd looked at in the intervening years; the reason is that they carry a particular sentimental value. Around the time I wrote them, Guy Hocquenghem visited New York and stayed with me in my loft on Chambers Street, and one night while I was out he read what I'd written. When I returned later, he said to me that such a straightforward description of gay culture was just the sort of thing that gay activists should be writing. I was embarrassed that Guy had found and read the pages. I'm self-conscious about my unfinished writing; this was not at all the sort of writing I did professionally and thus had any confidence in; and, though younger than I, Guy was both a heartthrob and an idol. Christian sent Guy my way in winter 1974. "Take much care of Guy, he is a darling," Christian wrote, and indeed he was and I did. He stayed with me, sharing my bed, for a few months. We went dancing most nights at Peter Rabbit's, a tiny gay bar with a largely black clientele and a great jukebox on the corner of West and Tenth Streets.

While still in his midtwenties, Guy had been a founder of FHAR (Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire, the French gay-liberation organization) and a year later, in 1972, published *Homosexual Desire*.² Although he'd subsequently published a second gay-liberation tract, *L'Après-mai des faunes*, and would eventually write his own descriptions of gay life in *Le Gay voyage*, he was now turning his attention to fiction. He



Piotr Stanislas (left) and Guy Hocquenghem (right) in Guy Hocquenghem and Lionel Soukaz, *Race d'Ep!*, black-and-white and color, sound, 95 min.

had recently published *Fin de section*, a collection of short stories, and begun work on his first novel, *Love in Relief*.³ Perhaps the story-like way I begin the fragment on disco is what appealed to Guy.

The sun seemed unnaturally bright when we opened the door and walked out onto lower Broadway. Steven adjusted the pitch-black, wrap-around sunglasses that he'd put on in the lobby. As we walked down Houston Street toward the Village, our bodies still gyrated, slowing our walk to a rhythmic amble. Moving at all was slightly painful and yet felt inevitable, as if the music had been absorbed by our muscles, especially the obliques, and would go on propelling that uncontrollable back-and-forth hip-swaying forever. On the way up Bedford Street to Seventh Avenue, two guys passed us. When one was right next to him, Steven drew out under his breath in a reverent whisper, "Disss-co." He gave it the same whooshing, electronic sound as the feedback drone that lingered in our ears, muting the sounds of the early Sunday morning. The two men smiled knowingly. There was no question where we were all coming from.

"It was *hot* tonight," Steven said. "It was really crazy, though. At first it was like that night at 12 West when we left so early. Creeps everywhere you looked, plaguing you. And you couldn't get into it. The lights were so

bright, and the music was weird. Then all of a sudden the music got real hot, they turned off those bright lights, everything went red and blue, and everybody was gorgeous—just big, hot, butch muscle numbers. Suddenly it was a different night. Then, after that real hot set, the music had no beat. Remember, I kept asking you if the music had a beat. I couldn't get into it. And I couldn't tell if Bobby liked it or not, but he kept dancing. He's a little bopper, Bobby. He just bops around. He's hot. You discoed good, babe. It was real good disco. *Diss-s-co.*"

Steven's conversation continues like that for at least a whole day after Saturday-night disco. A running analysis of the night before, the night that's really morning, beginning about 1 a.m. and lasting until 7 or 8. Of course, that's not counting the preparation, which begins early Saturday. Getting your disco act together. Finding a member to go with. Eating lots of protein, but early in the day. Resting up. Deciding what drugs to take and what clothes to wear. The clothes are particularly important because, apart from wanting the right look, you have to figure out how much you can comfortably shed or allow to get drenched in sweat without its bringing you down. At least until about 5:30, when nothing can bring you down. At that point, the music is always good, there's plenty of room on the dance floor, and only the serious discoers are left. But best of all your body has quit resisting. It has unstoppable momentum. That is the one thing about disco comparable to any other experience. It's like what happens in distance running or swimming. You pass a point where you're beyond tired, beyond pain, beyond even thinking about stopping, thinking only that this could go on forever and you'd love it. It's pure ecstasy. Nothing matters but disco, and nothing—not sex, not food, not sleep, nothing—is better.

The place Steven and I had just come from is called Flamingo. One of the first and most elaborate of the new private dance clubs, Flamingo has been operating for two seasons. That is something of a longevity record for gay discos, which usually last only about six months before a new and better place to dance comes along. There are several reasons for Flamingo's staying power. One is that Michael Fesco, the owner, has a loyal following among the A-list gay crowd. And Fesco shrewdly closes the club every spring, just as the devotees begin to tire of the routine. Most of the Flamingo crowd spend their summer weekends on Fire Island anyway. But more important, membership at Flamingo is by invitation only, which guarantees the clubby atmosphere this crowd loves. The feeling that the club is special, exclusive, the *best*, is essential to a good disco. Membership costs forty-five dollars per season; a member pays five dollars at the door and his guests pay seven dollars. What that gets you is juice, soda, coffee, fresh fruit, and stale doughnuts, which nobody much cares for. There's no liquor, and nobody cares about that at all. What the price of admission



Flamingo membership card

really gets you is the most perfect dancing environment yet, and the ingredients for that are very precarious.

Flamingo is located in a big, anonymous loft building on the north-east edge of SoHo, where on a Saturday night there's nobody else around. There's no sign in front, not even a lighted doorway. Going there for the first time feels like an initiation into a secret society. Gay men love the kinds of rituals that make what they do seem secretive, forbidden. (As if the whole world wouldn't realize Flamingo was there from the pulsating of the entire building—in fact, the building houses two discos; the other one is the Gallery—and the endless line of cabs pulling up in front from midnight to 6 a.m. New York taxi drivers could tell you a thing or two about forbidden places in New York.)

You walk through the uninviting entrance into a completely dark foyer where you can vaguely perceive that there are a few people shuffling around. Then a flashlight lights up and you put your membership card in its beam. You've passed the first test. You go through the doors at the back of the lobby to the stairway. There are two official-looking, if a bit stoned, attendants there to check your membership number off in a ledger, write down the number of guests with you (you're allowed two), and write out a bill—nineteen dollars for three. You then wait in line to go upstairs. This is the tensest part of the evening because you can hear the music coming from upstairs, and they're usually playing one of your favorite songs, so you know you'll miss dancing to it. At the top of the stairs, which are usually crowded with anxious, whispery guys, you pay your money and get your hand stamped with ink that glows under black light. Finally, you're in, but still not ready for the dance floor. There's another line at the coat check, which takes *forever*, because you have to decide there and then how much to take off, and there's a feverish shuffling of necessities from the pockets

of shed clothing to pockets in what you're still wearing: joints of dust, poppers, inhaler, downs, cigarettes, matches, coke, coke spoon, ethyl chloride (if you're a rag queen). If you're smart, you do all of this at home, but that means making the difficult decisions before you've got the feel of the place.

The next problem is getting into it, but that's not usually severe. Sometimes when you arrive late the dance floor is so crowded that it's difficult to penetrate, and the energy level is already so high that it's alienating. There are people acting really wild and ecstatic, and completely out of

The text ends there—at the bottom of a typewritten page, but not quite at the end of a line, so I don't think there's a page missing; I think I just stopped. The next page is the beginning of a brief history of disco:

Discotheques are nothing new. They came in during the 1960s, when people realized that good dance music was too dependent on studio effects to be reproduced by a live band. They were part of that very brief episode when London—King's Road and Chelsea especially—was synonymous with hip. They had names like Annabelle's and Arthur, and later the Electric Circus and Hippopotamus. They were private, or at least exclusive. They were expensive. They were straight. And now those places belong to bygone days.

The new discotheques bear very little resemblance to those places. In fact, they aren't even heirs to that tradition. Flamingo, 12 West, Infinity, the Loft, and Frankenstein are gay. Their predecessors are different kinds of places, still in some ways reflected in the new discos. These include the Sanctuary, a late-1960s discotheque in an unused church on Forty-Third Street; the Firehouse, the headquarters of the Gay Activists' Alliance, whose engine house became a dance hall on weekends;⁴ and the Tenth Floor, a private juice bar in a West Twenties loft. What all of these places had in common are traits of pariah culture: they were located in out-of-the-way neighborhoods in quickly refurbished spaces with the palpable feeling of being susceptible to a bust at any moment. You always knew that their days were numbered, that they would be shut down by the law, burnt down, or just abandoned for a new and better place to dance.

And there are a few pages that suggest a more analytical project titled "Disco: Technologized Pleasure." One of these begins:

What would it be like if we were able to somehow produce ecstasy synthetically? [The psychoactive drug MDMA, popularly known as ecstasy, came

into use as a party drug only in the 1980s.] If we were able to just plug ourselves into a machine that would produce pleasure? Is ecstasy something that can exist in a pure state, apart from some interpersonal context, from a connection of the ecstatic moment with a whole matrix of feeling about, let's say, another person with whom that ecstasy might be linked?

Another begins:

I want to describe the disco experience in a way that might convey what is extraordinary about it and also show how it is symptomatic of a wider experience of pleasure in our society, a mode of experience that is both terrifying and overwhelmingly powerful.

When I first went to the new kind of discos a few years ago I was struck by the conformity of the people there, conformity that goes well beyond the stylistic similarities of people in a demimonde. It was not only a question of similar hairstyles or that everyone had the same mustache. The most striking aspect of the similarity was that these people have identical *bodies*, and these bodies are also strikingly different from other bodies. They seem to be honed for a particular activity, maybe a fairly athletic form of sex. In fact, that activity is dancing, or what has become known as dancing. These bodies have been made into dancing machines.

Finally there are a few notes:

Place: Synthetic materials, industrial gloss, futuristic, spacey, technologized surfaces and lighting. Enormous plants and bowls of fruit appear as if technologically produced, having no similarity to natural objects. Views through doorways to the outside world are extremely disturbing. Views of reality look unreal, nightmarish, tacky. Going outside is always a shock, and it takes days to readjust to ugly reality.

People: Synthetically produced bodies using bodybuilding machines and protein supplements. Bodies moving en masse, like cogs in a machine.

What I wrote in 1975 or 1976 seems fairly obvious now. If there is anything interesting about it, it's that there was a time when all this appeared so new and astonishing—and so peculiarly gay, which is what must have interested Guy. The mention of "synthetically produced bodies" provides one clue as to why: Nautilus had just come out with their first line of machines. The innovation of the Nautilus was that it isolated a muscle group and, through the

use of a logarithmic spiral cam around which the chain is wrapped, made the load of weight on the muscles consistent through the entire range of exercise motion. This meant that energy expended in working out was used efficiently to produce results. Nowadays, of course, every decent health club has a great many brand-name variations of these workout machines, but in the 1960s and early 1970s bodybuilding still consisted of simple calisthenics, free weights, and Universal stack weight machines, and serious bodybuilding was pretty much limited to the subculture of bodybuilding contests. Arnold Schwarzenegger was the first bodybuilder to become well-known beyond the subculture—as a bodybuilder, that is, rather than as a fitness-program huckster like Charles Atlas or a sword-and-sandals movie actor like Steve Reeves or Mickey Hargitay. Schwarzenegger is one of the competition bodybuilders featured in Charles Gaines and George Butler's book *Pumping Iron*, published in 1974, and he became the star of the film of the same title, released in 1977. To help finance the film, Butler persuaded the Whitney Museum to host a promotional event, billed as *Articulate Muscle: The Male Body in Art*. Candice Bergen was hired to photograph it for the *Today* show, and Elliott Erwitt did so on his own. His pictures show what an unexpected success the event was—more than twenty-five hundred people showed up, most of them gay men, judging from their looks. A panel of art historians, moderated by *New York Times* critic Vicki Goldberg, watched three Mr. Olympia contestants pose and then conducted “a long panel discussion and slide show of the human physique in art and as art through the ages. Most people seemed angry or bored. Very few people paid attention.” But for Schwarzenegger, it was “like going to heaven.”⁵

Sometime before writing the disco fragment I had become friendly with *New Yorker* humor writer Veronica Geng, who, among other quirky interests, was a follower of bodybuilding, and she had gotten to know Schwarzenegger and told me about him.⁶ Veronica was also a devotee of New York City Ballet, to which she also introduced me, and she managed to combine her enthusiasm for these two types of bodies, shaped by rigorous daily routines, by introducing Schwarzenegger to City Ballet principal Peter Martins with a view to getting the dancer to assist the bodybuilder with his posing technique.

It was around this time that large numbers of gay men began going to gyms. The gyms we went to were either YMCAs or hard-core bodybuilding clubs, since well-appointed fitness centers were still in the future.



Arnold Schwarzenegger posing during the event *Articulate Muscle: The Male Body in Art*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, February 25, 1976. Photo by Elliott Erwitt/Magnum Photos

I joined the West Side Y in 1974; that's where I first encountered gay men whom I recognized from Flamingo pumping up their muscles on Nautilus machines.⁷ If you compare the "natural" musculature on the guys in photographs of the 1970s New York gay scene, you'll see why I was so amazed at the "synthetically produced bodies," the "dancing machines" I saw at the disco. I vividly remember the first time I took notice of a gay man with disproportionately large pectoral muscles. It was on Fire Island in summer 1973. He was a very good-looking guy named Frank who always came shirtless to tea dance at the Botel in the Pines, and my friends and I couldn't stop staring at and talking about his massive pecs. I guess I'd never before fully recognized the sexual appeal of that part of a man's anatomy; it took a chest overdeveloped by weight training to make me focus on it so fetishistically. Within a short five years, sculpted pectoral muscles had become one of the main attributes of gay male desirability, and Flamingo institutionalized it. Toward the conclusion of his history of 1970s disco, *Love Saves the Day*, Tim

Lawrence writes that Flamingo was starting to be “driven by an increasingly high dose of self-absorption”:

The launch of the first annual “Tetas” (Spanish for “tit”) contest—a variation of the female topless dance—in October 1978 confirmed the drive toward vanity and bodily display, with the chest reigning in the new temples of butch, and the following month Nathan Fain noted that Flamingo members “can barely stand how handsome they are, the first confirmed case of group narcissism on record.”⁸

Gay men’s overdeveloped breasts eventually came to be called disco tits.

My project on disco—such as it was—was probably an attempt to work through my ambivalence about the new scene. I wasn’t a member at Flamingo; I didn’t measure up to its standard of physical beauty, and I felt excluded by its cliquishness and conformity. But I was also attracted to some of the guys I thought did meet the standard, and I felt happy to be there when I found a member to go with. Most of all, I had always loved to dance, starting with fifth-grade ballroom-dance classes; intensifying during my junior-high-school years, when I learned to jitterbug with my older sister’s friends; intensifying still more when I easily picked up all the 1960s dance crazes from the twist and the Watusi to line dances like the Hully Gully (which would serve me well for learning the Hustle during my disco days); and intensifying most of all when the music, in the hands of the DJ, seemed to make my body move as if by remote control and manipulate my mood in ever-increasing rushes of pleasure. Of course, this last phase of dance loving was enhanced by drugs—everything from acid to angel dust, a tranquilizer so powerful and spatially disorienting that it was wise while high on it to stay in one place on the dance floor. (The “rag queens” I mention in the fragment on disco are what we called the guys who used ethyl chloride; they would soak a handkerchief in the chemical anesthetic and each put one end of it in his mouth to get high. You can see this in one of the disco sequences of William Friedkin’s 1980 film *Cruising*.)

Drugs—always hard on me—were probably the major cause of my ambivalence. I’m one of those people made edgy and paranoid instead of mellow by pot. On an acid trip, I hallucinated being in the middle of a forest fire. Heroin made me throw up. Speed made me feel great for an hour and crash for twenty-four. Once on Fire Island, a group of us took

mescaline before going into the water to play in the surf, got caught in a rip current, and just barely saved ourselves from drowning. I was tripping on hallucinogenic mushrooms at a party in Los Angeles when the police raided it. I took way too many drugs during the late 1960s and 1970s. I took them alone, with friends and boyfriends, at parties, for sex, for the “experience,” but most of all I took them for disco. You can’t really give yourself over to serious discoing without drugs. You need the incredible level of energy they give the illusion of supplying, and you need their disinhibiting quality to allow the music’s beat to take over your body, inhabit it, make it move with no sense of volition. Without drugs, disco can be fun, but just fun.

I resisted disinhibition probably because I was trying to get serious about being an art critic right at the time I became a disco bunny. I fought the effect of the drugs I took. I *thought* at the disco. I thought, “Why are all these grown-up men acting like excited children? Why do I like this so much? How will I feel about this tomorrow?” Several years ago, I read a passage of *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* that resonated with my disco experience. It’s not about drugs or dancing, it’s about sex, but the analogy works perfectly:

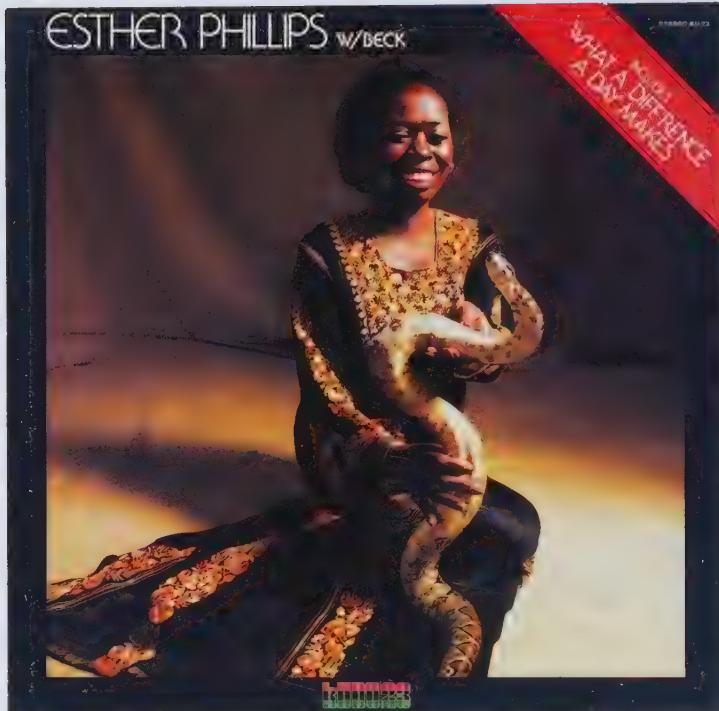
Some people can have sex and really let their minds go blank and fill up with the sex; other people can never let their minds go blank and fill up with the sex, so while they’re having the sex they’re thinking, “Can this really be me? Am I really doing this? This is very strange. Five minutes ago I wasn’t doing this. In a little while I won’t be doing it. What would Mom say? How did people ever think of doing this?” So the first type of person—the type that can let their minds go blank and fill up with sex and not-think-about-it—is better off. The other type has to find something else to relax with and get lost in.⁹

I tried to resolve my disco ambivalence not by finding something else but by changing venues. I stopped going to Flamingo and shifted my loyalty to 12 West, which was a bit less A-list and a bit more diverse. Later I occasionally went to Paradise Garage, which was way more diverse, but by the time the Garage opened in 1977 I’d started graduate school and become the managing editor of *October*, and the demands of course work and running a quarterly journal interfered with my disco routine. Eventually I pretty much stopped going to the big, fabulous gay discos. I realized that in many ways I preferred the grungy little gay bars that had dance floors, like

Crisco Disco and the Cock Ring. I could go at a more convenient hour any night of the week, never have to stand in line to get in, pay no admission, and still dance to music mixed by some of the best DJs spinning in New York. And unlike those at the “real” discos, the patrons of these places were into more than just dancing, which meant that my night often ended with one of them in my bed. Maybe I took Warhol’s advice “to find something else to relax with and get lost in” after all.

The clearest sign to me that my disco project stemmed from my ambivalence is that I described Flamingo instead of 12 West. I thought of 12 West as *my* disco during my serious disco days, which in memory seem to stretch over the entire decade of the 1970s but must really have been the few years from 1974 to 1977. The dance floor at 12 West was not only bigger than Flamingo’s but also much better designed. It was a square inscribed in another square, with triangular, stepped, carpeted platforms on three sides of the dance floor. (The fourth triangle that would have completed the square was only implied by the other three; the dance floor actually continued into the entrance lobby in one direction and a juice bar and lounge area in the other.) You could stand and dance in place on the platforms and look out over the dance floor at its sea of moving bodies, spotting friends or the attractive stranger you’d noticed earlier dancing next to you. At Flamingo, by contrast, the dance floor occupied one end of a long, narrow loft. It was approachable from only one side, and when the place was crowded there was never enough space between the sidewalls and the dance floor to make moving around it possible. The platforms at 12 West offered options. You could immerse yourself in the thick of dancing bodies, or you could stand slightly above and apart and take in the beauty of the multitude moving as one while dancing in place to the beat.

Another thing I liked about 12 West was that there were skylights above the dance floor, so when dancing ’til dawn you actually got to experience the dawn. I think this reduced the shock of moving from the synthetic, strobe-lit world of the disco to the diurnal streets outside. Day slowly broke over the dance floor, the crowd thinned, you danced a last dance or two, and as the sun really began to pour into the room you saw that your surroundings weren’t so magical after all but just an old industrial space, and you were happy enough to return to your regular life.¹⁰ The song I remember as my all-time disco favorite—Esther Phillips’s disco cover of Dinah Washington’s “What a Diff’rence a Day Makes”¹¹—dates from when I began going to



Cover of Esther Phillips's album *What a Diff'rence a Day Makes*, 1975

12 West; reprised at dawn, the lyric might have been “What a diff’rence *day* makes.” I was certainly being hyperbolic when I wrote in the fragment that it took “days to adjust to ugly reality.” Regular hours, jobs and other quotidian responsibilities, and being surrounded by ordinary, mostly straight people who had no appreciation of the intensities of pleasure that disco afforded did take some adjustment, and it did take time for even a young, physically fit body to recover from staying out all night, taking drugs, and dancing for eight hours at a stretch with rarely more than a fifteen-minute break. But by midweek, I’d be back in the swim and looking forward to the next weekend’s dance party.

The Steven of the fragment is Steven Butow, who was my regular disco buddy. I don’t remember for sure how or when we met, but I think it was probably through David, a mutual friend I’d picked up for sex and remained



Steven Butow as Lieutenant Grogan in *Desperate Living*, 1977.
Directed by John Waters

friends with until he was body-snatched by est (Erhard Seminars Training, a popular 1970s cult). Steven was part of the Baltimore crowd around John Waters (he played Lieutenant Grogan in *Desperate Living* [1977]), and we sometimes went dancing in a group that variously included Divine (in his Glenn Milstead guise), Cookie Mueller, David Lochary, and Van Smith. Steven and I occasionally slept together, but our bond was really about dancing. He worked as an illustrator for Butterick Patterns, and I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts and struggling to find my voice as a critic. We rarely saw each other during the week and had little in common beyond our disco companionship, but to that we were extremely faithful. Having a dance partner who wasn't a boyfriend worked well for disco: it kept the emotional experience musical and communal, uncomplicated by the petty jealousies that come with lovers who are just as attracted as you are to the

guys dancing nearby. If Steven said, “Let’s go dance next to Bobby—he’s hot,” I thought, Sure, let’s. And Steven or I could wander off and dance with whomever we pleased, knowing that we’d find our way back to each other soon enough and always be there at the end of the night to leave together. I don’t think there was ever a time when either of us went home with someone else. “Dance partner” doesn’t mean the same thing for disco as it does for, say, Fred and Ginger. With disco at its best, dancing is both individual and collective. You might connect with the stranger dancing next to you at a given moment, but it’s not a couples thing; it’s boogie intimacy, which can be very intense and sexy, but it’s usually limited to dancing together for a while before you each dissolve back into the crowd or return to your “partner.”

In this respect, the innovations of disco mirrored the ethos of gay liberation regarding the expansion of affectional possibility. Coupling was newly seen not as a “happily-ever-after” compact but as an in-the-moment union for sharing pleasure. Such pleasure sharing could, of course, lead to all kinds of longer-term relationships: now-and-again casual sex partners, regular fuck buddies, cruising comrades, bar and bathhouse companions, just plain friends, and combinations of any of these and many more. But it didn’t have to lead to anything at all. Pleasure was its own reward; it didn’t require redemption through love or commitment or even an exchange of phone numbers. Moreover, two stopped being a magic number: coupling could easily multiply to become a three-way, a foursome, group sex. Bathhouses had “orgy rooms,” steam rooms, and saunas for those who wanted more than one partner at a time, a little voyeurism and/or exhibitionism in the mix, or the total anonymity of sex in the dark with bodies detached from personhood. The liberation ethos developed into a new sexual culture, and that culture fed into the new dance scene. It’s not surprising that one of the earliest gay dance parties in New York happened at a bathhouse: the Continental Baths introduced disco in 1970.

I never went there. I missed out on Bette Midler’s legendary performances. I never went to the Loft or the Gallery. I never danced at the Ice Palace in Cherry Grove. I didn’t go to the Garage as often as I now wish I had. I went only once, by invitation, to Studio 54 but hated its “you-can-come-in-but-you-can’t” door policy and found it dull once I got inside. Obviously, I wasn’t there for one of the big occasions. I found the Saint exciting more as a brilliantly designed environment than as a place to dance.



