

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW FORMALISM?

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ABSTRACT

A body of work produced by artists and characterized by absence appeared in art magazines and galleries in the sixties and early seventies after which it almost completely dried out. Often impermanent, usually devoid of clearly defined boundaries, these works appeared to lack feeling, and form. They seemed to bear little relation to my concept of an Art Symbol.

However, I thought that these works might be setting up a new kind of Art Symbol, whose tensions and contrasts were elicited by clues not necessarily related to the plastic language. In short, I searched in these nonvisual works for a new formalism in which form had been redefined and was largely unrelated to the immediate contrasts in tangible or perceivable forms.

But while many of the works seemed to preach the redefinition of form, none really carried this out. The former components of the Art Symbol had indeed been eliminated. Many of the works had constructions of signs and symptoms but did not add up to symbols. Almost none conveyed a rich sense of experience.

However, a new art form was proposed, interweaving discursiveness and plastic elements.

The emergence of a new
formalism by Henry Lehmann

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INTRODUCTION

Recently I have become aware of some strange things appearing in the guise of art. These "things" either appeared in the art magazines which I follow, or occasionally, in galleries that I frequent. Nineteen sixty nine was the year when it seemed apparent to me that something - perhaps a new aesthetic - was coming into being. That these strange objects were not just a few offbeat, isolated examples was obvious from the frequency and consistency with which such objects were being shown or documented in art magazines. (I consulted four art periodicals which carried such work in nearly every issue.)

The work in question - this new "art" - was characterized by the display of photographs, maps, diagrams, and turned on tape recorders. There were such things as photographs of men wrapping up a building in plastic or a bird's eye view of excavated mud in the shallows of a bay. Often what I saw in galleries seemed to be there merely to explain how to do something, or it informed me on some thing or state that is, was, or could be. This "information" often dealt with processes. In the face of this new "art" I found myself wondering whether I was the victim of a hoax, or whether I was bearing witness to the emergence of a new art.

I began to examine more closely many examples of these new appearances. I noticed that a large amount of the work had been executed in the out-of-doors. Instead of producing clearly discernable art objects, certain artists were simply intervening in the environment. It was as though some artists - Ian Baxter and Les Levine among them - merely wished to leave a kind of personal signature on nature.

Other artists seemed to be using their bodies rather than a shovel to make their mark. There were images of prostrate artists making their bodies conform to the lay of the land. Occasionally the viewer was asked to observe an artist or the near immobile image of an artist on videotape. The human form became a point of reference. There were instances in which not even the human body was present; some artists merely documented their identification cards. It was as though certain artists were attempting to reduce the psychology or the physiognomy of a person down to an unsentient point. Other artists created "works" that were entirely invisible; in his "Inert Gas Series" in the Mojave Desert in 1969, Robert Barry released gas into the air and photographed it.¹ And there were events in which an artist would bring nature indoors. For instance, Hans Haacke incubated chickens and had them hatch in a gallery space.²

It was the apparent strangeness of things such as these that caused me to consider my expectations concerning art. These strange objects seemed to be knocking ideas, or definitions, which I had been taking for granted.

Clearly these strange objects were not meeting some criteria or concepts I had concerning art. Perhaps through examining this mismatch of expectations to reality I could clarify my thoughts on art but also examine and confront certain prejudices I might harbour.

I began delving into other people's criteria - what was it that they liked, what criteria did an object have to fulfill in order to be classified "art"? I read some works on aesthetics and the philosophy of art, seeking to objectify or form my own expectations, and I tentatively

began establishing some guidelines for myself. For example, I found that like Suzanne Langer, I sought a special kind of form known as the Art Symbol.³ And like Collingwood, I thought that art expressed feeling and emotion through total imaginative activity.⁴

After declaring as much as possible my expectations I returned to the strange objects. These I had classified according to theme. Presentation of Act or Process (direct intervention into ecology), Presentation of Act or Process (self-occluded natural systems, alive in parenthesis), Documentation of Object or Being - these are among the categories that I set up.

From all my material, I sorted out a few works that seemed to be the strongest examples in each category. I then set out to discuss each piece in relation to my expectations. The results and my opinions are summed up in the conclusion.

Thus my task was the following: 1) to define my expectations in terms of a set of clearly enumerated criteria. I wanted to know what basically must pass across my retina for it to be art. I would simply make statements which I felt applied to most art objects. 2) To choose some work for scrutiny and comparison. These works would consist of the "strange" objects. Since I was first aware of this "strangeness" in 1969, the beginning of that year became the left hand parenthesis for the body of work which I would analyze. Nineteen seventy one constituted a more arbitrary cut off point. I would observe all works in that period which seemed to lack something for me and which were written about, appeared in, or were documented by the following magazines which largely constitute my window on the arts: Vie des Arts, Art News, Studio International, and

Arts Canada. Therefore, my subject matter would have particular geographic focus, but could conceivably emerge anywhere in the world.

- 3) To break the strange work down into categories based on general themes.
- 4) To match these works with my expectations. 5) To draw conclusions concerning the works and my expectations. 6) To speculate on the direction art may be taking from here.

This is a personal thesis in that it ultimately relies upon my own attitudes toward art and its development.

I believe that art teachers should be aware of current directions in art. These directions may seem ugly to some, but they reflect aspects of society and art that cannot simply be blotted out. We may ultimately reject the new forms, but people who wish to teach art should not reject them out of hand.

I believe that as an art teacher, it is my job to explain and bring to light changes in the environment - art is part of that environment. Since art is an intangible concept with no clearcut definitions, my explanations have taken the form of an organized, personal voyage into the components of what I have called the "Art Symbol". This thesis is, also - and perhaps primarily - a journal of my experiences and observations along the way.

CHAPTER I

EXPECTATIONS

SOME STATEMENTS CONCERNING ART AND ITS PROPERTIES

~~There is~~ no ironclad definition for art. "... there can be no clear-cut cases of art in quite the same sense as there can be clear-cut cases of tables, chairs, and so forth."⁵ Yet, there are objects I accept as "art" and others which I simply reject as art. I accept a drawing by Rembrandt, sometimes I may even accept a child's scribbles or an object made from found objects by Picasso.

Recently, as mentioned in the introduction, there have appeared on the art scene - in galleries and reproduced in art magazines - objects which struck me as being of dubious citizenship. For some viewers it is perhaps sufficient that these works are presented in "art contexts." That special location transforms the otherwise strange objects into "art." At this point I am not ready to accept the context of gallery or magazine alone as a sure "certifier" of something as having the status of art.

