Modern Art and the Object
For my sister Elva, who saw me through school during the Great Depression and has never ceased to encourage me in my work

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Preface to the Revised Edition

It is a bittersweet task to make posthumous additions to a dear colleague’s book, since the pleasure of seeing *Modern Art and the Object* back in print, and expanded, is inevitably compromised by my doubts in deciding which new articles Ellen Johnson herself would have included. My dilemma is lessened somewhat because, as Ellen Johnson’s former student and longtime friend, and as an ex-professional art historian myself, I actually advised her extensively in the organization of the first edition of this collection of her essays. Moreover, I shared many of her views, whether on art or nature, and our sensibilities about contemporary art often overlapped. Therefore, I presumably am qualified, *faute de mieux*, to select the additions to her book, with the very helpful advice of her publisher, Cass Canfield, Jr.

Ellen Johnson had one of those extraordinary minds that, illnesses notwithstanding, can remain fully alert and active to the very end. In spite of multiple serious accidents and operations over the course of her last twenty-two years, she followed developments in contemporary art with indefatigable energy and interest, reading art magazines and the latest books diligently and critically, and photographing exhibitions and artists’ studios right up to a year before her death, on March 23, 1992, from a second attack of cancer. After her retirement from Oberlin College in 1977, she continued to lecture extensively and to write, concluding a productive career with her touching and witty art memoirs, *Fragments: Recalled at 80*, composed during her last two years (Gallerie Publications, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, 1993).

From her articles that appeared after the first edition of this book, in 1976, Cass Canfield and I selected five essays that I feel fit the preexisting subheadings of her main theme—namely, the dialogue between art and reality as it developed in Western culture during the last hundred years. What Ellen Johnson meant by ‘object’ was actually everything outside the ‘subject’: that is, all reality beyond the boundaries of one’s body or self—not only our fabricated environment, but nature as well. Such ‘outer’ reality was for her not inanimate
or alien to human beings. In fact, I would say that she was, in this regard, the 
very opposite of Robbe-Grillet (whom she nonetheless admired): she felt in 
communion with her surroundings—not only with her house and plants, but 
with rocks, pebbles, water, the entire universe. This was not through reasoning 
(for example, ‘How can we be different from the rest of the world, since we all 
are made of the same particles and energies?’), but through an intuitive grasp 
of cosmic union, which was one of her greatest innate gifts. It is in this sense 
that, unexpectedly yet meaningfully, she could group under a single heading, 
Modern Art and the Object, essays as seemingly disparate as those on Cézanne’s 
landscapes and on George Segal’s figures. To her, human beings simply were 
one with nature, and art was an extension of that same reality. I feel that her 
empathetic relationship with the ‘object’, her unquestioned linking of the live 
and the inert, justify including among the additions to this book her article on 
Alice Neel’s penetrating portraits.

In order to respect the thematic divisions of the first edition—Ellen Johnson 
never made such decisions lightly—the five recent articles were grouped as a 
new section at the end. A further advantage to this arrangement is that it high-
lights the not-coincidental fact that all these essays are on women. Though 
Ellen Johnson did not become actively involved with the women’s movement 
(she always had been a very strong, determined, and independent woman), late 
in her career she felt the need to shift her critical attention and support to 
women artists who had not received the recognition they deserved. The most 
famous of them, Eva Hesse, Ellen Johnson actually encouraged from very early 
on (1968) by buying one of her drawings for Oberlin College’s rental collec-
tion, and later by organizing a retrospective of her drawings. It hence seemed 
appropriate that the new cover of this book should bear Hesse’s Laocoön, which 
entered the Oberlin art museum partly thanks to Ellen Johnson’s keen eye and 
uncanny instinct for the best in contemporary art.

The final essay in the new section was actually a lecture, the keynote address 
at the 1984 annual meeting of the College Art Association of America, deliv-
ered when Ellen Johnson was seventy-four years old and Sherrie Levine was 
barely known as an artist. I feel that it serves as a wonderfully fitting conclu-
sion to a lifetime of distinguished writing on art by a critic-historian, for it 
demonstrates so well that Ellen Johnson still wanted to grapple with the hard-
est of issues in present art, appropriation and originality, yet place them within 
the context of history. Indeed, this lecture truly embodies the legacy she left 
during her thirty-four years of teaching to thousands of students, and to every-
one interested in probing the meanings of contemporary art through her 
insightful writings.

Athena Tacha
Preface

This publication is devoted to a reexamination of modern art from the point of view of the artist's approach to the object. The first essay chronicles the complex, changing relationship between art and the object over the past hundred years; it is a relationship which, like nature—or art itself for that matter—has no precise beginnings or endings, only a constantly shifting emphasis, advancing and receding, like the waves of the sea, always the same but never alike. This kind of fundamental organicism has determined the total structure of the book, as one thing grows out of another, holding its past and its future within itself. Cézanne's obsessive, full stressing of both nature and art throws a bridge from the faithful representation of the object in nineteenth-century painting to cubist and subsequent abstraction's freedom from the object. Picasso's indebtedness to Cézanne in his subjugation of the object is indisputable. However, it is not only formally that Picasso considered himself Cézanne's son, but also in the autobiographical expressiveness which asserts itself even in his most rigorously analytic cubist phase. He made that clear when he said that Cézanne wouldn't have interested him at all if he had not been the suffering human being that he was. In the mid-twentieth century, Jackson Pollock is akin to both earlier masters as he passionately identifies himself with his work; 'I am nature' also means 'I am the form I create'. Certainly Cézanne's as well as Pollock's painting is, like most art, to some extent about art; but such artists as Lichtenstein, Johns and Dine stress that aspect of their work more obviously. One might even propose, not altogether frivolously, that Cézanne's insistence on the importance of the painter's mind anticipates conceptual art. These instances of interrelationship, of a giving and taking kinship, and of a flexible continuity have been cited to exemplify the kind of organic order into which the contents of the book have been disposed.

Ellen H. Johnson
Oberlin, August 1974
Art criticism, like politics, is plagued by words which mean different things to
different people in different places at different times. When the contemporary
American artist Mel Bochner says, ‘In the early 'sixties the formula was “art =
object”;’ the word ‘object’ is different in meaning and reference from what it
was for Picasso, for whom it meant the source object in the visual world which
served as the point of departure for art’s inventions. He told Zervos, ‘There is no
abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterwards you can remove
all traces of reality. There’s no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the
object will have left an indelible mark.’1 Picasso meant by ‘object’ more what
Kandinsky had in mind when he called his abstract painting ‘non-objective’,
whereas Bochner was referring to the paintings and constructions of such artists
as Frank Stella, Robert Morris and Sol Lewitt as objects. The whole problem is
more a question of what is the object, than of what an object is; or one might
say it is more a question of where than of what. Is it something ‘out there’ in the
external world (a river, a mountain, a haystack); or is it something ‘in here’
(either the artist’s personal vision and his emotional reaction to the external
world, or the work of art turned in on itself, focusing on its own properties and
processes); or is it something having no visible substance and/or no direct
cause-effect relationship to physical reality (a philosophic proposition or similar
idea)?

Thus, in considering modern art from naturalism to conceptualism, we speak
first of the object as that part of the external world which served as the departure
point, the subject matter, for the work of art. Then gradually we switch, with
the artist, to thinking about the object as the work of art itself, a tangible thing
among things, which ‘lives its own life’, to use Picasso’s well-worn phrase.
Perhaps less familiar is a statement he made to Françoise Gilot: ‘One of the
fundamental points about cubism is this: not only did we try to displace reality;
reality was no longer in the object. Reality was in the painting.’2 Finally, we
encounter the widely held contemporary stance that the art object has sunk to
the level of a commodity and it is to be spurned by artists. So, the object is dead;
but long live the object! Because of course these artists stake out new territory and their new object (meaning either subject-matter or work of art or a combination of both) may be anything from a mathematical theorem to the life cycle of an ant. Throughout all the enormously varied ramifications of the basic usages of 'object', there runs, moreover, a hint of its signifying 'purpose'. A further variant on the use of the word is hardly relevant to the present study, but should at least be mentioned: the object as a matter-of-fact thing, i.e. as the result of an 'objective' as opposed to a 'subjective' approach. This is what Claes Oldenburg meant when he said that in his happenings he treated the actors and the audience as objects, or what Rainer Crone had in mind when he wrote that in Andy Warhol's Jackie Kennedy portraits 'the emotions of mourning become object'.

