

# OCTOBER

# 140

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Julia Bryan-Wilson

André Lepecki

Claire Bishop

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Anthony E. Grudin

*Trisha Brown's Notebooks*

*Choreography as Visual Art*

*Trisha Brown: Portfolio*

*Practicing Trio A*

*Moving as Thing: Choreographic  
Critiques of the Object*

*Delegated Performance:  
Outsourcing Authenticity*

*Objects in the Cluttered Field:  
Oldenburg's Proposed Monuments*

*"Except Like a Tracing":  
Defectiveness, Accuracy, and Class in  
Early Warhol*

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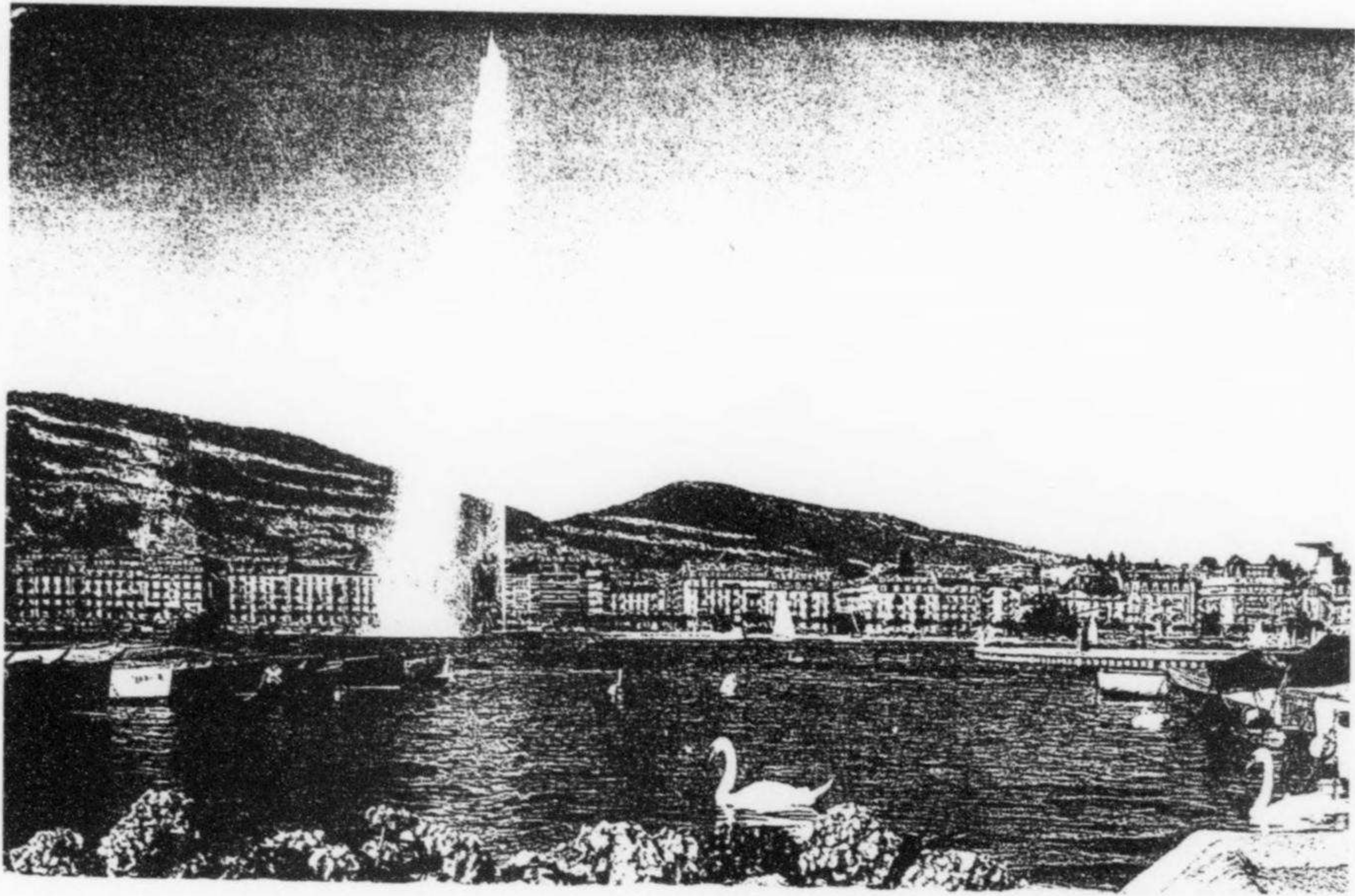
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## Trisha Brown's Notebooks

SUSAN ROSENBERG

In the years 1965 to 1976, Trisha Brown found herself investigating various ways in which the body could be said to *think*. This selection of documents from her private archives shows Brown doing so, working through strategies of accumulation and de-accumulation, seriality, language, and numbers in dialogue with her contemporaries in visual art.



GENEVE  
113 - La Rade et le Jet d'Eau (120 m.)

IRIS

PARIS 28  
20 IV 65 18H  
DES ECOLES (58)

FRANCAISE  
\* 075  
POSTES 115

This is a dance!  
(if I say it is)

Hommage to Rauschenberg's  
Portrait of Love, Snake

Trisha Brown

39 West 71<sup>st</sup> Street  
New York 23,  
N.Y.

PAR AVION

U.S.A.

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓  
reproduction interdite

(choreography follows; photography)

EDITIONS  
JAEGER  
GENEVE

Earle Brown. Dance Score for Trisha Brown. 1965.  
All images courtesy of the Trisha Brown Archive.

"NON" a Dance/Vision for Trish and Tulip

Walter De Maria  
May 1965

Walter De Maria. Dance Score for Trisha Brown:  
"Non": A Dance Vision for Trisha and Tulip. 1965.

*In 1965, shortly after the birth of her son, Brown, unable to dance, solicited scores from her friends. Among the responses were a postcard from Earle Brown and a typed text from Walter De Maria. Brown was delighted, declaring both card and text to be self-sufficient dances. In the days and years that followed, she came to regard these unperformed scores as an inspiration for her use of texts to generate choreographic ideas, particularly for her important choreography-as-recorded and -spoken-word score Skymap (1969). Another echo of one of the works can be found in her choice of the deliberately mysterious title Son of Gone Fishin' (1980), for which she consciously drew upon the proclaimed "purpose" of De Maria's score—"the spreading of the vision through the story telling of the people who saw it." In the case of her work, Brown explained to journalists, the title was designed to make an impression on audiences that would encounter it in reviews without seeing its performance.*

The Audience: The people on the streets who happen to see you.  
The piece is to take place completely unannounced and unadvertised. No friends nearby in any way. No persons shall film the dance.

Time Span: One half hour to one hour.

The ACTION: The action.

Trish happily, quietly smiling, gay, proudly, briskly, grandly, naturally, walks Tulip the Afgan through the town.

Through many streets without repeating her path.

-----  
purpose: To bring a fantastic vision into the lives of people who are going about their business.

To create a situation which will draw forth the occasion of the spreading of the vision through the story telling of the people who saw it.

If 100 persons see the dance, each may tell 10 others; hence 1,000 may share the image.  
Dinner tables.

The floating, flowered, lady, hat, dog.

PLACE: Near the center of any small town or small city, excluding university or resort communities, where it shall never happen.  
In large cities, the piece may be performed in areas away from the center.

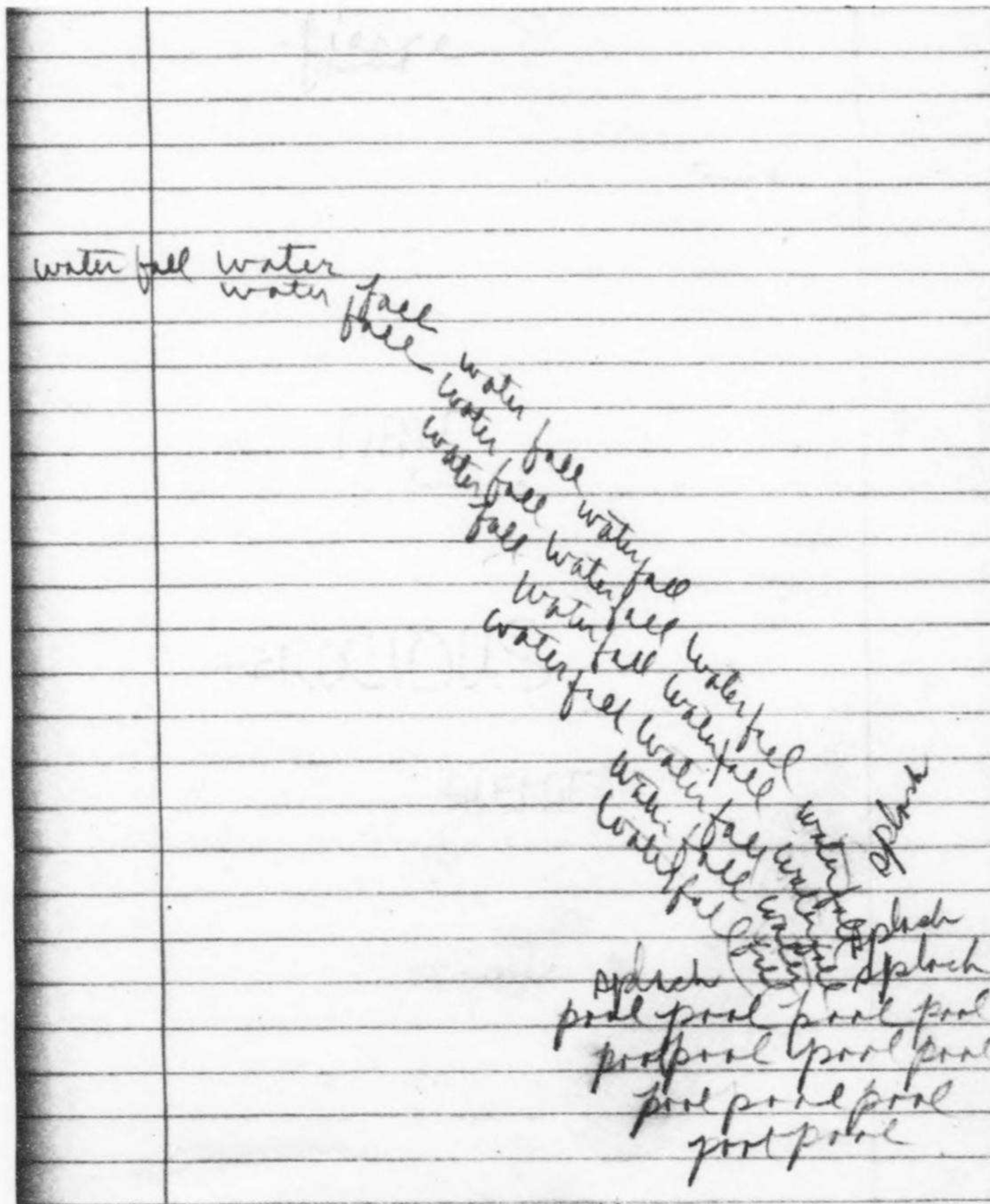
TIME: Any weekday during daylight in comfortable weather...Spring or Fall.

COSTUME: The dress and the hat.

The Hat: Trish shall wear a large "Victorian" hat. A hat with much material, lace, net, feathers or ribbons. So large as to make a parasol unnecessary.

The Dress: Should be florid, elaborate and expensive. It need not be a "costume". A calico dress would do, though it could be more elaborate. However, the dress should not outshine the hat.

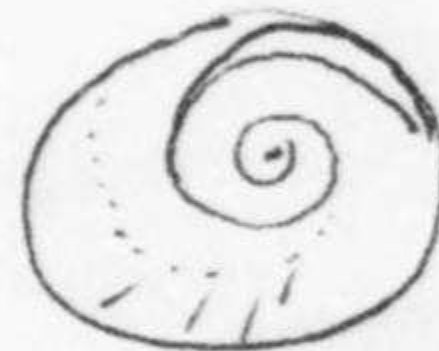
The total costume should not appear theatrical, just naturally grand.



Trisha Brown. Notebook Page. 1972.

Visually, Brown's drawings of the early 1970s resonate with the work of contemporaries outside of dance, in part because she was constantly turning texts into images. This notebook page from 1972, for example, seems to be in dialogue with Robert Smithson's *A Heap of Language* (1966). In Brown's drawing, however, the page is treated as an analog for the body's ability to think in language as a way of moving in space. Her visualization of motion records her consistent fascination with gravity (the increments of "falling"), and registers nature's motions, which she likewise explored in her body itself through dramatic incidents ("splashing") or subtle humming below the surface ("pooling"). Puns and wordplay pervade Brown's notebooks of the period, appearing on many hand-drawn and written representations devised to advertise her programs.

Trisha . . . really I find myself thinking so much about your dance . . . As an approach to Time and to accumulation and to return which I find liberating and guiding . . . My visual memory of it is something that I have, and is something that I keep close to something else that I have . . . a shell my friend gave me on my birthday saying that one day I should remember its origin . . . IT's very old . . . make hundreds of years . . . almost fossil-like . . . I'll draw for you it's two sides .



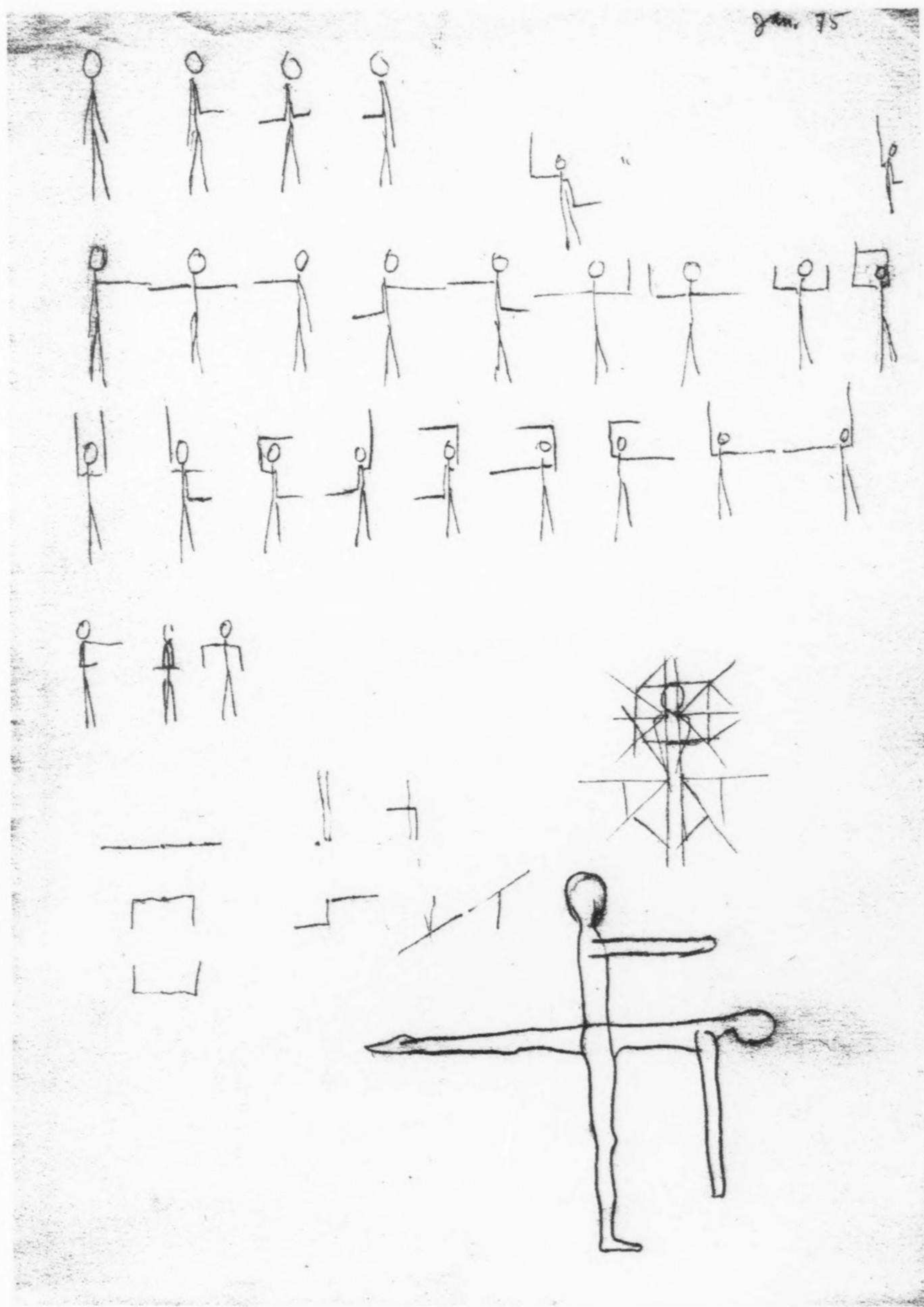
It's quite flat. Like a meditation .  
I used to stretch both hands to the future .  
Now I've been stretching one hand to the future and one to the past, and my house seems to be building up a lot stronger .  
I think of you, friend. Simone

Simone Forti. Letter to Trisha Brown. 1972.

Many of the artifacts in the Brown archive relate to Brown's signature work *Accumulation* (1971), an important milestone on the way to some of her best-known later choreographies. In 1972, choreographer-dancer Simone Forti sent a letter to Trisha Brown after witnessing Brown's performance of a version of the piece at Fabio Sargentini's *Galerie L'Attico* in Rome. In the letter, Forti remarks on a practice that at the time was growing in importance in Brown's work, the cultivation of "origins." In *Accumulation*, this takes the form of the cyclical, repetitive re-origination of gesture in an additive sequence of 1, 1-2, 1-2-3. Brown's performance at *L'Attico* was longer than usual, a fact that appears to have heightened Forti's awareness of *Accumulation*'s "cycles returning and returning enforcing the existing channels," that is to say, of the depth of Brown's writing or rewriting of the body's natural pathways. "Bend," "stretch," "rotate"—this is *Accumulation*'s vocabulary.

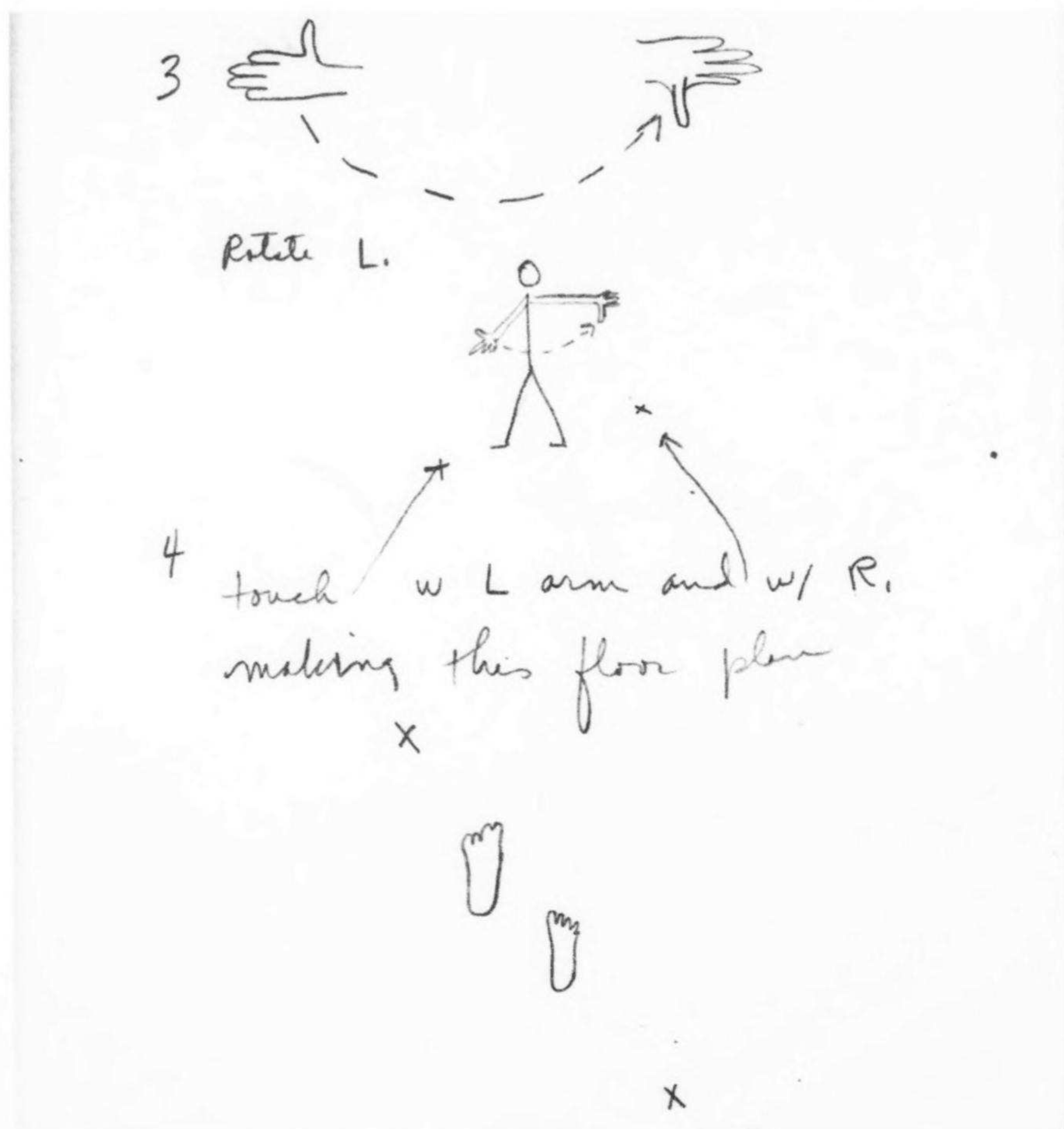
I should tell you more about my image of your dance. I see it very much as a forming crystal. The cycles returning and returning, enforcing the existing channels, and adding at any spot in the cycle. It strikes me as a co-ordination of yin force and yang force which is very new to me and which seems like a very good way to build.

Gasp! I don't have your address! Well, write to me.



Brown. Untitled. 1975.

In this drawing, Brown traces out some of *Accumulation*'s conceptual and physical conclusions, mapping possibilities for the body's geometric relationship to an implied cube's angles. This conceit led to *Locus* (1975). Here, the two large overlapping figures (one standing vertical, the other bent at the waist, parallel to the ground) are rendered with Rudolf Laban's round "kinesphere"—the body's immediate spatial surround or reach—in mind. The diagram of vortices extending from the body's angles into space represents Brown's adaptation of Oskar Schlemmer's format for visualizing this relationship. That *Locus* is informed by Brown's interest in proportion is confirmed by inscriptions on the original sketchbook cover for its finished large-scale independent scores, her best-known and most-exhibited drawings. On it she wrote the authors' names and the title of the first book to accurately survey—and measure—ancient Greek architecture, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762–1816).



Brown. Notebook page. 1973.

This particularly enigmatic drawing, belonging to the *Accumulation* series, is singular in notating several gestural components of that piece's choreography, recording its first and last hand movements: the wrist's primary rotations in space (*Accumulation's* originating move), as well as the final, sign-like physical indication for the performers to stop. The schematic floor plan indicates this work's minimal movement through space: the choreography instead makes its circuit through the body as it signs instructions back to itself. Though Brown never made a complete score showing the relationship of *Accumulation's* gestures to its choreography, she made the hand and wrist movements from the piece a motif much later, in finished drawings from the 1980s and '90s rendered in a sensitive linear style quite different from this cartoony illustration.

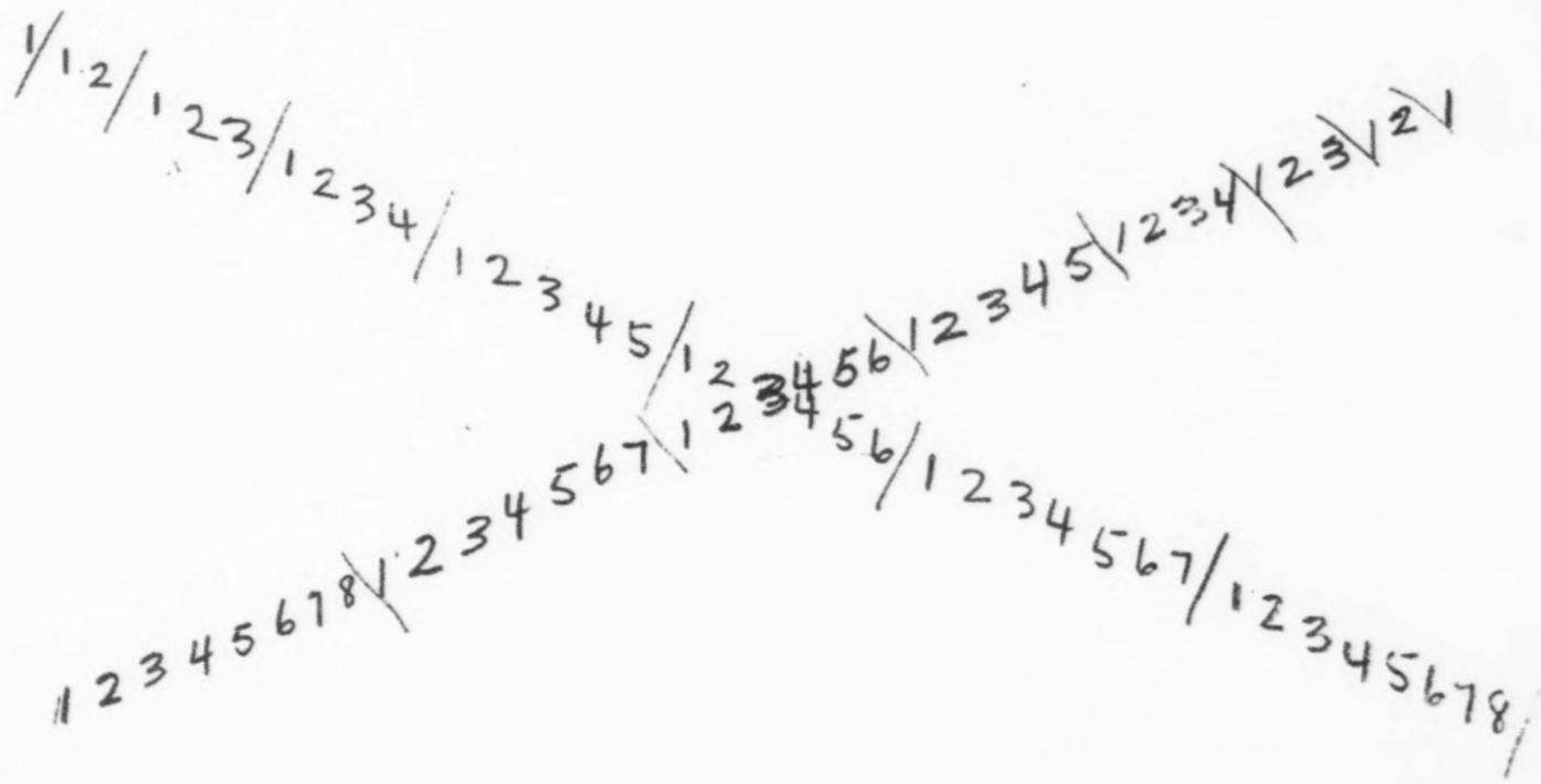
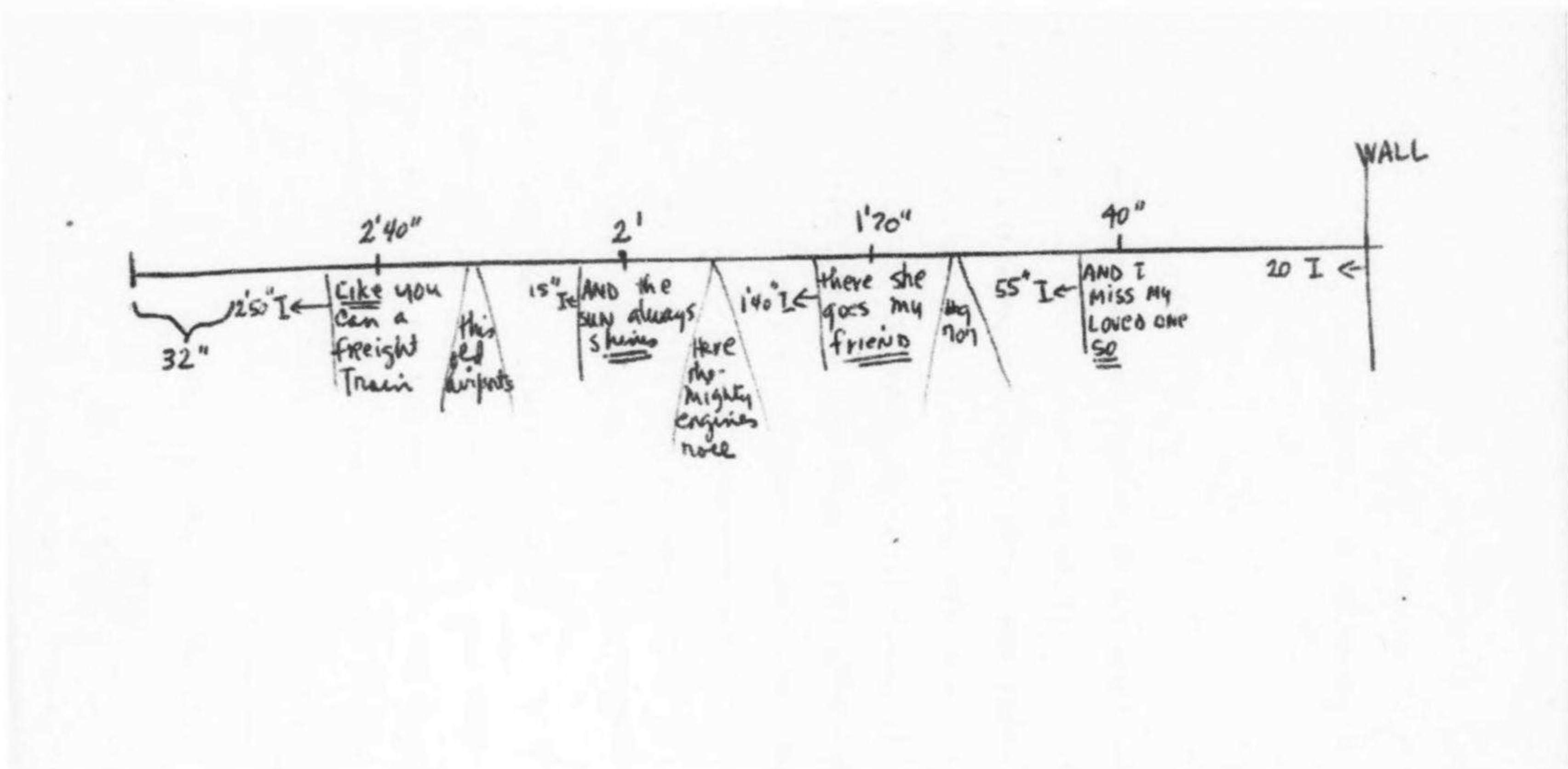


Figure 8  
Jan 2.74

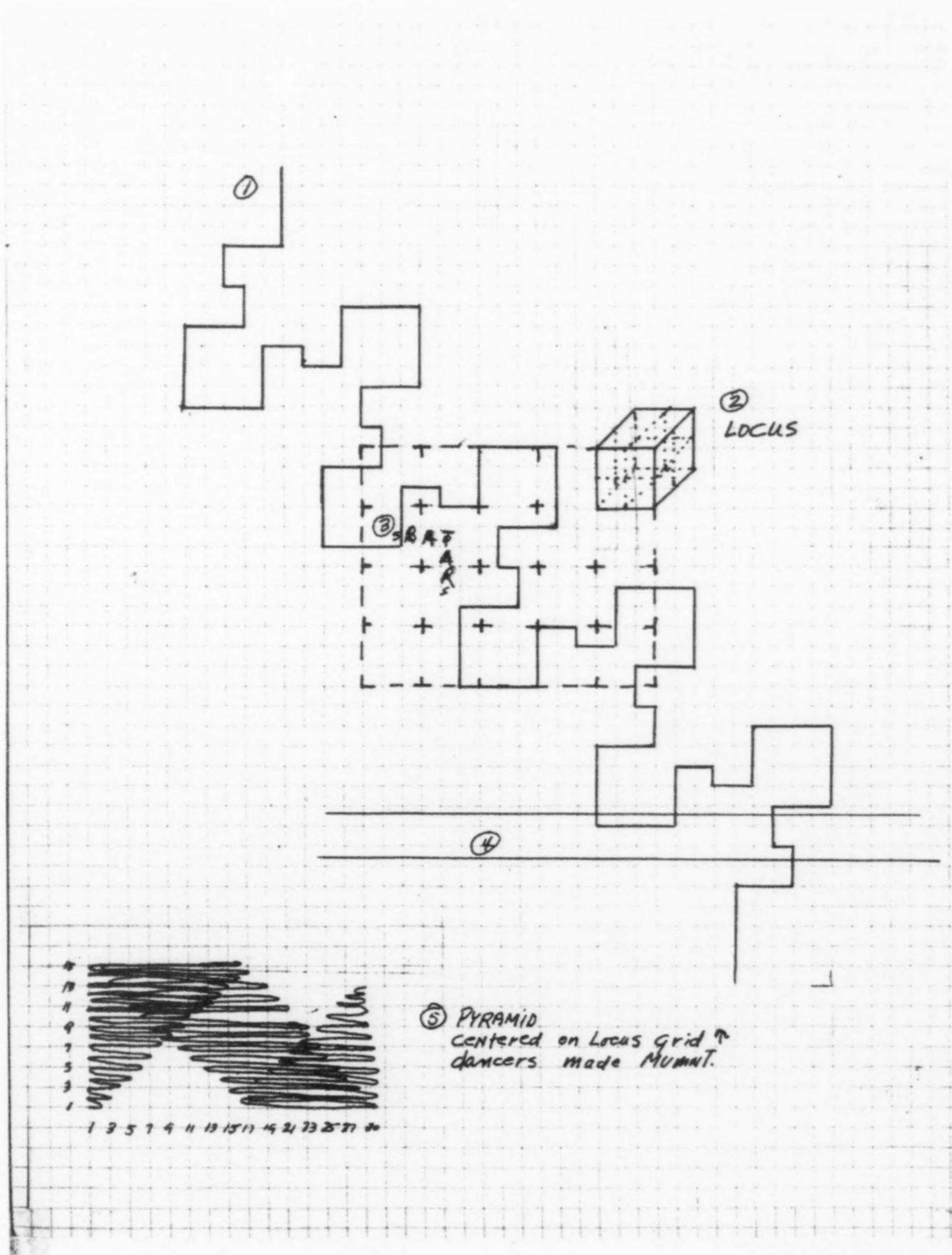
Brown. Notebook page. 1974.

*In some sketches, the diabolical complexity of Brown's work—and her ongoing application of Cagean time structures to generate choreography and drawing—can be seen with particular vividness. For example, her musico-choreographic score for Figure 8 (1974), which Brown envisioned as a "time crossing." Rendered in the period's visual lingua franca, the drawing records the counts (one accumulating and ascending, the other diminishing and descending) that Brown devised for dancers to perform on two sides of the body. The "crossing," pictured in the diagram as a diagonal, occurs in performance in the form of the center-crossing of each dancer's body. The movements, pictured in the document as numbered counts, are accumulated with the right arm, and deaccumulated with the left in simple gestures: rounded arms extend to the sides of the body and rise, arcing towards the center of the head, touched by the fingers. It is from here that, as in *Accumulation*, gesture originates. The elegance of this visual representation, and of the performance, is in contrast to the choreography's severe kinesthetic and cognitive challenges.*



Brown. Notebook page. 1976.

The musical-architectural device that underlies much of Brown's choreography can be seen in this drawing for *Spanish Dance* (1973) made in 1976. In it she visualizes the inner workings of one of her best-known and most frequently performed works. Contrasting with an earlier stick-figure drawing of the score, this document shows the dancers' initial, fixed positions in space, correlated with the time codes for its musical accompaniment (above) and the lyrics—Bob Dylan's 1970 recording of Gordon Lightfoot's "Early Morning Rain" (1966)—below. An arrow at the right wall indicates the choreography's travel in space as the first dancer (40"), hips swaying and arms slowly rising in front of the face, flamenco-style, bumps into—and picks up—the next still dancer ("there she goes my friend"). The reverberating motions of each body eventually carry the entire mobile cluster to the left wall of the proscenium arch (or gallery), so that the dancers pile up on one another and the work stops. The mapping of duration in relation to architecture—originating in *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970)—assumes enhanced complexity since movement and space must be correlated with a second determining time structure: recorded music.



Brown. Untitled (Pyramid Centered on Locus Grid). 1975.

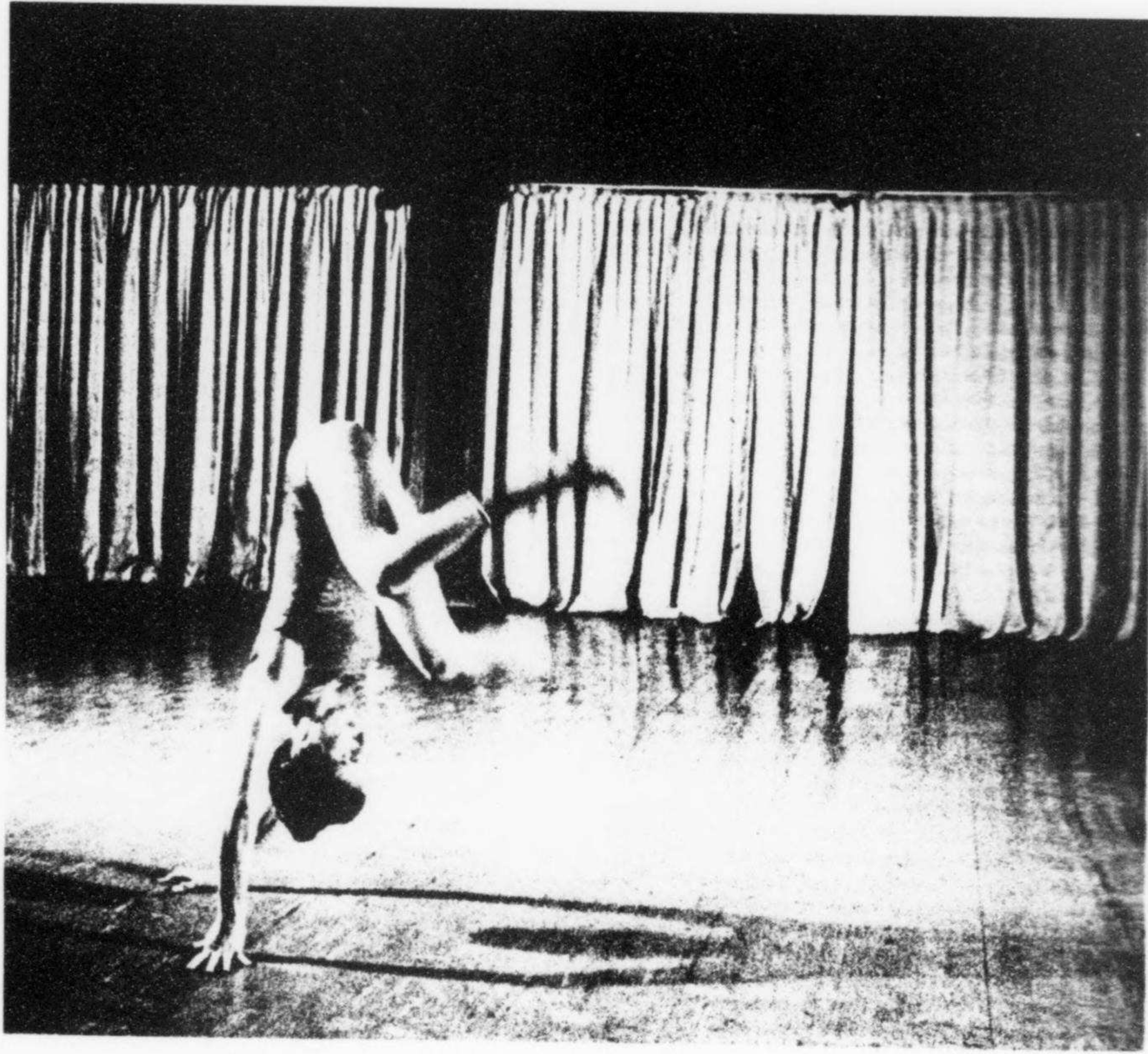
Brown's final accumulating-deaccumulating choreography is represented among the documents in a sketch for Pyramid (1975). An accumulation of "thirty dance actions," its successive repetitions erase the choreography: as performers reach the middle point, they return to drop the first gesture, rewind and dance up to move sixteen, dropping the second gesture, continuing until nothing remains. The document represents Pyramid as being centered on "the Locus grid," which may reflect an unrealized idea on Brown's part to insert one dance into another, as she did with her subsequent Line Up (1976), the components of which are additively complicated. The drawing's multiple cubes represent the four-part variations on the original Locus score: in the last indeterminate section, the four dancers each choose the floor plan, facings, and sequence.





*Banner with Babette Mangolte's  
photograph of Roof Piece. 1976.*

*In 1976, Brown and her company were among hundreds of American artists "airlifted" to West Berlin for a festival organized by René Block. Dancer Wendy Perron recalled spotting Samuel Beckett in a hotel hallway, and company members Elizabeth Garren and Judith Ragir remembered their Akademie der Kunst program inciting loud arguments in the audience. The exterior of the performance site was hung with a banner featuring Babette Mangolte's now-iconic photograph of Brown's Roof Piece (1973), on which Brown had mapped the SoHo lofts of artists featured in Block's exhibition. Brown's extensive list of people, addresses, and phone numbers resembles Harald Szeemann's list of New York artists' addresses in the catalogue for When Attitudes Become Form (1969). Block conceived the Berlin festival in celebration of the bicentennial of the United States, a gesture he saw as resistant to official American culture because it showcased pioneers of New York's downtown avant-garde: Trisha Brown and her friends.*



*Trisha Brown. Trillium. 1962.  
Photograph by Al Giese.*

## Trisha Brown: Choreography as Visual Art\*

SUSAN ROSENBERG

Four decades separate Trisha Brown's reincarnation of her legendary work *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* (1970) at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in the fall of 2010 from its premiere in Manhattan's SoHo district.<sup>1</sup> Always refusing—until recently—the countless invitations to reprise this well-known but almost-never-seen choreographic performance, Brown has met the curiosity of interviewers with a modest statement disavowing authorship: “I don't even know who that woman was, it has been such a long time.”<sup>2</sup>

A founding participant in Robert Dunn's legendary dance-composition workshop (1961–63) and pioneering member of Judson Dance Theater (1962–64), Trisha Brown has had a career that is unprecedented in its traversals of the fields of choreography, visual art, and opera. Given Brown's repeated acts of artistic self-invention, she has had many reasons and occasions to problematize the relationship of her work's present to its past, and when looking back, she has always demonstrated skepticism about the possibility of a work's “authentic” revival.<sup>3</sup> From her oeuvre of approximately one hundred choreographies, Brown has tended the legacy of *Man Walking* with particular care. Typical of her acute sensitivity to her work's institutional determination, to movement's temporality, and to choreography's history, she subtly reinvented *Man Walking* in 2010 in a manner similar to her treatment of other signature solo works and performances: contravening the iconic singularity of the 1970 original, the 2010 version of *Man Walking* was executed by two different performers: Stephen Petronio, a choreogra-

\* I thank Carrie Lambert-Beatty for her invaluable editorial comments and advice in the development of this text, and Mignon Nixon for her support. I owe special gratitude to Trisha Brown for formal and informal conversations about her choreography and career, and appreciation to members of the Trisha Brown Dance Company and its staff for their assistance.

1. Presentations of *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building* at the Whitney Museum of American Art (September 30–October 3, 2010) were the first in New York since the work's premiere on April 18 and 19, 1970. Brown had twice reprised this work: at Tate Modern in 2006 and at the Walker Art Center in 2007.

2. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 15, 2008. See also Andrew Princz, “Is Off the Grid Still Off the Grid?,” *On the Globe*, May 26, 2010, [ontheGlobe.com/trisha-brown](http://ontheGlobe.com/trisha-brown) (accessed May 6, 2012).

3. The subject of Brown's approach to reprising early choreographies cannot be addressed here, though it should be noted that her decisions stand in contrast to the rigorous and exacting methods that govern the preservation and presentation of her choreographic repertory.



*Trisha Brown. Man Walking Down  
the Side of a Building. 1970.  
Photograph by Carol Goodden.*

pher and former Trisha Brown Company member, and choreographer Elizabeth Streb, its first woman performer.<sup>4</sup>

Examining Brown's painstaking and self-critical process of redefining choreography as a *visual art*, this essay focuses on distinctions in her work between choreography and gesture, gesture and movement, movement and dancing. In light of the constructs and contexts of these distinctions, Brown's reluctance to represent *Man Walking* makes sense: a demonstration of walking as representation, the 1970 concert was a unique performance—different from others before and those that followed. This groundbreaking investigation of movement's intentionality and choreographic originality occurred in a precisely articulated relationship to a now unrecoverable institutional and historical territory: in what she called a "crack" between dance and visual art, which recent museum presentations of *Man Walking* narrow, but do not entirely foreclose.<sup>5</sup>

Conceived as a simple walk down the surface of a seven-floor loft building, from rooftop to ground, *Man Walking* originally premiered as part of a self-produced, site-specific concert of four works titled "Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street." Witnessed by approximately forty people and recorded on film, these events attracted sufficient attention that she was invited to exhibit at the Whitney Museum the following year. There Brown presented "Another Fearless Dance Concert," including a new work, *Walking on the Wall*. At the Whitney in 2010, it too was reprised for the first time, executed in the location of its first appearance: on the second-floor, in a space denuded of art objects.

*Man Walking* debuted during an economic recession in a relatively desolate district of the city that was home to a vanishing manufacturing industry and an influx of artist-residents. Realized with basic mountaineering equipment that Brown purchased at Tent and Trailer's Chamber Street store, the performance depended on two belayers situated on the roof of Brown's residence—one of George Maciunas's earliest Fluxhouse Cooperatives.<sup>6</sup> Manipulating a simple rope-and-pulley system, the belayers enabled the walker to release his weight into their hands and—as the film documentation of *Man Walking* reveals—realize a reasonably accurate reproduction of the act of walking, executed in a new orientation to gravity's inexorable logic: with the body shifted ninety degrees and pitched in space, and the

4. Petronio, a member of the Trisha Brown Company from 1979 to 1986 and its first male dancer, founded Stephen Petronio Company in 1984. In 1982 he performed *Man Walking* in Avignon, France. Streb founded STREB Extreme Action Company in 1985 and established S.L.A.M. (Streb Lab for Action Mechanics) in 2003.

5. See Camille Hardy, "Pushing Post-Modern Art into Orbit," *Dance Magazine* (March 1985), pp. 63–66; Branden W. Joseph articulated the significance of this "crack" in *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2008), pp. 83–84, where he writes, "for the generation of artists in Cage's wake . . . the issue was not one of seeking to restore the validity of medium-based or disciplinary distinctions . . . the very idea of producing an 'advanced' work seemed to imply precisely that question of a work's status—the disciplinary, institutional place of the work of art or music . . . almost necessarily had to come into play."

6. 80 Wooster Street was one of the first Fluxhouse Cooperatives, and Fluxus founder George Maciunas lived in the building's basement.

walker's back held straight as he promenaded, relatively effortlessly, while perpendicular to the building surface and parallel to the ground.

Orchestrated on the north façade of Marcel Breuer's significantly taller Whitney building in 2010, *Man Walking* started at a point on the roof just west and skyward of the street-level loading dock, an institutional threshold of everyday life and art. To witness *Man Walking* was to experience a treacherous, possibly life-threatening act. In 2010, as the crowd of approximately 150 gathered at the northwest corner of Madison Avenue and 75th Street, the fear was palpable. Rigging equipment, visible on the Whitney's rooftop, included a metal scaffold resembling the kind used for competitive ski-jump events. At each performance, the walker stood beneath this structure and then cantilevered forward into space, suspended from a harness placed at the hips, and then remained briefly still, with the soles of the feet barely touching the point where the building's façade joined its roof.<sup>7</sup> Petronio described "reaching [his] head into space and lengthening his body, to create tension against the building, while trying to hold onto space at the molecular level, even as the body [was] telling [him], *This should not be happening—don't do this.*"<sup>8</sup> To those witnessing this event, an uncanny experience of anxiety-as-repetition arrived in advance of and continued throughout the performance.<sup>9</sup> Absent a referent (besides potential viewings of the 1970 film of *Man Walking*) a sonic memory filled the void: sports announcer Jim McKay's voice inviting audiences to witness "the constant variety of sport . . . the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat," a soundtrack that accompanied televised images of the crashing, terrifying fall of skier Vinko Bogataj, recorded in March 1970 but played during the next decade as a repeating image loop in advertisements for ABC's Wide World of Sports.

In contrast to the apparent naturalness of the 1970 performance, the 2010 performance was labored and stuttering; but as Brown originally intended, walking was showcased as a complex physical artifice. Elizabeth Streb explained, "I felt like an idiot savant: like 'I don't remember how to walk. I don't remember how to walk.'"<sup>10</sup> The performances echoed a drawing in a sketchbook by Edgar Degas then on display at the Morgan Library, thirty blocks south of the Whitney: in a preparatory study for *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando* (1879), a woman is suspended, like a caught fish, from a high-wire gripped in her mouth. Degas's rendering of the human body made strange by its appearance in a circus act

7. In interviews with the author, Elizabeth Streb (November 11, 2010) and Stephen Petronio (November 24, 2010) both mentioned this clearly articulated moment as an intentional element of the choreography.

8. Stephen Petronio, interview with the author, November 24, 2010.

9. *Man Walking* provides a counterexample to the anti-spectacular vision of contemporary dance articulated by Yvonne Rainer in "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Amidst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," in *Minimal Art, Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York, E.P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 263–73.

10. Elizabeth Streb, interview with the author, November 11, 2010. For Streb's discussion of "myths of movement," see her essay "Pop-Action," *Performing Arts Journal* 18, no. 2 (May 1996), pp. 72–76.



Edgar Degas. *Sketch for Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando. 1879.*

includes a detailed drawing of the apparatus of the performer's suspension: a wooden plaque hollowed to hold her teeth's bite and attached to a simple hook, the mechanism of her upward lift towards the circus tent's heights. Similarly, *Man Walking* (2010) revealed not only movement through space but also the apparatus that made such movement possible. The walker was lifted while trying to exert her or his weight to walk downward, producing a succession of actions and cognitive decisions whose deployment—by gravity, by the belayers, and by the performer—was visible to the audience.

#### *Seeing the Score*

Brown made her New York debut as a choreographer with *Trillium* (1962), which she first presented in the context of New York's interdisciplinary avant-garde at the Maidman Theater's Poet's Festival in March 1962, and then tested against the different eyes of the modern-dance Establishment at the American Dance Festival in New London, Connecticut, four months later. There she presented *Trillium* on a slate of new works by "young choreographers."<sup>11</sup> In light of the subsequent course of her career, Brown's early double loyalty to dance and art, and to their different audiences and institutional apparatuses, is intriguing, and the performances of *Trillium* revealed much to Brown about the ways context can be organized by an artist to affect how a work is seen and means.

With its tripartite structure, derived from that of a flower of the Pacific Northwest (Brown's birthplace), *Trillium* consists of three elemental actions—

11. *Trillium* was part of the Maidman Theater's "Poet's Festival"; its program—music by Richard Maxfield, La Monte Young, Philip Corner, and Joseph Byrd; happenings by Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman; works by George Brecht and Ray Johnson; films by Stan Vanderbeek and Nicola Cernovich; and dance by members of Robert Dunn's workshop—reflects John Cage's influence on New York's interdisciplinary avant-garde.



*Trisha Brown. c. 1964.*

stand, sit, and lie down—performed in indeterminate, improvised relationship to one another, without transitions. Her elimination of transitions echoes ideas articulated in John Cage’s “History of Experimental Music,” where he wrote, “Composers were getting rid of the glue . . . where people had felt the necessity to stick sounds together to make a continuity. . . . We felt the opposite necessity, to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves.”<sup>12</sup> Yet in dance, more than in music, “erasing the glue” is an unachievable ideal: one has to *get* from A to B. Brown’s combination of pedestrian actions with indeterminate rules for their performance produced unpredictable results. As Brown cantilevered off the floor into handstands and hovered above the ground, critics discerned movement tasks: “a sitdown fall and handstands,”<sup>13</sup> or a “grow[ing], flower[ing] of its own natural accord from its first physical impulse of simply getting up and lying down,”<sup>14</sup> with “spontaneity” named as *Trillium*’s most prominent attribute. Brown’s choreographic logic, the dynamic of formalized movement tasks and indeterminate performance, went *unseen*.

Fellow dancer Steve Paxton considered *Trillium* to be emblematic of Brown’s love for dancing’s unruly ephemerality, its wildness, and its radiance. Paxton—soon to become a master of improvisational performance dedicated to dance that is “not historical. Not even a second ago”<sup>15</sup>—explained, “Trisha told me that a trillium was

12. John Cage, “History of Experimental Music,” in *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage*, 5th ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 71.

13. Maxine Munt, “For Dancers Only . . .,” *Show Business* 7 (April 1962), p. 6.

14. Jill Johnston, “Boiler Room,” *The Village Voice*, March 29, 1962, p. 14.

15. Steve Paxton, “The Grand Union,” *TDR* 16, no. 3 (September 1972), p. 130.

a flower that she had found in the woods. . . . She said she used to pick them . . . but by the time she got home they would be wilted and faded. . . . That's what she thought about movement—it was wild, it was something that lived in the air."<sup>16</sup>

If Paxton read *Trillium* as an elegy for the fading perfume of a wildflower, Brown was instead riveted by the problem of the flower's survival, by the quest to make evanescence endure.<sup>17</sup> *Trillium's* sound score, like its choreography, framed—through recording—vocalizations by Simone Forti, summarizing and making permanent many fleeting acts of improvisation that Brown had witnessed as a participant in Anna Halprin's dance workshop in the summer of 1960. Furthermore, *Trillium's* presentation history confirms Brown's wish to interrogate how choreography might flourish or fail according to its siting. In New York, critics applauded her work as "the high point of the evening."<sup>18</sup> At ADF it was nearly rejected before being saved by *eminence grise* of modern dance Bessie Schonberg; Schonberg wrote of Brown's performance, "Hers was the most original *material*. Could we suggest she try and make a dance?"<sup>19</sup> Ultimately Brown convinced Schonberg that despite *Trillium's* basis in and presentation of indeterminacy, it had structure; *Trillium* was not "material" that needed shaping, but the articulation of choreography itself.<sup>20</sup> Maxine Munt, a rare reviewer of the Poet's Festival, asked whether the program's offerings were "really studio studies," not finished works.<sup>21</sup> Between "studio" and "material," between art and dance contexts, Brown had begun articulating a concept of choreography-as-structure, deliberately framed.

Suspicious of improvisation because it always disappears "into the ether," Brown reacted against critics' perception of *Trillium* as impromptu and overly subjective, using different tactics to make *visible* her choreography's structure as that which remains.<sup>22</sup> In March 1966, in the third and last work she presented at Judson Church, *A String: Homemade, Motor, Inside*, she situated choreographic durability and concreteness in relation to visible frames. The first of three parts, *Homemade* contrasted a live, performed choreography with its cinematic recording and projection. *Motor* contrasted live motion with vehicular, mechanized motion

16. Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 121.

17. Brown's use of a concrete image and an object to structure *Trillium* recalls Robert Whitman's emphasis on the creation of temporal objects in his happenings. See Robert Whitman, "A Statement," in *Happenings: An Illustrated Anthology*, ed. Michael Kirby (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1965), pp. 135–36. As a metaphor for her choreography and its contextualization, the trillium flower embodies Brown's wish to frame and to make enduring the ineffability of dance.

18. Munt, "For Dancers Only . . .," p. 6.

19. Undated note from Bessie Schonberg to American Dance Festival director Jeannette Schlottman, American Dance Festival Archives, Durham, N.C. Thank you to Dean Jeffrey.

20. *Trillium's* musical accompaniment by Forti's sound score demonstrates Brown's receptivity to the Cage-influenced music of La Monte Young and Terry Riley, both of whom participated in Anna Halprin's summer workshop (1960). Brown has said the score was another reason for *Trillium's* initial rejection by ADF jurors.

21. Munt, "For Dancers Only . . .," p. 6.

22. Janice Ross, *Anna Halprin, Experience as Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 148. Brown's definition of improvisational dance as "that which disappears" is a foundational concept against which she articulated choreography's contrasting potential to remain.

(that of a motor scooter), while *Inside* articulated choreography's determination by the materiality of the studio's architectural frame. In this last part, Brown used the surface of her studio's interior walls to generate and organize movement. The concept dates to Brown's practice of improvisation shortly after her 1961 arrival in New York, when, together with Simone Forti, she commandeered an unauthorized space on Great Jones Street as a studio, a kind of illicit action that her friend Gordon Matta-Clark made an art form in its own right.<sup>23</sup> Brown recalled, "Simone would point blindly into the space and then follow out the end of her finger. From whatever there was, she would derive a set of rules about time and space that were complete enough to proceed with an improvisation."<sup>24</sup>

As Don McDonagh reported in *Artforum* in 1972, the method looked back to Brown's experience studying improvisation in Halprin's 1960 summer workshop: "[Halprin] began to work toward a type of dance activity that would draw upon its environment. . . . It was improvisation in which the resistance of materials . . . dictated the activity that the dancers would devise."<sup>25</sup> Founder of the San Francisco Dancer's Workshop in 1955, Halprin promulgated teachings that were unique in their emphasis on improvisation, which the modern dance Establishment considered taboo.<sup>26</sup> Practiced on Halprin's famous outdoor dance deck—located in the shadow of California's Mount Tamalpais and designed by her husband, architect Lawrence Halprin—movement-making was enacted in real space and time. A student of Walter Gropius, Lawrence identified his structure as a "plane" that was elevated and suspended in space, and Anna Halprin emphasized that this space was not that of the "static cube, confined by right angles, with a front, back, sides and top—a box within which to move."<sup>27</sup> When Brown transplanted Halprin's improvisational model to New York, however, it was precisely in reference to the static cube that she originated her choreography and on which its presentation depended. Brown embraced the urban context of New York to pursue those inexorable closed systems.