I have set out to discover or uncover - in a sense to clarify and objectify - some qualities which for me indicate an art object. It must be clear that when I employ the word art it is not in the evaluative sense ("That filling by a dentist is a real work of art!"), but rather in the classificatory sense. Though, as earlier stated, I do not believe that there is anything near a strict definition of art, I do suspect that there is a varied set or group of characteristics without which an object stands little chance of becoming or being understood as a work of art.

"... certain [paradigm] cases can be given, about which there can be no question as to their being correctly described as 'art' ... but no exhaustive set of cases can be given. I can list some cases and some conditions under which I can apply correctly the concept of art, but I cannot list all of them for the all-important reason that unforeseeable or novel conditions are always forthcoming or envisageable."⁶

What I wish to attempt in this chapter is to list the "cases" and "conditions" which apply for me - in other words my expectations. It remains a mystery to me how certain otherwise inanimate objects "light up" and come into special focus or relation with the viewer. I do not think that this awe for the way certain objects "separate" from their environment - their surroundings and the continuum of ordinary, barely noticed things - is unique to me. Why is it that in looking at certain objects or even flat surfaces we have the ability to erase real life, even our own otherwise visible reflections in the protective glass over a drawing?

I assume that the conditions and properties which for me seem to be requisites for an object being art are coloured by prevailing taste and fashion. So whatever concept I develop should be an open one, for taste is a highly unpredictable element. "An open concept is open if its conditions of application are amendable and corrigible, i.e., if a situation or case can be imagined or secured which would call for some sort of decision on our part to extend the use of the concept to cover this, or to close the concept and invent a new one to deal with the new case and its new property."⁷

It is my hope that by carefully examining some of the "strange" un-art

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objects currently emerging on the art scene, I will be compelled to clarify and declare my concepts and prejudices concerning the nature of art. Once having clarified my expectations, I may be able to observe the new objects more clearly; at the same time, these objects may force me to be more keenly aware of what it is I really think constitutes an art work.

The following is a discussion of various concepts which I believe enter significantly into the concept of art.

Art Symbol

I believe that a work of art is an Art Symbol. A symbol is a component of experience that elicits other components of experience. Art is an Art Symbol because it conveys some kind of meaning. However, this meaning is not the kind of meaning conveyed in a proposition; it's not meaning such as that involved in the solution of a problem. An Art Symbol is not a true-false proposition. "The work as a whole is the image of feeling."⁸ And "Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling."⁹

The Art Symbol does not seem to confront one with a problem demanding to be solved. When it comes into view it could be said to "come to life." It does not appear as a statement and "... it does something different from leading to an experience. It constitutes one ... art is an immediate realization of intent."¹⁰ "... assertions are true or false, and their adequacy has to be taken for granted before we can judge them as assertions at all. They are always debatable and may be tested for their truth - values by the nature of their inexplicable consequences. Art on the other hand, has no consequences; it gives form to something that is simply there; as the intuitive organizing functions of sense give form to objects and spaces, color and sound."¹¹

For example, let us say I am viewing a piece by Joseph Turner, the well-known "Steamer in a Snowstorm."¹² I may be interested in this work's background, its relation to an industrializing 19th century world, which seemed bent upon controlling nature's forces. I might even wish to know what kind or make of steamer Turner had thought of when creating this work. And I might wonder if this painting were based on real life experience. Yet, the answers to these queries in no way alter the work; this painting does not ask to be verified - whether such a scene ever existed is of no importance. Whether the boat is inaccurate has no bearing upon our experience of the work. It does not matter whether we think this painting is a true or false image of reality. We may, however, either like it or dislike it

The work constitutes an experience. We do not "read" the sky, all the while wondering if there are hints in the air of a storm. The vortex of brushwork seems to be the experience, we need not even know that this work depicts a ship caught in powerful cross-currents of Nature. In fact, the work does not tell us about anything. We do not study the Art Symbol to learn of climactic conditions or styles in ships; instead we directly absorb an event which is the Art Symbol.

Artists and art teachers are often heard to say things such as ". . . that painting breathes," "it has life." Pepper often speaks of Art Symbols in terms of "vigor."¹³ Yet it is common knowledge that most paintings are inanimate and made from inert materials.

To begin with, let's simply say that an Art Symbol is characterized by a very special kind of life. Clive Bell has referred to it as "significant form."¹⁴

In order to have an Art Symbol, there must be an object, a form, at which we may look. But, we wonder to what extent an Art Symbol is congruent with form. It is easy to accept that the rear of a canvas is not the Art Symbol, it is perhaps less clear that the picture side of the painting itself may not be the whole of the Art Symbol.

Imagine that we are standing in front of a stretched canvas. In one corner we observe a small, square painting with two of its sides at the edge of the canvas; the rest of the canvas, which is raw, has the shape of an L. In such a case, we might immediately pick out the small painted area as the Art Symbol. Or, perhaps the whole canvas could be viewed as a work involving texture. Or, the whole situation could become confusing - with the little inset vying with the whole for recognition as the Art Symbol.

So we ask, "what is the form of this work, and what is the Art Symbol?" Perhaps the raw areas are not part of the Art Symbol. They are form but not somehow sentient or alive enough to be seen as that special kind of form, the Art Symbol. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary gives the following as its first definition of form: "1a: the shape or structure of something as distinguished from its material." So I believe that an Art Symbol must have form, but now we wonder, "what is the relation of that special form - the Art Symbol - to form?"¹⁵ If only the small painting is an Art Symbol, what does its zone have that the raw canvas areas do not have?

An art object before it enters into relation with a viewer is, at least in part, a tangible, visible entity. The Art Symbol is not a miracle which comes as some kind of disembodied essence. It is rooted in existence,

just as the little painting in the corner of a larger canvas. There must be form before there can be - or emerge - an Art Symbol. Form may be the visible surface of objects or matter, it may also be shape, tangible, or perceived as a square painted upon a canvas. But if a form cannot be brought into the viewer's attention or if it has no clearly defined edges, then there can be no Art Symbol. And for a form to become wholly or in part an Art Symbol, then that form, or some smaller form within that form, must have clearly defined edges or contours. The Art Symbol is a totality - an experience - whose "edge" seems to go through the viewer's mind and also be partially defined by form. The Art Symbol inheres in a clearly defined form. I imagine it as a beam shining upon a canvas. The beam is more than just the canvas, but the beam's shape is congruent with that canvas or a shape within it.