The entire gamut of modern art can be viewed from the vantage point of the artist's attitude towards the object, an examination which should throw some light on the larger problem of how the modern artist chooses to interweave art and reality and, ultimately, of what constitutes reality for him. In this first chapter, the broad outlines of such an investigation are sketched in; and in the essays which follow, some particular areas of the problematic relationship between art and object are explored in greater detail.

It hardly needs saying that no movement or individual is concerned exclusively with any one phase of that relationship; rather, it is a matter of degree and emphasis. At the risk of falsifying through over-simplification in pursuit of clarity, I shall trace major strains of emphasis as they wind in and out of art history from Cézanne and John F. Kensett in the second half of the nineteenth century to Chuck Close and Mel Bochner in the second half of the twentieth century.

In late nineteenth-century nature painting one can detect three major emphases which will appear and reappear in numerous guises up to the present: 1) faithful representation of the visual appearance of the object, i.e. illusionistic or what Duchamp called 'retinal' art (the impressionists, Cézanne and that great body of landscape painters here represented by the American, Kensett); 2) revealing and underscoring the materials and process of painting, the art in art (the impressionists, Cézanne, Seurat); 3) exaggeration and departure from verisimilitude to express feelings or ideas (van Gogh, Munch, Gauguin, Seurat, Cézanne). The fact that Cézanne's name appears in all three categories, and most of the others in two, clearly points up the dangers and inadequacies of such classifications; but I hope it does not invalidate the attempt to find or make some paths through a very rich and tightly-packed forest of activity. The two essays on Cézanne demonstrate how his art fulfils the multiple requirements for the artist which he himself posited: 'There are two things in the painter: the eye and the brain. The two must co-operate; one must work for the development of both, but as a painter: of the eye through the outlook on nature, of the brain through the logic of organized sensations which provide the means of expression.'
And again, 'One is neither too scrupulous nor too sincere nor too submissive to nature; but one is more or less master of one's model and, above all, of the means of expression. Get to the heart of what is before you and continue to express yourself as logically as possible.' Vision, idea, creativity, feeling are conjoined. Cézanne delineates the structure of his source objects so exactly that one can locate almost the very spot where he set up his easel in painting each of his numerous studies of Mont Sainte-Victoire; one can recognize a particular pine tree when it reappears in several pictures, and even propose the date of a watercolour on the basis of the tree's growth. At the same time, his paintings and drawings are as much objects as the mountain and tree are; but the painted object (oil, watercolour) and the object painted (mountain, tree) vie with each other for dominance. The tension resulting from this conflict adds resonance to the pictorial dynamism animating the relationship of every last little brushstroke to the extremely complex, quietly vibrant whole. Literally hundreds of small opposing forces are brought into equilibrium; but the equilibrium and quietude of Cézanne's paintings are different in kind from Kensett's. The latter's pictures, like Monet's and most other nineteenth-century nature painting, are more passive in total structure and in detail. Kensett's idyllic, optimistic landscapes are utterly without tension; you feel no sharp craggy bones in his mountains, no treacherous currents in his rivers and lakes, and even the Atlantic stills its surf for him. One might say that neither did Cézanne paint turbulent seas; however, it is not the depiction of motion, but the interactivity of the pictorial elements which animates his painting — qua painting, not qua nature. Kensett's love for nature is more peaceful and he is more acquiescent towards her, whereas Cézanne was never in such easy harmony with nature, art and himself. While he worshipped nature, he insisted on being 'master of one's model'; he knew that he was a significant, inventive and courageous artist, but he was never satisfied. In his last year he wondered if he would ever 'realize the dream of art that I have been pursuing all my life'. Cézanne's magnificent struggle and his self-doubt meant almost as much as his revolutionary art did to many of his followers. Even Picasso, who said, 'Bien sûr! Cézanne was his 'father';' declared, 'It's not what the artist does that counts, but what he is. Cézanne would never have interested me a bit if he had lived and thought like Jacques Emile Blanche, even if the apple he painted had been ten times as beautiful. What forces our interest is Cézanne's anxiety — that's Cézanne's lesson... .' While Cézanne's inventions undermined the integrity of the object in relation to other objects and to its environment, and thus readied the ground for the cubist's more pronounced subjugation of the object, still he steadfastly cherished its identity. Cézanne upset the whole applecart, but he hung onto the individual apple; Picasso and Braque let that slip too, as they (first separately and then together) worked out the kind of formal analysis and vocabulary which came to be called cubism. Here the painting and the process of its constructing shatter the individual object to bits; but the source object, unlike Humpty-
Dumpty, *can* be put together again (see ‘On the Role of the Object in Analytic Cubism’, pp. 97–110). Not so in total abstraction, which inevitably and very rapidly evolved from the cubist premises.

Although there will probably never be a definitive solution to the problem of who is the rightful contender for the honour of having painted the first abstract picture, there is no question that by 1912–13 pictures with no recognizable objects had been painted by such diverse artists as Kupka, Kandinsky, Larionov, Balla, Malevich, Picabia, Delaunay, Morgan Russell and Mondrian, among the most conspicuous. Their created objects were not referential to any objects other than themselves—ostensibly. ‘Symbol snatchers’, as Arshile Gorky called iconographical investigators, have identified several of Kandinsky’s shapes (4) and paint gestures as signs for lightning, mountains, horses and riders, etc. And it is well known that Mondrian’s exquisitely balanced horizontal and vertical compositions began with series of studies of trees and church façades and the rhythmic beat of water against the pier at Scheveningen (5). There are very few first generation abstractions as completely ‘pure’ as Malevich’s daringly reduced squares (6), and even they are not exclusively self-referential, but have a distinct, almost programmatic relation to the Russian political and social ideal as well as a profoundly emotive significance. He called his art suprematism, he said, to signify ‘the supremacy of pure feeling in creative art... In the year 1913, in my desperate attempt to free art from the ballast of objectivity, I took refuge in the square form and exhibited a picture which consisted of nothing more than a black square on a white field. ... This was no empty square... but rather the feeling of non-objectivity.’ Geometric reduction wholly and *purely* rational served as the vehicle for mystic revelation for other artists besides Malevich, most notably Mondrian who sought to create what he designated as ‘pure reality’ by pruning painting to strictly right-angled relationships in dead-centre colours (red, blue, yellow, black and white). As much a preacher as van Gogh had been, Mondrian charged his paintings with a social as well as a theosophical spiritual message. In 1931 he wrote, ‘When “art” is thrown into the “abyss”, its real content will remain. Art will be transformed, it will be realized first in our physical surroundings, later in society... in our whole life, which will then become “truly human”’. Another student of theosophy, Kandinsky, in his numerous writings (beginning with *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, first published in 1912) professed a similar Utopian intent for his diametrically different non-objective art with spontaneous, eruptive lines and splashes of colour shooting out in violently opposing directions. (When he returned to Russia at the time of the revolution, his work became considerably more controlled-looking). In 1916 he wrote:

When will the question of form no longer replace the question of art? When will one really understand that art does not come from form, but form from art... and that form without content is a sin against the spirit?... The only
stand toward art which is creative demands . . . that one surrender oneself to
the personal resonance of the artist, that one entrust oneself to him. . . . Then
a new world . . . opens up for the spectator. He journeys into a new land of
the spirit where his life will be enriched. This country, which the artist is
compelled to show his fellow men and which, despite all and defying all, he
must embody, is created . . . not for the artist's sake but solely for the specta-
tor's, because the artist is the slave of humanity.11

Exploring the meaning of abstract art is not so peripheral to our particular
subject as it may seem. Aside from exemplifying the switch from external object
to the work of art as an object in itself, there is pertinence in the fact that this
early abstraction admittedly and consciously did, in its content, allude to some-
thing other than itself, whereas most of the new abstract art of the 1960s (which
falls within the same strain in the context of this essay) firmly abjures such
allusions.