Presenting *Inside* at Judson Church, she transplanted a method of improvisation from the outdoors and nature to an interior; placing the audience's seats around her in a rectilinear configuration, she reproduced the studio's original framing context within the public performance. Her siting of a choreographic work anticipated visual artists' mobilization of the frame as inseparable from their works' operations, as exemplified in Sol Lewitt's *Wall Floor Piece (Three Squares)* (1966), Bruce Nauman's *Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square (Square Dance)*

23. In 1963, 9 Great Jones Street became an art gallery overseen by Robert Whitman and Walter de Maria.

24. Marianne Goldberg, *Reconstructing Trisha Brown: Dances and Performances Pieces, 1960–1975* (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1990), p. 44.

25. Don McDonagh, "Notes on Recent Dance," *Artforum* 11 (December 1972), p. 50.

26. On many occasions, Brown described late-1950s perceptions of improvisation by paraphrasing Louis Horst: "if . . . you just turn the lights out and go gah-gah in circles that would be therapy or catharsis or your happy hour." See Brown, "Trisha Brown," in *Contemporary Dance*, ed. Anne Livet (New York: Abbeville Press, 1978), p. 44.

27. See Lawrence and Anna Halprin, "Dance Deck in the Woods," *Impulse* (1956), pp. 23–24.

(1967–68), or Mel Bochner's *Measurement Room* (1969). In Lewitt's work, three identical square structures are placed in a corner—one on the floor and the others side by side on two perpendicular walls: together they suggest a cubic volume, one that reiterates a room's interior architecture. Bochner's *Measurement Piece* makes a gallery's surfaces and volume its content. Lining the gallery's walls with black tape that includes each wall's numerical measurement, Bochner established—as did Lewitt and Brown—a dialogue between the viewer and the actuality of the material structure she or he inhabits.

Brown, considering *Inside juvenilia*, published an abbreviated score for it in 1978: a simple rectangle with directional arrows tracing, clockwise, its interior perimeter, accompanied by a description in which she recalled "mov[ing] along the edge of the room, facing out, on the knee caps of the audience, who were placed in a rectangular seating formation, duplicating the interior of my studio. I was marking the edge of the space, leaving the center of the room empty, the movement, completely specific to me, abstract to the audience."<sup>28</sup> The ascendancy of the grid and cube as infinitely expandable and repeatable formats of self-generating structural repetition in visual art echo *Inside*, which marks the inception of Brown's structuring of choreography in relation to geometric determinants—planar, cubic, and grid-based—both actual/material and imagined.<sup>29</sup> Its arrival coincides with the rise of proto-conceptual and minimal models of visual art in which "the structure, location, and materials of the intervention, at the very moment of their conception, are completely determined by their future destination."<sup>30</sup>

*Homemade*, in contrast, ensured Brown the permanent memory that *Inside* could not provide by making the cinematic frame a visual, material, and conceptual grounding for choreography's appearance. Brown derived *Homemade's* score from memory: a succession of pedestrian behaviors of personal significance that she instructed herself to perform "live"—not imitative "physical feats," but as representations of thought, demonstrating the mind's connection to the body.<sup>31</sup> With a recording of the performance, *Homemade* simultaneously offered its audience an example of choreographic memory inscribed on film.<sup>32</sup> With Brown sporting a film projector on her back, her movement sent the film around Judson Church's interior walls, incorporating both the architectural site and audience into its performance.

If *Trillium's* combination of task and indeterminate structure was inadequate to framing or visibly marking the *choreographic* as separate from the danced, *Homemade's* cinematic framing of remembered, re-presented task behaviors made possible their comparison to the live performance—visual evidence enabling the

28. Brown, "Trisha Brown," in *Contemporary Dance*, p. 44.

29. See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979), pp. 50–64.

30. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), p. 135.

31. In Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer, "A Conversation About 'Glacial Decoy,'" *October* 10 (Fall 1979), p. 32, Brown said, "The image, the memory, must occur in performance at precisely the same moment as the action derived from it. Without thinking, there are just physical feats."

32. The film of *Homemade* was shot by Robert Whitman.

differentiation of choreographed gestures and their pictorialized counterpart, that of choreography's visual logic, from the inevitable, subtle variations occurring in each of its performances. Film, through close-up shots, also made it possible for audiences to see *Homemade's* intimate, miniature gestures, performed at the actual scale of the everyday.

The film of *Homemade* metonymically announced choreography as existing through representation: live and on film.<sup>33</sup> This self-referential loop demonstrated an infra-slim distinction between choreography and each of its reproductions, showing choreography—as distinct from dance—as *always* reproduced in relation to the concept, if not the actuality, of a permanent model.<sup>34</sup> Never fully fixed, choreography occurs and recurs in an approximate relation to an absence—ever approaching but never arriving at fixity, different each time (and in time). Just as Brown insisted on memorizing the *structure* of the work—the vignettes of personal memory that she sourced “live” as everyday behaviors—the device of simultaneously presenting a performance and its record on film made *visible* the measurement of one reproduction against another. Choreography, through its doubled representation, is shown as a live reproduction of the body's memory, as a reproduction of executed physical memory captured on film and in terms of an “original” performance, an ephemeral event that is always choreography's unique reproduction. Positing choreography as a marriage of performance and filmed reproduction, *Homemade* questioned performance-art theory's binaristic separation of live performance from its documentation, producing a heightened experience of *choreography* as visually precise and recognizable in form, as a singular, temporally specific live iteration whose cinematic record documents an individual performance and an enduring visual score.

In *Homemade*, memory, physical articulation, reproduction, and visual recognition collaborated within a circumscribed set of performative preconditions. The cinematic frame delineates a permanence to which choreography aspires but can only ever partially achieve: for choreography is irrevocably an absence.<sup>35</sup> Showcasing each movement's ephemerality in performance, Brown paradoxically reinforces the priority given to choreography's relatively unchanging logic, her

33. Paula Caspão, “Stroboscopic Stutter on the Not-Yet-Captured Ontological Condition of Limit Attractions,” *TDR* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007), p. 147, questions Peggy Phelan's view of documentation as “a direct consequence of direct witnessing . . . leading to infinite circuits of representations of representations, from which the ‘real’ live-performance is . . . absolutely absent as such.” *Homemade's* documentation-as-performance interrogates the originary status of “live witness” and the choreographic “real.”

34. Brown's articulation of choreography's appearance as always reproduced contradicts the much-quoted statement of Peggy Phelan that “performance in a strict ontological sense is non-reproductive,” a valorization of live art's renunciation of the commodity, recapitulating initial responses to conceptual art in the 1960s. See “The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction,” in Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

35. In *Being Watched*, Carrie Lambert-Beatty questions the segregation of performance and document, arguing that the “distinction between action and image, performance and photograph” did not hold in Judson. See Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), p.72.

work's conceptual center. Rather than being destined to immediately disappear, each individual, ephemeral performance of choreography encircles the concept of choreography's durability. *Homemade* solidifies this concept of choreography's permanence and performance's originality in its apparatus: the film is a required element of the dance, and the dance, a required element of the film: the choreography can only be performed by one unique/original dancer: in relationship to a unique film.<sup>36</sup>

### Dance Machines

Questions of the body's memory, and the mind's a priori concept of movement—of walking—inform *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*. For this work, Brown rigged the body like a prepared piano and sent it on a vertical walk down the façade of a seven-story building at 80 Wooster Street.<sup>37</sup> Celebrated as a work in which Brown reoriented the body's relationship to gravity to alter the viewer's phenomenological experience of the everyday, *Man Walking* is a work of art demonstrating choreography to be visual and visible in relation to conditions of duration, material structure, and task.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than showcasing pedestrian behavior and dispensing with choreography, *Man Walking* reveals everyday life's choreography, its forms. *Man Walking* joins the logic of John Cage's concepts of indeterminacy and theater, making choreography's constituent parts visually transparent as structure and duration.<sup>39</sup> In this it is similar to Cage's *4'33"*, where the structure of time and task, the opening and closing of the piano keyboard's cover, articulates music as a time structure framing sound material. *Man Walking* makes duration indeterminate in relation to (architectural) structure, equating time with the physical distance required for the task—walking—to unfold. Proposing a simple answer to the choreographic problems of duration, traveling pattern, and "narrative," the piece enlists gravity as the

36. The inseparable dynamic of repetition and originality in *Homemade*, and its significance as a unique artwork, became especially recognizable when Brown presented this work on a program reprising works of Judson Dance Theater that Mikhail Baryshnikov organized, *Past/Forward* (2000). For this event, Brown set *Homemade*'s choreography anew on Baryshnikov and commissioned Babette Mangolte to film him performing the dance, a necessary requirement to re-present it.

37. Brown's "rigging" of the body compares to Richard Serra's techniques for "rigging"—and what he has called "choreographing"—the dangerously gravity-bound materials of early sculptures such as *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* (1969).

38. The year Brown arrived in New York, 1961, the film *West Side Story* made fireescaped façades of tenement buildings the backdrop for Jerome Robbins's choreography; Robbins himself was filmed dancing on a rooftop. On January 20, 1969, the Beatles gave their last (impromptu) performance as a group, on the roof of Apple Records headquarters, in London. Roger Copeland compared Brown's reorientation of gravity in *Walking on the Wall* (1971, Whitney Museum) to Fred Astaire's perambulations around a room's interior in *The Royal Wedding*, in Copeland, "The Post-modern Choreography of Trisha Brown," *New York Times*, January 4, 1976, p. D-1.

39. My reading of Trisha Brown's trajectory through Cage's ideas is indebted to Branden W. Joseph's *Beyond the Dream Syndicate: Tony Conrad and the Arts After Cage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books, 2008).

inevitable machine of choreography in a “work of art [that] is finished when the particular movement or task is completed.”<sup>40</sup>

*Man Walking* demonstrates how the most natural of human acts is contextually determined by gravity. Realized less than one year after Neil Armstrong’s historic, televised walk across the moon’s surface on July 11, 1969, Brown’s work resonated with popular interest in the imagery of anti-gravity situations revealing the human body’s experience of its weight, spatial coordinates, and physical capabilities as contingent, as *un-natural*.<sup>41</sup> Arriving at this work through a prolonged process of testing gravity’s role in choreography itself, Brown received news of her works’ resemblance to space-exploration research in a 1976 letter sent by the editor of *Astronautics and Aeronautics*, who suggested Brown visit NASA’s Langley, Virginia, headquarters to observe experiments simulating zero-gravity conditions in an actual, scientific—not artistic—laboratory context.<sup>42</sup>

A work of art literally presented “off the wall,”<sup>43</sup> *Man Walking* condenses and transforms a vast legacy of postwar American art, from Jackson Pollock’s reorientation of painting from horizontality to verticality to Robert Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955), in which an everyday object, usually deployed horizontally, is transformed by a ninety-degree shift to become an autonomous art object. In Brown’s “dance machine,” gravity is a device that introduces formal inevitability to the behavior of choreographic materials, not unlike Jasper Johns’s “painting machine,” *Device Circle* (1959). As in Johns’s work, where the trace of a wooden ruler’s movement across the work’s surface tells the story of its indexical relationship to the painting/object’s realization, Brown’s use of the device/task “to walk” plus vertical surface plus gravity (the inevitable motor of motion) produces an object-like dance. Like Rauschenberg’s combines, such as *Canyon* (1959), Brown’s work operates in the gap between art and life, between architectural frame and suspended volume. Her use of an overlooked urban site recalls Allan Kaprow’s use of sites as environments, such as *Yard* (1961), but, as in the plane of Halprin’s dance deck, makes a surface its frame. Finally, her use of gravity recalls Simone Forti’s *Slant Board* (1961) and Rauschenberg’s *Elgin Tie* (1964).<sup>44</sup> In Forti’s work, ropes, attached to a wooden board mounted at a forty-five-degree angle to the wall, provided the concept and means for a task: dancers’ repeated performance of walking against gravity. *Elgin Tie*, presented at the Moderna

40. Copeland, “The Post-modern Choreography of Trisha Brown.”

41. Brown’s fascination with gravity as a determinant of the body’s behavior and motor of choreography extends back to *Lightfall* (1963) and continues in *Falling Duets* (1968), *Planes* (1969), and *Leaning Duets I* (1970) and *II* (1971).

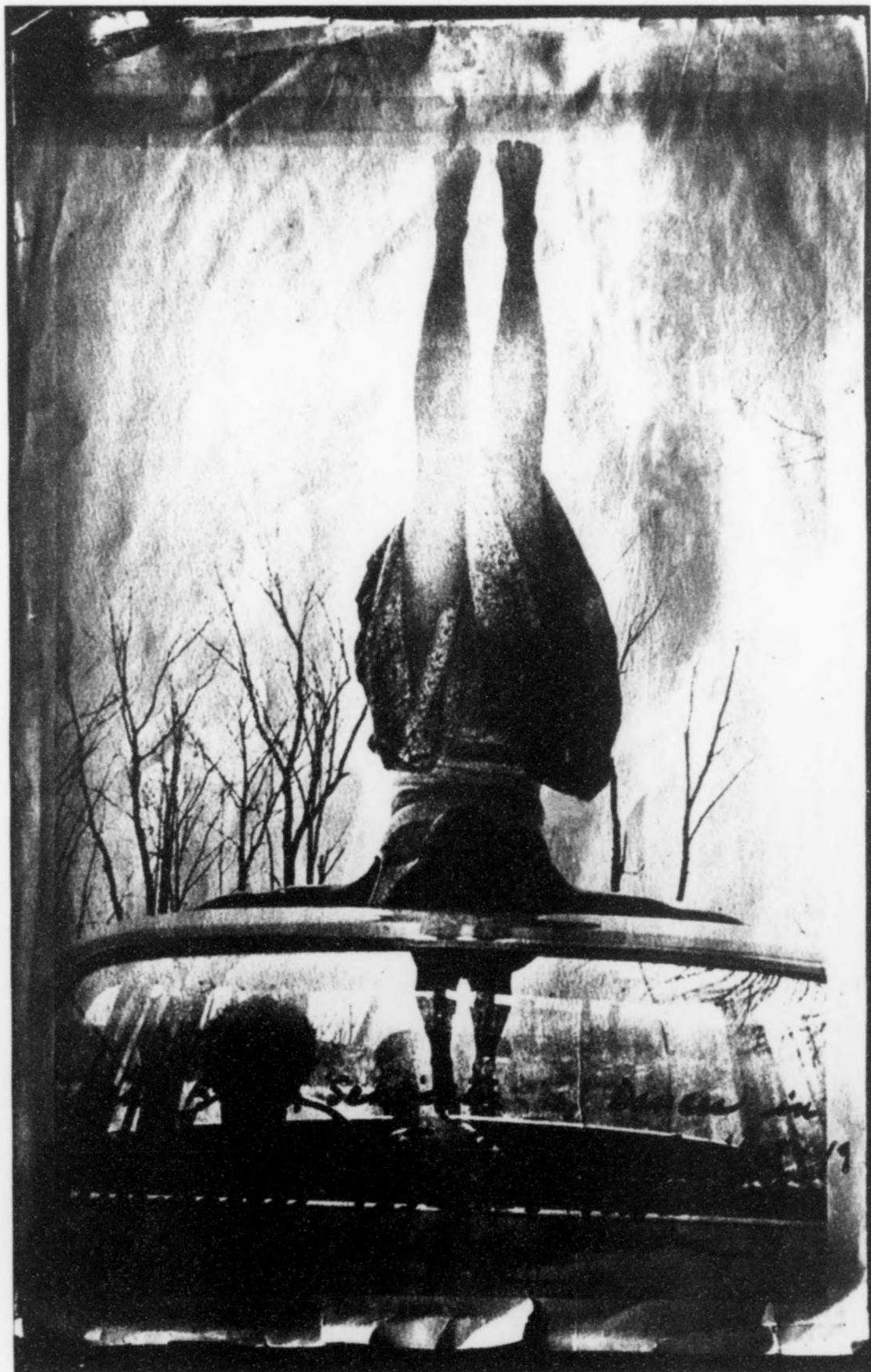
42. Prompted by a 1976 *New York Times* article that mentioned Brown’s “wall-walking experiments,” the journal’s editor, John Newbauer, also included an article by Rudolf F. Hoelker and Nolan J. Braud, “Charting Apollo Flights,” showing a suited astronaut suspended at a ninety-degree angle to a gridded wall. Newbauer thought it “might help you with your new dancing ideas for walking on the wall.” Letter dated January 29, 1976, sent by John Newbauer’s secretary, Eleanor L. Gray, to Trisha Brown c/o Anna Kisselgoff at the *New York Times*; Trisha Brown Archives.

43. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, February 2, 2007.

44. Forti’s *Slant Board*, in turn, looks back to Anna Halprin’s *People on a Slant* (1953); presented outdoors in San Francisco, the work required performers to walk up a steep hill while keeping their bodies straight. See Ross, *Anna Halprin*, pp. 126–27.



*Robert Rauschenberg. Elgin Tie. 1964.  
Photograph: Stig T. Larson. Courtesy of  
the Estate of Robert Rauschenberg.*



Poster for "Dances  
in and Around 80  
Wooster Street."  
1970. Photograph  
by Carol Goodden.

Museet, Stockholm, featured Rauschenberg descending by a rope from the ceiling lights in one of the museum's galleries, which took him, as he performed various tasks, to the gallery's floor. Brown's 1970 use of 80 Wooster Street's façade and interior, as well as the street outside, extended a legacy of Fluxus "street events" presented in SoHo in the mid-1960s.<sup>45</sup>

*Man Walking* defied expectations as to the nature of the sites where dance was presented, and also challenged assumptions associated with the Judson Dance

45. Brown's *Leaning Duets I* (1970) was performed by ten dancers on Wooster Street as part of the April 1970 program "Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street." On Fluxus street performances in SoHo, see, for example, Thomas Kellein, *George Maciunas: The Dream of Fluxus: An Artist's Biography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), pp. 87–97.

Theater, which posited everyday movement as both a critique of dance virtuosity and as a new movement lexicon. Steve Paxton said Judson aimed “to eliminate the look of learned movement.”<sup>46</sup> Brown’s dance contests the ordinariness of walking; once unleashed from gravity’s conventions, walking is neither an unquestioned medium of locomotion nor the imperfect recreation of a physical memory nor a signifier of the non-virtuosic dancing body. It is a strenuous act of illusion, of material, conceptual, and linguistic artifice. Brown described this work as a dance machine that “tells you 1) when to start 2) where you go and 3) where you finish”: it is a machine that remakes walking as form.<sup>47</sup>

\*

Performed two years after the remotely located Castelli Warehouse exhibition of post-minimalist sculpture and within months of Richard Serra’s first site-specific urban sculpture, *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram Right Angles Reversed*,<sup>48</sup> *Man Walking*—through the logic of indeterminacy—redefined choreography as site-specific, self-contained, and sculptural, and also delivered choreography to the threshold of Conceptual art. That Brown located her work in a “crack” between the sculptural and choreographic object, is confirmed by a little-known work, *The Stream*, presented in October 1970, six months after “Dances in and Around 80 Wooster Street,” at Astrofest, an outdoor festival in Union Square Park.<sup>49</sup> In *The Stream*, Brown experimented with performance in the absence of dancers: the work consisted of a thirty-four-foot-long trough-like wooden structure with two slanting sides, joined by a flat floor on which Brown placed approximately forty baking pans of different sizes and shapes, all filled with water.<sup>50</sup> *The Stream* invited audiences to “wad[e] through the water or step around pans as if from stone to stone in an actual stream, avoiding water, or racing up and down, climbing on the [construction’s] sides,” a dangerous activity, given the construction’s tilting walls, the precariously placed pans of water, and gravity.<sup>51</sup>

An uncharacteristically literal work, *The Stream* provided viewers with an opportunity to reexperience one of Brown’s lasting physical memories from childhood: the

46. Steve Paxton, “Brown in the New Body,” in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961–2001*, ed. Hendel Teicher (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 57.

47. See Corrine Diserens, introduction to *Trisha Brown: Danse, précis de liberté* (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, 1998), p. 10. Brown’s description resonates with Sol Lewitt’s 1967 definition of Conceptual art: “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art.” Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), p. 79.

48. Castelli’s warehouse was on 108th Street, and Serra’s sculpture was sited at the intersection of 183rd Street and Webster Avenue in the Bronx.

49. Astrofest’s theme was the signs of the zodiac and included works by Phil Corner, Ann Danoff, Sari Dienes, Joan Jonas, Phil Noblock, and others. *The Stream* was sited in the park’s southwest corner.

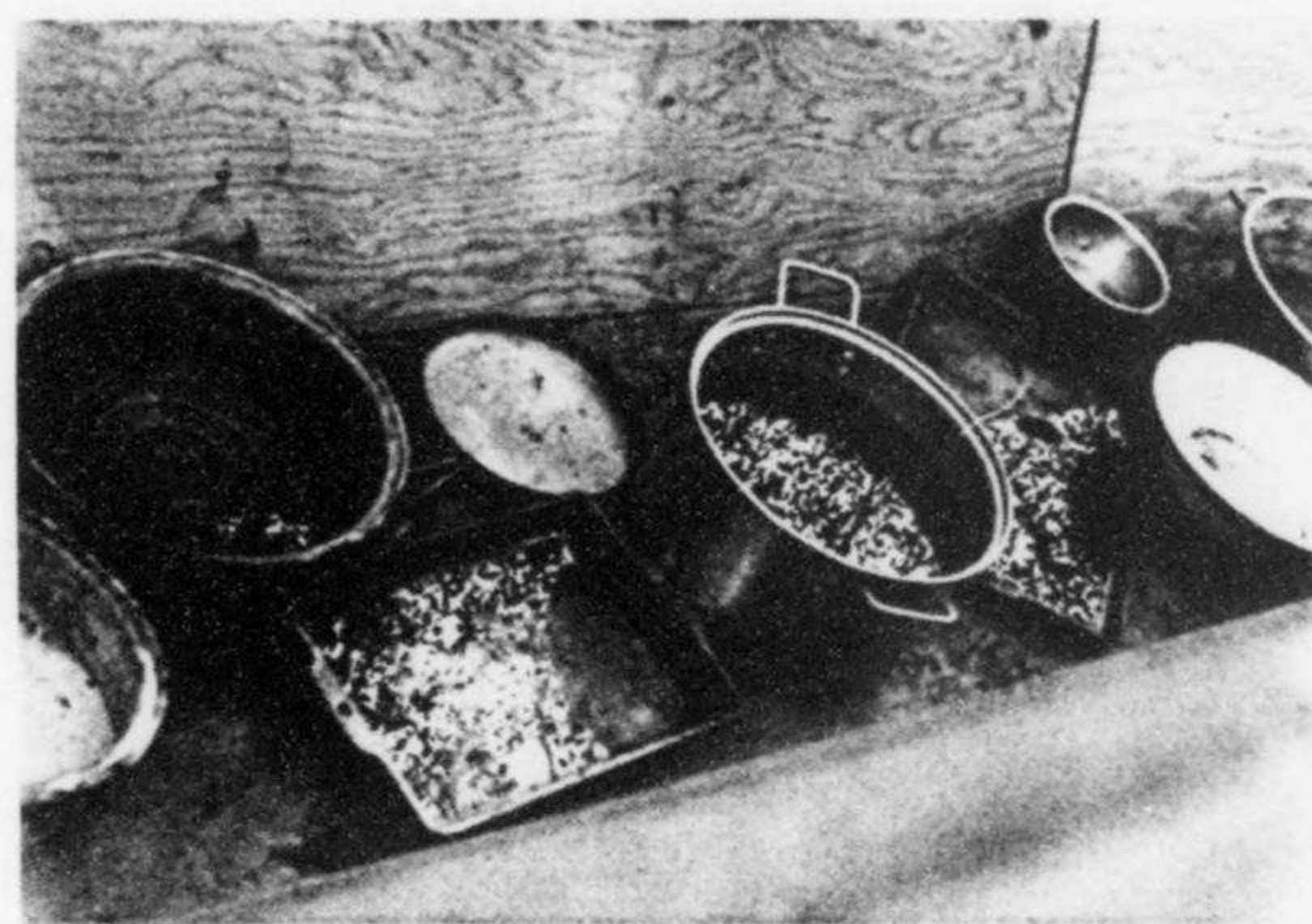
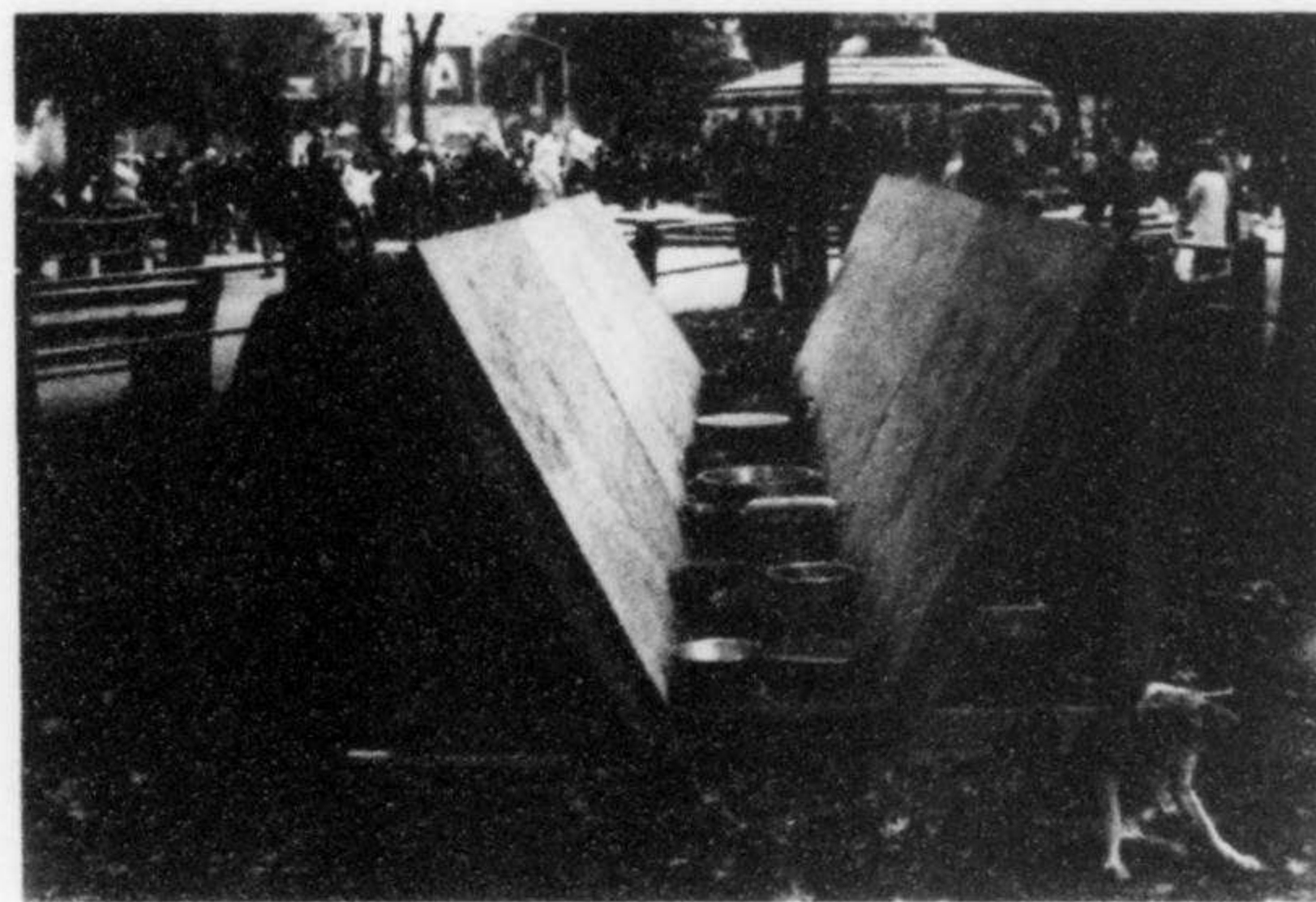
50. *The Stream* was reprised for the first time since 1970 in the exhibition *Move: Choreographing You*, October 13, 2010–January 9, 2011, at the Hayward Gallery, London.

51. Undated notes, Trisha Brown Archives.

subtle weight-shifting and balance required to play amidst streams and rocks, an image to which she often returns in conjuring sources for her natural-movement language.<sup>52</sup> Parallels between *The Stream*, and Bruce Nauman's *Performance Corridor* (1969)—a sculpture Nauman conceived to remove himself from his works' performance, inciting audience participation—are significant: the Whitney's 1969 *Anti-Illusion, Procedures/ Materials* exhibition, where *Performance Corridor* appeared, indirectly ushered Brown's work into the museum. Her April 1970 calendar records contact with the Whitney—the invitation to appear in its *Composer's Showcase* series, a program newly energized by four “extended time pieces” presented by Richard Serra (with Philip Glass), Bruce Nauman, Steve Reich, and Michael Snow and Keith Sonnier, as part of the *Anti-Illusion* exhibition.<sup>53</sup>

Brown's path from 80 Wooster Street to the Whitney Museum was anticipated by the logic of *Man Walking*, and the new interest in temporality on the part of museums underpinned her Whitney Museum program, “Another Fearless Dance Concert.”<sup>54</sup> In this context, Brown reconfigured the piece as *Walking on the Wall* (1971). Seven dancers, suspended from the grid of the Whitney's ceiling, walked across two perpendicular gallery walls. Without the determining limit provided by architecture, this activity was not object-like: instead, walking is defamiliarized as a group process enacted across two surfaces of an implied open cube.

*Skymap* (1969), among the works that Brown presented at the Whitney program, pursued to its conclusion the concept of dance in the absence of performance, reflecting a convergence of ideas around the scoring of art, emanating from John



Brown. *The Stream*. 1970.  
Courtesy of Trisha Brown.

52. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 4, 2007.

53. In a memo about these planned “non-events,” Stephen Weil emphasized that performances were not to be publicized as entertainment, and that curator Marcia Tucker had coined the name “extended-time piece” to describe work by Richard Serra with music by Philip Glass, Bruce Nauman, Steve Reich, Michael Snow, and Keith Sonnier. Whitney Museum Archives.

54. The temporal dimension of sculptural acts and sculpture's relationship to the durational and operational logic of “live art” were key to *Anti-Illusion, Procedures/Materials*, as catalogue essays by Marcia Tucker and James Monte record. These concepts also informed the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Spaces* (1970), organized by Jennifer Licht.

Cage.<sup>55</sup> The work looked back to Brown's May 1963 performance at the Yam festival, at Smolin Gallery, during which she presented *2 Improvisations on the Nuclei for Simone by Jackson Mac Low*. In the spring of 1965, Brown wrote "to several people and asked them to give me, send me scores for dances."<sup>56</sup> Of those she received, Brown performed none, considering the proposals themselves to be the dances, visions related to that of Henry Flynt's "Concept Art," "an art of which the material is concepts . . . and a kind of art in which the material is language."<sup>57</sup> Aligning a linguistic proposition with an impossible task—the realization of choreography on a room's ceiling—Brown recorded her verbalization of *Skymap*'s written score, enabling the choreography's performance in the absence of the artist or a performing body.<sup>58</sup>

In *Skymap*, Brown's calm, clinical voice instructed audiences to envision, and mentally enact, words being moved, tossed, and placed on the gallery's sixth wall. Contemporaneous to Richard Serra's 1967–68 list of instructive verbs and Vito Acconci's sound piece *Running Tape* (1969), *Skymap*'s deadpan narrative journey resonates with Robert Smithson's voice-recorded slide tour, *Hotel Pallenque* (1969). However, *Skymap* identifies the audience as its performers—anticipating sculptural works devised to spur interactive engagement between audiences and objects, as in Franz Erhard Walther's *First Work Set* (1970) and Robert Morris's 1971 Tate Gallery exhibition, *Bodyspacemotionthings*. More simply than in *Homemade*, a technology of reproduction—sound recording—enables the endurance of *Skymap* as a work of art, whose re-presentation is not complicated by the problem of gesture's reproduction.<sup>59</sup>

In May 1971, six weeks after the Whitney program, Brown presented an investigation of choreography as defined by relationships between vision, physical memory, and movement's realization. She established dancers as the fixed points to which choreography traveled across nine rooftops, from her residence at 53 Wooster Street to Robert Rauschenberg's 381 Lafayette Street studio.<sup>60</sup> Brown introduced

55. A further inspiration for *Skymap* was the score sent from Geneva by composer Earle Brown: on a postcard he wrote, "This is a dance (if I say it is), Hommage [sic] to Rauschenberg's Portrait of Iris"—a message invoking Rauschenberg's 1961 homage to Marcel Duchamp, shown at Iris Clert gallery, Paris. The work was a telegram stating, "this is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so/Robert Rauschenberg." Trisha Brown Archive.

56. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, May 31, 2009.

57. Henry Flynt, "Essay: Concept Art (Provisional Version)" in *An Anthology*, ed. La Monte Young (New York: La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963), n.p. Brown did not appear in *An Anthology*, though she had performed in the program organized by La Monte Young at Yoko Ono's loft. For discussion of the "unperformed score," see Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score," *October* 95 (Winter 2001), pp. 54–89.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

59. A thirty-four-year gap separates the presentation of *Skymap* at the Walker Art Center in 1974 and its reprisal there in 2008. It was shown more recently at Dia Art Foundation in 2010.

60. Unfolding in the real time and non-illusionistic space of the spectator's partial vision, *Roof Piece* possesses a scale that challenges the rigidly monocular perceptual experience of "seeing dance" on the proscenium stage, an undemocratic setting that organizes viewing positions in relation to a single ideal location. *Roof Piece* responds to Cage's critique of the proscenium stage, which he said, [assumes] "people will see it if they all look in one direction. . . . But our experience nowadays is not so focused at one point. We live in, and are more and more aware of living in, the space around us. Current developments in theater are changing architecture from the Renaissance notion to something else that relates to our lives." See John Cage, Michael Kirby, and Richard Schechner, "An Interview with John Cage," *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965), p. 51. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty has pointed out, conditions of spatial dispersal were realized by Allan Kaprow's Happenings; see *Being Watched*, p. 34.

simple, "semaphoric" gestures: the dancers were instructed to reproduce the movements they *saw*, relaying each gesture to one another; midway through the performance the last dancer switched places with the first, initiating a new movement phrase and completing the circle of gesture's travel. Reviewers compared the process to the child's game "telephone," aptly describing choreography's timeworn model of person-to-person transmission.<sup>61</sup>

The choreographic construct for *Roof Piece* is similar to that articulated through the relationship of filmed dance and live performance in *Homemade* and of physical action and linguistic construct in *Man Walking*. But *Roof Piece* transforms the choreographer into an instigator of movements that are broadcast, received, and actualized through idiosyncrasies of each dancer's vision and body.<sup>62</sup> Each "transmission" of fleeting gestural material reveals the imperfect translation of perception into physical response. Space and vision interfere to alter movement's neurological, kinesthetic reception, demonstrating the indeterminate relationship governing *Roof Piece's* choreographic concept and its performance.<sup>63</sup>

Designed to reveal movements as visual, cognitive, and physical facts, *Roof Piece* radically democratizes the artist's signature choreographic mark, introducing it as always already subject to the failure of intentionality, inherent to choreography's utterance, which "produce[s] effects beyond [the author's] presence."<sup>64</sup> A visually apparent spatial rupture separates the initial choreographic mark from its subsequent iterations.<sup>65</sup> This perceptible gap defines choreography as imperfectly repeated, as a "machine that is in turn productive, and [which the choreographer's] future disappearance, in principle, will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting."<sup>66</sup> *Roof Piece* distinguishes the body's materialization of movement from choreography; abstract and evanescent, gesture erodes in the work's performance, demonstrating the necessity and priority of *vision* and conscious imitation in choreography's transmission, and contesting the idea of choreography's survival as fixed forms that are memorized and repeated. Brown called *Roof Piece's* gestures "semaphoric": what she had in mind was the system of visual signals used by on-the-ground air-traffic con-

61. Though Brown first presented *Roof Piece* in 1971, its documentation dates to the 1973 presentation of the work, also in SoHo. Brown wrote about *Roof Piece's* "semaphore like" gestures in "Three Pieces," *TDR* 19, no. 1 (March 1975), p. 26.

62. In an unacknowledged appropriation of *Roof Piece's* concept, Christian Jankowski's *Rooftop Routine* (2007) substituted a commercial movement (hula hooping) for dance, an example of Trisha Brown's enduring influence on contemporary art, but also of the precariousness of choreography's artistic legacies.

63. See Joseph, *Beyond the Dream Syndicate*, p. 78.

64. Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 312.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 316: "This force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain (the always open possibility of its extraction and grafting), but also from all the forms of a present referent (past or to come in the modified form of the present past or to come) that is objective or subjective. This spacing is not the simple negativity of a lack, but the emergence of the mark."

66. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

trollers, a *language* for communicating visual information in alphabet-like code across large distances.

The dancers' gestures were bound by a language of movement, but it was one in which entropy reigned. For in *Roof Piece* choreography is movement's *eliminator*.<sup>67</sup> Demonstrating a basic concern of Judson Dance—the critique of a standard movement—*Roof Piece* defines choreography as a structurally contained empirical investigation, a machine to sculpt movement with the materials of vision, space, and time. Inverting her discipline's principles, in which the body traverses space by performing remembered, fixed movements, Brown has her dancers remain still and choreography travel in *Roof Piece*. Only movement's most visibly discernible qualities survive the choreography's conceptual effect: an incremental, successive subtraction, which, if performed ad infinitum, would bring gesture to the point of almost completely shedding itself, leaving each dancer in a state of near-stillness. *Roof Piece* problematizes this ontological construct in performance theory, which equates performance itself with (intrinsic) "self-annihilation."<sup>68</sup> Her exploration of gesture's annihilation—as a concept—is deployed to serve the concept of choreography's durability and to underscore the inviolable relationship between choreography and sight.

Artistically, *Roof Piece* returned Brown to a ground zero. She has said, "I didn't know what to do after I had cleansed myself of all dynamic artifice with my limbs."<sup>69</sup> At this point she said, "I made the decision to go back to the studio. I needed to know what was an acceptable gesture after Judson."<sup>70</sup> She now faced choreographic problems for which indeterminacy, in seamlessly marrying movement's generation, duration, and execution to choreography's logic, had provided a rationale in the form of visual answers. Movement's arbitrariness

67. In this way it shared with Robert Smithson's *Asphalt Rundown* (October 15, 1969) the privileging of an entropic motor. *Asphalt Rundown* was commissioned by L'Attico Gallery, in Rome, where Brown had performed in June 1969 and would perform in the early 1970s.

68. Rebecca Schneider questions "the equation of performance with disappearance as reiterating performance as self-annihilating" in "Performance Remains," *Performance Research* 2, no. 6 (2001), p. 101. *Roof Piece* demonstrates self-erasure and disappearance as choreographic concepts, introducing the varied, deliberate ways in which a performance's disappearance is consciously intended, rather than being an intrinsic property of a live performed artwork or of the "medium" itself, as Peggy Phelan first argued in "The Ontology of Performance." Phelan identifies disappearance as an *essential* condition of performance art (as opposed to theater), and equates this disappearance with political resistance to the commodity, the gaze, and power. See "Choreography as Apparatus of Capture," *TDR* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 120–23; and "Inscribing Dance," in *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*, ed. André Lepecki (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), pp. 124–39. Lepecki identifies movement with dissolution and imperceptibility, and choreography as its textual enframing. Brown's work challenges these rigid categories: in *Roof Piece*, improvised movement and choreographic structure are perceptibly distinct; their differential relation to one another is defined by (and defines) the choreographic as an absence made visible through representation-as-reproduction.

69. Trisha Brown, interview with Klaus Kertess, *Artpix Notebooks: Trisha Brown: Early Works, 1966–1979* (2004), DVD.

70. Ann Murphy, "Trisha Brown in Conversation with Joan Acocella, Wheeler Auditorium, University of California, Berkeley, February 24, 2004," *Dance View Times* 3, no. 10 (March 7, 2005); [danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brownlec.htm](http://danceviewtimes.com/2005/Winter/10/brownlec.htm) (accessed August, 1, 2010).

dogged her: until *Roof Piece* Brown had insisted that gesture's motivation be perceptible, with its intentionality presented as the inevitable result of choreographic structure—neither self-originated nor self-chosen. Reflecting on this dilemma in 1973, she explained, "You know there are a thousand choices—I mean why is this better than that? . . . I'd like to make as few arbitrary decisions as possible."<sup>71</sup> The following year, she clarified, "To make a movement, to make a dance, to choose a gesture . . . I have to have a reason to do it. It's just as simple as that. . . . I can't do something that has no logic to it. That's who I am."<sup>72</sup>

Plagued by the body's "inefficiency as an object for making art,"<sup>73</sup> Brown identified her search for an "acceptable gesture" with the search for "pure movement." From this concept—and hours of trials in the studio—she arrived at an abstract, nonreferential, physical sign-system that was grounded in the body's kinesthetic logic. This system was realized according to three elemental, natural pathways of the joint's motion: "bend," "stretch," and "rotate." No longer concerned with revealing the body's "core" possibilities, Brown's movements instead demonstrate gesture as a language, a structured system of differences, each manifested as a self-contained, unique sign purified only of reference and convention.<sup>74</sup>

Brown's solo *Accumulation* (1971) delineates physical gesture through a logical, reductive analysis of the body's anatomical functioning and an additive organization. Movements originate and then gradually extend throughout the body, incrementally animating individual joints: thumb and wrist, wrist and elbow, elbow and shoulder, etc. Gestures materialize in an accumulating mathematical sequence (1, 1+2, 1+2+3 . . .), with each iteration contributing to the effect of choreography as visibly constructed, gesture by gesture, before the audience's eyes, and repetition making gesture available to vision as well as memory. Previously reliant on external, actual structures as movement's generator, Brown now *internalized* structure as a mathematical system, a method similar to the non-relational conditions of Donald Judd's specific objects and Sol Lewitt's seriality. Implicit in *Accumulation's* movements is gesture's articulation according to a geometrical relationship between the body and the cubic, spatial construct of its studio surround, a context that these works' presentation history confirms. Between 1973 and 1976, *Accumulation* (1971) and two other accumulating choreographies "behaved" like portable art objects, being exhibited internationally in visual-art settings. Dan Graham's comment on the context generated and occupied by Minimal art applies to Brown's *Accumulation*: "both the architectural container and the work contained within it were meant to be seen as non-illusionist, neutral and objectively factual—that is, as simply material."<sup>75</sup>

71. Effie Stephano, "Moving Structures: Effie Stephano Interviews Trisha Brown, Carol Goodden, Carmen Beuchat, and Sylvia Whitman," *Art and Artists* 8, no. 1 (1974), p. 17.

72. Allen Robertson, "Trisha Brown," *Minnesota Daily*, November 15, 1974, p. 27.

73. Trisha Brown, unpublished journal entry, 1971, p. 90. Trisha Brown Archive.

74. Rosalind Krauss addressed the relevance of indexicality for a consideration of dance-as-representation and sign in discussing Deborah Hay's work in "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2," *October* 3 (Fall 1977), pp. 58–59.

75. Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: 'A History of Conceptual Art,'" (1965–1969), in *Dan Graham*, ed. Gloria Moure (Barcelona: Antoni Tàpies Foundation, 1998), pp. 61–62.

After presenting a fifty-five-minute-long, extended-duration performance of *Accumulation* at L'Attico Gallery in Rome in June 1972, Brown explicitly identified *Accumulation* with visual art models, writing in *Avalanche*, "The construction of the piece tends to make it object-like."<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, the duration of *Accumulation* was set by its soundtrack, The Grateful Dead's "Uncle John's Band." When Brown ends the work, bringing her right index finger, extended, to the center of the left palm, (a move reminiscent of American Sign Language's indication for "stop"), her gesture suggests the circuit of movement's travel from its origination by the artist through the body and back to itself.

Making repeatability and repetition artistic issues in dance, *Accumulation* announces choreographic originality as modernist repetition, representing choreographic intentionality in each of its gesture's iterations. Brown's ambition to define the originality of a gesture through abstraction, and to put in place a structure for repeated originality, positions her, as a choreographic artist, in relation to visual art's standards, standards of modernism and its critique.<sup>77</sup>

With *Primary Accumulation* (1972) and *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973), Brown extended her movement vocabulary to include everyday, "natural" behaviors made slightly abstract, revealing pedestrian movements—such as brushing the hair behind the ear with one's fingers—as conventionalized, already choreographed. She said, "Since I use natural movement the audience doesn't know if I have stopped dancing or if I am just pushing my hair back."<sup>78</sup> These *Accumulation* pieces, two solos and one quartet, traveled to the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford (December 1972) and to Sonnabend Gallery, New York (March 1973). Despite saying that "I'm not interested in taking a work which was made in a studio and performed in an interior space and placing it outside,"<sup>79</sup> Brown, given the opportunity to present work outdoors in New York's Spring Dance Concert in May 1973 remade the *Primary Accumulation* (1972) solo as *Group Primary Accumulation* (1973) to accentuate what she called the works' "object-like" character: she introduced two male performers, who were assigned the job of lifting and repositioning the dancers as their gestures continued unarrested.

In September 1973, Sonnabend presented Brown's work in the exhibition *L'Art Actuel* at the Musée Galliera in Paris,<sup>80</sup> followed by performances in Milan (1973) and Rome (1974). The Walker Art Center presented the most extensive museum exhibition of Brown's works to that point: in November, 1974, her work was presented in

76. Trisha Brown, in *Avalanche* 5 (Summer 1972), p. 3.

77. Much as Barnett Newman's *Onement* paintings announce the intentionality of his original signature gesture and its ongoing repetition, *Accumulation* marks Brown's representation of intentionality in physical gesture and through repetition. See Ann Temkin, "Barnett Newman on Exhibition," *Barnett Newman*, ed. Ann Temkin (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002).

78. Susan Richardson, "Brown Creates Dance Forms," *Spartan Daily: San Jose State University*, October 24, 1975, p. 7.

79. Stephano, "Moving Structures," p. 20.

80. This exhibition included work by Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Mel Bochner, Christian Boltanski, Jim Dine, Simone Forti, Gilbert and George, Joan Jonas, Alain Kirili, Janis Kounellis, Robert Morris, Bruce Nauman, Dennis Oppenheim, Charlemagne Palestine, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Richard Serra, William Wegman, and Robert Whitman.

the museum's galleries, its theater, and outdoors, where *Group Primary Accumulation (Raft Version)* was performed on floating rafts in Loring Park lagoon, its unison timing and the spatial relationships among the dancers subject to erosion by environmental conditions of wind, rain, and the water's currents. Questions about the commodity status of dematerialized art circulated widely in the media but never mentioned dance, even though works by Brown and others were presented in the same galleries that were then featuring Conceptual art and live performance.<sup>81</sup>

\*

With *Untitled (Locus)* (1975), associations between Brown's choreography and conceptualism in visual art reached a crescendo. Based on a visual and verbal score that Brown discussed with critics, *Locus's* choreography maps an imaginary three-dimensional cube with twenty-six numbers, each corresponding to a place held by a letter of the alphabet (with a neutral, twenty-seventh point at the center). Brown drew, numbered, and lettered the cube; then she wrote a simple biographical statement, matching each letter to its corresponding numerical digit. The choreography performs this autobiographical phrase, with each movement touching an alpha-numeric point in space. Contrasting with Merce Cunningham's vision of choreographic space as without fixed points, *Locus* travels to fixed points according to an impersonal, structural procedure. It is more complexly three-dimensional than *Man Walking Down the Side of a Building*.<sup>82</sup> *Locus* spatializes and makes repeatable a sequential narrative of origination, rewriting biography as a structural system of graphic/textual scoring and non-subjective iterations.<sup>83</sup>

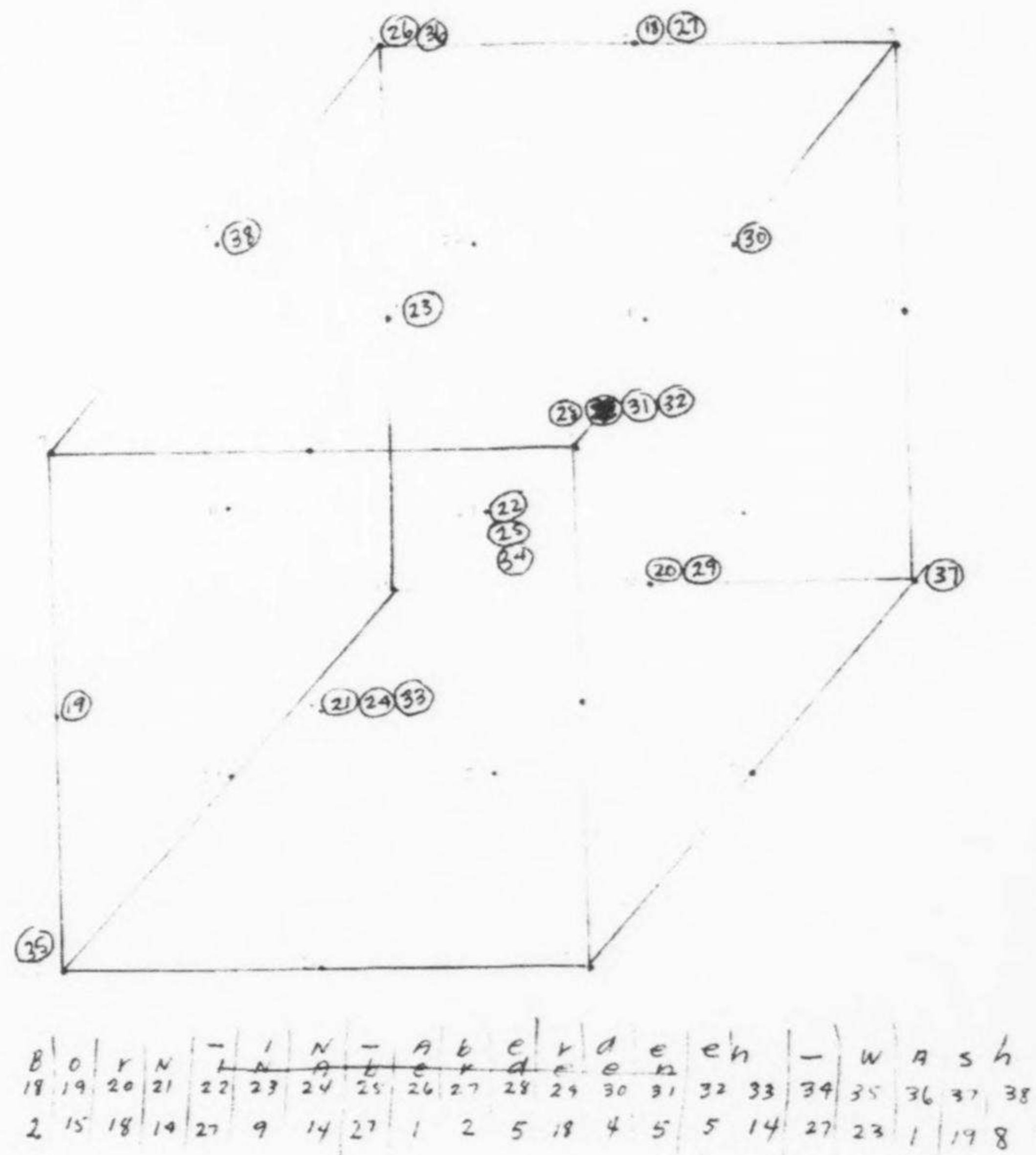
*Locus's* tasks, moves made to touch points on the cube from 'T' to 'R' to 'I', etc., are a machine for moving through space and generating a vocabulary of gesture whose logic is grounded in that of *Accumulation*. The work's geometrical construct was technically difficult and required trained dancers to perform it. As Brown explained to her audiences, the Gestalt of the cube, its words and sentences and drawn score, elevated the significance of its geometric structure and systematic task instructions over its language of movement. Although *Locus's* drawn/written scores specify, in written descriptions, the individual movements for touching each point in space, Brown never discussed these instructions or *Locus's* vocabulary: she emphasized *Locus* as a visual construction. Consistent with her previous methods, she provided no rules for transitions between movements in performance, introducing indeterminacy into the *Locus* score and also producing unforeseen movement that Brown recognized and called *dancing*.

Part fabrication model, part document, and part independent artwork, the

81. See, for example, Roy Bongartz, "Question: How Do You Buy a Work of Art Like This?," *New York Times*, August 11, 1974.

82. *Locus* transforms Rudolf Laban's notational mapping of the body's harmonious movement through space—his concept of the "kinesphere"—into an indeterminate choreographic format and form.

83. See Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *October* 9 (Summer 1979), pp. 50–64; and Eve Meltzer, "The Dream of the Information World," *Oxford Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 2006), pp. 115–35.



Brown. Untitled (Locus). 1975.  
 Courtesy of Trisha Brown.

*Locus* scores visualize choreography as architectural construction, related in function and appearance to sculptors' drawings, at once logical and rational and yet impenetrably personal, obsessive and mysterious, qualities that Sol Lewitt named as defining features of Conceptual art.<sup>84</sup> If the *Locus* drawings confirm the importance of the visual in Brown's choreographic art, they also raise questions about the primacy of the visual over the physical and choreographic, for the drawings provide an enigmatic record of Brown's choreographic ideas. As *Locus* aged, the cognitive challenge of iterating its score merged with the conventional dance practices of physical memory and movement's memorization. Brown came to see *Locus*'s kinesthetic and

84. On Brown's graphic work, see Susan Rosenberg, "Trisha Brown: The Signs of Gesture," *Trisha Brown: Drawing on Land and Air*, exhibition brochure (Tampa: Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida, 2007); and Philip Blither and Peter Eleey, *So the Audience Doesn't Know If I've Stopped Dancing* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008).

rhythmic execution as a dance on its own terms: "Of course I don't think you can say, 'Oh I get it, there's a cube, 27 points,' but the planes, the corners, the angles of the dance are much more visible. I think of it as a song."<sup>85</sup> Because of "the neutrality of it," "No bells and whistles, just ongoing," she described *Locus* as the closest approximate to her "barre"—an exercise for warming up the mind and the body.<sup>86</sup> The last of her entirely studio-determined choreography, *Locus's* system and vocabulary have remained the "DNA" for many of Brown's later works.

In the unpredictable *dancing* that emerged at the interstices of *Locus's* score, in the transitions between its verbal and visual systems of movement, Brown discovered her subsequent direction. In 1978, she conceived *Water Motor* without reference to the white cube's logic and without the desire to make its choreography perceptible to vision; instead she explored "the intelligence of the unknown, of the body moving in an unknown place."<sup>87</sup> *Water Motor* blurs distinctions between movement and choreography, announcing the erasure of choreographic structure, which is submerged and overwritten by dancing. With this shift in priorities from the visually choreographic to the danced, Brown reserved her ideas and structures as problems for critics and audiences to discern, even going so far as to say that her wish to provide language to explain her work had been a *reason* for making structured dances all along: that a dance was merely the means to generate a concept that could be explained in words: "It's one reason I made dances that had systems," she said, "because the conversation ends when you have nothing."<sup>88</sup> She remained silent about the complex procedures used to make *Water Motor*, a layered amalgam of text, task instructions, and an expanding physical vocabulary—including her use of movement to generate movement. *Water Motor's* choreography now exceeded Brown's desire to describe or fix it in a verbal or visual score, just as her dancing of *Water Motor's* choreography eludes vision's capture.<sup>89</sup>

In *Water Motor*, Brown initiates movement impulses internally and in different body parts, sending the body, its momentum, in contradictory directions. The opening movement—with three limbs raised off the floor and one down—is a consistent motif, as is the maintenance of continuous, rapid motion through the body's consistent overreaching of its pivot points, which otherwise secure equilibrium and balance. In what Brown called the "cut back," the body interferes with the natural logic of its own momentum. The term also referenced the historical context of Ronald Reagan's economic policies and their impact on the arts, what she later described as "the difficulty of life as a dancer, its precariousness and the threat of funding constantly being cut out from under you," conditions influencing her decision to abandon visual-art contexts in favor of the proscenium stage in 1979.<sup>90</sup>

85. Jean Nuchtern, "Accumulating Trisha Brown," *The SoHo Weekly News* (January 8, 1976), p. 24. Trisha Brown Dance Company Archive.

86. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, April 17, 2007.

87. Brown and Rainer, "A Conversation About 'Glacial Decoy,'" p. 30.

88. Trisha Brown, Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, October 1978. Whitney Museum of American Art Archives.

89. For a more extensive treatment of *Water Motor*, see Susan Rosenberg, "Trisha Brown's *Water Motor*: Forever, Now, and Again," *TDR* 56 (Spring 2012), pp. 150–57.

90. Trisha Brown, interview with the author, February 24, 2008.

In Brown's performance of *Water Motor*, dancing registers in vision's foreground. Indeed, Babette Mangolte subtitled her film *Water Motor* as "Performed and Choreographed by Trisha Brown," calling attention to Brown's newly reversed priorities: the film colludes with Brown's idea of *Water Motor* as a choreography devised to represent the idea of improvisation by privileging the live performance of dancing (over choreography) to show the originality of Brown's movement as organized in a permanent repeatable form. Mangolte's film, which includes two different "takes" of Brown's performance of *Water Motor*—one in real time and one in slow motion—indeed shows it to be a precisely structured choreographic work.

As representation of dancing, *Water Motor* anticipates Brown's embrace of the proscenium stage with *Glacial Decoy*'s 1979 premiere. This significant moment in Brown's career, the shift of her institutional affiliation from visual art to the theater—the institutional frame identified with and defining dance, and where she has continued to present her choreographies for more than thirty years—is recorded in the pages of *October*. In 1979, the fall issue featured a portfolio of twenty-three photographs of Brown's work by Mangolte, a retrospective of Brown's most significant choreographies to date, and seven new photographs of *Glacial Decoy*, the last of them printed on the magazine's left page, adjacent to Daniel Buren's essay "The Function of the Studio."<sup>91</sup>

In the relationship of one photograph to another, and in the discursive space between Mangolte's images and Buren's text, it is possible to see, convulsed as an absence, the "crack" between choreography and visual art that Brown's work inhabited in the 1970s, and to which her work of the 1970s is being returned today. A carefully sequenced visual essay, Mangolte's portfolio implicitly aligns Brown's work and artistic development with Buren's ideas, locating Brown's sustained investigation of choreography's contexts in terms of visual art's pressing concerns. Buren analyzes the dynamic between the studio, where art originates, and the museum, its destined site of presentation. Mangolte's photographs feature Brown's work against alternately white and black backgrounds. Every page spread or page includes a shot of each choreography as performed in, determined by, and identified with the white-walled context of the studio (fulfilling Buren's idea that a work's conceptualization in the studio must take into account the site of its institutional presentation) and as performed against the black grounds of theatrical settings (the context Brown had only recently adopted for her works' presentation).