Peter Hujar, *Divine*, 1975. Gelatin silver print, 15 7/8 x 15 7/8 inches

And the lure of the sex taking place in the balcony above the dance floor's domed scrim confounded my notion that a truly great disco was meant to make sex redundant, at least on the night you went dancing.

I never skated at the Roxy, even though I had been early to take up roller disco. I had a crush on a French dancer, a gorgeous straight guy named Daniel, who introduced me to it. Having been a roller skater in my teens, I was game to go with him to the old Empire Rollerdrome in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where roller disco is said to have started. We were usually the only white boys there,¹² and though good skaters, we were seriously outclassed by the regulars, who skate-danced double-time to the pounding disco music and flashing strobe lights. Sometimes they formed long chains by grabbing one another around the waist. The men were so fierce that women weren't allowed on the floor with them except during occasional "couples skates" to music with a slower beat. Otherwise it was either "women's skate" or "men's skate," with the nonskating sex hanging out in a fenced area in the middle of the rink. One fateful night skating at Empire just after Christmas in 1978, I was unintentionally clipped from behind, my legs went out from under me, and I fell—hard. I blacked out and only came to when I was on my feet again, having been scooped up by one of the floor monitors. There I was, stunned, standing in the middle of the rink with skaters zooming past me. Somehow I managed to push myself to the side of the rink with all my weight on my left leg, the only one that would support me. Although it took a while for me to admit it to myself, I'd broken my hip. By the time we called 9-1-1 and got an ambulance, I was in excruciating pain. I was taken to the medical facility nearest the Empire Rollerdrome, X-rayed, shot full of morphine, and, since I had no health insurance, sent to a ward with fifteen other guys. Within several years of going bankrupt and closing, Brooklyn Jewish Hospital was a pretty forlorn place. When I woke up early the next morning to the sound of boom boxes, there were cops hovering over my ward mates, most of whom were handcuffed to their bed frames while they recovered from gunshot wounds. I was unfazed: I was flying on morphine, which I guess is the only drug I've ever taken that made me feel just fine. Eventually I was transferred to Cornell Medical Center for orthopedic surgery to pin my hip. For the next six weeks, I was on crutches and, owing to an especially icy winter, more or less confined to my apartment.

I spent that confinement rewriting my essay “Pictures” for *October*. It was very slow going, no doubt in part because my usual work routine was disrupted by being unable to go out to the Cock Ring at the end of the evening to reward myself with a little dancing and maybe a trick. The more serious reason was the difficulty of clarifying the inchoate ideas I’d formulated in the catalogue for *Pictures*, the modest group show I’d put together for Artists Space in 1977. For that original essay, written a year and a half earlier, I attempted to apply the linguistic and poststructuralist theory I’d been reading. The theory was new to me, and so was the artwork by the artists I selected for the show, but both the theory and the art were “about” representation and thus seemed related. For the 1979 version, I returned to the notion of postmodernism that I now realize I had come up with a few years earlier for the book proposal that shared a file folder these past forty years with my disco fragment. This required an about-face: I concluded the 1977 essay by saying that “the self-reflexiveness and formalism of recent art appear to have been abandoned, as are interests in the specific characteristics of a medium. . . . It would be a mistake, however, to think of this [new, *Pictures*] work as effecting a complete break with recent art, or with modernism as a whole.”¹³ The same turn away from medium specificity led me to the opposite conclusion in the 1979 version: “If *postmodernism* is to have theoretical value, it cannot be used merely as another chronological term; rather it must disclose the particular nature of a breach with modernism. It is in this sense that the radically new approach to mediums is important.”¹⁴ Much would be made of the shifts I made between the first essay and the second in the years to come.¹⁵

What did it mean that the group of young artists who came to be known as the Pictures Generation hung out at the Mudd Club? The Mudd Club opened in Tribeca in the fall of 1978, and I went there occasionally because they did—and I hated it. It was one of the principal venues of the “disco-sucks” backlash. The dance everyone did there was called the spastic. It’s one of the only dances I could never learn to do.



FINANCIAL DISTRICT

93 NASSAU STREET, 1976-



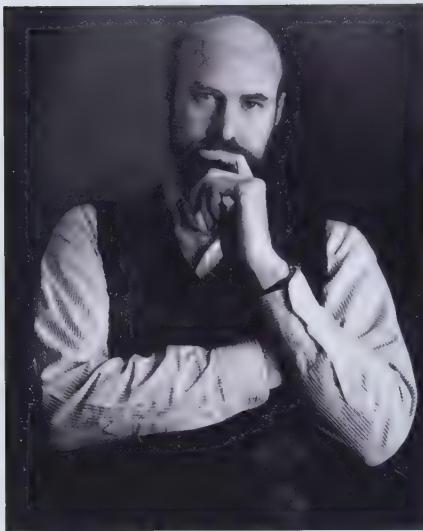


Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins in George Balanchine's *Agon*, 1957. Photo by Martha Swope, 1978

AGON

Symphony in C is one of George Balanchine's finest ballets. Made for the Paris Opera Ballet in 1947 to a newly discovered Georges Bizet symphony, it was originally called *Le Palais de Cristal*. Leonor Fini designed the set and the differently colored costumes for each of its four movements, but when Balanchine restaged it for Ballet Society (predecessor to New York City Ballet), he stripped it of its decor and dressed the fifty-two dancers in black and white—black tunics for the men, white tutus for the women. “*Symphony in C* makes everyone happy,” says critic Nancy Goldner.¹ The first time I saw it, I resisted its charm. Seeing it now, I don't know how I could have, but my resistance was undoubtedly connected to my affair with a brawny black modern dancer. I remember saying, “It's too *ballet blanc* for my taste,” even though I didn't know what *ballet blanc* meant at the time. I had been taken to the ballet by my friend Veronica Geng. To entice me, she said that Balanchine created wonderful, constantly changing patterns of dancers on the stage. She couldn't have been more right about that, but I didn't appreciate the genius of it immediately.

Not long after that first encounter with City Ballet, I entered the PhD program in art history at the City University of New York Graduate Center, which was then the only art-history department in the country where it was possible to specialize in contemporary art and criticism. Two former *Artforum* critics, Rosalind Krauss and Robert Pincus-Witten, taught there. I knew Rosalind slightly, and it was with her that I wanted to study. At the Graduate Center, I formed a strong bond with Craig Owens, a classmate who had also come to study with Rosalind. Like me, Craig was gay, but he was several years younger and several inches taller. He was also a balletomane, and under his guidance Balanchine won me over, although my initial skepticism continued in several respects, at least for a while: I didn't like tutu ballets, and I especially disliked story ballets. Neither of these were so much an issue at New York City Ballet because many of Balanchine's works were performed in practice



Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Douglas Crimp*, 1982.
Gelatin silver print, contact print from 11 x 14-inch
black-and-white negative



Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Craig Owens*, 1982.
Gelatin silver print, contact print from 11 x 14-inch
black-and-white negative

clothes and most had no explicit story. I quickly came to appreciate the starkly modernist works, such as *The Four Temperaments* (1946), *Agon* (1957), and *Episodes* (1959). But there were also a couple of exceptions in the lushly romantic *Serenade* (1935) and *La Valse* (1951), both costumed by Karinska in romantic-style ankle-length tutus and both telling ambiguous, haunted tales. *La Valse* is probably the least likely ballet for me to have loved so unreservedly at first sight, but maybe I can explain my affection.

Let me say to start that the more I understood Balanchine, the more I realized that the term *modernist* applies to his work in general, not only to the ballets choreographed to music by modern composers such as Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, and Anton Webern and containing deformed classical movement in which sharp angles replace soft curves, legs turn in as well as out, feet are flexed as well as pointed, and extensions are stretched to the breaking point. Initially, it was only ballets of the *Agon* type that I apprehended as modernist. *Agon* (from the Greek for “contest”) has a commissioned serial score by Stravinsky and is performed in black and white tights and leotards on a brightly lit bare stage with a backdrop as blue as the sky on a crisp, clear day. The choreography is rigorous, almost mathematical:

twelve dancers, twelve sections (plus a coda), and twelve-tone music. Two pas de trois, each divided into three parts, the first requiring one male and two female dancers, the second, one female and two males, precede a long central pas de deux. *Agon* begins with a quartet, followed by an octet, then all twelve dancers together. The finale repeats the combinations in different order: eight, twelve, four.

Stravinsky based *Agon* on a French Baroque dance manual by François de Lauze. Using such early dance forms as the *branle*, the *gaillard*, and the *sarabande* for the two pas de trois, Balanchine likewise reflected the old forms. The choreography for the opening and closing sections of the ballet, with names like *double pas de quatre* and *danse des quatre trios*, employs such unclassical movements as walking, skipping, sliding into splits, arm swinging, elbows pulling in with wrists folding to flap hands downward, and radical forward and then backward bending. But even the more classical pas de trois have moments of extreme deformation. Dance critic Edwin Denby perfectly captured these moments when he said of the first, “In triple canon the dancers do idiotic slenderizing exercises, theoretically derived from court gesture, while the music foghorns in the fashion of *musique concrète*.² (This might sound derisive, but it’s not; Denby’s tone is good-natured, and his essay on *Agon* is a paean.)

What I found most exhilarating was the pas de deux. Denby says of it that Balanchine turned the conventions of the pas de deux upside down. Even without knowing the conventions, you can’t miss its tension, which derives in part from the lack of danceable rhythm in the music; Balanchine said the movement should be like “one long, long, long, long breath.”³ Nor can you miss the unclassical, contorted, sexually suggestive moves the dancers make. At one point, as the danseur lifts the ballerina in front of him, she opens her legs in a spread eagle, and he carries her forward. When he lowers her to her feet, she slides into a split and falls backward between his legs. He drops to his knees, opens his arms, and does a deep back bend to grab her hands, then bends forward as she rises into arabesque. He supports her there from the awkward position of leaning forward, arms reaching back. At another moment, as he kneels supporting her, she steps over his arm with one leg, which leaves him holding her hand right under her crotch.

The male dancer spends a great deal of time on his knees in the *Agon* pas de deux, sometimes supporting the ballerina by grasping her leg rather than

her arm. At the most dramatic moment, he falls to his knees while supporting her in an arabesque on pointe by holding her outstretched hand, lies down on his back, then scooches around from side to front. Toward the end of the pas de deux, he once again supports the ballerina while lying down (she's not on pointe this time). Afterward, he gets up on his knees, and she collapses her upper body over his in a final embrace, whether of protection or exhaustion, it's hard to say.

Balanchine made the *Agon* pas de deux in 1957 for Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell. Mitchell, who is black, thought that Balanchine was interested in exploiting the contrast of white and black skin: "There was a definite use of skin tones in terms of Diana being so pale and me being so dark, so that even the placing of the hands or the arms provided a color structure integrated into the choreographic one."⁴ It was surely highly provocative in the late 1950s for such a sensuous pas de deux to be danced by an interracial couple, but nothing seems to have been publicly made of it. Denby wrote simply, "The fact that Miss Adams is white and Mr. Mitchell Negro is neither stressed nor hidden; it adds to the interest."⁵ When I first saw *Agon*, there were no black male principals or soloists in the company; Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins danced the performances of it that made the ballet a touchstone for me. Soon thereafter, in 1981, Mel Tomlinson, a black dancer from the Dance Theatre of Harlem, the company founded by Mitchell, joined City Ballet and danced the role with Heather Watts. Albert Evans and Wendy Whelan formed a more recent celebrated interracial partnership in the pas de deux.

If Craig was my ballet tutor, the medium for my understanding Balanchine was the choreographer's greatest ballerina, Suzanne Farrell. I paid careful attention to her right from the start, no doubt because Craig was mad for her. He would see anything she danced, and he rapturously sang her praises. He called her Suzanne (in fact, he called all the dancers by their first names—Patricia McBride was Patty; Peter Martins, Peter; and so forth). Of course, Craig wasn't the only ballet-goer who adored Farrell. Nearly everyone who was a regular at City Ballet in the late 1970s was as much a Farrell fan as a Balanchine fan. In his eccentric but insightful book *Following Balanchine*, Robert Garis writes of something he calls Farrellitis, a condition of being so taken with Farrell's gifts as to fatally neglect other dancers. As a regular City Ballet-goer, Garis felt himself to have suffered from the condition during the 1960s, when Balanchine was plainly in love



Diana Adams and Arthur Mitchell in George Balanchine's *Agon*, 1957. Photo by Martha Swope, 1957

with Farrell, creating new roles for her and giving her all the major ballerina parts in his repertory works. Garis's Farrellitis, like Balanchine's, blinded him to how destructive Balanchine's obsession was to the company's morale; indeed, one of the eccentricities of Garis's book is his self-proclaimed identification with Balanchine on this matter:

For I now had the sense not only of *agreeing* with him about this new dancer but of *collaborating* almost at first hand with his taste and judgment and with the project he was so clearly embarked on. If Balanchine from that point [of making the ballet *Meditation* for Farrell in 1963] on made the exploration of Farrell's dance genius his chief project, so did I. And when her dancing lit up role after role in the standard repertory, I felt a glow of personal gratification as my judgment was confirmed—sometimes I was so excited that I very nearly took credit for her dancing.⁶

Because Farrellitis was a 1960s phenomenon, I knew it only as legend. The story of it is complicated and heartbreaking (told in detail in Farrell's autobiography, *Holding On to the Air*, and the documentary film *Suzanne Farrell: Elusive Muse*). The fifty-nine-year-old Balanchine fell in love with his seventeen-year-old dancer. At the time, he was on his fourth marriage, to his former ballerina Tanaquil Le Clercq, who had been paralyzed by polio in 1956. His affair with Farrell was consummated, so to speak, through dance. In 1969, Farrell married a young dancer in the company, Paul Mejia; crushed and furious, Balanchine fired them both. The two dancers managed eventually to find interim employment with Maurice Béjart's Ballet of the Twentieth Century in Brussels, but then, during the City Ballet's 1974 summer season at Saratoga Springs, after seeing Balanchine's *La Valse* for the first time—though she had often danced it—Farrell wrote Balanchine a note: "As wonderful as it is to watch your ballets, it is more wonderful to dance them. Is this impossible?" His reply: "When do we get back to work?"⁷

Although Farrellitis ceased to be an issue, the mad love Farrell inspired nevertheless resumed. Here, for example, is Robert Greskovic writing in *Ballet Review* in 1978 about her performance of "Diamonds" from Balanchine's *Jewels* (1967):

As if the extraordinary mechanism of her turning weren't hypnotic and amazing enough, when she blossoms the gossamer funnel of her pirouette

into an arabesque and then tips into the penchée pose that lengthens in two directions at once as she extends an épaulé arm (to establish a second arabesque), we not only see a wonderful feat of turning and balance, we're deeply touched by the expression of sweet ecstasy that shines out from her uplifted gaze and gently tilted head. Concentrated there in her fair, warm coloring, her velvety gray eyes, and her fine, overbite-clarified smile (which gives a rabbitlike tweak to her kitten's face) is a kind of literal highlight: Farrell riding the crest of her art, her talent, her fame.⁸

Even the more measured doyenne of ballet journalism during the Farrell years, Arlene Croce, writing about her performance of "Diamonds" immediately after the ballerina's return to City Ballet in 1975, gets carried away:

Farrell's independent drive no longer seems unacceptably burdensome to her, and her mastery implies no rebuke.

And what mastery it is—of continual off-center balances maintained with light support or no support at all, of divergently shaped steps unthinkably combined in the same phrase, of invisible transitions between steps and delicate shifts of weight in poses that reveal new and sweeter harmonies of proportion no matter how wide or how subtle the contrast. Your eye gorges on her variety, your heart stops at the brink of every precipice. She, however, sails calmly out into space and returns as if the danger did not exist.⁹

To my mind, the most telling assessment of Farrell is that of Diana Adams, interviewed about Farrell by David Daniel for *Ballet Review*. It was Adams who discovered Farrell in Cincinnati when scouting for young dancers to bring to the School of American Ballet on scholarships paid for by a Ford Foundation grant. In the interview, Adams fiercely defends Farrell as someone possessed of both an extraordinary talent and an iron will. "The only real answer to the question of 'Why Suzanne?' was, and still is, right there before your eyes, in her dancing."¹⁰ About Farrell's work in Balanchine's notoriously difficult company classes:

If Balanchine said to do something, she never bothered to consider its difficulty or impossibility. She assumed it was possible, and did it. If he made a suggestion to her she applied it immediately and without question. . . . The intensity of her concentration was almost terrifying to watch. He'd give her one of his paralyzing combinations; you'd be exhausted even before the music started. But Suzanne would zip through it without batting an eye.

BEFORE PICTURES



Sean Lavery and Suzanne Farrell in George Balanchine's *Symphony in C*, 1947.
Photo by Martha Swope, 1979

She didn't even sweat. Whatever quirky movement or odd rhythm he gave, she'd take it in and feed it back to him. He began to make things harder and harder. Suzanne inhaled and kept going. Balanchine was thrilled to have a dancer like that, and he often said so.¹¹

About her artistic range:

She bypassed the idea of self-classification according to type as if the idea never existed, which meant that every ounce of her talent was available to Balanchine. She refused to limit herself. Whatever Balanchine thought was possible, she thought was possible. She never said something wasn't her type of role, that it was too fast, too slow, too hard, too anything. There wasn't anything she wouldn't risk for Balanchine.¹²

About why she was misunderstood by her critics:

In the end, though, it's one of the oldest stories in the book. She was a dramatically original artist, and no one knew what to make of her. . . . She gives you everything physically and at the same time seems to savor something secret for herself. It's a marvelous, fascinating quality. I think it has to do with what dancing means to her. For anyone to work as hard as she does, some part of it has to be for herself alone. And I think it's a remarkable act of grace and dignity that she doesn't involve the audience in these personal considerations. She withholds nothing physically from her dancing, and what she seems to withhold personally isn't the absence of anything so much as it is the presence of a personal mystery.¹³

This last passage rings especially true to my experience. Mind you, Farrell was the first great ballerina I ever saw, so I had no one to compare her with and no real understanding of what she was doing. (I don't count the one time I saw Margot Fonteyn in the late 1960s; it was my first ballet, indeed my first experience of theatrical dance, and I simply had no idea how to look at it; and I was undoubtedly more enthralled by Rudolf Nureyev than I was by Fonteyn.) I couldn't easily see the difference between a double and a triple pirouette—even quadruples in Farrell's case—but I could sense the speed of her turns and their secure placement. I could also luxuriate in her super-slow pirouettes, which provided her with an important means of rubato in her dancing. Indeed, Farrell's nuanced musicality was her most notable attribute, a constant source of delight in both her allegro and her

adagio styles. I absolutely thrilled at her risk-taking, and her grandeur would have been obvious to anyone. What is most crucial to me about Adams's assessment, though, is her account of Farrell's "personal mystery." Balanchine famously told his dancers just to dance the steps, not to try to express anything beyond them. Farrell was the most expressive of dancers, but her expression was that of dancing pure and simple: she *imparted* pleasure precisely because she appeared to *take* pleasure in what she was doing.

I remember several examples of Craig's Farrell obsession. One involved an ongoing argument with a young woman who was a Patricia McBride fan. McBride had become a City Ballet principal in 1961, a few years before Farrell, and she was one of the dancers who filled the void left by Farrell's departure in 1969. She was Farrell's opposite both in physical type and as a dancer. Relatively short, with a large, open face, she formed a celebrated partnership in the 1960s with Edward Villella in such ballets as *Harlequinade* (1965) and "Rubies" from *Jewels*, and later with Mikhail Baryshnikov during his brief stint with City Ballet in 1978–79. Possessed of an all-American glamour, she has been described as "not mysterious and grand but the epitome of normal," which is probably why I didn't care so much for her.¹⁴ Craig appreciated McBride's qualities, as is made plain in his first piece of published writing, a short essay on Balanchine's *Coppélia* written for the gay magazine *Christopher Street*.¹⁵ But when McBride was cast in a role that Farrell also danced, he resented it, and he would assuage his disappointment by disparaging McBride at intermission to the McBride partisan, whose intelligence was no match for Craig's but who was every bit as loyal to McBride as Craig was to Farrell.

The other example was more unsettling. In summer 1979, Craig got his dream job: he became the replacement dance critic of the Albany *Times-Union* for New York City Ballet's two-week summer season in Saratoga Springs. This meant he could cover Farrell's performances, and he did so in glowing, if necessarily brief, terms:

Suzanne Farrell blazed through Autumn [in Jerome Robbins's *The Four Seasons*] in a magnificently theatrical performance, that tears the choreography to shreds.¹⁶

Farrell has danced beautifully at every performance this week, but Friday night she was magnificent [in Balanchine's *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*]. The sweep of her line in arabesque, the breadth of her arms in the lifts, the

security of her balances were breath-taking. Farrell is the most generous dancer you are ever likely to see. She always gives you that extra flourish which separates sublime dancing from the nearly great.¹⁷

Farrell provided exactly what the score [of Stravinsky's *Movements for Piano and Orchestra*] required. She surrendered to Stravinsky's jolting accents with an awesome vulnerability, yet was never deflected from the underlying rhythmic regularity. She clarified continuity and revealed purely musical structures. Like Stravinsky's music, which has been described as "a ritual which attempts to overcome the coldness of the world," her demeanor revealed that more expression may reside in reticence than in those moments of exuberance in which emotion seems to overflow.¹⁸

In terms of performance, it was in a sense Farrell's season. She danced at every performance but one during the first week, offering an intensely focused *Who Cares?*, an explosive *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*, a supremely sexy *Union Jack*. In the weeks that followed, she gave definitive performances of *Monumentum* and *Movements*, *Chaconne*, and *Allegro Brillante*.¹⁹

As far as writing on Farrell goes, Craig's isn't especially fanatical in its praise. It's not even all that insightful or specific. However, when I visited him in Saratoga Springs to join him at the ballet for a few days, he told me a story that seemed to betray utter bedazzlement: "I met Suzanne," he proudly announced as soon as I arrived. "I told her that I had seen every one of her performances in the past few seasons, and she said, 'Oh, you're one of *those*.'"²⁰ Seeming to savor Farrell's derisive remark simply because she said it to *him*, he unabashedly relayed this brief exchange. That it conveyed distaste for his excessive devotion seemed not to faze him.

I eventually realized that Craig's imperviousness to Farrell's put-down wasn't the disturbing lack of self-awareness I thought it was. On the contrary, Craig was just completely self-assured in his balletomania, which was, I now believe, one of the many manifestations of his unrestrained intellectual enthusiasm. He was as unself-conscious in this instance as he was in many of our late-night phone calls, in which he would say something like, "I'm writing a brilliant essay on . . ."—on whatever it was he was working on at the moment. I was at first taken aback by his apparent immodesty, but I grew to understand and appreciate his elation at the processes of his own thinking, sparked by his voracious reading; and the fact is, he very likely *was* writing a brilliant essay. He wrote a whole string of them for *October* between 1977

and 1980: “*Einstein on the Beach*: The Primacy of Metaphor,” “Photography *en abyme*,” “Detachment from the *parergon*,” “Earthwords,” and the two-part essay “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism.”²¹

The piece on Robert Wilson and Philip Glass’s opera *Einstein on the Beach* begins with an epigraph drawn from Jacques Derrida’s essay on Antonin Artaud in *Writing and Difference*, which hadn’t yet been translated from the French. In the essay, Craig opposed what he considered excessive claims for *Einstein* and persuasively argued that its mythopoetic structure placed it firmly in a Symbolist strain of theater whose course had long ago been fully charted.

Craig continued his involvement with Derrida’s work by translating section two of the essay “The Parergon,” from *The Truth in Painting*, which the philosopher had recently published in French but which wouldn’t be fully translated into English until 1987. Needless to say, translating Derrida’s deconstruction of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* was no easy matter, but Craig’s translation is, passage for passage, superior to that of Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. Craig added an afterword, which he called, playing on the meaning of *parergon*, a detachment. There he argued that every aesthetic theory, from Plato to Heidegger, has been a semiotic theory, a subordination of art to language. He quotes Derrida: “Every time philosophy defines art, masters it, and encloses it within the history of meaning or the ontological encyclopedia, it is assigned the function of a medium.”²² Craig suggests finally that the implication of Derrida’s deconstruction of Western art theory is the transformation of art itself—“beyond recognition”—which would have “no better point of departure than that which has always been excluded from the aesthetic field: the *parergon*”: that is, the frame, the literal frame (as of a painting), the figurative frame (for example, a corps de ballet), the discursive frame (criticism and theory), and the institutional frame (a museum or a proscenium theater).