Imagine being shown a rectangular painting with an edge extending out of sight into a closet. Here an Art-Symbol could not occur. Or recall once again the little painting within a larger canvas ground; let us say we cannot decide upon the contours of the actual art work. We try to look at the painted area but the large raw canvas surfaces come into view; we try to look at the whole as a work of art, but our eyes continually stray back to the little painted area. In such a case the viewer is too distracted; though there are in fact shapes and forms, not one of them can come into sufficiently intense focus and no Art Symbol can emerge.

Form itself refers to surface as well as shape; it is usually but not always tangible. It is tangible in the case of lines of force which the spectator projects upon a surface. It is always palpable in the sense that though it may not always be embodied in physical matter, it is accessible

to our senses and not merely imagined.

In the example of a painted square within a rectangular canvas, form can be applied to many things; the rectangular shape of the canvas designates a form, the little painted area is a form. The little painting itself may contain forms. For me, form is clearly defined, but it need not exist physically in a work of art. It need only be perceived - form is a shape received or constructed by the eye's retina.

Expression

Earlier I mentioned that the Art Symbol is a symbol because it conveys meaning. But this meaning is of a very distinct nature. This meaning is not static, it seems to be a dynamic/action. Expression in varying degrees encompasses artist, object, and viewer. The Art Symbol does not independently say something; after all, it's a dead object. It only appears to independently speak. It seems to enter into a special relation with viewer. A naval flag may express something, but for it to have meaning, the viewer must be familiar with a code - or set of interpretations - separate from it; words are somewhat like this. To say "I had a dreadful Experience" is to describe rather than express an emotion in the way art expresses emotion.

On the other hand - and this I believe is what makes the Art Symbol unique - meaning (expression) and symbol seem to be fused together. Thus there is no way to "verify" a work of art (the flags might become art symbols if we simply enjoyed their designs).

Of course many works of art adhere in part to codes - those works of art could be said to have literary content. However, it is a mistake - one

all too often made by self-styled connoisseurs of art - to think that one "reads" a painting. A work presents itself directly, there is no concrete explanation for what it expresses. Looking at a work by Poussin is greatly enhanced if one has a working knowledge of Greek legend; medieval Italian art is fraught with religious iconography.

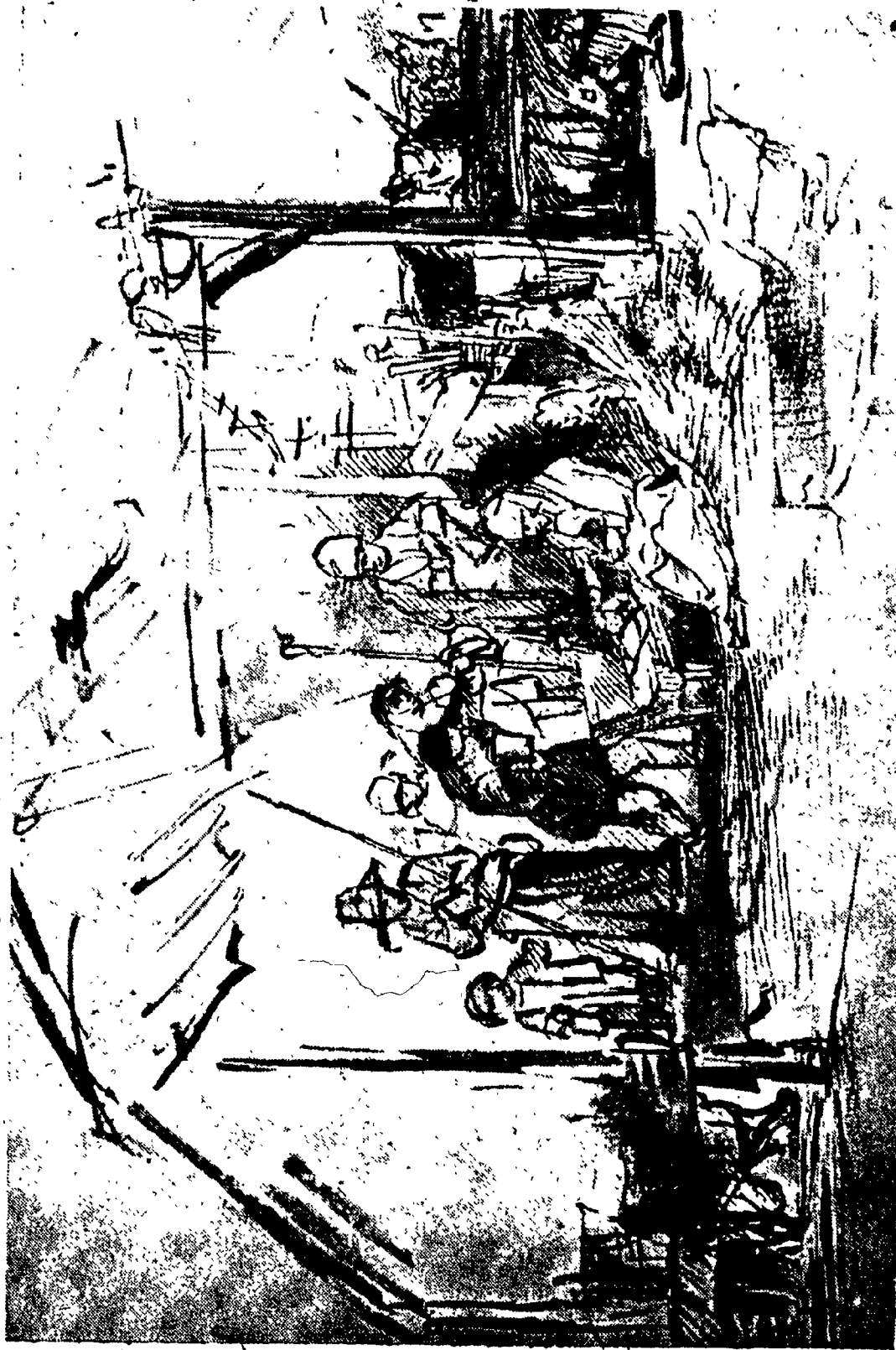
But for me any work of art seems to "begin" to live - to take root in me - on a different, perhaps lower stratum, below the level where one begins to interpret.

For example, I look at a pen and bistre wash drawing by Rembrandt in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (see Plate I). This work is entitled "The Adoration of the Shepherds" and obviously "tells" a religious story.¹⁶ Yet, what strikes me immediately - what brings it to "life" - is the sensuous play of line and shading themselves and in their mutual relations.

There is a sense of tension toward the centre of the work. Grey shapes pinned down by rows of parallel lines lurk near the picture's centre. These parallel lines seem at odds with thicker, grey lines pushing upward, their strong trajectories breaking at certain points. These are echoed - in a sense reinforced - by tall, straight verticals closer to the left and right edges of the drawing.