Read against Buren's text, Mangolte's portfolio visualizes the gap Buren delineates, between the space of an artwork's origination in the studio and its distance from that setting through its appearance in the theater, a context that fundamentally alters it.<sup>92</sup> Mangolte marks *Water Motor* as the turning point in Brown's trajectory

91. Babette Mangolte, "A Portfolio of Photographs of Trisha Brown's Work," *October* 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 38–50. Mangolte's portfolio begins with *Accumulation* (1971), Brown's first studio-determined choreography, which premiered the same year Buren wrote "The Function of the Studio."

92. When Brown made the proscenium stage her works' "home," she presented choreographies conceived for the "white box" in theaters, typically as the first act on programs featuring new repertory produced for the proscenium; this format continued through the early 1990s, though she had performed works from the 1970s in European theaters before 1979. Since 2002, Brown's "Early Works" have increasingly been presented in museum settings.

from studio to stage: only this work is represented in photographs capturing the exact same movement as performed in the studio (white) and the theater (black): images of *Water Motor* performed onstage also face the first *Glacial Decoy* image.

In "The Function of the Studio," Buren argues that "when the work is in place, it does not take place (for the public), while it takes place (for the public) only when not in place, that is, in the museum."<sup>93</sup> Mangolte's images show how in Brown's case, the word "theater" should be substituted for "museum": by exiting visual art to adopt the proscenium as the site of her works' presentation, Brown escaped the "crack" of invisibility, the unmarked space between dance and art where, because her choreography eluded the art market, she was alerted to its imperiled relationship to its audience.<sup>94</sup> If "The Function of the Studio," then, seems to perform a requiem for Brown's choreography as visual-art made for visual art settings, Buren's text is also a lens through which to see Brown's approach to the proscenium stage in terms of her critique of its conventions, as continuous with her engagement with visual art's contexts and ideas and as a rupture with, not capitulation to, the stage.<sup>95</sup>

Over the last decade, international museums have returned to this historical moment, re-presenting Trisha Brown's early works of the 1970s in the institutional context for which they were originally conceived. Paradoxically, as Brown's work returns to the crack between choreography and visual art and recovers visibility in visual-art contexts, the specter of the commodity haunts museums' project to present and collect live art, for questions of choreographic remains, performance remains, dance remains—of executed intentionality and its preservation—haunt Brown's work amidst the vitality of its current resurgence. Brown's choreography of the 1970s mapped the institutional space of the museum abstractly with the body, to structure and to visualize its field as a discursive space available to live art. Today the return of her work to museums brings with it the challenge of choreography's enduring artistic significance—and the possibility for its permanence, a concept her work set in motion in precisely articulated increments, moment to moment.

93. Daniel Buren, "The Function of the Studio," *October* 10 (Fall 1979), pp. 53–54.

94. Brown's explanation of her conundrum occurred on many occasions after 1972. In Marianne Goldberg, "All the Person's Person Arriving," *TDR* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 169–70, Brown was quoted as saying, "Dance depends on an audience. . . . There is a system, a network, a language for the touring and support of dance in the world. This network operates on the proscenium stage. If you choose to work outside of that you have built into it a problem of communication with the sponsor and with the uninitiated audience. In Judson days there was no NEA or corporate support. I stopped walking on walls and doing those site-specific pieces that involved equipment because there was no support for it, and I couldn't afford it. For economic reasons I redirected the thrust of my career. Someone has to change, either the system or the artist. Eating and resting are accepted modes of behavior—one can't change that. If one goes to the proscenium stage, is that by nature selling out? I changed medium. I didn't change integrity."

95. Though this subject cannot be addressed here, Brown's treatment of the proscenium remained founded in an acknowledgement of its particular material and institutional conventions, and thus extended from her investigations of the visual, material, architectural, and institutional logic of the white box. Craig Owens presented this argument in "The Pro-Scenic Event," *Art in America* (December 1981), pp. 128–33.

## Trisha Brown: Portfolio

### BABETTE MANGOLTE

Trisha Brown's choreography showed important changes between *Line Up* (1976) and *Glacial Decoy* (1979), with different spatial contexts transforming the way it could be seen.

*Line Up* was choreographed for an open space with no stage and no standard seating.<sup>1</sup> Brown has said it was organized around "the making, remaking, or unmaking of horizontal lines, resulting in clarity, disorder, clarity, disorder, clarity, order, disorder, and so on." She has described it as a series of negotiations: "The line appears and is nudged into straightness, you are allowing change, being stable and flexible, talking to others, helping someone else, anticipating, warning, disconnecting, reconnecting, doing two incompatible activities at once, circling with the body, maintaining contact."

Choreographers map spacing by lines drawn on the floor. In *Line Up*, Brown uses shifting imaginary lines to provoke and constrain her dancers improvisation. Those lines have no point of origin and appears in suspension between the constantly moving dancers. Bodies float in space. White pants and long-sleeved tops unify the dancers' bodies and lead the viewer to perceive an abstract design rather than each dancer's expressivity.

*Glacial Decoy* was Brown's first choreography for a theatrical stage. It is performed before a constantly evolving backdrop, designed by Robert Rauschenberg, of photographic projections timed to shift left to right every four seconds. Costumes of transparent off-white silk reveal and mask the bodies beneath. The tempo of the slides creates a beat, and the verticality of the set gives the movement an orientation and spacing: movement can be measured against the uniform width of the slides, and bodies against their flatness. Constant entrances and exits open an infinity of possible dancer configurations. You see only two or three dancers at any given time, and it is not until the end of the dance that you really know how many dancers are involved.

It was through improvisation that Brown and her dancers invented a new vocabulary of movement in both choreographies, but *Glacial Decoy's* rigid background space and the floating freedom of *Line Up* do a lot to affect the way that movement is perceived.

1. Trisha Brown in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue, 1961–2001*, ed. Hendell Teicher (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, 2002).

*Trisha Brown. Line Up. 1976. Dancers: Trisha Brown, Elizabeth Garren, Terry O'Reilly, Steve Paxton, Wendy Perron, Judith Ragir, Mona Sulzman. Photographs by Babette Mangolte.*













*Trisha Brown. Glacial Decoy. 1979. Dancers: Trisha Brown, Nina Lundborg, Lisa Krauss, Elizabeth Garren. Photographs by Babette Mangolte.*







*Yvonne Rainer. The Mind Is a Muscle, Part I (Trio A). 1973.*

## Practicing *Trio A*

JULIA BRYAN-WILSON

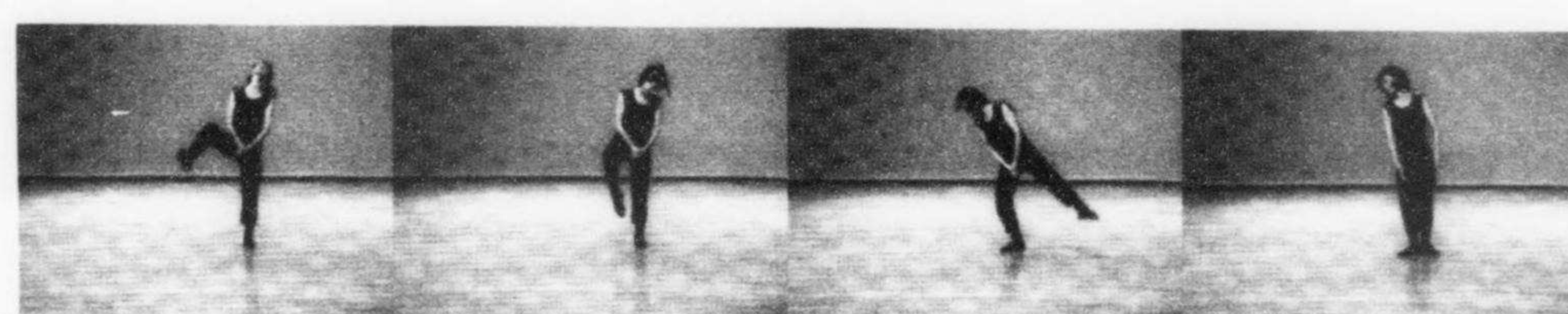
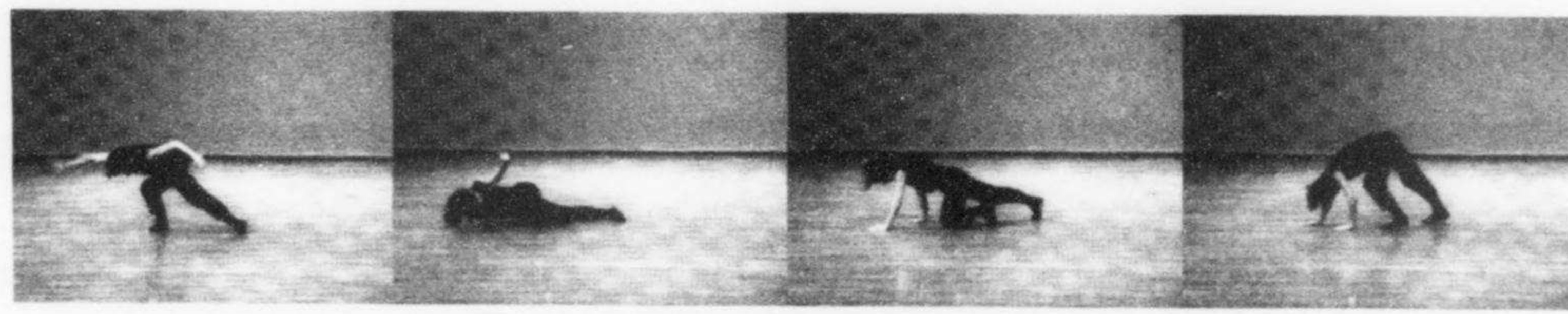
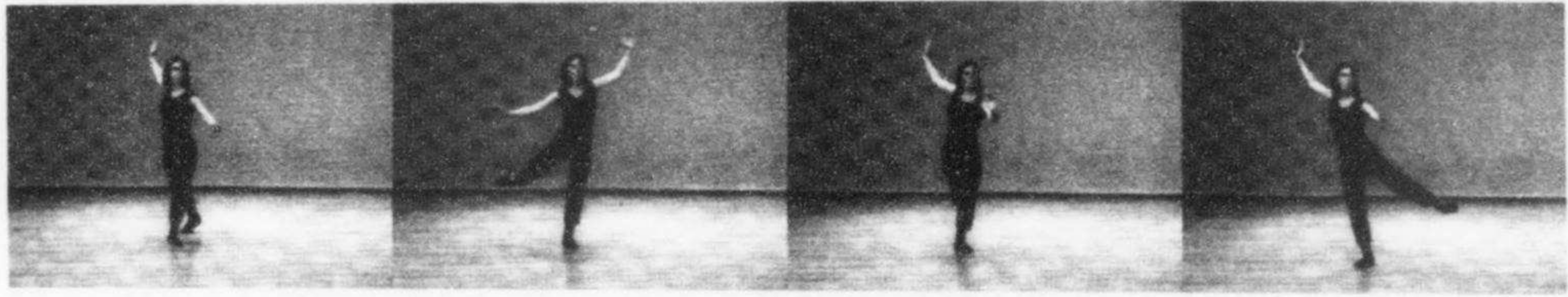
### *Walk On*

This is a text about embodiment and presence, about specters and time. It is about tempo, about slowness, about pacing, about duration, about counting, about the routines we give ourselves to make it through hard times. It is about “going through the motions.” It is, more specifically, about the endurance—one could say haunting—of a single set of motions, routines, and gestures: Yvonne Rainer’s *Trio A*. Choreographed over a six-month span in 1965, and first performed in 1966, the dance has been understood as inaugurating a new field of practice that embraced laconic movements and ordinary bodies, and helped usher in postmodern, task-based dance.<sup>1</sup> In addition, *Trio A* has refigured what it means to talk about the medium—or mediums—of contemporary art.

Though many are familiar with this now-canonical work, here is some basic descriptive ground: in *Trio A* the performers—often a mix of dancers and non-dancers—generally wear normal street clothes, usually dance without musical accompaniment, and perform the same movements together, but not in unison.<sup>2</sup> The sequence of unpredictable actions, ones that disregard dance conventions of phrasing and climax, runs about four and a half to five minutes long, but since there is no musical beat or rigid metronome to keep people in sync, inevitably each performer ends up dancing for different lengths of time. It premiered as a work-in-progress at Judson Memorial Church in New York City in 1966, featuring Rainer, Steve Paxton, and David Gordon as part of a larger work, *The Mind Is a Muscle, Part 1*; since then, it has been danced in dozens of diverging versions (initiated both by Rainer and by others). Some of its other iterations have been included at an anti-war protest exhibition in 1970, the “People’s Flag Show,” in which it was performed by naked dancers with U.S. flags tied around their necks; a back-

1. I would like to extend my thanks to Ian Carter, Mel Y. Chen, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, and Richard Meyer for their insightful comments on this text. Special thanks to Yvonne Rainer for her patience and assistance. The literature on *Trio A* is rich and voluminous; for more on its connection to postmodern dance in particular, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980); and Jill Johnston, “Rainer’s Muscle,” in *Marmalade Me* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1971).

2. For a history of this increasing “canonization,” see Jens Richard Giersdorf, “*Trio A* Canonical,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009), pp. 19–24.



*Rainer. Trio A. 1978.  
Cinematography by Robert Alexander.*

wards or “retrograde” version; one with Rainer in tap shoes; one in which the performer was confined to a small platform; one danced by a group of students on the sidewalk outside of Rainer’s hospital; one set to the Chambers Brothers’ song *In the Midnight Hour*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The recent widespread availability of a previously somewhat obscure 16-millimeter film of Rainer dancing *Trio A*, produced in 1978 by Sally Banes, has provided greater visual access to the dance’s basic contours than the still photographs alone. Inspired to use these captured motions as a guide, many have learned *Trio A* by following Rainer’s filmed body; for instance, in 2010, artist Lindsay Lawson commissioned a dancer to learn *Trio A* by repeatedly watching the 1978 recording that had been made into a digitized video and posted on YouTube. The dancer, Elisa Vazquez, then executed the motions in front of a projection of Rainer, so that her body and her shadow performed a trio with the flickering historical image behind her; Lawson entitled this piece *A.Trio*.<sup>4</sup>

In the past few years, *Trio A* has been subject to a wealth of interest, including the substantial scholarly analyses of two excellent books: a focused look at *The Mind Is a Muscle* by Catherine Wood, and a monograph on Rainer’s wider body of work in the 1960s by Carrie Lambert-Beatty.<sup>5</sup> In addition to live performances around the world, the dance has garnered visibility in an array of other venues and contexts: from its presence in the online community Second Life, where it was learned by a group of virtual avatars, to its 2010 appearance in an exhibition about avant-garde drawing, *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century*, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art. The museum displayed a large-scale projection of the 1978 documentation, and curators Connie Butler and Catherine de Zegher justified its inclusion in this show based on the fact that here the dancing body draws in space.<sup>6</sup> *Trio A* has long been, in Rainer’s words, her old “warhorse”;<sup>7</sup> but in recent years it has generated a storm of attention, and is recruited as a signature piece for an ever-widening number of histories as it scatters across media (it is at once a dance, a set of instructions, a performance, a drawing, a film, a digitized video made of the film, etc.).

This flexibility underscores that *Trio A* might be understood as an example of what Rosalind Krauss termed the “post-medium condition” in contemporary art. According to Krauss, the “medium” of art can no longer be reduced to its technological support, as artists have reinvented what the means and methods of

3. *The Mind is a Muscle* first appeared in its totality at the Anderson Theater in New York in April 1968. For a more comprehensive list of some of its versions, see Yvonne Rainer, “*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009), pp. 12–18.

4. Choreographer Andrea Božić has also used *Trio A* as a departure point for questions of mediation; in her work *After Trio A* (2010), she instructed dancers with no previous knowledge of the piece to learn a portion of it by watching it on a television monitor for one hour.

5. Catherine Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind Is a Muscle* (London: Afterall Books, 2007); Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008).

6. Cornelia H. Butler, “Walkaround Time: Dance and Drawing in the Twentieth Century,” in Catherine de Zegher and Cornelia Butler, *On Line: Drawing in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), pp. 137–203.

7. Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts—A Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 465.

art-making might look like, often focusing on a conceptual idiom by deploying a range of materials.<sup>8</sup> It is worth asking, then, how *Trio A* functions among and across different media: where does it reside, and how do we come to know it? How is each iteration both a fresh interpretation of an archival act and a reenactment—or reactivation—of a repertoire? These questions point to the limitations of medium-specificity; what is more, they go to the heart of why and how *Trio A* has been understood as a dense cultural, historical, political, and artistic act.

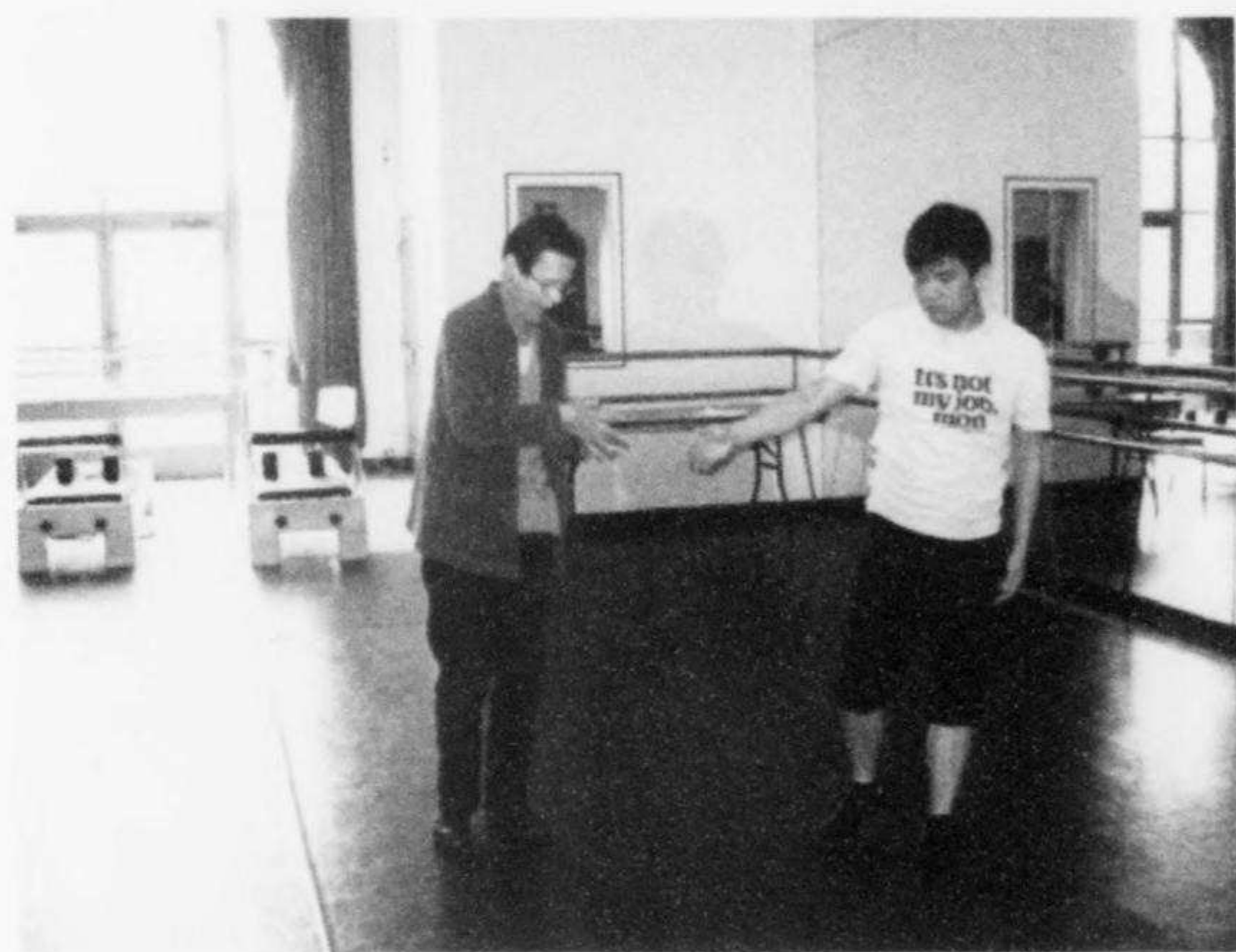
#### *Turn Head*

It has been argued that *Trio A* presents a special case in terms of its challenge to the spectator. As is often noted in the literature, viewers have a notoriously difficult time mentally “tracking” this dance, as it repeats few phrases and unravels assumptions about internal through-lines. I have taught documentation of Rainer’s work for years, in contemporary-art classes that focus on everything from Minimalism to performance to political art. Having studied many photographs, screened the film numerous times for my students, and read incisive written accounts of it, I thought I had a pretty good sense of what it entailed. I was wrong. I now approach the question of the medium of *Trio A* differently, because in the fall of 2008, over the space of about six months, I took a class from Rainer at the University of California, Irvine and learned *Trio A*.

To be clear: I am not a trained dancer. I have never taken a dance class in my life, and have always been pretty clumsy—as a child I clomped around, constantly walking into tables and bruising my shins. I had not, in fact, initially intended to take the class. I showed up the first day to the dance studio thinking I would silently observe and take notes. Given UCI’s highly regarded MFA program, its popular dance major, and the iconic status of *Trio A*, I imagined dozens of students would want to seize this rare opportunity and clamber to enroll. But because of a clerical error, the class was incorrectly listed in the UCI course catalogue, and few people on campus knew that Rainer was spending the quarter teaching *Trio A*. In the end, only six people showed up, including my colleague, artist and professor Simon Leung; three undergraduates (Rachel Pace, Amanda Prince-Luboway, and David Gutierrez); and an MFA student, Caryn Heilman, who had danced professionally for ten years with the Paul Taylor company. I was wholly unprepared for what came next: Rainer, with virtually no preliminary explanation, introduction, or discussion, started teaching the opening movements and assumed we were all there to learn. Though I was not sure I was prepared to flail around alongside students, it seemed like madness not to join in.

Any dreams I might have had about preserving my professional dignity vanished as we all began to follow the initial motions: you walk onstage, stop, turn your

8. Rosalind Krauss, “Reinventing the Medium,” *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1999), pp. 289–305; and “Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition,” *October* 116 (Spring 2006), pp. 55–62.



*Yvonne Rainer teaching  
Trio A. 2008.*

head to the left, and bend your knees. It took me an embarrassingly long time to do that right. I could not always reconcile what I knew to be the required gesture (such as a modified version of an arabesque that the trained dancers could leap into with little prompting) with the limitations of my body as I wobbled, tripped, and fell. My knees didn't bend the way they were supposed to; my sense of my center of gravity and balance was totally off; and as Rainer once said to me, her brow furrowed with concern, "Do you even know how to run?" For it turns out that most of our received ideas about this dance are slightly misleading; it is not full of "everyday" actions (for instance, it includes a free handstand in the middle of the room, and balance *en demi pointe* while wearing tennis shoes). Rather, it is exhausting, it is strenuous, it is very physically challenging, and Rainer has incredibly precise ideas about the ways the body needs to configure itself, where exactly the gaze should land, how even the fingers should be positioned. One does not sloppily move through a series of somewhat improvised or random motions; every tiny movement is prefigured, and it takes a great deal of concentration and work. Far from a free-form, unstructured terrain of unconstrained movement, Rainer's instructions were a reminder that dance, though it can be deeply pleasurable, is equally a discipline, concerned with techniques of training and regimes to shape the body.

My eagerness to do right by *Trio A* was further complicated by my

occasional unsteadiness simply being in Rainer's physical presence; this has something to do with the subtle, ever-shifting erotics of pedagogy. As students, we want to please. What is more, photographs of Rainer taken decades ago have long hovered like ghostly afterimages in my own imaginary, and libidinal, version of the 1960s and 1970s as a time of experimentation both artistic and sexual. Suddenly this fantasy version of history—a kind of peculiar romance, really—intertwined (and sometimes clashed) with the current moment. Rehearsing a dance innovated many years ago by a figure who has come to be a queer hero of mine, cast me, as her student, into a curious vexation of past and present. Rainer was affiliated with gay and lesbian activism long before she actually had a female partner. She was not queer-identified when she first choreographed *Trio A*, but later came out of the closet and now calls herself a lesbian, as well as, even more queerly, an “a-woman.”<sup>9</sup>

One could say, then, that *Trio A* can be understood as a queer dance (narrowly understood here as a dance produced by a queer-identified maker)—but that would be misleading, as retroactively attributing queerness to Rainer in the 1960s erases a richer, more complicated story. In fact, the arc of *Trio A*'s success might be tied, in some respects, to its very *lack* of identifiable matter related to gender or sexuality, and hence is reliant in part on a kind of straightness. As Rainer has commented, “There is no doubt in my mind that the extent to which I can be called a successful artist can be directly traced to a life as a white heterosexual...It is also interesting to speculate how my career might have fared if the content of my work—both dance and films—had focused on lesbian subjects and subject matter throughout the sixties and seventies.”<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Rainer's early work refused to explicitly thematize queerness, though its use of three performers in its initial incarnation—its “trio”—as opposed to the heterosexual binary implied by the traditional duet possibly opens up a queer space. Still, I am not sure what might be gained by reinscribing *Trio A* as “queer,” for any insistence on continuity or identity as it resides in the body of the maker does an injustice to the rangy vicissitudes of desire (queer and otherwise), and cannot account for the openings that queer theory has provided that move away from intention into the realm of interaction, promiscuous circulation, and unlikely affective modes of reception.

I am more interested in how my own revisiting of the dance in 2008 could be seen as a kind of “temporal drag,” to invoke Elizabeth Freeman's term. For Freeman, temporal drag invokes both cross-gender performance as well as the “pull of the past on the present”; she defines it as the “stubborn identification with a set of social coordinates that exceeds [our] own historical moment.”<sup>11</sup> These sorts of trans-temporal

9. Rainer, “Working Round the L-Word,” in *Queer Looks: Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Film and Video*, ed. Martha Gever, Pratibha Parmar, and John Greyson (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 12–20.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

11. Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31 no. 4 (Autumn 2000), pp. 727–44.

crossings have been extensively theorized by queer thinkers like historian Carolyn Dinshaw, and one could say, following her lead, that learning a dance from 1965 was a queer way of “touching the past.”<sup>12</sup> Of course such “touchings” can only ever be partial and phantasmatic. My spectral relationship to Rainer-in-the-past was overlaid and vitalized by my recognition of her as a living being in the present. How might queer anachronisms, delays, lags, and other backward-formations apply, then, in the case of the return to *Trio A* in 2008?

This temporal drag—and the decision to insert oneself bodily into motions from the past as an experiment to test out the discontinuities between a *then* and a *now*—is deployed by current queer artists such as Sharon Hayes. In her series *In the Near Future* (2004–ongoing), Hayes wields protest signs—many of them anachronistic slogans from the 1960s and 1970s—in locations that are removed from their original geographical context but loaded as cultural spaces. For instance, she held the *I AM A MAN* sign from the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers’ strike in front of St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York (an important site for AIDS activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s). Hayes has commented that her actions necessitate that she physically hold the signs herself; that is, she must place herself “in the space of enactment” as a way of examining how “history is rupturing in the present moment.”<sup>13</sup>

Wresting the sign from its context in 1968, Hayes (a white woman) resignified *I AM A MAN*, leaving open the possibility for a transgender interpretation. As the notion of temporal drag helps make clear, trans-temporal crossings potentially echo other kinds of gendered trans-ing and gender refusals. To return to Rainer, the score for *Trio A* might be gender-neutral, but it is not necessarily neutral in terms of how its motions are translated by a range of gendered bodies. It may be instructive, then, to consider the gendering of *Trio A* as danced by Rainer when she taught it in 2008. Her present, more androgynous or butch appearance (having undergone the inevitable shifts brought about by aging, as well as by her more robust queer self-styling) more visibly registers her identification as an “a-woman.” *Trio A* was in part a backlash against Rainer’s modern-dance training under Martha Graham, who once told her, “When you accept yourself as a woman, you will have turn-out” (i.e., achieve the proper hip rotation).<sup>14</sup> Rainer goes on to write: “Prophetic words. Neither condition has come to pass.”

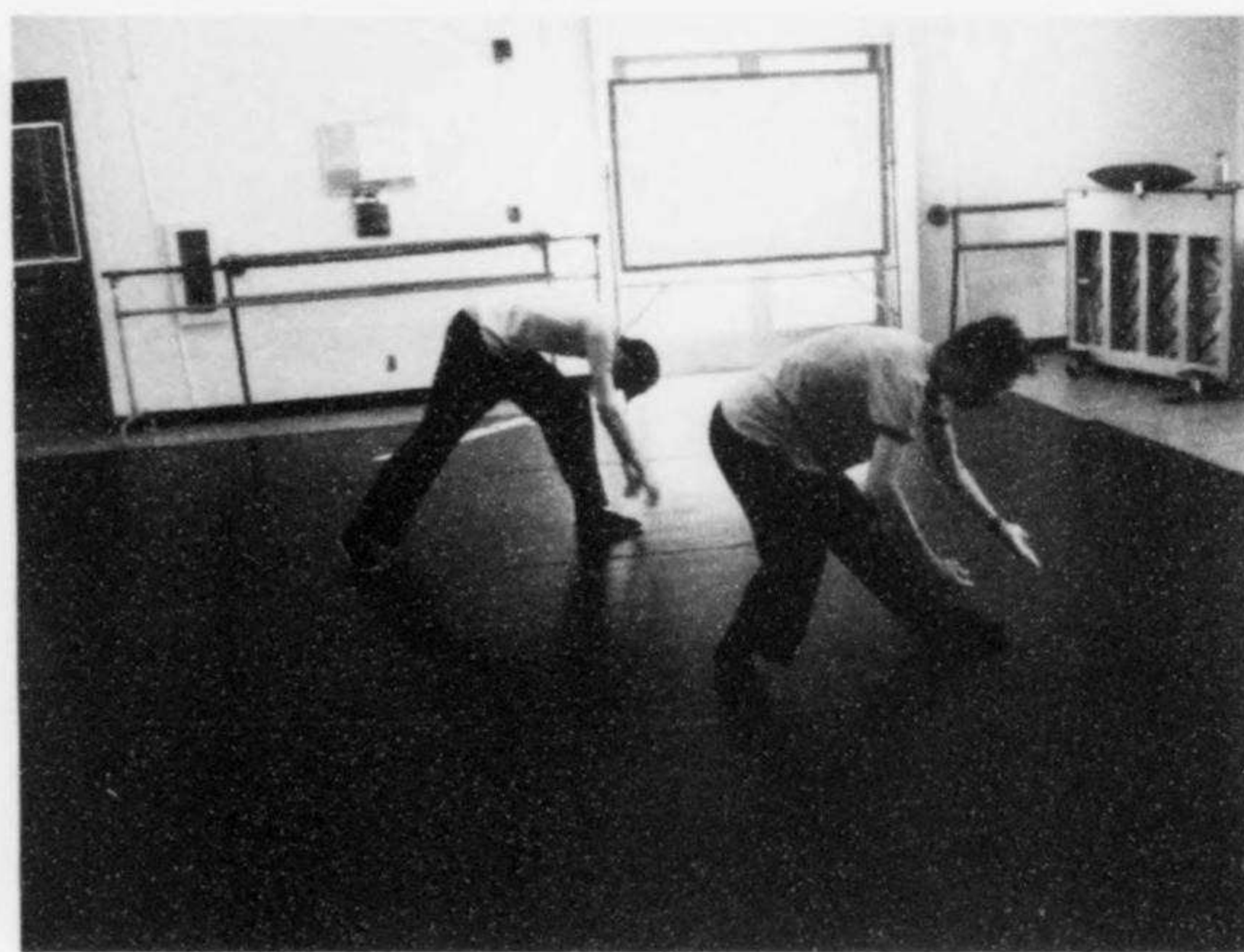
#### *Bend Knees*

*Trio A* is often characterized as full of pedestrian motions, especially since it is meant to be danced by both professional dancers and non-dancers. It is

12. Carolyn Dinshaw, “Touching the Past,” in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Post-Modern* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 1–54.

13. Hayes further discusses her relationship to queering the past in my interview with her, “We Have a Future: An Interview with Sharon Hayes,” *Grey Room* 37 (Fall 2009), pp. 78–93.

14. Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts*, p. 183.



Rainer teaching Trio A. 2008.

described in the same language as other Judson Church pieces, such as Rainer's work *We Shall Run* from 1965, in which its participants jog for seven minutes onstage wearing regular street clothes.<sup>15</sup> Such task-based movement sought to counteract the prevailing conventions of dramatic modernist dance by aligning itself with "found" motions, rather than refined, spectacular phrases that only a talented professional could possibly execute. A "found" or task-based motion means to visually index the exact amount of energy it takes to execute it, rather than partake of the myth of effortless. In *Trio A*, the body is further made intentionally awkward: the head is thrown back; shoulders hunch and the mouth gapes; arms are inelegantly arrayed; the body jerks and hops and rolls and heaves through a series of actions that are strenuous but do not require specialized balletic training.

The very structure of the dance emphasizes return: once a performer moves through the entire sequence, she starts over and exactly repeats the entire dance—sometimes it is danced again, a third time, with each dancer following his or her own internal pacing and tempo, none in sync with the others. Each time, they create different configurations on the stage together. Like Robert Rauschenberg's dual pieces *Factum I* and *Factum II*,

15. For more on this dance, and Rainer's relationship to Steve Paxton, see S. Elise Archias, "The Body as an Everyday Material in the 1960s: Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton," *Wreck* 3, no. 1 (2010), pp. 1–5.

from 1957—in which the artist attempted to contest myths of spontaneity in painting by matching the brushstrokes and drips of two canvases—this repetition within *Trio A* underscores that what might appear to the casual viewer like random improvisation is actually carefully thought-out, highly deliberate movement. (However, as with Rauschenberg's works, these motions are far from robotic, and give way to slight variations and differentiation as the dancer moves from one cycle of the sequence to the next.)<sup>16</sup>

*Trio A* heralded the arrival of an unprecedented vision for what dance could look like, and what sorts of bodies were allowed to participate in it—in this, it was a significant moment in what Sally Banes has called “democracy's body.”<sup>17</sup> It was claimed to be populist, egalitarian, and nonhierarchical, not only in its inclusion of non-dancers but also in its lack of a narrative, its evenness, and its lack of interest in classical emphasis, climax, and retreat. Dancer and choreographer Pat Catterson has called it “the people's dance.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most signifi-



*Rainer teaching Trio A. 2008.*

16. Branden Joseph discusses how Rauschenberg's *Factum I* and *Factum II* were simultaneously constructed, so neither was a “copy” of the other; Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), p. 191.

17. Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

18. Pat Catterson, “I Promised Myself I Would Never Let It Leave My Body's Memory,” *Dance Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2009), pp. 3–11.

cant aspect of the dance—or at least the one commented upon with the most frequency—is that at no point does the performer look at the audience. The gaze is always averted, and in many instances, the gestural logic commands the body to follow the eyes—in other words, the face first turns and then the arm will follow; or the hand gently curls at the hip and the eyes dip down in response towards the palm. The dancer is primarily concerned with attention to her own flesh. In the one moment in the dance when the performer's face is directly angled towards the viewer, her eyes are closed. Practicing the dance in front of a mirror turned its reflective surface into a substitute for the audience. To consistently look away from the phantom viewers was also a reminder not to get caught in constant self-checking or self-correcting; avoiding its presence meant a furthered attention to the body as enfleshed, rather than as represented.

The studied avoidance of eye contact with the audience and the careful, blank neutrality of expression were central to Rainer's critical intervention while composing this dance. As mentioned, she had studied modernist movement with Martha Graham, and *Trio A* was a polemical, assiduous rejection of some of modernist dance's primary tendencies. As she wrote in her famous "NO Manifesto," from 1965: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendence of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to the involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator no to the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved."<sup>19</sup> This manifesto has much in common with contemporaneous sculptural work, as has been pointed out by Lambert-Beatty and others, most notably the Minimal forms that her dance soon became affiliated with. The elimination of phrasing and development meant that every movement was equally important, and flowed from one to another, somewhat akin to Donald Judd's "one thing after another."<sup>20</sup> In addition, both Minimal dance and Minimal sculpture raised questions about the ethics of spectatorship: this is Lambert-Beatty's incisive characterization of Rainer's dance, that it is "difficult to see" in that it provokes a heightened awareness in the body of the viewer. The very absence of phrasing means that the sequencing of time—the logic of how something just past continues into the ever-approaching future—is challenging to keep in order.

*Trio A* has been characterized as both photographing spectacularly well, but also as importantly resistant to documentation.<sup>21</sup> Much of the literature on *Trio A* is concerned with this question of memory, disappearance, and documentation—how to look at the photographs, for instance, or how much weight to give the filmed ver-

19. Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts of Some Sextets*, Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1965); repr. in *Yvonne Rainer, Works 1961–73* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 51.

20. See Lambert-Beatty, *Being Watched*, p. 95.

21. Lambert-Beatty considers this issue in depth in her "Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*," first published in the pages of this journal in 1999; a revised version appears in *Being Watched*.

sion as “authentic.” Rainer’s abiding physical presence is crucial to maintaining the details of the dance, but as she ages—when she taught the dance in 2008, she was 74, and could still perform with agility most but not all of it—this memory vessel is less and less secure. Rainer has been afforded some measure of relief now that the dance has been officially notated in the Labanotation system, a graphic charting system that archives choreography by translating it into a written score and thus renders it into a script can be, at least in theory, followed quite exactly.

After decades of having a fairly *laissez-faire* attitude towards those who took up and performed *Trio A* without her to oversee the process, Rainer admits that she has begun to feel uneasy with its widespread dissemination and the many variables of its replication. As she wrote in 2009,

When I hear rumors of people learning *Trio A* from the video, I know that they have achieved only a faint approximation of the dance with little understanding of its subtleties. Precision has always been an important component of *Trio A*. Its geometric floor patterns, governing direction of feet and facing of hips, is exacting and not to be trifled with. For example, the final diagonal with all its twisting perambulations, though not literally drawn, constitutes a directive as rigorous as any issued by Balanchine, Cunningham, or Lucinda Childs.<sup>22</sup>

Having it notated within the Laban system allowed Rainer to “set the record straight” and be as fastidious and scrupulous as possible about the minute gestural demands of the dance, but even this scientific method has its limitations; the version learned by students at the Laban Center in the U.K. who used the score alone needed, as Rainer notes, “not just fine-tuning but gross adjustments.”<sup>23</sup> Instead, Rainer foregrounds the one-on-one pedagogical encounter, the importance of the interpersonal transmission of the dance’s motions that become, as Catherine Wood puts it, a “living archive.”<sup>24</sup>

The question of how performance endures through time, and the paradox of capturing ephemeral events, have been central to work on live art—including arguments by Phillip Auslander, André Lepecki, Peggy Phelan, Rebecca Schneider, and others, and I will not recapitulate those important debates here. Instead I propose that we think about *Trio A* as a complex discursive site that invites, demands, and necessitates *practice*—as obvious as that might seem, given that it is a dance that is rehearsed and repeated. However, the term *practice* could use more attention beyond the meanings delimited by Pierre Bourdieu (who uses the word to theorize social ordering as it “unfolds in time”) and Michel de Certeau (who thinks through the procedures and modes of everyday behavior).<sup>25</sup> Recently the word, commonly used in contemporary art criticism to signify post-studio artistic work that is difficult

22. Rainer, “*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation,” p. 16.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

24. Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind Is a Muscle*, p. 93.

25. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 9; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

to pin to one medium, has come under some scrutiny. An article by Roberta Smith in the *New York Times* in December 2007 called its use “lamentable” and “pretentious,” a sanitization of art-making that aligns it with the work of those white-collar professionals who need licenses to practice such as “lawyers, doctors, and dentists.”<sup>26</sup>

Smith overlooks something critical; *practice* as a way to describe artistic labor that is wide-ranging and difficult to categorize has its uses, as it signals that art-making (which might not adhere to any one medium) might continually be in process. Against Smith’s claim that the term professionalizes art, Andrea Phillips in her article “Education Aesthetics” argues that “practice” strains the definition of artistic labor by distancing it from an expectation of production or remuneration, placing it rather in the flow of process, learning, or procedure.<sup>27</sup> (Rainer’s insistence that *Trio A* be transmitted through teaching prefigures the wider “educational turn” in contemporary art.) Historically, Herbert Marcuse used the phrase *political practice* in his 1969 *An Essay on Liberation* to refer to attempts to forge new forms of experience that move both the political and the aesthetic realm away from the automatic and the engineered. He writes: “Such a practice involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms of a nonaggressive, nonexploitative world.”<sup>28</sup> The literally repeated practice of *Trio A* might, counterintuitively, connect to Marcuse’s notion of a political practice that offers a way out of routine.

#### *Swing Arms*

During my experience with *Trio A*, “practice” took on new levels of meaning. I set myself the task of learning something I had read about and studied for years from a radically transformed perspective—suddenly I was thrust from the role of witnessing scholar (ostensibly removed by a historical distance) to a body on the scene. It felt, in part, like trying an alternative research methodology, what Donna Haraway has called “situated knowledge” at its most literal, as I sited myself within and among Rainer’s rigorous paces. “We need to learn in our bodies,” wrote Haraway in her call for a critical feminist epistemology.<sup>29</sup> What, too, about *unlearning*? Many of the actions in *Trio A* are slight tweaks on ballet movements such as the *rond de jambe* and the arabesque, but made more ordinary, their dynamic range toned and tamped down, the flourishes and emphases taken out. Former professional dancer Caryn Heilman told me during one rehearsal that the hardest thing for her was to stop putting accents on the movements, to stop stylizing her ges-

26. Roberta Smith, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Art,” *The New York Times*, December 23, 2007, p. 2.37. Further, Smith does not discuss how “practice” could be viewed as an element of praxis.

27. Andrea Phillips, “Education Aesthetics,” in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds. Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2010), pp. 83–96.

28. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 17.

29. Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988), p. 581.

tures—in other words, to stop dancing too much. But at least she knew the basic moves that Rainer was perverting: as a non-dancer, I found learning *Trio A* akin to learning a language so foreign that you not only don't understand the words or the alphabet, but you can't even distinguish between consonants and vowels.

Learning *Trio A* expanded and enriched my relationship to time. It slowed things down (all that exertion only took five minutes?); it sped things up (we only have a few more minutes to go?). It was the last thing I thought about before going to bed, and the first thing I thought about when waking up. Its chain of motions, which progress uninterruptedly with very little emphasis, functioned like a mental string of worry beads that I would go over to calm myself. Through Rainer's infinite patience, and over many, many hours of rehearsal, I slowly managed to put the pieces together into a "good enough" version. (Rainer acknowledged that her small UC Irvine troupe in 2008 "worked their asses off."<sup>30</sup>) Still, though eventually I could do it just right in my own mind, my body did not always comply. The disconnect between my perfectly executed mental motions and my actual flubbings were a reminder of the disjunction between visualization (how the mind sees the self) and material embodiment (how the body performs its own incoherence).

Even if you "know" the dance, there are endless things to refine, to polish, to finesse—dozens of little tricky weight changes to maneuver, for instance. In addition, it offers the absorbing experience of focusing attention onto your own limbs while also negotiating around the dancers who share the space with you. When you dance it, it is hard to think of anything else but dancing it. You can't focus on where the body has been or anticipate by more than a few seconds where it will go. As my fellow dancer Amanda said, "I am more in the present in those minutes than I am in any other part of my life." Strikingly, this idea of "presence" echoes Michael Fried's famous formulation about Minimalism from his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."<sup>31</sup> Still useful for its crystallizing polemic, Fried's argument asserts that minimal sculpture demands that the spectator remain self-aware at all times. His grimly negative assessment of this "theatrical" art contends that it is such awareness that defeats art, which is meant to suspend duration in order to take one out of time. As he writes in his well-known concluding sentence, "Presentness is grace." Yet in my experience of the Minimal dance, *Trio A* is specifically about heightened presentness, as one must be fully conscious of time unfurling from second to second (although I might revise his dictum in my own plodding case to read "presentness is gracelessness").

A letter from John Bernard Myers (director of the Tibor De Nagy Gallery in New York) to Rainer from 1968 articulates more about the possible corporeal and political stakes of *Trio A*:

My reaction was to see the whole "ballet" as a form of "preaching":  
"This is what the body is about." The body is cool, or it sweats, it cannot

30. Rainer, "Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation," p. 17.

31. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), pp. 12–23; reprinted in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 116–47.

ignore gravity, best to give in to it. The body leaps; it falls down. We balance ourselves, but only for a moment or two. The body gets tired. . . . But can you understand my kind of shocked awareness that a dancer and choreographer has set out to “teach” the public what the Body is all about? . . . The questions your art proposes are very hard to face. Should the public be asked to face them? The answer of course is a resounding “Yes!” But my dear Yvonne, I hope you are prepared to accept that fact that they may kick like hell . . .<sup>32</sup>

What, for Rainer, is the medium of the body about? She has many metaphors for the dance, most of them mechanical: an airplane coming in to land, a motorized machine for flapping the ears. When teaching, Rainer said that one of the things that makes it so very hard to learn is that “there is more energy where you wouldn’t expect it and less energy where you would expect it.” But it is a faulty machine, she admits, unruly and bizarre, with potential for failure and humiliation and foolishness and fragility and vulnerability. Thus at one point she instructs that you “scramble up however you can.” Body parts scatter and disperse: they become unfamiliar and disembodied, as if they had minds of their own. You “unspool your arm from your body,” or your foot “skitters along like a mechanized bug,” or you lean back as if your leg had suddenly become leaden and were too heavy to lift.

Myers notes that the dance teaches the public something of crucial importance. Why might the public in 1968 have needed this lesson? Then, as now, the contested terrain of the body has everything to do with questions of embodiment, of fleshy presence, and all its ramifications: gender, race, ability, age, and sexuality (the very terms thrown most into question during the social movements of the mid- to late 1960s, when Rainer choreographed *Trio A*). The body is the very grounds on which social and public identity is fought.

#### *Step Left*

During the fall of 2008, the months in which I learned *Trio A*, the materiality of aged, raced, gendered, and differently abled bodies came to matter quite pointedly within the heated rhetoric of the presidential election: think of John McCain’s war wound, Sarah Palin’s beauty-queen self-presentation, and Barack



*Rainer teaching Trio A. 2008.*

32. Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts*, p. 303.

Obama's mixed-race heritage. Bodies, with their specificities, have always played an important role in U.S. political life, but in this election season, the scrutiny seemed ever more intense. While in the full grip of my fixation on rehearsing *Trio A*, I noticed how commonly dance metaphors were invoked—Obama, for instance, was depicted in numerous caricatures as a slick, smooth tap dancer (a trope that is racially loaded). What is more, the idealist politics of the 1960s that provided such fertile ground for experimental movement had significant echoes in the 2008 election, as both campaigns worked to mobilize the successes and failures of the civil-rights era and the Vietnam War.

When *Trio A* was performed in 1968, it was accompanied by an artist's statement that detailed Rainer's "horror and disbelief upon seeing a Vietnamese shot



Student learning *Trio A*. 2008.

dead on TV—not at the sight of death, however, but at the fact that the TV can be shut off afterwards as after a bad Western. My body remains the enduring reality.”<sup>33</sup> As Lambert-Beatty has argued, Rainer's work was in critical dialogue with the culture of media and televised images of the Vietnam War. In this argument, the dancing body is positioned as an antidote to televisual death, some sort of counterproposal to a distant horror. But I am not sure that the presumed dichotomy or tension between mediatization versus presence still works forty years later.

In the fall of 2008 (again a time of a brutal and spectacularized war), the polarization of documentation versus liveness was made increasingly unstable. During practice, the other students and I would bring our laptops or iPods to watch the 1978 filmed version (which Rainer finds inaccurate and was constantly striving to correct) to compare ourselves against or to remind us of certain transitions. *Both* the live body of Rainer and her filmed body were our guides. To practice *Trio A* in the fall of 2008 was to exist in a heightened present but was also to try to retell, however provisionally, a text from the past, as a way to have a palpable, affective relationship to a charged previous time. The toggle between the “original” dance from the 1960s and the version we enacted was framed, however, by our constant connection to the “now”; we checked the election polls at breaks on our electronic devices and then got back to work.

There is something in dance called “muscle memory”—the capturing of

33. Rainer, “Statement” from *The Mind Is a Muscle*, Anderson Theater, New York (April 1968); repr. in *Work, 1961–73*, p. 71.

movement within your flesh so thoroughly that when you move, you can do so without much conscious thinking. The body can contain and store thought, history, and meaning; it is capable of holding and learning and even teaching the mind. Seeing dance can arguably work to imprint its motions within the observer; in fact, dancers healing from injuries are encouraged to watch others dance, as it is claimed that simply witnessing the movements helps prevent their muscles from forgetting.<sup>34</sup> Now, when I see pictures of *Trio A* from past versions, somatic triggers remind me of exactly when in the sequence they were taken; I can feel the motions in my legs or torso that lead to what comes after. This is not to privilege my experience, but to note that performers become specialized types of viewers, with somewhat altered relationships to documentation.

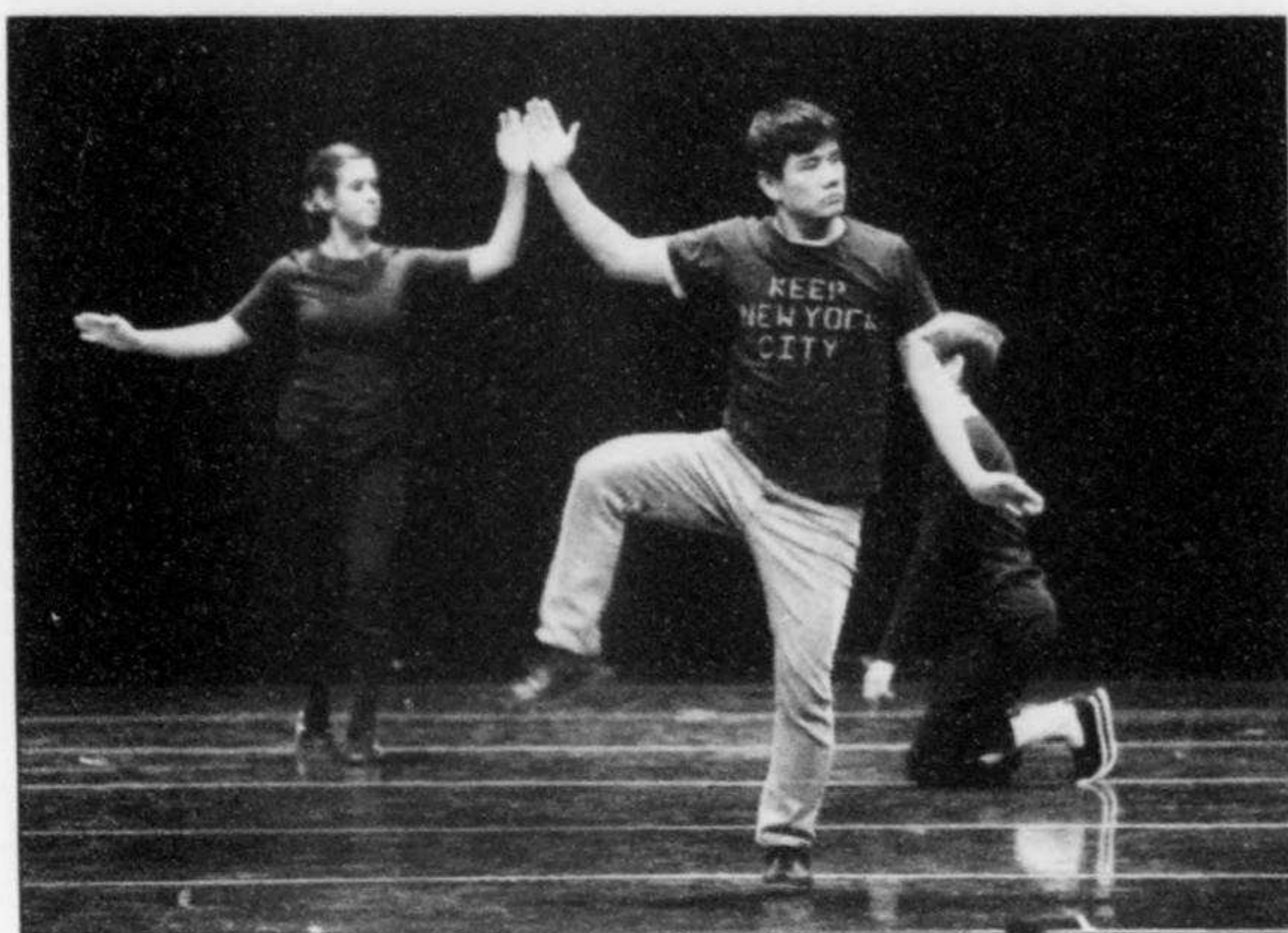
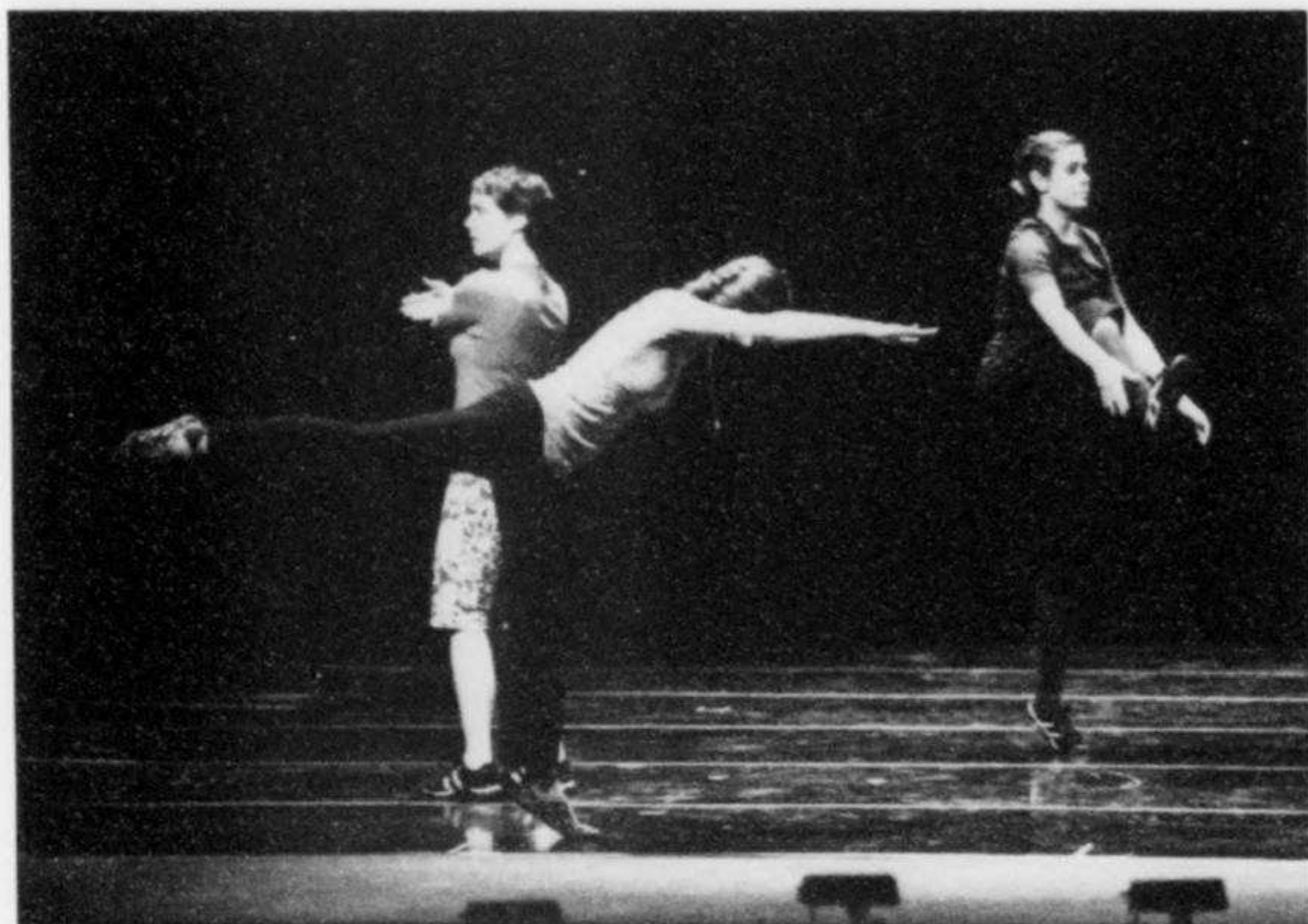
Might it be this muscle memory that is at the crux of *Trio A*'s haunting of contemporary art today, for it posits an alternative model—something that might augment writing, or traditional research, or photography, or digital technologies—to help us rethink the construction and reconstruction of the past as it continually reappears in the present? In this sense, I invoke the “medium” of *Trio A* to indicate that, re-inflecting Krauss's notion of the “post-medium condition,” the dance also functions as a *medium*—to dance it is to travel to another time, to conjure like a mesmerist or spirit guide images or moments or gestures that have (only spectrally) passed. The name for a person who has learned a dance from its maker and is officially authorized to teach it to others is the custodian, reconstructor, or “transmitter.”<sup>35</sup> Yet she is also the carrier of its hard-to-index traces—she transmits its information within her body; it is a profoundly intimate exchange, this taking in of an archive and holding it close to revivify it for the future. Perhaps Rainer was so strict with us at UCI because she has grown more aware that when she teaches it, she is actively creating within her students a living archive that will exist alongside the many photographs, the film, the virtual versions, the Laban score, and the written descriptions.

This sort of embodied, temporal “holding” might be understood as queer. As theorists like Molly McGarry, Elizabeth Freeman, and Judith Halberstam have argued, the untimely—and affective—interweaving of the past and the present could be called non-normative or queer time.<sup>36</sup> As Freeman wrote in her introduction to a 2007 special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* explicitly dedicated to “queer temporalities,” “time has, indeed *is*, a body. . . . [T]his sensation of asynchrony can be viewed as a queer phenomenon—something felt on, with, or as a body, something experienced as a mode of erotic difference or even as a means to

34. This is a common dance convention, but such a presumed psychophysical response based on spectating has been questioned by Susan Leigh Foster in her *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2011).

35. Rainer, “*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation,” p. 15.

36. Molly McGarry, “Secular Spirits: A Queer Genealogy of Untimely Sexualities,” in *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), pp. 154–76; Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University, 2005); and Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2010).