In 1965 Donald Judd (7), writing on Lee Bontecou's work (8), considered
it as an example of the scale, economy and oneness of the new American art
which he characterized as 'pragmatic, immediate and exclusive. Rather than
inducing idealization and generalization and being allusive, it excludes. The
work asserts its own existence, form and power. It becomes an object in its own
right.'12 While Judd's historic 'Specific Objects' article (published in Arts
Yearbook 8, 1965, but written about a year earlier) is primarily concerned with
three-dimensional art, he also refers to the new painting as sharing the desired
'specific, aggressive and powerful character', which derives largely from the
fact that 'the thing as a whole, its quality as a whole, is what is interesting . . . the
shape, image, colour and surface are single and not partial and scattered.' These
qualities are apparent not only in the strictly geometric work of such artists as
himself, Robert Morris (9), Sol LeWitt, Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland and
Will Insley, but also in the fluorescent light pieces of Dan Flavin, in Richard
Smith's canvas constructions, in Lee Bontecou's cloth over metal reliefs and the
clothing, food and home items of Claes Oldenburg (10) in which the image
corresponds with – actually creates – the shape of the object. Among the notable
1950s precursors of the 1960s image/object structures are Jasper Johns's flags
(11), which were especially important for Stella, Insley and a whole host of
shaped canvas painters, including Charles Hinman and Neil Williams (see
'Mathematics and the New Abstraction' (pp. 196-201) and 'American Attitudes
towards Art and Experience' (pp. 125-121), in which some of the issues raised by
the art and attitudes of many of these artists, including Judd and Morris, are
touched upon). One of the major 'specific object' makers, Robert Morris, told
David Sylvester, 'The reason I don't title them is that I don't think the work is
about allusions. And I think titles always are. And I think the work is very much
about that thing there in the space, quite literally. And titles seem to me always
to have some allusion to what the thing isn't, and that's why I avoid titles.'13
Morris’s comment brings to mind the name of a little magazine, *It is*, published briefly in New York in the late ’50s; one also recalls that from about 1948 to 1951 several of the major abstract expressionists assigned numbers to their paintings instead of titling them, thus emphasizing the autonomy of the painted object. But they never adhered to a programme of excluding extra-pictorial meaning; on the contrary, they continued to uphold the principles set forth in the famous 1943 letter to the *New York Times* prepared by Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman, in which they proclaimed, ‘There is no such thing as good painting about nothing.’ For the rest of their lives, Rothko and Newman produced abstract work which for countless observers supports another contention expressed in that letter, ‘Only that subject matter is valid which is tragic and timeless.’ Most ‘minimalists’ (as Morris, Judd, LeWitt, Andre, etc. are commonly, but annoyingly, called) would insist that such concerns are extrinsic to the art object itself. In a 1971 interview Judd asserted, ‘I wanted to get rid of all those extraneous meanings – connections to things that didn’t mean anything to the art.’\(^{14}\)

However, such disavowals on the artists’ part cannot prevent the observer from responding as deeply and explicitly as he chooses to, or can, to the minimalists’ severely stripped-down, monumental constructions. Basic in form, direct and clear in concept: either one piece (a triangle, rectangle or L by Morris), or the same unit repeated a number of times (Andre’s row of bricks on the floor (14), or a simple progression (Judd’s horizontal wall and floor pieces; 7, 76), or a more involved group of permutations (LeWitt’s forty-nine cubes; 58), these bold new works take their point of departure from principles operating or implicit in the art of such immediate predecessors as Newman, Reinhardt, Rothko (12) or the earlier precursor Malevich – and of course Brancusi.

While Brancusi’s sculpture has been of the greatest importance for such artists as Andre and Morris, it is, I feel, fundamentally different from major American art since the Second World War in some respects. Brancusi’s work tends to retain a more intimate, human scale, and (except for the extraordinarily advanced *Endless Column* (13), which repeats the same unit to a height of ninety-six feet, and implies indefinite extension) it evidences careful ‘relational’ adjustments, i.e. the kind of subtle balancing which makes the *Bird in Space* such a living image and a symbol of aspiration. Moreover, Brancusi’s work has a lovingly hand-made, beautifully crafted quality. Even the rough, unfinished-looking bases, which he sometimes regarded as sculptures, are ‘crafted’, though partly by nature’s hands. In any case, all of his work looks as though it were made by an artist, not a machine. Another, and profound, difference from most minimalists is that Brancusi’s art consciously celebrates human spiritual values, as is clear from the photographs that he took of his work, one of which catches the light on the highly polished bronze *Bird in Space* in such a way that the physical object is totally dematerialized – the body is transformed into pure...
light, pure spirit, like the Christ in Rembrandt's drawing of *The Supper at Emmaus*. (I am thinking particularly of the one attributed to him in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.)

Probably the flattest statement of the minimalists' neutral attitude (evidenced even in the absolutely flat surfaces of both their two- and three-dimensional art) was made by Frank Stella in 1966:

I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting – the humanistic values that they always find on the canvas. . . . My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there is there. It really is an object. . . . All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion. . . . What you see is what you see.\(^{15}\)

Stella's painting follows strict correspondence between interior image and exterior shape. His idea is basically quite simple – clear and direct as a total concept and in the structure of each picture. In the 1959 black paintings the movement of the white lines conforms to the edges, i.e. he took his leads straight from the traditional rectangular format. Many earlier artists had reinforced or reiterated, in their images, the vertical-horizontal nature of the support; but Stella simply covered the surface with lines uniformly distant from each other into such strictly rectilinear patterns as concentric rectangles, diamonds or triangles. Then, as though he asked himself: 'What's so inviolate about the outer edge?', he let the movement of the lines actually determine the exterior configuration, and continued doing so in all his paintings from 1960 to 1965 (except for some mitred and concentric squares which return to the black pictures in basic pattern, but which are executed in bright colours, extremely flatly applied with machine-precise edges). First after the black paintings came the aluminium series (15) in which the lines are allowed to notch the edges. These initial, only slightly 'shaped canvases' are followed by a series of copper-coloured paintings in such right-angled conformation as a broad L, a T, a U, a zig-zag and a Greek cross. Next come polygons in purple metallic paint whose concentric lines leave widely open centres to the hexagon, trapezoid, rhomboid etc. shapes; then red, green and smoky-blue metallic-coloured chevrons forming trapezoids, parallelograms, stars or crosses, and the notched Vs, thrusting vectors, of the series which Stella termed the 'running V' or 'flying wedge' pictures. Robert Rosenblum's reference to this last type as a 'symbol for abstract, mechanized speed'\(^{16}\) openly contradicts the artist's intention, but that is only one of many instances when the observer gets a great deal more out of what's there than would presumably please Stella and other artists who, by the late '50s, had had more than enough of the abstract expressionist soul-searching and soul-finding as extolled by such critics as Harold Rosenberg. In 1966, the parallel stripes which had served as the basis of all Stella's imagery from 1959 to 1965 gave way to a series of irregular polychrome polygons. While there is interaction
1. Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, c. 1887

2. Claude Monet, *Haystack at Sunset near Giverny*, 1891
3 Georges Braque The Portuguese 1911

4 Wassily Kandinsky Skizze 160A 1912
5 Piet Mondrian Pier and Ocean 1914

6 Kasimir Malevich Suprematist Composition: Red Square and Black Square 1914 or 1915
7 Donald Judd  *Untitled* 1967

8 Lee Bontecou  *Untitled* 1961
12 Mark Rothko The Rothko Chapel dedicated 1971

13 Constantin Brancusi Endless Column 1937
FRANK STELLA Six Mile Bottom 1960
19 Dennis Oppenheim Annual Rings 1968

20 Mel Bochner Range 1975
< 21 Robert Rauschenberg Charlene 1954

< 22 Jim Dine Black Bathroom No. 2 1962
26  **Marcel Duchamp** *In Advance of the Broken Arm*
1915 (original lost; second version obtained by Duchamp 1945)

27  **Kurt Schwitters**
*Hanover Merzbau* 1925
(destroyed)
28  JAMES ROSENQUIST  Painting for the American Negro 1962–3

29  ANDY WARHOL  Green Disaster No. 2 1963
between the shape of the canvas and the pattern painted on it in the irregular polygons and in the subsequent, dazzlingly-coloured protractor series, still the movement of line is no longer the actual determinant of shape in Stella's painted objects. That it had been the design, the drawing, which determined the configuration of the support in the earlier work is not only visually apparent but is supported in a statement by the artist himself to William Rubin, 'I don't think of the perimeter as such... when I see the outline of the picture I see the interior drawing with it. In other words I see a line drawing of the idea. I never see just a cut-out of the shape.'