Now, viewing the picture from a slightly greater distance, I see large white expanses, well controlled - dominated - by the black verticals which "frame" the main event, as we move toward the centre - the locus of Mary and Child, the lines are a bit more violent, darkness and light are felt like hot and cold. Then we arrive at a sort of clearing, a lighter area "protected" to its left side by an organic shape in a half

PLATE I



crescent position - this is the Virgin.

Thus an Art Symbol has expressed a meaning. But we cannot simply say that the lines and splotches did the expressing; the Art Symbol is not the same as the picture. The Art Symbol's "contours" seem to be elsewhere, they may "touch" the external shape which we are experiencing, but they move beyond it and back into our own psychic lives. Remember that in the case of the little painting upon a large canvas the Art Symbol may have "touched" an area smaller than the entire, visible surface.

Through screens of hard cross-hatching, I see softer lines and splotches applied with a brush. In the upper left hand corner of the drawing the tension of the complicated, central composition seems to abate and I arrive at several strong, thick lines. Of course as I scan this work I also begin to take in the story, yet the story is not the object that immediately presented itself.

Expression has the quality of a unified experience; it is as though a vivid or heightened segment of time had been lifted out of - or existed for a moment parallel to - the ordinary, far less differentiated experience of life. But expression - though it comes about only with the participation of the viewer - is not the viewer's province alone. It is easy to imagine that it is indeed the picture itself that speaks or expresses. It seems to possess a weave of elements - of such things as line, hue, or texture - which at the same time have emotion and elicit emotion within the viewer.

But the art object is not itself alive. Rather it is the artist's experience as articulated in the work - and hence the viewer - that lives.

The Art Symbol expresses through articulation - the articulated elements are one with the viewer's articulated experience.

Now, imagine that a work were sensitive to changes of humidity in its gallery space - if there were much dampness it would turn red, under dryer conditions it would become pale. In a sense we could say that it expresses interior climactic conditions. But such a piece does not articulate emotion, it is merely symptomatic of certain prevailing conditions, it is a symptom. In an Art Symbol it is as though the work, the artist, and the viewer were bathed in one total experience (of course the artist would not have this experience at the same time as the viewer). Thus, the notion of articulation has also to do with some level of intentionality felt by the viewer. It is intentional that the art object came into being. An Art Symbol cannot come entirely of immediate felt reaction; it is not simply a cry of pleasure or pain - it is a special, intentional weaving, structuring, and contrasting of such sensations.

Again imagine the raw canvas with a painting in one of its corners. Our attention may be drawn towards that painting - we might say that the painting is somewhere between form and pre-Art Symbol. Pre-Art Symbol is an area having the potential - a sensed potential - of becoming an Art Symbol. It is a curious state - not exactly form or shape, not exactly a unified experience.

The form in which an Art Symbol flows takes on a special character. For example, I regard a painting by Jack Youngerman entitled "AM. July, White" and executed in 1966.¹⁷ (It hangs in the Corcoran Gallery of Art.) I scan the work's surface. The rectangular format is divided in two by a line moving upwards at a slightly diagonal angle. Actually, there is

no line. What I see is a white area with one almost vertical, flat side moving against a red zone. This is an abstract painting. The white area is flat on one side, but the other is tough and jagged, it contrasts with a jagged mass of blue.

But I experience this work as an Art Symbol, not as a description of a succession of shapes, colours, and lines. As an Art Symbol, it seems to lose its materiality, it becomes intangible. This doesn't mean I cannot see the texture of the physical canvas itself. I can. But even this awareness of physicality is of a new kind of destiny visible only by the fact that it seems separate from ordinary, everyday form, in a sense it is a revelation. It also has the quality of having purpose. I sense that this experience is not equivalent to the experience of being rained on. What I feel in this work articulates feeling and emotion, it has the quality of communicating something, except that the message and that which communicates it and the reception of the communication seem to be all in one, the Art Symbol.

Emotion and Feeling

Feelings originate in the mind and - through the medium of a painting - may be moved to a more external position. "Feeling passes from a relatively potential condition to one of full articulation."¹⁸

There are two basic kinds of feeling. One refers to sensation such as hot or cold, hard and soft; the second type is emotions and includes love, anger, etc. An Art Symbol for me has the character of a constellation or intertwining of many threads of that feeling and emotion, and I suspect that for me a form to become an Art Symbol must embody emotion, though it does not necessarily have to have feeling.

But how does this emotion or feeling enter into the art object? What does the art object "offer" the viewer so that a fusion of work and viewer can be activated?

One way in which an Art Symbol may enter into relation with the viewer is the following ". . . what we get from looking at a picture is not merely the experience of seeing, or even partly imagining experience of certain complicated muscular movements."¹⁹

For example, let's imagine that I have drawn two lines perpendicular to each other so that they each bisect an edge of a rectangular piece of paper. I place a dot near the center and - though it remains still - it seems to "pull" towards the center. Let's say I put another dot midway between one of the paper's corners and the center; now the situation is more complicated as the dot is pulled with varying degrees of force but simultaneously towards the edge of a line, the center of the paper, and an edge. Indeed, these pulling tensions are feelings. They are experienced in terms of hard or soft pressures.

Emotions are more complicated; here I'm not referring to emotion in a figurative sense, such as a smiling or crying face in a painting. Rather I'm referring to visual events which are immediate and felt on a deeper level by the viewer. For example in Van Gogh's "Portrait of the Artist with Severed Ear" we notice a very troubled man; but the real emotion in this work is expressed not by the artist's doleful mouth, but by the unity of varied parts.²⁰ Even if we didn't recognize the artist, the painting would express mixed threads of anger and sorrow. The contrast of light and dark flat areas and the bent traces left by the brushwork arouse - in a sense create - emotion within the viewer. Emotion

thrives on contrast, and conflict of elements in a form is ultimately emotional."²¹

Let us look at the drawing by Rembrandt again. Some of the tilted vertical lines of which I spoke - namely a man's stall - appear to extend upward and beyond themselves. We can feel it growing, striving,

Feeling and emotion can also result from natural resonance. The Art Symbol is ineffable, what makes it unique is that it touches inner states or movement which can never be described or explained. Some colours and textures may have intrinsic links with inner states. Looking at grainy surface may evoke what can only be described as some kind of psychological texture.

Yet another origin of emotions and feeling is association.