*Rainer. Trio A in Ten Easy Lessons. 2009. Dancers: Julia Bryan-Wilson, David Gutierrez, Caryn Heilman, Simon Leung, Rachel Pace, and Amanda Prince-Luboway. Photograph by Rose Eichenbaum.*

express or enact ways of being and connecting that have not yet arrived or never will."<sup>37</sup>

### *Spread Hands*

Though I came into the experience thinking that my not-quite-rightness at *Trio A* would be my own private shame to shoulder, it was soon made clear that for Rainer, the point of a dance is to make it public. Just because the dancers are mandated to avoid gazing at the viewers or meeting their eyes does not negate those viewers. With this, another stereotype about *Trio A* was shattered: though the performers avert their gazes, the dancers are there to be looked at. Indeed, it is crucial that the dance be witnessed; as Wood writes, "its primary purpose was to hold the audience's attention, to be seen."<sup>38</sup> The culmination of our obsessive practice was a series of performances at UC Irvine, February 5–8, 2009, as part of a larger program that highlighted the work of the dance-department faculty and was a wider tribute to choreographer Donald McKayle. The six of us performing this version of *Trio A*, which Rainer entitled *Trio A in Ten Easy Lessons* in a nod to the ten-week quarter, had formal rehearsals, tech checks, and a dressing room in which we shared space with the dancers changing into costumes for a piece by William Forsythe. It seemed a logical endpoint, for though the dance is so

37. Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction," special issue, "Queer Temporalities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 1–2 (2007), p. 159.

38. Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind Is a Muscle*, p. 24.

much about the impossibility of seamlessly holding the past within the present, it is also always looking ahead. Think of how the eye first looks to where the body then follows—the entire sequence is a series of anticipatory gestures that move towards the future. The received notion that *Trio A* renounces the spectator is simply incorrect—when someone in our class asked, “Do we bow at the end?,” Rainer replied, “Absolutely. I never said no to bowing.”

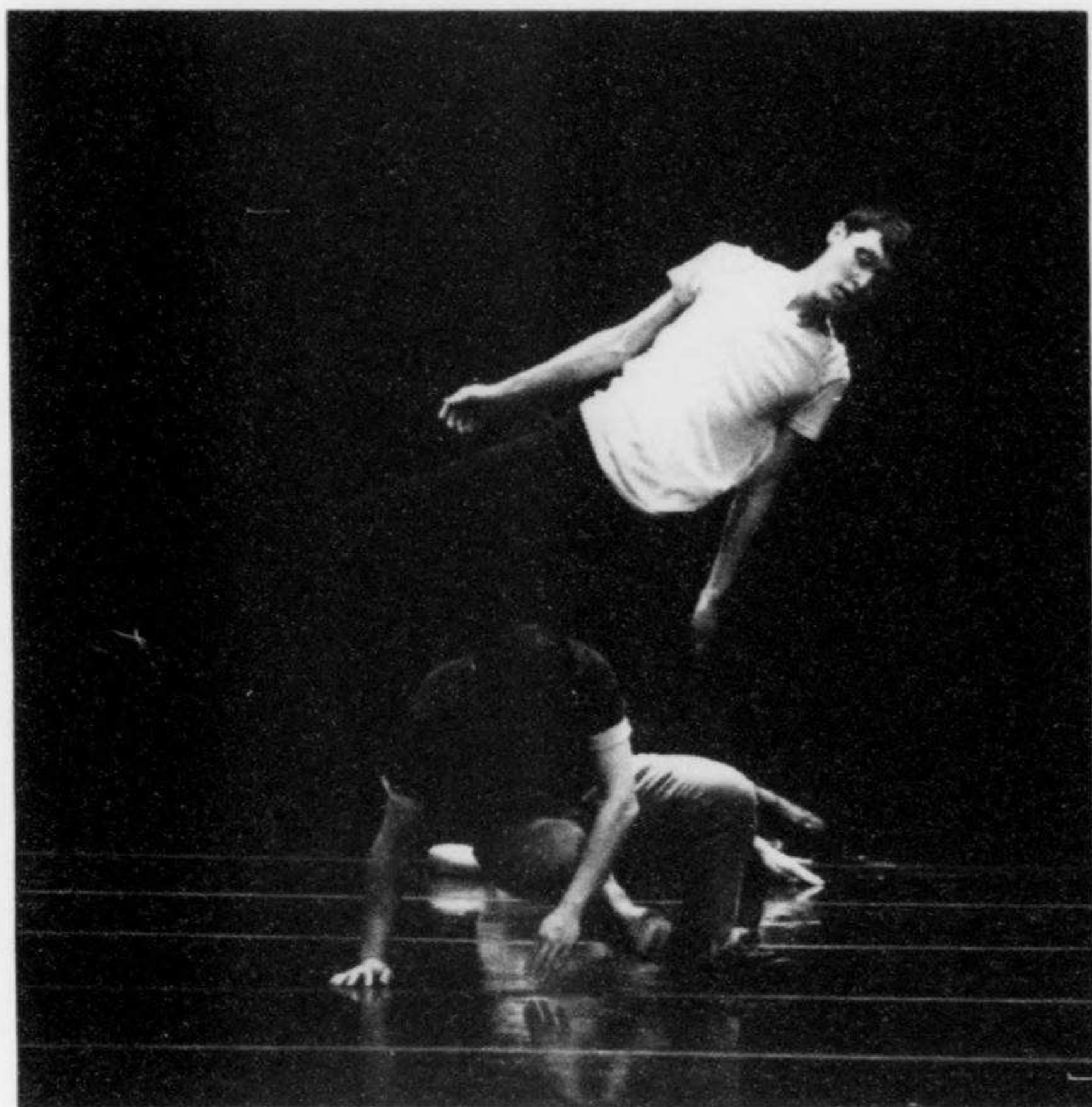
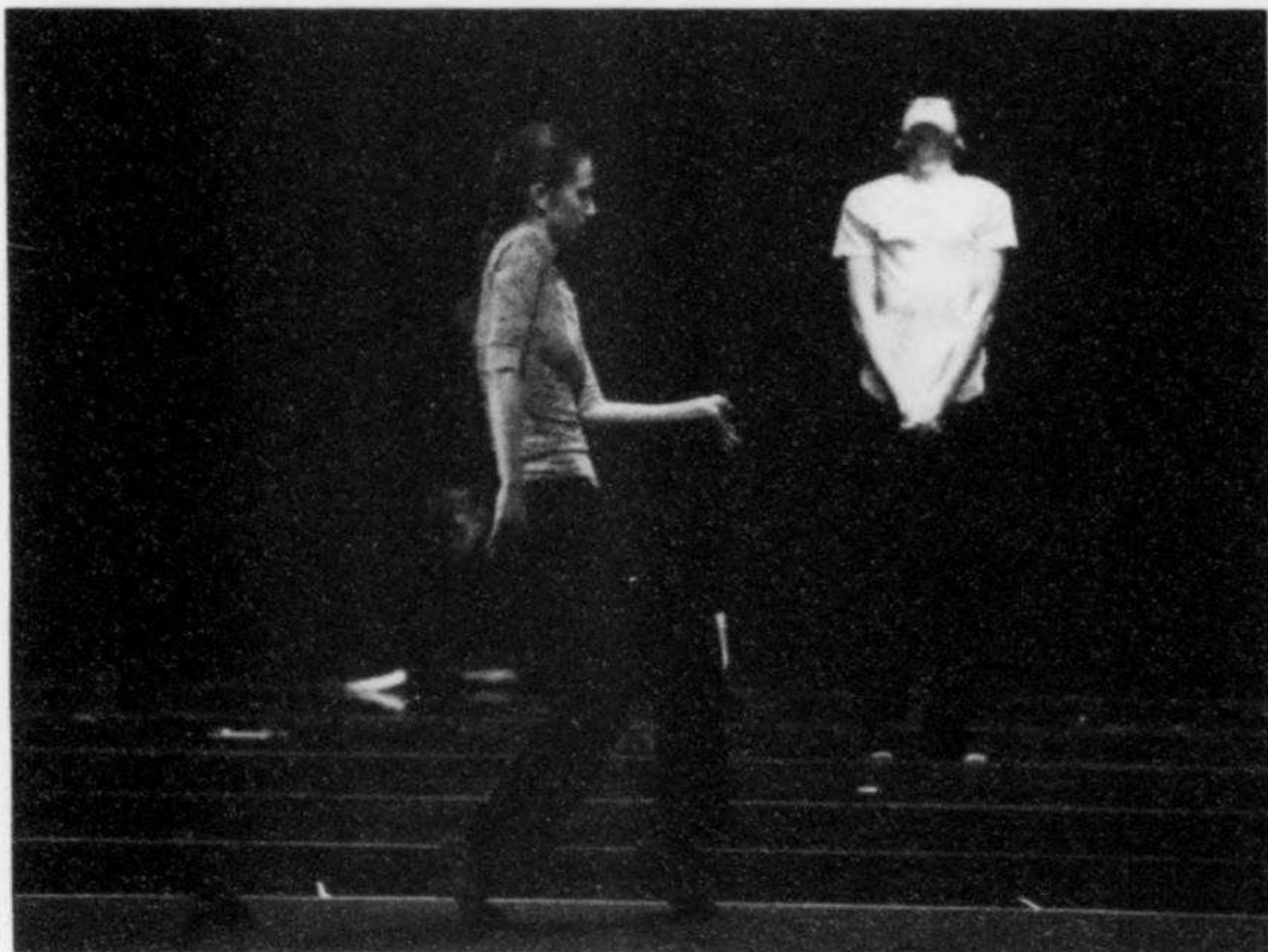
By the end of the run I was still the worst in the bunch, but I made a kind of peace with that, taking comfort in the notion that there is a generosity in being the worst. (In the photos I have selected to illustrate this text, I have chosen ones that do not include me, or where I am a blurred figure in the background: such is my lasting sheepishness). Rainer has written the following about our UCI performances:

The visible variations in difficulty and struggle, the poignant determination and concentration of the three tyros—set off against the facility of the more “professional” performers—made it possible for me to engage with the dance in a way I hadn’t experienced before. In the past, if I had used untrained people, I had isolated them—that is, had them perform alone or in a group of others with a similar lack of training. But here everyone was operating simultaneously in the same space. . . . The difference between this group and the class I had observed at the Laban Centre lay in the consciousness of the former of both their limits and their struggle with those limits; they knew what they could not do, like balance on one leg convincingly or roll the head around while doing a difficult side step. The Laban people all had some dance training; they knew how to perform. What they didn’t know and couldn’t project was that sense of precariousness and achievement. My UCI “amateurs” had weathered the fire of my obsessive attention, and it showed—in their pride, determination, and self-awareness.<sup>39</sup>

Rainer’s intentional mixing of amateur and trained dancers was also a revelation during the performance. When dancing the work in front of an audience, performing the same movements alone but together, alongside each other but not in unison, I had the sensation of working next to these other students and colleagues in a wholly transformed way. The stage we performed on was much smaller than our practice space, so we had to compress our movements and find ways not to bump into each other. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has described what she calls the “beside”—a realm of respectful horizontal intimacy that is noncombative, porous, and open.<sup>40</sup> Sedgwick’s “beside” is not just spatial, but theoretical—it delimits a space of critical openness in which you assert your ideas *next to* rather than in opposition of other thinkers. Dancing *Trio A* felt very much like that as I moved alongside the other performers and had to negotiate, with great respect and admiration,

39. Rainer, “*Trio A*: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation,” pp. 17–18.

40. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2003).



*Rainer. Trio A in Ten Easy Lessons. 2009.  
Photograph by Rose Eichenbaum.*

their own swooping or jerking or hand-splaying motions.

This essay is an attempt to put into words what this method of experiential learning might mean for a scholar of contemporary art history, a field notorious for its indeterminate starting point as well as for its often uncomfortable blurring between theory and practice, between criticism and history. It feels especially fraught given the proprietary demands about “being there” that sometimes shadow discussions of the 1960s. And, as with rehearsing *Trio A*, I find myself stumbling as I write—in the face of so much strong scholarship on this dance, I grasp for original words, looking for angles that have not been covered before. But the lesson of *Trio A* might be not only mastering the sequence of gestures, the rolling on the ground, the scooting back or leaping forward, but one of collective corporeal negotiation that could be extended to think about how, too, we might practice contemporary art history. The lesson, then, may be about owning what Rainer called “precariousness and achievement.” So this text is very much in the spirit of the *beside*; I work next to (and am very much indebted to) Carrie Lambert-Beatty and Catherine Wood and Connie Butler and Pat Catterson. *Trio A* provides a potent metaphor for group relations, as you must give each other room on the stage, be aware of the other bodies and what their trajectories might be to avoid running into them. The logic of

adjacency in the dance, which is not one of lockstep, put me in mind of Susan Leigh Foster's notion of dance as modeling community or coalition.<sup>41</sup> The blankness of expression is not one of affectlessness, but one of measured awareness, of studied intensity without hysteria, of acting without overreacting. Though one is absorbed by one's actions while doing it, it is a dance against vanity.

During the Vietnam War, *Trio A* was pressed into service specifically as a protest, and I think it continues to register as such, however subtly. It is a protest against speed and acceleration. It is a protest against forgetting. The dance endures not only because of its negativity—its rejective force—but also because of its optimism, its expansiveness, its acceptance of the uncoordinated and its celebration of the awkward, its ability to structure and mark time. In fact, Rainer recently wrote a reflection about the dance that focused on passion:

As far as *Trio A* was concerned, PASSION (shout) was a given; it resided offstage, in the obsessions of the artist, among other excesses and more quotidian expressions of emotion. While no emotions were consciously generative of or relevant to the movement phrases in the ultimate sequence, they remained latent, submerged in the uninflected flow. Now I prefer to describe the mode of that performance as low-keyed impersonation, suggesting a provisional or ambiguous self that is at once produced, erased, and confounded.<sup>42</sup>

As this excerpt indicates, the self that *Trio A* instantiates is not one that merely says no; it also is desirous; it is contingent; it is relational and sensitive to its proximities to others; it does not take itself too seriously. In fact, Rainer has said that her "No Manifesto" has haunted her, and that she "wishes it could be buried."<sup>43</sup> She once told me that she should have written a *Yes* manifesto.

In the wake of learning *Trio A*, here is my provisional version of what such a manifesto would look like: yes to looking to the past for a way to endure the present, yes to inventing mediums and yes to creating new muscle memories and yes to alternative models of transmitting knowledge and yes to potential humiliation and yes to possible failure and yes to passion and yes to aging and yes to the messiness of contemporary art history as an uncertain and vital and undefined platform and yes to queer temporalities and yes to desirous histories and, finally, yes to bowing.

41. Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theater Journal* 5 no. 3 (October 2003), pp. 395–412.

42. Rainer, "Where's the Passion? Where's the Politics? Or, How I Became Interested in Impersonating, Approximating, and Running Around My Selves and Others', and Where Do I Look When You're Looking at Me?," *Theater* 40, no. 1 (2010), p. 49.

43. Rainer, "Meeting Yvonne Rainer," interview with Helmut Ploebst, [corpusweb.net/meeting-yvonne-rainer-3.html](http://corpusweb.net/meeting-yvonne-rainer-3.html) (accessed May 1, 2012).

## Moving as Thing: Choreographic Critiques of the Object

ANDRÉ LEPECKI

*To give oneself as a thing that feels and to take a thing  
that feels is the new radical experience that asserts itself  
on contemporary feeling.*

—Mario Perniola<sup>1</sup>

*To be moved by some thing, rather than by oneself.*

—Yvonne Rainer<sup>2</sup>

If there is a distinguishing trait of recent experimental dance, it is the noticeable presence of objects as main performative elements. Examples can be found in numerous works of the past three or four years. German choreographer Thomas Lehmen's recent *Schrottplatz* (Scrapyard, 2010) is a fifty-minute solo piece in which Lehmen interacts with a lamp, chairs, a microphone, a hammer, a tomato, and a newspaper, among other items, attempting to explain to one object the function or nature of the object next to it. Exploring the elusive yet inescapable referentiality of objects, *Schrottplatz* probes the limits of signification, as it displays language bouncing against the opaque surface of matter. In Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero's group piece *We Are Going to Miss Everything We Don't Need* (2009), we also encounter an investigation of what Mantero calls the "rebound effect" between an "object of the world" and the word that signifies it, the ambiguous movement between an object's sheer presence and its semantic resonances. As Mantero writes in the program notes for her evening-length piece, such a rebound effect between bodies and objects, mediated by language, opens the possibility for "touching the other side of things."

But the recent choreographic move toward objects is not only concerned with exploring the gap between referentiality and signification. In *My Private*

1. Mario Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic: Philosophies of Desire in the Modern World* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 1.

2. Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), p. 269.

*Himalaya* (2009), by Amsterdam-based choreographer and visual artist Ibrahim Quraishi, seven performers interact with 500 objects—including mannequins, lamps, one plastic rabbit, all sorts of medical paraphernalia, flowers (plastic and organic), a replica of *Star Wars*' R2D2, different kinds of furniture (old and new), household cleaning products, glass bottles, bouncy balls, and a huge bust of Aristotle. By accumulating all sorts of stuff on, under, or around the performers, Quraishi slowly reveals the overwhelming saturation of contemporary life by what Jean Baudrillard once called "the system of objects." Objects, understood now as vectors of subjectivation, can also be found in Brazilian choreographer Marcela Levi's *Em volta do buraco tudo é beira* (2009) and in several of the recent works by French choreographer Christian Rizzo (particularly *Christian Lacroix Seen by . . .*, 2007–08, and *My Love*, 2008).

Object-invested experimental dance echoes somewhat the concurrent resurgence of the object in recent philosophy (for instance, in Graham Harman's *Tool Being* and *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, Mario Perniola's *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, and Silvia Benso's *The Face of Things*), literary studies (Barbara Johnson's *Persons and Things*), critical theory (Jane Bennet's *Vibrant Matter*), critical race studies (Fred Moten's *In the Break*), and in some curatorial projects (*Part Object Part Sculpture*, Wexner Center for the Arts, 2005; *Not to Play with Dead Things*, Villa Arson, 2008; *Thingly Variations in Space*, Mokum, 2010). Of course, objects have always been present on dance stages. Indeed, it is the history of this presence that has shaped the vivid dialogue between dance and the visual arts over the past century, most significantly after World War II. As Rosalind Krauss noted in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*,

a large number of postwar European and American sculptors became interested both in theater and in the extended experience of time which seemed part of the conventions of the stage. From this interest came some sculpture to be used as *props* in productions of dance and theater, some to function as *surrogate performers*, and some to act as the on-stage generators of scenic effects.<sup>3</sup>

The recent redefinition of the status of the object in experimental choreography, however, deserves some scrutiny, for it moves away from the terms utilized by Krauss to describe postwar uses of sculpture in dance stages. Indeed, in all the works mentioned above, and in the four works I analyze in this essay, choreographers are not using sculpture created by visual artists—neither as "generators of scenic effects" nor as "surrogate performers." Instead, these choreographers bring *stuff* onto stages and into rooms and galleries in a procedure that is quite different from the one described by Krauss: objects are picked up, brought into a place, and then, most of the time, just left alone alongside dancers' bodies. But isn't letting an object be—i.e., opting not to manipulate it as a "surrogate performer," nor to affirm it as "art," nor to use it to create "effects"—already a provocation in the

3. Rosalind E. Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), p. 204.

object of a substantial transformation? Isn't letting be already a move toward de-objectifying the object, a move that turns the object into a mere *thing*—if we understand that “a thing is neither an instrument, nor a utensil, nor a means,” as Mario Perniola, closely following Heidegger, reminds us in *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*?<sup>4</sup>

If the concept of object (as opposed to the concept of thing) is ontologically tied to instrumentality, to utility, to usage, to means, then it follows that objects exist in a symmetric relationship regarding subjectivity. In this relation, objects are always “an endless reproduction and confirmation of the *manipulative abilities of the subject*,” as Silvia Benso has remarked.<sup>5</sup> In dance, the figure of the “manipulative subject” is powerfully linked to the authoritative figure of the choreographer, to his or her authorial function in dictating steps, controlling gestures, and directing moves to the minutest details. To control and to dictate, and then to be obeyed with precision: this is why choreographer William Forsythe once described choreography as “an art of command.”<sup>6</sup> Within this system, quite often a dancer's moves are perceived as being little more than the immediate (or sometimes even unmediated) and obedient expression of a choreographer's will. Within this specific choreographic economy, the dancer's subjectivity is seen as always ready for manipulation, as a mere means or as an instrument. It is in this sense that a dancer might be assimilated to an object—the dancer becomes merely a tool used by the choreographer. It was this problematic “political unconscious” defining the choreographic project that Yvonne Rainer so lucidly identified, and was so openly against, in her famous essay written in 1966 (but only published in 1968), when she defended the need for dance to be moved by “some *thing*” rather than by “oneself.”<sup>7</sup> Given that “self” names a particular mode of subjectivation, predicated on manipulative and instrumental intentionality, which Rainer could no longer accept, a “thing” would be that a-personal, subjectless matter, that noninstrumental entity that would liberate a dancer's moves into a field of nonhierarchical, horizontal interactions. The task (ontological but also political, aesthetic but also ethical) was to create a choreographic logic where any links between “manipulation” and “subject,” “utility” and “object,” would be bypassed—so that other possibilities for things could come into being.

Once objects and subjects symmetrically co-determine each other, it follows that “if the status of the object is profoundly changed, so also is that of the subject.”<sup>8</sup> In this light, the change of the object's status in recent choreography raises a pressing question for subjectivity: once an object surrenders (or is evacuated from) utility, once it is removed from the realm of instrumentality, from relations

4. Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, p. 109

5. Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 2000), p. xxxiii.

6. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera, eds., *Dance Discourses: Keywords in Dance Research* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 16.

7. Rainer, “A Quasi Survey,” p. 269.

8. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), p. 20.

of subordination in regards to a subject that manipulates it—in other words, *once an object becomes no longer an object but a thing*—then what does a subject become? Specifically, what does the subject who dances become? In the co-constitutive symmetry obtained between objects and subjects, the subject follows the path of the object: the subject involutes, becomes-thing.<sup>9</sup> But, if this is indeed the case, what does this involution actually perform, in the realm of the choreo-aesthetic as well as that of the choreo-political?

These questions frame the affirmation of the thing in recent experimental dance, and they inform the four works I consider here in detail: *Rubbish City* (2008) by Chinese visual and performance artist Yingmei Duan; *Tickle the Sleeping Giant #9* (2009) by U.S. choreographer Trajal Harrell; *Este corpo que me ocupa* (2008) by Portuguese choreographer João Fiadeiro; and *Solo . . . ?* (2008) by Spanish choreographer Aitana Cordero. Going one step further than Rainer's pieces, these very different works share one common trait: they not only proclaim, and perform, the need not to be moved by a self, they bypass even the desire to be moved *by* a thing—since this would still cast onto things a hint of instrumentality, of a thing's being *used* a necessary *means* to an aesthetic *end* (things would move a dancer and thus become representatives or substitutes of a self's will). Rather, these four works propose how to move as thing and how to become-thing.

#### *Rubbish City*

*Rubbish City* was first performed at the Lilith Performance Studio in Malmö, Sweden, in 2008. In 2009, as the curator of the festival IN TRANSIT at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, I invited Yingmei Duan to re-create the piece in the building's larger gallery space. Duan, along with her artistic team and the technical crew of HKW, built a haunting environment made out of five tons of Berlin's "clean trash," turning the main gallery space at HKW into a temporary trash center. In this labyrinth of rubbish, the audience (only ten individuals at a time) roamed through a narrow, winding path, stepping on thousands of objects covering the floor and negotiating piles of stuff as high as three meters: battered washing machines, torn curtains and rugs, hundreds of cardboard boxes, piles of paper, half-broken or miraculously intact plates, cups, and glasses, a stove, TV sets and electronics, a door, mattresses, planks of wood, old toys, rags, books—all in different states of preservation and decay. In a dim light, the audience also encountered in the labyrinth five ghostly presences. Three people stood in three different spots: a girl of about twelve years of age idling on the floor, amidst the

9. "Creative involution" is the expression Deleuze extracts from Bergson, changing its original denotation in Bergson (involution as the arresting force countering the *élan vital*) to signify the minoritarian vector of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "Involution" must "in no way [be] confused with regression. Becoming is involutionary, involution is creative." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), p. 238. See also Valentine Moulard-Leonard, *Bergson-Deleuze Encounters: Transcendental Experience and the Thought of the Virtual* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 2008), p. 42.

stuff; an older male actor sitting on a wooden stool mumbling repetitively half-lost memories; a piano player striking half-broken melodies from an out of tune upright piano (also found in the garbage). Two others roamed about: a silent, tall, mysterious man in a tuxedo and the naked, silent figure of Yingmei Duan shuffling along the path carved out of rubbish. The whole environment was pierced by the acrid smell of dust and mold and by the rancid smell of soiled garments and dirty linens, and the whole experience sutured by the clunky, melancholy sound coming from the out of tune upright piano.

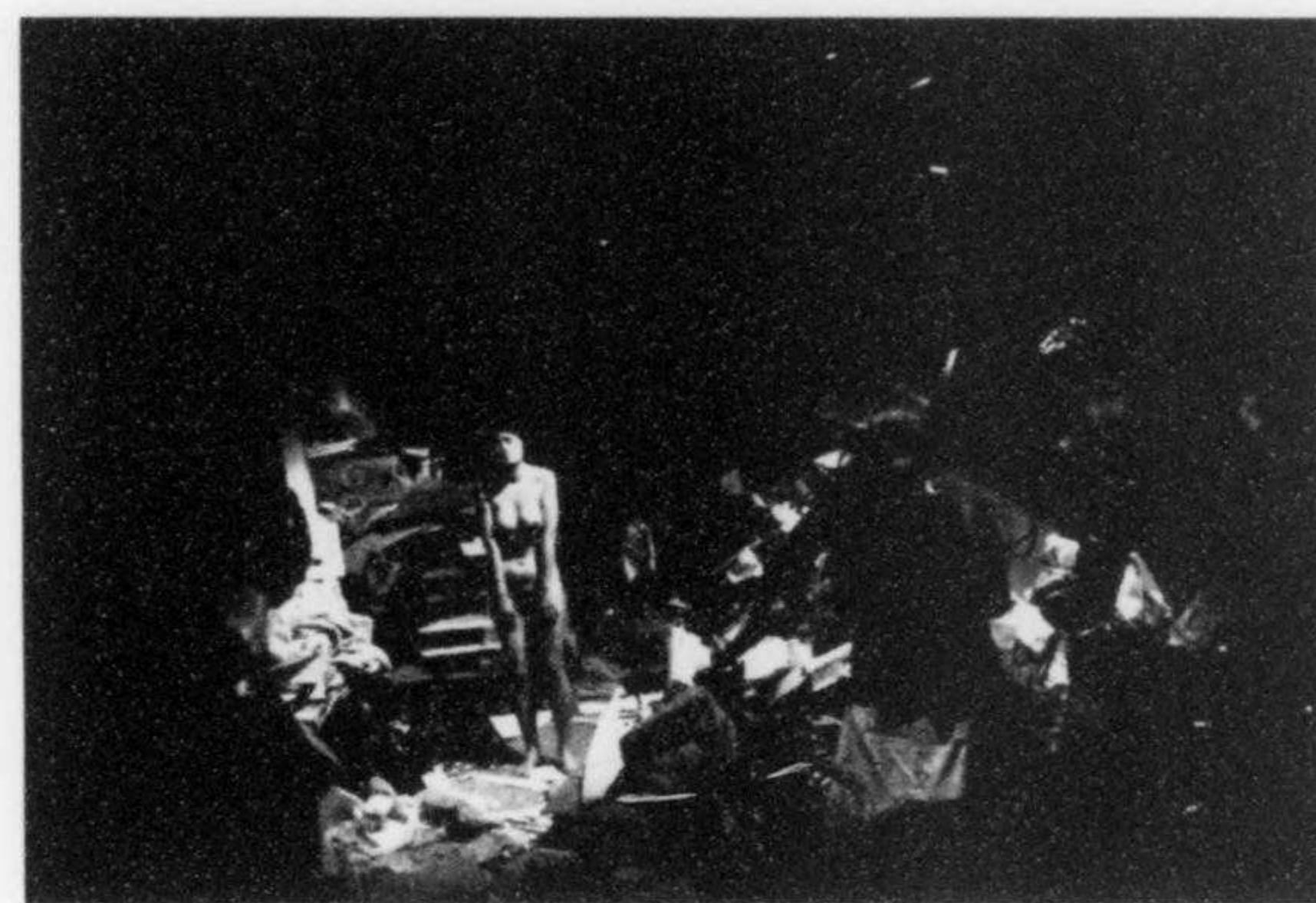
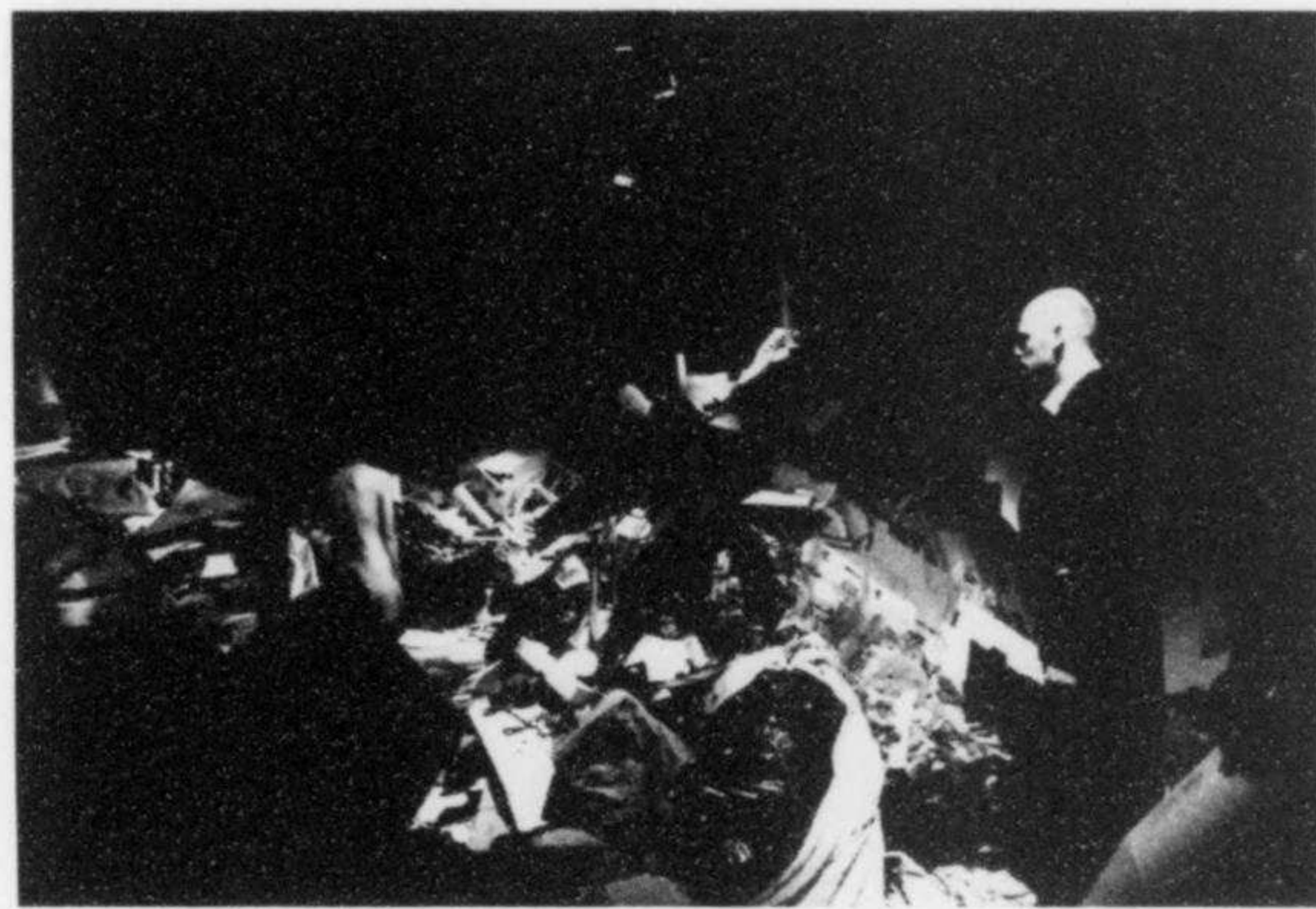
A mix of installation, butoh dance, theater of objects, endurance performance, social sculpture, and social choreography, *Rubbish City* is an overwhelmingly harsh, overwhelmingly sad, and deeply sensorial experiment. Straddling a pre-determined path, feeling our way in the dim light, trying not to trip or bump into the rubbish, attempting to engage or, more often, to avoid the self-absorbed, solitary performers, one cannot help being struck by a sudden realization: how recent, how *contemporary*, all that trash is. Moving within the rubbish city, blending with it thanks to the darkness and the stench, our hesitant steps resonating with Duan's own shuffling, we realize that all those discarded goods are not relics of a distant past. Rather, all that stuff was thrown away because such is the short-term destiny of all commodities in a society of intense consumerism. *Rubbish City* offers a kinetic-political, as well as affective-political, epiphany about our own condition as participants, accomplices, witnesses, and makers of a catastrophic, yet apparently unstoppable, culture of mass production that necessitates (and is predicated upon) a symmetrical, also catastrophic, *mass rejection*. In the context of the rejection of what once had been objects of desires, of what not too long ago had been used and useful, a true Benjaminian "dialectical image" flashes, provoking a moment of political-historical discernment. Benjamin noted that "every dialectically presented historical circumstance polarizes itself and becomes a force field in which the confrontation between its fore-history and after-history is played out. It becomes such a field insofar as the present instant interpenetrates it."<sup>10</sup> In the phantasmagoria of *Rubbish City*, the playing out of the fore- and after-history of discarded stuff in the present instant of the performance appears as the revelation of how, by the mere fact of being no longer in use, of having been discarded, all those objects endured what Deleuze and Guattari call an "instantaneous incorporeal transformation."<sup>11</sup> By the simple (f)act of having been discarded, they had passed from the realm of utilitarian commodities to the realm of useless stuff; they had stopped being objects and become mere things. And yet, emptied out of all instrumental use, the carefully choreographed rubbish evoked another kind of possibility for being in the world: the thing's.

Perniola wrote: "our ignorance and our contempt for things is such that they

10. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1999), p. 470.

11. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 80-82.

are generally considered only and exclusively in a relation of subordination with respect to our subjective will or to our desires."<sup>12</sup> Yet, through the experience of roaming Duan's path and of brushing our bodies against piles of things and anonymous figures, *Rubbish City* proposes a reversal of this "subordination" in order to affirm what could be called a proximal aesthetics with things—an alongsidedness without identification. Thus, if the audience experiences physical proximity to the performers, the performers never relate to the audience, refusing even a simple eye-to-eye exchange. And if the spectator steps on a landscape made entirely of familiar daily objects, it is only to see those objects existing far away from their intended purpose. Finally, if the spectator breathes in dust and mold from all that discarded stuff, literally inhaling particles of history, it is only to be overtaken by a sudden desire to cough, sneeze, or puke—thanks to a very real incorporation of the vapor of things. These carefully choreographed tensions between proximity and incorporation, distancing and excorporation, which hold the affective atmosphere and dramaturgical consistency of Duan's artwork, reaffirm the proximal yet nonrelational mode of being with things. In words that are resonate with the experience of roaming in *Rubbish City*, Silvia Benso proposed the development of such an ethics of things that would promote the development of ecological and



*Yingmei Duan. Rubbish City. 2008.*  
*Photographs by Elin Lundgren.*

12. Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, p. 109.

political awareness: "Only if things are recognized in their own peculiar alterity which does not submit, because it cannot be submissible, to the categories of the subject, can any ecological project be grounded on something more profound and fundamental than the fortuitous occurrence of subjects of good will."<sup>13</sup>

In *Rubbish City's* apocalyptic environment, it becomes clear that good will is not enough. Yet the piece also gives us a possible line of hope: once objects and subjects are both stripped of instrumentality, functionality, value, and identity, what they can find proximally is the actual possibility of simply *tarrying alongside*, as thing next to thing. This may not seem much of an accomplishment. But let us recall that alongsidedness, which is always a yielding to the nonhierarchical appeal of things, is one of the necessary preconditions for an ethics of becoming, not only in Deleuze and Guattari (becoming molecular as the necessary nonanthropomorphic political and ethical movement), but already in Heidegger's insight that "just tarrying alongside" is the mode of being which allows "a holding-oneself back from any manipulation or utilization."<sup>14</sup> Holding oneself back, holding back the very mode of subjectivation called "self," is nothing more than to initiate a becoming thing by giving space (within objects and within subjects) to things.

*Tickle the Sleeping Giant #9*

In the opening moments of his 2007 piece *Showpony*, choreographer Trajal Harrell sits on his spectators' laps as if on chairs. Positioning his audience in two parallel rows of chairs on both sides of an empty catwalk, Harrell walks into the space and then methodically moves from spectator to spectator, sitting on everyone's lap, as the catwalk remains empty. Humorously redefining what a lap dance might be, Harrell's repetitive gesture has a slow cumulative effect that gradually creates a sense of generalized discomfort, as the sensual, embarrassing, funny, and intimate physical interaction reveals how easily anyone can be turned into an object. Transforming subjects into objects, the opening of *Showpony* intensifies the impact of such an act thanks to the inescapable racial inflection given by Harrell's brown skin. As Fred Moten has suggested, black performance is informed by a onto-historical force he called "the resistance of the object." This particular mode of resistance is one where objecthood and blackness inscribe upon each other a whole dynamics of (in)visibility and (silenced) aurality characterized by a "deictic-confrontational field."<sup>15</sup> In this confrontational field, subjects resist and persist, perform and act, despite a history of having been reduced legally, politically, and affectively to the status of objects for use and trade: the history of the Middle Passage, of slavery, and also of capitalism; a history where entire populations have been, and continue to be, reduced to the status of commodities, machines, or tools.

13. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. xxxviii.

14. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1996), pp. 88–89.

15. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), p. 233.

Two years later, Harrell further blurred the fine line between object and subject with *Tickle the Sleeping Giant #9*. This time, Harrell moved closer to the proximal aesthetics and affective politics of things. Turning the dancing body as much as possible into a thing, *Tickle the Sleeping Giant #9* was presented at the main foyer of Haus der Kulturen der Welt in June 2009 also as part of IN TRANSIT 09. The piece gathered six dancers, all of whom had taken the sleep-inducing drug Ambien. Harrell having surrendered authorial and choreographic control, neither the piece's duration nor its choreographic and gestural score was commanded by Harrell's will. Indeed, they were not even directed by the dancers' wills. Instead, the piece was composed entirely by pure (a-subjective) metabolic velocities, as each dancer's body interacted with Ambien's active hypnotic chemical ingredient imidazopyridine. The piece's length was approximately eight hours, dictated by the average duration of the drug's effect. The six dancers took the drug at around noon, and laid on five rectangular white foam frames on the cold stone floor of HKW's main foyer. In terms of movement, bodies supposedly to perform the supposedly distinctive trait of dance as an art form (movement across space) remained mostly inert—only occasionally twitching, trembling, or turning according to physiological forces.<sup>16</sup>

A “thingly zone” was thus defined and produced according to specific anti-choreographic concerns. If the subject that defines dance as an autonomous artistic discipline within the “aesthetic regime of the arts” (to use Rancière's expression) is a kinetic, disciplined “being-toward-movement” (to use Peter Sloterdijk's expression<sup>17</sup>) always ready to perform at the slightest command of the choreographer-author, then once a dancer becomes incapable of fulfilling such a task, he or she risks losing all aesthetic “utility” and identity. But if a loss of kinetic proficiency within a choreographic system of obedience threatens the onto-aesthetic grounds of what is usually referred to as dance, it also opens up the possibility for thinking movement otherwise. Rather than movement as macro-displacement, we have small perceptions. Rather than spectatorship, we have caring as a mode of being alongside unconscious bodies—bodies that have given up intentional animation to just let be. Finally, in the case of Harrell, choreographic authorship is replaced by a kind of attending. In Berlin, throughout the whole piece, Harrell sat discreetly behind a column a few feet away from the sleeping dancers, definitely “off-frame” but still there. Later, he told me that the urge to be there, next to the dancers, for eight hours, had derived from an irresistible sense of feeling responsible for them; an inescapable need to ensure nothing would happen to them throughout their slumber. Harrell's description of this impulse, which has nothing to do with autho-

16. For a critique of dance as an art of “movement in space,” see my book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (London: Routledge, 2006). See also chapters 1 and 2 of Erin Manning, *Relationescapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009); and chapter 3 of Petra Sabisch, *Choreographing Relations: Practical Philosophy and Contemporary Choreography* (Munich: epodium, 2011).

17. For a discussion on choreography and Sloterdijk's notion of “being-towards-movement,” see Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance*, especially chapters 1 and 2.



Trajal Harrell. *Tickling the Sleeping Giant #9*. 2009.  
Photographs by David Bergé.

rial oversight but everything to do with an ethical imperative of caring, made him less a choreographer than an attendant. Yet Harrell's version of the attendant is not the one that Deleuze defines in *Logic of Sensation*: "An *attendant* is not a spectator but part of the Figure." It is "a constant, or point of reference in relation to which a variation is assessed."<sup>18</sup> Harrell's presence does not belong to the regime of the "Figure" since his off-frame presence never allows him to become a "point of reference" in the piece's overall plane of composition. Instead, his attending care suggests the particular erotics Mario Perniola assigns to the mode of being he calls "a thing that feels," a mode predicated on the fact that

the discovery of the essence of things goes hand in hand with the dismissal of any desire and individual cupidity. Therefore when I give myself as thing, I do not mean at all to offer myself to the exploitation and the benefit of others. I do not offer myself to the other but to the impersonal movement that at the same time displaces the other from himself and allows him in turn to give himself as thing and to take me as thing.<sup>19</sup>

18. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sensation*, trans. D. W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2003), p. 14.

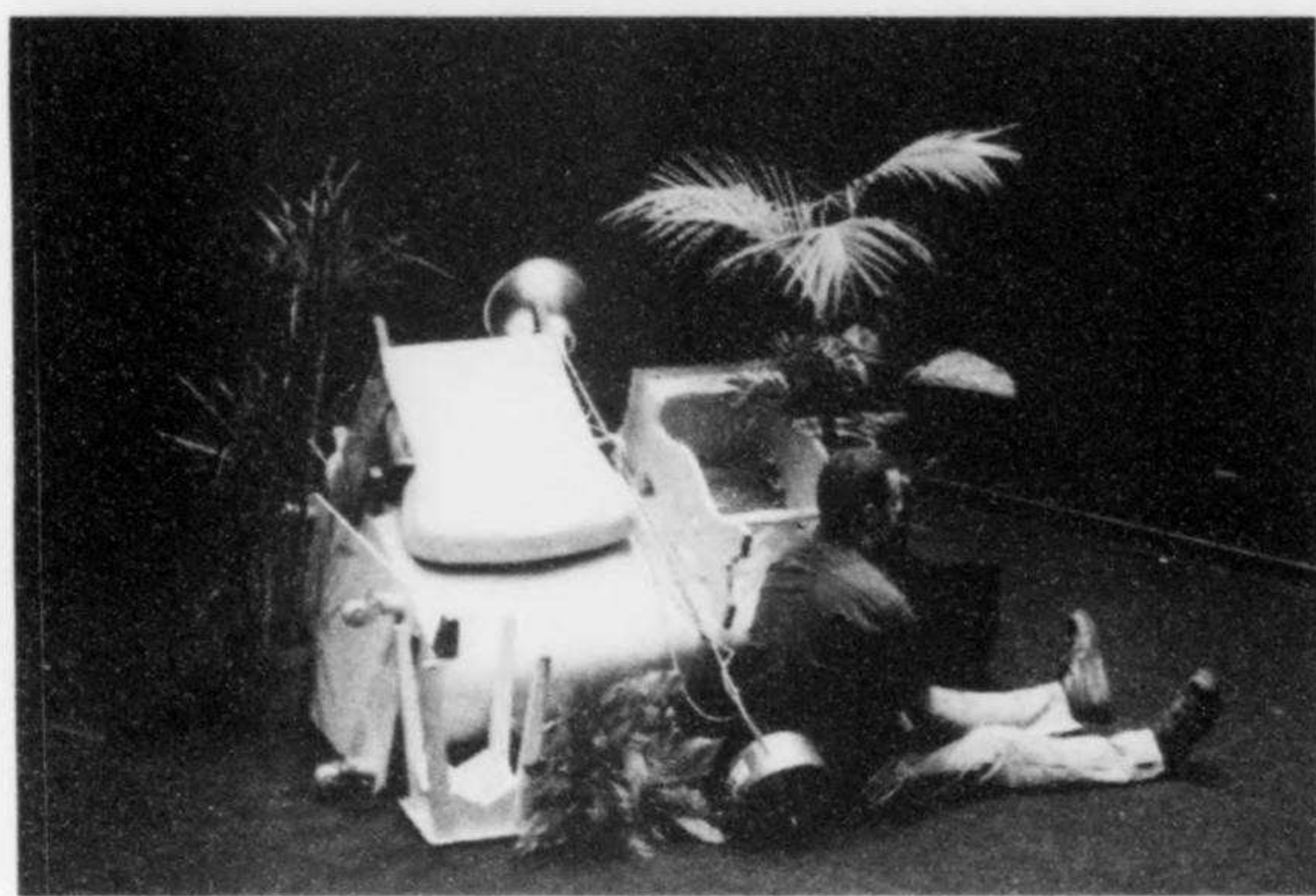
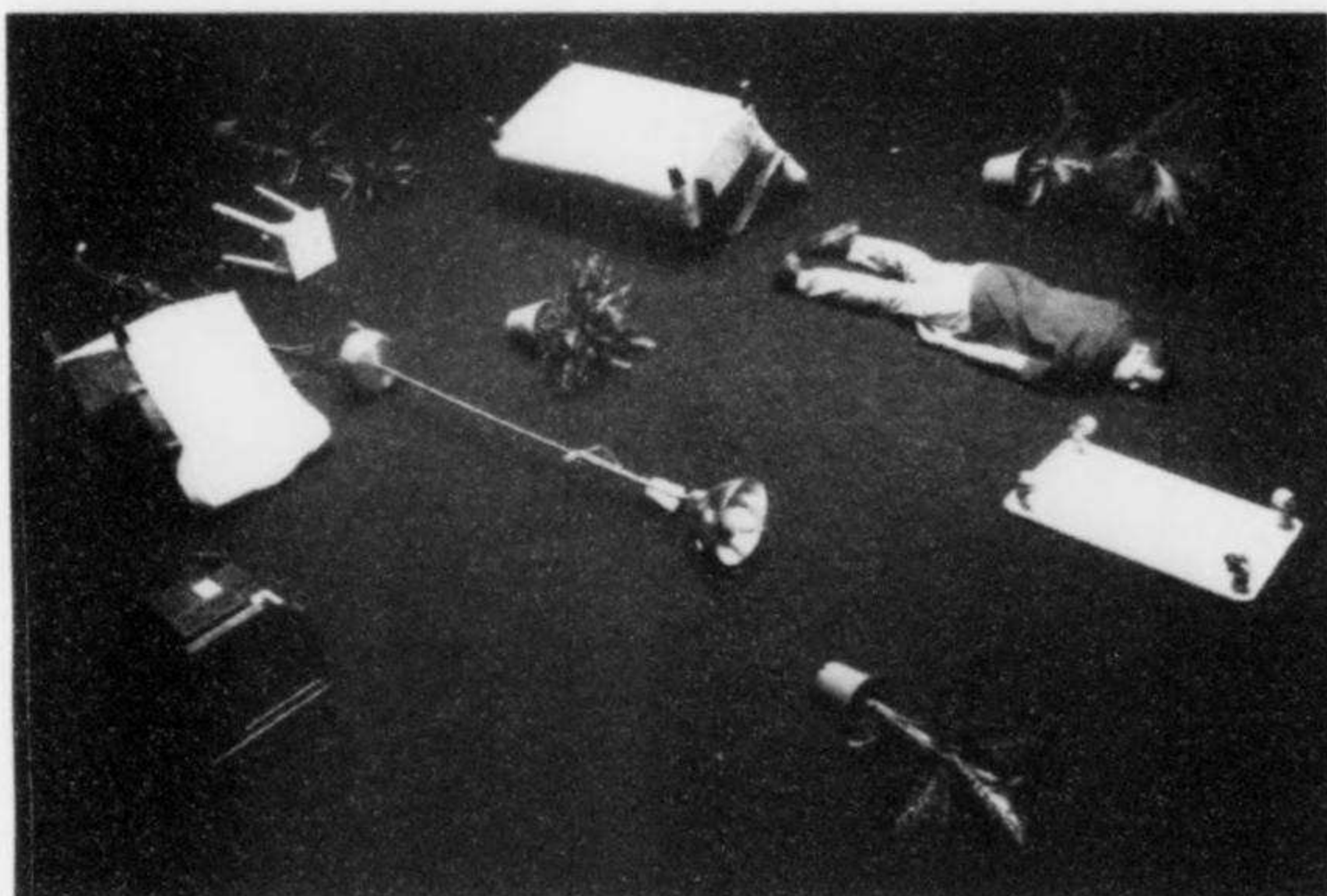
19. Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, p. 109.

*Este corpo que me ocupa*

In the first ten minutes of *Este corpo que me ocupa* (This Body That Occupies Me), lines of dialogue between two anonymous interlocutors, discussing haphazard events involving the building and the city where the performance is taking place, are projected onto the stage's back wall. Once the projection is over, João Fiadeiro walks into the stage coming from the audience, crosses it, opens a door on the back wall, and brings in a tall plant in a vase. With care, he lays the vase down on the stage floor and returns to his place among the audience. At the center of the stage, the plant executes a beautiful solo with living creature, inert matter, and imperceptible motions. After a while, Fiadeiro gets up again from his chair, and methodically—never hurrying—proceeds to bring more objects into the scene: three more tall plants, a sofa, a little cart with wheels, an armchair, a lamp, a metal stool, a large TV set, a wooden stool. He places all those objects in ways that are either unusual or explicitly nonutilitarian—the cart, the sofa, and the armchair are all placed upside down; the plants and the unplugged lamp in their sides; and the TV set, also unplugged, with its screen facing the floor. He aligns everything in several parallel diagonals, filling up the stage with a precise composition. Finally, Fiadeiro lies on the stage floor, face down, removes his glasses (which he places on the floor as just another thing among things), and aligns himself alongside the objects.

*Este corpo que me ocupa* reinforces but also adds another dimension to the concept of aloneness understood as an erotics and a politics of becoming-thing. Its title offers a crucial key to the ways objects and subjects co-determine each other. As far as mere matter is concerned, the question of knowing which body occupies another remains a matter for physics or chemistry. However, in the field of subjectivation and instrumental reason, the question of being occupied and possessed by bodies and by objects is *the* crucial question. As Fred Moten observed, "While subjectivity is defined by the subject's possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by a dispossessive force objects exert such that the subject seems to be possessed—infused, deformed—by the object it possesses."<sup>20</sup> This dynamics of self-possession, predicated on possessing an object that nevertheless ends up taking possession over subjectivity itself, is clearly demonstrated in the second half of *Este corpo que me ocupa*. After his noninstrumental arrangement of the objects, Fiadeiro performs a choreographed reorganization of them according to their "proper" use. Restoring each object's instrumental mode of being (sofa and stools right-side up; TV and lamp in their proper functioning position and plugged into a power outlet; vases standing vertically), Fiadeiro creates the image of a generic sitting room. Then, with a self-contained energy, he assumes the position of the contemporary subject in regard to those possessions that both possess and distort him: he slouches on a couch to enjoy his domesticity. In this properly set-up world,

20. Moten, *In the Break*, p. 1.



*João Fiadeiro. Este corpo que me ocupa. 2008. Photographs by Patrícia Almeida.*

where objects have been replaced back to their functional positions to perform their utilitarian purposes, we see how a whole system of objects invades, takes possession, and defines the very core of subjectivity. We see that the systematicity of this system choreographs to the minutest detail, even at the level of desire, the subject who is supposedly controlling the system. In this mode of usage, an unbearable portrait of contemporary passivity emerges thanks to the figure of the solitary man sitting on a couch, before a TV set, surrounded by tamed, decorative nature. This scene—this image—is held for minutes toward the end of the piece, generating an effect that is not at all the same as when Fiadeiro was lying alongside the matter of the world. What emerges is the realization of how “immersed in the object of enjoyment, the enjoyer is conditioned by what is enjoyed.”<sup>21</sup>

At this moment of realization, *Este corpo que me ocupa* resonates deeply with Giorgio Agamben’s recent critique of the object. In his essay “What Is an Apparatus?,” Agamben describes the object in contemporaneity as an overwhelmingly pervasive system of command. He writes: “I shall call an apparatus literally *anything* that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”<sup>22</sup>

21. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 53.

22. Giorgio Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?” and *Other Essays* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 2009), p. 14.

Endowed with the capacity to capture, model, and control *gestures* and *behaviors*, this “anything” matches quite well with the definition of choreography, which can be understood precisely as an apparatus for the control of gestures, mobility, dispositions, body types, bodily intentions, and inclinations for the sake of a spectacular display of a body’s presence.<sup>23</sup> As Agamben’s lists demonstrate, his conception of the term goes beyond the notion of apparatus as a general system of control, and instead approaches a very concrete, very specific understanding of apparatus as an *object that commands*: “Not only therefore prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, juridical measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones . . .”<sup>24</sup>

Between pens and cigarettes, computers and cellular telephones, it seems that the number of objects controlling our gestures, our desires, and our movements is limited only by availability—particularly in “the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live,” characterized by “a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, as we produce objects, we produce apparatuses that diminish our own capacity to produce non-subjugated subjectivities. As we produce objects, we find ourselves being produced by objects: “Today there is not even a single instant in which the life of individuals is not modeled, contaminated, or controlled by some apparatus.”<sup>26</sup> Agamben’s definition of apparatus, then, is useful for understanding the predominance of objects in recent experimental dance: first, because his notion uncovers a performativity in objects, and second, because it identifies a choreographic force defining and inhabiting objects in contemporaneity—a force securing the relation between subjectivity and objectivity as it mediates the question of obedience, of governing gestures, of determining who determines whose movements. It is no wonder that contemporary experimental dance (but also performance art, thanks to its openly political verve, and particularly its concern with how objects elicit actions) must approach critically the system of objects that defines life today, since objects seem to be governing our subjectivity, seem to be subjecting us, under their apparatus-function. But perhaps there is more to it than just control . . .

Agamben notes that under the force of the apparatus (prison or pen; religion or cigarette; agriculture or cell phone) a “de-subjectifying moment is certainly implicit.”<sup>27</sup> The pressing question then is: how does one desubjectify an apparatus, and, most particularly, an object? Agamben’s answer is “profanation,” what he calls the “counter-apparatus.” According to Agamben, profanation is the only

23. For a discussion of choreography as apparatus of capture, see Ric Allsopp and André Lepecki, “On Choreography,” *Performance Research* 13, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 1–6.

24. Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*,” p. 14.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

action that would lead to restoring "the thing to the free use of men."<sup>28</sup> Yet both the reinstatement of the category of "man" as a countermove and the priority given to the "use of men" as an instrumental force seem odd ways out. A solo piece by Spanish choreographer Aitana Cordero may indicate a means of escaping these capturing and controlling apparatuses without invoking the category of "man" or the need for more instrumental "use."

*Solo . . . ?*

Karl Marx famously noted that if human activity in general is capable of enacting *corporeal transformations* on matter by turning it into an object of use (for instance, by turning a block of wood into a table), under the specific parameters of capitalism, human activity makes objects endure a supplementary, magical, or incorporeal transformation, where anything made for the use of humans turns into "a very strange thing" called a commodity.<sup>29</sup> Guy Debord remarked how, in this peculiar mode of transformation, "we have the principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by *things* whose qualities are 'at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses.'"<sup>30</sup> Debord took this principle of domination and used it to define our "society of the spectacle," which is not a society made of spectacles but one where "the spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which *the commodity completes its colonization of social life*. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity."<sup>31</sup>

The political destiny of the commodity is, then, to complete its total dominance over social life, including the life of things, but also over somatic life, since the commodity's dominance inscribes itself deeply into both inorganic and organic bodies. Indeed, the commodity dominates not only the world of things (by turning them into instruments of profit, or use, or exchange) but also the realm of what is deemed to be perceptible and what remains imperceptible (or irrelevant), the realm of the sensible and of the infra-sensible, the domain of desiring, the domain of dreams. The commodity governs even the very possibility of *imagining governance*. At least, this is its impetus. Under its domain, humans and things find their shared openness for endless potentiality violently crushed or substantially diminished. Even if the commodity is a material *object*, its power makes sure that neither persons nor things are left in peace. In this way, we can see the link between Agamben's "apparatus" and Marx's "commodity." But what kind of act, gesture, or movement can one perform against such dominance? If Agamben proposed "profanation," Aitana Cordero's *Solo . . . ?* proposes revolt.