Later, Craig would write “From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After ‘The Death of the Author’?,” an important early essay on the type of art that came to be known as institutional critique,²³ and “The Pro-Scenic Event,” a critique of Trisha Brown’s *Son of Gone Fishin’* (1981) for what he considered the choreographer’s abandonment of her critical engagement with the proscenium, which had been such a pronounced feature of her first work for the conventional stage, *Glacial Decoy* (1979): “If *Glacial Decoy*, by acknowledging



Antonio Fantuzzi (School of Fontainebleau), ornamental panel with empty oval, 1542–43, used by Jacques Derrida to illustrate his essay "The Parergon," 1978

the frame, made contact with the specific conditions of its performance, *Son of Gone Fishin'*, entirely contained within the frame, ignores those conditions."²⁴ Brown very quickly came back to her engagement with the frame. In *Set and Reset* (1983), for example, dancers are held aloft to "walk" horizontally around the stage's side legs, which instead of the usual solid velour were made of a see-through mesh that rendered the dancers' offstage behavior visible—"downtime on display," as Brown put it.²⁵ Craig never returned to Brown's work in his criticism, which was tragically cut short by his death from AIDS in 1990. In the meantime, he moved on to other issues, the most important and enduring of which was feminism. His groundbreaking essay "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," written for the influential anthology of postmodern theory *The Anti-Aesthetic*, remains an essential text.²⁶



Walker Evans, Cary Ross's Bedroom, 1932. Film negative, $6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Walker Evans Archive

I was never as fluent in Continental theory (not to mention the French language) as Craig, but there was nevertheless a moment when the two of us worked very much in concert. Together we took a course on photography taught by Rosalind in fall 1977 and, like her, we were eager to apply our interest in theory to this burgeoning field of study. The question of photography's relation to art had been much debated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but with the exceptions of Roland Barthes in France and Allan Sekula in the United States, little in the way of a theoretical perspective had been brought to bear more recently on the question. Nevertheless, the market for photographs had started to substantially expand, as private collectors and museums embraced the medium as never before. So Rosalind, Craig, and I sought to remedy the situation in *October*, whose staff I had joined as managing editor. Dedicating the journal's first special issue to photography, we each contributed an essay (Craig's and mine had been developed in Rosalind's graduate seminar) that attempted

to theorize photography as a language and that relied to some degree on Derrida—Rosalind on the notion of the trace as it figures both in linguistic theory and in Derrida's essay on Mallarmé, "The Double Session"; Craig on the *mise-en-abyme*; while I left my reliance on Derrida implicit, a measure of my relative insecurity with his work.²⁷ Craig and I made versions of essentially the same argument: that photographers had developed a photographic language through processes of doubling such that photographs could be read as images of photography itself. Thus, for example, in "Photography *en abyme*," Craig wrote of Walker Evans's photograph *Cary Ross's Bedroom* (1932) that "what we recognize in this photograph, despite its claim to transparency, is an image of the photographic process. . . . This scene must have appeared as a photograph even before Evans exposed it."²⁸ My essay, "Positive/Negative," concludes with a passage on an 1895 photograph by Edgar Degas of his niece Odette:

This is a photograph of the photogenic, everything already resolved into black and white. Even Odette's cute smile is so resolved. She is at that age when children lose their baby teeth, and her smile reveals the gaps where two of her incisors are absent [looking at the photograph now, I realize that it's not her incisors but her canine teeth that are missing]. The preponderance of lace in this photograph is a pun on that smile, for the French word for lace is *dentelle*, a diminutive of the word *dent*, meaning tooth. So Odette's smile is indeed photogenic; already reduced to presence and absence, positive and negative, black and white, it is a wry metaphor for photography.²⁹

I was first drawn to Degas's photographs through a series he made of ballet dancers, not a surprising subject for him, of course, but these photographs were very surprising. Printed in both positive and negative versions, they were also positive and negative within each version. Degas had employed what is known as the Sabatier effect, a form of solarization in which extraneous light is admitted partway through the process of development of the negative, which causes partial reversals of light and dark. I don't remember to what extent my delight in finding these photographs was related to my growing interest in ballet, but it is unlikely that the two interests were entirely separate. Within a year of meeting Craig, I too had become a balletomane.

What is balletomania? The term is Russian in origin and seems to have been coined toward the end of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Arnold Haskell's

Edgar Degas, *Odette*, c. 1895

Balletomania: The Story of an Obsession, first published in 1934, popularized the term in English. Haskell gives a clear sense of its meaning in his introduction, albeit in convoluted phrasing: “When a work and a company are both so well known that carmine-coloured nails, objectionable at all times, can in *Les Sylphides*, by cutting off abruptly the fine line of the fingers and substituting bloody stumps, produce a feeling of profound irritation, then the right diagnosis is *balletomania*.³¹ Add to this the first sentence of his text proper: “It is my firm belief that human society is divided into three distinct castes: Russian dancers, dancers, and very ordinary people.”³² And this one, a few pages farther along: “Today my best definition of a balletomane is, that he is a person who is sad, very sad, on the first night of a season, just because he realises that it is only for a season, and that a first night implies a last night, most exciting and melancholy of events.”³³ Haskell is an unashamed proponent of *balletomania*. For others, however, *balletomania* is a term of scorn. Thus, Akim Volynsky, an important Russian ballet critic during the period of Balanchine’s youth, writes in his *Book of Exaltations*,



Edgar Degas, *Danseuse le bras tendu*, 1895–96

It is precisely in ballet, as in no other art, that it is impossible to make a move without setting into motion the entire mechanism of enthusiasm and rapture. This enthusiasm is not of a lower order, but rather of a higher one; yet only he who himself burns with rapture at this time, he who exalts in the same sensations as he shakes open all the doors, windows, and apertures of his soul, can apprehend this. Here we have a genuine devotion to the ballet and not that balletomania that often conceals in itself profanation, lust, and blasphemy.³⁴

New York Times dance critic Alastair Macaulay's definition is succinct: "What's a balletomane? Someone who thinks dancers matter more than choreography."³⁵ Both distinctions—between spiritual and carnal desire, between choreography and dancers—seem unsustainable. Indeed, Balanchine accused Volynsky of balletomania using Volynsky's very own terms of reproach: "There was a famous critic in Petersburg, his name was Akim Volynsky, I knew him well. He was drawn to ballerinas and created a whole ballet theory out of it: that in ballet, eroticism is the most important thing, and so on. In his reviews he described how big the thighs of his favorites were, things like that."³⁶ Balanchine has a point about Volynsky, but what of Balanchine's own theory of ballet, aphoristically stated: "Ballet is woman"?³⁷ Certainly, choreography comes to life in performances by dancers. Balanchine again: "The choreography, the steps—those don't mean a thing. Steps are made by a person. It's the person dancing the steps—that's what choreography is, not the steps by themselves."³⁸ Even the eminently discriminating (not to say condescending) Croce questions the distinction: "The City Center [during the American Ballet Theater winter season of 1975] is full of star-gazers, and this annoys some of the dance addicts. But the general public that buys into a dance event only when some new comet [Baryshnikov in this case] is passing across the heavens knows what it is doing. It is looking to have explained to it something about an art form which it has never understood."³⁹

Choreographers make works for particular dancers; professional lingo has it that a ballet is made *on* such-and-such a dancer: "Balanchine made 'Diamonds' on Farrell." And choreography is often changed as dancers assume roles. Sometimes a dancer embellishes choreography to suit herself. Nevertheless, it is an article of faith at New York City Ballet that there are no star dancers; choreography is the star. To see star dancers, one goes

across Lincoln Center Plaza to the Met to see American Ballet Theater, where choreography is thought to be secondary (even though Balanchine made his great *Theme and Variations* in 1947 for ABT on Alicia Alonso and Igor Youskevitch, and indeed the rival company has a great many Balanchine ballets in its repertory, not to mention major works by Frederick Ashton, Michel Fokine, Kenneth MacMillan, Antony Tudor, and many other fine choreographers). There was some worry when Baryshnikov joined City Ballet in 1978 that there would be a lot of unseemly applause for virtuoso displays and an excessive demand for curtain calls from the audience he would bring with him. (Arnold Haskell: “No balletomane ever knew the meaning of restraint, and his infernal din is the dancer’s main reward.”)⁴⁰

The condescension toward ABT and the balletomania it inspired was something I unthinkingly shared, even though I had almost no experience of the rival company. The sense of superiority was easy to absorb, imparted as it was by City Ballet’s famously intellectual audience during intermission conversation. It extended even to City Ballet’s own “other” choreographer, Jerome Robbins, whose ballets Craig and I would often sit out, so insufferable did we find them. I am still no great Robbins fan, apart from two or three of his works, and since Peter Martins took over the company after Balanchine’s death, I avoid programs that include his own works, which I find academic and empty. (In addition, like many others, I deplore Martins’s dismissal of Farrell from her position as a coach for the company’s dancers.) Still, I very much regret now that I participated so fully in City Ballet chauvinism in the past, which prevented me from seeing as much as I might have of Baryshnikov in the repertory in which he shone. Although I did see Natalia Makarova once or twice, I missed out entirely on such great ABT dancers as Fernando Bujones, Carla Fracci, Cynthia Gregory, and Gelsey Kirkland—a high price to pay for ill-informed snobbery.

It wasn’t only a question of snobbery, though. My eye had been trained on Balanchine’s stripped-down ballets, and I found myself unable to focus on the dancing amid the sets, props, costumes, and supernumeraries in the traditional nineteenth-century story ballets that formed the foundation of the ABT repertory. I had no understanding or appreciation of mimed sequences. I much preferred the pure-dance white acts (whence *ballet blanc*), but even then I missed Balanchine’s bare stage and practice clothes. Which brings me back to *La Valse*.



Tyler Angle and Rebecca Krohn in George Balanchine's *La Valse*, 1951. Photo by Paul Kolnik, 2009

La Valse is less a story than an atmospheric allegory—but of what, exactly? Phrases from John Martin's *New York Times* review are suggestive: “piquant decadence,” “sickly hedonism,” “dainty madness.”⁴¹ Choreographing the work to Maurice Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *La Valse*, Balanchine returned in it to ballet romanticism, especially to equating dancing with death. *La Valse* is constructed as a series of eight waltzes danced variously by three women (sometimes interpreted as the Fates) and four couples, together with a figure of Death. The lead ballerina (originally Le Clercq, Farrell when I first saw it) wears white. All of the other women wear tutus that are among Karinska's most dazzling creations. Essentially reinterpretations of the romantic tutu through the lens of Dior's New Look, they have long gray bodices and skirts made of layer upon layer of different colors of tulle—orange, red, pink, lavender. Like the bodice, the top layer is gray, and at first you think the skirts are a sort of muted crimson, but the dancers' movement grants flashes of the half spectrum of layered colors underneath.

The women also wear long white evening gloves, which accentuate the angular arm movements that form an integral part of the choreography. All of the men are dressed in black, which makes the figure of Death indistinguishable from the others at first. Francisco Moncion danced the role of Death when *La Valse* premiered in 1951, and he was still dancing it when I saw it in the mid-1970s.⁴² His seduction of the “decadent” girl in white includes re-dressing her in black—black gloves covering her white ones, black tulle covering her white gown, a black necklace, a black bouquet. He then dances her to death and drops her lifeless body to the ballroom floor.

Why was the girl in white referred to as decadent? No doubt because Le Clercq danced the role that way. According to Moncion,

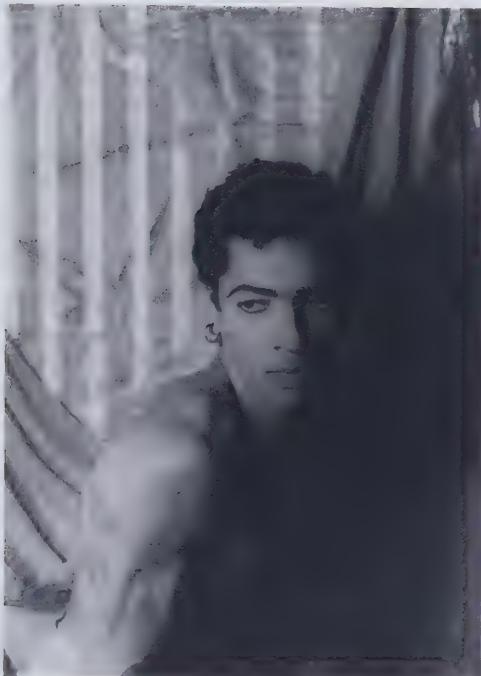
The quality Tanny gave to the character was a kind of discontent and then an avidity—not really greed—for reaching out to something new, a discontent not assuaged by the man she has met [Nicholas Magallanes in the Eighth Waltz]. Somehow, with the Death figure, it is the allure of the unknown that tantalizes her. She clutches the necklace, tries it on, and suddenly something fulfilling begins to happen. She looks into the broken mirror, which distorts her, and recoils. Always Death is leading her, leading her—at this point she’s completely mesmerized.⁴³

And Denby: “The way I remember Tanny’s marvelous gesture of putting on the [long black] gloves was that when she put her hand into the glove she threw up her head at the same time, so that it was a kind of immolation, you felt, like diving to destruction.”⁴⁴ Goldner uses a phrase of Martha Graham’s: “doom eager.”⁴⁵ Farrell didn’t dance the role with the fervor that clearly characterized Le Clercq’s performance, but the way the choreography requires the ballerina to plunge her arms into the long black gloves makes it obvious that she is willingly seduced. My seduction followed hers. Moncion was no longer the spectacular beauty he had been in his youth, the beauty obvious in photographs of him by Carl Van Vechten and George Platt Lynes. But Ravel’s music for “dancing on the edge of a volcano”⁴⁶ together with the “piquant decadence” of Karinska’s costumes and the ballet’s depiction of a woman’s acquiescence to forbidden pleasures, represented by her avid donning of black garments, struck a chord.

On many a night after performances, with Balanchine’s ballets fresh in my mind, I walked farther uptown on Amsterdam Avenue to the Candle



Tanaquil Le Clercq and Francisco Moncion in George Balanchine's *La Valse*, 1951.
Photo by Walter E. Owen, 1951



Carl Van Vechten, *Francisco Moncion*, 1947

Bar, which had one of the largest, darkest, and most active back rooms of any gay bar in the city. I wasn't attracted, as others were, by the possibility the pitch-dark room provided for tactile sensation entirely divorced from visual stimuli, of connecting just to bodies or parts of bodies independent of any sense of a person. For me, faces and their expressions were requisite. But all it took was a come-on from an attractive-enough guy in the front of the bar, and I eagerly followed (or led) him into the darkness.

Other times after the ballet, I walked in the opposite direction, down Ninth Avenue to a neighborhood gay bar filled with a congenial Hell's Kitchen crowd—congenial enough that City Ballet soloists (and eventually husband and wife) Daniel Duell and Kyra Nichols sometimes showed up for a post-performance drink. They were among my favorite dancers, so seeing them at the bar was a special thrill, even if their offstage ordinariness tempered the feeling. Nichols went on to a long and illustrious career with the company; her dancing of the lead role in *Serenade* during her final years as a ballerina (she retired in 2007) was finely nuanced and deeply affecting.

Like Nichols, Duell was promoted to principal dancer in 1979, but he left the company in 1986, not long after his younger brother, Joseph Duell, also a City Ballet principal dancer, committed suicide. Daniel Duell, like his fellow dancer Bart Cook, was seemingly made for Balanchine's modernist roles; both were solidly built, with broad shoulders and flexible backs, but were slightly too short and had heads slightly too large to be right for the part of the classical ballet cavalier, even though they had excellent partnering skills. I think of them as the sarabande guys, the type of male dancer like Todd Bolender, for whom Balanchine made the sarabande in the first pas de trois of *Agon*. In fact, in 1976, when he revived another work from 1957, *Square Dance*, Balanchine added a solo for Cook to Arcangelo Corelli's *Sarabanda*, "a majestic, stately piece, full of sculptural poses (interspersed with beats and turns)."⁴⁷ Duell was not as great a dancer as Cook, but he was the one who most captivated me. As I said, following Craig's lead, I had become a balletomane.

Although our balletomania and our attempts to apply poststructuralist theory to art coincided, we didn't attempt to put the two into any sort of relation. Craig's piece on *Coppélia* preceded our "theory phase," even though Craig's theoretical bent was nascent in his attribution to Balanchine of "a conviction that the ballet has far more intellectual density than is usually presumed." It is right around the time that Craig became ill—in the late 1980s—that poststructuralist theory began to be applied to dance by such scholars as Susan Leigh Foster and Mark Franko. Theory-informed dance studies have since grown into a thriving field of research, and I cannot help but wonder what Craig would have made of it. Balanchine's ballets have hardly been the focus; indeed, the displacement of the Western ballet tradition's centrality has been one of the field's goals from the very beginning. In Foster's *Reading Dancing* (1986), Balanchine is one of four choreographers who serve as different and essentially equal models of dance making; the others are Deborah Hay, Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham.⁴⁸ But Balanchine has returned to centrality in dance studies, albeit negatively, in the furor over *Apollo's Angels*, a synoptic history of ballet published in 2010 by former *New Republic* dance critic Jennifer Homans, who subsequently founded and directs the Center for Ballet and the Arts at New York University. In *Apollo's Angels*, Homans makes a point of her distaste for the new dance studies. As Franko puts it in his angry review of the book,

In her epilogue—that nasty and self-indulgent little diatribe that contains the key to so much that is erratically incomprehensible in her historiography—she blames dance studies for the ills of dance. “Dance today has shrunk into a recondite world of hyperspecialists and balletomanes, insiders who talk to each other (often in impenetrable theory-laden prose) and ignore the public” (548). Her attention to the public exemplified in this book through fabrication to match her own fantasy, and to blazon her allegiance to Balanchine, is hardly a model of intellectual honesty or clarity.⁴⁹

The Homans diatribe that has begotten such diatribes in response is called “The Masters Are Dead and Gone.” It begins, “In the years following Balanchine’s death his angels fell, one by one, from their heights. Classical ballet, which had achieved so much in the course of the twentieth century, entered a slow decline.”⁵⁰ Homans goes on to excoriate today’s dances (“Contemporary choreography veers aimlessly from unimaginative imitation to strident innovation”) and dancers (“very few are exciting or interesting enough to draw or hold an audience”),⁵¹ dance revivals (she calls Millicent Hodson’s scholarly reconstruction of Nijinsky’s *Rite of Spring* an “American postmodern dance masquerading as a seminal modernist work . . . tame and kitschy, a souvenir from an exotic past”)⁵² and new dance forms (“contemporary experimental dance is retreating to the fringes of an inaccessible avant-garde”).⁵³ Even video and film are problems: they cause “the dull, flat-screen look of today’s dances.”⁵⁴ All of this is the fault of “our contemporary infatuation with instability and fragmentation,” which must be overcome if ballet is to survive; and Homans’s contempt for dance experimentation means that for dance to survive it must be classical ballet: “honor and decorum, civility and taste would have to make a comeback.”⁵⁵ Franko ends his review by castigating Homans’s fealty to Balanchine: “This is not just a confused and a-disciplinary treatment of ballet history, it is just another pro-Balanchine tract masquerading as history, perhaps the last gasp of the Balanchine-as-the-be-all-and-end-all version of ballet history.”⁵⁶

Is Balanchine the problem, then? I don’t think so. Instead, it may be the dominant view of Balanchine as Apollonian, neoclassicist, upholder of ballet as a pure-dance art form. As Franko asserts, *Apollo’s Angels* is a popular rewriting of Slavicist Tim Scholl’s scholarly study *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet*. Franko praises Scholl’s book as a “brilliantly presented . . . theory of retrospective modernism” that Homans

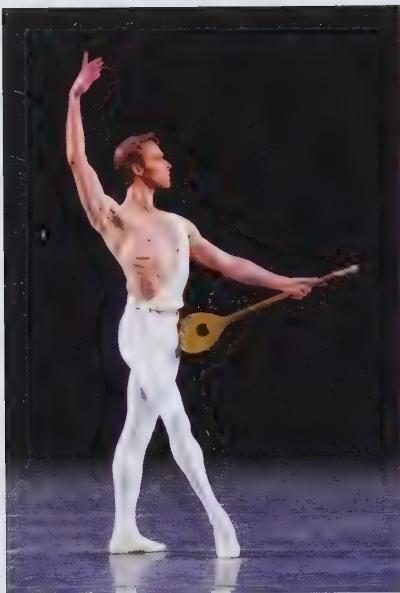
turns into a standard teleological history.⁵⁷ It is certainly true that Homans, writing history as if Nietzsche's and Foucault's genealogical critiques had never been formulated, locates the origin and telos of ballet in the *ballet de cour* (Louis XIV identified himself with the god Apollo and danced the role in court ballets). In spite of its more genealogical conception of classicism, however, Scholl's book is also tendentious in its arguments and conservative in its conclusions, particularly in its correlation of Balanchine's choreography with the Russian Acmeist poets. His argument requires that the innovations of the Soviet avant-garde at the time of Balanchine's earliest choreographic endeavors for his Young Ballet in St. Petersburg, as well as those of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Paris, were dead ends, developments that were transcended in 1928 when Balanchine returned to classicism with his masterpiece choreographed to Stravinsky's *Apollon Musagète* (later retitled *Apollo*). Scholl faults Diaghilev, Fokine, and Vaslav Nijinsky (perhaps tellingly, he never mentions Bronislava Nijinska, the great female choreographer of the period, also considered a neoclassicist) for their perpetuation of two of Symbolism's central influences: Wagner and Nietzsche—or more specifically the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the Dionysian principle. The former supposedly displaced choreography and dance technique with music and decor; the latter was a repudiation of the vocabulary of the *danse d'école* that brought in its wake what Scholl describes as “a kind of dionysian erotomania.”⁵⁸ Scholl claims that *Apollo* is Balanchine's direct response to Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, particularly the latter's flattening of stage space, its use of classicism as style rather than substance, and Nijinsky's final masturbatory gesture. Scholl underscores his point with the conclusion of Nikolai Minsky's review of *Faune*: “Apollo cedes place to Dionysius, and the curtain falls.” Scholl's next chapter begins:

As the curtain rises on George Balanchine's *Apollo* . . . the eponymous god stands center stage in profile, his right arm extended above and behind him, the left holding a long-necked lute that rests on his hip. Apollo's right, extended arm begins to swing in large circles, strumming the lute. The gesture is autoerotic, though its implications have gone politely undiscussed in the criticism. With his flattened pose and unseemly gesture, Balanchine's Apollo begins where Nijinsky's Faune left off: the supremely dionysian act that concluded Nijinsky's work is a point of departure for Balanchine, whose choreography conveys in one terse gesture the “wild, half-human” quality of the youth who will acquire “nobility through art.”⁵⁹

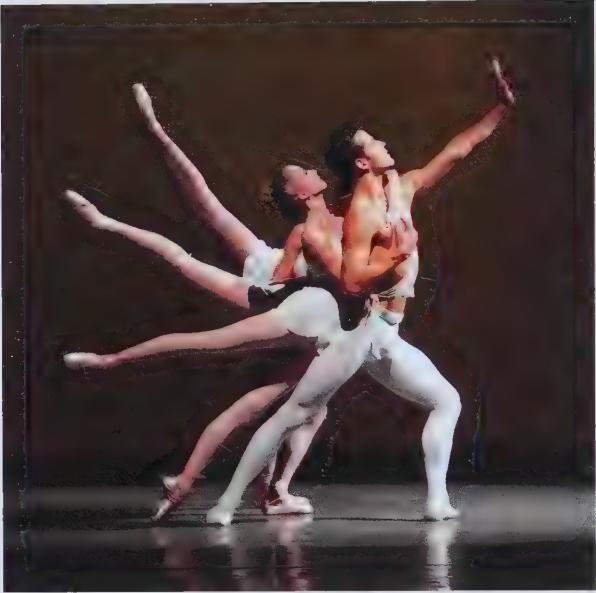
That nobility has everything to do, in Scholl's argument, with reconquering the space that Nijinsky's *Faune* had done away with—the three-dimensionality of both the stage and the dancing body. Scholl claims this dimensionality even for "the ballet's final pose," a pose that has become known as the Apollo logo, "a sunburst formed as the muses lean against Apollo and each extends a leg in arabesque as Apollo gestures toward the heavens. Like Apollo's first position, the pose is flat, a silhouette, but its dramatic opening suggests a spatial complexity that Nijinsky's ballet had abjured as the 'rays' of the sun round out and complete the promise of the ballet's opening scene."⁶⁰

Trouble is, as Scholl knows and even admits at one point, *Apollo* didn't begin or end with these two images in 1928, when Balanchine made it and when Nijinsky's *Faune* might still have been a point of reference. Scholl is describing the ballet as Balanchine radically truncated it in 1979, when he revived it for Baryshnikov. The original version began with Leto giving birth to Apollo, who, when he first appears, can barely stand up, much less stroke his instrument. And the repositioning of the logo at the end of the ballet, as Croce wrote when this version first appeared, "leaves a blank in the progression of the dance; it forces our admiration in a way that seems alien to the spirit of 'Apollo.' The pose, one of the casual wonders of the ballet, used to float into view and dissolve, leaving its light to irradiate the events that followed."⁶¹ Those events culminated in Apollo, Calliope, Polyhymnia, and Terpsichore's walk (as Croce puts it, "an ad-lib walk, not even a regulated one") upstage and their climb up the stairs of the platform that has remained on the stage since the birth scene.