. . . the associations are not based on objects as such (horses, water) but on the shapes, directions, brightness, values by which objects are represented in the picture. From everyday experience, certain perceptual phenomenon are known to be connected with movement and objects that move. For instance, movement through water leaves a wedge-shaped trace. Boats, arrows, birds, airplanes, motor cars are wholly or in part, pointed, converging shapes. Similarly, any oblique position of an object indicates potential physical motion since it deviates from the zero-positions of hanging perpendicularly or lying on the ground. An oblique object is often in the process of actually moving toward or away from the vertical or horizontal positions of rest (consider our dot in its relation to the edges of the format). Again, shaded brightness values are observed in fast-moving objects, such as wheels, cars, flags, arms, legs. . . it can be assumed that any picture that presents objects by means of such perceptual qualities as wedge shapes, oblique directions, shaded surfaces will give the impression of movement, while the same objects will look stiff in pictures that do not fulfill the perceptual conditions.

Unity

" . . . the form of an aesthetic object is the total web of relation among its parts."²³

"Art is concerned primarily and finally with the . . . organic whole

of a work of art and consequently, with building it into a unit with particulars subjugated and tolerated only in so far as they contribute inevitably to the structure of the whole."²⁴

Unity seems to have been a powerful concept for over sixty years and held by a varied group of art philosophers, from Croce to Graham.

There seems to be much agreement that for an object to have the potential of becoming an Art Symbol - or just a work of art - it must be both visible, and in some curious way, indivisible. This notion of indivisibility apparently clashes with the fact that I have no difficulty in accepting works like those by American artist David Novros as Art Symbols.²⁵ Novros' compositions use several separate L-shaped units.

For me, indivisible must therefore refer to something other than tangible, or visible form. That an Art Symbol can be physically divided and yet remain a unity implies that form - when it is known as an Art Symbol - is not altogether tangible.

Form is static and refers to surfaces, shapes. The Art Symbol seems to depend upon or be rooted in form but it seems to extend beyond tangible form; its "contours" are difficult to discern because it also seems to penetrate the viewer's psyche. It's as though a work of art were made not only of graphic or painterly elements, but also of the ineffable "movements" at some basic stratum in the human mind. I think here of the fusion which was discussed in the section on expression.

". . . the art symbol is the experience of expressing one's emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity."²⁶ Here the author acknowledges that the Art Symbol is something far more than visible form, that it "moves" - it is in all an "experience" far

more than it is an object.

For 19th century artists, the "picture" and the object were not equals - they knew they were making physical objects also. In the picture all the materials and elements were subsumed in the final pattern and/or illusion. The artist often used a marbling brush to obliterate his traces.

Specificity and Time

The experiencing of a work of art has the quality of a unity. ". . . the artist [produces] works of art. These exhibit more clearly how integrated and meaningful experiences can be. Their point is a sort of perceptual demonstration of the felt unity which in routine experience is usually too diffuse or thin to count for much. It is as if the artist manipulates his material in a way that makes the manipulation a perceptible dynamic quality transfusing the finished work."²⁷

However, when Aldrich writes of "perceptible dynamic quality" I do not take him to mean that the viewer actually identifies with the artist's physical movements while creating. In fact, I prefer "articulation" to the word manipulation in this case; the way an artist manipulates his material does not have to enter a viewer's awareness, what does count is the way that material orchestrates - or plays upon - a strata or sensitized surface in the viewer's mind.

So the work or the experience of the work is felt to occupy a certain subjective unit in time. There seem to be time limits within which to experience a given Unity. For instance, imagine that an artist produces a work consisting of two physically separate entities, each placed in a separate room. The viewer first sees one, then strolls into

the other room where he encounters the remainder of the work; we can read a book in this way - over days or months with large pauses. A written work does not appear to need the same kind of unity or specificity in time as a painting. Of course we may come back many times to a painting in an art gallery. But I believe that each visit constitutes another single experience. It cannot be exactly the same experience each time. But I assume that each subsequent experience is clearly related to the previous experience of the same work.

Specificity in Space

Here is an example from my own experience; recently I was playing with empty white sheets of paper; I was enthralled by the notion of placing them on the wall so that the viewer could feel or sense the white picture planes and the invisible - negative space - in front of them which they sliced. But I was offended by the tacks and pins I was using to get the paper up. They interfered with the so-called purity for which I was searching.

The problem was seemingly solved by simply placing tape beneath the paper. Yet, something was missing - to exaggerate, it is as though the piece had become invisible. Its impact, its effect upon its setting could be spoken of as indifferent, different. Yes, the paper was there, but ... so what? I replaced the pins and - though some of its purity had been compromised - the work almost came to "life." It gained in specificity. The perpendicularity of the pin contrasted with the flatness of the surface. The work now had structure. Recall the hypothetical painting within a larger canvas - for that painted area to become an Art Symbol, and therefore come into focus, it would have to

possess sufficiently visible contrasts. If it had been all grey, or all texture, it would simply not assert itself, it would be visible, but invisible as art. It would be interesting to discover the relationship between intensity of internal contrast and a form's potential for becoming artistically specific.

Earlier, it was stated that the Art Symbol must at least in part be joined with form. But I now believe that the locus of this connection must be fairly clear, this area must be a defined shape. We must somehow perceive edge. For example, imagine a surface whose edges are constantly changing, this myriad-shaped form could never become pre-Art Symbol because the viewer seems to need a somewhat stable launching point. In order to enter into relation he must have a solid foothold at the threshold - pre-Art Symbol - of the Art Symbol.

Inevitability

To enter into relation with an object and experience pre-Art Symbol produces within me a sense of inevitability, what critics and teachers often refer to as "rightness." When I unite with a form - which simultaneously and including me, becomes an Art Symbol - it often seems as though my experience had been inside me all along; indeed that it had been waiting to enter into expression.

"A creator,' Valery puts it, 'is one who makes others create.'"28

Looking at a drawing, say one of the disarmingly simple line drawings by Matisse, I am struck by the way each line's location appears ordained by fate. At the same time, it is as though everything had been orchestrated to precisely fit my personal sense of organic wholeness.

I believe that the Art Symbol is indivisible in that the

imaginative activity through which it is perceived and "understood" requires one dialogue between the viewer's psyche and the articulation of elements - the pre-Art Symbol.

The total imaginative activity cannot be defined because it is involved with deepseated psychic movements which only art can show. Art Symbol is the only definition of total imaginative activity. But total imaginative activity involves the viewer in some characteristic behaviour. For example, I observe a drawing under glass in a museum. I see the work but in front of it are the reflections of the room and my face. I see these things, yet they "disappear" as I enter into a relation with the contrasts and mingled emotions that will fuse - with my participation - into an Art Symbol. During total imaginative activity we seem to live on two planes; on one level, almost disembodied from the viewer, life goes on around me; on another level it simply becomes invisible.