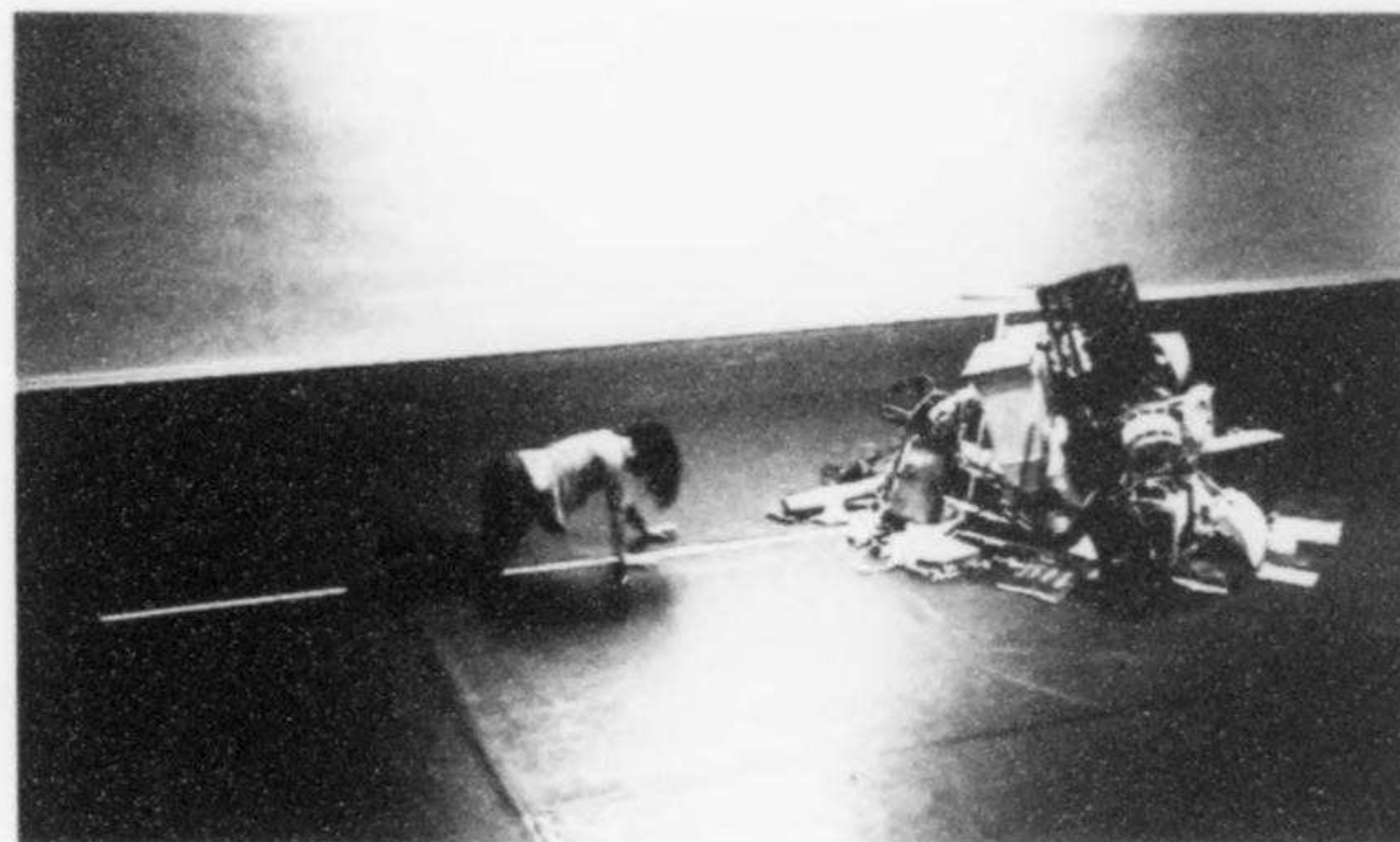
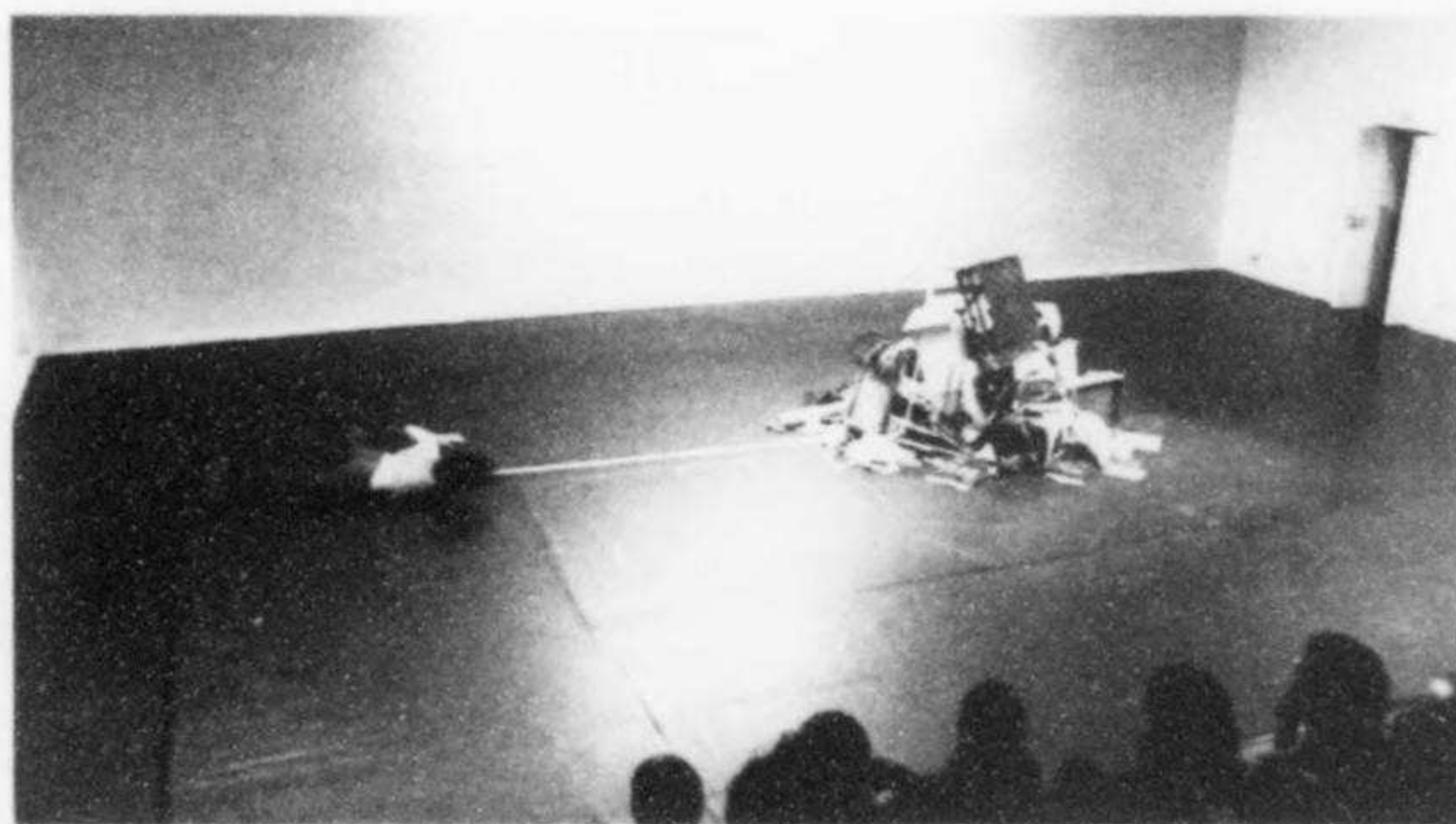
28. Ibid., p. 18.

29. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books), p. 163.

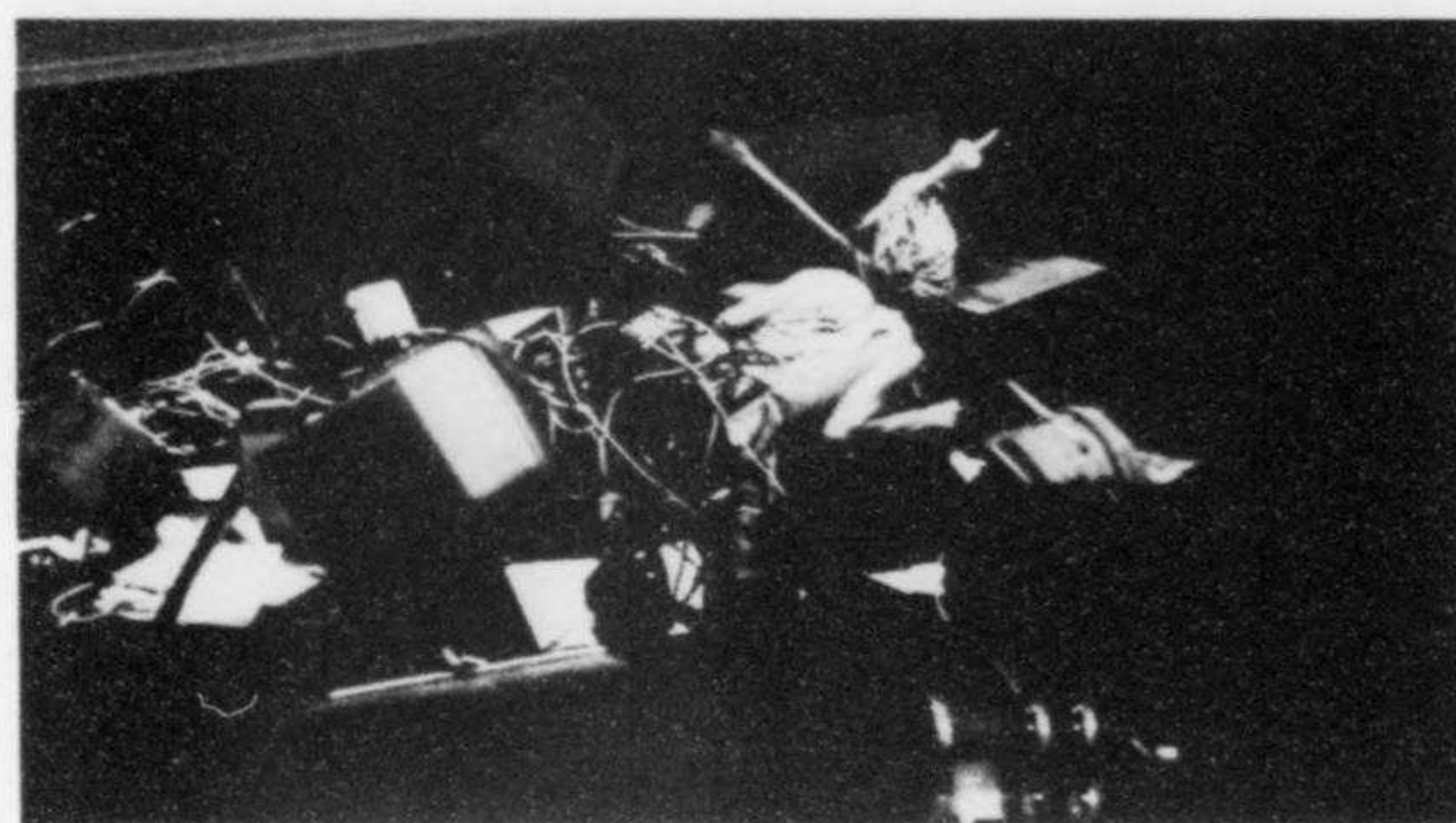
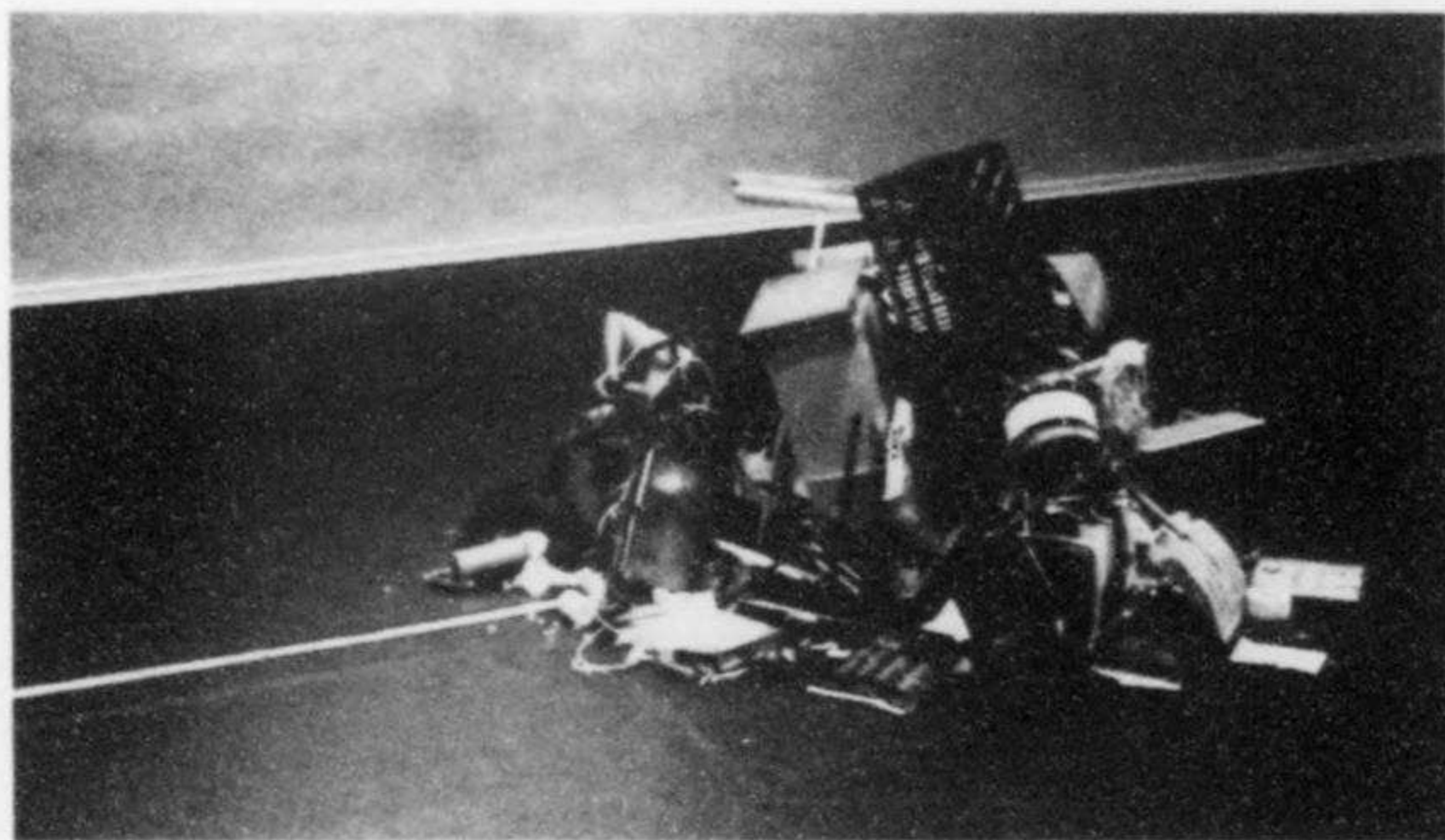
30. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 29.

31. Ibid. (emphasis added).

Cordero's *Solo . . . ?* (2008) is an evening-length piece, in which she brings to the stage a variety of domestic objects, among them a TV set, electric appliances, buckets, fans, electric wires, lamps, shovels, irrigation systems, and desktop and laptop computers. As the solo progresses, the affective atmosphere changes, along with the way Cordero handles the objects. In the beginning, the piece seems to be an exercise in creating a display or archive of everyday paraphernalia. For several minutes, we watch Cordero matter-of-factly carrying on object, placing it on the floor, and through gradual accumulation creating a visual composition of colors, textures, dimensions. As objects start to fill the stage and to saturate the possibilities of display, Cordero begins—slowly at first, then more intensely—to randomly attack the objects, stomping on them, throwing them against each other, against the walls or against the floor, finding ways to destroy each one as much as possible. Then she proceeds to pile it all up. Using white duct tape she draws a straight line on the floor that leads from one side of the stage to the pile of objects, Cordero then goes on all fours and, as a good dancer should, follows the white line with care, as if it were a choreographic notation. As Cordero ever more gently crawls toward the pile, the lights in the theater slowly dim to blackout. Carefully, even caringly, as darkness looms, Cordero pushes her body into the pile of destroyed, no longer use-



*Aitana Cordero. Solo . . . ? 2008.  
Videography by Filip Molski.*



ful objects. She is less a body among objects than a thing among things: a fusion—a confusion—is performed. The piece ends in tranquility, despite, or perhaps because of, all the preceding violence against objects, which now may simply be. Here, I would suggest we have not really a “profanation” of the object for “the use of man” (as Agamben would have said), but a violent revolt, performed by a woman against the domination of things and subjectivity by the gripping force of that colonizing apparatus known as commodity. Different from the three pieces discussed previously, *Solo . . .* introduces a very explicit link between revolt and revolution, where violence emerges not as destructive force but as the necessary action to break free subjects and objects, and reveal a shared mode of being thing, and moving as thing.

\*

The paradox of any thingly investment in creating art turns on the fact that even as a work proposes modes of becoming-thing, the work itself remains, obviously, an art *object*. This is the inescapable limit that thingliness places on all representation—it lies at the threshold of objectivity, just as it defines the outer border of subjectivity. And, yet, the current choreographic interest and investment on thingliness is precisely where such a paradox becomes not a dead end but a source for energizing the links

between art and politics, subject and objects, performance and its effects. Within the regime of expectations that representation invokes (a regime immediately subverted by dancers who do not move according to a system of command, and by things that refuse to be merely producers of effects or proxies for human bodies), the disbanding of representation proposed by the thing may be, at last, if only briefly, glimpsed, experienced, or enacted. When Fiadeiro simply lies alongside objects devoid of utilitarian or signifying functions; when Cordero gently fuses with a pile of destroyed commodities; when Duan sutures history, ecology, and politics by using her naked presence and piles of recently discarded stuff in a choreographed mist of dust and mold; and when Harrell presents a dancer's drugged body sleeping in the museum as a mode of being-alongside in an "ethics of things," the bind between objecthood and subjectivity is shaken for a moment. In this tremor, a gap or opening in the field of possibility is revealed and activated. This activation is nothing else than the political effect that a choreographic critique of the object has the capacity to create: the formation of an "impersonal movement that at the same time displaces the other from himself and allows him in his turn to give himself as thing and to take me as thing."<sup>32</sup>

32. Perniola, *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic*, p. 109.

## Delegated Performance: Outsourcing Authenticity

CLAIRE BISHOP

Let's begin with a generalization: one of the most conspicuous manifestations of the "social turn" in contemporary art since the 1990s has been the hiring of nonprofessionals to do performances. This stands in sharp contrast to a tradition of performance from the late 1960s and early 1970s in which work is undertaken by the artists themselves; think of Vito Acconci, Marina Abramović, Chris Burden, and Gina Pane. If this tradition valorized live presence and immediacy via the artist's own body, in the last two decades this presence is no longer attached to the single performer but instead to the *collective* body of a social group.<sup>1</sup> Although this trend takes a number of forms, some of which I will describe below, all of this work maintains a comfortable relationship to the gallery, taking it either as the frame for a performance or as a space of exhibition for the photographic and video artifacts that result. I will refer to this tendency as "delegated performance": the act of hiring nonprofessionals or specialists in other fields to undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time and a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following his or her instructions. This strategy differs from a theatrical and cinematic tradition of employing people to act on the director's behalf in the following crucial respect: the artists I discuss below tend to hire people to perform *their own socioeconomic category*, be this on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, or (more rarely) profession.

Much of this work has not been addressed or analyzed in depth by art historians or critics, so the position outlined below forms a response not so much to existent writing but to the reactions that this work repeatedly elicits—both from the general public and specialist art world—at conferences, panel discussions, and symposia. One of the aims of this essay is to argue against these dominant responses and for a more nuanced way to address delegated performance as an *artistic practice* engaging with the ethics and aesthetics of contemporary labor, and not simply as a micro-model of reification. I will begin by outlining three dif-

1. Of course there are exceptions, such as Cildo Meireles's hiring five "bodyguards" to watch over his flammable sculpture *Fiat Lux* for 24 hours (1979), or Sophie Calle hiring a detective to follow her (*Detective*, 1980). The difference between these and more recent examples is one of degree: the extent to which the identity of the hired laborer becomes a central and visible component of the work of art.

ferent manifestations of this tendency, and the different performance traditions they draw upon: body art, Judson Dance and Fluxus, and docudrama.<sup>2</sup>

### *A Provisional Typology*

My first type of delegated performance comprises actions outsourced to non-professionals who are asked to perform an aspect of their identities, often in the gallery or exhibition. This tendency, which we might call "live installation," can be seen in the early work of Pawel Althamer (working with homeless men in *Observer*, 1992, and with female guards for the Zachęta exhibition *Germinations*, 1994), or Elmgreen & Dragset's hiring, variously, gay men to lounge around in the gallery listening to headphones (*Try*, 1997) or unemployed men and women to be gallery guards (*Reg[u]arding the Guards*, 2005). It is telling that this work developed primarily in Europe: its light and playful tone marks a decisive break with the more earnest forms of identitarian politics that were so crucial to American art of the 1980s.

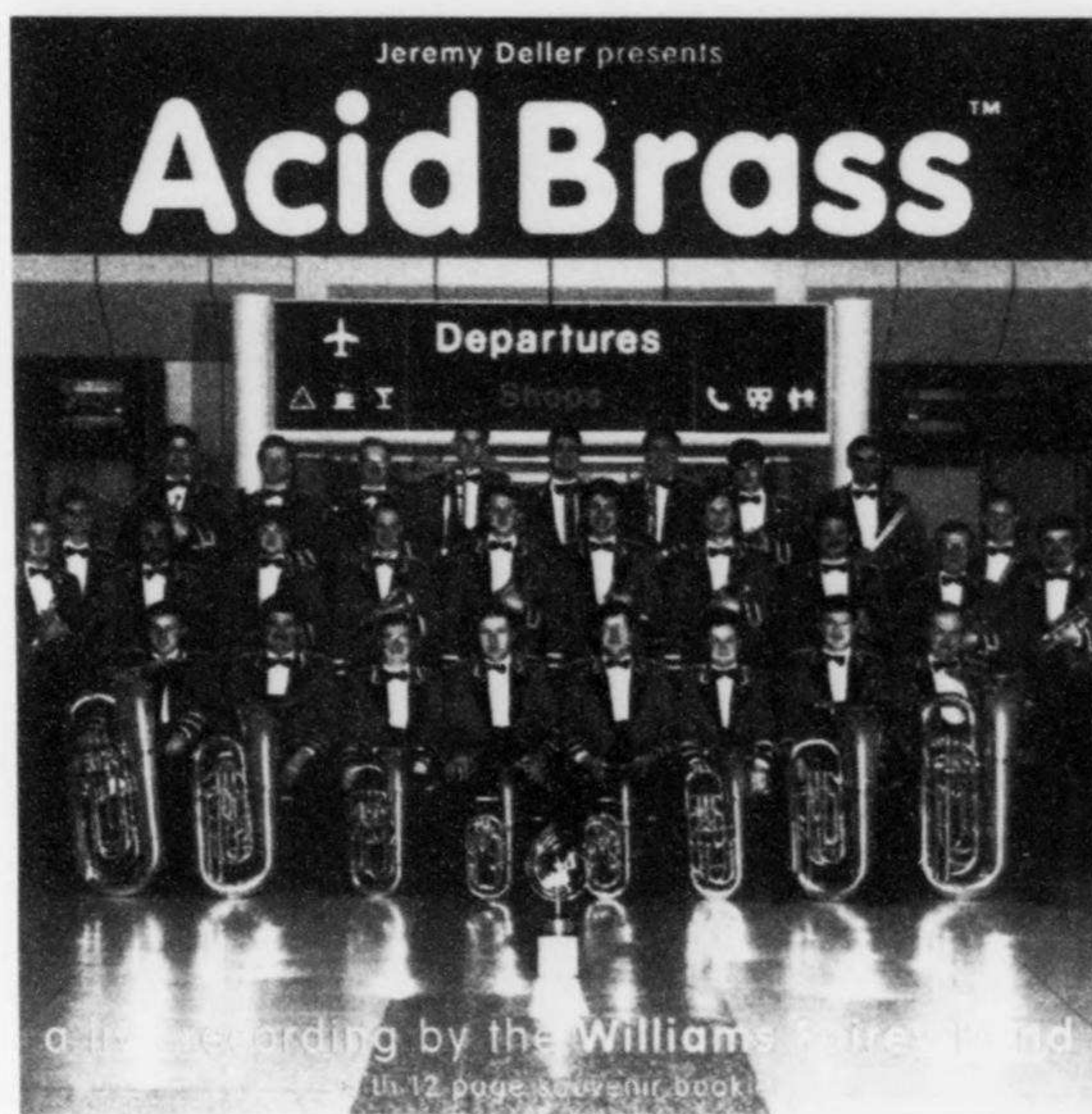
Consider, for example, one of the earliest examples of this tendency, by Maurizio Cattelan. In 1991, the Italian artist assembled a soccer club of North African immigrants, who were deployed to play local matches in Italy (all of which they lost). Their shirts were emblazoned with the name of a fictional sponsor, RAUSS: the German word for "get out," as in the phrase *Ausländer raus*, or "foreigners out." The title of the project, *Southern Suppliers FC*, alludes to immigrant labor ("suppliers" from the south), but also to the trend, then hotly debated in the Italian press, of hiring foreign footballers to play on Italian teams. Cattelan's gesture draws a contrast between two types of foreign labor at different ends of the economic spectrum—star soccer players are rarely perceived in the same terms as working-class immigrants—but without any discernible Marxist rhetoric. Indeed, through this work, Cattelan fulfils the male dream of owning a football club, and apparently insults the players by dressing them in shirts emblazoned RAUSS. At the same time, he nevertheless produces a confusing image: the word RAUSS, when combined with the startling photograph of an all-black Italian football team, has an ambiguous, provocative potency, especially when it circulates in the media, since it seems to blurt out the unspoken E.U. fear of being deluged by immigrants from outside "fortress Europe." *Southern Suppliers FC* is a social sculpture as cynical performance, inserted into the real-time social system of a soccer league.<sup>3</sup> Francesco Bonami therefore seems to ascribe a misplaced worthiness to the project when he claims that Cattelan aimed

2. I will not be addressing reenacted performances, although they often cover similar territory (see, for example, the recent retrospectives of Marina Abramović at MoMA and Tania Bruguera at the Neuberger Museum of Art, both 2010, or the European tour of Allan Kaprow's "Art as Life," initiated by Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2006). Re-enactment, like delegated performance, has accelerated with the institutionalization of performance art and facilitates its collectability. For a good summary of re-enactment see the catalogue *Life, Once More* (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005).

3. Cattelan's other works of the 1990s also revolve around a displacement of the artist's identity: *Super Noi*, 1992, for example, comprises fifty drawings of the artist based on descriptions given by his friends and acquaintances and drawn by police composite portrait sketchers. Here the acts of both description and production are delegated to a kind of artist whose skills are not typically valued on the contemporary art market.

“for a democratic new way to play the artist, whilst remaining central to the work as the coach and manager of the teams.”<sup>4</sup> At most, the collaborative process of *Southern Suppliers FC* could be said to share the performance limelight, but it is highly directorial and far from straightforward in its political message.

Cattelan turned to sport as a popular point of reference, but music is a more frequent focus of collaboration. Swedish artist Annika Eriksson’s *Copenhagen Postmen’s Orchestra* (1996) and British artist Jeremy Deller’s *Acid Brass* (1997) both invited workers’ bands to perform recent pop music in their own respective idioms. The Copenhagen Postmen’s Orchestra played a song by the British trip-hop group Portishead, while the Williams Fairey Brass Band (historically connected to an aircraft factory in Manchester) interpreted a selection of acid house tracks. Eriksson’s event resulted in a five-minute video, while Deller’s has become numerous live performances, a CD, and a diagram elaborately connecting these two forms of regional working-class music. Beyond the aesthetic frisson of mixing two types of popular music, part of the appeal of both projects lies in the fact that the artists employ real bands. These are not actors hired to play electronic music on brass instruments, but “genuine” work-



4. Francesco Bonami, in *Maurizio Cattelan* (London: Phaidon, 2003), p. 58.

Top: Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. Try. 1996.  
Middle: Maurizio Cattelan. *Southern Suppliers FC*. 1991. Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.  
Bottom: Jeremy Deller and the Williams Fairey Brass Band. *Acid Brass*. 1997.

ing-class collaborators who have agreed to participate in an artistic experiment—a rather formal one in the case of Eriksson (the camera remains static throughout the video), more research-led in the case of Deller.<sup>5</sup> The musicians perform their public personae (determined by their employment and strongly linked to class) and come to exemplify a collectively shared passion (in this case, performing music) and recurrent theme in both artists' work. These follow the trend for light and humorous ways in which delegated performance in Europe in the '90s is used to signify class, race, age, or gender. Their bodies are a metonymic shorthand for politicized identity, but the fact that it is not the artist's own body being staged means that this politics can be pursued with a cool irony, wit, and distance.

A rupture with this mood arrived in 1999 with the performances of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. Prior to 1999, Sierra's work comprised a forceful combination of minimalism and urban intervention; over the course of that year his work shifted from installations produced by low-paid workers to displays of the workers themselves, foregrounding the economic transactions on which the installations depend. There is a clear path of development from *24 Blocks of Concrete Constantly Moved During a Day's Work by Paid Workers* (Los Angeles, July), in which the workers are not seen but their presence and the fact that they are paid are made known to us, to *People Paid to Remain Inside Cardboard Boxes* (G&T Building, Guatemala City, August), in which the low-paid workers are concealed within cardboard boxes, a metaphor for their social invisibility. The first piece in which the participants were rendered visible is *450 Paid People* (Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, October), which led to a work that continues to be inflammatory: *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People* (Espacio Aglutinador, Havana, December). Many of these early performances involve finding people who were willing to undertake banal or humiliating tasks for minimum wage. Sierra's works are stripped of the light humor that accompanies many of the projects mentioned above, since they frequently take place in countries already at the disadvantaged end of globalization, most notably in Central and South America. Consequently, he has been heavily criticized for merely repeating the inequities of capitalism, and more specifically of globalization, in which rich countries "outsource" or "offshore" labor to low-paid workers in developing countries. Yet Sierra always draws attention to the *economic* systems through which his works are realized, and the way these impact the work's reception. In his work, performance is outsourced via recruitment agencies, and a financial transaction takes place that leaves the artist at arm's length from the performers; this distance is evident in the viewer's phenomenological encounter with the work, which is disturbingly cold and alienated. Unlike many artists, Sierra is at pains to make the details of each payment to the workers part of the work's description, turning the economic context into one of his primary mediums.<sup>6</sup>

5. Significantly, Deller's collaboration has now become part of the Fairey Band's repertoire and features on their website. See [faireyband.com](http://faireyband.com) (accessed May 15, 2012).

6. In each of Sierra's publications, works are documented with black-and-white photographs, the artwork title, a brief caption that explains where and when the performance took place, and information about how much the participants were paid. Sierra's more recent work is more sensationalist and does not foreground the question of remuneration.

In its emphasis on the phenomenological immediacy of the live body and on specific socioeconomic identities, we could argue that this type of delegated performance is heavily indebted to the body-art tradition of the late 1960s and early '70s. At the same time, it differs from this precursor in important ways. Artists in the '70s used their *own* bodies as the medium and material of the work, often with a corresponding emphasis on physical and psychological transgression. Today's delegated performance still places a high value upon immediacy, but if it has any transgressive character, this tends to derive from the perception that artists are exhibiting and exploiting other subjects. As a result, this type of performance, in which the artist uses other people as the material of his or her work, tends to occasion heated debate about the ethics of representation.<sup>7</sup> Duration, meanwhile, is reconfigured from a spiritual question of individual stamina and endurance to the economic matter of having sufficient resources to pay for someone else's ongoing presence.

A second strand of delegated performance, which began to be introduced in the later 1990s, concerns the use of professionals from other spheres of expertise: think of Allora and Calzadilla hiring opera singers (*Sediments, Sentiments, Figures of Speech*, 2007) or pianists (*Stop, Repair, Prepare*, 2008); of Tania Bruguera hiring mounted policemen to demonstrate crowd-control techniques (in *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, 2008); or of Tino Sehgal hiring university professors and students for his numerous speech-based situations (*This Objective of That Object*, 2004; *This Progress*, 2006).<sup>8</sup> These performers tend to be specialists in fields other than those of art or performance, and since they tend to be recruited on the basis of their professional (elective) identity, rather than for being representatives of a particular class or race, there is far less controversy and ambivalence around this type of work. Critical attention tends to focus on the conceptual frame and on the specific activities or abilities of the performer or interpreter in question, whose skills are



Allora and Calzadilla.  
*Stop, Repair, Prepare*. 2008.

7. A frequent point of reference is the "ethnological spectacles" shown at the World's Fairs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the *village nègre* at the 1878 and 1889 Paris World's Fair. Such events propagandized the imperial mission of France and were formative in generating enthusiasm for "primitive" art. See Burton Benedict, "International Exhibitions and National Identity," *Anthropology Today* 7, no. 3 (June 1991), pp. 5–9. Benedict notes that "the whole of the Exposition Coloniale in 1931 was a theatrical performance" (p. 7).

8. Here we could also consider the Berlin-based performance group Rimini Protokoll and their use of "experts in everyday life" as the basis for performances such as *Soko São Paulo* (2007, using Brazilian policemen), *Airport Kids* (2008, using children who have lived in three or more countries), or *Deadline* (2003, which included a crematorium employee, a forensic doctor, a stonemason, and a florist).

incorporated into the performance as a readymade. That the work has an instruction-based character, which—along with the fact that many of the performers in these works are Caucasian and middle-class—has facilitated the repeatability of this type of work, and enhanced its collectability by museums.

The best-known example of this tendency is unarguably Tino Sehgal, who is adamant that his practice be referred to not as “performance art” but as “situations,” and that his performers be referred to as “interpreters.”<sup>9</sup> While his insistence is somewhat pedantic, it nevertheless draws our attention to the scored nature of Sehgal’s work, and to its relationship with dance: as every critic of his output has observed, the artist was trained in choreography and economics before turning to visual art. *This Objective of That Object*, for example, places the viewer within a highly controlled experience: as you enter the gallery, five performers with their backs turned to you urge you to join in a discussion on subjectivity and objectivity. The performers tend to be philosophy students, but their semi-scripted dialogue comes across as somewhat depersonalized and rote, and any contribution you make to the debate feels self-conscious and hollow, since it is impossible to alter the work’s structure; you are free only to assume your role within it. (If you remain silent, the performers wilt onto the floor until a new visitor enters the gallery.) Although Sehgal makes a point of renouncing photographic reproduction, his works seem actively to tear apart any equation between being live and being authentic; indeed, the very fact that his work runs continuously in the space for the duration of an exhibition, performed by any number of interpreters, erodes any residual attachment to the idea of an original or ideal performance.

A less well-known—and less gallery-based—approach that deploys similar methods can be found in the conceptual performances of Spanish artist Dora García. Several of her early performances explicitly allude to avatars and surveillance (such as *Proxy/Coma*, 2001) but her most compelling projects blur into the outside world and can potentially last for years, as in *The Messenger* (2002). In this work, a performer (the “messenger”) must deliver a message in a foreign language that he/she does not understand—but to do so he or she must search for someone who can identify and understand that language.<sup>10</sup> The performer is entrusted with the task, and it is important to note that García—like Sehgal—is a meticulous recruiter: *The Beggar’s Opera* (2007) required one performer to play a charming beggar in the streets of Münster, while *The Romeos* (2005) involved hiring handsome young men to establish seemingly spontaneous conversation with visitors to the Frieze Art Fair.<sup>11</sup> This form of “invisible theater” operates less to raise con-

9. By using this term, Sehgal does not intend any reference to the constructed situations of the Situationist International.

10. See [doragarcia.net](http://doragarcia.net) for a log of each iteration of *The Messenger* as it happens.

11. Visitors were made aware of the performances thanks to a large poster displayed in the fair, although the casual observer would never know the outcome of these encounters. The piece was based on the memoirs of a former East German spy who had used attractive young male agents to seduce lonely female secretaries in Bonn as a means to access confidential information.

sciousness (as in the Augusto Boal model) than to insinuate a moment of doubt and suspicion into the viewer's habitual experiences of city life.<sup>12</sup> García often strikes a careful balance between an open-ended score and the performer's interpretation of her instructions. If Sehgal's works are self-reflexive and cerebral, encouraging the subjective contribution of the audience, then García's are less visibly participatory and seem to reinforce doubt and unease.

Sehgal and García exemplify a type of performance that emphasises simple instructions, which are carried out in a manner that allows for individual variation and a quotidian aesthetic. As such, they evoke several precursors from the 1960s and '70s. Boal's "invisible theater" seems an immediate point of reference, but neither artist would subscribe to his political agenda; another would be the task-based participatory instructions of Fluxus.<sup>13</sup> With their emphasis on everyday gestures, clothes, and movements as the basis for choreographic invention, works performed at Judson Dance Theater are perhaps the closest precedent, especially Steve Paxton's walking pieces from the mid-1960s. One of them, *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967), was first performed with forty-two dancers, and comprises three movements only: walking, standing, and sitting.<sup>14</sup> Paxton's score is structured into six parts, in each of which the performers walk a certain number of steps and stand for a certain number of counts before exiting, at roughly thirty-second intervals. He describes the pace of walking as "an easy walk, but not slow. Performance manner is serene and collected"; the costumes are "casual."<sup>15</sup> As Yvonne Rainer observes, "It was as though you had never seen ordinary people walk across a space. It was highly revelatory."<sup>16</sup> Judson Dance finds its direct lin-



Dora García. *The Romeos*. 2008.

12. García has acknowledged the influence of Augusto Boal, but rejects his assumption that art should be politically useful. Email to the author, December 22, 2010.

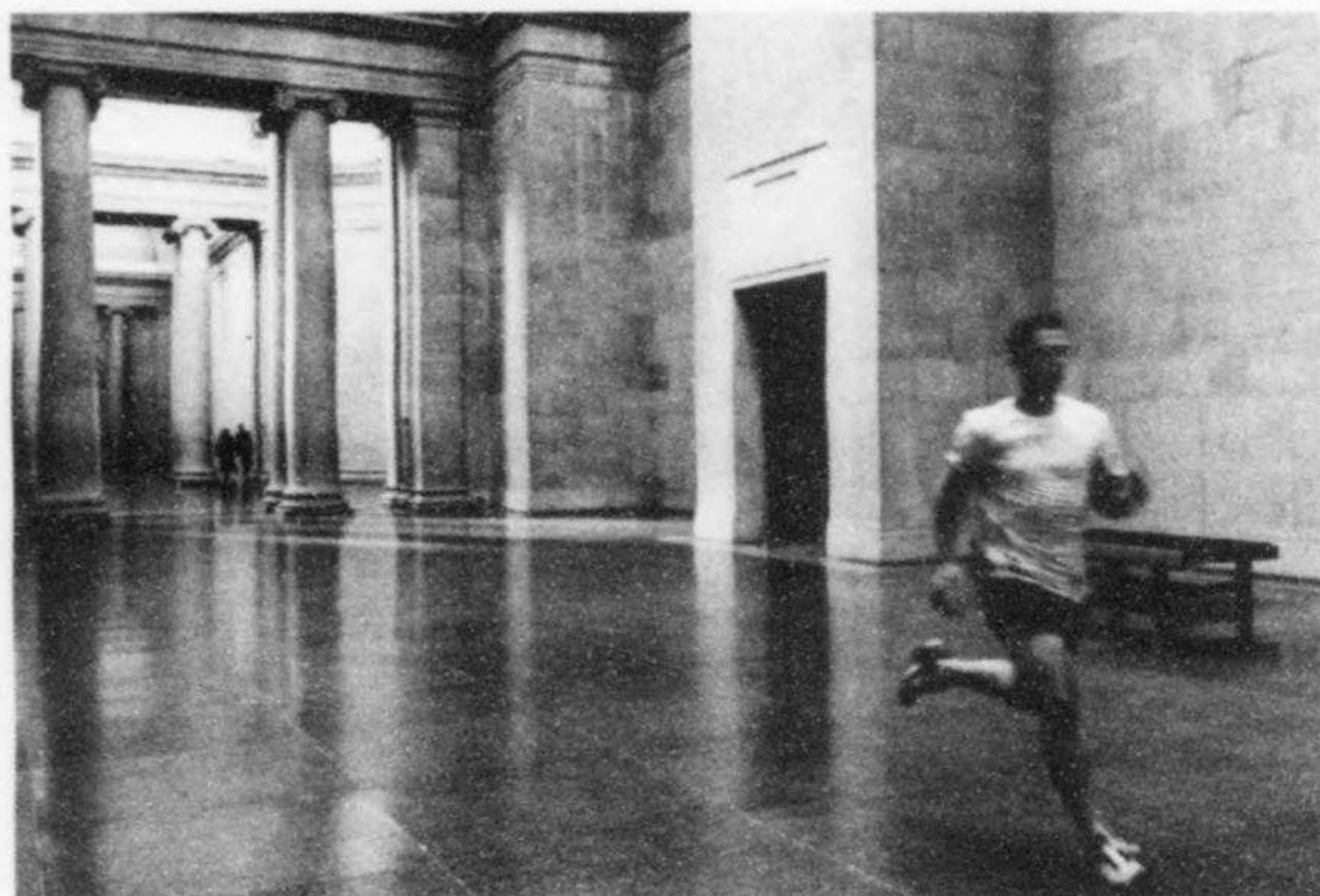
13. Consider Alison Knowles's *Make a Salad* (1962) or *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963): in the former, the artist makes a large salad for the audience to consume; in the latter, she invites people to hold up their footwear and tell the audience about it.

14. *Satisfyin' Lover* has also been performed with as few as thirty and as many as eighty-four people. Forty-two was the number of "friends" that the choreographer had during a residency in Salt Lake City. (Steve Paxton, email to author, June 21, 2010.) For a full score and instructions to performers, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University, 1987), pp. 71–74.

15. Steve Paxton, *Satisfyin' Lover* (1967), in Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, p. 74. See also Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 137; Jill Johnston, "Paxton's People," *Village Voice*, April 4, 1968, reprinted in Jill Johnston, *Marmalade Me* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 137.

16. Rainer, cited in Chrissie Iles, "Life Class," *Frieze* 100 (June–August 2006).

eage in contemporary choreography such as Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On* (2001), which makes use of everyday movements to literalize the lyrics of pop songs. Several of these strands come together, albeit in a more professionalized



Martin Creed. *Work No. 850*. 2008.

manner, in Martin Creed's *Work No. 850* (2008), in which professional sprinters ran the eighty-six metres of the Duveen Gallery at Tate Britain at fifteen-second intervals; the artist compared the pauses between these sprints to the rests in a piece of music, reinforcing the connection between choreography and daily life.<sup>17</sup>

A third strand of delegated performance comprises situations constructed for video and film; key artists might include Gillian

Wearing, Artur Żmijewski, and Phil Collins. Recorded images are crucial here since these examples frequently capture situations that are too difficult or sensitive to be repeated. (Here it should be reiterated that my interest is not in artists working in a documentary tradition, but on works where the artist *devises* the entire situation being filmed, and where the participants are asked to perform themselves.) Depending on the mode of filming, these situations can trouble the border between live and mediated to the point where audiences are unsure of the degree to which an event has been staged or scripted. Because the artist assumes a strong editorial role, and because the work's success often relies on the watchability of the performers, this kind of work also tends to attract ethical criticism both from over-solicitous leftists and from the liberal and right-wing media.

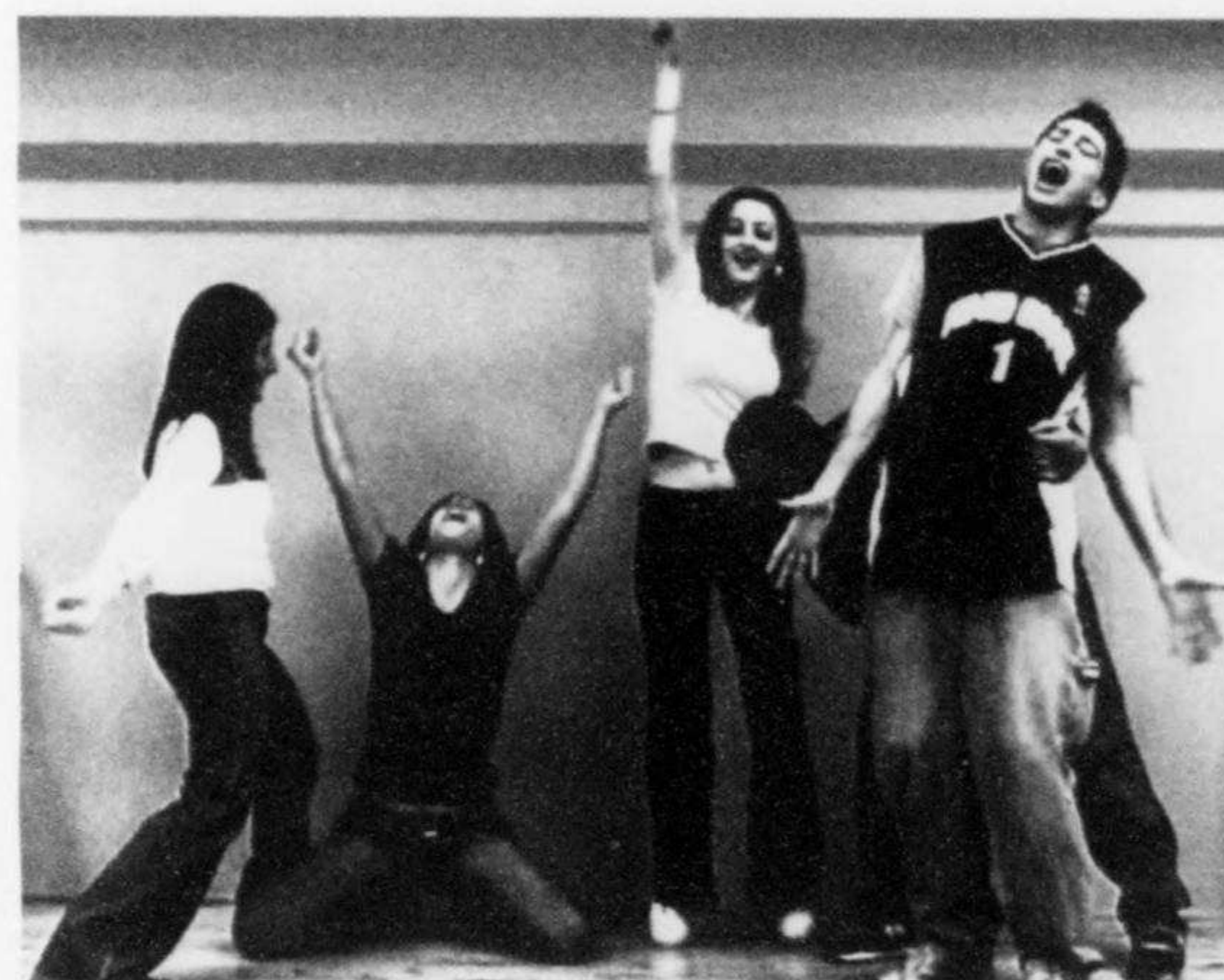
*They Shoot Horses* (2004) by the British artist Phil Collins is a striking example of this tendency. Collins auditioned and paid nine teenagers in Ramallah to undertake an eight-hour disco-dancing marathon in front of a garish pink wall to an unrelentingly cheesy compilation of pop hits from the past four decades. The resulting videos are shown as a two-channel installation, in which the performers are projected to more or less the same size as the viewers, creating an equivalence between them. Although we don't hear the teenagers talk, their dancing speaks volumes: as the gruelling day continues, their performances shift from individual posturing to collective effort (increasingly daft moves by way of generating mutual entertainment). At several panel discussions about this work, I have heard members of the audience raise concerns about the artist's "exploitation" of his

17. Creed, cited in Charlotte Higgins, "Martin Creed's New Piece for Tate Britain: A Show That Will Run and Run," *Guardian*, July 1, 2008. Creed's *Ballet (Work No. 1020)* (2009) involves five dancers restricted to using the five core classical ballet positions, each of which is ascribed a musical note.

performers—for example, by not listing their names in the credits.<sup>18</sup> Yet the point of Collins's project is not to create an exemplary instance of artistic collaboration, but to universalize his participants by addressing multiple genres of artistic and popular experience: the portrait, endurance-based body art, reality television (and its precursor in Depression-era dance marathons, to which his title alludes).<sup>19</sup> It is also a deliberately perverse approach to site-specificity: the Occupied Territories are never shown explicitly but are ever-present as a frame or *hors cadre*. This knowledge colors our reception of the banal pop lyrics, which seem to comment on the kids' double endurance of the dance marathon and the political crisis in which they are mired. In subjecting the teenagers to an onslaught of Western pop, Collins plays an ambiguous role: both ally and taskmaster, he depicts them as generic globalized teenagers; the more usual media representation of Palestinians is that of victim or fundamentalist (hence Collins's use of the "usual suspects" backdrop, akin to a police lineup).

18. For example, at "Art in Politically Charged Places" (Photographers Gallery, London, December 13, 2004) and "Public Time: A Symposium" (Modern Art Oxford, May 25, 2006).

19. Sidney Pollack's film *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) follows a handful of characters competing in a dancing marathon held during the Great Depression. The film foreshadows a contemporary culture of reality television, in which the participants' quest for fame and financial success seamlessly dovetails with commercial exploitation.



*Phil Collins. They Shoot Horses. 2004.*



Artur Żmijewski. *Them*. 2007.

Artur Żmijewski's *Them* (2007) offers a more troubling narrative, less concerned with portraiture than with the role of images in reinforcing ideological antagonism. The artist set up a series of painting workshops for four different groups in Warsaw: ladies from the Catholic Church, young socialists, young Jews, and Polish nationalists. Each group produced a symbolic depiction of its values, which were printed onto T-shirts worn by each member of the group in subsequent workshops. Żmijewski then encouraged each group to respond to each other's paintings, altering and amending the images as they saw fit. The first gestures were gentle—such as cutting open the door of a church, to make the building more open—but became more violent, culminating in an explosive impasse: painting over an image entirely, setting fire to it, and even assaulting the other participants by cutting their T-shirts or taping over their mouths. As in many of Żmijewski's videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role, and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting of their own volition or being gently manipulated to fulfil the requirements of his preplanned narrative. The action unfolds with apparently minimal direction from the artist, who nevertheless establishes the structure of the participants' encounters, records the escalating conflict between them and edits this into a narrative. Following the first screening of this work in Warsaw, many of the participants were angry at this pessimistic representa-

tion of the workshops as ending in an irresolvable antagonism.<sup>20</sup> However, artists like Żmijewski are less interested in making a faithful documentary than in constructing a narrative, grounded in reality, that conveys a larger set of points about social conflict. *Them* offers a poignant meditation on collective identification and the role of images in forging these identifications, as well as a harsh parable about social antagonisms and the facility with which ideological differences become hardened into irresolvably blocked patterns of communication.

The genealogy for this type of performance work is complex. On the one hand it bears a strong relationship to the contemporaneous emergence of reality television, a genre that evolved from the demise of documentary TV and the success of U.S. tabloid TV in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Like reality television, it also has roots in a longer tradition of observational documentary, mock-documentary, and performative documentary that emerged in the 1960s and '70s.<sup>22</sup> Although Italian Neorealist cinema, particularly the later films of Roberto Rossellini, incorporated nonprofessional actors in secondary roles in order to stretch the prevailing boundaries of what was then considered realism, the singularity of contemporary artists' approaches is more comparable to that of idiosyncratic film auteurs like Peter Watkins. Watkins's early work used nonprofessional actors, handheld cameras, and tight framing as a way to address contentious social and political issues, such as the consequences of nuclear attack in his 1966 film *The War Game*.<sup>23</sup> He is an apt point of reference for contemporary artists, and not just for his subject matter and use of amateur performers: firstly, his films exceed the conventional length of mainstream cinema and can be extremely long (eight hours in the case of *La Commune*, 2001), and secondly, he frequently configures the camera as an agent or performer within the narrative, even when the story is set in a period prior to the invention of

20. See the transcript of this discussion in Claire Bishop and Silvia Tramontana, eds., *Double Agent* (London: ICA, 2009), pp. 99–106. Żmijewski is clear about his authorial role: "You can say I decide where the plot is to begin—and life takes it from there. Only this means a loss of control, or only partial control over the course of events. Therefore the answer is that things always get out of control—I do not know what the film is going to look like, I do not work with actors that imitate reality. I have no script. My protagonists are unpredictable and their behaviour is beyond my control. . . . It is a voyage into the unknown. There is no plan—no script—I do not know where the trip ends." Żmijewski, in "Terror of the Normal: Sebastian Cichocki interviews Artur Żmijewski," *Tauber Bach* (Leipzig: Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, 2003), p. 112.

21. Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 17. Hill notes that "reflexivity, performance, and the boundaries between fact and fiction are all hallmarks of reality programming" (p. 20).

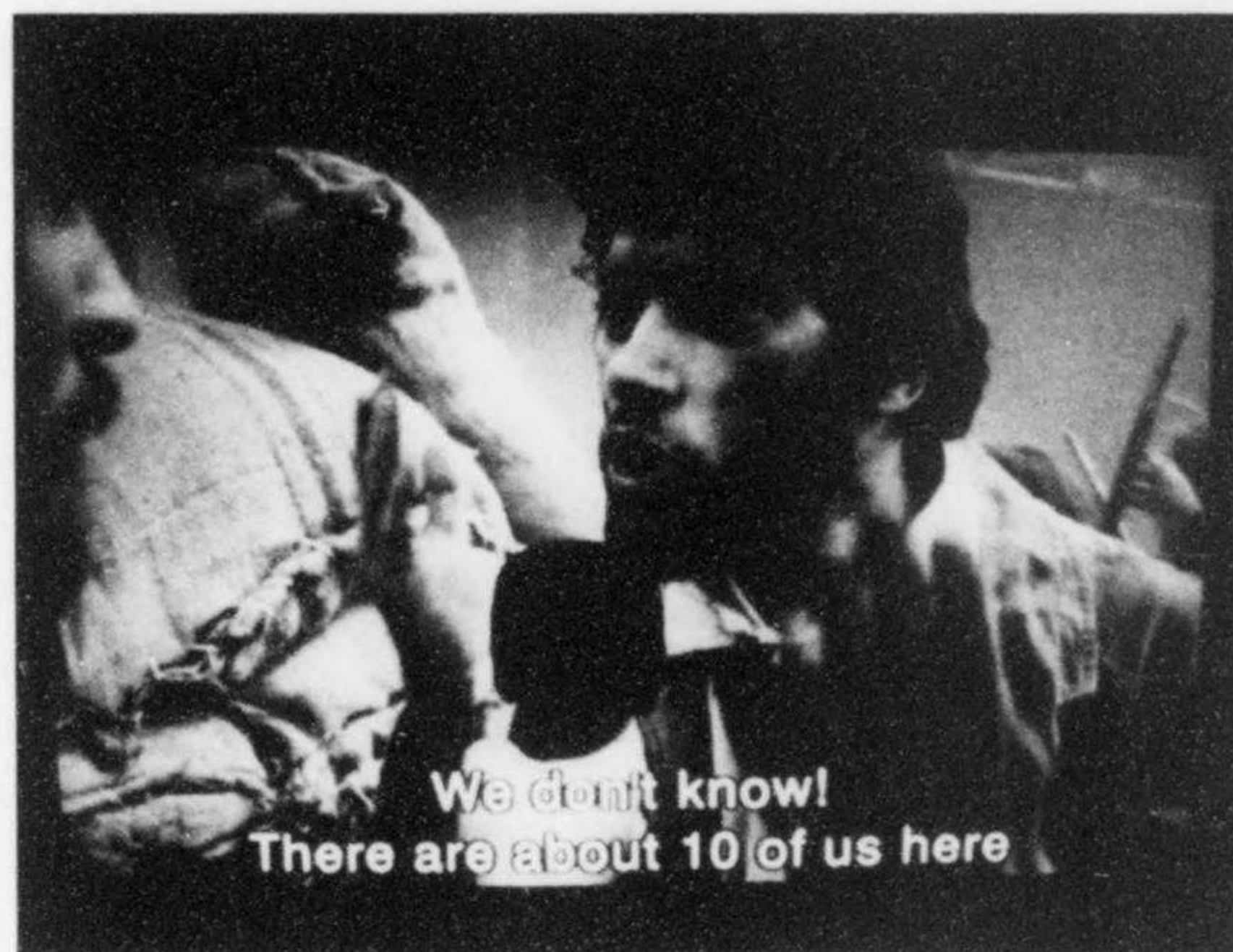
22. For a discussion of these categories, see Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, *Faking It: Mock-Documentary and the Subversion of Factuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). Observational documentary emerged from 1960s "direct cinema" (U.S.) and cinema vérité (France) and from "fly on the wall" television (U.K.) in the 1970s. See Hill, *Reality TV*, p. 20.

23. Watkins describes the process of recruiting participants, which has more in common with visual art than traditional film casting, in Alan Rosenthal, "The War Game," *The New Documentary in Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 151–63: "You have to get to know the character, and you have to pull him into the communal thing of making films. . . . [W]hat holds them might possibly be my personality, but it certainly has to do with what you have impressed on them as the meaning of the subject" (p. 159).

film; the conceit of *La Commune*, for example, is that the protagonists are being interviewed for a television report on the events of 1871 as they are taking place.

We can see from this rapid overview that what I am calling delegated performance in all its contemporary iterations (from live installation to constructed situations) brings clear pressures to bear on the conventions of body art as they have been handed down to us from the 1960s. Contemporary performance art does not necessarily privilege the live moment or the artist's own body, but instead engages in numerous strategies of mediation that include delegation and repetition; at the same time, it continues to have an investment in immediacy via the presentation of authentic nonprofessional performers who represent specific social groups. If body art in the '60s and '70s was produced quickly and inexpensively (since the artist's own body was the cheapest form of material), delegated performance today, by contrast, tends to be a luxury game.<sup>24</sup> It is telling that body art takes place primarily in the West, and that art fairs and biennials were among the earliest sites for its popular consumption. Jack Bankowsky has coined the term "art-fair art" to designate a mode of performance in which the spectacular and economic context of the art fair is integral to the work's meaning, and against which the artist's gestures provide a mildly amusing point of friction.<sup>25</sup> Many of his examples are delegated performances, with the Frieze Art Fair as a significant incubator for this type of work: consider Elmgreen & Dragset's doubling of the booth of their Berlin gallery Klosterfelde, complete with identical works of art and a lookalike dealer (2005); Gianni Motti's *Pre-emptive Act* (2007), a policeman meditating in a yoga position; or numerous performances staged by Cattelan's Wrong Gallery, such as Paola Pivi's *100 Chinese* (1998–2005), 100 identically dressed Chinese people standing in the gallery's booth.

Whereas once performance art sought to break with the art market by dematerializing the work of art into ephemeral events, today dematerialization and



Peter Watkins.  
*La Commune*  
(Paris, 1871). 2000.

24. Performance was "a democratic mode, where young artists who did not have access to art galleries or enough money to produce studio art for exhibition could show their work quickly to other artists in the community." (Dan Graham, "Performance: End of the 60s," in *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), p. 143).

25. Jack Bankowsky, "Tent Community," *Artforum* (October 2005), pp. 228–32.



Paola Pivi. 100 Chinese.  
1998–2005.

rumor have become two of the most effective forms of hype.<sup>26</sup> Performance excites media attention, which in turn heightens the symbolic capital of the event—as seen in numerous covers of *The Guardian*'s annual supplement to accompany the Frieze Art Fair, but also the recent controversy around Marina Abramović's "human table decorations" for the LA MOCA gala: eighty-five performers were paid \$150 to kneel on a rotating "Lazy Susan" beneath the tables, with their heads protruding above, staring into the eyes of diners who had

paid upwards of \$2,500 for a ticket.<sup>27</sup> Although this project seems to be a clear example of Abramović entering the domain of self-parody (apparently unwittingly), I would like to maintain that not all examples of delegated performance should be tarnished with the label of "art-fair art" or "gala art": the better examples offer more pointed, layered, and troubling experiences, both for the performers and viewers, which problematize any straightforward Marxist criticism of these performances as reification.