Why does this matter? For one thing, the minimal stage set (devised to replace André Bauchant's original faux-naïve stage design) might remind us that *Apollo* was a costume drama when Balanchine first made it. And the set's dual purpose as the scene of Leto's birth pangs and the Parnassus to which Apollo and the muses ascend might remind us of another similarly repurposed, similarly Russian Constructivist-looking stage prop—the fence/table/ship of *Prodigal Son*, the expressionist narrative ballet that Balanchine choreographed to Sergei Prokofiev's score the year following *Apollo*. Only by forgetting *Prodigal Son* and making *Apollo* emblematic—in every sense—of Balanchine's trajectory can his essence be purified of its Dionysian side. For that matter, for *Apollo* to become an emblem of timeless classicism, it must be purified of all the elements of its choreography that derive not



Adrian Danchig-Waring in Balanchine's *Apollo*, 1928. Photo by Paul Kolnik, 2015



Sterling Hyltin and Robert Fairchild in Balanchine's *Apollo*, 1928. Photo by Andrea Mohin/New York Times/Redux, 2012

from the *danse d'école* but from jazz, gymnastics, and Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanics—flat feet, pelvic thrusts, and skittering on heels; the “creation of Adam,” “swimming lesson,” “wheelbarrow,” and “troika” images.

Balanchine's choreography is nothing if not protean. He made dances not only for the ballet stage but also for Broadway and Hollywood musicals and even for Ringling Brothers Circus elephants. He absorbed influences from everywhere, from modern dance, Fred Astaire, and not least from African-American dance—from Josephine Baker, Katherine Dunham, and the Nicholas brothers. He made story ballets and divertissements; marches and waltzes; opera ballets; romantic, classical, and modern ballets. He made a square dance with a caller and at least one determinedly avant-garde experiment, *Variations pour une Porte et un Soupir* (1963). Perhaps, then, it is the very “contemporary fascination with instability and relative points of view” that Homans so laments that accounts for Balanchine’s hold on us—or at least on Craig and me.

While thinking back to my introduction to Balanchine’s work through my friendship with Craig and returning to our simultaneous encounter with

poststructuralist theory, I pulled my copy of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* off the shelf and opened it to the title page. There, handwritten, was the following:

4th ring AA
low numbers
below 20

—a note to myself, dictated by Craig, about which tickets to buy at the City Ballet box office. These are the seats Craig and I nearly always sat in—the single row on the fourth-ring side arms of the New York State Theater, as far back as possible, away from the stage. They were inexpensive, which was essential, since we went to the ballet three or four times a week. The seats were numbered from the back to the front of the stage, even numbers stage right, odd numbers stage left. They weren't available by subscription, so the sooner we got to the box office after single tickets went on sale, the more likely we were to get our preferred seats, fourth-ring AA 1 and 3 or 2 and 4. This means that my entire formative experience of Balanchine's ballets was from an oblique angle high up. “Many of Balanchine’s works are best seen from the upper balconies of the theater, where the floor patterns and the resulting play of spatial volumes is more



Alexandra Danilova and Serge Lifar in the “swimming lesson” in the original Ballet Russes production of Balanchine’s *Apollo*, 1928.

Photo by Sasha/Getty Images



Felia Doubrovská in the original Ballet Russes production of Balanchine’s *Prodigal Son*, 1929.

Photo by Sasha/Getty Images

distinct," writes Scholl, for whom this architectonic quality is yet another of Balanchine's correspondences with Acmeism.⁶² For me and—I think I can say this—for Craig, this obliquity is what allowed us to reframe Balanchine, to release him from the neoclassical purity that would cordon him off from our other interests at the time, among them what came to be called postmodern theory.

Trying to imagine what Craig might have made of the current conjunction of dance and theory and of the art world's enthusiastic embrace of dance, I return to "The Parergon." I have suggested that the lesson he drew from his engagement with Derrida was that we should attend to what aesthetic theory had heretofore excluded—the frame, which supposedly differentiates the intrinsic from the extrinsic in the work of art. Derrida asks, What if aesthetics is not about what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic to the work of art but rather about the impossibility of distinguishing the two? What if we were to understand the frame not only as "a detachable part, a separate part. . . . But also as a nondetachable part, a nonseparate part, since it constitutes the articulation between two others."⁶³ In other words, heeding Craig's call to turn our attention to the parergon, among those aspects of the frame to which we need to attend are its instability, the impossibility of locating it, fixing its place with regard to art's inside and outside.

How might this apply to Balanchine's ballets? According to Lynn Garafola, the strict hierarchies of the classical ballet during Marius Petipa's reign as ballet master

mirrored the hierarchy that governed all aspects of imperial life. Ranks determined the minimum or maximum number of dancers who could appear in a group. Coryphées could dance in groups of no more than eight, second soloists in groups of no more than four, first dancers in groups of no more than two. The ballerina danced alone. Thus hierarchy was built into the very substance of the choreography. It also went to the heart of the ballet's social "message."⁶⁴

The corps de ballet occupies the lowest level of the hierarchy. Jill Johnston, a champion of postmodern dance who scorned ballet, wrote, "In ballet the frame remains a frame. The corps de ballet is often seen to form a frame within a frame to make it clear that something is being framed. A FRAME-UP."⁶⁵ Derrida: "The violence of framing proliferates."⁶⁶



Sara Mearns (aloft), with fellow company members, in George Balanchine's *Serenade*, 1935. Photo by Paul Kolnik, 2013

A modernist account of Balanchine generally focuses on his reduction of ballet to its “essentials”—his stripping away of story line, sets, and costumes such that ballet becomes nothing more than movement in relation to music. But such a reduction is inapplicable to most of his works. Moreover, a deconstructive approach reveals the uncertainty of its results: Scholl tells us “Balanchine’s ‘black and white’ costumes are designed not to be noticed.” But he then makes clear that they are precisely what is noticed: “The sparse, minimalist works of Balanchine’s American period are known as ‘black and white’ ballets.”⁶⁷ Even *Serenade*, the first ballet Balanchine made in America, suggests to Scholl that Balanchine’s intention was the legibility of the body, although after its premiere in 1935, he dressed it up rather than down: simple tunics eventually became romantic tutus.

The skirts that Barbara Karinska (with Balanchine) developed for *Serenade* . . . differ from their romantic models in two important ways. First, they are not as full as the traditional skirts; they are lighter and more motile. In performance, the skirt “flies” to a much greater extent than those typically worn in the nineteenth century, in accordance with the quicker tempi and invigorated choreography of Balanchine’s romantic reverie. They are also more revealing. The front of the skirt contains a white panel of tulle that shows the workings of the legs more clearly. Thus, even in a work with obvious historical allusions, with costumes dictated more or less by tradition, the Balanchinian priorities are apparent.⁶⁸

To me, what is most radical about *Serenade* is its dissolution of classical ballet hierarchy through the motility of not only the dancing body but also the frame. *Serenade* is, legendarily, a ballet Balanchine made for students of the newly founded School of American Ballet, “a ballet of patterns, a ballet of constant movement, a ballet to train an ensemble.”⁶⁹ In a sense, it is a ballet that is all corps de ballet. Occasionally dancers do break free of the ensemble to dance solos, and over the years Balanchine gave greater emphasis to three principal female roles and added a pas de deux. But owing to the ceaseless reconfiguration of the female corps—in numbers, in space—no description of *Serenade* could securely fix its frame beyond noting its perpetual motion. I have seen the ballet scores of times, and I have trouble remembering at any given moment what will come next.

Of course, not all of Balanchine’s ballets do away with the hierarchies of classical ballet. Many, like *Symphony in C*, are made in the mold of Petipa.

Even that ballet's rousing finale, however, calls attention to the frame *as* frame, as the corps of thirty-six women lines the stage on either side and performs a series of quick, repetitive tendus. It's hard to look at anything else. Others of Balanchine's ballets—for example, *Concerto Barocco* (1941)—while maintaining the division between corps de ballet and principal dancers, give equivalent choreographic weight to each. And at least one of Balanchine's greatest ballets, *Le tombeau de Couperin* (1975), with music by Ravel, is made for the corps alone.

I don't mean to suggest that the mobility of the frame and the attendant dehierarchizing of choreography are the sole determinants of Balanchine's ballet modernism. Rather, I think they are the qualities that are most compatible with the simultaneity of Craig's and my Balanchine-driven balleto-mania and interest in poststructuralist theory. Although the latter led to our theorizing postmodernism, we first used it as committed modernists—to show how certain photographs image the processes of the photographic medium. And if the *parergon* shows us that aesthetics is not about what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic to the work of art but rather is about the impossibility of distinguishing between the two, then perhaps the imbrication of the modern in the postmodern—and the postmodern in the modern—was what we saw in Balanchine's ballets from the oblique angle in fourth-ring seats AA 1 and 3 or 2 and 4.

BEFORE PICTURES

P I C T U R E S



ARTISTS SPACE

Cover of the exhibition catalogue for *Pictures*, Artists Space, New York, 1977

PICTURES, BEFORE AND AFTER

IN FEBRUARY OF THE YEAR LEADING UP to the *Pictures* exhibition, which opened at Artists Space on September 24, 1977, I traveled to Los Angeles with Helene Winer, the director of the gallery. It was my first time in the city I would come to know well and love enough to teach a university course about. The Hollywood glamour associated with the place was driven home the moment I arrived: Bette Davis stood next to us waiting for her luggage to appear on the same conveyor belt as ours. Although I didn't know it until we got off the plane, she had been on our flight. If sharing the return flight with another movie star seems implausible, nonetheless the fact is that on the way back to New York I sat right next to Arnold Schwarzenegger. I was so late getting to the airport that all the seats in coach were taken, so I was bumped up to first class and found myself seated beside him in the center section. Even though I screwed up my courage to talk to him, he paid no attention to me whatsoever, preoccupied as he was with the woman seated across the aisle from him. Of course, Schwarzenegger was nowhere near as big a star as Bette Davis, especially then. I knew him as a bodybuilder and as an actor playing versions of himself in Bob Rafelson's *Stay Hungry* (1976) and George Butler and Robert Fiore's *Pumping Iron*, which I'd seen just two weeks before the trip to LA. I learned only later that he had appeared, uncredited, as a thug in Robert Altman's 1973 film based on Raymond Chandler's novel *The Long Goodbye*; once my infatuation with LA began in earnest, after visiting often in the 1980s, I read all of Chandler's novels and then saw all the films made from them—good, bad, and mediocre.

Helene and I went to LA to see the director of the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Robert Smith, to discuss the possibility of the *Pictures* show traveling to that venue.¹ Although by the time *Pictures* opened in Los Angeles in spring 1978 LAICA had relocated to South Robertson Boulevard, our visit was to its original location in Century City, the

then-new skyscraper business center in West Los Angeles that was built on the former Twentieth Century Fox lot. It was a far cry from either Artists Space's original gallery in SoHo or its space in Tribeca, where it had moved just a month before our trip. This new location, where *Pictures* debuted, was a suite of several adjoining rooms one flight up in a Renaissance-revival office building on the northeast corner of Franklin and Hudson Streets. The so-called Fine Arts Building was a congenial place for those of us in the downtown art world, since it was in our neighborhood and not unlike the kinds of places we lived and worked in.

I had lived near the building on Hudson Street until the previous summer, when I had to vacate my Chambers Street loft. Helene had a loft nearby, and it was thanks to her that I found the place farther downtown on Nassau Street where I live to this day. Some of the younger artists whose work interested Helene—Barbara Ess, Matt Mullican, and David Salle—had moved into the beautiful cast-iron office building just south of City Hall in the Financial District. Matt moved there from the basement apartment of a town house on King Street that belonged to Mia Agee, James Agee's widow and a friend of Matt's parents. But the Nassau Street office he'd signed a lease on proved too much for Matt. He didn't know how to get a telephone, much less put in a shower and kitchen, so he found a more conventional place to live. Knowing that he needed to break the lease he'd just signed, Helene put us in touch, and thus I inherited his place.²

That was a godsend for me. I had already started graduate school and had been subletting my old college friend Fontaine Dunn's loft on the corner of Duane and Greenwich Streets while I looked for a place of my own. The Nassau Street office space became available just as Fontaine was returning to the city and needed her place back. What's more, sometime earlier I had seen the building on Nassau Street on one of my meanderings downtown and distinctly remember looking up at the top northeast corner of the striking ten-story building, with its tall curved-glass window, and thinking to myself, "That's where I'd like to live." It's not the only place about which I had said that to myself; it was my regular pastime to search out places and fantasize about living in them. I suppose it was a holdover from my student days in New Orleans, where, together with two prospective roommates from the Tulane School of Architecture, I searched for an off-campus home to rent by driving around the city and

looking only at buildings whose distinctive architecture caught our eye. Apartments were so inexpensive in New Orleans in those days that even as students we could choose where we wanted to live based on architectural style; of course, it was a city chock-full of attractive residential buildings. My pals and I ended up with a ten-room double-shotgun cottage for \$135 a month.

The Bennett Building on Nassau Street is indeed distinctive. Built in 1873 as a real-estate venture for the owner of the *New York Herald*, it was designed by Arthur D. Gilman, the architect of Boston's Old City Hall and a popularizer of the French Second Empire style in America. The building was initially six stories tall with a large mansard roof, but in 1889 a new owner had it enlarged to its present height. James M. Farnsworth, the architect of the addition, removed Gilman's mansard and extended the original ornamental design for the facade upward four stories. It is billed in the New York City landmarks designation report as "the tallest habitable building with cast-iron facades ever built."³ Although it was (and still is) a working office building, the landlord was having trouble filling it with commercial tenants. There was a glut of new office space in Lower Manhattan in the mid-1970s, including ten million square feet in the just-completed World Trade Center alone, and older buildings suffered the consequences of the severe economic downturn that immediately followed a period of overdevelopment. So, like the owners of commercial buildings in SoHo and Tribeca before him, the owner of the Bennett Building opened up his spaces to residential tenants. Living in such buildings was illegal, of course (the lease Matt signed and then assigned to me was a commercial lease), but everybody agreed to look the other way.⁴ The only help the landlord offered me in making the two rooms of the former dentist's office livable was to suggest that I hire his building superintendent during his off-hours to put in a water heater, shower, and kitchen sink. There was no question of a toilet, since there were no waste stacks in my corner of the building, so for years I had to use the men's room down the hall. It was a bit strange for us "live-ins" to tread the halls in our pajamas and other unusual attire during regular office hours, but people looked the other way about that, too.

Many of the remaining commercial tenants in the building at that time worked in the jewelry trade. The grinding whir of the equipment used

BEFORE PICTURES



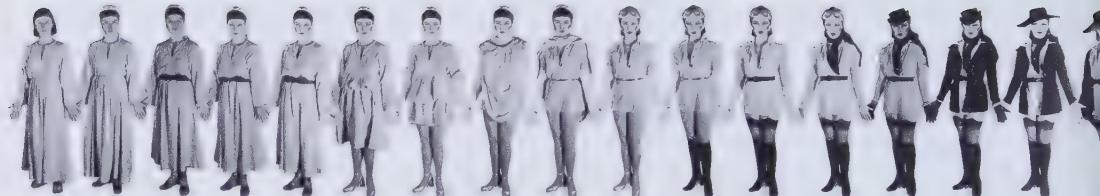
Nassau Street in New York City, with Arthur D. Gilman's Bennett Building, c. 1883

by my next-door neighbor, a metal plater, woke me nearly every weekday morning. One especially nattily dressed and courteous elderly neighbor was a binocular repairman. Among my favorite residential neighbors was Mike Webb, a founding member of the British Archigram group and a delightfully eccentric guy. His single room was very small and square, in fact more or less a cube (the top-floor ceiling heights are over twelve feet). He filled the entire room with a jungle-gym-like structure made of galvanized pipe, from which he suspended his various living spaces and fixtures. At the very top was his bathtub, installed there, he said, because from that vantage he could see City Hall, a building he admired.

That first year on Nassau Street was tough for me. I needed to get my place into functional shape right away, since by late October when I moved in I was already partway through my first semester of graduate school; and because Helene had asked me to organize an exhibition of emerging artists for Artists Space, I needed to make many studio visits, something I was never comfortable doing. The February trip to Los Angeles wasn't the only one Helene and I took together. In March, during a blinding snowstorm, we drove to Buffalo to see a show of upstate artists at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Robert Longo remembers our visit:

Prior to *Pictures*, I was working on a piece called *Missouri Breaks* which was being cast in a foundry in Buffalo, and I was teetering between different versions of how to finish it. David Salle, who was in Buffalo for the show I curated [an exhibition of artists associated with Artists Space at Hallwalls, the artist-run gallery in Buffalo that Longo cofounded with Charles Clough], had one idea; Troy [Brauntuch] and Jack [Goldstein] were also very verbal and helpful, it was interesting to talk to them about it. Then I showed the piece in a Western New York exhibition in which Cindy [Sherman] was also included. It is usually a competition but that one year Linda Cathcart curated it. Linda had come to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo at the time when Charlie and I were just starting Hallwalls. She was like a breath of fresh air. She became our co-conspirator, only she was located in a high art institution. Helene and Doug Crimp came up to see the show, which was when I first met him. He saw the piece, *Missouri Breaks*, and the next thing I knew I was in the *Pictures* show.⁵

I will always regret that I didn't appreciate Sherman's early work fully enough to include her in *Pictures*. Her contribution to the Albright-Knox



Cindy Sherman, *Line-Up for Linda from Robert*, 1977. Cutout photographs mounted on board, 9 x 120 inches

show, *Line-Up for Linda from Robert* (1977), consisted of a series of thirty-five cutout photographs of herself in identical poses but wearing costumes and makeup that slightly shift from one figure to the next. It is clear in hindsight that *Line-Up*, together with other works from the years Sherman spent in Buffalo, including *A Play of Selves* (1975) and *Murder Mystery* (1976), presages the series of Untitled Film Stills that Sherman began soon after she moved to New York City. Helene remembers that Cindy wasn't included in *Pictures* because she had already shown at Artists Space, which had a one-time-only rule about showing, but I think her memory is faulty. So far as I can determine, the only times Cindy had previously shown at Artists Space were in a Hallwalls exchange exhibition in 1976 and the 1977 iteration of the New Art Auction exhibition, and both of those shows also included Longo.

Pictures was a departure for Artists Space: it was the first exhibition organized by an outside curator, the first for which the gallery published a catalogue, and the first to travel to other venues. It could have included many more artists, but when I had to decide between a small, focused group show and a larger survey I chose the former. This allowed for a more complete representation of each of the five artists—Longo, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, and Philip Smith—and for a more in-depth discussion of the work of each in the catalogue. Looking back now at the list of artists that I considered, Sherman's name stands as a kind of rebuke. A number of curators, dealers, and fellow critics had suggested artists whose studios I should visit, but in the end it was Helene who steered me in the direction the show took. Clearly she was on to something, and since she and I were in constant conversation about art, it only makes sense that I followed her advice as closely as I did.



I had to make my selection by early spring, since we had a catalogue to produce and I had an essay to write. In addition, I was in my second semester of course work at the Graduate Center and scheduled to take my comprehensive exams in early May. It was before the end of that month that Rosalind and Annette Michelson had asked me to become managing editor of *October*. This was another godsend; I needed a job. And just as I had fantasized about living in the apartment I eventually came to live in, when the first issue of *October* appeared in 1976, I had thought to myself, “This is the magazine I’d like to be associated with.” I didn’t know Annette, but I admired her writing for *Artforum* and was impressed when, together with Christian, I heard her lecture on Sergei Eisenstein at Anthology Film Archives. The first several issues of *October* appeared intermittently. Issue number four, scheduled for fall 1977, was in production when I was hired. Beginning with number five, things had to change: MIT Press became the journal’s publisher, and they agreed to pay a modest salary for a part-time managing editor on the condition that the journal come out quarterly. So the summer after my first year of graduate school, I learned the ropes of the *October* job, which entailed editing manuscripts; tracking down illustrations; proofreading galleys, page proofs, and blue lines; pasting up the pages; dealing with our printer in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and—most challenging—negotiating the tense relationship between Rosalind and Annette, who were sometimes not even on speaking terms. Meetings with the two together were harrowing.

I also took an intensive French course at the Graduate Center that summer. And—let’s not forget—it was one of the most explosive summers in New York City’s history: the summer of the Con Edison blackout that led to widespread looting, and the summer of the Son of Sam serial-murder



Helene Winer and me at the opening of *Pictures* at
Artists Space, September 1977

investigations, which finally ended with David Berkowitz's capture in mid-August. When the blackout occurred, on July 13 at around 9:30 p.m., I lit some candles and sat at my desk in the muggy heat of my apartment, studying by candlelight for the next day's French class. The neighborhood was deadly quiet; that was nothing new, although the pitch darkness outside made it especially eerie.

Almost no one lived in the Financial District in those days. You couldn't buy a quart of milk after working hours, there was no place to do laundry, and you had to put your garbage in the trash cans on the street surreptitiously, since there was no residential garbage pickup. But there were advantages, too: you could go for evening walks and have a whole neighborhood virtually to yourself, only occasionally encountering a nighttime office cleaner or one of the artists or other adventuresome souls who lived nearby. Longo and Sherman, at the time a couple, were among the artists who lived near me, and many of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills were taken in and around our neighborhood from 1977 to 1980.

In late August, with the galley of the *Pictures* catalogue in hand, I went to visit my family in Coeur d'Alene. I distinctly remember sitting on our

Opening of *Pictures* at Artists Space, September 1977

front porch reading proofs aloud to my mother. In spite of the care we took, a few mistakes inevitably slipped into the printed catalogue—*spatial* is spelled “spacial” twice on page six and the syntax is garbled in a sentence about John Baldessari on page ten. I’m surprised about the misspelling. I have always been a terrible speller, but my mom was just the opposite. She was a crossword-puzzle whiz.

My visit was to extend past Labor Day, and I had the impulse while there to drive the five hours to Ellensburg, Washington, my father’s hometown, to see my aunts, uncles, and cousins during the annual rodeo. Visiting my paternal grandparents at rodeo time was among the happiest memories of my childhood. One of the major rodeos on the American circuit, the Ellensburg Rodeo has been staged every Labor Day weekend since 1923. My brother Greg agreed to accompany me but changed his mind because he was about to begin his first year as a schoolteacher and was understandably nervous about it. So my mother said she would go with me instead. At the last minute, my father decided he wanted to come along, too. This took us all by surprise. My father had had heart trouble for some time, beginning with an embolism in his arm when I was in college, that had eventually

required open-heart surgery, and he also had emphysema. He had been a heavy smoker and was still a heavy drinker, never exercised, and was totally exhausted by his usual workday at the hardware store he owned with my maternal grandfather. What's more, he was severely depressed and withdrawn, and he was almost entirely alienated from me. We never got along well, and after I went away to college our relationship further deteriorated. We rarely spoke to each other except to bicker. Of course, it was *his* brother and sister and their families that I planned to visit, so it made sense that he would wish to come along. It's just that we had grown used to his never wanting to do anything that involved interacting with others.

On the drive to Ellensburg, he complained of discomfort. Apparently just sitting in the car was taxing. When we finally arrived at our destination, the whole family gathered for dinner. My aunt and uncle were clearly happy to see their brother, who hadn't visited his hometown since his mother's funeral in 1970. It was odd for me. I'd never stayed anywhere in Ellensburg but at my grandparents' house, a big sprawling place with four upstairs bedrooms and my grandmother's handiwork everywhere—beautiful braided rugs in nearly every room, needlepoint upholstery on the chairs, and crocheted doilies on the tables. Our meals in late summer had been full of the bounties of my grandparents' gardening and canning. Grandma and Grandpa Crimp made the best mustard pickles I've ever tasted. But now their house had been sold, so we were staying next door with my father's brother and sister-in-law. After a pleasant reunion dinner with all three families, we retired. Before dawn, my mother, in a terrified state, awakened me. My father had had a massive heart attack; an ambulance was on the way. Dad was panicky and protesting. Mom said he was afraid of hospitals, but I wonder in retrospect if maybe he didn't want to survive. By the time the ambulance reached the hospital, he was in a coma; he would never regain consciousness.

I have come to believe that my father had a foreboding of his death and traveled with us to Ellensburg to see his siblings one last time, in effect to say good-bye. It was, I think, a final, extraordinary act of will by a man whom I'd always experienced as being largely without will, a man resigned to his fate as someone who could never compete with my maternal grandfather for my mother's respect, or for mine.

After the funeral in Coeur d'Alene, I flew back to New York just in time for the first day of classes and, a week later, the opening of *Pictures*.