I have spent a considerable amount of time on Stella as the master par excellence of the shaped canvas, because such structures underscore heavily the existence of the painting as an object and because minimal sculpture is closely allied to Stella's painting, or even in some cases indebted to it, and because the power he gives to line as the basic generator of his work connects it with that of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. (The idea could be carried back, but only generally speaking, to the Futurist 'lines of force', Klee's 'going for a walk with a line', and the veering directions of parallel lines van Gogh used as one means of expressing what he called 'the struggle for life'.) In Pollock's most personal painting (16), however, it is line alone which charges those swaying fields of energy, and it is with line that Newman 'declares space' (17), the phrase by which he indicated that he was not representing space, but actually creating it. And he did so with a single breath-taking 'zip'. Newman's orange line cutting right down the centre of a red-brown field in Onement I, 1949, was as daring, and as seminal, as Malevich's black square on a white ground. The two artists, one Russian and the other an American whose parents came from Lomza in Russian Poland, are further comparable in that their radical reductivism puts their art at the service of values extrinsic to it. Although Malevich sought specifically to further the social ideals of his political position, whereas Newman's thrust is religious (primarily poetic analogies with ancient Judaic myths of creation, etc.), those implications of their work are secondary to its central concern, namely that its abstract content be experienced. Such art makes special demands on the spectator; one must forget everything else - put everything else aside as the artist had done - and allow oneself to feel the void, to experience the reality of nothingness and of that sudden streak of energy which quickens nothing into being. To call Newman an abstract expressionist is no misnomer. Although his painted line is absolutely straight and as inorganic as a mathematical equation, it is fundamentally no less expressive and personally felt than Pollock's or van Gogh's. Among the more recent unexpected uses of line are Dan Flavin's fluorescent light fixtures (which may seem like Duchamp's 'ready-mades', but actually have far more to do with Newman as art and idea; 18), Dennis Oppenheim's paths on ice (19) and Mel Bochner's numbers (20). Although concealed, line is still at work in Larry Poons's circles and ellipses moving through large fields of colour (101), and in the chicken-wire and plaster pieces by Claes Oldenburg.
Although Oldenburg is totally committed to common objects, he, in distinction to several of the other artists carelessly grouped together as ‘Pop’, almost never incorporates actual objects (only in some small studies where he uses cigarette butts, three-way plugs, a clothes-peg). Rather, he makes objects which have the intensity that ordinary things possess when they are isolated from their normal surroundings or robbed of their function.

In the early 1950s, Robert Rauschenberg had begun to attach real things to his paintings (a stuffed goat in a rubber tyre like a ballet-skirt, an umbrella, a cushion, a rooster, etc.; 21). Except for printed matter, principally sports and other news images, Rauschenberg’s objects seem to have come from attics and junk piles, whereas Jim Dine, one of his numerous followers, got his tools, bathroom fixtures and such objects straight from hardware and plumbing shops (22). But there is an equally personal flavour to the objects selected by Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Tom Wesselmann and other major 1960s common-object artists, each of whom is decidedly individual aesthetically, iconographically and art historically. In much of his work, Lichtenstein deals specifically with earlier art styles; Dine’s sink functions, not only emotively as a naked, unshielded object, but also visually, like a slashing stroke of white against black in a Franz Kline painting (23); and there are in Rauschenberg’s combines reminiscences of cubist pictorial structure in spite of their other differences from cubist collage, which is of course the cradle of object art.

While analytic cubist painting emphasized the supremacy of the created object by subjugating the source object to it, and thus prepared the way for totally non-objective painting, cubism also ironically set the stage, in its collage phase beginning in 1912, for the eventual elimination of the created object. The bits of reality from ‘out there’ (fragments of newspaper, labels, rope, etc.) which Picasso (24) and Braque (25) combined with oil paints in their pictures, brought so much of their life into what Picasso referred to as the life of the forms that the step from cubist collage to Duchamp’s hat-rack, shovel (26), urinal, etc. which he designated ‘ready-mades’ (and which become art objects simply by virtue of their being selected by an artist) was not such a fantastic stride as it seemed during and immediately after the First World War – and as it still continues to seem for many people.

A casual comment by Rauschenberg became a cornerstone of 1960s criticism; he said he was operating in the gap between art and life.19 The attempts on the part of artists to narrow that gap, by bringing everyday life into art’s theories, concerns, materials and processes, can be traced back through a long course of art history, taking on increased urgency throughout the nineteenth century and our own century of constantly shifting values. The Dada shattering of traditional values, graphic evidence of the cultural and political changes signalized by the First World War, took many different forms and degrees, although generally speaking the basic destructiveness was intended, as Duchamp later recalled, to be a sweeping out process.20 The musician Edgard Varèse expressed the same idea.
From Nineteenth-century Nature Painting to Conceptual Art

(in a talk given during a symposium on art and music at Bennington) in 1955: 'Radical changes in music written today are considered not evolutionary, but dangerous and destructive. And they are. Dangerous to inertia and destructive of habits.' The range within Dada is evident, for example, in comparing the objects of Kurt Schwitters with those of Duchamp. The former's collage paintings and constructions, his Merzbau (an environmental maze of niches and caves filled with physical mementoes of his family and friends - fingernail clippings, cigarette ashes, a bottle of urine; 27), his proposed Merz theatre (which would have incorporated an amazing assortment of sights, sounds, smells, anticipating the 1960s happenings) and his Ursonate (a 35 minute vocal sound poem, with no words) do bring life into art while dissolving the barriers between the two realities. However, in spite of the immensely generative effect Duchamp's act of selecting the ready-mades has had on subsequent art, it remains an intellectual gesture. While it devastatingly proclaims the anti-traditional art position that anything the artist says is art is art, it is exclusively involved with an art issue, and it demonstrates that the narrower the gap between art and life, the deeper it is. To most people, a shovel is a shovel; only those who are supposed to 'know' could call it an art object.