#### *Performance as Labor and Pleasure*

As I have indicated, the repeatability of delegated performance—both as a live event or as a video loop—is central to the economics of performance since 1990, enabling it to be bought and sold by institutions and individuals, performed and re-performed in many venues.<sup>28</sup> It is not coincidental that this tendency has developed hand in hand with managerial changes in the economy at large, providing an economic genealogy for this work that parallels the art

26. As Philip Auslander has argued, "Despite the claim . . . that performance's evanescence allows it to escape commodification, it is performance's very evanescence that gives it value in terms of cultural prestige." Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 58. He continues: "Even within our hyper-mediatized culture, far more symbolic capital is attached to live events than to mediatized ones."

27. Yvonne Rainer authored a letter of complaint to LA MOCA, denouncing this "exploitative" and "grotesque spectacle" as reminiscent of Pasolini's *Salò* (1975). See "Yvonne Rainer Blasts Marina Abramović and MOCA LA," *The Performance Club*, [theperformanceclub.org/2011/11/yvonne-rainer-douglas-crimp-and-taisha-paggett-blast-marina-abramovic-and-moca-la](http://theperformanceclub.org/2011/11/yvonne-rainer-douglas-crimp-and-taisha-paggett-blast-marina-abramovic-and-moca-la) (accessed April 27, 2012).

28. The Tate appointed a performance curator in 2002, while MoMA created a Department of Media (as a breakaway from Film) in 2006, which changed its name to the Department of Media and Performance Art in 2009. The Pompidou Centre has never had a curator of performance, nor considered it as a possible department, since it has always come under the administration of Contemporary Art. Bernard Blistène, email to the author, August 17, 2010.

historical one outlined above. "Outsourcing" labor became a business buzzword in the early 1990s: the wholesale divesting of important but noncore activities to other companies, from customer-service call centers to financial analysis and research. With the growth of globalization, "offshore outsourcing" became a term that refers—with not altogether positive connotations—to the use of hired labor and "virtual companies" in developing countries, taking advantage of the huge differences in wages internationally. Business theorists present outsourcing as a tool for maximizing profits; in the U.S., this led to some controversy as outsourcing was perceived to threaten domestic employment figures (as well as security). For those skeptical of globalization, outsourcing is little more than a legal loophole that allows national and multinational companies to absolve themselves of legal responsibility for unregulated and exploitative labor conditions. It is strange and striking that most U.K. guides to outsourcing emphasize the importance of *trust*: companies give responsibility for some aspect of their production to another company, with all the risks and benefits that this shared responsibility entails. In the light of the present discussion, it is telling that all of these textbooks agree that the primary aim of outsourcing is to "improve performance" (understood here as profit). But there are also important differences: if the aim of outsourcing in business is to *decrease* risk, artists frequently deploy it as a means to *increase* unpredictability—even if this means that a work might risk failing altogether.<sup>29</sup>

Noting the simultaneous rise of outsourcing in both economics and art in the 1990s is not to suggest that the latter phenomenon exists in complicity with the former, even though it seems telling that a boom in delegated performance coincided with the art market bubble of the 2000s, and with the consolidation of a service industry that increasingly relies upon the marketing of certain qualities in human beings.<sup>30</sup> Both performance and business now place a premium on recruitment, and in many cases the work of finding suitable performers is delegated to the curator, who now finds him- or herself becoming a human-resources manager (negotiating qualifications, shifts, and contracts). Although unique qualities are sought in each performer, these are—paradoxically—also infinitely replaceable: since contemporary performance increasingly tends to be on display for the duration of an exhibition, shift-work becomes necessary. There is less emphasis on the frisson of a single performance, even while the impact of the live remains: performance enters "gallery time" as a constant pres-

29. For the exhibition *Double Agent* (ICA London, 2008), Mark Sladen and I attempted to commission a new work from Phil Collins. His proposal, *Ghost Rider*, involved hiring a ghostwriter to write a feature on ghostwriters, which would appear in *The Guardian* newspaper, signed by Phil Collins. The resulting article was considered unsuitable by Collins in both tone and content, since the ghostwriter had decided to try to mimic the artist's language and vocabulary, and the feature did not go to press.

30. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have referred to the extraction of profit from the intangible uniqueness of a given place, person, or service as the "commodification of the authentic." Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 444. For a promotional take on the issue, see James Gilmore and B. Joseph Pine II, *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School, 2007).

ence, eight hours a day for the duration of an exhibition, rather than being assigned to a few intense hours (as is customary with "theater time"). Presence today is arguably less a matter of anti-spectacular immediacy (as was the case during the 1960s) than evidence of precarious labor, but artists are more likely to sustain this economy than to challenge it.

If I seem to be overstressing these economic changes, it's because they not only provide the contextual backdrop for contemporary art but also affect our reception of it. Financial transactions have become increasingly essential to the realization of delegated performance, as anyone who has organized an exhibition of this work can corroborate: contractual wage labor for performers is the largest outgoing expense in such shows, which operate with an inverse economy to that of installing more-conventional art: as Tino Sehgal points out, the longer a steel sculpture by Richard Serra is on display, the cheaper the cost of its installation becomes, whereas Sehgal's own works cost more for the institution the longer they are exhibited.<sup>31</sup> But despite the centrality of economics to delegated performance and the impact it has upon our understanding of duration, it is rare for artists to make an explicit point about financial transactions; usually such arrangements tend to be tacit. Unlike theater, dance, and film, where there are long-established codes for experiencing a performer's relationship to labor, contemporary art until recently has been comparatively artisanal, based on the romantic persona of the singular (and largely unpaid) artist-performer. It is only in the past twenty years that performance art has become "industrialized," and this shift—from festival to museum space, mobilizing large numbers of performers, unionized modes of remuneration, and ever larger audiences—means that contemporary art increasingly exists in a sphere of collaboration akin to that of theater and dance, even while it retains art's valorization of individual authorship. (There is no serious market, for example, for signed photographs of theatrical productions.)

One of the most successful exhibition projects of recent years has addressed this intersection of performance and the economy head on: the itinerant three-day exhibition *La Monnaie Vivante* (The Living Currency) by the French curator Pierre Bal-Blanc. The first iteration of this continually changing performance experiment began in Paris in 2006; subsequent versions have been held in Leuven (2007), London (2008), Warsaw (2010), and Berlin (2010).<sup>32</sup> Most of the works exhibited are delegated performances, drawn from a diverse range of generations (from the 1960s to today) and geographical locations (from Eastern and Western Europe to North and South America). *La Monnaie Vivante* places visual art performance into direct conversation with contemporary choreographers interested in the "degree zero" of dance, such as Compagnie les Gens d'Uterpan (Annie Vigier

31. Tino Sehgal, in a discussion at the ICA, London, November 19, 2004.

32. Each version also experimented with a different venue: a mirrored dance studio (Paris); a theater (Leuven, Warsaw, Berlin); a gallery (Tate Modern's Turbine Hall).



*Installation view of La Monnaie Vivante at the Tate Modern, 2007. Photographs by Sheila Burnett.*

and Franck Apertet) and Prinz Gholam. Curatorially, *La Monnaie Vivante* is distinctive in presenting performances as overlapping in a single space and time (a combination of exhibition and festival); this format forges an intense and continually shifting proximity between the different performances, as well as between performers and viewers, who occupy the same space as the works and move among them. At Tate Modern in 2008, for example, performances of varying duration took place on the Turbine Hall bridge, ranging from a six-hour live installation by Sanja Iveković (*Delivering Facts, Producing Tears*, 1998–2007) to fleeting instruction pieces by Lawrence Weiner (shooting a rifle at a wall, emptying a cup of sea water onto the floor). This led to some sublime juxtapositions, such as Santiago Sierra's *Eight People Facing a Wall* (2002) as the backdrop to Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper #5*, which in turn circled around six dancers holding poses, and salivating onto the floor, choreographed by Vigier and Apertet.

The title of Bal-Blanc's exhibition is taken from Pierre Klossowski's enigmatic and near impenetrable book of the same name, published in 1970, in which he argues for a troubling mutual imbrication of the economy and pleasure (*jouissance*), rather than perceiving them to be separate domains. The "living currency" of his title is the human body. Building on his analyses of Fourier and Sade (most notably in "Le Philosophe-Scélerant," 1967),

Klossowski's text is organized around the premise that industrial mechanization introduces new forms of perversion and pleasure.<sup>33</sup> Klossowski defines perversion as the separation that occurs as soon as the human is aware of a distinction between reproductive instincts and pleasure ("voluptuous emotion"): this first perversion distinguishes the human from the mechanical, the functional from the nonfunctional, but it is subsequently appropriated and contained by institutions as a way to organize the processes of production toward specific and highly policed ends.<sup>34</sup> As such, industry engages in a perverse act (reducing human actions to a functional tool, fixated on doing only one thing) while at the same time expelling as perverse everything that overruns and exceeds this functional gesture. Klossowski argues that art (which comes under his category of *simulacre*) is thought to die in this domain of excess because it is not functional, but in fact art should also be seen as a tool, since it is compensatory and creates new experiences ("*l'usage, c'est-à-dire, la jouissance*").<sup>35</sup> Klossowski pressures the dialectic of use and non-use, breaking down this distinction to argue that the functional and the non-functional, industrial processes and art, are *both* libidinal *and* rational, since the drives ignore such externally imposed distinctions. Humans are "living currency," and money is the mediator between libidinal pleasure and the industrial/institutional world of normative imposition.

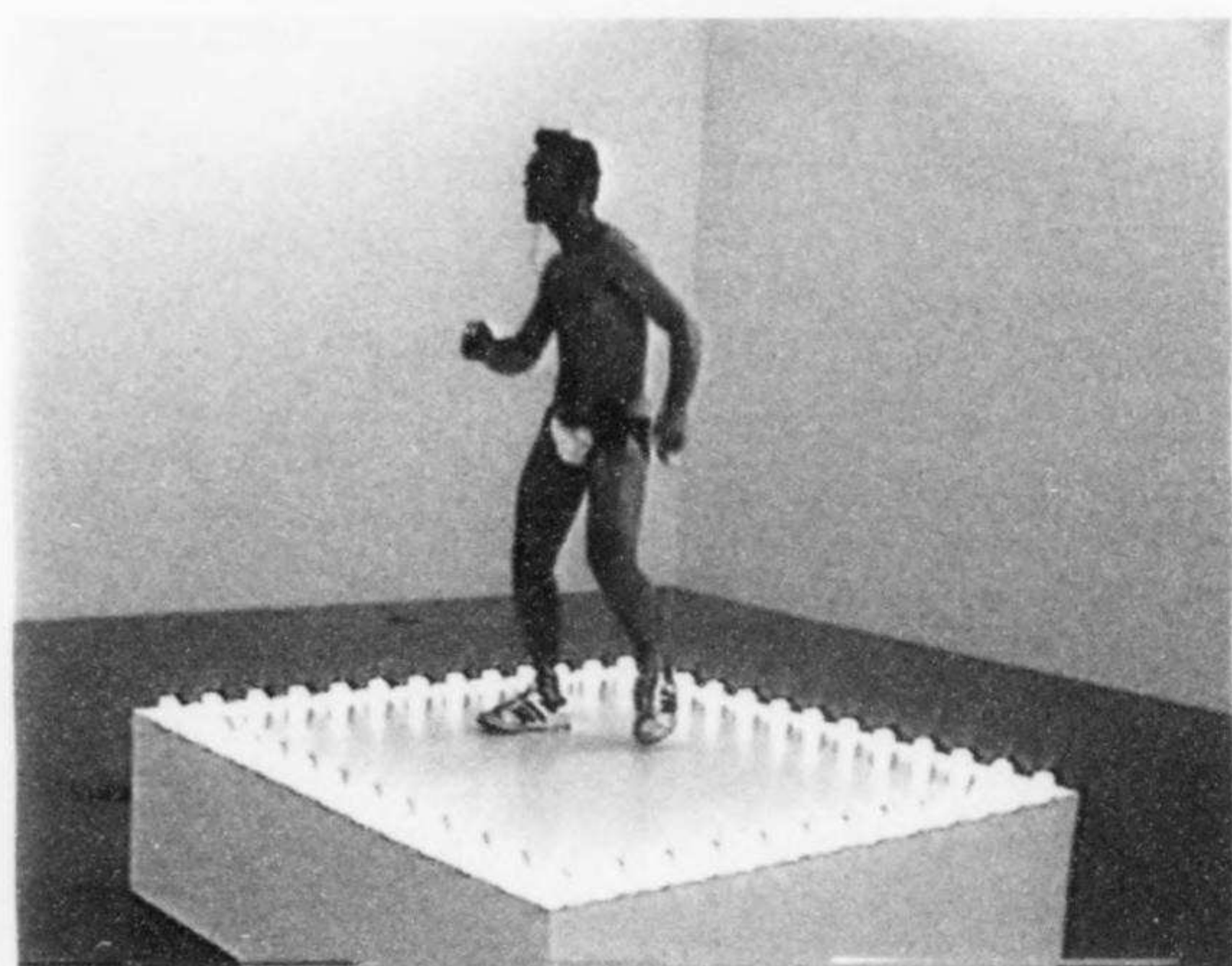
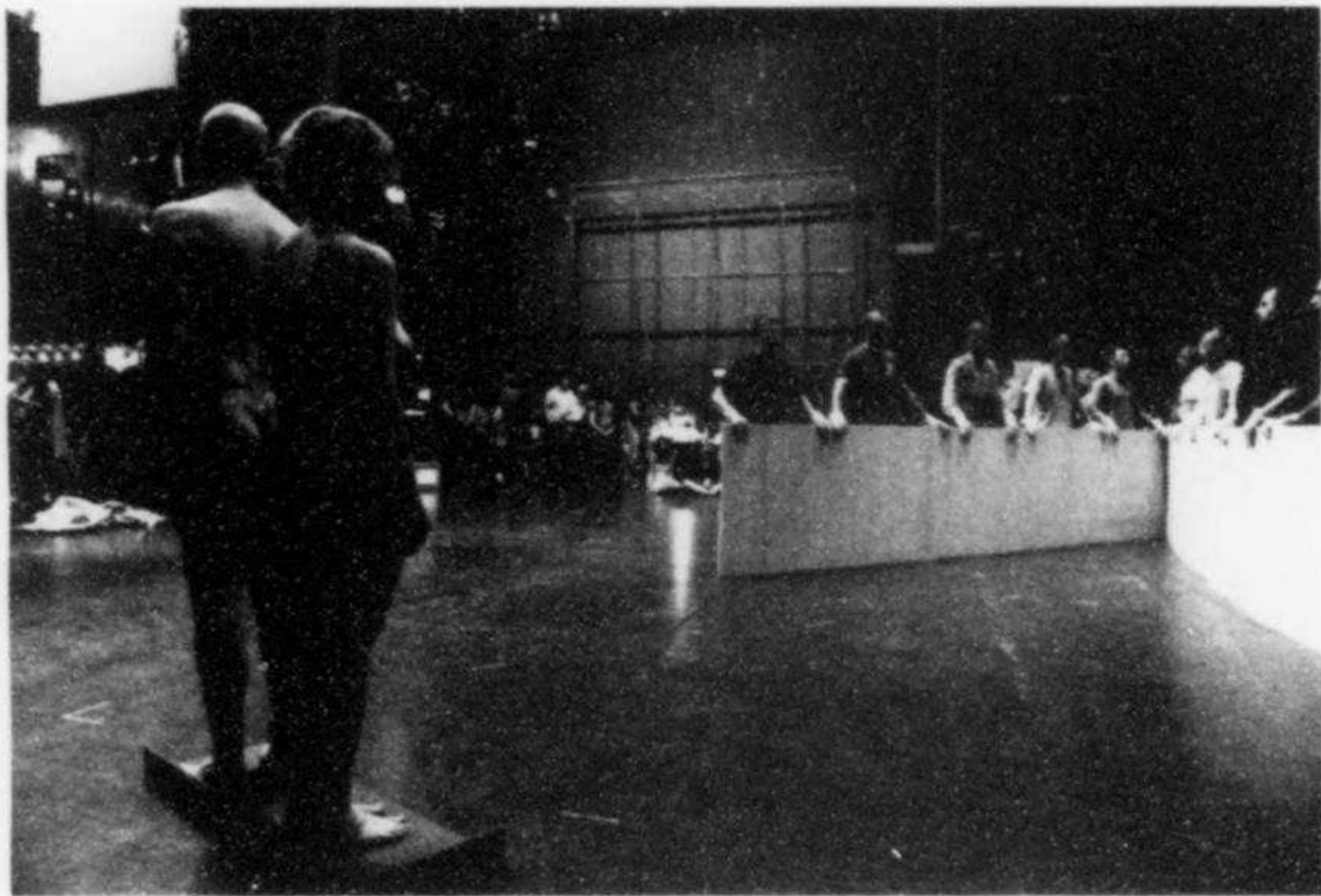
Using this to interpret performance art, Bal-Blanc argues that the whole impulse to produce "open form" in the 1970s is an inversion or reversal of the industrial system, which is itself a form of perversion.<sup>36</sup> Artists today are therefore redefining transgression by making a dual appeal to the reification of the body on the one hand, and to the embodiment of the object on the other—two poles that he sums up in the evocative quasi-oxymorons "living/object" and "inanimate/body." It is no coincidence that delegated performance makes up the majority of works exhibited in *La Monnaie Vivante*, but Bal-Blanc places these paid bodies alongside the performance of conceptual-art instructions (such as Weiner's) and more obviously participatory works (such as Lygia Clark's *Caminhando* [1963], or Franz Erhard Walther's steel *Standing Pieces* of the 1970s). These works blur the difference between many types of participatory art, as is reinforced in the photographic documentation of *La Monnaie Vivante*, in which more recent types of so-called "exploitative" art are placed next to earlier work, reminding us that the dancers of, say, Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961) are also being paid for their bodily

33. Klossowski refers to Sade's *La Nouvelle Justine*. D'Esterval can only sleep with someone if that person also agrees to be paid. Valuing one partner (to the exclusion of thousands of others) is a kind of financial transaction. See Pierre Klossowski, *La Monnaie vivante* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 1994), p. 62.

34. In other words, since the advent of industrialization, "voluptuous emotion" is no longer tied to the auratic artisanal object, but attaches itself to the superficial, mass-produced commodity, which allows emotion to be externalized and exchanged, but always through the institutional norms of the economy.

35. Klossowski, *La Monnaie vivante*, p. 12.

36. Pierre Bal-Blanc, in Elisabeth Lebovici, "The Death of the Audience: A Conversation with Pierre Bal-Blanc," *e-flux journal*, February 13, 2010, available at e-flux.com (accessed May 15, 2012).



Top: Installation view of *La Monnaie Vivante*, at the Sixth Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2010.  
Bottom: Pierre Bal-Blanc, *Contrat de travail*, 1992.

labor. This juxtaposition of generations and types of work (participatory, conceptual, theatrical, choreographic) is also staked as an engagement with *interpassivity* (rather than interactivity), because this is the dominant mode installed by mass media and an information society. Bal-Blanc argues that all the works he exhibits show the way in which individual drives are subordinated to economic and social relations, and how these rules are parsed in the entertainment industry's laws of transmission and reception ("interpassivity reveals what interactivity conceals, an admission of dependence on the user; interactivity, by contrast, gives the impression that the subject masters his language").<sup>37</sup> In other words, interpassivity is the secret language of the market, which degrades bodies into objects, and it is also the language that artists use to reflect on this degradation.

It is not unimportant that Bal-Blanc's development of this project was rooted in his own experience performing for two and a half months in Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1991. In this work, a scantily clad male wears headphones and dances upon a lightbulb-studded, minimalist podium for at least five minutes a day for the duration of the exhibition.<sup>38</sup>

37. Pierre Bal-Blanc, "Notes de mise en scène: *La Monnaie Vivante*," p. 5; pdf available at [cacbretigny.com](http://cacbretigny.com) (my translation).

38. First shown in Gonzalez-Torres's exhibition *Every Week There Is Something Different* (May 2–June 1, 1991, Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York), *Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)* was subsequently installed at the Hamburger Kunstverein, where Bal-Blanc took on the role of go-go dancer.

Bal-Blanc's feeling of depressed subjection after a month of performing this work raised a number of questions for him that were only answered when he later encountered the performances of Santiago Sierra.<sup>39</sup> Like many of the artists in *La Monnaie Vivante*, Sierra seems to use perversity as a meditation on the degree to which social and economic institutions assure the triumph of perversion. For Bal-Blanc, the difference between works of art and capitalism is that artists appropriate perverted power *for themselves*, in order to produce reoriented and multiple roles (as opposed to the singular roles of industrialization). As such, they propose new forms of transgression, and prompt a *secousse* (jolt) in the viewer. As Bal-Blanc suggests, in delegated performance two types of perversion confront each other face to face: the perversity exercised by institutions and presented as a norm, and that employed by artists, which by contrast appears as an anomaly.

#### *Perversion and Authenticity*

Klossowski arguably provides a bridge in French theory between Bataille and Lacan and a subsequent generation of thinkers, including Lyotard, Baudrillard, and Foucault, who take from him, respectively, the ideas of libidinal economy, the simulacrum, and institutional discourse. For Klossowski, Sade's sexual perversions work against all normative values and structures, both rational and moral, but it is hard to ascertain Klossowski's relationship to the system he describes.<sup>40</sup> Klossowski's interest in the human body as "living currency" seems to be a meditation on how subjects may come to pervert and thereby enjoy their own alienation at work, but his invocation of industrialized labor also seems rather dated. *La Monnaie vivante* was published in 1970, at the moment of transition between what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello identify as the second and third spirits of capitalism: from an industrialized model of labor, organized by management, in which the worker feels exploited and unrealized, to a connexionist, project-based model, structured by networks, in which the worker is arguably even more exploited but feels greater fulfilment and autonomy. To the extent that the third spirit of capitalism is marked by elaborate forms of self-exploitation (rather than a monodirectional, hierarchical flow), Klossowski's understanding of the way we find perverse pleasure in labor is perhaps even more relevant.

39. Of all the people I have spoken to who have appeared in delegated performances, it is striking that Bal-Blanc is the only one who didn't enjoy his time performing. The usual reaction is one of enjoyment in the face of a new experience. As Joe Scanlan notes, participants' enjoyment often extends so far as to preclude critical engagement with the works that they appear in, resulting in a kind of Stockholm syndrome whereby they are grateful to their artistic captors and unable to admit the relative lack of returns on their labor invested in the work of art. See Joe Scanlan, response to Don Byrd, letters page, *Artforum* (September 2010), pp. 54, 56.

40. Klossowski's second edition of *Sade mon prochain* (*Sade My Neighbour*, 1947) revises his earlier reading of Sade in line with his post-Catholic outlook. In the later revision, he views Sade's sexual perversions as universally oppositional, rather than being a secret affirmation of God. See Ian James, *Pierre Klossowski: The Persistence of a Name* (Oxford: Legenda/European Humanities Research Centre, 2000).

Following Klossowski's logic, it is as if the delegated performance artist puts him/herself in a Sadean position because he/she knows from experience that this exploitation and self-display can itself be a form of pleasure.<sup>41</sup> From this perspective, it is only doing half the job to point out that delegated performance "reifies" its participants. From a Sadean point of view, this reading doesn't establish the occult pleasure of the participant in exploiting his subordination in these works of art, nor does it account for the evident pleasure of viewers in watching him/her. This interlacing of *voyeur* and *voyant* is at the core of Pierre Zucca's quaintly perturbing photographic vignettes accompanying the first edition of Klossowski's publication (in which two men and a woman engage in sadomasochistic acts), and is essential for rethinking the stakes of delegated performance for both the audience's visual pleasure and that of the participant. (The most brutal image of this reciprocal pleasure recently is Sierra's two-channel video *Los Penetrados* [2010], showing a near-industrialized array of anal penetration between couples of different races and genders.)

Klossowski's writings therefore invite us to move beyond the impasse of certain intellectual positions inherited from the 1960s: on the one hand, arguments that society is all-determining as a set of institutional and disciplinary constraints (Frankfurt School, structuralism), and on the other, arguments for the perpetual vitality and agency of the subject that continually subverts and undermines these restrictions (poststructuralism, Deleuze and Guattari). Rather than collapsing these positions, Klossowski requires us to take onboard a more complex network of libidinal drives that require perpetual restaging and renegotiation. This tension between structure and agency, particular and universal, spontaneous and scripted, *voyeur* and *voyant*, is key to the aesthetic effect and social import of the best examples of delegated performance.

Although the artist delegates power to the performers (entrusting them with agency while also affirming hierarchy), delegation is not just a one-way, downward gesture. The performers also delegate something to the artist: a guarantee of authenticity, through their proximity to everyday social reality, conventionally denied to the artist, who deals merely in representations. By relocating sovereign and self-constituting authenticity *away* from the singular artist (who is naked, masturbates, is shot in the arm, etc.) and *onto* the collective presence of the performers, who metonymically signify a solidly sociopolitical issue (homelessness, race, immigration, disability, etc.), the artist outsources authenticity and relies on his performers to supply this more vividly, without the disruptive filter of celebrity. At the same time, the realism invoked by this work is clearly not a return to modernist authenticity of the kind dismantled by Adorno and poststructuralism. By setting up a situation that unfolds with a greater or lesser degree of unpredictability, artists give rise to a highly directed form of authenticity: singular authorship is put into

41. "It would never occur to the sadist to find pleasure in other people's pain if he had not himself first undergone the masochistic experience of a link between pain and pleasure." Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 43.

question by delegating control of the work to the performers; they confer upon the project a guarantee of realism, but do this through a highly authored situation whose precise outcome cannot be foreseen. In wresting a work of art from this event, the artist both relinquishes and reclaims power: he or she agrees to temporarily lose control over the situation before returning to select, define, and circulate its representation.<sup>42</sup> Authenticity is invoked, but then questioned and reformulated, by the indexical presence of the members of a particular social group, who are both individuated *and* symbolic, live *and* mediated, determined *and* autonomous.

At the same time, the phenomenological experience of confronting these performers always testifies to the extent to which people relentlessly exceed the categories under which they have been recruited. Using "amateurs" is essential in this regard, for it ensures that delegated performance will never assume the seamless character of professional acting, and keeps open a space of risk and ambiguity (comparable to the history of chance operations throughout twentieth-century art). That this amateurism nevertheless provokes a sense of moral outrage betrays the extent to which institutional perversion has been internalized as fully normal, while that of the artists comes across as unacceptable. The logic is one of fetishistic disavowal: I know that society is all-exploiting, but all the same, I want artists to be an exception to this rule. When artists make the patterns of institutional subordination that we undergo every day both visible and available for experiential pleasure, the result is a moral queasiness; and yet the possibility that this might also be a source of *jouissance* and a "tool" is precisely the point of Klossowski's disturbing analysis. What becomes thinkable if the pleasure of reification in these works of art is precisely analogous to the pleasure we all take in our own self-exploitation?

#### *Performance in Context*

It should be clear by now that I am trying to argue for a more complicated understanding of delegated performance than that offered by a Marxist framework of reification or a contemporary critical discourse rooted in positivist pragmatics and injunctions to social amelioration, all of which reduce these works to standard-issue questions of political correctness. The perverse pleasures underlying these artistic gestures offer an alternative form of knowledge about capitalism's commodification of the individual, especially when both participants and viewers appear to enjoy the transgression of subordination to a work of art. If one is not to fall into the trap of merely condemning these works as reiterations of capitalist exploitation, it becomes essential to view art not as part of a seamless continuum with contemporary labor but as offering a specific space of experience where those norms are suspended and put in service of pleasure in perverse ways

42. In general, much more attention needs to be paid to the modes in which this representation is figured—whether huge Cibachrome prints, in the case of Vanessa Beecroft, or short documentary videos in the case of Zmijewski—rather than dismissing artists out of hand for exploitation.

(to return to Sade, a space not unlike that of BDSM sex). Rather than judging art as a model of social organization that can be evaluated according to preestablished moral criteria, it is more productive to view the conceptualization of these performances as properly *artistic* decisions. This is not to say that artists are uninterested in ethics, only to point out that ethics is the ground zero of any collaborative art. To judge a work on the basis of its preparatory phase is to neglect the singular approach of each artist, how this produces specific aesthetic consequences, and the larger questions that he or she might be struggling to articulate.<sup>43</sup>

And what might these larger questions be? Artists choose to use people as a medium for many reasons: to challenge traditional artistic criteria by reconfiguring everyday actions as performance; to give visibility to certain social constituencies and render them more complex, immediate, and physically present; to introduce aesthetic effects of chance and risk; to problematize the binaries of live and mediated, spontaneous and staged, authentic and contrived; to examine the construction of collective identity and the extent to which people always exceed these categories. In the most compelling examples of this work, a series of paradoxical operations is put into play that impedes any simplistic accusation that the subjects of delegated performance are reified (decontextualized, and laden with other attributes). To judge these performances on a scale with supposed "exploitation" at the bottom and full "agency" at the top is to miss the point entirely. The difference, rather, is between "art-fair art" and work that reifies *precisely in order to discuss reification*, or that exploits *precisely to thematize exploitation itself*. In this light, the risk of superficiality that occasionally accompanies the reductive branding or packaging of social identities in a work of art ("the unemployed," "the blind," "children," "brass band players," etc.) should always be set against the dominant modes of media representation in opposition to which these works so frequently intend to do battle.<sup>44</sup> This, for me, is the dividing line between the facile gestures of so much gala and art-fair art and those more troubling works that do not simply take advantage of contemporary labor conditions but trouble our relationship to them through the presentation of conventionally underexposed constituencies. It is true that at its worst, delegated performance produces quirkily staged reality designed *for* the media, rather than paradoxically mediated presence. But at its best, delegated performance produces disruptive events that testify to a shared reality between viewers and performers, and which defy not only agreed ways of thinking about pleasure, labor, and ethics, but also the intellectual frameworks we have inherited to understand these ideas today.

43. For example, a distinction can be made between those artists whose work addresses ethics as an explicit theme (e.g., Żmijewski's *80064* [2004]), and those who use ethical discomfort as a technique to express and foreground questions of labor (such as Sierra) or control (Bruguera).

44. As Phil Collins's *Return of the Real* (2006–7) makes so abundantly clear, reality television depends upon the merciless shoehorning of participants to fit stereotypical characters in clichéd narratives whose predictability is designed to attract lots of viewers.

## Objects in the Cluttered Field: Claes Oldenburg's Proposed Monuments

JULIAN ROSE

*Q: Why didn't you make it larger so that it would  
loom over the observer?*

*A: I was not making a monument.*

*Q: Then why didn't you make it smaller so that  
the observer could see over the top?*

*A: I was not making an object . . .*

—Tony Smith<sup>1</sup>

*It is difficult to comprehend why so many artists  
seem interested in monuments.*

—Dan Graham<sup>2</sup>

*The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is insepara-  
ble from the logic of the monument.*

—Rosalind Krauss<sup>3</sup>

One would be hard pressed to collect three documents with a greater significance for 1960s American sculpture than artist Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture," critic Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood," and art historian Rosalind Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." As Morris gained a reputation as one of Minimalism's best-known practitioners, his essay emerged as one of the movement's core manifestos. Despite, or perhaps because of, its virulent attack on Minimalism, Fried's essay is probably the most famous text on the movement,

1. Tony Smith, cited in Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 128. Robert Morris also uses this Smith quote in "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," in Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), p. 11.

2. Dan Graham, "Models and Monuments," *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 5 (March 1967), p. 32.

3. Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 279.

providing a canonical definition that galvanized contemporary critics and practitioners and that almost every subsequent commentator has had to address, whether arguing with Fried or against him. And while it is a now-familiar story that Minimalism and other late-1960s sculpture made forays into territory traditionally understood as the domain of other disciplines, particularly architecture, Krauss's essay, originally published in *October* in the spring of 1979, was an early and masterful situating of this work in relation to a broad range of contemporary practices, permanently altering the way sculpture has been defined and understood. It is striking, then, that the term "monument" plays a pivotal role in all three texts.

The term's use is striking not only because of its central role but also because it recurs despite appearing suddenly, with no obvious precedents, and lacking a clear meaning. While it had played a role in architectural debates in the 1940s at the hands of Sigfried Giedion, Jose Luis Sert, and others who sought to give the monument a specific and contemporary definition, the question of monumentality was largely put to rest at the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM) gatherings of the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Similar debates on monumentality are not found in art criticism or history, and despite its sudden return, the term remained paradoxically peripheral, fleeting phantom-like through the discourse on 1960s sculpture.<sup>5</sup> Yet there "monument" remains. It is not only embedded in these three canonical texts, but sprinkled throughout late-'60s American art, popping up in artists' statements and proposals, critics' essays, and titles of exhibitions and individual works.

So it seems that Graham was entirely justified in questioning the term's appeal. Why did "monument" assume such an importance at this moment? One set of possible answers is offered by Claes Oldenburg's *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings*, from 1965 to 1969. This body of Oldenburg's work stands out because of his willingness to recognize the monument's productive potential even as he approached it critically and ironically, particularly its simultaneous (and profound) relevance for both art and architecture at a time when new, and often bitterly disputed, relationships were developing between the two fields. When the monument did appear in the discourses surrounding both the art and architecture of this time, it was usually as a focus for opposition. Most contemporary artists related to the monument through rejection (as in Tony Smith's denial) or even negation (as in Gordon Matta-Clark's famous series of "Non-uments"). Krauss linked the monument not to sculpture in general but to the traditional

4. As Joan Ockman has pointed out, at the eighth CIAM congress in 1951, Sigfried Giedion—originally responsible for the first calls to a "new monumentality" in his manifestos of 1943 and 1944 ("Nine Points on Monumentality" and "The Need for a New Monumentality")—flatly stated, "There is no excuse for the erection of a monumental building." Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943–1968* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), p. 28.

5. The term is used sporadically, and apparently with little rigor, as a general designation assigned to works of unusually large scale. For an example of such use contemporaneous with the texts discussed here, see the description of large-scale commissions by sculptor Alexander Calder in Robert Osborn, "Calder's International Monuments," *Art in America* 51, no. 2 (March–April 1969), p. 32.

definition of sculpture exploded by her "expanded field." And while the monument experienced something of a resurgence in the discourse of emerging post-modern architects, particularly Robert Venturi, they invoked it as a focal point for critiques of modernism, rather than as an architectural ideal as it had been at the early CIAM conferences.

Oldenburg recognized that the monument was a kind of no-man's-land between art and architecture, intimately connected to both but claimed by neither. By occupying this liminal zone rather than staking a claim to contested disciplinary territory, Oldenburg gained a unique vantage point from which to reflect on both disciplines and sidestepped the problem of having to choose between them. His proposed monuments make meaningful contributions to our understanding of both the sculpture and architecture of their period. In the face of contemporary discourses that suppressed the object as secondary, transparent, or even obsolete, Oldenburg's monuments radically reassert the validity of objects, granting them a new degree of autonomy and opacity.<sup>6</sup> While Minimalism and post-Minimalism appealed to phenomenology to propose new models of experience as a shared field mutually constituted by subject and object, Oldenburg's monuments implied an alternate model of experience, more complex and less stable, predicated on this new independence of the object. And at a time when self-conscious borrowing from early-twentieth-century avant-garde movements by advanced 1960s practices added new urgency to discussions of historical narrative, Oldenburg used the monument's inherent connection to history to explore alternative models of temporality, opening up new possibilities for relating to historical practices and reflecting critically on the present.

*Art in Relation to Architecture: The Monumental Shortcut*

Rosalind Krauss's "expanded field" remains one of the prevailing models of the relationship between sculpture and architecture during the period in which Oldenburg proposed his monuments.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, she sees the monument as the primary mediator between the two domains. For Krauss, monumentality is the default state of sculpture, in that sculpture is traditionally figurative, commemora-

6. These discourses are discussed in more detail below, but include, in architecture: formalist modernism, which tended to see the object in terms of dematerialized perception, as in Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture* or Colin Rowe's famous "Literal and Phenomenal Transparency"; postmodernism, which understood the object as a network of signs, as in the work of Robert Venturi; and CIAM urbanism, which recast "new monumentality" as a field of effects rather than the property of an architectural object. In art, they include Minimalism, which reduced the object to a co-producer, with the subject, of aesthetic experience, and Pop, which presented the object as a kind of prop commodity, meaningful primarily for its cultural and commercial associations.

7. Although writing almost a decade later, Krauss explicitly placed the inception of her model in the late 1960s, at the height of Oldenburg's monument project: "It seems fairly clear that this permission (or pressure) to think the expanded field was felt by a number of artists at about the same time, roughly between the years 1968 and 1970." Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 287.

tive, and strongly tied to a particular location as a marker of place.<sup>8</sup> Thus the monument is primarily a symbolic representation. But eventually the logic of modern sculpture undermined the idea of a cohesive, site-specific object (for example, through use of fragmentation or multiples) and sculpture “crosse[d] the threshold of the logic of the monument, entering the space of what could be called its negative condition.” While productive for a time, this opposition to the monument tended toward “pure negativity.”<sup>9</sup> Seeking to transcend modernism, practices such as Minimalism were forced to turn away from the monument entirely and search for other terms to relate to, finding (primarily) landscape and architecture.

Enter the “expanded field.” Following a structuralist diagram, Krauss uses the oppositions between sculpture, landscape, and architecture to create terms describing new modes of synthetic practice.<sup>10</sup> She calls the category most directly related to both sculpture and architecture “axiomatic structures.” Her choice of the term “axiomatic” is revealing, for Krauss had used the word before, in other slightly earlier texts, but not in regard to architecture. Instead, she used it—in a clearly pejorative sense—to describe the kind of abstract formal systems (from linear perspective to deductive logic) attacked by the work she championed.<sup>11</sup> While Krauss does not use “axiomatic” in an explicitly negative sense in “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” she does use the term’s connotations of self-evidence and its association with abstract logics of derivation to cast architecture as an inevitably diagrammatic spatial system, lacking the rich experiential potential of sculpture. In fact, she implies that a kind of sculptural intervention is necessary to introduce contingency and specificity into architectural experience: “The possibility explored in this category is a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the

8. “The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the monument. By virtue of this logic a sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place. The equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius is such a monument, set in the center of the Campidoglio to represent by its symbolical presence the relationship between ancient, Imperial Rome and the seat of government of modern, Renaissance Rome.” *Ibid.*, p. 279.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

10. She uses the structuralist diagram called a Klein group, which was conceived particularly for opening binary fields: “By means of this logical expansion a set of binaries is transformed into a quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it. It becomes a logically expanded field.” *Ibid.*, p. 283.

11. See, for example, the following description of the certainties undermined by Robert Morris’s work in *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. “The notion of the axiomatic coordinates [of perspective], which allows one to think of oneself as capable of reconstituting the object, from all around itself, regardless of one’s own position, or its, is a notion that wants to forget that meaning arises only from *this* position, and *this* perspective; and that one has no knowledge of these things beforehand.” In contrast, Morris’s work “insists that only phantoms appear to ‘the syncretic vision’; but *its* meaning is specific and is a function of lived time.” For Krauss, this amounts to a “sculptural attack on a classical explanation of how things are known.” Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 240. Also her description of the subversive “concepts” driving Sol LeWitt’s conceptual art: “These ‘ideas’ exist on an entirely different order than that of the mathematical, the deductive, the axiomatic.” Rosalind E. Krauss, “LeWitt in Progress,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 245, originally published in *October* in the fall of 1978.

architectural experience—the abstract conditions of openness and closure—onto the reality of a given space.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, while it stands as a virtuosic application of structuralist logic, Krauss’s expanded field is ultimately not an opening up of sculpture and architecture to each’s complete range; rather, it is a carefully selective reading of architecture paired with a narrow range of sculptural practices that reinforce, or at least play off of, this understanding. The new field occupied by her “axiomatic structures” has been expanded, but also conceptually cleared.

Here the monument’s absence begins to tell. According to Krauss, modern sculpture’s rejection of the monument left it “cut off from the project of temporal and spatial representation.”<sup>13</sup> Subsequent sculpture, still separated from the monument by the gulf of modernism, did not return to this project and is therefore incapable of engaging architecture on any of the levels on which the monument might operate—cultural, historical, or representational. Sculpture is limited to unpacking architecture’s “axiomatic” role as shaper of space.

Krauss does not mention Oldenburg in her essay, and it is not difficult to understand this omission. Where would his proposed monuments possibly fit in her expanded field? His colossal *Clothespin* (1967), for example, can be read both as a kind of ready-made sculpture in clear dialogue with contemporary sculptural movements such as Minimalism and as a building proposal that resonates with a number of historical and cultural discourses in architecture (ranging from wartime debates on monumental urban expression to Venturi’s “Pop” or postmodern architecture of signs and symbols). If for Krauss the monument is the term from which sculpture must be freed before it can relate to architecture, for Oldenburg the monument is a shortcut between the two. Lacking the rigorously sequential logic of Krauss’s diagrammatically structured synthesis, Oldenburg’s shortcut retains all the messy simultaneity of a collision or collapse and so ultimately promises a greater range of connections between sculpture and architecture, in addition to a more genuinely expanded understanding of both.

#### *Architecture: Object, Monument, and Kitsch*

Despite Krauss’s association of the monument with sculpture, for many artists of the 1960s and ’70s, “monumental” simply meant a large-scale architectural object.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, in twentieth-century architectural discourse, the link between

12. Ibid., p. 287. Hence this category is made up primarily of artists such as Bruce Nauman or Richard Serra, whose work does indeed use an abstract conception of architecture as the starting point for a kind of axiomatic exploration of the subjective nature of spatial experience and perception. The relationship of this work and architecture is thus perhaps reminiscent of a kind of modernist self-reflexive exploration of medium (here expanded to encompass the relationship between two disciplines), although this association is repressed in Krauss’s text, which strenuously attempts to separate the new “post-modern” practices she describes from their “modernist” predecessors.

13. Ibid., p. 280.

14. See, for example, Neil Welliver, “Monumentality,” *Perspecta* 11 (1967). Welliver writes that “monuments and monumentality seem today to be almost exclusively the concern of architects” and so have “an essentially architectural definition.” Welliver, p. 23.

monumental qualities and buildings was much more tenuous. The problem lay in the monument's entanglement with history. In his text "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," German art historian Alois Riegl argued that the monument's most universal and accessible function was to inspire a sense of the passage of time, which he termed its "age-value." That value is necessarily highest when the ravages of time are most evident, and hence when the object itself has almost dissolved; hence the profound pathos of a ruined medieval castle or a weather-scarred ancient obelisk. As Riegl puts it, "the object has shrunk to a necessary evil," merely a "catalyst" for triggering a sense of the cycles of time.<sup>15</sup>

If Riegl problematized the monument's status as object in favor of its commemorative value, Lewis Mumford, writing decades later, profoundly questioned the place of this value in modernity. Mumford argued that the monument's inevitable orientation toward the past (for him reducible to a morbid obsession with death) put it at odds with the progressive future to which modernity aspired. Hence his famous pronouncement: "The very notion of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument."<sup>16</sup>

But the notion of monumentality remained seductive for anyone wishing to discuss architecture's expressive or symbolic value. In 1944, Sigfried Giedion countered critiques of modernism as cold or inhuman by calling for a "new monumentality." Yet this new phase of modernism depended on severing the monument's connection to both history and the architectural object. The expressive value of new monumentality—and his preference for this term over "monument"—underscored that the former was no longer commemorative or historical, but instead a kind of generalized expression of civic spirit.<sup>17</sup> Citing World's Fair fireworks displays as a precedent, Giedion proposed to achieve new monumentality through "ephemeral architecture."<sup>18</sup> While still invested in marking place (the "new monumentality" was grounded, after all, in broader debates on postwar urban renewal) Giedion reimagined the modern civic center as populated not by stalwart buildings but as the site of "great spectacles capable of fascinating the people."<sup>19</sup>

15. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," translated in *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982), p. 24. Admittedly, Riegl's subject is the preservation of existing monuments rather than a prescriptive formula for the creation of new monuments, but his de-emphasis of the object remains suggestive.

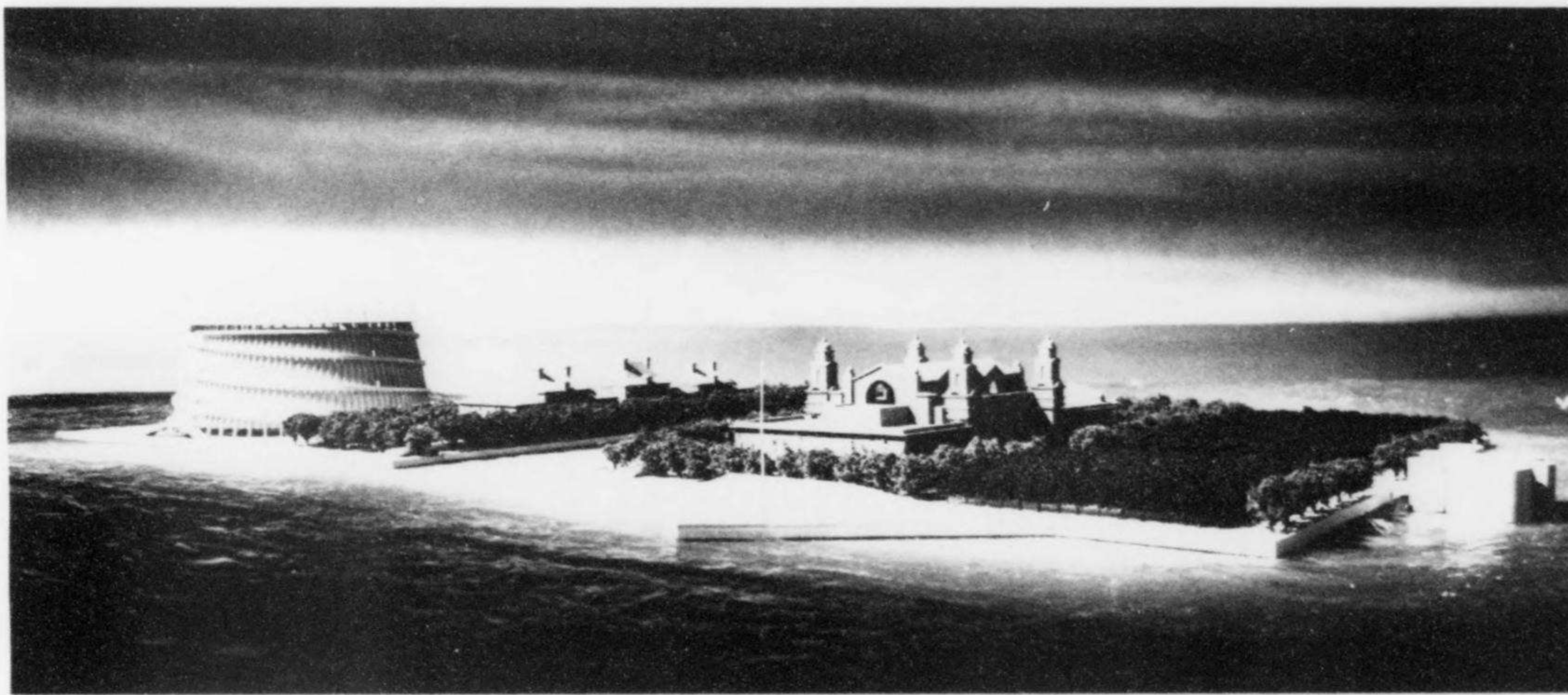
16. Lewis Mumford, "Death of the Monument," *Circle* (1938), p. 264.

17. "Monuments are the expression of man's highest cultural needs. They have to satisfy the eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. The most vital monuments are those which express the feeling and thinking of this collective force—the people." Sigfried Giedion, Jose Luis Sert, and Fernand Léger, "Nine Points on Monumentality," in Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943–1968*, p. 29.

18. Sigfried Giedion, "The Need for a New Monumentality," in *New Architecture and City Planning*, ed. Paul Zucker (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), p. 563.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 568. A remarkable proposal for such a spectacle was given by Léger, who proposed to paint the entire city of Paris white for the 1937 Exposition, so that every night it could become a vast spectacle of colored lights projected by airplanes and spotlights. Fernand Léger, "A New Space in Architecture," in Léger, *Functions of Painting* (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 158.

Of course, the construction of monuments did not cease in the modern era simply because Mumford condemned it or Giedion excised it from his "new monumentality." It did, however, become harder to take seriously. As early as 1944, writing in the same volume in which Giedion published his call for a new monumentality, another commentator lamented the fact that new monuments were often ridiculed, as for example the "neo-Renaissance fountain in the Plaza, New York, [which] has called forth innumerable jokes."<sup>20</sup> In his 1969 book *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, cultural historian Gillo Dorfles devoted an entire chapter to monuments, pointing out that "at a certain point in history monuments became associated with kitsch." This association was not simply a matter of dated styles, as



*Philip Johnson. Model of Ellis Island Park. 1966. Photograph by Louis Checkman.*

in the Plaza fountain. Dorfles points out that attempting "to avoid the danger of evoking the comic qualities of traditional monuments that has led certain artists to employ 'modernistic' styles. . . . Unfortunately, the effect created is doubly kitsch."<sup>21</sup> The problem lay in the underlying ideology of monuments rather than their realization in one form or another.<sup>22</sup>

Architect Philip Johnson's 1966 proposal for a monument on Ellis Island is the apotheosis of this trend toward kitsch. In 1965, after long debates over appropriate recognition of its historical value, Ellis Island was proclaimed part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument and the design of a memorial structure was solicited. Johnson's response was a stunning assemblage of clichés. In a travesty of Riegl's "age-value," Johnson proposed to create what he described as "instant" or "stabi-

20. Philip Goodwin, "Monuments," in Zucker, *New Architecture and City Planning*, p. 589.

21. Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969), p. 80.

22. As Dorfles puts it, "Solemnity, majesty and heroics are evidently attributes and concepts too far removed from the modern mentality." *Ibid.*, p. 79.

lized" ruins by removing the roofs, doors, and windows of several of the existing administration buildings and planting vines along their walls. The remaining buildings on site would be razed to clear space for Johnson's own design, in its own right a travesty of both the idea of monumental scale and the neoclassical style associated with traditional monuments: a 130-foot-high circular wall, in the form of a squat, fluted column, to be engraved with the names of the sixteen million immigrants who had passed through the station between 1892 and 1954.<sup>23</sup>

Johnson's proposal claimed that the historical meaning of a monument could be fixed, as permanently stabilized as his artificial "ruins," by the judicious use of a few heavy-handed architectural symbols. Such a claim was not well received. The proposal was never realized, officially because of lack of funds, but presumably in part as a result of adverse public reaction. Ada Louise Huxtable, architecture critic for the *New York Times*, described Johnson's monument as "spurious and over-simplified; at best hollow; at worst a mockery."<sup>24</sup>

As Dorfles warned and Johnson illustrated, refusing to acknowledge the kitsch element of monuments ensured its production. But what if this slide into kitsch was simply accepted, taken as the starting point for a new understanding of the monumental object? "Such is Oldenburg's strategy in his response to the problem of memorializing Ellis Island *Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island: Frankfurter with Tomato and Toothpick* (1965). While Johnson's proposal was publicized primarily through model photographs, Oldenburg presented this monument (like most of his proposals) in a small watercolor sketch. Johnson's photograph reads as an almost absurdly dramatic assertion of his design's monumental presence. Centered in a spotlight, his enormous column-tower rises to nearly twice the height of the adjacent neo-gothic administration buildings. Oldenburg, however, exploits his medium to carry this assertion of the object even further. Everything in the sketch, a view of his monument from New York Harbor looking toward Manhattan, dissolves into atmospheric background except the colossal hot dog itself. Both the sausage and the bun have been carefully shaded with a succession of washes in different tones to obtain the effect of a looming, bulbous three-dimensionality. The hot dog rests directly on the horizon line with no intermediary land mass, having visually replaced the island. Its immense scale is suggested by a minuscule freight ship in the foreground and by the fact that it stands almost as tall as the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan, not individually recognizable but suggested by a cluster of blotches to the right.

Why this glorified hot dog for Ellis Island? In large part because of its symbolic appeal as kitschy Americana. Responding to an interviewer who described his choice

23. For a full description of Johnson's proposal, see Ann Novotny, *Strangers at the Door: Ellis Island, Castle Garden, and the Great Migration to America* (Connecticut: Chatham Press, 1971), p. 141.

24. Huxtable, quoted by Dan Graham in "Oldenburg's Monuments," *Artforum* 6, no. 5 (January 1968), p. 31.

of objects as “the apotheosis of middle class icons,” Oldenburg agreed that “a catalogue could be made of all such objects, which would read like a list of the deities or things on which our contemporary mythological thinking has been projected. We *do* invest religious emotion in our objects. Look at how beautifully objects are depicted



Claes Oldenburg. Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island: Frankfurter with Tomato and Toothpick. 1965.

in ads in Sunday newspapers.”<sup>25</sup> The combination of their universal familiarity and their fetishization as commodities transforms these “common bourgeois objects, things used by everybody,” into “the closest thing to symbols available in our time.”<sup>26</sup> For Oldenburg it was a lack of appropriate symbolism that precipitated the modern crises of the monument in the first place: “Architects find it difficult to design monuments today . . . because they can’t find appropriate symbols. Didn’t Lewis Mumford say that there’s no such thing as a monument in the modern world?”<sup>27</sup>

25. Claes Oldenburg, *Proposals for Monuments and Buildings* (Chicago: Big Table Publishing Company, 1969), p. 33.

26. Oldenburg described his monuments in this way in an interview with John Coplans, “The Artist Speaks: Claes Oldenburg,” *Art in America* 51, no. 2 (March–April 1969), p. 75.

27. Oldenburg, *Proposals*, p. 25.

Oldenburg's interest in the symbolic possibilities of consumer culture resonated with the ideas of architect Robert Venturi, who was developing his theory of pop- and vernacular-inspired architectural symbolism at approximately the same time as Oldenburg proposed his monuments.<sup>28</sup> Like Oldenburg, Venturi recognized kitsch's powerful potential to critique the tired pretensions of modernism. Venturi understood modern architecture as aspiring to a kind of purely formal monumental expression based on a vocabulary of massive, "heroic and original" forms. Lacking grounding in relevant symbolism, however, these heroic and original attempts at monumentality fail: "Big, high spaces do not automatically make architectural monumentality. . . . We rarely achieve architectural monumentality when we try."<sup>29</sup> Instead, Venturi proposed an "ugly and ordinary" sign-based monumentality drawn from the symbolism of commercial culture, most famously exemplified by his interest in the signage of the Las Vegas Strip. At his most polemical, Venturi claimed that the most appropriate contemporary proposal for a monumental building would be "a conventional apartment building, lost by the side of the expressway, with a big sign on top blinking, I AM A MONUMENT."<sup>30</sup>

Several of Venturi's paradigmatic examples of commercial architecture directly echo Oldenburg's Ellis Island proposal by presenting the building itself in the form of a commodity object. Not only is his famous "duck building" a poultry store in the shape of a duck, but in *Learning from Las Vegas* he also published photographs of both a hot-dog stand and a hamburger restaurant built in the form of their respective wares. It might be tempting, then, to equate Oldenburg's intentions with Venturi's. But despite parallel interests in kitsch symbolism, there is a crucial distinction between the two: Venturi's "duck" is not a commodity object but a sign, and thus an extreme case of the sign's triumph over architectural form. "The duck is the special building that *is* a symbol. . . . The sign is more important than the architecture."<sup>31</sup> Whether in the shape of a duck or topped with a blinking sign, the architectural object itself is unimportant.

Despite his interest in symbolism, Oldenburg always retained a basic concern for the object itself, particularly as he began to engage architecture more explicitly. While it is not clear that Oldenburg envisioned *Frankfurter with Tomato and*

28. In his first book, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, published in 1966, Venturi already expressed interest in Pop art and vernacular streetscapes, although primarily as strategies for formal composition: "Some of the vivid lessons of Pop Art, involving contradictions in scale and context, should have awakened architects from their prim dreams of pure order." Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1966), p. 104. His explicit theorization of architecture as a system of signs and symbols did not appear in full until the 1972 publication of *Learning from Las Vegas* (co-authored with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour), but this book was based on research conducted for a studio Venturi and Scott Brown taught at the Yale School of Architecture in 1968. All quotations from the sixth printing: Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977).

29. Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p. 50.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

*Toothpick* as a specifically architectural form, he did explicitly present *Late Submission to the Chicago Tribune Architectural Competition of 1922: Clothespin* as a monumental building. As implied by the title, the piece was inspired by the 1922 competition held by the *Chicago Tribune* for its headquarters building. Oldenburg



Oldenburg. Late Submission to the Chicago Tribune Architectural Competition of 1922—Clothespin, Version Two. 1967.

has remarked that he was fascinated by several competition entries, in particular, “several versions of a skyscraper in the form of a column, including one by Adolf Loos; a building in the form of an Indian with raised tomahawk; and another in the form of Skeeze, the comic strip character. My clothespin seemed to belong in this company.”<sup>32</sup>

These competition entries are sometimes cited as a kind of proto-pop architecture, and their interest for Oldenburg could be attributed to a superficial affinity for object-buildings. But historian Manfredo Tafuri’s masterful analysis of the *Tribune* competition as a kind of “crisis of the skyscraper” suggests a deeper resonance.<sup>33</sup> Tafuri argues that the column proposals of Loos and others were attempts to stabilize the meaning of the skyscraper as a monumental expression in the face of an increasingly fragmented and chaotic modern urban environment.

32. Claes Oldenburg, *Object Into Monument* (Los Angeles: Ward Richie Press, 1971), p. 66.

33. Manfredo Tafuri, “The Disenchanted Mountain: The Skyscraper and the City,” in *The American City from the Civil War to the New Deal* (London: Granada, 1980), p. 390.

(The tomahawk-wielding Indian and Skeezix reflected this same desire, although perhaps even more ironically by explicitly acknowledging its nostalgia and implying its impossibility.) These proposals "endowed the skyscraper with a very particular expression [that was] ostentatiously monumental. Their intent was obviously to create an allusion to the desire for stability of forms and institutions, a pause in the continuity of the 'metropolis without quality.'"<sup>34</sup>

But this last, desperate assertion of monumental architecture's ability to stabilize meaning failed, for the now-familiar reason that its symbolism could gain no purchase in a modern context. The

column is not symbolic; it is only a polemical declaration against the metropolis seen as the universe of change. A single column extracted from the context of its order is not, strictly speaking, an allegory; rather, it is a phantasm. As the paradoxical specter of an order outside of time, Loos's column is gigantically enlarged in a final effort to communicate an appeal to the perennial endurance of values. . . . In the face of the metropolis, in the face of the universe of change where values are eclipsed, the 'aura' falls away, and the column and the desire to communicate absolutes becomes tragically outdated and unreal.<sup>35</sup>

Even if directed at Loos, Tafuri's dismissal of the column as "phantasm" also explains Venturi's ultimate decision to abandon architecture in favor of language. Given that even the most obviously symbolic formal gestures would remain too isolated and nostalgic to take part in a viable play of architectural symbolism, he retreated to the most literal and rudimentary of architectural "signs": the billboard.