I have two distinct memories of that time, both painful, both concerning my father's death. The first was that a close friend, an artist with whom I'd discussed the *Pictures* show while I was organizing it, didn't call me when he learned that my dad had died. It finally dawned on me after returning to New York that his continuing silence was because of the show. Evidently he had expected to be included in it, even though he is a generation older than those who were. I was not only devastated by his silence but also shocked: it would never have occurred to me that an artist's career considerations might trump such fundamental human sympathy for a friend. It signaled the end of a friendship that had lasted for the entirety of my first ten years living in New York.

I wrote about the other memory in my 1989 essay "Mourning and Militancy," the final essay I published in *October* during my thirteen-year stint as an editor there. A special issue on AIDS that I'd edited for the journal in 1987, "AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism," led to a major change of direction in my life that rivals the *Pictures* show as the endeavor with which I'm most often associated. For me, it was the more momentous of the two events, since my life changed so profoundly as a result. Of the nearly twenty speeches and essays I wrote about AIDS over the course of the ensuing decade, "Mourning and Militancy" was the first in which a personal experience formed the germ of the argument. In order to suggest the psychic cost of failing to heed the processes of mourning for AIDS activists, I returned to my father's death:

In 1977, while I was visiting my family in Idaho, my father died unexpectedly. He and I had had a strained and increasingly distant relationship, and I was unable to feel or express my grief over his death. After the funeral I returned to New York for the opening of an exhibition I'd organized and resumed my usual life. But within a few weeks a symptom erupted which to this day leaves a scar near my nose: my left tear duct became badly infected, and the resulting abscess grew to a golf-ball sized swelling that closed my left eye and completely disfigured my face. When the abscess finally burst, the foul-smelling pus oozed down my cheek like poison tears. I have never since doubted the force of the unconscious.⁶

The psyche was a subject I tentatively broached in my essay for the *Pictures* catalogue. After describing the odd assortment of images on one

BEFORE PICTURES



Philip Smith, *Bring*, 1977. Oil pastel, oil paint, and pencil on paper, 100 x 62 inches

of Philip Smith's drawings included in the exhibition, I asked, "Where else do we encounter this diffuse and undifferentiated array of pictures? Where else but on these drawings would the image of a parachute follow that of a parakeet? Or a real dog be transformed into a personified dog? It is, of course, in our imaginations, where the movement from one signifier to another is free to take its own course, and thus to escape rational order."⁷ I then turn to Freud's description of how representation functions in dreams. As is suggested by my use of the word *imagination*, however, my interest in psychoanalytic theory did not yet explicitly stem from its most radical concept—the unconscious—but from the way it allowed me to combine structural linguistics with the mind's modes of picturing (I quote Jacques Lacan earlier in the essay). At the same time, I insisted that our capacity to picture was reliant on the pictures we encounter in the world around us: "This is not to say that Smith's pictures are the invention of his imagination; they obviously have their sources in the world of images that is available to all of us."⁸ This repeats a point I made at the beginning of the essay: "For their pictures, these artists have turned to the available images in the culture around them."⁹

Smith has a different notion of where his pictures came from. In 2008, he published a memoir about his father called *Walking through Walls*. It tells of growing up as the son of Lew Smith, a successful Miami decorator who, when Philip was ten years old, began to sense that he had extraordinary powers: he was able to heal the sick by transferring cosmic energy to a patient. He could heal people even at great distances, people whom he never met in person, by transmitting homeopathic and other remedies using only thought processes or telephone conversations. He also took dictation from spirit guides, primarily Arthur Ford, who achieved momentary fame by putting Bess Houdini in touch with her husband, Harry, after his death. Smith's memoir relates story after far-fetched story about his psychic-healer father and what it was like to grow up in the household of a parent who could read his mind and know his every move. It concerns mostly Smith's teenage years but extends to his time as a young artist in New York. In 1980, sensing that his son was unhappy about not having a gallery to represent his work, Lew Smith phoned Philip and tried to cheer him up by reminding him of the importance of being in the *Pictures* show:

"The 'Pictures' exhibition you were in traveled all over the country. It is a very important show and will have a great influence on art for many years into the future. You should be very pleased. It got a lot of attention. People respond to your paintings in a profound way. While they are not for everyone, there is an energy and power in your paintings. If you meditate before you begin work, you can actually put healing energy into your paintings just like Zen monks before they begin their calligraphy. I always wanted you to work with me, but I think you do your best metaphysical work through your paintings. I know you're depressed. Do you want me to remove it? It'll just take a second."¹⁰

Although Smith recounts life with his father (and his mother before the couple divorced) in a style more comic than serious, rendering his father's psychic activities both preposterous and the cause of constant embarrassment to him, he intends his memoir to honor his father. Despite his campy account of the many miracles performed in his presence, he moreover wants his reader finally to accept that his father's powers were real. At the end of his book, he quotes from his own eulogy at the memorial service he arranged:

In cooperation with unseen spirits from another dimension, my father devoted his life to creating the future of medicine. He struggled against official ignorance and prejudice in the hope that he could show doctors a safer and more effective way to treat disease. . . . When my father healed, he addressed the intelligence and the miracle of the body. He was able to cure when pills wouldn't and surgery couldn't, in ways that seemed strange and simplistic yet achieved remarkable results.¹¹

While Smith declined to follow in his father's footsteps and become a psychic healer himself, he describes in a promotional video for his memoir how his paintings accomplish something akin to his father's work:

To me being an artist, it was like being a magician. You are able to see things no one else could see, and you are able to take that invisible vision and make it tangible and share it with other people. . . . I wanted to take some of [my father's] ideas, and the way I could do it is through painting. And for me the paintings happen in an almost kind of like trance state, not unlike maybe when he would be healing. And I go into this state where I don't know anything else that's going on, the painting's talking to me, and it's telling me, "Put this image here, put this image here."¹²

I briefly met Lew Smith in spring 1979. Philip had returned to Miami to live at home, and I went there to stay with him for a short vacation. My broken hip from my roller-disco accident was healed enough for me to walk normally, although my legs were still weak after six weeks on crutches and a month or so using a cane. Philip didn't tell me much about his father, only that he was eccentric. I don't remember the hordes of people coming to the house to be healed that Philip describes in the memoir. In fact, I have only one vivid memory of the visit. I wanted very much to see Miami gay life, and Philip accommodated my wish by taking me to a bar in the north section of Miami Beach. He didn't say anything about it in advance, so when we walked in I was astounded. I'd never seen a bar like it before, except in the movies. It was a grand 1940s-style nightclub with a large dance floor surrounded by tables on several raised levels. But it wasn't so much the place itself as what I saw on the dance floor that so struck me: beautifully turned-out Latino and Latina couples dancing merengue and salsa like ballroom professionals. It had been years since I'd seen people dancing actual dance steps in couples, and indeed I'd never seen gay men and women partnering each other that way, with the exception of some dull "slow dancing" intermittently punctuating the rock 'n' roll we danced to in the early days of the GAA Firehouse. Dancing in the 1970s meant disco to me, and this was something completely different. First, unlike at the gay clubs I went to in New York, there were men and women in nearly equal numbers. Second, the female couples were butch-femme, with the butch often dressed as an old-fashioned passing woman. I loved the spaciousness of the place, the atmosphere, the music. I loved the skillful dancing. *I loved* the men. A lightbulb lit up.

Why was I so slow to recognize my marked attraction to Latinos? It's not as if I'd had no direct experience of them. Shortly after Christian returned to Paris, I had a fling with Juan Fernández, a Dominican actor who appeared briefly in Carmelo Bene's *Salomè* (1972) and whom Christian had met at Cinecittà. I knew him as Juan de Jesús (his full name is Juan de Jesús Fernández de Alarcón). I recall that he told me his mother, with whom he lived, was the cultural attaché from the Dominican Republic. She must have been away, because the night I met him on the street we went to her Washington Heights apartment, a lavishly decorated place with many rooms containing bouquets of fresh flowers. Juan was tall, lean, very striking, and very



Charles James adjusting a black crepe gown on Juan Fernández.
Photo by Bill Cunningham

sexy, but he had a stubborn habit of biting during sex—biting *hard*, not to the point of drawing blood but certainly to the point of leaving bruises all over my body. I began to think of him as a were-jaguar, the Mesoamerican mythological creature that was said to be the offspring of a jaguar and a woman. (Michael Coe wrote a famous book about pre-Columbian sculptures called *The Jaguar's Children*, which had made a strong impression on me when I read it in college.) Years later—in the mid-1990s—I ran into Juan at the Sunday farmer's market in front of the Frank Gehry-designed Hollywood Public Library. By then he had become a successful movie and TV actor, specializing in desperado roles. I also came across a photograph

of him in the Brooklyn Museum exhibition catalogue *The Genius of Charles James*. Bill Cunningham, the fashion photographer famous for his On the Street column in the *New York Times* Sunday Styles section, contributed an essay for the catalogue in which he discussed the friendship between James and fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez, who recorded James's early designs over a ten-year period:

Work was frequently carried on throughout illuminating nights, with Charles explaining the shapes, directing the model's posture, and introducing Antonio to an elegance far beyond the commercial work he had known on Seventh Avenue. . . .

I remember vividly at 2:00 a.m. during one of the drawing sessions Charles became exasperated by the female model's hips and buttocks, which bulged and distorted the line of a slender black 1929 gown. Antonio quietly left the studio on the pretext of going for coffee. He returned from 23rd Street with a handsome, straw-thin young man whose body fit perfectly into the sinuous gown—and the drawing session went on at an inspired pace.¹³

That young man was Juan. Just how Antonio happened to find him on Twenty-Third Street at the moment he needed him to step in as James's model, I don't know.

The eighth issue of *October*, which would contain my rewritten version of the *Pictures* catalogue essay, was in page proofs at the time I visited Philip in Florida. *Rewritten* isn't really the right word; it was an altogether different essay. I suggested as much in a prefatory note: "The following essay takes its point of departure from the catalogue text for *Pictures*; but it focuses on different issues and addresses an aesthetic phenomenon implicitly extending to many more artists than the original exhibition included."¹⁴ One of the significant changes was the cast of characters: I eliminated Philip and prominently included Sherman. This should have been on my mind during my visit to Philip, since he would undoubtedly be disappointed when the essay appeared; but I don't remember worrying about it, nor do I remember discussing it with him. Perhaps his return to Miami suggested to me that he was no longer so serious about his art making, and, in any case, I had no way of knowing that the *October* version of the essay would become so influential. Truth to tell, I don't think I considered Philip's reaction at all when I rewrote the essay, and I guess I was able to put it out of my mind during

the Miami vacation, too. I think now that I was both right and wrong about Smith: his work didn't fit with the other work in *Pictures*, but he was most certainly a serious artist, and the work from 1977 holds up well today.

Rosalind had suggested to me that we republish the catalogue essay, since there was a certain amount of buzz about the *Pictures* show, and artists associated with it were beginning to garner attention. But a year after the show, I was no longer happy with what I'd written. It seemed a naive attempt to apply structural linguistics to art that returned to issues of representation. In the original essay, I situated the work in the exhibition in relation to a rather odd assortment of predecessors—Sol LeWitt, Joel Shapiro, Joan Jonas, John Baldessari, Jonathan Borofsky, and Michael Hurson. In the second version, the predecessors (also a somewhat different cast of characters) were folded into an argument in favor of what Michael Fried castigated in “Art and Objecthood” under the rubric “theatricality.” My argument contra Fried served to set the scene for my descriptions of work by the *Pictures* artists. Seeing the first of Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills clarified—or perhaps I should say transformed—my sense of what the *Pictures* phenomenon was all about. Whereas issues of signification predominated in the first essay, performance now became the paradigm. After describing in some detail *Untitled Film Still #21* (1978) and suggesting that it was “a picture of presentiment,” I concluded of Sherman’s new photographs, “We do not know what is happening in these pictures, but we know for sure that *something* is happening, and that something is a fictional narrative. We would never take these photographs for being anything but *staged*.” Although Sherman’s photographs were not yet known to me as “film stills,” I described them as being “like quotations from the sequence of frames that constitutes the narrative flow of film. Their sense of narrative is one of its simultaneous presence and absence, a narrative ambience stated but not fulfilled. In short, these are photographs whose condition is that of the film still.”¹⁵

A few years after moving to the Financial District, I saw Brian De Palma’s film *Dressed to Kill* (1980). Near the beginning, the prostitute played by Nancy Allen, pursued by the killer, jumps into a taxi and says, “Ninety-three Nassau Street”—my address. And sure enough, in the next scene the cab pulls up right in front of my building. There is a particular frisson when you recognize a real location in a film, especially if it has personal meaning. Such a frisson inflects a number of the Untitled Film Stills for me. The first



Me with Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo, 1977. Photo by Helene Winer

few that Sherman took outdoors—on location, we might say—date from 1978. The largest number of pictures using the same location and costume, *Untitled Film Stills #17–20* were shot at an uncharacteristically “uptown” location, London Terrace, an early-1930s apartment building that occupies the entire block between Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Streets and Ninth and Tenth Avenues.¹⁶

For nearly a year in 1971, after my loft a few blocks east on Twenty-Third Street burned down, I lived in a sublet apartment facing London Terrace. Although Chelsea was a run-down neighborhood in the early 1970s, London Terrace was relatively upscale. What I remember most vividly about living there was when I went for a walk one warm summer evening that took me along Twenty-First Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues, a favorite block with beautiful town houses on one side and the nineteenth-century General Theological Seminary on the other. Along the way I passed a guy dressed in full leather gear. I’d never seen a “leatherman” before—leather wouldn’t become trendy among gay men

until later in the decade—so, intrigued, I followed him. He led me down Twenty-First Street to where it ends at West Street, to the Eagle’s Nest, the leather bar just then becoming popular. I became a habitué of the bar until it moved seven blocks farther north, having been priced out by the end of the 1990s of the burgeoning gallery district. (The building that housed the original Eagle’s Nest has now been replaced by a condominium tower.) Among my fondest memories of the place is that it hosted Sunday brunches, where for only a dollar you could get a Bloody Mary and steak and eggs. On one summer Sunday in 1973, a customer turned up dressed in *white* leather, which would have been heresy at night, but was perhaps a fittingly camp commentary on brunch at a leather bar. This was the moment when gay men began to take on the clone look, self-consciously appropriating the uniforms—and facial hair—associated with working-class masculinity. Thinking about the man in white leather, among all the others dressed in black or in Levi’s, I am reminded of Sherman’s comment about the art world a decade later: “Everyone in the art world wore black back then—absolutely everyone, especially since punk was so in. It was weird. I didn’t want to blend into the art world so I wore my vintage ski pants and little ’50s fur-trimmed rubbers over my low heels.”¹⁷

Sherman’s costume in the four Untitled Film Stills taken on Twenty-Third Street looks to be late 1960s, rather than 1950s. She wears a flower-print sweater over a prim white blouse with a large bow at the neck and has a kerchief tied over her bouffant hairdo. Black pumps and a handbag accessorize her short black skirt. As though a tenant of London Terrace, she appears in #20 to be emerging from one of the building’s doors. In each of these Untitled Film Stills, architecture plays a crucial role. Indeed—I only realize this fully now—all the New York City daytime location shots use the relationship of distinctive architecture and the figure to create the emotional tone of the picture.¹⁸ In #17, we see Sherman’s face close up, set against the apartment building’s facade. It is similar in this regard to #21, the picture I described and illustrated in the *October* version of “Pictures.”¹⁹ The latter is shot from Battery Park toward the former Standard Oil Building at 26 Broadway and an Emery Roth–designed building from the late 1950s at 2 Broadway; its two companion works were taken nearby, one on the stairs of the Alexander Hamilton US Custom House at Bowling Green and one shot across Bowling Green toward the base of the Standard Oil Building. Sherman



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #17*, 1978. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

refers to these as the “city-girl” pictures.²⁰ Her straw hat and tailored career-girl suit suggest an earlier era than that of the first group, sometime before hemlines rose above the knee.

After a year of taking her exterior shots elsewhere—mostly in Arizona—Sherman returned to New York in 1980 to shoot a number of Untitled Film Stills, one at the Art Deco Western Union Building on Hudson Street, three at the World Trade Center, two at the Manhattan Municipal Building at Chambers and Centre Streets, and one in a vacant lot near Warren and West Streets. This last one especially resonates for me, since it was taken just down the street from the loft on Chambers Street where I lived in the mid-1970s. Sherman wears a short dark wig, a V-neck sweater, and her vintage ski pants. She seems to have stopped in midgesture while lighting a cigarette to look intently at something outside the image. At the right edge of the picture is the profile of Independence Plaza North, a Tribeca housing complex built on West Street in 1975, when no one but artists wanted to live in the neighborhood. Most of the picture is taken up by a run-down tenement building that stands in the otherwise empty lot, a survivor of the destruction of Washington Market to make way for Battery Park City. The 1988 edition of *The AIA Guide to New York City* includes a brief note about the building:

Holdout: Ever since the inception of the Washington Market Urban Renewal Area project back in the 1950s, one lone structure has resisted the city, the developers, the lawyers, the courts, and the wrecking ball: 179 West Street (1845), just north of Warren. Dingy, ill-kempt, bedraggled, sporting a twisted fire escape and leaky downspouts, a victim of continuing uncertainty, it alone in this multiblocked area of the new reminds us of the old.²¹

The “new” that the guide refers to hadn’t been built when Sherman took her photograph. One seventy-nine West Street was legendary among early art-world inhabitants of Tribeca. It is the very same ramshackle nineteenth-century building that made an appearance in Jonas’s 1973 film *Songdelay*. The building remained until 2003; its tenant, sculptor Mardig Kachian, having won a court decision to keep his rent-controlled apartment “until such time as projects planned for the renewal have been authorized by all appropriate governmental bodies and until such time as sponsors proceed

forthwith with the development of the renewal site.”²² For Sherman, it serves as a suitably scruffy backdrop for the white-trash character she plays.

For the two Untitled Film Stills Sherman made at the Municipal Building, designed by McKim, Mead & White and completed in 1914, Sherman used the overscaled pillars, arches, vaults, and staircase of the building’s portico and lobby to dwarf her persona. Dressed in black and wearing a dirty apron, the character looks to be a working-class woman in an Italian Neorealist film, while the setting could be a pompous building from the era of the National Monument to Victor Emmanuel II in Rome. Around the time Sherman took these photographs, I was enamored of this grand urban New York space, which I often walked through in a shortcut to nearby Chinatown. Several years earlier, when I lived at the opposite end of Chambers Street, my erstwhile boyfriend Richard worked for New York City’s public radio station, WNYC, whose studios were on the top floor of the Municipal Building. On many a summer evening, I walked down Chambers Street to meet him as the sun set behind me and shone straight toward my destination, crowned by the gold allegorical figure of Civic Fame. When I look out the north-facing windows of my apartment now, Civic Fame is still there to greet me.

When the Metropolitan Museum staged *The Pictures Generation* exhibition in 2009, curator Douglas Eklund took his title from my exhibition but downplayed its importance for the conception of his show. His exclusion of Philip Smith caused considerable commentary, especially because Eklund resurrected and even foregrounded a number of artists active at the time of the original *Pictures* show who had not been heard from recently, most prominently Paul McMahon. Why, people wondered, if you’re going to feature a dropout like McMahon, would you exclude Smith, who in addition to being in the original show has continued to be a productive and consistently exhibited artist?²³ Thomas Lawson, another lesser-known artist participating in the Met’s show, proffered an answer:

As for the Philip Smith question, the real investigation should look to the original sin—what prompted Doug Crimp to drop him from the revised essay when it was republished in *October*? My guess would be the disapproval of that dark prince, Jack Goldstein. Jack was very clear in his mind about what cut it and what didn’t, and he made his opinions known. If



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #60*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

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Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #64*, 1980. Gelatin silver print, dimensions variable

you take a look at Jack's aesthetic it is clear he would have had no time for Philip's. And I'm sure he told Doug that many times.²⁴

The writer of the blog who interviewed Lawson comments, "So, as with many stories in our art world's New Noir, we end up blaming the dead guy."²⁵

I'm happy to let Goldstein off the hook. Our relationship was far from close, and I don't remember him ever saying anything to me about Philip Smith. My memories of Goldstein are few, but I do have a hazy one of working with him on a film. I can't recall anything about the film except that it involved my hands and that at the critical moment when the camera began to roll, my hands began to shake uncontrollably, thus ruining the take. After one or two more hopeless attempts, Jack said never mind, he would find someone else to do it. The film to which I attach this memory is *A Ballet Shoe* (1975). Among the many things that make this memory suspect is the fact that I can't picture the ballet dancer. If I had been the one whose hands were to have untied the dancer's toe shoe as she stood on pointe in that film, surely I would remember her. Nor does my memory include the presence of Babette Mangolte, who shot the films Goldstein made in New York. So perhaps it is an invented memory, and yet it's very strong, even if not vivid. I wonder if, like a dream, it involves condensation and displacement.

Goldstein had a memory of me from the period when we knew each other, too, but nothing quite as specific as mine:

Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens would come over to the place where Helene [Winer] and I lived. They were into postformalists like Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, and Richard Serra, but slowly they came around to what the CalArts crowd was doing. They formed their careers around our work. It was first defined by Crimp in "Pictures," which was a show at Artists Space, and an influential article that announced a new sensibility. At first, Doug would hardly even speak to me. On different occasions, I showed him a number of my films, but it took a long time before he understood what I was talking about. He slowly accepted the fact that you could borrow and recontextualize images from anywhere, not only popular culture but from political ideologies and history books and fashion magazines.²⁶

The interviews Goldstein gave to Richard Hertz in the months before his suicide in 2003, published posthumously as *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts*

Mafia, don't serve him well. He comes off as paranoid, competitive, and bitter—wanting both to settle scores and to control his legacy. Nevertheless, what he says about me is essentially accurate. Helene was a close friend, and I was often at the place she shared with Jack (two Jacks—there was also a black Labrador retriever called Jack). I had known Helene for two years before I met Craig. I was indeed “into” Martin, Ryman, and Serra, but I don't think Craig had such formulated taste in contemporary art; he was just then coming to the art world from having studied literature at Haverford College and working briefly in theater. As for the assertion that I would hardly speak to Goldstein, it may well have appeared that way to him. He says in the interviews that he is shy and that people misunderstand his shyness and resulting diffidence as an affront. Since I too am shy, no doubt we were mutually standoffish.

More important, it certainly took time for me to understand the films Goldstein was making at the time—the ones I included in *Pictures*. They were unlike any other films I'd seen up to that point, and I was no expert on artists' films in any case. The only writing about film I'd done by that point was a New York Letter for *Art International* in 1973 that included a combined review of Michael Snow's work shown at the Center for Inter-American Relations and a Paul Sharits exhibition at the Bykert Gallery. The review ended with a comparison of Snow's \leftrightarrow (*Back and Forth*, 1969) and Sharits's *Ray Gun Virus* (1966), in which I saw the first as appropriately cinematic, the second as overly static. (I didn't have nearly enough experience with Structural cinema at the time to be writing about such works.) I had seen some of Bruce Nauman's films, which now seem an important precedent for what Goldstein was doing, but I don't think I knew what to make of those films either. The artists' films I remember feeling genuinely connected to were Jonas's *Songdelay* and Richard Serra's *Railroad Turnbridge* (1976). The last critical essay I published before addressing Goldstein's films in the *Pictures* catalogue was a piece on Jonas for a special issue of *Studio International* on performance art, and it is perhaps telling that my historicizing of the turn to representation and psychological affect in the work of the *Pictures* artists was routed through a discussion of Jonas's video performances. “Jonas converted event into image using the simultaneous broadcast capacity of video,” I wrote. “And the images that Jonas used confronted psychological subjects directly: narcissism in *Organic Honey's Visual*

Telepathy, childhood memory in the games of *Delay Delay*, the imagination of the exotic in *Twilight*.²⁷

I worked with Helene before she took over the directorship of Artists Space in fall 1975. In 1974, she had hatched a plan to sell slides of contemporary artworks to university and art-school slide libraries, since in those days it was hard to get slides of current work except directly from art galleries or artists themselves, and she had enlisted me to help her with the project. Our small entrepreneurial venture was called Art Information Distribution. We packaged the slides with artists' bibliographies, annotations of each slide, and critical texts explaining the art in the slides. I was responsible for three texts, the introduction to the entire set, titled "Introduction to 1970s Art," "Recent Sculpture" (cowritten with Helene), and "Recent Painting."