A slightly different ironical twist was encountered by the Pop artists in relation to their public. Since they incorporated or imitated the most ubiquitous, everyday objects, they thus, theoretically, made their work more accessible; but at first even art critics found it difficult to separate their art objects from their source objects. Even now, I suspect, to the uninformed, Oldenburg's sculptures are still food (86) and clothing (84), and Lichtenstein's paintings are comics (94), Rosenquist's are billboards (28) and Warhol's are news photographs (29). Although these artists take their subjects from already abstracted images (such as advertising art), they are presenting the appearance of the object 'out there' as surely as Kensett had done, or as the photo-realists of the 1970s are doing. While the latter use photographs, as many nineteenth-century artists had done, they do so very differently. Most of the new photo-realism is about photography, as much Pop art was about advertising. Chuck Close's colossal portraits (30) are more about putting into paint the appearance of the black-and-white and colour photographic and reproductive processes than they are about the persons represented. His concerns, and those of many other photo-realists, like the British-born Malcolm Morley, who was already precisely copying coloured photographs (31) in the early '60s, are in many ways closer to those of modernist abstract painters than to nineteenth-century representational artists, or even to the American precisionists of the 1920s. The means usurps the subject; and that is still not easy to see because of the ironical way in which it happens. But anyone can see that Picasso's Glass of Absinthe (68) and Schwitters's collages, unlike Duchamp's ready-mades or 'rectified' ready-mades, look like art objects. Even the Merzbau is a construction, a free-form, open-ended cubist sculptural building.
In Schwitters's constructions and in the enigmatic, contradictory Surrealist work of the 1930s such as Magritte's *The Therapeutic* (32) or Meret Oppenheim's historic fur-covered teacup and saucer (33), or in Cornell's pure poetic boxes (34), the found objects are responsible for the character of the work. In cubist collage, on the other hand, the *objet trouvé* keeps only some of its presence while it is being used as a material like paint or charcoal. In the 1950s, when Rauschenberg put found objects together with paint again, they remained much more themselves than they had done in cubist collage and much more amalgamated with painting than in Dada or surrealist objects. The surrealist artist acts as a kind of medium, releasing the mysterious power of things. The appeal of surrealism for the American 'myth makers' (Rothko, Newman, Pollock, etc.) of the 1940s lay in that area, as well as in its emphasis on ritual and primitivizing and on what Pollock spoke of as its 'freeing of the subconscious'. Pollock identifies his inner self so closely with his activity as a painter that one might say he abolishes the distinction between subject and object. Figuratively speaking, the action, the acted upon and the actor become one.

Happenings, which had their high point in New York in the early '60s and dwindled in impact as they increased in popularity, are a direct outgrowth of this attitude. From being a pictorial record of an act, the art object easily became the act itself. In this and other areas where the art object ceases to be a portable *thing*, I have veered slightly away from the initial theoretical bent of this essay to a more specific and even, to some extent, historical analysis. My reason for doing so is that recent departures from the traditional object are extraordinarily numerous, complex, more in need of introductory explication than the work of Cézanne, Picasso, or the Pop artists, and less fully covered in the following essays.

Involving the spectator directly in the art work, as happenings often do, is another phase of the historic levelling-out process which, like the dissolution of the barriers between the separate arts and between art and life, makes unexpected companionships. Pollock, who joins hands with Dada in this respect, would have been startled, to say the least, at some of the art educed from ideas implicit in his work and attitude. Allan Kaprow's article, 'The Legacy of Jackson Pollock', published in 1958, is a brilliant prophecy of the new art unconsciously generated and sanctioned by Pollock. He writes that Pollock

... left us at the point where we must become preoccupied with, and even dazzled by, the space and objects of our everyday life, either our bodies, clothes, rooms, or, if need be, the vastness of Forty-Second Street. Not satisfied with the *suggestion* through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movements, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things which will be discovered by the present generation of artists. Not only
will these bold creators show us, as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us, but ignored, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings and events, found in garbage cans, police files, hotel lobbies, seen in store windows and on the streets, and sensed in dreams and horrible accidents. An odor of crushed strawberries, a letter from a friend or a billboard selling Draino [sic]; three taps on the front door, a scratch, a sigh or a voice lecturing endlessly, a blinding staccato flash, a bowler hat – all will become materials for this new concrete art.

The young artist of today need no longer say ‘I am a painter’ or ‘a poet’ or ‘a dancer’. He is simply an ‘artist’. All of life will be open to him. He will discover out of ordinary things the meaning of ordinariness. He will not try to make them extraordinary. Only their real meaning will be stated. But out of nothing he will devise the extraordinary and then maybe nothingness as well. People will be delighted or horrified, critics will be confused or amused but these, I am sure, will be the alchemies of the 1960s.22

Claes Oldenburg, who declared his debt to the abstract expressionist master in vivid language (‘I feel as if Pollock is sitting on my shoulder or rather crouching in my pants!’),23 had been affected by Kaprow’s essay when he wrote his famous

I am for an art that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum. I am for an art that grows up not knowing it is art at all. . . . I am for an art that involves itself with everyday crap and still comes out on top. . . . I am for an art that comes out of a chimney like black hair and scatters in the sky. I am for an art that spills out of an old man’s purse when he is bounced off a passing fender. I am for the art out of a doggy’s mouth, falling five floors from the roof. I am for an art that a kid licks, after peeling away the wrapper. I am for an art that joggles like everyone’s knees on a bus. . . . I am for an art that unfolds like a map, that you can squeeze like your sweety’s arm, or kiss, like a pet dog. . . . I am for the art of red and white gasoline pumps and blinking biscuit signs. . . . I am for the art of underwear and the art of taxi-cabs. . . .24

But Oldenburg’s happenings (87) were very different from Kaprow’s, as is indicated even by the term ‘performances’, which he preferred to call his Ray Gun Theater pieces. While chance and the extemporizing of his performers created considerable variation in what happened, still Oldenburg did have a kind of script, and the observer very definitely felt the artist’s presence and his profligate richness in the visual as well as experiential character of the work. Kaprow’s pieces, on the other hand, tended to be stricter, less abundant, and usually kept closer to actual events which he designated as happenings. Indeed there were as many varieties of happenings as there were artists presenting them. The German, Joseph Beuys, one of the most important and earliest artists in this field, calls such pieces as his famous How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare (35) ‘actions’, thus underlining with Teutonic certitude the fact that the object has
become the act. Other artists loosely grouped together in the international Fluxus association include several Americans, especially George Brecht, who has yet to have a major show in a US museum. A few of his Duchamp-inspired arrangements were exhibited in some of the early '60s group shows; but those objects (such as a stool with a bag of oranges on it) are somewhat less pertinent to our investigation than some other aspects of his work, particularly his mail art. As early as 1961 Brecht began sending out such cards as the following:

**TWO VEHICLE EVENTS**

- start.
- stop.

Summer, 1961

Fig.1 GEORGE BRECHT Two Vehicle Events 1961

**TWO EXERCISES**

Consider an object. Call what is not the object “other.”

**EXERCISE:** Add to the object, from the “other,” another object, to form a new object and a new “other.”
Repeat until there is no more “other.”

**EXERCISE:** Take a part from the object and add it to the “other,” to form a new object and a new “other.”
Repeat until there is no more object.

Fall, 1961
The major and most consistent exponent of correspondence as the object is another American, Ray Johnson, who spends twelve to fifteen hours a day at his work-table, writing, pasting, labelling, xeroxing his art. He too has had more official recognition in Europe than at home, although, unlike Brecht, he has always lived in the States. In April 1973 he wrote a letter to the obituary section of the *New York Times* announcing the death of the ‘New York Correspondence School’, which has since been replaced by a variety of sobriquets including ‘Buddha University’ and ‘The Dead Pan Club’. Johnson’s mailings are usually in the form of his highly individual collages, which the recipient is frequently requested to add something to and send on to a designated person. In this way Ray Johnson and George Brecht and, more recently, a great many others who are mailing out their art (from Gilbert and George’s *Pink Elephants* to Eleanor Antin’s antic 100 Boots postcards; 36) extend the object-act to the observer, and even to several unwitting participants – those workers who process and deliver the mails.