Oldenburg's greatest insight was to recognize that the inevitable failure of attempts to intervene in or control the increasingly chaotic system of objects and signs defining modern culture did not prevent him from treating the symbolic associations of his objects in the same way as the objects themselves: as a given, a found condition. Loos's column building certainly did not fail to accumulate associations; it simply failed to establish a single, stable meaning, instead dissipating into an endless and fluctuating chain of signification.

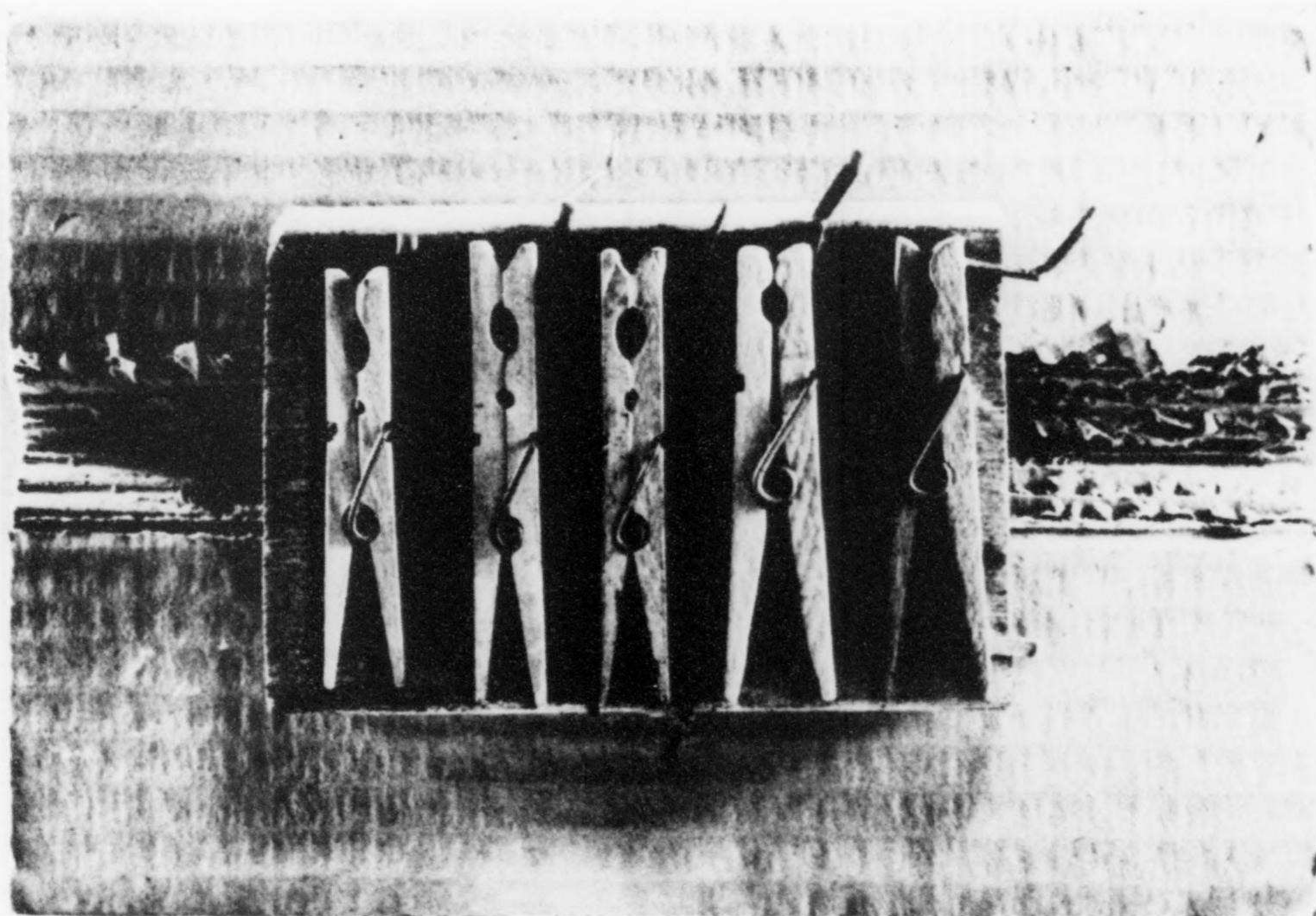
Even Venturi's suppression of the building in favor of the sign is a kind of desperate grasp for control, as if linguistic signs were easier to fix and manipulate than objects. And indeed, in the examples of the "signs" he cites in *Learning from Las Vegas*, they are; but at a steep cost of both richness of meaning (reduced to the literally denotative "I am a monument") and complexity of the object (reduced to the blank box of Venturi's "decorated shed"). *Clothespin* evinces none of Venturi's frantic faith in the new pop symbols. Nor is it burdened with the proof of its own monumental meaning, as are the "heroic and original" buildings Venturi opposes. By embracing the fluidity of his everyday objects' symbolism, Oldenburg no longer needs to repress their objecthood, which returns with a vengeance: to

34. Ibid., p. 403.

35. Ibid., p. 402.

someone faced with a clothespin 600 feet high, questions of symbolic success or failure are irrelevant. We are left with the object, in all its architectural glory, an “ostentatious monumentality” unhinged.

Oldenburg reveals his hand in what might be called the architecturaliza-



Oldenburg. Clothespin Samples. 1967–68.

tion of the clothespin itself.<sup>36</sup> A quick comparison between the finished sketch and the small sculpture *Clothespin Samples* he used as a model reveals that the clothespin has been significantly altered to become a building. Most obviously, the “legs” do not taper to a thin triangular point, as in a real clothespin, but have been thickened into rectangles that widen as they meet the ground to provide the building with a stable foundation. The legs sweep outward in a curve not found in the models but reminiscent (as Oldenburg admits) of other Chicago skyscrapers, including the John Hancock Building (completed in 1965) and the First National Bank (completed in 1964). (Its intact spring mechanism notwithstanding, Oldenburg’s clothespin clearly would not work—its thick curved legs would prevent it from opening.) The proportions have changed, with the spring moving up into the top half of the pin in order to give it a more elegant taper. The dramatic low angle perspective and suggestively rendered atmospheric effects complete the transformation of clothespin into skyscraper. There is no question that we are looking at “clothespin as building,” not “building as sign.” Half joke, half serious, *Clothespin* thus shows how Oldenburg

36. In his words, “I became far more interested in the architectural form of the clothespin, which seemed somewhat gothic to me, like the Tribune Tower itself.” Oldenburg, *Proposals*, p. 33.

embraces kitsch associations as a kind of found symbolism, leaving room for the object without relinquishing its monumental potential.

*Sculpture: Monumental Object and Minimalist Objecthood*

It is obvious from his interview excerpt that Tony Smith wished to place his work between the terms "object" and "monument" ("I was not making a monument. . . . I was not making an object"). It is equally obvious that he understood this placement primarily as a matter of scale in relation to the viewer's body (larger and it "would loom over the observer," smaller and "the observer could see over the top"). In their subsequent writings on Minimalism, both Michael Fried and Robert Morris took this in-between scale as one of its basic conditions. And although they disagreed violently over the quality of the resulting work, both agreed about its primary consequence: the physical sculpture itself assumed a secondary importance in the experience of Minimalist sculpture.

The primary objective in scaling the work roughly to the human body was to establish a connection between viewer and object. Objects that are too small or too large, as Smith implies, tend to isolate themselves from the observer. A small object is perceived all at once, in a glance; it demands no participation. A similar problem arises with much larger objects, which are unintelligible at a short distance and fully legible only from distances so great that the viewer no longer feels that he or she is sharing space with it. A human-sized sculpture, neither too small nor too large, invites the viewer to move around it, gaining a full understanding through exploration of a shared space.

For Morris, this shared continuum replaces the sculptural object itself as the content of the work. Minimalist sculpture "takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic."<sup>37</sup> Minimalism was also known as "literalism," and there is an implicit faith in much Minimalist discourse that by virtue of being a literal fact of the viewer's experience, this shared spatial field is somehow more "real" than the space represented in or inhabited by other works of art. Donald Judd went so far as to proclaim that this new shared space eliminated spatial illusion entirely: "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism . . . which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art. . . . Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface."<sup>38</sup>

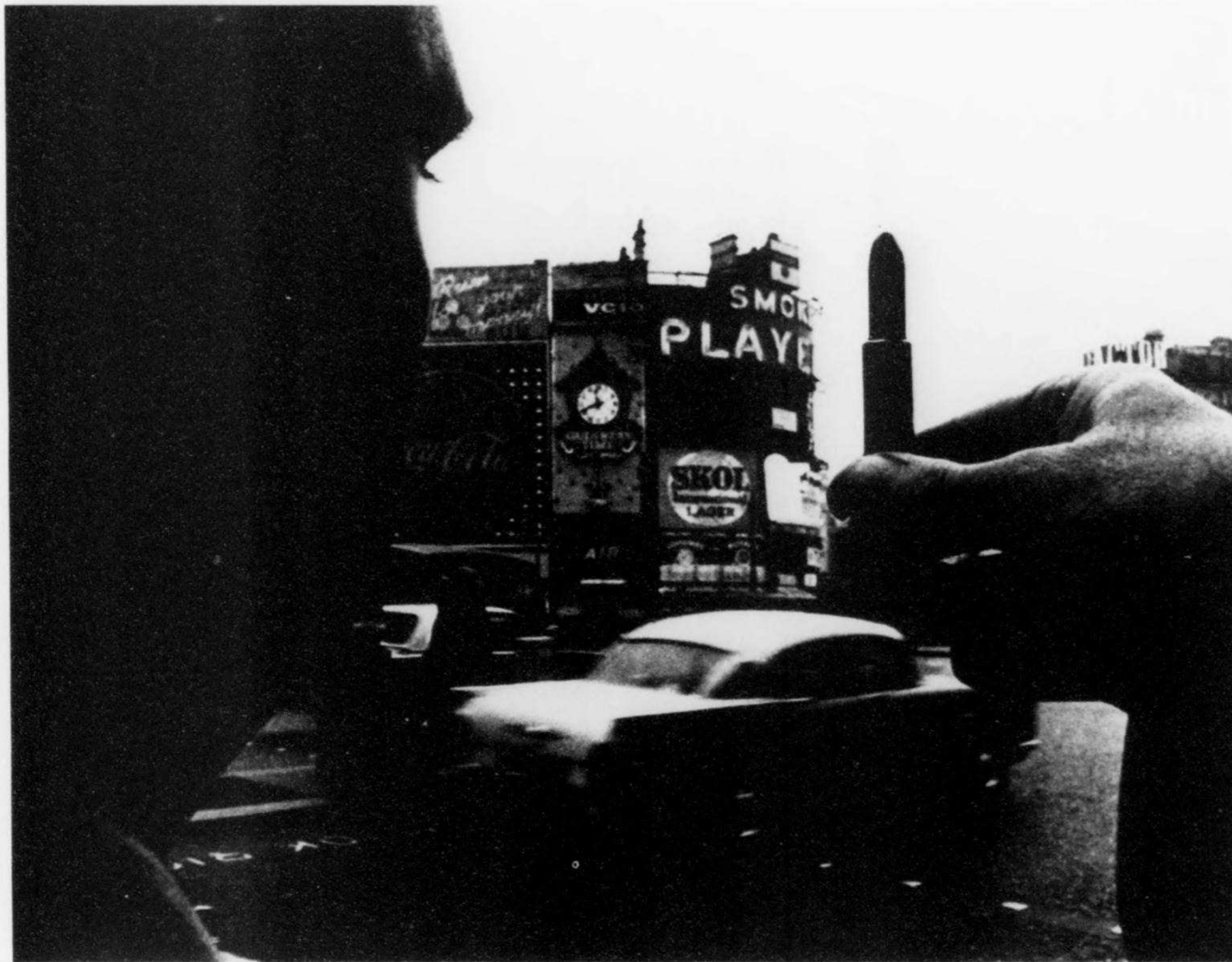
Morris warns, however, that increasing the work's size can fracture this shared experience: "Beyond a certain size the object can overwhelm and the gigantic scale becomes the loaded term."<sup>39</sup> One of the most basic operations

37. Morris, cited in Fried, "Art and Objecthood," p. 125.

38. Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 184.

39. Morris, cited in Fried, "Art and Objecthood," p. 126.

Oldenburg carries out with his monuments is precisely an alienating increase in scale. But he ultimately pushes much further: not only does he exceed one limit of Minimalism by creating a monument, he collapses the two limits of Minimalist scale into each other by turning an object *into* a monument.<sup>40</sup> A photograph taken



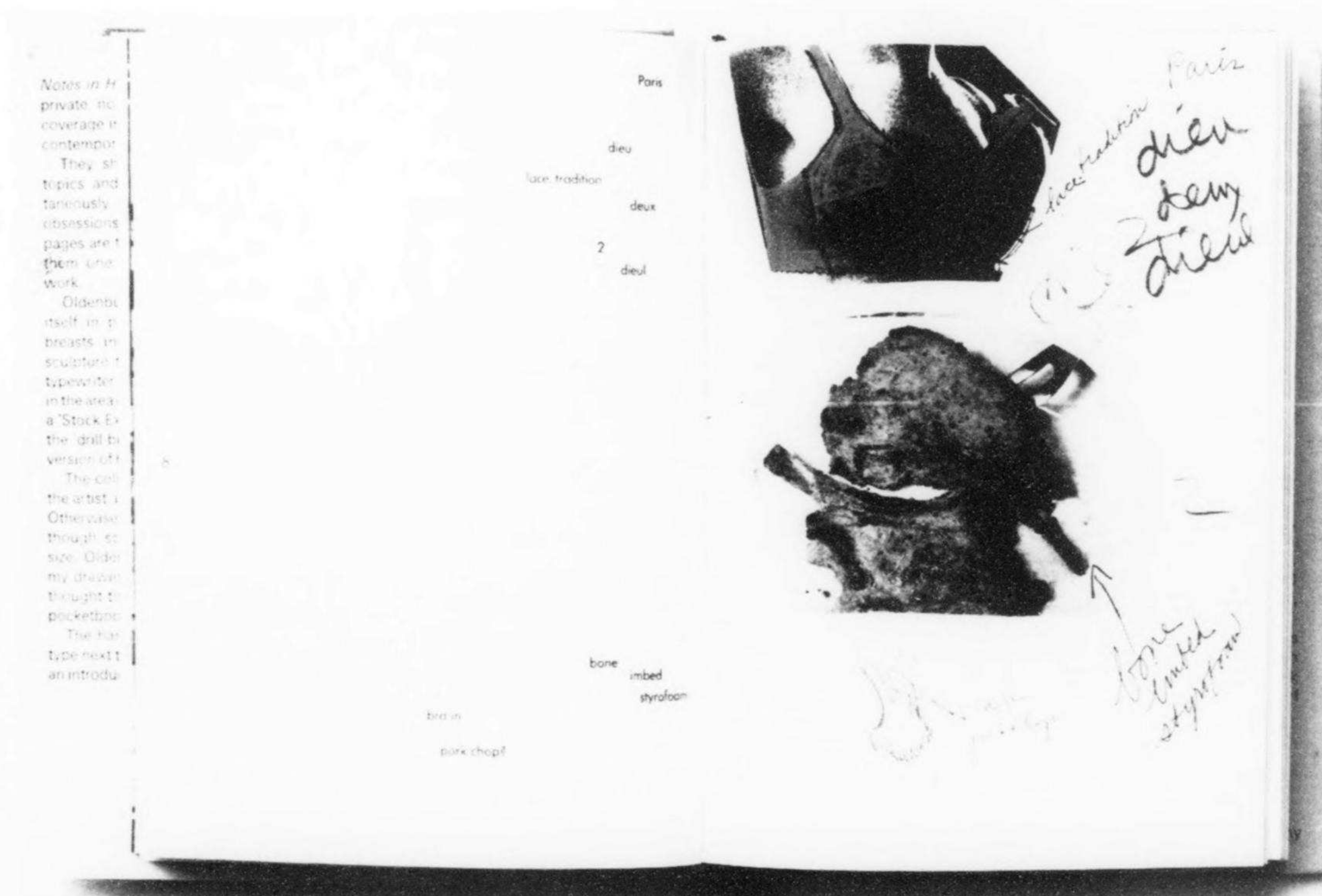
*Claes Oldenburg comparing a lipstick tube with the Fountain of Eros in Piccadilly Circus, London. 1966. Photograph by Hans Hammarskiöld.*

of Oldenburg studying the London location for his *Lipstick Monument* perfectly illustrates his contingent understanding of space. At arm's length, he raises a lipstick tube to eye level and sights down his arm at the monument's proposed location. For a moment, his subjective viewpoint matches that of his watercolor renderings, the tiny lipstick tube becoming a monument towering over the city square. Judd's dream of a non-illusionistic continuum of shared "real" space is shattered, and all perception, whether of a two-dimensional picture or of an embodied viewpoint, is shown to be relative.

Oldenburg's sense of scale is unstable in more than one direction. He claims

40. Indeed, Oldenburg's 1971 exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum was called *Object Into Monument*. See the exhibition catalogue for the 1971 show of Oldenburg's work at the Pasadena Art Museum: Claes Oldenburg and Barbara Haskell, *Object Into Monument* (Los Angeles: Ward Richie Press, 1971).

that the entire monument project was originally suggested by the experience of flying—a scale of vision that is both particularly unstable and uniquely modern: “I always look out the window on [an air] journey.... You see the world as very small and then project things onto this smaller world: but you leave the projected objects the size they actually are.”<sup>41</sup> His *Clothespin* monument began as a real



Oldenburg. *Notebook Page: Pork Chops*  
 Compared to *Breasts in Brassiere, Paris*. 1964.

clothespin resting on his tray table as he flew over Chicago, viewed against the background of the city's tiny buildings thousands of feet below.

This contingency ultimately encompasses not only the subject's relationship to the object but the object's relationship to architecture as well. Minimalist sculpture was essentially limited to installation inside empty gallery spaces because any juxtaposition between rectilinear, vaguely building-shaped Minimalist sculptures and actual architectural forms would yield problematic ambiguities of scale. For example, Morris laments that Minimalist work cannot be shown outside, and attempts to describe an appropriate outdoor viewing space: “architecturally designed sculpture courts are not the answer, nor is the placement of work outside cubic architectural forms. Ideally, it is a space without architecture as background and reference.”<sup>42</sup>

41. Coplans, “The Artist Speaks: Claes Oldenburg,” p. 71.

42. Morris, cited in Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” p. 135.

Oldenburg, on the other hand, delights in confusions between object and architecture; the lipstick appeals to him in large part because its cylindrical form looks architectural when superimposed on the background of a city plaza.

The contrast between Morris's anxiety and Oldenburg's delight regarding this building-object confusion also implies something more fundamental about how each understands the identity of the object. Specificity was a cornerstone of the Minimalist discourse of experience; the work's meaning was held to be constituted only in the singular time and place of interaction between a particular viewer and particular object. Judd, after all, in his most famous essay on Minimalism, dubbed these works "specific objects." Such specificity was anathema to Oldenburg, whose objects possessed an essential fluidity. He celebrated formal slippages and pseudo-morphisms. A representative page from his sketchbooks shows how easily he conceived the transformation, with the help of only one or two transitional sketches, of a bra into a pork chop: the solid volume of meat in the chop doubles as the large fabric surface covering a breast; the thin rib bone angled off this meat becomes the bra strap.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere in the same notebook, a triangular slice of pie becomes the trapezoidal shape of a typewriter in perspective,<sup>44</sup> and his notes throughout are littered with equations such as "skyscraper=scissors."<sup>45</sup>

This slippage between objects and buildings would have been equally radical in an architectural context. Many modern architects, too, believed in a kind of specificity of form, in the sense that a particular form could be uniquely suited to a particular building, as evidenced by both the long history of functionalism and the more expressive pretensions to "heroic and original" buildings that Venturi ascribes to a second generation of modernists. Oldenburg ridicules any notion of formal specificity by claiming not only that his objects can be architecture but also that a deeper slippage between object and building can produce an architecture as plausible and functional as any other.

See, for example, his *Building in the Form of an English Extension Plug*, an ironic exploitation of formal similarities between a piece of electrical hardware and a modernist building (chamfered corners, metal plugs reinterpreted as concrete piloti) of which he remarked, "an object and a building in the modern style change places easily."<sup>46</sup> Or his alternative design for the Pasadena Art Museum based on "an advertisement showing an open package of cigarettes against half of a tobacco tin. It didn't seem far-fetched. In an enlarged version, the package and tin are indeed building-like and even adapt well to the different functions: a library and restaurant in the extended cigarettes; the exhibits in the package itself; the auditorium in the half tin. From the ground, the structure would appear abstract; it would only look like the original from the air."<sup>47</sup>

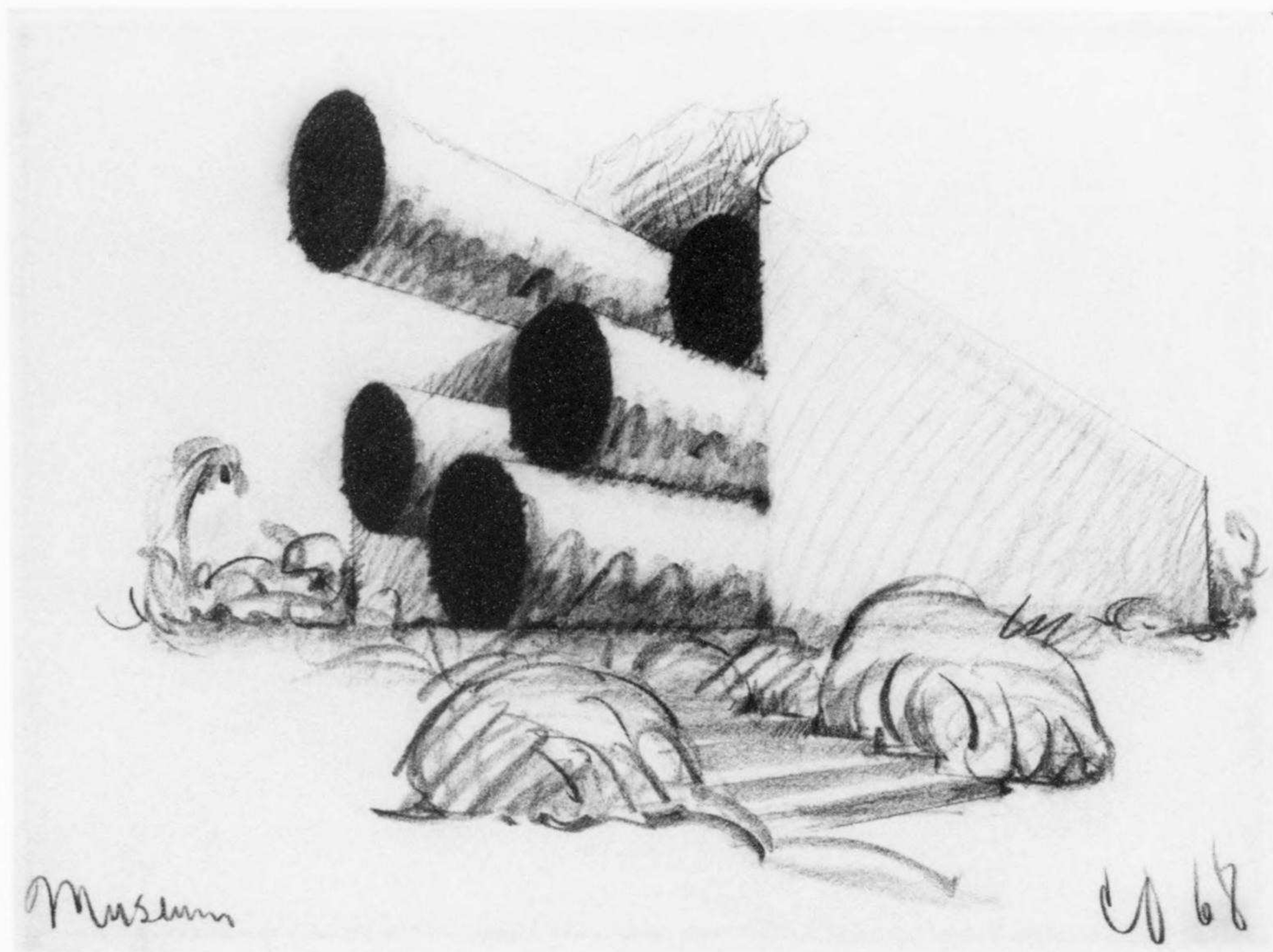
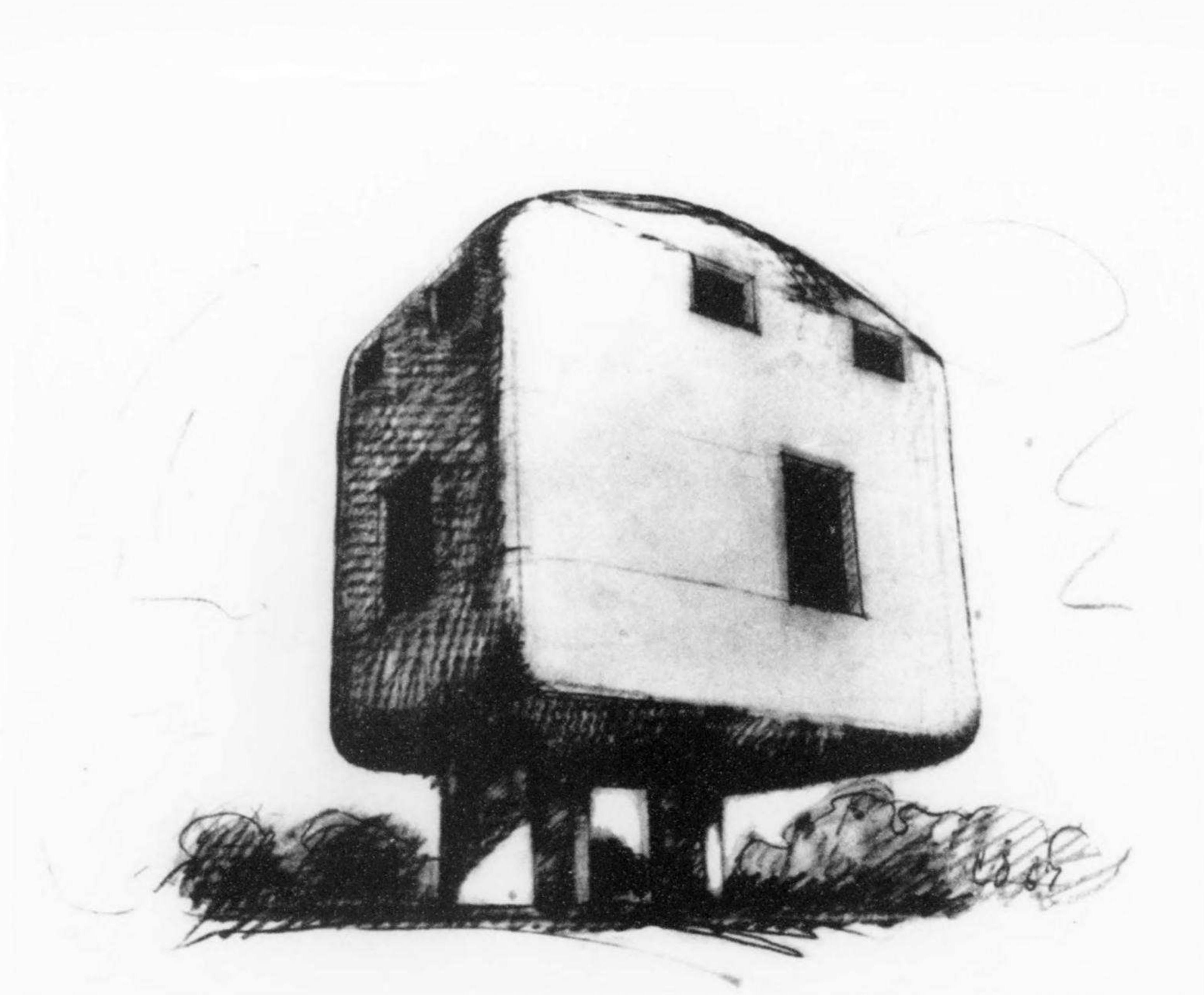
43. Claes Oldenburg, *Notes in Hand: Miniatures of My Notebook Pages* (London: Petersburg Press, 1971), p. 9.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

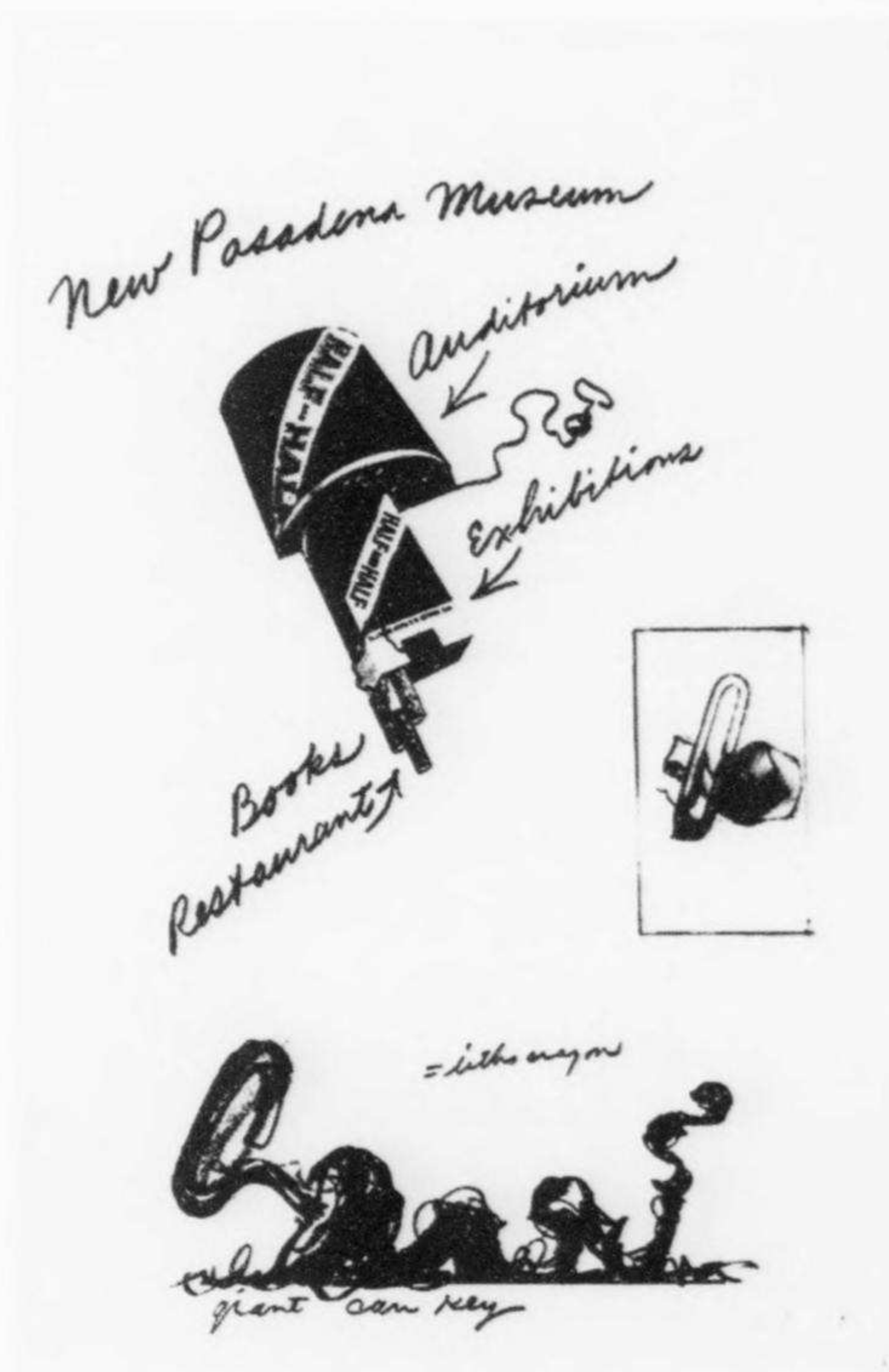
46. Oldenburg, *Object Into Monument*, p. 42.

47. Oldenburg, *Proposals*, p. 35.



*Top: Oldenburg. Building in the Form of an English Extension Plug. 1967.*  
*Bottom: Oldenburg. Museum Design Based on a Cigarette Package. 1968.*

Oldenburg here demonstrates another fundamental difference between his approach and Venturi's. One of Venturi's criticisms of the duck was that a building is compromised when forced into the shape of a found object: "Space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form."<sup>48</sup> As Oldenburg demonstrated by the care with which he turned his clothespin into architecture, or the point-by-point correspondence he sees between various museum functions and the cigarettes and tobacco tin, he recognized a remarkable ability of object and building to absorb the forms and functions of the other. Whether understood as sculpture or architecture, Oldenburg's objects are thus profoundly ambiguous. Lacking stable formal qualities, they morph from objects to buildings and back again, depending on the subject's point of view. And while Oldenburg's viewer may still inhabit a field of space shared with objects, this field is no longer the literal, specific space of Minimalism but a deeply contingent space riddled with illusions and sudden reversals of scale.



Oldenburg. Notes. 1968.

#### *Time: Monumental Models of History*

The claim for continuity made by Minimalist sculpture was spatial *and* temporal; existing in a continuum of space, subject and object necessarily shared a field of time as well. Fried called this quality a "presentment of endless, or indefinite, *duration*."<sup>49</sup> Endlessness, in turn, echoed the program of the traditional monument, typically meant to endure forever. A different kind of endlessness was also crucial for the entropy-based "new monumentality" theorized by sculptor Robert Smithson in 1966, and an examination of Oldenburg's monuments in light of these three understandings of time helps to situate their own ambiguous temporal qualities.

Smithson aspired to timelessness not by standing in triumphant defiance of the passage of time but by embracing the zero-degree state of energy postulated as

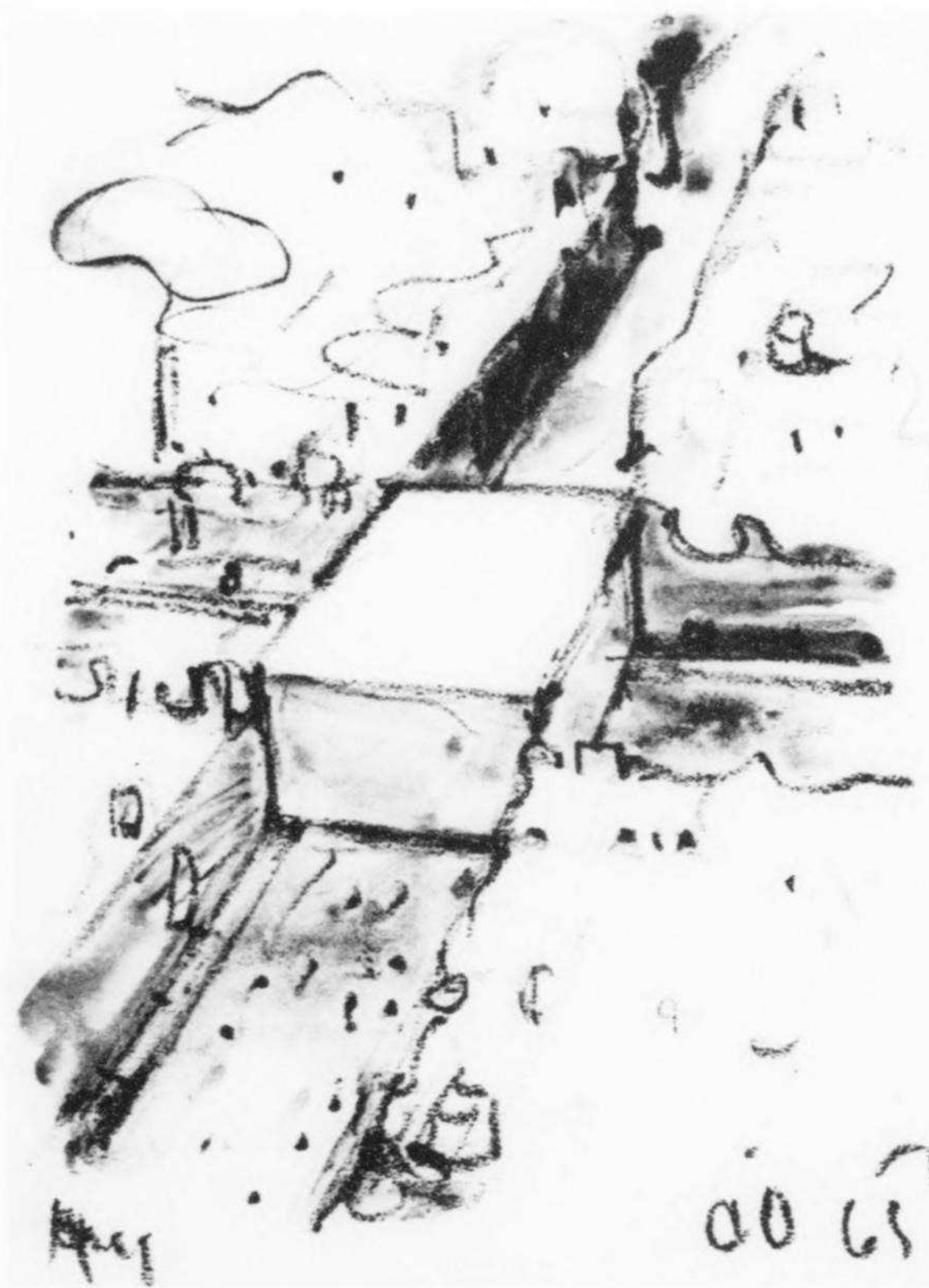
48. Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, p. 87.

49. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," p. 144.

the ultimate future by the laws of entropy. New monuments conceived according to these laws could undermine not only any linear understanding of the passage of time but the very notions of past and future: "instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget

the future. . . . They are involved in a systematic reduction of time. . . . Both past and future are placed into an objective present."<sup>50</sup> The potential problem with this entropic notion of time from the perspective of monument making was that it tended to prioritize time over space, and hence image over object.<sup>51</sup> Smithson inadvertently illustrated the inability of objects to exist as entropic monuments a year later when he published his "Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey."

Here Smithson documented a visit to the city of Passaic, "the land that time forgot," and his encounter with a series of "ruins in reverse," as he provocatively titled the succession of decaying industrial infrastructures recast as entropic monuments.<sup>52</sup> While originally suggested by a series of found elements in the landscape—a bridge, a pumping derrick, a waste-discharge pipe—these "monuments," Smithson makes clear, ultimately exist for



Oldenburg. Proposed Monument for the Intersection of Canal Street and Broadway, N.Y.C.—Block of Concrete with the Names of War Heroes. 1967.

50. Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 11.

51. Smithson remarked that "this kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere." *Ibid.*, p. 11. His marked preference for the crystal can thus be understood in context as an affinity for objects that are all surface and therefore nonspatial. As he describes a "crystalline" work by Judd: "The inside surfaces of the steel sides are visible through the transparent Plexiglas. Every surface is within full view, which makes the inside and outside equally important." *Ibid.*, p. 21. While this transparent crystal may still have an "inside" and "outside," the distinction is essentially meaningless because the two collapse into a single visual field, creating an object that offers itself in its entirety to the viewer in a single instant, thus refusing to acknowledge its three-dimensionality according to the normal rules of spatial perception.

52. Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," in *Collected Writings*, p. 72.

him as images. Of his encounter with "Bridge Monument," he writes:

Noon-day sunshine cinema-ized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an overexposed *picture*. Photographing it with my Instamatic 400 was like photographing a photograph. . . . When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.<sup>53</sup>

Oldenburg's treatment of his monument's materiality was diametrically opposed to Smithson's. He said of his *Clothespin*, for example: "The 'spring' of the Colossal Clothespin is a tunnel through which the wind can sound. The area between the 'legs' would also be a huge wind tunnel, with blue glass facing the inside. . . . The rod of the spring along the side of the building would be glassed in and contain a restaurant."<sup>54</sup> If Smithson's urge was to wish away his monument's materiality, turning wood and steel into a photographic surface, Oldenburg hallucinated his monuments as real, endowing his watercolor sketches with full material specificity.

This difference also explains Smithson's preference for Passaic as site and Oldenburg's for New York and other major cities. If Giedion's new monumentality reenvisioned the civic center as monumental spectacle, for Smithson the civic center achieved its ultimate significance as void. Smithson's Passaic "seems full of holes. . . . Passaic center was no center—it was instead a typical abyss."<sup>55</sup> Oldenburg not only prefers to work in what Smithson dismissed as the "tightly packed and solid" mass of New York, he envisions his monumental interventions as infill, adding further density to that mass. His *War Memorial*, a proposal for filling the intersection of Canal Street and Broadway with a giant concrete block, is exemplary in this regard: a monumental object inserted into one of the few vacancies in a densely populated urban field.

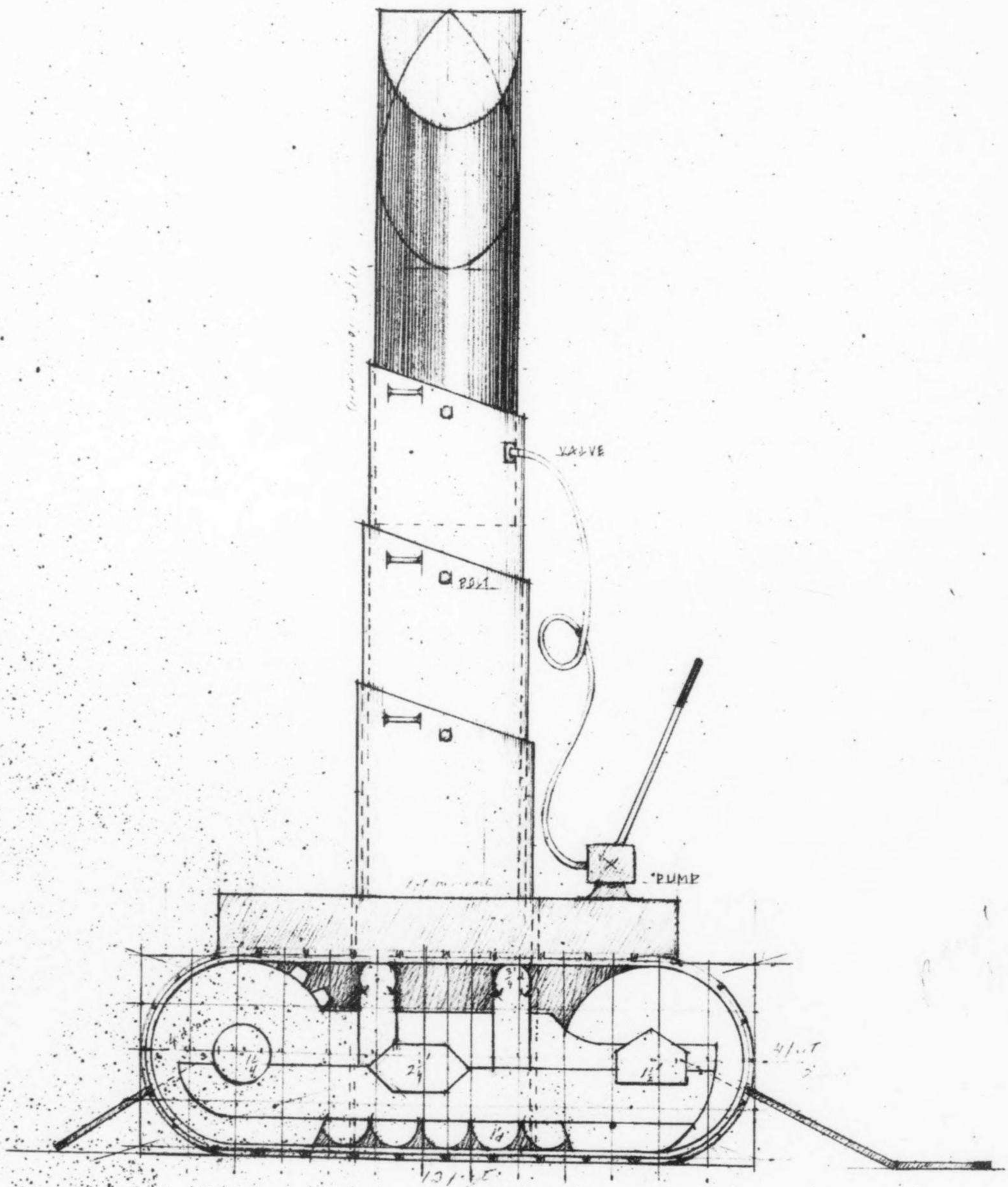
An entropic void obviates questions of time; an object (with its inevitable problems of style, experience, and decay) tends to force them. And the discourse on time in 1960s art takes on renewed urgency when understood as part of a "neo-avant-garde" practice responding to early-twentieth-century models. While the term "neo-avant-garde" was a new term retroactively applied by historians, there is no doubt that artists such as Oldenburg and Smithson saw themselves in relation to the historical avant-garde and that this relation was established in part by a mutual interest in the monument. Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*, for example, is a clear precedent for both Smithson and Oldenburg. Oldenburg cites it explicitly as a model for his *Lipstick Monument* for Yale. A suggestive preparatory drawing for this project, in a pseudo-technical architectural style (complete with ruler-straight edges and construction lines), shows how the shaft of the base of the lipstick has been transformed from a single cylinder into a series of nested circular volumes of decreasing diameter spiraling upwards in a clear formal reference to Tatlin.<sup>56</sup> Smithson's

53. Ibid., p. 70.

54. Oldenburg, *Proposals*, p. 165.

55. Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic," p. 72.

56. "I was reminded of Tatlin's Tower for Red Square, which I had seen in a miniature reconstruc-



LIPSTICK (ASCENDING) ON CATERPILLAR TRACK  
 GIFT TO YALE UNIVERSITY - MAY 1969 - CLAES OLDENBURG

1/2" = 11.08

Oldenburg. Study for Feasible Monument: Lipstick, Yale. 1969.

drawing for his unrealized earthwork *Spiral Tower* (from 1971, a year after his iconic *Spiral Jetty*) also bears a strong resemblance to Tatlin's monument in its neatly nested upward spirals, and in conversations about the spiral motif in his work he acknowledged a connection to Tatlin.<sup>57</sup>

But even as they may have viewed Tatlin's avant-garde as a potential formal precedent, both Smithson and Oldenburg remained acutely aware of what subsequent critics would call its historical "failure"<sup>58</sup> and of the indomitability of the market in the face of revolutionary art practice. Smithson, for example, derisively described Pop's reinterpretation of the readymade, which arguably robbed Duchamp's original project of its radical ambiguity and served it up as an aestheticized art commodity, as "an avant-garde of dissipated scandals."<sup>59</sup> Oldenburg wrote as early as 1961 that "the bourgeois scheme is that they wish to be disturbed from time to time, they like that, but then they envelop you, and that little bit is over, and they are ready for the next."<sup>60</sup> In the face of this inevitable assimilation, Smithson seemed to advocate a detached resignation in keeping with his entropic understanding of time: "At any rate, eternity brings about the dissolution of belief in temporal histories, empires, revolutions, and counter-revolutions—all becomes ephemeral and in a sense unreal."<sup>61</sup>



Robert Smithson. *Spiral Tower*. 1971. © Estate of Robert Smithson, licensed by VAGA, New York.

tion at Rice University." Oldenburg, *Object Into Monument*, p. 96. It is an ironic twist that Tatlin's legacy should have been passed on to Oldenburg in the form of a miniature reconstruction.

57. As, for example, when he described the unrealized *Island of Broken Glass* as "an inversion of Tatlin's *Monument*" in a series of conversations with Dennis Wheeler in 1969 and 1970. Published as Robert Smithson and Dennis Wheeler, "Well, in nature you can fall off cliffs...": Four Conversations Between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson," in *Robert Smithson Unearthed: Drawings, Collages, Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 98.

58. This is the term used by Peter Bürger in his famous *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published as *Theorie der Avantgarde* in 1974. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For alternatives to Bürger's understanding of this "failure," see Hal Foster's more recent work on the neo-avant-garde.

59. Smithson, cited in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 11.

60. Claes Oldenburg, notes from 1961, in *Store Days* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), p. 8.

61. Robert Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," in *Collected Writings*, p. 67.

This impossibility of a meaningful connection to historical avant-garde practice was echoed by Peter Bürger, who famously condemned all neo-avant-garde attempts to restage avant-garde practice as "devoid of sense." As Hal Foster has pointed out in subsequent commentary, however, Bürger's narrative relies on an understanding of both historical and neo-avant-gardes as fixed points in history with a stable and linear temporal relation. The notion of neo-avant-garde as historical return, however, implies the possibility of a far more complex and ambiguous temporality: a looping, continuous historical feedback marked by both continuities and breaks.<sup>62</sup>

If Riegl's monuments commemorated the past by showcasing the passage of time (a unidirectional temporality), and Smithson's "new monuments" collapsed the past, future, and present in a frozen instant of entropy (an immobile temporality), Oldenburg's monuments offer a looping, multidirectional time, reminiscent of that described by Foster, which falls somewhere between the two. This temporality is first apparent in the kinds of objects Oldenburg chose for his proposals. While they were very much part of the commercial vernacular, Oldenburg had a taste for the ubiquitous, avoiding objects that were too new or too desirable; he preferred what he called "things used by everybody" to true commodity fetishes. And as he pointed out, "In finding an object I want to use . . . I usually pick one that is settled in time somewhat, but not antique."<sup>63</sup> (His fascination with the clothespin in an age of electric dryers is one example among many.) Jean Baudrillard, in *The System of Objects*, his landmark study of the commodity in consumer society (originally published in 1968, in the midst of Oldenburg's work on his monument proposals), pointed out that everyday objects often fall victim to the "planned obsolescence" rewarded by industrial capitalism, existing "not exactly in the present, which is, along with the future, the time of the avant-garde and of the model, nor in that transcendent past which is the preserve of the well-to-do and their acquired culture, but instead in an 'immediate' past, an indefinite past which is fundamentally a sort of belated present, a limbo into which yesterday's models have just recently fallen."<sup>64</sup> Oldenburg's notion of "settling" in time, reflected in Baudrillard's "indefinite past" and "belated present," invests his objects with yet another level of ambiguity and simultaneity. Oldenburg does not elide time, as Smithson did; his monuments' built-in obsolescence as consumer objects (inherent in the convention of the model year, for example) marks them with its passage. But such objects remain in circulation, still useful (or at least still used), close enough to being contemporary to be firmly cut off from the monument's connection to history, even as their position in a hierarchical system of consumption alienates them from the shared present of minimalism.

62. Foster proposes "a temporal *exchange* between historical and neo-avant-gardes, a complex relation of anticipation and reconstruction," arguing that "the Bürger narrative of direct cause and effect, of lapsarian before and after, of heroic origin and farcical repetition, will no longer do." Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p. 13.

63. Oldenburg, cited in Haskell, *Object Into Monument*, p. 9.

64. Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 164.

This ambiguous temporality is reinforced by the cyclical movement that Oldenburg proposed to give to many of his monuments: his *Thames Balls* for London continuously rise and fall on the river's tide; his *Windshield Wiper* for Chicago endlessly sweeps back and forth across Grant Park; his *Scissors* slowly open



Oldenburg. Proposed Colossal Monument for Thames River: Thames Ball. 1967.

and close at the end of the National Mall; and his *Baseball Bat* perpetually spins in place. Remarking on the kind of movement he desired, Oldenburg pointed out that while many artists incorporated water into monuments as a reference to the passage of time, "water . . . moves too much in real time for me."<sup>65</sup> His monuments certainly do not belong to "real time." They do not commemorate, but neither do they degenerate, and they are not frozen in the zero-degree state of entropy. Instead they pulse or cycle; theirs is a model of history that is emphatically nonlinear, yet still fluid, mobile, and dynamic. Recognizing this sense of history, Oldenburg's reference to Tatlin seems natural and productive, rather than futile and nostalgic. Unburdened by the finality of Bürger's sense of historical failure, Oldenburg was able to browse through history in the same way he perused the clutter of contemporary consumer culture, recouping some of the potential of historical avant-garde practice just as he did that of the monument itself.

65. Oldenburg, cited in Haskell, *Object Into Monument*, p. 57.

Postwar America confronted both artists and architects with a linguistic, symbolic, and urban field that was increasingly saturated and increasingly unstable. In response, many of Oldenburg's contemporaries searched for renewed clarity by sweeping the field of their operations clean, or positing new moments of stability and certainty at the core of their practice. Smithson's entropic images aspire to exist in a void field cleared of both time and matter. In different ways, Morris, Venturi, and Giedion all posit fields of experience cleared of objects, or at least ones in which the object assumes a drastically reduced importance. Even Krauss's field was narrowed conceptually before her operations of expansion were carried out. And both Venturi's architectural symbol and Judd's specific object clung to a stability that was increasingly untenable in the fields of contemporary meaning and experience. Ultimately, Oldenburg's greatest strength is that he, too, operates in an expanded field, but one that requires no initial clearing and entails no loss of fluidity. What he offers is not quite a way forward, strictly speaking, but a productive negotiation of this increasing contingency and complexity.

“Except Like a Tracing”:  
Defectiveness, Accuracy, and  
Class in Early Warhol\*

ANTHONY E. GRUDIN

*The deliberate creation of lack as a function of  
market economy is the art of a dominant class.*

—Gilles Deleuze and  
Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*<sup>1</sup>

Andy Warhol's most astute interpreters have frequently been forced to acknowledge that class plays a key role in his work, and that its manifestations may be stylistic as well as iconographic, but they have typically had a difficult time describing its specific power in any detail. In his review of Warhol's 1962 show at the Stable Gallery, Michael Fried bemoaned "the advent of a generation that will not be as moved by Warhol's beautiful, vulgar, heart-breaking icons of Marilyn Monroe as I am" and remarked that "Warhol has a painterly competence, a sure instinct for vulgarity (as in his choice of colors) and a feeling for what is truly human and pathetic in one of the exemplary myths of our time that I for one find moving . . ." <sup>2</sup> The essay is only a few hundred words long, and the repeated references to vulgarity are therefore all the more striking. Vulgarity, as T. J. Clark has convincingly shown, is fundamentally a class-based pejorative: a "betrayal, on the part of those who by rights ought to be in the vanguard of good taste." <sup>3</sup> What Fried immediately sees in Warhol is a breach of bourgeois taste that is somehow successfully counterbalanced by the force of Warhol's aesthetic proficiency. <sup>4</sup>

\* My thanks to Tam Bryfogle, Tim Clark, Whitney Davis, Molly Donovan, Jonathan Flatley, Hal Foster, Tan Lin, Frank Owen, Kaja Silverman, Gustavus Stadler, Anne Wagner, and Matt Wrbican for their comments on various drafts of this essay, and to the Javits Foundation and the University of Vermont for their generous support of my work. Portions of this essay appeared in "Myth and Class in Warhol's Early Newsprint Paintings," in *Warhol: Headlines*, ed. Molly Donovan (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery, 2011), pp. 36–47.

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 28.

2. Michael Fried, "New York Letter," *Art International* 6, no. 10 (December 1962), p. 57.

3. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (New Haven: Yale, 1999), p. 378.

4. Strikingly, in Fried, this balance between betrayal and beauty is almost explicitly sexualized: the reason the Marilyn works succeed and the Troy Donahue works fail is "because the fact remains

“Beautiful, vulgar, heart-breaking”—in these paintings, class betrayal is the middle term, the hinge, between pleasure and tragedy, but the specific workings of this relationship are not investigated here or elsewhere in Fried’s work.

Although Arthur Danto’s initial discussion of Warhol’s Brillo Boxes described their real-world counterparts as “homely,” the works themselves were quickly reincorporated into the sublime transfiguration that marks the difference between “real world” and “art world.”<sup>5</sup> And yet, even in this rarefied context, class briefly reared its ugly head: describing a number of possible *Brillo Box* installations and their likely interpretations, Danto imagined a claustrophobic tunnel of boxes, which could be interpreted “as the closing in of consumer products, confining us as prisoners.” “True,” he admitted, “we don’t say these things about the stockboy. But then a stockroom is not an art gallery, and we cannot readily separate the Brillo cartons from the gallery they are in, any more than we can separate the Rauschenberg bed from the paint upon it.”<sup>6</sup> The art world, for Danto, was precisely the place where one could reflect upon modernity’s indignities without having to consider the particular class positions that suffered these indignities most directly; its relationship to its objects was as sacrosanct and inviolable as an artwork’s relationship to its materials.<sup>7</sup> In his subsequent writings on Warhol, Danto has continued to deploy the first person plural as an alternative to class analysis or specificity. A recent monograph refers to “the bare declarative aesthetic of the proletarian representations [Warhol] began to favor,” but then claims, pages later, that Warhol’s “mandate was: *paint what we are.*” “The breakthrough,” Danto continues, “was the insight into what we are. We are the kind of people that are looking for the kind of happiness advertisements promise us that we can have, easily and cheaply.”<sup>8</sup> The question of who “we” are and whether “our” enthusiasms may vary—or be presumed to vary—with our class, goes unaddressed.

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that Marilyn is one of the overriding myths of our time while Donahue is not, and there is a consequent element of subjectivity that enters into the choice and mars the effect. (Epic poets and pop artists have to work with the mythical material as it is given: their art is necessarily impersonal, and there is barely any room for personal predilection.)” This “personal predilection”—a phrase Fried seems to have adopted from Clement Greenberg—is, of course, code for homoeroticism. See Greenberg, “Review of the Whitney Annual,” *The Nation* (December 28, 1946); reprinted in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 118; Fried expands on this problematic in his “An Introduction to My Art Criticism,” *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 16.

5. Arthur Danto, “The Artworld,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October 1964), pp. 580–82. “The artworld stands to the real world in something like the relationship in which the City of God stands to the Earthly City” (p. 582).

6. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

7. One ought to be reminded here of Jacques Rancière’s claim that philosophy “could never affirm its traditional aristocratic requirement or its new thoughts of equality without linking its purity with the vigilant guarding of its borders.” Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 217.