Brief Resumé of Expectations

I believe that I'm a subscriber to the presentational theory in which "... the work of art differs from physical objects not in the sense that it is imperceptible, but because it has only sensible properties which are not open to direct or immediate observation." ²⁹

For me, immediate association can include not only the images that touch the retina but also the feeling evoked by the tensions and contrasts presented in that image.

I am aware that my theory makes short shrift of figurative art. I believe the recognition of certain entities - say people or trees, - in a painting to be extremely secondary to the expression coming about in part through structure and contrast.

One question arises throughout my effort to objectify at least some of my more accessible attitudes towards whatever it is we call "art." I have hinted that Art Symbol or form is not in continuous existence, that it emerges only in what seems to be a unified relation or fusion with the viewer - or I might add, with the artist while he conceives it. Does this mean that each art object is really a countless number of Art Symbols, as many Art Symbols as there are viewers who enter upon and simultaneously create unity?

I will have to answer this question in a somewhat ambiguous manner; yes, there are as many unities as there are viewers, but at the same time I believe that most viewers' experience of Art Symbol at least overlaps, and therefore there is but one work. There are many works and there is one work. Or, there are many works of close enough resemblance to each other that they can be classified as one work.

Composition

An Art Symbol is a unit, but not just any unit - i.e. the indifferently different paper. An Art Symbol has ". . . unity in variety. Expression is a synthesis of the various, or multiple in the one."³⁰ In fact, unity in an Art Symbol can, it would seem, come about only through variety. For an Art Symbol must have emotion, and "Emotion thrives on contrast, and conflict of elements in a form is ultimately emotional."³¹ (Recall the conflicting lines in the Rembrandt drawing.)

If composition ". . . is limited to the large scale relations, and/or dominant patterns, it is synonymous with structure."³² Structure is perceived contrast, it is not necessarily tangible. invisible lines of force referred to earlier - can also constitute

structure.

But I think that for form to have the potential for becoming pre-Art Symbol, it must also have dominant structure. An undifferentiated field will not add up to a pre-Art Symbol. Nor will a square in which there are equally spaced, parallel lines add up to a pre-Art Symbol.

It is only through varying of spacings or the varying of hue that artists can be said to be articulating feelings or emotions. But this articulation of structure must play upon - and articulate - the viewer's emotions and feelings - which in turn seem to articulate the Art Symbol. (Recall the notions of inevitability and of an experience that the viewer has always had within him.)

The play of emotions and feelings must reach a sufficient level of complexity for an Art Symbol experience to take place.

Composition is one of the unities. In order for composition to exist there must be a specificity of place. The units of a given work cannot be so physically separate from one another that the viewer's felt relation to them is intervened upon by thoughts or extraneous feelings.

Actually, to describe various types of compositions is to describe various kinds of arrangements which could possibly enter into relation with the viewer through articulation.

Arrangement generally has to do with commonality - units that are grouped together into one work through shared attributes. Composition relates more to the structure rather than the shape of the form.

Structure may simply be units or elements; the structure of two rectangular forms of equal dimensions placed side by side is two rectangular forms. However structure may not refer directly to the

material, but rather to how different parts are related or what are the salient describable characteristics of that relation.

An Art Symbol has the quality of complexity, as though something within the viewer were dissolved into several streams of water. Some of these interweaving currents are dominant, yet these stronger elements do not stand alone but relate the viewer to the other currents.

An analogy with nature can be made. Like the heart's diastole and systole, the tension tightens, then demands resolution. It rises like the tides - the dominant force being the steady upward, forward pulse. Within this upheaval, swift eddies and vortexes coalesce, live out their ephemeral lives and recede and dissolve, creating myriad tiny contrasts with the larger movements. The cutting edge of the tide as it rides up the slight incline of the beach breaks in infinite eddies, as each pebble, each grain of sand comes into play. There is the element of surprise, chance, little explosions as an unexpected pebble is encountered, the miniscule battle of forces fought, and the conflicts consummated. But in retrospect, an instant after each distraction the whole comes back into view and surges forward and the element resumes its inevitable course towards the moment when it too will be tired and compelled to pull back, its aspirations exhausted, but only for the moment.

Through its articulation in cycles, aspiration and consummating through surprise and inevitability, the fabric and feeling attains the requisite level of complexity to dispatch the willing viewer on the voyage which fuses viewer and art symbol.

Tensions can only obtain complexity through articulation - a special structure of tensions. Articulation requires dominance. The forward

surge of the tide.

However, if all tensions differ from one another in varying degrees, but there is no single tension or cluster of tensions which stand out or surge along with noticeably greater force, then we can call what we observe indifferently different. There is texture without structure. In the Art Symbol dominance is structure.

Dominance necessitates differentiation. This differentiation is brought about by contrast.

Now, let us consider composition involving separate units. It can be based upon the possession of an object of two or more separate units. It can be based upon the possession by two or more separate objects of a similar attribute. For example, consider Ronald Bladen's untitled aluminum and painted wood piece shown in 1965 at the Jewish Museum in New York.³³ This work consists of three separate, slightly inclined, rectangular columns. These columns are too widely spaced to enclose space as does a Henry Moore hole. Yet, because of shared shape we recognize this to be one work, an arrangement. We may arrive at arrangement through shared colour. Each widely separate object, though different in shape, shares the same colour.

Here, I will refer to some of my own works. For example one of them consists of ten entities. Each unit is one foot by six inches high. Yet there are three different kinds of units. Some have a semicircular piece of wood nailed perpendicular to the six by twelve plane. Over these are stretched canvas. Some are merely flat rectangles. Each unit is sometimes placed quite separate from its mate, though always in the same room. I call this one art work or one composition. Though there

are different shapes, all share a similar colour - white and beige.

Another attribute upon which arrangement may be granted is progression, as in a piece by Judy Gerowitz, which was shown at the Jewish Museum in New York.³⁴ This piece consists of a row of identical but separate pieces attaching wall to floor. However, each succeeding piece is proportionally longer than the last. There are six units in all.

Widely separate units can even become or be part of one arrangement by the fact that they share the same room or through sharing the same delimited space and/or same appellations.

Imagine, for example, an art gallery consisting of several rooms. In each room there is one object, entirely different in appearances from objects in the other rooms. Before exploring these rooms the viewer reads the information concerning this hypothetical show, and discovers that this is one piece. This arrangement can be identified because of shared intentions. It is not really a composition since it is divided by a certain lack of immediate presence.