My essay on painting confirms Goldstein's view that I was interested in "post-formalists." (*Formalist painting* was the term used at the time for what we now call Color Field painting. *Postformalism* is a term that I used to characterize painting that eluded or opposed that style.) The slides represented work by James Bishop, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, David Novros, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Ryman, and a few others—a very narrow canon of painters that I justified in the opening lines of my essay: "The progressive developments in the art of the late 1960s all seemed to proclaim, whether explicitly or implicitly, the death of painting and sculpture. These media were considered to be so hamstrung by their long traditions as to make any further developments degenerate into meaningless refinements of already rehearsed issues." Thus, contemporary painting as we represented it in our slide set consisted only of those painters whose work "incorporate[d] the criticism implicit in other recent art into painting's own esthetic strategies."²⁸

The Art Information Distribution volume on artists' films was compiled by artist Michael Harvey and included Vito Acconci, Walter De Maria, Nancy Graves, Nancy Holt, Robert Morris, Nauman, Serra, Robert Smithson, Keith Sonnier, and Lawrence Weiner. Harvey also included himself—he had recently made a film called *Sub Rosa*—and Goldstein's 1972–73 films *Glass of Milk*, *Here*, *Hey*, and *Volleyball*. Harvey's essay was likely written before Goldstein completed *The Portrait of Père Tanguy* (1974), the first of his color films and the first in the group of works that was included in *Pictures*. But Goldstein's *Pictures* films would not, in any

case, have accorded with Harvey's analysis of Goldstein's work: "The content of his films is as sculptural as that of his earlier wood pieces. The works evolved not from a desire to make films, but from a desire to resolve certain sculptural problems which he discovered he could best realize through film. In all his films, the spatio/temporal nature of the end result is derived from the physical properties of the thing being filmed."²⁹

The Portrait of Père Tanguy is another of Goldstein's films that entails a hand, a hand that, within a four-minute single take, masterfully traces a reproduction of the eponymous painting by Van Gogh, rarely hesitating as it fills in details—of the sitter's face and clothing and the Japanese wood-block prints that surround him—and completes the straight edges of the picture. Two or three times, the tracing paper slips slightly under the pressure of the felt-tip pen with which the tracing is done, but even then the hand doesn't pause. That steady, sure hand is Goldstein's own. His control is impressive, just the opposite of my memory of my own shaking hands, and indeed they are not my hands but Goldstein's that we see in *A Ballet Shoe*.

Although extremely brief and simple, *A Ballet Shoe* is often inaccurately described. For example, I wrote in the revised "Pictures" essay, "A pair of hands comes in from either side of the film frame and unties the ribbon of the shoe; the dancer moves off pointe; the entire film lasts twenty-two seconds."³⁰ In fact, the hands do not come into the frame; they are already there when the film begins. Let me have another go at it: *A Ballet Shoe* shows a ballet dancer's foot from just above the ankle standing on pointe on a hardwood floor. The ribbons of her pointe shoe are tied in a bow and their ends are held by the thumbs and index fingers of a pair of hands. Those hands slowly pull sideways until the bow is untied, whereupon they drop the ribbons and disappear from the frame on either side. The ribbons dangle to the floor, and the dancer slowly descends from pointe. When her heel touches the floor, her ankle relaxes and pulls slightly upward, and the film comes to an end. Including the brief title at the beginning, the film lasts forty seconds.³¹

A Ballet Shoe's scenario, if we can call it that, is odd. Ballet dancers tie their pointe shoe ribbons in a knot, not a bow—a bow wouldn't be secure enough—and they tuck the ends inside the ribbon that wraps about the ankle to hide them. So one would not see a bow on a dancer's shoe when she stands on pointe; Goldstein imagined this. In the *October* version of



Stills from Jack Goldstein, *The Portrait of Père Tanguy*, 1974. 16 mm film, color, sound, 4 min.

“Pictures” I wrote of the film’s fragmented images—by which I meant the disembodied foot and hands, as well as the unexplained untying action—“generating multiple psychological and topological resonances,” but I didn’t say what those resonances are.³² I surely had fetishism in mind, and I might have felt that the untying suggests disrobing, perhaps even despoiling. Temporality is key. However short *A Ballet Shoe* is and however truncated its event—however much it converts event into image—it requires time. It is a picture that occurs over time. This is obviously the case regarding the hands untying the ribbon, but it is also important for what follows the untying: the descent from pointe. Most descriptions of *A Ballet Shoe* describe this moment in such a way as to suggest the dancer could not stay on pointe once the ribbon was untied. Thus David James: “The foot of a dancer *en pointe* occupies the frame until a man’s hands unties [sic] the shoe’s ribbons, releasing the tension and causing the dancer’s foot to sink to the floor.”³³ It is not the ribbon that maintains the tension in the dancer’s foot, nor does her foot “sink” to the floor. I repeat: the dancer slowly descends from pointe. Among the topological resonances that I read from the film now is that a dancer on pointe is a metaphor for ballet, or more accurately, romantic ballet.

In 1832, when Marie Taglioni performed in *La Sylphide*, it was the first time anyone danced on pointe, and ballet was irrevocably changed.³⁴ It marked the moment that ballet became, as Balanchine famously said, “Woman.”³⁵ Until Taglioni went up on pointe, virtuoso dancing was

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Stills from Jack Goldstein, *A Ballet Shoe*, 1975. 16 mm film, color, silent, 40 sec.

something men did. It was considered undignified for women, and they didn't wear shoes that would even make it possible. But if the dancer on pointe is now "ballet," and moreover "ballet as woman," the dancer descending from pointe is "dancing." It is a meaningful dance step. Taking it as such, we might read the untying gesture of *A Ballet Shoe* differently, as a symbol of the male dancer giving and then releasing his support of the ballerina. Although she makes use of his support, she does not require it; when he lets go of her, she continues to dance. In Goldstein's film, the descent from pointe takes eight seconds. That might seem like almost nothing, but in ballet it is everything. Watching ballet, you must attune your eyes to what occurs in a very short space of time in order, for example, to see the dancer's line at the climax of a jeté or to distinguish whether the dancer is dancing slightly in advance of the music or simply following it. Those eight seconds in *A Ballet Shoe* require considerable strength and control on the part of the dancer, and it really matters whether she simply moves off pointe or slowly and smoothly descends from pointe. I doubt that Goldstein knew the difference, but his dancer did. I didn't know it when I first wrote about *A Ballet Shoe*, but I do now.

The dancer in *A Ballet Shoe* is a fine technician. She is able to execute a gorgeously steady descent from pointe. But one difference between a perfect technician and a great ballet dancer is the latter's readiness to relinquish control, to move off-balance, to take unexpected risks. That was the marvel of watching Suzanne Farrell dance Balanchine's ballets. It's not that you were afraid she might fail. On the contrary, you had complete confidence in her, but her out-of-control risk-taking thrilled you and, visibly, her as well. Goldstein's films, by contrast, create in the viewer "foreboding, premonition, suspicion, anxiety," as I wrote in "Pictures."³⁶ I attributed those qualities to how his pictures were presented, staged, and structured. I would now add: controlled.

Trying to maintain control over one's work is a losing proposition. Moreover, as Louise Lawler succinctly put it in an interview with me, "The work works in the process of its reception."³⁷ Lawler is another artist associated with the Pictures Generation and my closest and longest-standing friend among them. I first knew her as one of the women at the front desk of the Leo Castelli Gallery at 420 West Broadway. It was she who provided photographs to accompany my reviews for *Art News* and



Installation view of Louise Lawler's work in _____, *Louise Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman are participating in an exhibition organized by Janelle Reiring at Artists Space, September 23 to October 28, 1978*

Art International. At the time I organized *Pictures*, Louise was not yet making the photographs for which she has become known, but her work did figure prominently in a second curated group exhibition at Artists Space that opened one year after *Pictures*.

Organized by Janelle Reiring and including, in addition to Lawler, Christopher D'Arcangelo, Adrian Piper, and Sherman, the exhibition effectively had no title. Indeed, *self-effacement* would be a good descriptor for the show. D'Arcangelo contributed by entirely removing his name and work from the twenty-page catalogue; the pages allotted to him were left blank, while his four texts about Conceptual art that had been typeset for those pages were shown in the gallery. Lawler designed a logo for Artists Space that was printed on the cover of the catalogue; inside the book, her single page was printed, simply, with "Louise Lawler: Cover." On the back wall of the main gallery, she hung a portrait of a racehorse borrowed from the Aqueduct Racetrack and, using rented stage lights, shone one directly toward the viewer and a second through the gallery space and into the street beyond. The lights were kept on until midnight. Piper showed *Aspects of the*



View from Artists Space across Hudson Street of Louise Lawler's work in _____.
Louise Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman are participating in an exhibition organized by
Janelle Reiring at Artists Space, September 23 to October 28, 1978

Liberal Dilemma (1978) as a taped monologue accompanying a blown-up appropriated photograph in the gallery; in the catalogue, her monologue appeared as a transcription alongside the image. Sherman showed her earliest Untitled Film Stills; four of them appear in the catalogue. Unlike *Pictures*, Reiring's exhibition is little known today, even though it was groundbreaking in so many ways—a group show in which women artists predominate, one of the earliest exhibitions of Lawler's work, the first show of Sherman's Untitled Film Stills, the first show to foreground women artists involved in institutional critique, including Piper's critique of racialized viewing habits. Reiring's contribution to the catalogue consists of a one-page statement about the show, which begins, "I asked Christopher D'Arcangelo, Louise Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman to participate together in this exhibition because their work addresses the issue of how art is presented and, in turn, how it is seen." Reiring raises the issue of control in two ways: "Each [artist], in his or her way, underscores or circumvents the system that has developed to exhibit, market and interpret the artist's work. This implies maintaining a control over one's work that the artist has traditionally

relinquished to the go-between—dealer, curator, critic, etc.” Reiring then acknowledges the significance of her own choices:

The premise of the exhibition somewhat limits my role as mediator between artist and viewer. I did not select, install nor explicate the work being shown. But I did select the artists and set up a specific context for their work, thus accepting responsibility for an exhibition that ultimately reflects my own notions of art, politics, etc. This involves a form of control over the work, how it is presented, and seen, in addition to the control exerted by the physical, economic and organizational aspects of Artists Space.³⁸

Whether or not Reiring was right to assume that the goal of the artists she selected was to maintain control over their work, it is certainly the case that they were all interested in interrogating the exhibition apparatus and the assumptions spectators brought to their engagement with artworks. Lawler’s statement that “the work works in the process of its reception” is astute in this regard. The statement is as true of an exhibition as it is of an artwork. In the years since 1977, *Pictures* has taken on a life of its own. Mostly I’ve been a bystander.

None of the initial reviews of *Pictures* suggests that the show was especially momentous. Most are brief and descriptive and comment on the difference between the work in *Pictures* and more traditional representational approaches. As my former colleague at *Art News* Gerrit Henry put it, “What [Crimp] seems to be proposing is not a ‘new realism,’ but a new conceptualism, a plastic rather than linguistic or act-oriented investigation into the nature of art-making.”³⁹ Reviewing the show for *Art in America*, Thomas Lawson pointed to models from popular culture: “Instead of relying upon references to the conventions of modernist art, these young artists seek their authority in a wide range of conventions stemming from film and television. They borrow images and procedures from these mediums as material for their own investigations of our confused understanding of what a picture is.”⁴⁰ Peter Frank wrote in *Artweek* about the LAICA version of the show, “The subject matter is not the image, but the image of the image. These artists have isolated their images, deprived them of their original contexts and liberated them from referent visual structures.”⁴¹

Several reviews mention my catalogue essay. A *Los Angeles Times* writer was predictably snide (journalists tend to be allergic to theory): “These artists are clearly hip to current criticism. The catalogue essay by organizer Douglas Crimp is almost a required text for ‘Pictures.’ Unfortunately, the first portion reads like a term paper.”⁴² No one’s assessment of my essay was harsher than my own, though, and so given the chance at a second try, and with effort that I recall as feeling Herculean, I rewrote the essay for *October*. Published in the spring 1979 issue, that version is the one that for years most people read. By the time of its eighth issue, *October* was hitting its stride, and the company for my essay was illustrious: Roland Barthes’s inaugural lecture for his induction into the Collège de France, Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit’s essay on Assyrian wall reliefs from their book *The Forms of Violence*, Rosalind Krauss’s “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Laurie Anderson’s texts and lyrics from *Americans on the Move*, Bérénice Reynaud on Stuart Sherman, Jean Clair on Magritte, and Annette Michelson on Michael Snow. The following issue included Craig Owens’s translation of Derrida’s “The Parergon,” Rosalind Krauss’s “Grids,” Yvonne Rainer’s script for her film *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, and essays by Louis Marin and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. Issue number ten featured Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer’s conversation about Brown’s *Glacial Decoy* together with a portfolio of Babette Mangolte’s photographs of Brown’s 1970s dances, Daniel Buren’s “Function of the Studio,” and Jean-François Lyotard on Buren, Hubert Damisch on Duchamp, Birgit Pelzer on Dan Graham, Craig Owens on Robert Smithson, and Annette Michelson’s interview with Richard Serra and Clara Weyergraf on Serra’s films. And so it went. The result was that *October* became required reading in the art world.

Five years after it appeared in the journal, the *October* version of “Pictures” reappeared in Brian Wallis’s anthology *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, which *Artforum* writer David Rimanelli characterized as “the Big Think bible of the art world ingenue” during the 1980s.⁴³ Between 1981 and 2002, “Pictures” was translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, and Finnish. It appeared once again, both in English and in German translation, in a 2011 catalogue of an exhibition at the Kunsthaus Bregenz about the techniques and aesthetics of appropriation, where, together with Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and

Martin Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology," it constituted the section devoted to "underlying historical theories."⁴⁴

By the end of the 1980s, *Pictures* had begun to be designated a foundational exhibition for postmodern art. Howard Singerman's essay for the catalogue accompanying *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation*, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, was the first of his many reflections on *Pictures* that parsed the two versions of my essay.⁴⁵ The catalogue also contains an exhibition chronology that lists a number of 1980s group shows that covered territory related to *Pictures*, such as *Pictures and Promises: A Display of Advertisings, Slogans and Intervention* (The Kitchen, New York, 1981), *A Fatal Attraction: Art and the Media* (The Renaissance Society, Chicago, 1982), *Image Scavengers: Photography* and *Image Scavengers: Painting* (Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, 1982–83), and *The Art of Memory: The Loss of History* (New Museum, New York, 1985). There were others, too. One that I remember is Germano Celant's virtual remake of *Pictures* in one of a series of exhibitions grouped under the rubric *Inexpressionismo Americano*, organized to coincide with a festival of independent film in Genoa in 1981.

Remaking *Pictures* didn't stop there: twenty years after Celant's show, Jenelle Porter, then a young curator at Artists Space, attempted to reconstruct the original *Pictures* show as faithfully as possible in "*Pictures*" at an *Exhibition*. "The impulse to remake a historically critical exhibition," she explained, "emerged from an array of thoughts about exhibition making: Stephanie Barron's inspired use of re-creation in her great *Degenerate Art* show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991; the ways exhibitions live through images, specifically installation photographs; and a desire to examine how critically significant exhibitions are historicized, theorized, and, especially mythologized."⁴⁶ Scott Rothkopf, a curator himself, responded to the remake with the peevishness of a child who has discovered he's been hoodwinked about Santa Claus:

By the time I began studying art history in the mid-'90s, Douglas Crimp's 1977 group show "Pictures" had achieved the quasi-mythic status of those exhibitions we latecomers can imagine we've seen, even if we haven't. . . . With that show, we are told, a canny critic inaugurated the enticingly slick and brainy strain of '80s art, and we might envision a gallery space in which Richard Prince's Marlboro man gallops alongside Cindy Sherman

as she mugs for the camera, with Sherrie Levine's rephotographed sharecropper grimacing nearby. Never mind that none of these iconic works had yet been realized at the time of the exhibition's opening, or for that matter that Sherman and Prince didn't even grace its walls. They may as well have—given that the hype and attendant theorizing of "postmodern" and "appropriation" art grew so bloated as to have obscured its fabled source. . . . Yet rather than substantiate the myth, the rehanging felt more like a glimpse behind the wizard's curtain.⁴⁷

Rothkopf's quandary is easily enough solved. If the 1977 exhibition doesn't live up to its reputation, it is because its reputation accrued over time and inevitably departed from its origin. *Pictures* has come to stand less for a small exhibition at Artists Space than for an artistic tendency that has been shaped by myriad artists, curators, critics, essays, books, and exhibitions. *Pictures* is a signifier—even a *floating* signifier—as we came to understand that structural-linguistics term right around the time of the *Pictures* exhibition. If anything about it proved especially canny, it was my choice of such a thoroughly generic word as a title of the exhibition and essay. But Rothkopf's perplexity is not only about the "myth" of *Pictures*, about which I, too, often marvel. It also extends to what he sees as an "asymmetry between Crimp's theoretical model and its initial objects. . . . How, one wondered, could Crimp have based such grand claims on art that seemed to make such modest claims for itself?"⁴⁸ Rather than acknowledge that a critic might draw out and articulate what is as yet only nascent in artworks themselves, Rothkopf implies some sort of chicanery on my part. Writing a few years later about the *Pictures Generation* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum, *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl was even more adamant about the critic's proper place in relation to art:

I missed "Pictures," a movement-initiating, instantly legendary group show curated by the critic Douglas Crimp, at the public-funded Artists Space, in the autumn of 1977. . . . But the alien sensibility that the show heralded was soon unavoidable: a precociously brainy mood in art that was fronted, rather than followed, by critical talking points. "Postmodernism" was the password. Critics—including Crimp, Craig Owens, and Hal Foster . . . vied for prestige with the artists, whom they rather gingerly promoted.⁴⁹

I asserted myself publicly about the reception of *Pictures* only once. In spring 2003, for its fortieth anniversary, *Artforum* published a pair of

special issues devoted to the 1980s that included short interviews with a number of artists central to that era. The one with Richard Prince began with this exchange:

Steve Lafreniere: You weren't in Douglas Crimp's "Pictures" exhibition, but a lot of people seem to think you were, maybe because of your later association with Helene Winer, who was at Artists Space before starting Metro Pictures. Did you feel a kinship to the artists in the "Pictures" show?

Richard Prince: I've never said this before, but Doug Crimp actually asked me to be in that show. I read his essay and told him it was for shit, that it sounded like Roland Barthes. We haven't spoken since.⁵⁰

Pleased as I was to be accused of sounding like Barthes—something I consciously tried to do in my 1982 essay for the *October* special issue on Rainer Werner Fassbinder—I figured I'd better set the record straight, so I wrote a letter to the editor:

I have no illusions about being able to control how the "Pictures" show I organized at Artists Space in 1977 will be understood historically, but for the record I did not, as Richard Prince claims in "Richard Prince talks to Steve Lafreniere" [March 2003], ask him to be in the exhibition or show him the essay for the catalogue. I didn't know Richard Prince or his work at the time. Prince himself has previously written, in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years* [New York: Artists Space, 1998], "I wasn't aware of the *Pictures* show or what other people were doing. I'd been living in the West Village completely isolated and working at Time-Life. . . . I had a very punk attitude, a chip on my shoulder. I thought I was doing something no one else was doing, and therefore it couldn't possibly be incorporated into anything that was going on."⁵¹

Ironically, I myself contributed to the association of Prince with *Pictures* when, in "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," published in *October* in 1980, I returned to the issues explored in the exhibition. As the title suggests, the essay concerns artists using the medium of photography, but the cast of characters is substantially the same as that in the *October* version of "Pictures": Jack Goldstein, Robert Longo, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman. Once again, I made a substitution, this time dropping Troy

Brauntuch in favor of Prince. I wrote just a single short paragraph about Prince, but it was the essay's final flourish:

Richard Prince steals the most frank and banal of [mass advertising] images, which register, in the context of photography-as-art, as a kind of shock. But ultimately their rather brutal familiarity gives way to strangeness, as an unintended and unwanted dimension of fiction reinvades them. . . . Focusing directly on the commodity fetish, using the master tool of commodity fetishism of our time, Prince's rephotographed photographs take on a Hitchcockian dimension: the commodity becomes a clue.⁵²

For Prince's large-scale retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in 2007–2008, the show's curator, Nancy Spector, published a catalogue essay that began with what she called "origin myths" about Prince's beginnings as an artist. The first is a fabricated interview with the eighteen-year-old Prince, conducted by J. G. Ballard. The second is the story of Prince giving up his romantic fantasy of emulating Franz Kline when, in 1977, he rephotographed someone else's photograph and called it his own: "With his first purloined photograph Prince's career began," writes Spector. Then, without saying anything one way or another about Prince's connection to *Pictures*, she discusses the "emerging, critical sensibility" the show identified.⁵³ *Pictures* had by now been fully ensconced in history: the chapter for the year 1977 of the Thames and Hudson textbook *Art since 1900* is devoted to it, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art further canonized it with *The Pictures Generation*, but Spector's claim for *Pictures* was the most extravagant of all:

Today, *Pictures* has entered the pantheon of paradigm-shattering exhibitions, comparable to the first exhibition of Futurism at Paris's Bernheim-Jeune Galerie in 1912, the introduction of Suprematism and Constructivism in the 0.10 exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1915, and the consecration of conceptualism as an international phenomenon in Harald Szeemann's 1969 exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*.⁵⁴

There are, of course, dissenters. Interviewed for the Artists Space twenty-fifth-anniversary publication, painter David Salle, my next-door neighbor at the time of the *Pictures* exhibition, said, "I think the whole thing was

essentially misguided. Because of that, I keep coming back to the same point: *Pictures* was all really ephemeral, it was never meant to last and didn't last, not really."⁵⁵ I myself have been a bit of a dissenter. In the interview with me for the Artists Space volume, which immediately precedes Salle's, I hedge my bets: "I can't say *Pictures* was necessarily a founding moment. Neither can I say it wasn't important or that I didn't do a good job. But retrospectively, it has assumed an overblown importance."⁵⁶

One thing I can say for certain: when I wrote the *Pictures* catalogue essay, and even more when I rewrote it for *October*, I was convinced that with sufficient insight a critic could—even should—determine what was historically significant at a given moment and explain why.⁵⁷ That conviction was a result of my intellectual formation as an art historian and aspiring art critic. Moreover, it was *possible* to believe such a thing then: the art scene as I experienced it in New York from 1967 to 1977 was small enough to seem fully comprehensible. That, of course, no longer holds true. And because it is so clearly not true now, it seems unlikely that it could really have been true then. In the meantime, coming to the understanding that my knowledge of art can never be anything but partial has been liberating. It has allowed me to write about what attracts me, challenges me, or simply gives me pleasure without having to make a grand historical claim for it. No doubt that is why I respond to the reception of *Pictures* with ambivalence. It historicizes me.



My apartment in the Bennett Building

NOTES

FRONT ROOM, BACK ROOM

1. *Coeur d'Alene* means literally “heart of an awl” but metaphorically “shrewd hearted”; the French fur trappers who settled the region used the term to characterize the local Indians, who were evidently tough businessmen.
2. The Vieux Carré Commission was established in 1925 to protect and preserve the historic architectural character of New Orleans.
3. See Robert Fitch, *The Assassination of New York* (London: Verso, 1993), and Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York's World Trade Center* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
4. Tennessee Williams, *Suddenly Last Summer* (New York: New Directions, 1958), 13.
5. For a popular history of Max's Kansas City, see Yvonne Sewall-Ruskin, *High on Rebellion: Inside the Underground at Max's Kansas City* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1998).
6. “The art heavies would group around the bar and the kids would be in the back room basically.” Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980), 186. For my account of meeting and briefly sharing my loft with Holly Woodlawn, see “Addendum: Mother Camp,” in Douglas Crimp, “*Our Kind of Movie*: The Films of Andy Warhol” (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 39–44.

WAY OUT ON THE NUT

1. Alexander Alberro, in conversation with Daniel Buren, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, March 29, 2005.
2. Ibid. From my notes, I paraphrase Buren here.
3. Michael Kimmelman, “Tall French Visitor Takes Up Residence in the Guggenheim,” *New York Times*, March 25, 2005.
4. *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, April 3, 2005, 105.
5. The Horst P. Horst photograph is the frontispiece for Elizabeth Ann Coleman, *The Genius of Charles James* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, and Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982). The cape is catalogue no. 374 on page 149.
6. Daniel Buren, “Beware,” in *Five Texts* (New York: John Weber Gallery and Jack Wendler Gallery, London, 1973), 13, 15.
7. Daniel Buren, quoted in Alison M. Gingeras, “The Decorative Strategy: Daniel Buren's ‘The Museum Which Did Not Exist,’” *Parkett*, no. 66 (December 2002): 89.
8. Dan Flavin, “The Guggenheim Affair: Letters to *Studio International*,” *Studio International* 182, no. 935 (July–August 1971): 6.
9. Daniel Buren, “Round and About a Detour,” *Studio International* 181, no. 934 (June 1971): 246–47.
10. Alison M. Gingeras, “Who Is Daniel Buren?,” *The Buren Times* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2005), 3A, 1. Buchloh's review appears in *Artforum* 35, no. 1 (September 1997): 116.
11. Buchloh continues to apply this early-equals-pure/late-equals-decadent thesis to Buren. In a roundtable discussion for the catalogue for *Flashback*, an exhibition about the art of the 1980s, the following exchange takes place:

John M. Armleder: . . . In the seventies, [Buren] is not the same as in the eighties or nineties. If you follow a linear construction, then you have to ask how his work changed.

Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: Buren in 1970 is like Picasso in 1912, and in 1980 how Picasso was in 1930. In the 1990s Buren is like Picasso was in the 1950s and 1960s. Do I think Buren is the best artist? Yes, sure. Absolutely, until 1975.

- "The Eighties Are in Our Midst: Roundtable Discussion, Basel June 18, 2005," in *Flashback: Revisiting the Art of the 80s* (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, Kunstmuseum Basel, and Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, 2005), 56.
12. Kimmelman, "Tall French Visitor."
 13. Ibid.
 14. My lecture, which formed the groundwork of this chapter, took place on April 26, 2005.
 15. Rosalyn Deutsche, "Inadequacy," in *Silvia Kolbowski: Inadequate . . . Like . . . Power* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, and Secession, Vienna, 2004), 69.
 16. See Alan R. Sawyer, *Mastercraftsmen of Ancient Peru* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1968).
 17. See Kynaston McShine, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 186.
 18. According to Coleman, James had begun discussing an autobiography with Harper & Row as early as 1956, and he received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1975 to write a book on his techniques. None of his book projects came to fruition. See Elizabeth Ann Coleman, "The Background," in *The Genius of Charles James*, 98–99.
 19. *A Decade of Design for Mrs. Millicent H. Rogers by Charles James* ran at the Brooklyn Museum from November 19, 1948, to January 1, 1949.
 20. Coleman, "The Background," 79.
 21. Richard Martin, *Charles James* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 18.
 22. Mary St. John Hutchinson, quoted in Coleman, introduction to *The Genius of Charles James*, 9.
 23. Anne, Countess of Rosse, "Charles James: The Couturier," in Coleman, *The Genius of Charles James*, 111.
 24. *Form Follows Fashion*, Museum at FIT, Fashion Institute of Technology, October 6–December 31, 2004.
 25. *Guggenheim International Exhibition 1971* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1971).
 26. See Diane Waldman, "The Museum Responds," *Studio International* 181, no. 933 (May–June 1971): 248.
 27. Buren, "Round and About a Detour," 246.
 28. In 1976, I wrote about Buren's work for his exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven ("Daniel Buren's New York Work," in R. H. Fuchs, *Discordance/Cobérence* [Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 1976], 75–78), and five years later in "The End of Painting," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981): 69–86.
 29. Alexander Alberro, "The Turn of the Screw: Daniel Buren, Dan Flavin, and the Sixth Guggenheim International Exhibition," *October*, no. 80 (Spring 1997): 81.
 30. Roberta Smith, "On Daniel Buren," *Artforum* 12, no. 1 (September 1973): 67.
 31. Daniel Buren, preface to "Why Write Texts or The Place From Where I Act," trans. Patricia Railing, in *Five Texts*, 6–7.
 32. Daniel Buren, quoted in Grace Glueck, "Museum Presents Wide Media Range," *New York Times*, February 12, 1971.
 33. Alberro, "The Turn of the Screw," 71–72.
 34. Frank O'Hara, *Art Chronicles 1954–1966* (New York: George Braziller, 1975), 1–2. James Schuyler ends his poem "To Frank O'Hara" with the following lines:

As once under the pie plate tree
(paulownia)
it broke you up to read Sophie Tucker

—with the *Times* in a hammock—
had a gold tea service. "It's way out
on the nut," she said, "for service,
but it was my dream."

James Schuyler, *Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993), 155–56.

35. See Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
36. William Middleton, “A House That Rattled Texas Windows,” *New York Times*, June 3, 2004.
37. See Hal Foster, *Design and Crime (and Other Diatribes)* (London: Verso, 2002).
38. During the restoration of the building that was completed in 2008, “conservators stripped away 11 layers of paint from the landmark building’s exterior and found that it was originally coated with a light brownish-yellow shade.” The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission decided nevertheless to “maintain the same light-gray paint shade it has had since 1992, when a major expansion of the museum by Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects was completed.” One dissenter on the commission, Pablo E. Vengoechea, was quoted as saying, “I’ve heard arguments that the lighter color is less jarring, less controversial and so forth, but I think that that really doesn’t persuade. . . . This building was designed to stand out.” Sewell Chan, “Pale Gray or Light Yellow? A Ruling on Guggenheim,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2007.
39. Thomas Messer, “Which Is in Fact What Happened,” interview by Barbara Reise, April 25, 1971, *Studio International* 182, no. 935 (July–August 1971): 37.

BACK TO THE TURMOIL

1. Lynne Cooke, “. . . going forward into unknown territory . . .: Agnes Martin’s Paintings 1957–67,” exhibition brochure (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2004).
2. Douglas Crimp, *New York Letter, Art International* 17, no. 4 (April 1973): 57–59, 102–10.
3. *Ibid.*, 57.
4. The following is an excerpt from a letter I wrote to Silas Rhodes, the president of the School of Visual Arts at the time: “Last Wednesday night shortly after 8:00 p.m., I stopped in the gallery to have a look at the Jo Baers. In the few minutes that I was in the lobby and the gallery areas there was not a guard around. In view of the forthcoming exhibition under my directorship of the paintings of Agnes Martin, I found this cause for alarm. The school and I will be jointly responsible for paintings which have high insurance values [the paintings were insured for \$12,000–\$20,000] and are both very fragile and virtually irreparable if damaged.”
5. Kasha Linville, “Agnes Martin: An Appreciation,” *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (Summer 1971): 72. See the discussion of Linville on Martin’s *Red Bird*, and of Rosalind Krauss’s interpretation of Linville’s article, in Anne H. Wagner, “The Cause of the Response,” in *Agnes Martin* (New York: Dia Art Foundation, and Yale University Press, New Haven, 2011), 228–39.
6. Linville, “Agnes Martin,” 73.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Most museums include Martin’s work in galleries displaying Minimal art.
9. Lawrence Alloway suggests as much about Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings in “Agnes Martin,” *Artforum* 11, no. 8 (April 1973): 36.
10. Douglas Crimp, “Opaque Surfaces,” in *Arte come arte* (Milan: Centro Communitario di Brera, 1973); reprinted in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer (London: Phaidon, 2000), 257–60.
11. Douglas Crimp, “Agnes Martin: Numero, Misura, Rapporto,” *Data* 3, no. 10 (Winter 1973): 83. As Lynne Cooke points out, Annette Michelson had warned in 1967 against this sort of analysis: “Looking at Agnes Martin’s paintings, one reaches for a tape measure, only to relinquish it, knowing that verification of that rationale will in no way account for the interest of the work.” Michelson, “Agnes Martin: Recent Paintings,” *Artforum* 5, no. 5 (January 1967): 46.
12. Linville, “Agnes Martin,” 72.
13. Rosalind Krauss, “The /Cloud/,” in *Agnes Martin*, ed. Barbara Haskell (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), 155.
14. Krauss makes Alloway out to be the source of reading Martin’s work in relation to the “abstract sublime” (Robert Rosenblum’s term for the work of Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clifford Still). This is somewhat unfair: Alloway had, in fact, included Martin in his 1966 Guggenheim exhibition *Systemic Painting*.

15. Krauss, "The /Cloud/," 164.
16. Ibid.
17. Agnes Martin, "The Untroubled Mind," in *Writings*, ed. Dieter Schwarz (Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, in association with Kunstmuseum Winterthur, 2005), 37.
18. Ibid., 38–39.
19. Martin, "Perfection Is in the Mind: An Interview with Agnes Martin," interview by Joan Simon, *Art in America* 84, no. 5 (May 1996): 86.
20. Martin, "The Untroubled Mind," 37.
21. Benita Eisler, "Profile: Life Lines," *New Yorker*, January 25, 1993, 77–78.
22. I should note that there is more than one photograph from this series—Briony Fer reproduces a shot taken from a different angle in her book *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art after Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 50.
23. Valerie Solanas's *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* was first commercially published by Olympia Press in 1968, the same year Solanas shot and nearly killed Andy Warhol. Solanas is credited with the screenplay for Seyrig and Carole Roussopoulos's twenty-six-minute film, which was produced by the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire and distributed by the Centre Audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir in 1976.
24. Catherine Lord, "Wonder Waif Meets Super Neuter," *October*, no. 132 (Spring 2010): 151–52.
25. Jill Johnston, "Agnes Martin: Surrender & Solitude," in *Admission Accomplished: The "Lesbian Nation" Years (1970–75)* (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1998), 298; originally published in the *Village Voice*, September 13 and 20, 1973.
26. Ibid., 298–99.
27. Ibid., 300.
28. Ibid., 304–305.
29. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Soho Weekly News*, June 2, 1977, 38. Bill Moritz was an experimental filmmaker and film scholar. When Joan Simon asked Martin about Mekas's anecdote about how hard she worked in the lab to get the colors right, she replied: "It didn't happen at all." Martin, in Simon, "Perfection Is in the Mind," 124.
30. Krauss, "The /Cloud/," 156. Krauss sees the various shots of *Gabriel* as "one after another 'Agnes Martin' painting," as if Martin had deliberately set out to make a filmic equivalent of her paintings. This seems to me unlikely both on the face of it and because of Martin's statements about the film.
31. Martin, in Simon, "Perfection Is in the Mind," 124.
32. When Simon asked Martin why she chose the *Goldberg Variations*, the artist replied, "I just like it, I think it's beautiful." Ibid.
33. Partly because of my desire to see a good print of *Gabriel* and my insistence on seeing an analog print rather than a digital transfer, the Pace Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art restored *Gabriel*; in the process, the camera original was found. The restored film was first screened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on October 28, 2011.
34. For a useful study of landscape films, see Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
35. Martin told John Gruen, as she set out to make *Gabriel*: "Of course, I'll never consider my movie-making on the level with painting. But I'm making it in order to reach a large audience. . . . I've never seen a movie or read a story that was absolutely free of any misery. And so, I thought I would make one." John Gruen, "Agnes Martin: 'Everything, everything is about feeling . . . feeling and recognition,'" *Art News* 75, no. 7 (September 1976): 94.
36. Mangolte's film also reminds us how essential landscape cinematography is to the Hollywood Western. Some Hollywood films—John Ford's *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), for example—seem to use their stories virtually as a pretext for filming the landscape of the West.
37. Martin, in Gruen, "Agnes Martin," 94.
38. Simon, "Perfection Is in the Mind," 124.

ART NEWS PARTIES

1. John Ashbery, *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles 1957–1987* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 14.
2. Esther Newton's *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972) is a groundbreaking ethnographic study of male-to-female transvestism.
3. Annette Michelson's 1973 article on Cornell in *Artforum* is probably responsible for my memory of this moment. See Annette Michelson, "Rose Hobart and Monsieur Phot: Early Films from Utopia Parkway," *Artforum* 11, no. 10 (June 1973): 56.
4. Hazel Hawthorne, *Salt House* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1934), 155.
5. Douglas Crimp, "Georgia Is a State of Mind," *Art News* 69, no. 6 (October 1970): 48, 51, 85.
6. Douglas Crimp, "Quartered and Drawn," *Art News* 70, no. 1 (March 1971): 48–49, 72–73.
7. The *New York Times* reported *Newsweek's* sale of *Art News* to a group of eight investors headed by Milton Esterow in August 1972. The article quoted Hess, saying "The loss of *Art News* is the loss of my alter ego. . . . I'm sad for myself and my colleagues." Esterow, a journalist, took over as editor, intending to reorient the magazine to stress news, particularly news about the market. He is quoted as saying, "The art world is fascinating and mysterious. . . . It is also underreported. There is a genuine thirst for art information that publications haven't been satisfying." David L. Shirey, "Art News Is Sold to 8-Man Group," *New York Times*, August 12, 1972.
8. "Also it seemed to me that the attempt to revive the Parisian tradition of the poet-critic was total nonsense. It seemed to me that there was some attempt at that in *Art News*." Annette Michelson, quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962–1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 40. "*Art News* was really a writer's magazine, a poet's magazine. The New York poetry style is no less arrogant than any other, but this isn't obvious to everyone at first glance because it's a style of off-handedness and understatement and occasionally just being silly." Carter Ratcliff, in *ibid.*, 279.
9. Thomas B. Hess, editorial, *Art News* 71, no. 5 (September 1972): 19.
10. Kenneth Koch, "The Artist," *Art News* 57, no. 1 (March 1958): 66.
11. J. A. (John Ashbery), "Robert Smithson," *Art News* 69, no. 8 (December 1970): 62.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Ashbery, *Reported Sightings*, 7. Ashbery made even more extravagant claims for the legacy of Surrealism in his review of the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (1968): "Mr. [William] Rubin [the exhibition's curator] ought to remember that not only is he a Surrealist but that Alfred Barr and the trustees of the Museum of Modern Art are too; that all artists now working in America (except Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland, for reasons I cannot fathom) are Surrealists; that Thomas B. Hess, Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer are Surrealists; that President Johnson is a Surrealist; that that [sic] Congress is 96 per cent Surrealist and that the entire nation and the world including Vietnam are Surrealist places." John Ashbery, "Growing Up Surreal," *Art News* 67, no. 3 (May 1968): 65.
14. Ashbery, *Reported Sightings*, 17–18. Ashbery equates an early encounter with Cornell with his self-recognition as a Surrealist: "I first encountered Joseph Cornell's work when I was about ten years old. At that time there was a show of surrealist art at the Museum of Modern Art which was written up in *Life* and other magazines. I'm not sure whether Cornell was included in the show, but after reading *Life* and discovering that I was a surrealist, I found pictures of his work in books on surrealism in the local library, and also his scenario for a film in Julien Levy's Anthology of Surrealism." John Ashbery, foreword to *Joseph Cornell: The Theater of the Mind* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 9.
15. Rosalind Krauss, "A View of Modernism," *Artforum* 11, no. 1 (September 1972): 50.
16. Annette Michelson, review of *What Is Cinema?*, by André Bazin, *Artforum* 6, no. 10 (Summer 1968): 67–71.
17. In the preface to his *Selected Prose*, Ashbery says, "There are two pieces on film, the only ones I've ever written." The essays are "Jacques Rivette: Rivette Masterpiece(s?)," *Soho Weekly News*, October 24, 1974; and "On Val Lewton's *The Seventh Victim*," *Modern Painters* 16, no. 5 (Autumn 2003): 98–100. Ashbery seems to have forgotten his review of *Spiral Jetty*, even though he references *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*'s wedding guest in both it and his discussion of Jacques

Rivette's *Out 1: Spectre* (1972).

18. Frank O'Hara, "To the Film Industry in Crisis," in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, ed. Donald Allen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 232.
19. James Schuyler, *Selected Art Writings*, ed. Simon Pettet (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1998), 147.
20. Frank O'Hara, *Art Chronicles 1954–1966* (New York: George Braziller, 1975), 151.

HOTEL DES ARTISTES

1. Bernadine Morris, "The Era of Balenciaga: It Seems So Long Ago," *New York Times*, March 23, 1973.
2. *The World of Balenciaga* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), 68–69.
3. Ibid., 48.
4. Diana Vreeland, *D.V.*, ed. George Plimpton and Christopher Hemphill (New York: Knopf, 1984), 106–107.
5. President Richard Nixon's press secretary Ron Zeigler's first public comments on the Watergate break-in.
6. *The Watergate Hearings, Break-in and Cover-up: Proceedings of the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities as Edited by the Staff of the "New York Times"* (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), 139; all subsequent quotations from the hearings are from this source.
7. John W. Dean III, *Blind Ambition: The White House Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 29.
8. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 331.
9. Crimp, "Opaque Surfaces," in *Minimalism*, 258.
10. Ibid., 257.
11. Ibid., 260.
12. Douglas Crimp, New York Letter, *Art International* 17, no. 6 (Summer 1973): 89.
13. The catalogue of *Arte come arte* lists the show's dates as April–May 1973, while the Castelli Gallery show's dates are April 7–28. It seems unlikely that the catalogue for the former show was available while the show was still up, because I couldn't have written the essay until mid-April at the earliest and my text had to be translated into Italian for the catalogue.
14. Crimp, New York Letter.
15. Crimp, "Opaque Surfaces," in *Minimalism*, 260.
16. Ibid., 258.
17. Crimp, New York Letter.
18. Ellsworth Kelly, quoted in E. C. Goossen, *Ellsworth Kelly* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 29.
19. John Elderfield, "Color and Area: New Paintings by Ellsworth Kelly," *Artforum* 10, no. 3 (November 1971): 46.
20. Elizabeth C. Baker, "The Subtleties of Ellsworth Kelly," *Art News* 72, no. 9 (November 1973): 33.
21. E. C. Goossen, *The Art of the Real: An Aspect of American Painting and Sculpture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1968), 6.
22. Yve-Alain Bois, "Ellsworth Kelly in France: Anti-Composition in Its Many Guises," in *Ellsworth Kelly: The Years in France, 1948–1954* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1992), 14.
23. Hilton Kramer, "A Modish Revision of History," *New York Times*, October 19, 1969.
24. Peter Crane, *Ginkgo: The Tree That Time Forgot* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 38.

ACTION AROUND THE EDGES

1. *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Berkeley: University Art Museum, University of California, and Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1983), 22. Jonas's exhibition at the University Art Museum took place in 1980.
2. See *112 Workshop, 112 Greene Street: History, Artists and Artworks*, ed. Robyn Brentano with Mark Savitt (New York: New York University Press, 1981).
3. An exception to the oversight of this fact is the inclusion in *New York—Downtown Manhattan: SoHo* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 1976) of a 1976 flyer headlined "STOP DISCOS IN SOHO!," protesting the plans for a fourth disco in SoHo after the Loft, Flamingo, and Frankenstein (see page 25). A more significant exception is Tim Lawrence, *Hold On to Your Dreams: Arthur Russell and the Downtown Music Scene, 1973–1992* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), whose subject, the music director of the Kitchen Center for Video and Music in 1974–75, straddled the experimental music and gay disco scenes.
4. Gordon Matta-Clark, "Work with Abandoned Structures," typewritten statement, circa 1975, in *Gordon Matta-Clark: Works and Collected Writings*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafia, 2006), 141.
5. Rosalyn Deutsche, "Louise Lawler's Rude Museum," in *Twice Untitled and Other Pictures (Looking Back)*, ed. Helen Molesworth (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2006), 130.
6. Louise Lawler, "Prominence Given, Authority Taken," interview by Douglas Crimp, *Grey Room*, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 80. Lawler recorded *Birdcalls* in 1981 with a somewhat altered and updated roster of male artists' names.
7. See *Harry Shunk/Projects: Pier 18* (Nice: Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain, 1992). Though this book does not credit János (Jean) Kender, Harry Shunk and Kender worked collaboratively between 1956 and 1973, and all of their photographs taken during this period had been credited to Shunk-Kender. This was the case when *Projects: Pier 18* was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in 1971. The collaboration dissolved in 1973, with Shunk retaining the photographic archive. See "Harry Shunk and Shunk-Kender Archive," http://www.getty.edu/research/special_collections/notable/shunk_kender.html, accessed May 1, 2016.
8. Vito Acconci and Gregory Volk, *Vito Acconci: Diary of a Body 1969–1973* (Milan: Charta, 2006), 25.
9. Ibid., 258.
10. Ibid., 259.
11. Gordon Matta-Clark, interview for the Internationaal Cultureel Centrum, Antwerp, September 1977, in Moure, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 252–53.
12. Gordon Matta-Clark, in "Gordon Matta-Clark: The Making of Pier 52," interview by Liza Baer, March 11, 1976, in Moure, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 217.
13. Ibid., 220.
14. Joel Shapiro, quoted in Pamela M. Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 130. Lee argues for a combination of phenomenology and the sublime to capture the experience of Matta-Clark's work.
15. Matta-Clark, "Gordon Matta-Clark: The Making of Pier 52," 220.
16. Ibid., 215.
17. Ibid., 218.
18. Gordon Matta-Clark, "My Understanding of Art," typewritten statement, circa 1975, in Moure, *Gordon Matta-Clark*, 204. On the journalistic conflation of the dangers to gay men using the piers with the supposed dangers of gay men's sexuality, see Lee, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 119–20.
19. Many others photographed the piers; none to my knowledge as extensively or beautifully as Alvin Baltrop. Included among those who took photographs of the piers were Peter Hujar and Leonard Fink. The latter's vast trove of photographs of the gay scene are held in the National Archive of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in New York. In addition to photographic documentation, the piers are the setting of a gay porn feature film called *Pier Groups*, made by Arch Brown in 1979.

20. Alvin Baltrop, "Ashes from a Flame: Photographs by Alvin Baltrop," ed. Randal Wilcox, unpublished manuscript.
21. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
22. See Janelle Reiring, "Joan Jonas' 'Delay Delay,'" *TDR: The Drama Review* 16, no. 3 (September 1972): 142–50; and Katie Stone, "Joan Jonas: Beyond the Frame" (master's thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 2003).
23. *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions*, 34.
24. The Art on the Beach events at the Battery Park City landfill extended from 1978 to 1985. For a thorough analysis of the uses of a different version of "public art" in the interests of real-estate development at Battery Park City, see Rosalyn Deutsche, "Uneven Development: Public Art in New York City," in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 49–107.
25. Joan Jonas with Rosalind Krauss (misspelled "Krause"), "Seven Years," *TDR: The Drama Review* 19, no. 1 (March 1975): 13.
26. I wrote, "By presenting real space as an impenetrable illusion in her performances, Jonas has made the experience of performance equivalent not only to film and videotape—the other two mediums she works with—but also to painting. At issue in her work, then, is an ambitious relationship to the history of painting and a reversal of the priorities of most contemporary art." Douglas Crimp, "Joan Jonas's Performance Works," *Studio International* 192, no. 982 (July–August 1976): 10.
27. The warehouse in question is visible in the distance, across the Hudson River, in several of the photographs of Richard Serra's work for *Projects: Pier 18, Shooting a Square through a Trapezoid, Camera Angle Measured*.
28. The building, at 179 West Street, survived until 2003 because a court ruling in favor of the tenant prevented his eviction until the renewal projects for the site had been fully approved by all necessary government agencies. The building also appears in Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #60* (1980). See "Pictures, Before and After," in this book, 259–60.
29. In one shot of the puppetlike figure, it is possible to make out a street sign that says "Greenwich Street."

DISSS-CO (A FRAGMENT)

1. A British graduate student recently e-mailed me to ask how I came to characterize the artists in my 1977 Artists Space exhibition *Pictures* as "postmodernist" in the revised version of the catalogue essay, published in *October* in 1979. Since I hadn't used that term in the original essay, he wondered, what had transpired in the meantime? When had I begun to think about postmodernism? Was it through my association with other *October* critics such as Craig Owens? Did I take the term from architectural discourse, where by 1978 it was used fairly regularly? I couldn't remember. But now, reading my book project dating from 1975 or 1976, I find the word *postmodernism*. See Douglas Crimp, *Pictures: An Exhibition of the Work of Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Philip Smith* (New York: Artists Space, 1977); and Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, no. 8 (Spring 1979): 75–88.
2. Guy Hocquenghem, *Le Désir homosexuel* (Paris: Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1972), translated into English by Daniella Dangoor, preface by Jeffrey Weeks (London: Allison & Busby, 1978); reprinted with an introduction by Michael Moon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993).
3. Guy Hocquenghem, *L'Après mai des faunes: Volutions* (Paris: Grasset, 1974); *Le Gay voyage: guide homosexual des grandes métropoles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1980); *Fin de section* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1975); *Love in Relief*, trans. Michael Whistler (New York: Seahorse Press, 1986). For more on Hocquenghem, see Bill Marshall, *Guy Hocquenghem: Beyond Gay Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).
4. Richie Rivera, who had DJed at the Firehouse, became one of the DJs at Flamingo in 1977, after having worked in the interim at the Sandpiper in Fire Island Pines and at the Anvil in New York.
5. Ian Frazier, "Muscles at the Whitney," *New Yorker*, March 22, 1976, 27.
6. Geng wrote an article about bodybuilding for *Ms. Magazine* in 1975. (Veronica Geng, "Muscle

over Mind," Ms., October 1975, 24–30.)

7. "Almost every YMCA in America has a weight room, and all of the ones I know about (with a few exceptions, like the big Y on Central Park West where the faggots will track you to the shower with their heads down like they were following a spoor) are wonderful places to train." Charles Gaines, *Pumping Iron: The Art and Sport of Bodybuilding* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), 27–28. The homophobia here is typical of the book's text, no doubt as a reaction formation, but here from the book's preface is the stated reason: "Almost since its beginnings here [in the United States], bodybuilding has advertised itself with consummate tackiness, confining itself to the back pages of pulp magazines and, in the national consciousness, to the same shadowy corners occupied by dildos and raincoat exhibitionists. Unflattering myths developed early here. And the composite picture that seems to have emerged from them, of bodybuilders as narcissistic, coordinatively helpless muscleheads with suspect sexual preferences, has done little to promote the sport. Part of what we have tried to do is to demonstrate that this is an inaccurate picture" (8).