Other recent production in a related genre includes body sculpture or ‘performance art’, street art and events, earthworks and process art. Some critics and artists place this whole area of activity within the category of conceptual art, which owes so much to Duchamp, frequently via John Cage, as it extols ‘visual indifference’ (Duchamp’s phrase) and chance rationally planned-for, extends the boundaries of art and gets rid of the buyable, sellable object. These historic tendencies were given added impetus by the resistance, which steadily increased during the affluent ’60s, to the production of art objects as commodities for sale (thought by many only to feed the vanity and fill the pockets of the rich) and by the disenchantment with the entire gallery-museum-journalism system. Numerous artists of this persuasion left the galleries and studios to produce their art in dance-halls and restaurants, in the forest, the desert and the street. But, ironically, the heartfelt opposition to élitism which prompted many of these artists succeeded in producing even more élitist art. When Walter de Maria draws mile-long chalk lines in the Mojave Desert and Michael Heizer displaces 200,000 tons of the Virgin River Mesa, Nevada (37), it is often thought that they are trying to subvert the establishment while simply moving the gallery or museum out of doors, thereby increasing the size of the showplace but pitifully reducing the size of the audience. A common reaction is: how many people can hire a helicopter to look at a line in the desert or a cut in the rock? However, the majestic visual power of such remote works can be felt in one’s imagination from published descriptions and photographs. What is sometimes interpreted as the artist’s arrogance towards nature is more than matched by that of the patron (‘collector’, as he is designated in several publications illustrating these and other earthworks). In 1969 Robert Scull stated, ‘I’ve collected art for the last ten years because I love it and I want to own it. It ennobled me and my surroundings. But things have changed with the discovery of Heizer’s work. My walls used to be my gallery. Now the vast open spaces have become my gallery.’
Although Carl Andre's own 'post-studio' art (his term) has seldom taken the form of earthworks (a notable exception was the 580 foot long Joint, made up of 183 bales of hay), his concept of 'sculpture as place' is one of the roots of earth art. Andre defined place as 'an area within an environment, which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous. Everything is an environment, but a place is related particularly to both the general qualities of the environment and the particular qualities of the work which has been done.' So 'sculpture as place' (which is to say the art object as place) means what happens to the environment out there when the artist does something to part of it. The conditions of the specific location determine, or at the very least strongly affect, the choice and placement of materials; there would be no work without the place.

Within such a concept, it was an easy step from the studio and gallery location to the outdoor site. Moreover, the boldly simplified, unambiguous, monumentally scaled structures of the minimalists called for an outdoor location. As Dennis Oppenheim said, 'Minimal art made people look at minimal forms. The best minimal forms were outside the gallery.' Earth art is also related to the way in which Andre, Oldenburg, Judd and Morris among others had, in the early '60s, placed their boldly simplified, unambiguous sculptures directly on the floor. Especially prophetic were Andre's separated identical units laid down in a lateral extension, hugging the ground like a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Andre says, 'All I am doing is putting Brancusi's Endless Column on the ground instead of in the air.' But that change from a predominantly upward thrust to a flat, horizontal extension is highly significant in its cultural as well as aesthetic implications — a levelling-down tendency.

Earth works constitute one phase of the broader category of process art. In such examples as Richard Long's removal of daisy heads to form a twenty-foot long cross in a meadow, called England, 1968, and Jan Dibbets's 6 x 6 foot turf shaped into a Grass Roll, 1967, process becomes the art object. Robert Morris, one of the initiators in the States of the open, indeterminate kind of work which first earned the 'process' designation, wrote of 'making process not behind the scenes but the very substance of the work'. A factor of major importance in process art is the role played by gravity, whether it be in materials with no fixed form of their own, such as vinyl, rope, latex and chicken-wire as used by such artists as Oldenburg, Eva Hesse, Robert Rohm and Bruce Nauman, or whether it be in solid materials such as lead, steel and wood. Gravity and process combine dramatically in Richard Serra's powerful, monumentally scaled works of flung or precariously balanced lead and of huge California logs positioned as they fell during the act of sawing, as in Log Measure: Sawing Five Fir Trees. Although Robert Morris is particularly identified with cut-felt sculpture, Richard Serra and Alan Saret had also made pieces in similar spineless materials (leather and rubber) in 1967; and Joseph Beuys, whose work Morris saw in Germany, had used felt several years earlier, but most often...
as corner pieces or to cover objects, not to hang like paintings, as Morris's did at first. The process of the felt's cutting and the way it takes its own form in the hanging and changes from one state to another are the very 'substance of the work'; it, like the process of picking the heads off the daisies, or the dye changing the waters of the Caribbean to magenta in a work by Dennis Oppenheim, is the object itself.

In some respects, earth art is both conceptual and perceptual, that is, it is perceptual for the person(s) actually doing it or seeing it; but for the rest of us it can only exist in our minds -- unless the experience is shared graphically, as is certainly the case with Robert Smithson's extraordinarily evocative film, a work of art in its own right, about the Spiral Jetty (42) which he built out into the Great Salt Lake, Utah. As the record of a spectacularly beautiful event, it would be difficult to surpass the film made of Christo raising his 200,000 square foot, bright orange Valley Curtain (43) across a 1,250 foot span at Rifle, Colorado. The art object was not the curtain, but the process, the event and the preparation for it and in fact the entire history of it, so that the ordinary activities of many persons become part of the art object. Christo makes his art of their daily life; the film makes this concept clear and involves the spectator emotively.

Most of the time, however, the photographs or films are only documentary evidence and in no sense works of art themselves, although they are too frequently so misapprehended when they are framed, exhibited and sold. This, like many other troubling discrepancies between the artists' stance and reality, results from the brute fact that, for the artist to live, money has to change hands somehow, although there have been several noble attempts to circumvent that problem. Among the few successful solutions are Tom Marioni's Museum of Conceptual Art, for several years operating on a shoe-string in a bare loft in San Francisco, where art-minded people can meet and talk and occasionally give performances; the numerous activities of Seth Siegelaub, a non-dealing dealer organizing non-exhibited exhibitions, like his 1969 One Month, for which he assigned a specific date in March to each of 31 artists whom he invited to send him verbal information regarding the 'work' they planned to 'contribute' to the exhibition, their replies, or blank pages for the non-replies, being published as the catalogue; or John Gibson's efforts to help artists realize their earth or other grand projects by trying to get commissions from collectors or patrons. The Fernschgalerie Gerry Schum, Cologne, which commissions artists' films for German television, frankly admits the financial problem and their solution to it. Schum explained in 1969: 'The TV gallery exists only in a series of transmissions. . . . One of our ideas is communication of art instead of possession of art objects. . . . This conception made it necessary to find a new system to pay the artists and to cover the expenses for the realization of art projects for the TV show. Our solution is that we sell the right of publication, a kind of copyright, to the TV station.' As Lucy Lippard pointed out, the Art & Project 'gallery', Amsterdam, is usually just its Bulletin.
In spite of these and other interesting attempts to bypass it, the traditional kind of gallery arrangement remains the most viable one for most artists. It has even served as the subject of several conceptual works, among them Walter de Maria's piece consisting of photographs of six dealers, and three adjectives describing each of them, together with this statement, 'My Dealers The following six people have represented me and my work to the outside world in the ten years of my professional career. Richard Bellamy, Paula Cooper, Arne Ekstrom, Nicholas Wilder, Heiner Friedrich, Virginia Dwan. I would like to thank them, for our past association and for representing me here, for I do not like to be photographed.' Does one reject the gallery system by embracing it fully, by making dealing itself the subject and the object? Is it an ironical gesture, or a straight acknowledgment of the system, or a clever idea for a work? Since dealers 'represent' an artist, why not have them literally represent him or her? De Maria does not show his physical appearance, but he reveals other aspects of his person in his relationship with his dealers and in his personal interpretation and reactions to them, as evidenced in his three-word characterizations of them. The extremely varied and significant role played by the major contemporary dealers, not only economically but in every aspect of the artist's relation to his public (and even to himself as an artist in extreme cases), needs the attention of a just, sensitive and totally disinterested historian. Perhaps the curator's role should also be evaluated, particularly when, as sometimes happens, it almost seems as though vanity had been the motivation. This results most probably from the difficulty of striking a balance between a fresh, stimulating show and one wherein the exhibition itself becomes the art object; the curator, the artist; and the exhibited works, the material.