Units adhering to a single arrangement of separate units usually share more than one of the above mentioned attributes. They always have at least one of these bases of commonality. Another primary factor of commonality is that units in one arrangement share a common purpose. For example, two separate objects though they share the same floor space, colour, shape, and title, in some cases may not adhere to a simple arrangement. This could come about because they are the works of two different artists or because they each have a different title and therefore indicate discrepancies of intention or attitude.

Composition is the existence of relations. Relation depends upon a

sharing of space, attribute, or intention. To some writers, composition means the arrangement of all the areas in the design or work. If it is considered in this way, then composition may be synonymous with form. I prefer to limit my concept of composition to large scale relations and/or dominant pattern. Therefore to me composition is synonymous with structure.

It is possible that in some cases structure includes both the consideration of separate units and occurrence of structure within each unit. For example, some recent works by Dorothea Rockburne consist of several separate pieces of paper hung from a wall.³⁵ Within each sheet of paper are major separations of light and dark areas. I believe that these too indicate the structure, in fact are the structure and are therefore to be subsumed under the concept of composition. Composition is dominant pattern.

What happens then if we are confronted by a single unit seemingly nearly devoid of internal relations? In this case structure is indeed synonymous with form. The arrangement is the object.

Thus far I have spoken only of dominant pattern as expressed by physical separation of objects and visual or psychological joining through the recognizable visual or psychological attributes which bring each unit together as a single "piece." Let us call this organic unity.

This refers to the unity created through oppositions of forms within a format. Let us say we are viewing a painting consisting of a red real square on the right hand side and a blue disk on the left; the forms are separate upon a white ground. No real action takes place, yet the two forms may be "seen" as being in conflict with each other. The red tries to push out the blue, the square pulls on the circle. There

are seemingly invisible tensions which become a felt structure or dominant pattern. And while there appear to be conflicting forces wrenching the painting apart, paradoxically that tension and conflict is also holding the work together - holding it as one total imaginative experience.

Earlier I have considered structure a unifier based upon the showing of attributes. We have seen that it is at once the face of separateness and, most important, a coming together.

Now let's consider a unit whose form is not synonymous with structure. In such a case the composition is the structure which at once divides it or breaks the unit into smaller subunits and to which these smaller subunits adhere. The emphasis here is upon separation as opposed to sharing and bringing together, for to discover the structure it will be necessary to survey the entire form or composite form for seams and lines of stress. Again David Novros' L-shaped units come to mind. The spaces between them seem to have more specificity than the solid units themselves.

Structure becomes visible through contrast. Sometimes this contrast can be between an open space between two units partaking of the same composition. Composition seems to "hold" a work together, not so much physically as visually.

An artist takes a rectangular white paper format. He places a mark with a pencil within this format - and we have a structure no longer synonymous with the unit of paper. But is this an arrangement or pattern?

Recall in the discussion in Chapter I on feeling and emotion that the relation of a dot to a line may create conflict and tension. It is

conceivable that such "invisible" lines of force could assert themselves as structure. Hence, it is possible to propose a type of composition to be called projective composition because the viewer experiences the structure as being on the surface of form while in actuality, he projects structure onto the surface.

Within the concept of projective composition I also place felt and "invisible" structures produced by perceptual phenomena produced by association - of say a wedge shape - with objects that move (see Chapter I on feeling and emotion).

Throughout history groups and combinations from among these factors have been employed in art. Those elements which within a given unit form the major structure may be the composition. However, one element may reappear in several places within one unit or format. In one place it is major structure - in other places because of a different position and hence altered relationship to the whole, it is minor structure, merely an echo of itself. The same element may, depending upon its location, serve as major or minor structure.

How then, do we distinguish major from minor structure? Some elements such as perceptual lines of force, physical elements such as colour and texture are simply more dominating. There are certain units in which certain areas are noticeably more significant, stronger focal points, and this we know empirically from observation.

There are units which do have structure synonymous with form. A hypothetical example is a square format filled with points such that no one point or group of points can cause the projection of lines of tension nor become focal points on their own. The point becomes visual texture and the unit's form remains its major structure. The points are minor.

One could argue that a painting consisting of repeated and related elements such as the paintings by Agnes Martin fall within this category.³⁶

Within their formats, some of her paintings have arrangement. There are internal tensions between colour, form, tactile qualities. But there are no dominant patterns. Hereafter, I shall refer to minor arrangements as texture.

There is yet another type of composition - dynamic composition.

Dynamic composition is made of a structure which is perceptibly changing. This changing can occur for two reasons. The elements constituting a unit may be in motion. I refer here to units external to the viewer. Their relationships may be in constant flux - for example, consider kinetic art of Schoffer or Savoie.^{37, 38} Or the invisible lines of tension which as we have seen are based upon association and projected outward from the viewer may be in constant flux. Even though the flux within a format or unit may create or constitute only texture, the movement within may bring great perceptual tension to bear on the edges of the format, thus creating pulsating edges, though externally and physically the edges remain perfectly rigid. I think here of Bridget Riley's op art.³⁹

In dynamic composition the unit is a dynamic form. I will define dynamic form through comparison. Imagine that I observe a waterfall. I see the water flowing over the ledge and then lurching into vortices of action as it cascades down over various protruding stones and logs. Form changes everywhere - yet no individual vortex dominates enough visually to become structure. The overall waterfall is structure. It at once has no definite contour, consists of white little happenings,

yet it remains one unit. And as earlier mentioned the changes are perceptible. If a clock were placed before me as a unit for consideration in terms of composition, I would immediately conclude that whatever types of structure it embodies, it is not a dynamic composition, because our senses cannot readily see the actual motion. Only in hindsight do we recognize the change of position in the hands.

Composition may thus be the dominant factors or attributes which identify each of several widely separated units as one art object. Or it may be the dominant structure to which texture adheres within one unit. Also we have considered subjective association composition which consists primarily in invisible lines of force and dynamic composition which consists of one unit whose contrast is physically or through association (as in subjective association composition) in motion. Most compositions are combinations or overlapping of the above classifications.

Suppose we are confronted by three widely separate units, one each in different adjoining rooms. These three forms fall under one title, are by the same artist, and share several attributes. However, in the show catalogue we are informed of the existence of a fourth form which was supposed to be part of this work but was lost. There is, thus, no composition - only units. The contour of all the units is not visible.

Here the artist's stated intentions are considered. It is not enough merely to conceive or imagine the missing unit. Only its concrete presence under the authorship of the artist will create composition. In some cases it might be necessary to guess at the artist's intentions in an attempt to reconstitute a composition as in the restorations of Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Rome. Or imagine looking at an object which conjures up scenes from our past. These intuitions do not embody composition for they are

not an expression emanating sufficiently from the unit, the physical and present reminders of our hypothetical piece which set them off.