8. Tim Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day: A History of American Dance Music Culture, 1970–1979*

(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 424. Lawrence quotes Nathan Fain, writing at the time in the entertainment magazine *After Dark*. Flamingo's choice of *tetas* rather than *pecs* for the name of its annual contest suggests that something more than the chest was being fetishized: Latino men. Andrew Holleran's 1978 novel *Dancer from the Dance* makes this explicit.

9. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 48–49.

10. Evidently others disagreed with my assessment of the effect of the skylights: "Back in the Village, the owners of 12 West discovered that they were having their own problems maintaining the 'cloak of nonthreatening anonymity' that was so important to gay men who were in the club but not quite out of the closet. 'We couldn't stay open too early [*sic!*] because we had light coming through the skylight,' says owner Alan Harris. 'People would also begin to look very gray at eight in the morning.' Consequently the club started to close its doors at five, with [DJ] Tom Savarese winding up an hour later. 'Tom would stop promptly at six o'clock and go into a set of encores that would begin to bring the crowd down. That was when the sound of sleaze started to come into play. People just hung over one another, and then they would put on their sunglasses, stroll out of the club, and go for breakfast or additional acts.'" Lawrence, *Love Saves the Day*, 234.

11. The original song was written in Spanish by Mexican songwriter María Grever in 1934.

12. I recently learned that during his residency at the Institute for Art and Urban Resources at PS1 in 1978, German photographer Thomas Struth also frequented the Empire Rollerdrome.

13. Crimp, *Pictures*, 28.

14. Crimp, "Pictures," 87.

15. See, for example, Howard Singerman, "The Myth of Criticism in the 1980s," *X-tra* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 3–16.

AGON

1. Nancy Goldner, *More Balanchine Variations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 23.
2. Edwin Denby, "Three Sides of 'Agon,'" in Denby, *Dance Writings*, ed. Robert Cornfield and William MacKay (New York: Knopf, 1986), 461.
3. Arthur Mitchell, quoting George Balanchine, in Nancy Reynolds, *Repertory in Review: 40 Years of the New York City Ballet* (New York: Dial Press, 1977), 183.
4. Arthur Mitchell, in Francis Mason, *I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 395.
5. Denby, "Three Sides of 'Agon,'" 462.
6. Robert Garis, *Following Balanchine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 160.
7. Suzanne Farrell, conversation with David Daniel, *Ballet Review* 7, no. 1 (1978–79): 11.
8. Robert Greskovic, "Suzanne Farrell," *Ballet Review* 7, no. 4 (1978–79): 32.
9. Arlene Croce, "Dancing," in *Writing in the Dark, Dancing in the "New Yorker"* (New York: Farrar,

- Straus and Giroux, 2000), 100–101.
10. Diana Adams, conversation with David Daniel, *Ballet Review* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 9.
 11. *Ibid.*, 14.
 12. *Ibid.*, 16.
 13. *Ibid.*, 19.
 14. Robert Gottlieb, *George Balanchine: The Ballet Maker* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 134.
 15. Craig Owens, “Politics of *Coppélia*,” *Christopher Street*, November 1976; reprinted in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 239–42.
 16. Craig Owens, “New Ballet ‘Pretentiously Vulgar,’” *Times-Union* (Albany, New York), July 4, 1979.
 17. Craig Owens, “Tchaikovsky Sneaks into NYC Ballet,” *Times-Union* (Albany, New York), July 7, 1979.
 18. Craig Owens, “5 Balanchine Ballets Are SPAC’s Event of Week,” *Times-Union* (Albany, New York), July 18, 1979.
 19. Craig Owens, “On That Hectic Spa Ballet Season,” *Times-Union* (Albany, New York), July 22, 1979.
 20. Robert Garis reports a similar brush-off from Farrell: “My excitement about the performance [of *Don Quixote*] led me to go up and say something like, ‘You were really wonderful this afternoon,’ to which she had literally nothing to say, nor did she show the least hint of ‘manner’ or style or even courtesy in acknowledging my compliment: she looked at me blankly, even a bit hostilely, as if I had said something a little offensive, then turned away.” Garis, *Following Balanchine*, 195.
 21. Craig Owens, “Einstein on the Beach: The Primacy of Metaphor,” *October*, no. 4 (Autumn 1977): 21–32; Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” *October*, no. 5 (Summer 1978): 73–88; Craig Owens, “Detachment from the *parergon*,” *October*, no. 9 (Summer 1979): 42–49; Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” *October*, no. 10 (Fall 1979): 121–30; Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism,” *October*, no. 12 (Spring 1980): 67–86; Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2,” *October*, no. 13 (Summer 1980): 58–80.
 22. Jacques Deleuze, quoted in Craig Owens, “Detachment from the *parergon*,” 46.
 23. Craig Owens, “From Work to Frame, or, Is There Life After the ‘Death of the Author?’” in *Beyond Recognition*, 122–39.
 24. Craig Owens, “The Pro-Scenic Event,” *Art in America* 69, no. 10 (December 1981): 133.
 25. Trisha Brown, in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961–2001* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 2002), 128. Brown’s engagement with the proscenium persisted: *Foray Forêt* (1990) employs a marching band playing music by John Philip Sousa in and around the theater but never onstage. In *For M. G.: The Movie* (1991), a single performer faces upstage for the entirety of the dance; and, tellingly, Brown shot a video of the piece entirely from the wings titled *Shot Backstage*. See Douglas Crimp, “You Can Still See Her: The Art of Trisha Brown,” *Artforum* 49, no. 5 (January 2011): 154–59, 242.
 26. Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 57–82.
 27. Rosalind Krauss, “Tracing Nadar,” *October*, no. 5 (Summer 1978): 29–47; Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” *October*, no. 5 (Summer 1978): 73–88; Douglas Crimp, “Positive/Negative: A Note on Degas’s Photographs,” *October*, no. 5 (Summer 1978): 89–100.
 28. Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 85–86.
 29. Crimp, “Positive/Negative,” 100.
 30. In his book on Marius Petipa’s *Sleeping Beauty*, Tim Scholl uses the term *balletomane* for the dance writers that “mostly belonged to the cadre of inveterate dance fans. . . . Conservatism and connoisseurship characterize their writing on the ballet, and their interest in the ballet was proprietary: they saw themselves as defenders of a tradition they ‘owned.’” Scholl contrasts these *balletomanes* with “a more progressive set of critics” who were considered outsiders. “Where the *balletomane*-insiders expressed a proprietary interest in an art form they perceived as national and superior, these outsiders (mostly music critics) expressed their interest in the development of an art

- form they viewed within a much larger context: contemporary performing arts traditions in Russia and in Western Europe.” Tim Scholl, “*Sleeping Beauty*,” *a Legend in Progress* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 2.
31. Arnold Haskell, *Balletomania Then and Now* (New York: Knopf, 1977), xii.
 32. Ibid., 3.
 33. Ibid., 11.
 34. Akim Volynsky, *Ballet’s Magic Kingdom: Selected Writings on Dance in Russia, 1911–1925*, ed. and trans. Stanley J. Rabinowitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 144.
 35. Alastair Macaulay, “Joy of Being Groupies in Lofty Halls of Ballet,” *New York Times*, May 13, 2010.
 36. George Balanchine, in Solomon Volkov, *Balanchine’s Tchaikovsky: Conversations with Balanchine on His Life, Ballet and Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), 105.
 37. The quote derives from an article Balanchine wrote in *Life* magazine in 1965, in which he said, “The ballet is a purely female thing; it is a woman, a garden of beautiful flowers, and man is the gardener.” George Balanchine, “To Get into the Act,” *Life*, June 11, 1965, 97.
 38. George Balanchine, quoted in Bernard Taper, *Balanchine: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 321.
 39. Arlene Croce, “New Boy in Town,” in *Writing in the Dark*, 85.
 40. Haskell, *Balletomania*, 27.
 41. John Martin, “City Ballet Group Opens Its Season,” *New York Times*, June 6, 1951.
 42. Francisco Moncion had the longest tenure to date of any dancer with New York City Ballet, dancing for Balanchine from the 1940s until Balanchine’s death in 1983 and staying on the company’s roster until 1985. Moncion told Francis Mason the story of how Balanchine took the role of Death in *La Valse* away from him when Karin von Aroldingen debuted as the woman in white, only later realizing that he needed Moncion in the role after all. Moncion’s interview ends with the words: “The man was a genius and he had feet of clay. No one’s perfect.” Francisco Moncion, quoted in Francis Mason, *I Remember Balanchine* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 203.
 43. Francisco Moncion, quoted in Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, 119.
 44. Edwin Denby, quoted in *ibid.*
 45. Goldner, *More Balanchine Variations*, 35.
 46. Maurice Ravel, notes on *La Valse*, quoted in *Ravel: His Life and Times* (New York: Omnibus Press, 1983), 86.
 47. Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, 182.
 48. Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
 49. Mark Franko, review of *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*, by Jennifer Homans, *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 200.
 50. Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), 540.
 51. Ibid., 541.
 52. Ibid., 545.
 53. Ibid., 549.
 54. Ibid., 546.
 55. Ibid., 549–50.
 56. Franko, review of *Apollo’s Angels*, 202.
 57. Ibid., 198.
 58. Tim Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 67.
 59. Ibid., 79.
 60. Ibid., 101.
 61. Arlene Croce, “Dancing: *Enigma Variations*,” *New Yorker*, May 21, 1979, 131.
 62. Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine*, 125.
 63. Jacques Derrida, “The Parergon,” trans. Craig Owens, *October*, no. 9 (Summer 1979): 6. Derrida riffs throughout “The Parergon” on Kant’s intention that the *Critique of Judgment* bridge

- the gulf between the first two Critiques, those of theoretical and practical reason.
64. Lynn Garafola, "Russian Ballet in the Age of Petipa," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, ed. Marion Kant (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 158.
 65. Jill Johnston, untitled essay in "Essays, Stories and Remarks about Merce Cunningham," *Dance Perspectives*, no. 34 (Summer 1968): 244–45.
 66. Derrida, "The Parergon," 30.
 67. Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine*, 116.
 68. Ibid.
 69. Reynolds, *Repertory in Review*, 36.

PICTURES, BEFORE AND AFTER

1. In addition to LAICA, *Pictures* traveled to the Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio, and the Fine Arts Gallery at the University of Colorado, Boulder.
2. "In 1976 I had an awful time and had to regroup; it was a kind of midlife crisis [sic!]. It was part of growing up, is what it was. I had rented a place downtown on Nassau Street; it was only six hundred square feet but was almost all windows. It was a beautiful place. I liked being there; I signed the first legal document of my life. I had always lived hand-to-mouth so it was a big step for me to make that kind of commitment. I couldn't take the pressure of growing up, and Douglas Crimp took over the lease from me." Matt Mullican, in *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, ed. Richard Hertz (Ojai, CA: Mineola Press, 2003), 159.
3. "Bennett Building, 139 Fulton Street (aka 135–139 Fulton Street, 93–99 Nassau Street, 28–34 Ann Street), Manhattan. Built 1872–73, Arthur D. Gilman, architect; addition 1890–92 and 1894, James M. Farnsworth, architect," Landmarks Preservation Commission, New York, November 21, 1995, http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org/db/bb_files/95-bennettbuilding.pdf, accessed May 31, 2016.
4. In 1982, the New York State Legislature passed Article 7-C of the Multiple Dwelling Law (commonly known as the Loft Law), which required landlords to recognize their residential tenants and bring their residences up to code in order to obtain a certificate of occupancy.
5. Robert Longo, in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space: 25 Years*, ed. Claudia Gould and Valerie Smith (New York: Artists Space, 1998), 81.
6. Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October*, no. 51 (Winter 1989): 4–5.
7. Crimp, *Pictures*, 20.
8. Ibid., 24.
9. Ibid., 5.
10. Philip Smith, quoting Lew Smith, in *Walking through Walls: A Memoir* (New York: Atria Books, 2008), 278.
11. Ibid., 318.
12. Philip Smith, "Walking through Walls," video produced by TurnHere for Simon & Schuster, 4:03, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJ4emXcysA>, accessed May 23, 2016.
13. Bill Cunningham, "Charles James: The Man," in *The Genius of Charles James*, 103–104.
14. Crimp, "Pictures," 75.
15. Ibid., 80–83. Sherman's *Untitled Film Still #6* illustrates an article by Valentin Tatransky in *Arts* from January 1979 and is captioned "Cindy Sherman, Film Still, 1978," so clearly Sherman was using that rubric at the time.
16. Untitled Film Stills is the conventional title used for Sherman's series of seventy works made between 1977 and 1980. Her gallery, Metro Pictures, designated each photograph with a number, which more or less follows a chronological order. There is a break in the sequence, when the numbers jump from 69 to 81. There is also a 27b. See the index in *Cindy Sherman: The Complete Untitled Film Stills* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003).
17. Cindy Sherman, "The Making of Untitled," in *ibid.*, 14.
18. "When I needed more outdoor shots I made notes whenever I was going around town, of

- certain archways, stairs, or architectural details that would be good backgrounds.” *Ibid.*, 12.
19. I wrote there about the use of architecture in *Untitled Film Still #21*: “Can we locate the solicitation to read the picture as if it were a fiction in a certain spatial dislocation—the jarring juxtaposition of close-up face with distant buildings—suggesting the cinematic artifice of rear-screen projection?” Crimp, “Pictures,” 80.
20. Sherman, “The Making of Untitled,” 13.
21. Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *ALA Guide to New York City*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1988), 51.
22. “The Lamps of Pre-Beca,” *Forgotten New York*, <http://forgotten-ny.com/2000/09/the-lamps-of-pre-beca>, accessed May 18, 2016.
23. Among those questioning Smith’s exclusion were Holland Cotter, “Framing the Message of a Generation,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2009; Barry Schwabsky, “A Million Little Pictures: The Pictures Generation Revisited,” *Nation*, June 1, 2009; and Michael Lobel, “Outside the Frame,” *Artforum* 48, no. 1 (September 2009): 252–56. Philip Smith wrote a letter to the editor of *Art in America* contesting Douglas Eklund’s assertion that he had reviewed Smith’s work and found it “not strong enough to be included,” claiming that Eklund never contacted Smith or any of his representatives. Philip Smith, “Setting the Record Straight,” letter to the editor, *Art in America* online, June 26, 2009; <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/setting-the-record-straight-philip-smith-douglas-eklund-pictures-generation/>.
24. Thomas Lawson, quoted in James Kalm (nom de plume of Loren Munk), “Brooklyn Dispatches: The Lies We Tell Children,” http://www.loremunk.com/writing/the_lies_we_tell.html, accessed May 18, 2016.
25. Kalm, in *ibid.*
26. Jack Goldstein, quoted in Hertz, *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia*, 89–90.
27. Crimp, *Pictures*, 5.
28. Douglas Crimp, *Recent Painting* (New York: Art Information Distribution, 1975), 1–2.
29. Michael Harvey, *Artists’ Films* (New York: Art Information Distribution, 1975), 18.
30. Crimp, “Pictures,” 78.
31. The film laboratory that Galerie Buchholz uses for the films counts forty-three seconds. My own count excludes leader. Goldstein claims in his interview with Morgan Fisher that the film is sixteen seconds long; see Morgan Fisher, “Talking with Jack Goldstein,” *Journal—The Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art*, no. 14 (April–May 1977): 43.
32. Crimp, “Pictures,” 78–79.
33. David E. James, “Artists as Filmmakers in Los Angeles,” *October*, no. 112 (Spring 2005): 125.
34. Taglioni did not go up on full pointe as dancers later routinely would. She danced on a high half-pointe. For a history of the pointe shoe, see Marion Kant, “The Soul of the Shoe,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, 184–97.
35. Balanchine, “To Get into the Act,” 97. See “Agon,” note 37, in this book.
36. Crimp, “Pictures,” 80.
37. Lawler, in “Prominence Given, Authority Taken,” 72.
38. Janelle Reiring, _____, *Louise Lawler, Adrian Piper and Cindy Sherman are participating in an exhibition organized by Janelle Reiring at Artists Space, September 23 to October 28, 1978* (New York: Artists Space, 1978), np.
39. Gerrit Henry, “Pictures,” *Art News* 77, no. 1 (January 1978): 143.
40. Thomas Lawson, “‘Pictures’ at Artists Space,” *Art in America* 66, no. 1 (January–February 1978): 118.
41. Peter Frank, “Pictures and Meaning,” *Artweek*, April 29, 1978, 4.
42. Suzanne Muchnic, “Conceptualism Spans the Gulf,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1978.
43. David Rimanelli, “Signs of the Time,” *Artforum* 40, no. 2 (October 2001): 131. The anthology’s twenty-five texts included such classics as Jorge Luis Borges’s “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” Roland Barthes’s “From Work to Text,” Walter Benjamin’s “The Author as Producer,” and Michel Foucault’s “The Subject and Power,” along with essays by Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey, and *October* regulars Krauss, Owens, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh.

44. *So machen wir es/That's the Way We Do It: Techniques and Aesthetic of Appropriation: From Ei Arakawa to Andy Warhol*, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Bregenz: Kunsthaus, 2011).
45. Howard Singerman, "In the Text," in *A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in association with the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1989), 155–66; see also Singerman's "Pictures and Positions in the 1980s," in *A Companion to Contemporary Art since 1945*, ed. Amelia Jones (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 83–106; "The Myth of Criticism in the 1980s" (see note 15 in "Diss-co [A Fragment]," in this volume); and *Art History: After Sherrie Levine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
46. Jenelle Porter, "Making Copies," *The Exhibitionist*, no. 2 (June 2010): 26.
47. Scott Rothkopf, "Hit or Myth," *Artforum* 40, no. 2 (October 2001): 133.
48. Ibid.
49. Peter Schjeldahl, "Alien Emotions," *New Yorker*, May 4, 2009, 74.
50. Richard Prince and Steve Lafreniere, "80s Then: Richard Prince Talks to Steve Lafreniere," *Artforum* 41, no. 7 (March 2003): 70.
51. Douglas Crimp, letter to the editor, *Artforum* 41, no. 10 (Summer 2003): 18. Of course, even a letter "setting the record straight" doesn't necessarily do the job. In an article about Prince in the *New Yorker*, Peter Schjeldahl wrote, "[Prince] refused an invitation to appear in 'Pictures,' he has said, because he was put off by what he deemed to be Crimp's dogmatism. (Crimp has denied inviting Prince.)" Peter Schjeldahl, "The Joker," *New Yorker*, October 15, 2007, 90. Five years went by, and then for some reason Prince decided to respond to my correction of the record. In a long letter, he returned to his original story and claimed his fib was just one more example of his being an incorrigible bad boy: "Paint it white. I'm a liar. I make things up and I can't be trusted. It's not my fault. I've always been a thief and started stealing when I was six years old. . . . I lied when I said I was invited by Doug Crimp to be in his Pictures show. I was fooling around. I made it up. My judgment frosted. The truth of the matter didn't apply. I tried to get away with it and paint it white. I added on to the story. You could say I was writing under a pseudonym. I was never there to begin with. I had never met him, wasn't aware of the show, and didn't know any of the artists in the show. I had never been to Artists Space." Richard Prince, letter to the editor, *Artforum* 46, no. 10 (Summer 2008): 38–40.
52. Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October*, no. 15 (Winter 1980): 100.
53. Nancy Spector, *Richard Prince: Spiritual America* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2007), 24.
54. Ibid.
55. David Salle, in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 91.
56. Douglas Crimp, in *5000 Artists Return to Artists Space*, 89.
57. "Crimp, like most critics—like me most of the time—links the art he sees and the community he forges, or is part of, to history, to the machinery or direction of history, and to its rhetorical figures. As [Sande] Cohen puts it, 'the language on art' works 'to historicize or make contemporary art historically significant.' That is how Crimp's appeal to the revolutionary tradition of modernism in the first of his 'Pictures' essays and to the breach of postmodernism in the second essay function: they work to make these products 'historical' in the large sense, to make them meaningful and necessary in relation to a history already in train, rather than arbitrary or meaningless." Singerman, "The Myth of Criticism in the 1980s," 9.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2005, curator Susan Cross invited me to give a lecture in conjunction with *The Eye of the Storm: Works in situ by Daniel Buren* at the Guggenheim Museum; I presented “Way Out on the Nut,” liberally illustrated with slides. The queer structure of the lecture, its apparently incompatible subjects, and its mixture of anecdote and criticism set me on the course that led to *Before Pictures*. From the beginning, I dreamed of working with a book designer attuned to the material, someone who would help me make a book as well illustrated as that lecture, with color images throughout, but I assumed it would be impossible in today’s publishing climate.

Five years later, after having written several more chapters, I approached designer Joseph Logan, who immediately expressed enthusiasm. When I asked, But how?, he recommended that I talk to Karen Kelly and Barbara Schroeder. Karen and Barbara were just then starting Dancing Foxes Press, and they were just as enthusiastic about *Before Pictures* as Joseph was. When I repeated, But how?, they said, “We’ll make it happen.” They did (with some fund-raising help from Bridget Donahue, Jacob King, and a great many artist friends who donated valuable artworks). It is impossible to express how happy Karen, Barbara, and Joseph, assisted by Rachel Hudson, have made me. They have been a joy to work with every step of the way. They are consummate professionals. They have made the book I wanted.

Five years after approaching Joseph, in part because he was so highly recommended by Zoe Leonard after designing her book *You See I Am Here After All*, I asked Zoe to take pictures of the five New York City buildings I’ve lived in; she readily agreed. Her photographs—on the cover and dividing the book’s sections—are way more than I asked for: they are works of art.

When I e-mailed Susan Bielstein, executive editor at the University of Chicago Press, to ask if Chicago would be interested in copublishing the book, she didn’t hesitate. “Send me some chapters,” she said, and proceeded within a few days to read them with her reliable editorial pencil in hand. She markedly improved the manuscript during the ensuing year.

Various friends read one or another chapter or the entire manuscript and provided valuable suggestions and support; thank you to Karen Beckman, Janet Berlo, Leo Bersani, Gregg Bordowitz, Emily Coates, Lynne Cooke,

Rosalyn Deutsche, Bettina Funcke, Rachel Haidu, Damien Jack, Thomas Lax, Jocelyn Miller, Ann Reynolds, Juan Antonio Suárez, and Janet Wolff.

Chapters in addition to the first resulted from invitations—from Lynne Cooke for a Dia Art Foundation colloquium on Agnes Martin; from Jonathan Flatley to contribute to a special issue on disco of *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*; from Tavia Nyong’o to give the keynote address for a conference honoring Henry Abelove’s teaching career; from Gavin Delahunt to participate in a lecture series on Raymond Williams’s *Keywords* at University College London and Tate Liverpool; from Janet Wolff, who arranged for me to lecture at Urbis: The City Centre in Manchester, England; and from Diedrich Diederichsen, Juliane Rebentisch, and Marc Siegel, who organized a symposium for my seventieth birthday at the Arsenal Institut für Film und Videokunst in Berlin.

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Finally, a sad note: “my first boyfriend,” Christian Belaygue, died unexpectedly while traveling alone in the Canary Islands, just after I’d finished writing about the year we lived together, in “*Art News* Parties.” His wife, Emmanuelle Toulet, kindly returned my letters to him, which helped me reconstruct some of the stories I include here.

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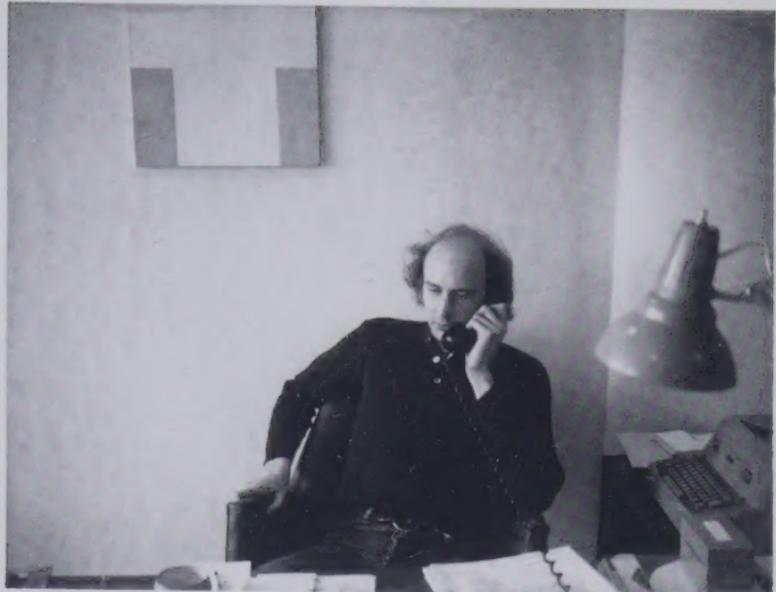
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Douglas Crimp is an art critic and the Fanny Knapp Allen Professor of Art History at the University of Rochester. He is the author or editor of numerous books, including *Pictures*, *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions 1968–1982*, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, *On the Museum's Ruins*, and “Our Kind of Movie”: *The Films of Andy Warhol*.

Above: Douglas Crimp, c. 1971

Cover: Zoe Leonard, *Downtown (for Douglas)*, 2016

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