The severely criticized gallery and museum establishment is not about to crumble when it is still being used by several of the strictest conceptual artists, i.e. the art-language group — those who insist that art is not visual; it is idea, information. But why, if art is not something to be looked at, do they put their words, too often boring, ill-digested liftings from currently fashionable philosophy or sociology, on exhibition in museums and galleries? Is it because the idea, like Duchamp's shovel, cannot be art outside the art context? Lawrence Weiner declared, 'I don't see how you can differentiate poetry from art without the proper information. First you might see it as a poem, but with the correct information, you would accept it as it is intended.' In the words of Joseph Kosuth, American editor of Art-Language:

In so far as visual experiences, indeed aesthetic experiences, are capable of existence separate from the art, the condition of art in aesthetic or formalist art is exactly that discussion or consideration of concepts as examined in the functioning of a particular predicate in an art proposition. To restate: the only possible functioning as art aesthetic painting or sculpture is capable of, is the engagement or inquiry around its presentation within an art proposition.
Without the discussion it is 'experience' pure and simple. It only becomes 'art' when it is brought within the realm of an art context (like any other material used within art). Douglas Huebler's succinct statement, 'The world is full of objects, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more,' could be paraphrased, 'The world is full of information, more or less interesting; so why add any more?' Often information is given straight like a weather report (with the difference that almost everybody has some personal interest in the weather) or words are used to show how words are used, disdaining what they are used for. Much linguistic-based art is about how we think, not what we think, about how we perceive, not what we perceive. Victor Bürgin says, 'Some recent art... has tended to take its essential form in message rather than in materials;' however, it seems to me that these artists are interested in materials. They are interested in the words which are their materials, but not in words as physical entities (the way 'sonorous', for example, sounds full-bodied and reverberating), nor in words as conductors of emotional, associational responses (e.g. the way D. H. Lawrence uses 'dark'), but in the way words function. Once more, the art object is process. Bürgin himself says:

Perception is a continuum, a precipitation of event fragments decaying in time, above all a process. Vertical structuring, based in hermetic, historically given concepts of art and its cultural role, has given way to a laterally proliferating complex of activities that are united only in their common definition as products of artistic behavior. This situation in art is the corollary of a general reduction in the credibility of institutions.

In the light of such ideas, it is behind the times to persist in looking for the avant-garde, as many critics still do. The whole idea of 'advancing' belongs to a more optimistic age. Modern man is a sandcrab, moving sideways instead of straight ahead; he doesn't advance, he shifts.

Certainly not all conceptual art in which the object has become language or information or theory is dry pedagogy. The work of such artists as Hans Haacke, John Baldessari, Steve Kaltenbach (44), Daniel Buren, Iain Baxter, Robert Barry, Agnes Denes and Lawrence Weiner, for example, does not merit Carl Andre's condemnation, 'If abstract art is art as its own content, then conceptual art is pure content without art.' While conceptual art is truly abstraction (a concept is without physicality), it may deal with, imply or evoke physical facts, sensations, states, which may be more or less visually oriented. Some of the best of it is almost as rigorous in rejecting everything that is not art, and as totally dedicated to what is art, as Ad Reinhardt was - surely one of the greatest conceptual artists, avant la lettre.

Robert Barry declares, 'In my work the language itself isn't the art... I use language as a sign to indicate that there is art, the direction in which the art is, and to prepare someone for the art... Art is about man himself... It is about
myself, about the world around me. And it is also about things that I don’t know, about using the unknown.’ 39 Much conceptual art supports Bochner’s contention that ‘... it remains specifically impossible to abandon visibility, to speak, as it were, only with the mental voice.’ 40 The fact that it is equally impossible to separate oneself from one’s body is the basis of the large branch of conceptual art known as performance or body sculpture.

Although all of Yves Klein’s work antedates the use of any such terms, most of it underscores the conceptual orientation of subsequent body/performance art. His Anthropometries (45) presented in Paris in 1960 combined advanced advanced music and a happening to make a painting on canvas. While twenty musicians played his Monotone Symphony, three nude females smeared their bodies with paint and rolled or dragged each other or pressed themselves upon the canvas, as directed by the artist. As Manet’s Déjeuner sur l’herbe had done, Anthropometries takes a traditional theme and genre—a monumental nude composition in oil paint—and puts it into a contemporary, shockingly actual life situation. Klein’s body performance action painting comments upon, while it demonstrates, the action painter’s non-traditional materials, methods and tools (here a ‘living brush’), the commitment to gesture and ritual, the physical involvement and existential identification with the act of painting on a conceptual level (he only directed the nudes to paint his Anthropometries; no paint touched his own elegantly clad body). The conceptual bent of Klein’s art was signalized a dozen years before when he is said to have ‘signed’ his name to the sky as his part of the world, which he, Arman and Pascal divided among themselves. In 1959 Klein lectured at the Sorbonne on ‘The Evolution of Art Toward the Immaterial’ and released his first ‘immaterial pictorial sensitivity zones’, throwing into the Seine the gold leaf purchased by the buyer, who simultaneously burns his receipt for ‘the material value correspondent to the immaterial acquired’. Through ‘this act of integration of the work with himself’, the spectator (‘the buyer’) becomes an essential part of the art object.41 In 1960 Klein published his Journal d’un seul jour, illustrated by a photograph of himself (again in evening clothes) jumping from the second floor of a building and flying out over the street, with the caption, ‘Le peintre de l’espace se jette dans le vide’.42 The Italian Piero Manzoni, like Klein, devised work of prophetic import within a tragically short lifetime, especially in such proclamation type gestures (both from 1961) as exhibiting a can labelled, and professedly containing, ‘Artist’s Shit’, and signing his name on a nude body, thus making ‘living sculpture’.

Comparable concerns motivated the work of a good many artists during the 1960s and early ’70s. Curiously, the more global-minded one became in political and social sympathies throughout that period, the more one sought to develop awareness of one’s own individual self and to explore every nuance of one’s personal experience. The artist—his body, his activity, his thoughts, his perceptions, his relation to society, to the spectator, the dealer, etc.—become the art object. Such works range from Bruce Nauman’s sculptures cast from parts of his
body, such as his *From Hand to Mouth* (104), recalling Jasper Johns’s *Target with Plaster Casts* (46), and his corridors altering one’s physical and aural perceptions of space, and Morris’s key work, the 1963 *I-Box* (47) whose door is shaped like an I, which when opened reveals a photograph of the artist’s nude body, to Vito Acconci’s *Seed Bed*, 1973, wherein the spectator walks on a raised section of the floor, knowing (or being told) that underneath his feet, the hidden artist is masturbating – an extreme example of the artist’s relation to the spectator becoming the art object.

Most of Acconci’s other work and a great deal of body sculpture or performance art altogether involves self-violence: Terry Fox’s *Cellar Event*, in which he smashed a burning light-bulb and broke the windows with a knife while the flying glass cut his face and wrist; Barry le Va’s *Velocity Piece* (the artist rushing back and forth across a room, hurling his bleeding body against the wall for as long as he could move – 1 hour and 43 minutes); Chris Burden’s *Movie on the Way Down* (an unforgettable image lasting only 1 ½ minutes, of the artist’s nude body hanging upside down from a rope tied to his feet, holding in his hands a movie camera, photographing the process even as he crashed to the floor when the rope was cut by someone hidden in the high rafters; 48). But the ultimate in self-mutilation was Rudolf Schwarzkogler’s amputating his own penis inch by inch, one of several such acts transgressing the line between art and madness which led to his death at the age of twenty-nine.