8. Arthur Danto, *Andy Warhol* (New Haven: Yale, 2009), pp. 13, 16 (original emphasis).

Closer consideration demonstrates that, in the face of the increasing success of generic brands, the motifs Warhol borrowed in his early "brand image" artworks—Campbell's Soup, Brillo, and Coca-Cola, among others—were deployed and widely understood as class-specific images, explicitly targeted at a working-class audience.<sup>9</sup> "In contrast to white collar women," as one advertisement put it, "(who have no qualms about private [generic] labels) the working class wife has an extraordinary emotional dependence upon national brands—her symbol of status and security (because she is basically unsure of the world outside her door)."<sup>10</sup> The motifs discussed in this essay are, by contrast, more obviously class-specific—comic-book panels, pulp advertisements, tabloid headlines: the types of things Max Kozloff was thinking of in 1962 when he described Pop Art as "the pinheaded and contemptible style of gum chewers, bobby soxers, and worse, delinquents."<sup>11</sup> But an investigation of their context reveals that superheroes and hernia relievers and cheap diamond rings were not the only things being marketed specifically to working-class readers in these pages. They shared space, throughout this period, with prominent efforts to sell the possibility of what might be called amateur cultural participation: commercial art schools, photography competitions, "Magic Art Reproducers." Advertisements for this promise were ubiquitous in low- and middlebrow publications. In the face of these offers, Warhol's work from this period took up the cheapest and most accessible images available—images marketed to and associated with a working-class demographic—and tested the possibilities of their everyday, amateur reproduction. Could real culture, "mass" culture—Popeye, the Little King, and tabloid advertisements and headlines—be convincingly remade at home, even with the aid of these new reproductive technologies? Was participation in these powerful new myths of creative production and reproduction now actually available for the audiences to whom they were directly targeted and with whom they were most clearly associated? And could participation be as easy as it looked in the commercials, could one "create things with the least amount of effort" (as Gerard Malanga described what he called "Andy's

9. See Anthony E. Grudin, "'A Sign of Good Taste': Andy Warhol and the Rise of Brand Image Advertising," *Oxford Art Journal* 33, no. 2 (June 2010), pp. 211–32.

10. "The Quality Revolution—New Hope for National Brands," advertisement, *New York Times*, March 7, 1962, p. 72 (original emphasis). Warhol's stint as an illustrator at the *Times* overlapped with the publication of five of these full-page advertisements, as well as multiple articles discussing the campaign; it seems unlikely that, as a prominent advertising professional, he would have been unaware of their claims.

11. Max Kozloff, "'Pop' Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians," *Art International* (March 1962), pp. 35–36. For further analysis of the problem of class in Pop art, see Roger Cook, "Andy Warhol, Capitalism, Culture, and Camp," *Space and Culture* 6, no. 1 (February 2003), pp. 66–76; Sara Doris, *Pop Art and the Contest Over American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Jonathan Flatley, "Like: Collecting and Collectivity," *October* 132 (Spring 2010), pp. 71–98; Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Peter Schjeldahl, "Warhol and Class Content," *Art in America* 68 (May 1980), pp. 112–29; and Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

aesthetic")?<sup>12</sup> In early Warhol, the inability to reproduce successfully the imagery of one's contemporary surroundings is as much a marker of class and powerlessness as the borrowed imagery itself. The task is to uncover the ways in which "the language deficits of class" that Benjamin Buchloh has remarked upon in Warhol's style were actively being produced during this period in and through the creation of new compulsions toward cultural reproduction.<sup>13</sup> At its best and most incisive, Warhol's art was not fundamentally an art about the ontology of art; it was an art about the possibility of mass-cultural participation within capitalism.

Class permeated Warhol's work during this period from two directions: it infused both its motifs (no matter how "American" or "universal" some of them may now appear) and the technique and style of their execution. The working class's perceived fondness for popular culture—for brand names and celebrities and comic books—was a key element in Warhol's contemporary scene, one that he constantly incorporated into his work and his persona. "Amateur cultural participation" is an apt way of describing Warhol's style during the 1960s and after, as it incessantly tested the possibility of consumer-grade reproductive technologies like silkscreens, Polaroids, and video cameras to contribute to the "common culture." But Warhol's work and persona were also informed by a countertendency, less immediately apparent but nevertheless irreducible: indications of a working-class suspicion that the world of popular culture, despite its promises to the contrary, was being channeled to them unilaterally, without the possibility of consumers' ever really participating in its production.<sup>14</sup> Warhol's reproductions of popular images constantly telegraphed their own incompleteness and impossibility—the "precisely pinpointed defectiveness that gives [Warhol's] work its brilliant accuracy," as David Antin put it in 1966.<sup>15</sup> The manufactured imperfections in Warhol's work should tell us something about the ways in which culture has been produced and consumed in the United States. As

12. Christoph Heinrich, "Freezing a Motion Picture: An Interview with Gerard Malanga," in *Andy Warhol: Photography* (Zurich: Edition Stemmler, 1999), p. 115. Malanga emphasized that this attitude deeply informed Warhol's approach to film: "That's why the photobooth was an instantaneous thing; the movie camera had a motor driven attachment, where he wouldn't have to touch the button to stop and start, the film would just run out."

13. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Drawing Blanks: Andy Warhol's Late Works," *October* 127 (Winter 2009), p. 3.

14. My approach to these ideas is informed by Kaja Silverman's discussion of the super-ego, which "puts the ego in a vicious double bind; it says not only, 'you cannot take your father's place,' but also, 'you must take your father's place.' Since the ego cannot obey either of these commands without transgressing the other, it is always already 'guilty.'" Silverman, "Untitled Response," *October* 123 (Winter 2008), p. 142. The double bind described by Silverman is also active in contemporary mass culture, which is always simultaneously calling out for emulation *and* blocking this process from being successfully achieved; a similar dynamic is described in Hal Foster, "Test Subjects," *October* 132 (Spring 2010), pp. 37–38.

15. David Antin, "Warhol: The Silver Tenement," *Art News* 65, no. 4 (Summer 1966), p. 59.



*Bonwit Teller window display, New York. April 1961.*

recent investigations of Warhol's identity have demonstrated, it was often Warhol's conspicuous *inability* to reproduce ideals that made his artistic production remarkable.<sup>16</sup>

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In April 1961, the first known exhibition of Andy Warhol's pop paintings was assembled, fittingly, in the window of the upscale Manhattan department store Bonwit Teller.<sup>17</sup> A surviving photograph shows five overlapping paintings displayed at

16. See in particular Jonathan Flatley, "Warhol Gives Good Face: Publicity and the Politics of Prosopopoeia," and José Esteban Muñoz, "Famous and Dandy like B. 'n' Andy: Race, Pop, and Basquiat," in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, ed. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 101–33 and 144–79; and Gavin Butt, "Dishing on the Swish, or, the 'Inning' of Andy Warhol," in Butt, *Between You and Me* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 106–35.

17. Bonwit Teller figures prominently as a sign of class aspiration in Philip Roth's early stories. See "Eli the Fanatic" (1958) and "Goodbye, Columbus" (1959), both reprinted in Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* (New York: Vintage, 1994). For an overview of the history of department-store window dressing leading up to Warhol's Bonwit Teller display, see Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*, pp. 9–22.

various heights in front of a dark backdrop, each matched with a smartly dressed mannequin. The mannequins' poses were simultaneously brazen and coy, with chins craning upward and hips jutting toward the window. The cherry red, ultramarine blue, and cotton canvas of the outfits matched the dominant hues of the paintings, and the mannequins and paintings were arranged so as to allow the latter a high degree of visibility. The juxtaposition is puzzling: were passersby expected to believe that these well-dressed figures read the comic books or answered the tabloid ads whose verve and punch their outfits appropriated? Their perfect silhouettes, cast in shadows on the paintings' surfaces by the camera's flash, seemed to exist in a separate, painless, modern world, a world set at a distance from the drips and



Andy Warhol. *Superman*. 1961.  
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Fine Arts/ARS, New York.

imperfections of the canvases and their subject matter—cheap nose jobs and superheroes, hair tinting, hernias. The mannequins more closely resembled Warhol's paintings of comics and advertisements than they did the comics and advertisements themselves. They borrowed their energy from some other arena, and were now showing it off to an audience that was as yet mostly unfamiliar with it.

All five of the paintings Warhol displayed in the Bonwit Teller window were built upon the same basic structure: a simple two-dimensional motif (or composite of motifs), seemingly amenable to reproduction, which—despite the apparent aid of mechanically reproductive technologies, including a Photostat machine—was only incompletely and somewhat anxiously reproduced. Three of the paintings were based on comics (*Superman* on a comic book, *Little King* and *Saturday's Popeye* on newspaper comic strips); the other two—*Advertisement* and *Before and After (1)*—drew on newspaper advertisements. Notably, Warhol seems to have altered all five of these paintings after they left Bonwit Teller and before they entered the art market; in what follows I will investigate *Superman* as a representative sample, and then proceed to discuss the newsprint works more generally.

The cultural connotations of a painting of Superman in the early 1960s

would have been manifold and contradictory.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman* (1905) had been given two Manhattan productions in 1960 (one just a mile from Bonwit Teller), only months before Warhol displayed *Superman* in the department store's window. Reviews and advertisements had appeared prominently in the *New York Times*, which also gave a headline review to a televised version of the play in February 1960.<sup>19</sup> Warhol's painting must have been seen in part as a mocking response to this high-minded fare.<sup>20</sup> But, by deriving its motif from a comic-book source with close ties to television, *Superman* would also have had powerful working-class connotations; despite their immense popularity, television and comic books were explicitly associated during this period with working-class audiences. Articles about working-class children in the press often included prominent references to comic books. Reporting the rape and murder of an 18-year-old girl from Queens, the *New York Times* described her as having "last been seen at 10:15 p.m. Sunday when she bought some comic books in a candy store after leaving a moving picture theater."<sup>21</sup> Pepito, a 14-year-old youth gang member who had allegedly killed a taxi driver, "knows almost nothing about the world beyond his neighborhood [and] 'reads' the pictures of comic books."<sup>22</sup> "Don't the comic books always tell you at the end that you can't win?" a police officer asked a 15-year-old gang leader, 'Sure,' was the answer, 'but we never read the end—just how.'<sup>23</sup> Dorothy Barclay, writing in *The New York Times*, summed up the overriding sentiment:

... a happy youngster in a good home. . . will not be turned toward a life of crime by reading crime comics. Such youngsters, however, are least likely to read them to excess. It's the poorly adjusted child most liable to be harmed who indulges most freely.<sup>24</sup>

18. For a thorough psychoanalytic analysis of the painting, see Bradford R. Collins and David Cowart, "Through the Looking-Glass: Reading Warhol's *Superman*," *American Imago* 53, no. 2 (1996), pp. 107–37, which argues that "Warhol records in *Superman* a realization of the impossible gap, both moral and physical, between his deficient self and the perfect hero with whom he once identified" (p. 129). See also Michael Moon, "Screen Memories, or Pop Comes from the Outside: Warhol and Queer Childhood," in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, p. 89.

19. Jack Gould, "TV: *Don Juan in Hell*," *New York Times*, February 16, 1960.

20. Philip Pearlstein's *Superman* painting, produced in 1952, and now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, is another potential reference.

21. "Dog's Barks Reveal Slain Queens Girl," *New York Times*, September 23, 1958.

22. Harrison E. Salisbury, "Youth Gang Members Tell Of Lives, Hates and Fears," *New York Times*, March 25, 1958.

23. "Brain Washing: American Style," cited without source, United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary, "Juvenile Delinquency (Comic Books). Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954). This testimony contradicts Christin Mamiya's claim, in one of the few extended analyses of this subject, that the comics borrowed by Warhol and Lichtenstein "functioned in a manner very similar to advertising in reinforcing certain codes and norms of behavior" (*Pop Art and Consumer Culture*, p. 85). For more on the history of comic books in America, see David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

24. Dorothy Barclay, "That Comic Book Question," *New York Times*, March 20, 1955.

In this context, "poorly adjusted" is clearly a euphemism for "poor," someone lacking a "good home." It could be admitted that all children read comic books, as long as one emphasized that only poor children were influenced by them.

The ubiquity of the comic book notwithstanding, Superman's most prominent cultural appearance in the New York of the early 1960s must have been the *Superman* television program, which aired on Saturday and Monday evenings on channel 11, just before dinner-time. The lead-ins on Mondays were *Amos 'n' Andy* (4 p.m.), *Abbot and Costello* (4:30 p.m.), *Bozo the Clown* (5 p.m.), *The Three Stooges* (5:30 p.m.), and *Popeye the Sailor* (6 p.m.), a murderer's row of after-school temptations. The close proximity of the *Popeye* and *Superman* shows on television may have been a factor in Warhol's decision to exhibit these two paintings together at Bonwit Teller.

Television and comic books were both characterized by a complex set of class dynamics during the 1950s. Functionally ubiquitous, these media were nevertheless powerfully associated with working-class audiences who were assumed to be less educated and therefore more susceptible to their vulgar charms. A 1959 article in the *American Journal of Sociology* opened with the claim that "research has shown an inverse relationship between enthusiasm for television-watching and social class" and concluded that "liking TV has become symbolic of low social status."<sup>25</sup> The authors asked their survey group, "Which of the following groups would you say most enjoy watching TV?" Almost half of the respondents (48%) checked the box for "People who can just barely afford to buy a TV set," while only 1% checked the box for "Persons very well off economically."<sup>26</sup>

But even as television viewing remained closely associated with low social status during this period, it also became a crucial medium for the dissemination of "American" norms and ideals. In her fascinating study of television's influence on working-class children in the late 1950s, Adeline Gomberg drew a comparison between these children and their predecessors: "The working-class child of the thirties shared a common experience but only with children of his own class. His play activities reflected what he understood best—his home and his parents. The working-class child of the fifties, because of television, shares an experience with children of all classes. The context of his play activities, and his behavior at play, are similar to the activities and behavior of children of all classes."<sup>27</sup> Along these lines, Gomberg described a striking new game developed by working-class children to while away their time at preschool:

The children called it "watching television." This was unlike any other play either in structure or content. . . . Here they lined up chairs and stared fixedly ahead at some imaginary screen.

25. Kent Geiger and Robert Sokul, "Social Norms in Television-Watching," *American Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 2 (September 1959), pp. 174, 176-77.

26. 25% answered "Persons in comfortable circumstances," and 25% answered "Don't know."

27. Adeline Gomberg, "The Working-Class Child of Four and Television," in *Blue-Collar World: Studies of the American Worker*, ed. Arthur B. Shostak and William Gomberg (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 436.

Occasionally one child would twist a "dial" and the viewers would sigh. Infrequently some viewer would express annoyance: "Why did you change that? I wanted 'Lassie'"; or "No, 'Little Rascals'! Boy—leave that channel alone. . . ."

Teacher: Whatever are you doing?

Dawn: Gee whiz, don't you know nothing, watching television.<sup>28</sup>

The intense passivity of the television experience is revealed in this game as a learned activity, requiring practice and repetition to be accepted by its practitioners, who can then grudgingly enlighten their teacher. Even as these children were being trained to emulate television's stars—as Gomberg puts it, "Today *all* working-class children want to be like or marry television performers"—they were simultaneously being taught to consume this emulation passively.<sup>29</sup>

As was the case with the discourse surrounding Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*, contemporary attitudes toward these media allowed Americans to take their guilty pleasures—advertising, comics, television—while simultaneously disavowing their cultural legitimacy. The working-class connotations carried by comics and television therefore need to be recognized as at least partially ideological rather than factual. And yet, as Gomberg's study so powerfully illustrates, television also played a key role in the interpellation of lower-class viewers into middle-class norms and ideals. Chief among these were the ideals of consumerism, which promised that social status could be attained not only through wealth or achievement but also through possession of the proper commodities. Commercials for Kellogg's cereal, a primary sponsor of the *Superman* program, epitomized this idea; one from the mid-1950s featured Clark Kent and his boss, Perry White, awaiting the arrival of the copy boy, Jimmy Olsen, who is late in delivering a box of "Sugar Smacks" cereal for the group's breakfast.<sup>30</sup> "Mild-mannered" Kent remains calm, but the chief becomes irate over the delay. Jimmy trips as he walks through the door, nearly fumbling his precious cargo. The chief: "Young man, if you spill those new Sugar Smacks, you're fired!" The scene cuts to the three men eating together; taking a bite of cereal, Kent announces, "Well, I guess we *all* agree on Sugar Smacks!" Here the sweetened cereal is represented as pacifying the tension that characterizes the relationship between boss and the assistant. Strikingly, although it is the chief who demands the cereal and Jimmy who provides it, it is Clark Kent who, with his secret otherworldly powers as Superman, speaks for the cereal and its uncanny ability to transcend boundaries of taste and class. Like Sugar Smacks, Superman/Kent has the wondrous ability to overcome class difference, to leave the world of the ordinary and the subordinate and attain

28. Ibid., p. 434.

29. Ibid., p. 436.

30. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfrjXMBNNJ8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfrjXMBNNJ8) (accessed December 15, 2011).

superiority when necessary, but also to escape from the burdens and responsibilities of superiority when they become too great.

By the time Warhol painted *Superman*, however, this wondrous figure would also have taken on tragic connotations. Less than two years before Warhol's *Superman* appeared in the window at the Bonwit Teller department store, George Reeves, the actor who played the title role on *Superman*, was reported as having shot himself in his Hollywood home. The Associated Press article was predictably sensational: "George Reeves, television's Superman, killed himself early today. Seconds earlier his fiancée had predicted his death."<sup>31</sup> The *Daily News* took its headline one step further: "Superman Kills Himself; Fiancee [*sic*] Called the Shot."

Why did he do it?

"Because he was known as Superman to 9 million children, but he couldn't get a job," Miss Lemmon said.

"They stopped shooting the series a year and a half ago. They had 105 chapters finished, and they can show them for the rest of their lives . . ." <sup>32</sup>

Six days later, the *News* led with a huge headline: "Doubts Suicide of Superman—His Mother Demands Probe."<sup>33</sup> The prominence of this story, and the *News*' decision to conflate "Superman" and the actor who portrayed him on TV, are deeply relevant to Warhol's painting. Although Reeves's death predates the painting by almost two years, his posthumous image was still appearing on New York television sets twice a week throughout 1960 and 1961. The suicide was framed from the outset as a cautionary tale regarding the perils of celebrity: Reeves had achieved fame, but only at the cost of his own individuality and the respect of his peers. His personality had been consumed by his fictional role; as his fiancée pointed out, at the time of his death he was simultaneously a hero to millions and utterly unemployable in Hollywood. Likewise, his actual human presence had become irrelevant to the show's success—all the shows were prerecorded and available for perpetual syndication. Reeves's story doubly demystifies the Superman myth, first by declassing it from the world of Shaw and Broadway to the pulp world of television and comics, and second by pulling away the veil of glamour from that pulp world and exposing its disappointments and disasters. Reeves's death should be understood as inflecting the painting, and thereby establishing it as a precedent to Warhol's more direct focus on the problem of celebrity and death in the silkscreened paintings of the coming years.<sup>34</sup>

31. Associated Press, "George Reeves, TV Superman, Commits Suicide at Coast Home," *New York Times*, June 17, 1959.

32. *Daily News*, June 17, 1959.

33. *Daily News*, June 23, 1959.

34. See Thomas Crow, "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," in Crow, *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 49–65; and Hal Foster, "Death in America," *October* 75 (Winter 1996), pp. 36–59.

*Superman* was thus neither a straightforward celebration of an American myth nor a painting about an artist's inability to live up to his childhood ideals; instead, taken in its cultural context, the painting can be understood as a first step in Warhol's examination of the internal inadequacy of those mythic ideals, their terminal failure to live up to themselves.<sup>35</sup> All of this is efficiently summarized on the cover of the December 1961 edition of *Life with Millie*, where the eponymous cartoon celebrity herself is shown as failing to live up to her own spectacular image. As Warhol would later put it, "It must be hard to be a model, because you'd want to be like the photograph of you, and you can't ever look that way."<sup>36</sup> The possibility of absolute social mobility—figured both by *Superman* and by the actor who played him—was spectacularly revealed by Reeves's death as an unsustainable and yet irresistible fiction.

All of these various dimensions of *Superman's* context are germane to its meaning, but they leave unexamined what may be the painting's most striking formal feature, namely its pronounced imperfections, the areas of the canvas that seem to have been left unfinished. These areas are particularly noteworthy because they did not appear in the Bonwit Teller photograph; they were late additions to the canvas, added only after the painting had been shown in the department-store window.<sup>37</sup> Why would Warhol have gone back to this painting after displaying it, to scrawl in wax crayon across the top margin and to obscure, partially, the words in *Superman's* "thought bubble"? Is it cogent to conclude, with Marco Livingstone, that the scrawl-



Life with Millie.  
December 1961.

35. For versions of these arguments, see Arthur Danto, "Warhol and the Politics of Prints," in *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1962–1987*, 4th rev. ed., ed. Frayda Feldman and Jörg Schellmann (New York: D.A.P., 2003), pp. 10–11; and Collins and Cowart, "Through the Looking-Glass," p. 129. Danto's effort to see these myths as purely affirmative and innocuous is exemplified by his description of another print in the *Myths* series, of a segregation-era Mammy figure, "as the emblem of our daily bread" (p. 11).

36. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: HBJ, 1975), p. 63.

37. The alterations are mentioned without further comment in *Pop: Themes and Movements*, ed. Mark Francis (New York: Phaidon, 2005), p. 85.



*Left: Superman's Girlfriend Lois Lane. April 1961.*

*Near right: Advertisement for Art Instruction Inc. April 1961.*

*Far right: Advertisement for Jowett Institute of Body Building. April 1961.*

ing "activated the sky area with a rhythmic linear pattern" or with Benjamin Buchloh, that it reinforced "the laconic mechanical nature of the enterprise"?<sup>38</sup> This messy new scrawling traverses the surface, seeming at first to resist and reject all logic, signifying precisely the absence of sense or signification: a completely de-skilled and merely space-filling mark.

As it turns out, this wax-crayon scrawling cannot be described accurately either as decorative or arbitrary. In each of the five areas where this scrawling appears, it follows, or attempts to follow, one basic rule: never cross a contour line. It colors between the lines—behind Superman's cape, along the top margin, across the cold blue background. The scrawling seems to struggle against its own incompleteness: the marks were apparently drawn from left to right, filling in the space between their origins and the proximate edges and contour lines. Thus the scrawling begins midway across the upper margin and is initially divided into two registers, which alternately lose and gain distinction as they proceed toward the right edge. It seems that the upper marks were begun first, since they continue, in various permuta-

38. Marco Livingstone, "Do It Yourself: Notes on Warhol's Technique," and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956-1966," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), pp. 67, 50.

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THIS IS AN ACTION PHOTO of TOMMY "IRONWORK" GEORGE, 47 years old, after a record-breaking battle, wearing some of the WORLD'S CHAMPIONSHIP MEDALS and MEDALS' honoring him as "WORLD'S BEST BODY BUILDER" & "WORLD'S STRONGEST & MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

**HOW TO GAIN UP TO 50 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE FAT, HAVE BULKS OF BODY FAT, OR ARE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO GAIN UP TO 50 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 200 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 200 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 300 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 300 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 400 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 400 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 500 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 500 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 600 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 600 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 700 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 700 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 800 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 800 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 900 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 900 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

**HOW TO BUILD UP TO 1000 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES**

IF YOU'RE TOO THIN, THIS COURSE WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO BUILD UP TO 1000 LBS. OF MIGHTY MUSCLES FAST!

tions, across the margin to the right-hand side. The lower register of marks was then brought in to fill some of the space left blank by the first round of scrawling. This doubling of the scrawl reaffirms the ruling prescript: "only between the lines"—it is willful and rapid, but willful and rapid only within a controlled framework. The same tension animates the blue scrawling in the upper right-hand quadrant of the painting. Again, the marks begin arbitrarily, but they are quickly brought under control by the surrounding margins, and their rhythm becomes increasingly regular as they proceed. Where spaces are left vacant by one scrawl, auxiliaries are deployed to fill the gaps. Directly above Superman's head, a small area of blue sky is colored in almost neatly, from edge to edge. All of these overtly handmade marks stand in stark contrast to the rest of the painting, which so clearly declares its dependence on mechanical reproduction: the image was originally created from a comic-strip panel that had been projected onto a canvas and traced.<sup>39</sup>

How did these late additions change the painting? The pertinence of this question exceeds *Superman*, for similar scrawls appeared in a number of other works produced during 1961: *Advertisement*, *Batman*, *Dick Tracy*, *Dick Tracy and Sam Ketchum*, *Strong Arms and Broads*, *Wigs*, *Make Him Want You*, *\$199 Television*, *Icebox*, *Telephone [1]*, *Dr. Scholl's Corns*, *Coca-Cola [1]* and *[2]*, *A Boy for Meg [1]*, and the very first *Campbell's Soup Can (Tomato Rice)*, as well as numerous drawings. If

39. Warhol's assistant Nathan Gluck described the process in an interview with Patrick S. Smith. See "Nathan Gluck, New York, 17 October 1978," in Smith, *Andy Warhol's Art and Films* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986), p. 314.

they were meant to convey reckless willfulness, or “the laconic mechanical nature of the enterprise,” as Livingstone and Buchloh have argued, why were they pushed across the blocked-out surfaces with such careful attention to the rule of the contour line? This attentiveness suggests that the scrawled marks constituted a determinate reassertion of handmade visual reproduction over and against the industrially depersonalized tone that otherwise characterizes the image. The scrawls inscribed the artist’s emulative intention across the inhuman blue of the sky and the arbitrary and mechanical upper margin. More than anything else, these crayoned additions resemble a printed panel half-converted by its young reader into a coloring book—a common and revealing mass-cultural scenario replayed in bedroom after bedroom on comic books, comic strips, children’s books, newspapers, and advertisements, as a result of an apparently acute and insatiable childhood desire to reproduce the culture with which one is confronted.<sup>40</sup> Beginning early on, in works like *Superman*, Warhol’s artworks found ways to visualize the suspicion that the possibility of reproduction is at least partially foreclosed by the mass-cultural object. The partial erasure of the “thought-bubble” text reiterates the same suspicion: letters and words, the image’s most legible and presumably most replicable elements, are rendered, in the painting’s final version, irreproducible. The painting’s final additions, its scrawls and counter-scrawls, were in fact concerted efforts to qualify—rather than to finalize—its claim to cultural reproducibility.

The specific areas that were retouched in this final version were literally marginal, displaced from the painting’s ostensible subject: Superman’s body and its action. This displacement underscores the painting’s key shift: away from an emphasis on the physical irreproducibility of the mass-produced masculine ideal, and toward an emphasis on the cultural irreproducibility of mass-produced visual ideals in general. This is a crucial transition in Warhol’s practice, and, for better or worse, it moved the focus of the works’ attention from sexual and physical reproducibility to cultural and visual reproducibility. Instead of the problem being how to emulate Superman, the problem became how to emulate—how to reproduce—a mass-produced cultural image, anything from a frame in a comic to a newspaper page to an advertisement.

The stakes of this shift from physical to cultural emulation can be better understood by examining the context in which Warhol found his borrowed imagery by, for example, turning our attention to the printed advertising that accompanied and subsidized the comic book from which *Superman* was sourced: the April 1961 edition of *Superman’s Girl Friend: Lois Lane*.<sup>41</sup> This thirty-six-page issue contained just over six pages of advertising, pages that provide insight into

40. The anthropologist Michael Tomasello has investigated the centrality of imitation for early childhood learning. See “The Human Adaptation for Culture,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999), pp. 509–29.

41. The source is identified in Francis, *Pop: Themes and Movements*, p. 85.

the book's readers and their priorities, as well as the publisher's. One and a third of these pages were dedicated to announcements for other comic books. Three pages advertised employment opportunities: selling seeds for the American Seed Company, "popular Patriotic and Religious Mottoes" for Stephens Credit Sales, and "White CLOVERINE BRAND SALVE" for Wilson Chemical Company. In these cases, the merchandise was sent out on credit, and the amateur salesperson was expected to mail the collected monies, minus a small profit, back to the company. This business model presupposed a relatively impoverished clientele, lured into the scheme with the promise of goods on credit and willing to trade a significant portion of labor for a meager return.

The two other full-page advertisements were, at least superficially, more conventional, in that they attempted to sell merchandise rather than to recruit salespeople. The comic's most obviously pertinent ad appeared on its penultimate page, and stood out among all the pages in its complete lack of color. This page's antiquated black-and-white design implied either obsolescence or the absence of a need to impress; unlike the rest of the comic, this advertisement was not embellished with bright hues. Instead, it was jam-packed with text and black-and-white photographs of male bodies in various states of exhibition. The uppermost line read:

I don't care what your age is! Whether you're a teenager, in your 20's, 30's, 40's, or 50's. Just RUSH me your LAST CHANCE COUPON below checking the KIND of HE-MAN BODY YOU DESIRE FAST and I'LL SEND YOU absolutely FREE 6 AMAZING PICTURE-PACKED COURSES LISTED BELOW . . . SKINNY OR FAT, I'LL BUILD YOU INTO A NEW ATHLETIC STREAM-LINED MIGHTY-MUSCLED HE-MAN as I have for 35 years rebuilt MILLIONS like you!

The accompanying illustrations drove the point home: the teacher and his pupils had achieved the masculine ideal, and the reader was only one postcard away from joining them. The Jowett Institute of Body Building would take care of the rest. Unsurprisingly, the ideal celebrated in this advertisement shared much in common with the figure of Superman as he appeared in the comic. The ad's motif of a man carrying a woman in his arms, for instance, appeared twice in this comic alone, on pages 7 and 9 of the final story.

The issue's cover also turned on the image of the male ideal, integrating it into broader issues of cultural participation. In this image, Lois Lane stands on a television set as a host with a microphone informs her that his computer has selected her "ideal husband." There, behind a dividing wall, is Clark Kent, anonymous in his single-button suit and rep tie. But Lois has a different image in mind, which is visible to the reader as a thought-bubble above her head: Superman, his muscles rippling. The four figures' heads form a pyramid, with Superman at its apex; the masculine ideal presides over the entire scene, and the studio audience in the foreground consumes the resulting comedy and melodrama. The promise

of a few minutes of television airtime would apparently be enough to persuade these otherwise extraordinary figures to forfeit their dignity and privacy, while the spectacle of failure that attended this promise was sufficiently entertaining to fuel an entire TV genre. The image must have immediately appealed to Warhol when he saw it on the newsstand.

This same promise of cultural engagement was brilliantly marketed by this comic book's first advertisement, printed inside its front cover, for a correspondence art school called Art Instruction, Inc. Three rough sketches—the heads of a sad clown, a woman, and a dog—took up the bulk of the page, and the reader was invited to copy them:

*Draw your choice* of any of these heads—clown, girl or boxer. Draw it any size except like a tracing. Use pencil. Everyone who enters the contest gets a professional estimate of his talent. Winner receives the complete art course taught by world's largest home study art school. Professional artists give individual instruction in advertising art, illustrating, cartooning, or painting. Contest sponsored to uncover hidden talent.

The winner was promised a \$495 scholarship.

This ad, which appeared again and again with varying illustrations in comics, magazines, and newspapers throughout the 1950s and 60s, did not need to rely on the masculine ideal that figured so prominently throughout the rest of the issue.<sup>42</sup> Instead of espousing any single cultural ideal, it sold the possibility of profitably participating in the production and reproduction of visual-cultural ideals. This possibility was clearly a false promise for most of the comic's readers, but it was a false promise that carried great allure. Like the multiple ads in this issue for amateur business schemes, this one was selling productivity rather than consumption, but unlike those advertisements, it was specifically predicated upon the idea of *artistic* productivity and re-productivity: the promise of creating and re-creating contemporary visual culture. By the early 1960s, Warhol was already a poster child for this promise; his facility as a draftsman had provided him with an escape from poverty and admission to the center of social prestige. In a 1977 interview he even claimed that his childhood teachers had submitted his drawings to a correspondence-art-school contest:

Warhol: . . . if you showed any talent or anything in grade school, they used to give us these things: "If you can draw this," where you'd copy the picture and send it away. . . .

O'Brien: Famous Artist's School?

42. See, for example, the inside back cover of *Life with Millie*, December 1961, and *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, November 1961, p. 33.

Warhol: Uh, yeah.

O'Brien: Did you send them away?

Warhol: No, the teachers used to.

O'Brien: Did they say you had natural talent?

Warhol: Something like that. Unnatural talent.<sup>43</sup>



Kathy. October 1961.

which two matronly ladies proposed frozen pizza dough and sauce as the key ingredients in the ideal high-school party meal. Half of the left-hand page was

"Unnatural talent": the promises made by these schools were distinctly anti-Kantian; they tied artistic productivity directly and unapologetically to economic success. And the schools communicated, even in their advertising, a basic paradox of mass-cultural production and reproduction: skill could only be reliably gauged by copying preexisting visual-cultural icons, but this copying could never be allowed actually to duplicate the original: "Draw it any size except like a tracing."<sup>44</sup>

These promises and challenges were extended into newspapers as well, and they sometimes blurred the lines between various forms of advertising. An unusual example appeared on facing pages of the comics in the January 31, 1960, *Chicago Daily Tribune*.<sup>45</sup> Half of the right-hand page was taken up with a comic-style ad for Betty Crocker called "The Case of the Teen-Age Problem," in

43. Glenn O'Brien, "Interview: Andy Warhol," *High Times*, August 24, 1977; reprinted in *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, ed. Kenneth Goldsmith (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004), pp. 234–35.

44. Warhol's own art education at Carnegie Tech emphasized similar benefits. As Nan Rosenthal has pointed out, "To go to art school at Carnegie Tech in those post-Depression GI Bill years was to attend a quasi-professional school, in the sense that a law school is a professional school. It was not exactly an institution drawing upon the European art academy or conservatory model and not an institution focusing on developing the individual expressive talents of young painters willing to starve to create high art." Rosenthal, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Warhol as Art Director," in *The Work of Andy Warhol*, ed. Gary Garrels (Seattle: Bay Press, 1989), p. 38.

45. The paired advertisements also appeared in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and the *Pittsburgh Press*; see "Art and Food," *New York Times*, February 25, 1960, p. 47. The advertisements discussed in this essay were found through intensive searches of newspaper, comic-book, and magazine archives and databases and are not, to my knowledge, discussed elsewhere in the scholarship on Warhol.

occupied by an ad for Art Instruction, Inc., labeled "How a commercial artist works." In this second ad, also illustrated in comic-strip style, an agent and an illustrator collaborated on the facing page's pizza ad: "Thanks to the artists, this Betty Crocker ad is an eye-catcher in the comic section of Sunday's newspapers." The initial Betty Crocker ad was disguised as a comic strip in order to sell pizza, while the Art Instruction ad borrowed the same style in order to sell the promise of a career producing these very ads. The line between art and business in comics was presented as porous, as was the distinction between artist and reader. In this respect, the Art Instruction advertisements were a false correction of the cultural world into which they were introduced. This world was founded on the passivity of the consumer, which might eventually be seen as a limiting factor in that consumer's satisfaction and pleasure. The commoditized spectacle of the consumer's own cultural participation promised to correct this constitutive passivity.

Comics targeting a female audience frequently included opportunities for readers to mail in drawings of outfits and hairstyles, some of which were then to be included, with credit to their creators, in future issues.<sup>46</sup> In a very few cases these promises yielded real opportunities: the consumer of images aced the correspondence school, landed a job on Madison Avenue, and became a producer of images—Lois Lane ceased to be her ideal and became instead her product.<sup>47</sup> But even this rare scenario did not fully correct the problem, because to the degree that the consumer became the successful manipulator of images, she was unlikely to believe in them fully.

Art Instruction, Inc.'s invitations to cultural production were targeted at television viewers as well, appearing regularly on the television-schedule pages of major newspapers. The ads' finished and unfinished faces shared space on these pages with glamour shots of television and film celebrities. It was a logical conjunction: television viewers could be expected to be more interested in these iconic faces, and therefore in the possibility of reproducing them, if only on paper. In one such instance, a 1953 issue of the *Los Angeles Times* paired these two interests with a "Before and After" ad for plastic surgery, bringing three of the key Warholian cultural concerns together on one page.

The class-based marketing of these fantasies of cultural productivity was made directly apparent in numerous advertisements for both Art Instruction, Inc., and its

46. Most such comics had one or two such pages per issue as well as multiple "reader-created" and credited outfits and/or hairstyles. The November 1961 issue of *Linda Carter, Student Nurse* devoted four of its thirty-six pages to these competitions.

47. Anne Wagner has pointed out to me that both Sylvia Plath and Eva Hesse entered and won fashion-magazine talent contests (at *Mademoiselle* and *Seventeen*, respectively), which helped to launch their careers. Matt Wrbican directed my attention to a "Coloring Contest" in Warhol's *Interview* magazine in 1972, with the winner promised Warhol's signature on the winning entry. The source image was a cartoon line drawing of Tarzan, Jane, Cheetah, and Boy. The editors ultimately selected a childishly slapdash entry.



John Busketta was a pipefitter's helper in a gas company. He still works for the same company but now he's an artist in the advertising department at a big increase in pay.<sup>50</sup>

Another Famous Artists Schools ad distributed during the late 1950s and early '60s delivered a similar message: "They DREW their way from 'Rags to Riches'—Now they're helping others do the same."<sup>51</sup> The opening line: "Albert Dorne was a kid of the slums who loved to draw. He never got past the seventh grade. Before he was 13, he had to quit school to support his family. But he never gave up his dream of becoming an artist."<sup>52</sup>

The correspondence art school was not the only promised route to cultural participation and remuneration during this period. Interspersed with the art-school

ads, sometimes sharing the same pages, were ads for a number of mechanical shortcuts: cheap cameras, oil-painting services, recording devices, and the "Magic Art Reproducer." This last was a small optical device that employed a mirror to transfer an image onto the horizontal surface beneath it, a smaller and cheaper version of the device Warhol had used to produce many of his early Pop paintings.<sup>53</sup> The "de luxe" model (the only model) was marketed for \$1.98 in comic books, magazines, tabloids, and the back pages of newspapers. The pitch was familiar: "Have fun! Be popular! Everyone will ask you to draw them. You'll be in demand! After a short time, you may find you can draw well without the 'Magic Art Reproducer' because you have developed a 'knack' and feeling artists have—which may lead to a good paying art career."<sup>54</sup> Warhol would spend the rest of his life testing mechanical reproductive devices against their promises of mass-cultural participation. The opaque projector was soon replaced by screen-presses, tape recorders, Polaroids, video



Advertisement for the Magic Art Reproducer. 1961.

cameras, early PCs. Each machine promised amateur cultural participation freed from the burden of training. Even when the gestural seemed to disappear from Warhol's work later in 1961, imperfect reproduction remained a prominent element

50. *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1959, p. 17.

51. *New York Times Magazine*, August 4, 1957, p. 5. This ad was widely and prominently disseminated; see also *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1957, p. G5, and *Life*, August 5, 1957, p. 9. Ads with similar text appeared in comic books that were contemporary with Warhol's sources. See, for example, the back cover of *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, December 1961.

52. *Washington Post and Times Herald*, February 3, 1957, p. AW5.

53. Matt Wrbcian informs me that the Warhol Museum has two of Warhol's projectors, a Beseler Vu-Lyte and a Vu-Lyte III, in its collection.

54. Norton Products advertisement, *Kathy*, October 1961, p. 25. See a similar ad in *Linda Carter, Student Nurse*, November 1961, p. 7; the device was also regularly advertised in the back pages of *Cool*, *Popular Mechanics*, *Popular Science*, the *New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.



Warhol. Advertisement. 1961. © 2012 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./ARS, New York.

of his style. When Warhol claimed that he wanted to be a machine, his words emphasized his distance from this ideal of reproduction and reproducibility as much as his proximity; he never claimed to *be* a machine, only to *want* to be one.<sup>55</sup> As Claes Oldenburg pointed out in 1964, "Andy keeps saying he is a machine, and yet looking at him, I can say that I never saw anybody look less like a machine in my life."<sup>56</sup>

*Superman* was not alone among the Bonwit Teller paintings in its emphasis on the vicissitudes of visual reproduction. At first glance, *Before and After [1]* is a painting

55. As Roger Cook has put it, "By virtue of his marginalized ethnic and class origins in the social field, Andy Warhol was, like many on the margins, hypersensitively aware of his lack of these forms of monetary, cultural, and social capital." Cook, "Andy Warhol, Capitalism, Culture, and Camp," p. 69.

56. Bruce Glaser, "Oldenburg, Lichtenstein, Warhol: A Discussion," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966), p. 22. Compare Malanga, who claimed that "Andy was not mechanically inclined. He was just an utter fright if he had to deal with something mechanical, so he never really pursued it." Heinrich, "Freezing a Motion Picture," p. 115.

about cosmetic surgery and the unbearable pressures of normative cultural ideals. But as in *Superman*, these pressures—toward perfection and the aesthetic ideal—are displaced in the paintings onto the brushwork itself, which constantly makes a show of its losing battle to reproduce flat, two-tone images borrowed from down-market media. And this losing battle seems to have been the thing Warhol most wanted to emphasize. The final additions of white paint seem intended to hide the mole beneath the left-hand figure's eye, to widen and adjust the white of her eye, and to soften the contours of her lashes. But the white paint is a poor match for the neutral background and only partly covers the dark paint it is meant to correct. It is the paintbrush here, not the surgeon's scalpel, which struggles to reproduce the ideal form.<sup>57</sup> This same drama is perhaps best summarized in *Advertisement*, a pithy catalogue of the marketing of physical improvement. The "before and after" faces reappear, in miniature, alongside an offer of "strong arms" from Anthony Barker, a George Jowett contemporary and competitor. Above these are ads for Pepsi-Cola and for a "Rupture Easer," which promised to treat hernias. In the upper left is an ad for hair coloring; Warhol has the dye dripping down the figure's neck like blood or errant contour lines. None of these ads has been reproduced completely, and most are less than half finished. Words and even hand-drawn letters are left incomplete, as are the borders of boxes and the oval of the Pepsi logo. And yet the copied elements evidence a fairly high degree of exactitude and purpose; furthermore, the neat regularity of their contours suggests the use of a mechanical aid, in this case probably a Photostatic copy and an opaque projector. Script is visualized in these works; the reproduction of letters and words is treated like drawing and tracing, rather than like writing. It is as though the painting is suspended between a desire to reproduce the motifs accurately and a recognition that this task is ultimately impossible. The painting's motifs are similarly suspended—between the promises of physical perfection somehow attained through a 25-cent pamphlet and the realization of the emptiness of that promise. And, crucially, these twin suspensions are staged with what have to be recognized as distinctly working-class props. Warhol borrowed these images from contemporary tabloid magazines; three have been identified as deriving from the late March and early April issues of the *National Enquirer* in 1961. The "rupture" ad, which has proved irresistible to poststructuralist readings of Warhol, should also be understood more literally as a promise to treat hernias, a quintessentially working-class affliction. The stereotypically ethnic, working-class profile in the before-and-after image is unmistakable, though Pepsi's contemporary image as "oversweet belly-wash for kids and poor people" is now less legible.<sup>58</sup> It is the Pepsi logo that stands out among these otherwise adamantly anthropomorphic images, foreshadowing Warhol's turn toward the brand image.

57. *Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 20. Malanga has stated that many of Warhol's key Pop images were provided to him by John Rublowsky, who "was working for one of these sleazy tabloids like the *New York Enquirer*, or the *National Enquirer*." Heinrich, "Freezing a Motion Picture," p. 121.

58. Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), p. 259. I discuss some of the racial tactics of postwar American marketing in "A Sign of Good Taste," pp. 229–32.

The Bonwit Teller photograph thus offers an unusual perspective on Warhol's early production and proves that imperfection in these works was neither an accidental by-product of the reproductive process nor an Abstract Expressionist holdover; it was an intentional and calculated addition to the works' style. Again and again, it is the defective capstone that simultaneously completes and undoes these paintings. Their final additions, their scrawls and counter-scrawls, were in fact concerted efforts to qualify rather than finalize their claims to cultural reproducibility.

A painting like *Carat*, 1961, effectively summarizes these concerns. The script along the inside of the painted ring is emblematic. It is as though the entire possibility of mass-cultural replication rests on Warhol's ability to paint an "S" that



Warhol. *Carat*. 1961. © 2012 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc./ARS, New York.



ings modeled the ironization of working-class consumer desire. The commercial fictions aimed at these subjects had already been spiced with irony (see the *Lois Lane* and *Life with Millie* covers discussed above). What Warhol added was a visualization of the possibility of the working-class subject's ironic understanding of herself *as a consumer*, a splitting of the consumer's consciousness into dupe and cynic, someone who can be expected to snicker at her own manipulation even as she succumbs to it.<sup>60</sup> By the late 1950s, advertisers were beginning to sense a growing skepticism regarding their techniques (a skepticism fueled by books like *The Hidden Persuaders*). They turned to working-class consumers as a supposed last bastion of credulity. But, as Guy Debord reminds us, advertising is fundamentally self-defeating: "Each new lie of the advertising industry is an admission of its previous lie."<sup>61</sup> Advertisers were well aware of this vulnerability; in his 1958 book *The Story of Advertising*, James Playsted Wood described a "fear that sometimes grips advertising men":

Some day, the sated customer, surfeited to lazy discomfort with all the goodies he has been able to swallow and all the shiny objects he has been able to cover with down payments, may be able to take no more. It is not that he will be unwilling or stubbornly refuse to cooperate, but there may be just no more of him to respond. Soggy with repletion, he may want only to lie down and sleep it off. He'll rise and try manfully again, but his first vigor will be gone.<sup>62</sup>

Ironization is advertising's desperate gamble that cynicism can be defused homeopathically, by having it integrated into the advertisement itself. This is a world of marketing, and a subject-position, which is very much still operative. Burger King's "King" mascot revels in its own faux-nobility; customers are meant to laugh at the commercial's awkwardness even as it wheedles them toward a purchase.<sup>63</sup> Toyota advertises its low-budget model with the tag line

60. See Paul de Man: "the ironist invents a form of himself that is 'mad' but that does not know its own madness; he then proceeds to reflect on his madness thus objectified. . . . [The] ironic subject at once has to ironize its own predicament and observe in turn, with the detachment and disinterestedness that Baudelaire demands of this kind of spectator, the temptation to which it is about to succumb." De Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 216–17. Or, as Emile de Antonio described Warhol's attitude to mass culture in 1982, "You think he's making fun of it all, and at the same time you know that he's serious. He means both. He knows how dreary and shallow it is." David Segal, "De Antonio and the Plowshares Eight" (1982), in *Emile de Antonio: A Reader*, ed. Douglas Kellner and Dan Streible (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 317. Cited in Branden Joseph, "1962," *October* 132 (Spring 2010), p. 129.

61. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2006), p. 35 (original emphasis).

62. James Playsted Wood, *The Story of Advertising* (New York: Ronald Press, 1958), p. 499, n. 4.

63. The company touts its recently redesigned European packaging as "draw[ing] inspiration from the Andy Warhol 'Pop Art' movement of the 1950s [sic] . . ." "Press Releases—Burger King®

"YARIS/it's a CAR!" (framed by a jagged Warholian bubble), while bragging that "STANDARD FEATURES COME STANDARD." If, as Clark has warned us, capitalism involves "a systematic ironizing of subject-positions . . . which produces the conditions for effective, that is, controllable citizenship," then Warhol's "beautiful, vulgar, heart-breaking" efforts of the early 1960s ought to be recognized as a crucial moment in the construction of the American consumer.<sup>64</sup> Despite the pathos of its origins, Warhol's vulgarity pointed in a sinister dimension: toward a truly post-Abstract Expressionist world in which an appetite for vulgarity *and* an ironic condescension to it are forcibly internalized in every subject, even those presumed to be the least sophisticated. In the early 1960s, Warhol's work was at the forefront of this project.

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unveils new global packaging design," July 2010, [www.burgerking.co.uk/press-releases?pressid=35](http://www.burgerking.co.uk/press-releases?pressid=35) (accessed December 9, 2011). It is unclear whether Burger King is aware of Warhol's earlier googly-eyed rendezvous with their products ("Andy Warhol eating a hamburger," [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejr9KBQzQPM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejr9KBQzQPM) [accessed December 9, 2011]).

64. Clark, "On the Very Idea of a Subversive Art History," Unpublished conference paper, University of Leeds, 1992, p. 26. I am very grateful to Jeremy Spencer for sharing this paper with me.



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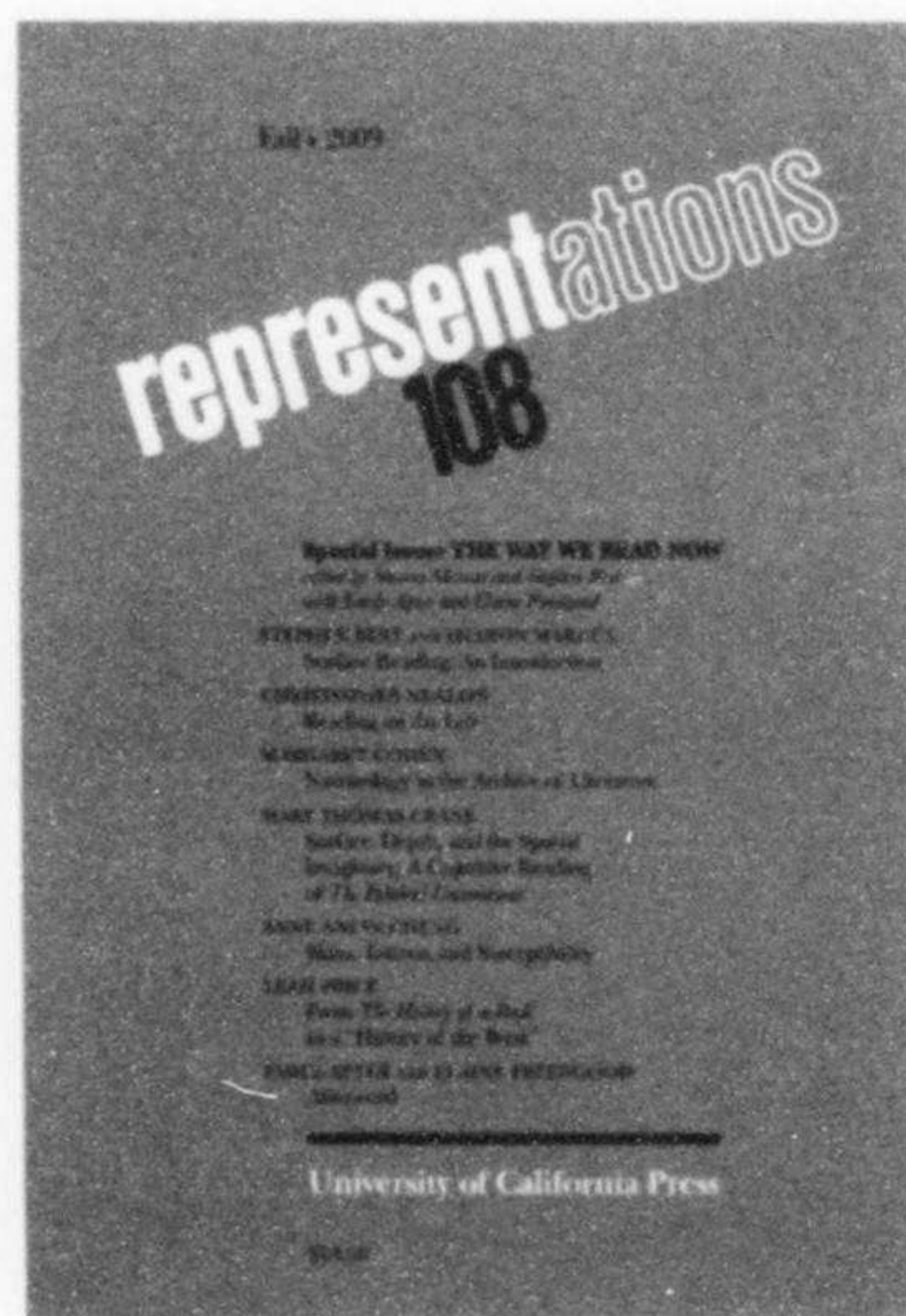
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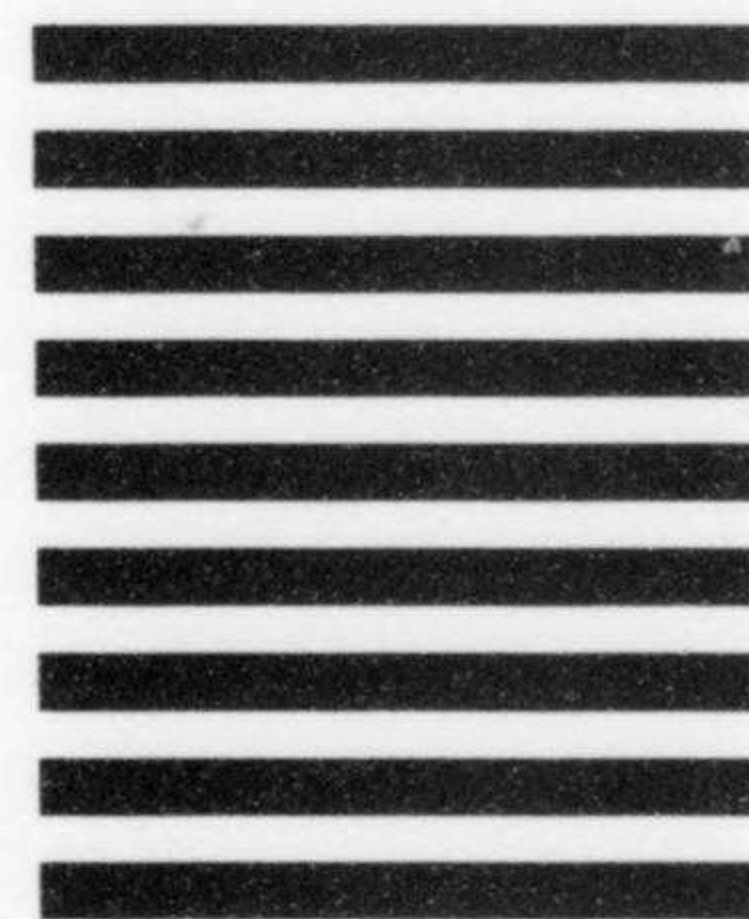
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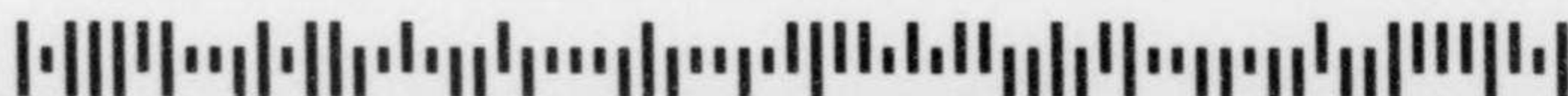


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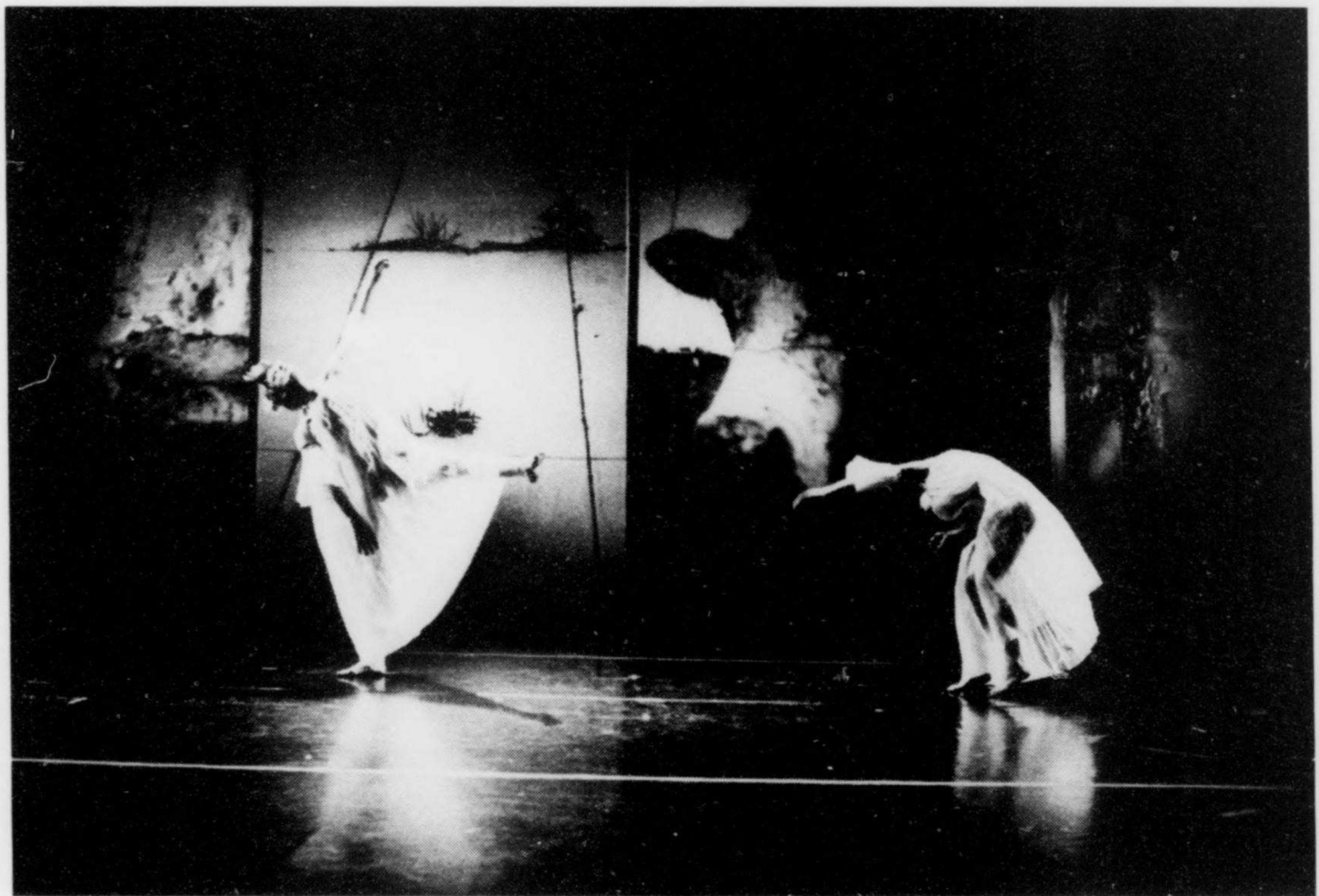
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