In a more pleasant vein, the ritual of eating and drinking has been the object of many performance pieces from Spoerri’s dinners served at the ‘Restaurant de la Galerie J’ in 1963 to Tom Marioni’s solitary drinking of a case of beer. The latter, and the majority of performance works, are either recorded, i.e. documented, on film or actually executed as film or videotape art. There is an enormous amount of work done in this category, ranging from Dan Graham’s works in which, as he says, ‘The camera may or may not be read as extension of the body (‘s identity)’, to William Wegman’s deadpan, witty and lovable photographs and videotapes with his dog, *Man Ray* (49). Graham describes his *Two Correlated Rotations*, 1969:

Two performers/filmmakers hold their cameras so viewfinders are direct extensions of their eye and visual fields. They walk in a counter-spiral to each other, the outside performer moving outward while the other walks inside towards the center. . . . The two films are projected simultaneously at right angles to each other. . . . The spectator rotates his neck to see frontally one or the other image. . . . The filmmakers are, to the spectator’s apprehension of the projected images, each other’s subjects (observed) as they are simultaneously each other’s objects (observers). . . . The spectator is part of a three-way relation between the attention of the performers and the attention of his perception.43
Speaking of his dog, Wegman says:

In a way he's like an object. You can look at him and say, how am I going to use you, whereas you can't with a person... Maybe I was always trying to animate objects, maybe I wanted to make them come to life in some way in my work. And Man Ray already had that tension, that potential of becoming more than he was... Once I thought I heard him say, 'Will you be needing me today, Bill?'

Man Ray is like an extension of Wegman's own totally engaging self.

But in regard to the art object as the artist's self, Andy Warhol (50) remains the prime example. In the 1960s, in his glittering Factory perfumed by all the beautiful flowers surrounding him, he became an art object of mythic proportions. Probably no other artist's studio activities have been made so public, and yet we know more about even Mondrian's interior world than we do about Warhol's. The reason is that 'Andy Warhol' is a carefully planned and executed aesthetic entity, and the very secrecy about the real Andy Warhol is a major factor in it, even though it may be partly unconscious (he was the way he is long before the image was established). Making the artist's life the art object is not an unexpected development when one remembers how the artist's biography is just as effective as monetary value in drawing crowds to van Gogh, Gauguin and Rembrandt exhibitions. Moreover, Andy Warhol, his films, the live performances of the Velvet Underground and his entire entourage vividly expressed the attractive decadence and other not altogether negative values of the '60s drug and rock scene. One should also realize that Warhol has always been a movie addict, and his unquestioned importance as an innovator rests in his films and silk-screen paintings (29). Both are two-dimensional image arts; and both are second-hand images made in large part by a machine 'interfered with' as little as possible by the artist. Irony abounds: making films with no editing or writing a novel, simply by recording conversation in the Factory, should, on the face of it, be very real. But how real is that isolated life, and who goes around looking exclusively at sections of a sleeping man's body for eight or more hours? What studied artistry in that concentration! Violent death in motor accidents (29), or the electric chair, or by suicide, becomes unreal by repeating over and over again, often in artificial colours, the silk-screen print of a newspaper photograph; they are thrice removed from reality. Warhol remarked once, a good many years ago, that he used to be afraid of death, but seeing it repeated all the time made it unimportant. (Since the attempt on his life in 1968, however, his attitude has changed: 'Having been dead once, I shouldn't feel fear. But I am afraid. I don't understand why.') To a generation brought up on films and television, has reality become confused with the picture of it? Fed constantly on the endlessly duplicated, multiplied image of reality, is it surprising that an artist should take his cue from the reflections or shadow of a thing, rather than its substance? The fact that someone else now makes Warhol's films, just as a
stand-in has often made his public appearances, adds a conclusive touch to the masterful Warhol art object.

The way Andy Warhol lives his life becomes the art object; with the sculptors Gilbert and George, the reverse is the case: they become the art object and live its life (51). They actually are singing, walking, sitting, dancing, drinking sculptures. They carry the self-identifying implications of van Gogh's and Pollock's art to an extreme realization; but they do so with the nostalgic grace and purity of a Watteau painting come to life.

At the opening of Dokumenta 5 in 1972, Joseph Beuys, the German counterpart of France's Yves Klein in terms of germinal importance, sat, wearing the battered old felt hat that has become something of himself, signing his name to plastic bags imprinted with one of his social-democratic manifestos. He was just as much a work of art as Duane Hanson's disorientatingly convincing trompe-l'œil sculpture, Artist with Ladder (52), exhibited in another part of the show. Beuys has ever more sharply focused his efforts onto two phases of his richly varied creativity: his teaching and his democratic political activism, which ultimately become fused into the single object which his dedication constitutes. In 1969 he declared, 'To be a teacher is my greatest work of art . . . Man really is not free in many respects. He is dependent on his social circumstances, but he is free in his thinking, and here is the point of origin of sculpture . . . My theory depends on the fact that every human being is an artist. I have to encounter him when he is free, when he is thinking.' Art is one of the last strongholds of freedom. It offers us freedom — and we give it so little.

Beuys's activity exemplifies in part a final major branch of conceptual art, namely, that based on a variety of systems - biological, political, economic, social or mathematical. In the late eighteenth century, on the threshold of the modern age, Wright of Derby painted scientific demonstrations; now such demonstrations are exhibited as the art work (for example, Alan Sonfist's birds moving in response to the changes of heat and air currents, or Newton Harrison's extremely complex Survival Pieces (53, 54), including the Portable Fish Farm which caused such an outcry when it was shown at the Hayward Gallery in London together with other Los Angeles art in 1971). When the intermediate stage, i.e. the painting of the phenomenon, is eliminated, the subject becomes object. Such is also the case with Athena Tacha's 1968–9 Phaenomena sculptures (55) and subsequent films which include Burning, Specific Gravity 1.18, Dripping, etc. She as well as several other artists take their point of departure and, in Hans Haacke's case, even form and content, from sociology and its key tool, the questionnaire. Another of the several artists who have made works in the questionnaire format is Agnes Denes, whose art (56) based on a wide spectrum of science - biology, physics, astronomy, chemistry, psychology - is extraordinarily ambitious and sometimes, curiously, almost mystical. Using the idea of advertising because, as he said, he 'wanted to become a legend', Stephen Kaltenbach put ads in Artforum like 'Build a Reputation', 'Tell a Lie'.

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But it is the mathematical branch of systems as the art object which has probably attracted most proponents, including Mel Bochner, in such demonstration pieces as *Meditation on the Theorem of Pythagoras* (57), and Sol LeWitt, who is generally regarded as the first master of conceptual art. His sculptures (almost exclusively white) which are constructed in sets running through numerous permutations in the placement of the same or similar elements, such as *Part Variations on 3 Different Kinds of Cubes* (58), are rigorously intellectual, but at the same time strangely sensuous and even touching in their austere purity. His *Paragraphs* (1967) and *Sentences* (1969) on Conceptual Art, which are almost as revered as Duchamp’s dicta, likewise deal in contradiction: ‘Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach. . . . If words are used, and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature.’ From this last statement, one would hardly expect the following, ‘These sentences comment on art, but are not art.’ While LeWitt says, ‘Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical,’ he surely would also agree with Robert Smithson’s statement, ‘There is no escape from matter. There is no escape from the physical nor is there any escape from the mind. The two are in a constant collision course.’ The impact of that collision is felt in the work of all modern artists from Cézanne to Bochner, however varied their attitude toward the object.
33 Meret Oppenheim \textit{Objet (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)} 1936

34 Joseph Cornell \textit{Taglioni's Jewel Casket} 1940
JOSEPH BEUYS How to Explain Paintings to a Dead Hare 1965

ELEANOR ANTIN 100 Boots Enter the Museum 1973
38 Richard Long England 1968

39 Claes Oldenburg Soft Ladder, Hammer, Saw and Bucket 1967
40 Richard Serra Log Measure: Sawing Five Fir Trees 1970

41 Eva Hesse Right After 1969
44  Steve Kaltenbach  Personal Appearance: Eye-disguise 1969

45  Yves Klein  Anthropometries 1960
46 Jasper Johns Target with Plaster Casts 1955

47 Robert Morris I-Box 1963

48 Chris Burden
Movie on the Way Down 1973
53  NEWTON HARRISON Portable Orchard: Survival Piece No. 5 1972

54  NEWTON HARRISON Drawing for Portable Orchard 1972
Athena Tacha: Dripping 1969

57  Mel Bochner  Meditation on the Theorem of Pythagoras  1972

58  Sol LeWitt 49 3-part Variations on 3 Different Kinds of Cubes  1968