CHAPTER II

CATEGORIES

In this chapter I have reported on a number of objects - photos, documents, information - that have emerged between 1969 and 1971.

I collected material relating to "bizarre" objects that appeared as "art" during that period. I proceeded to study and compare that material - I found that there were definite recurring themes, such as Documentation of an Act or Process and Documentation of Object or Being. I sorted out material according to such categories hoping that the categories themselves would be close to or statements about the objects' strangeness.

This chapter includes what I thought were the strongest examples from each category. The following pages contain what amounts to a list of the "strange" works.

Documentation of an Act or Process

A. Direct Intervention into Ecology

1. Three arbitrary zones were drawn on a street map of downtown Milan. This established the form of the pieces. The central location in the map constitutes the "safe zone" (food and water deposits, bordered by 1' deep fire break). In the secondary zone the surface is burned with commercial flame throwers. The remaining zone uses kill traps and rat poison (placed inside shallow slit-trenches) which extend to the outer edges of the land forms. The project is executed on a man-made hill near Milan (exact location withheld).⁴⁰

This photograph now is the work.

2. The photograph of a square area of a beach transformed by prints made by 5,000 human feet. The original photograph has been exhibited as the work. This piece was realized by Bill Vazan.⁴¹

PLATE II

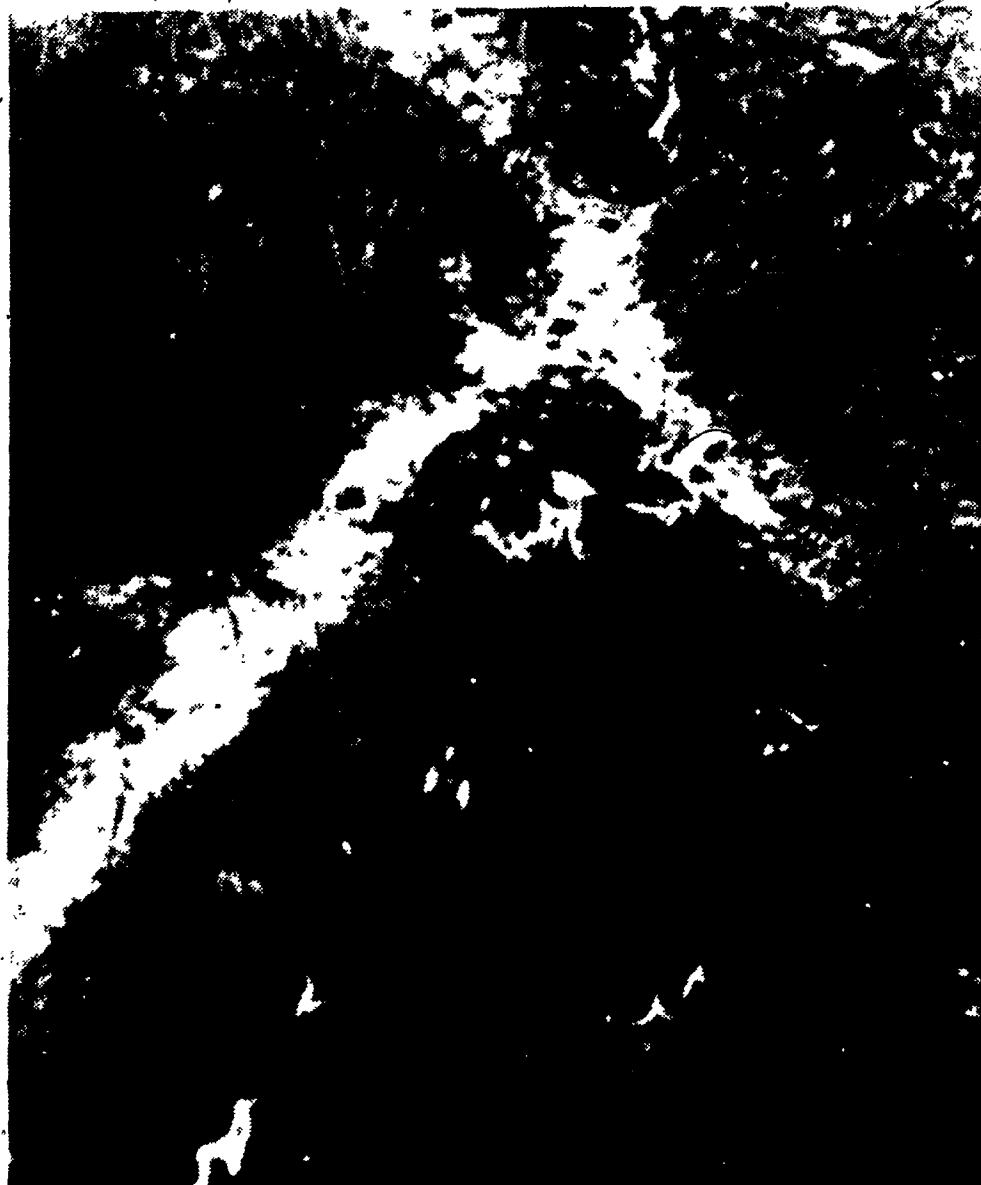


PLATE III



3. A proposal by Lawrence Weiner:

A removal of an amount of earth from the ground.
The intrusion into this hole of a standard
processed material.

An amount of paint poured directly upon the floor
and allowed to dry.⁴²

4. Work by Canadian artist Ian Baxter.

"Annual rings 1968, 150' x 200'

U.S.A./Canada Border at Fort Kent, Maine

Schemata of annual tree rings severed by political boundary."⁴³

Apparently this piece now exists as a memory and in the form of a photograph in which we see concentric rings shovelled out of the snow; this huge circle drawing is cut in half by a real river.

5. In photos we see rows of buckets which seem to have been placed beneath natural waterfalls. The buckets are arranged simply in a row. The course of the water is slightly altered.⁴⁴

B. Introduction into Environment of Man-Made or Contrived Objects Which "Perform," but Only With the Assistance of the Out-of-Doors Environment

1. "The Process of Elimination, New York 1969."

In the photograph we see a lawn surrounded by buildings. Les Levine has scattered over 100 rectangular plastic objects over this zone. But about a week later he returns to find that his "plastic garden" has thinned out, that the weather has probably carried some of the elements away.⁴⁵

2. Reported in a magazine:

Hans Haacke, 100 plastic bottles thrown into the North Saskatchewan River on September 5, 1969, requesting the finder

PLATE IV





PLATE V

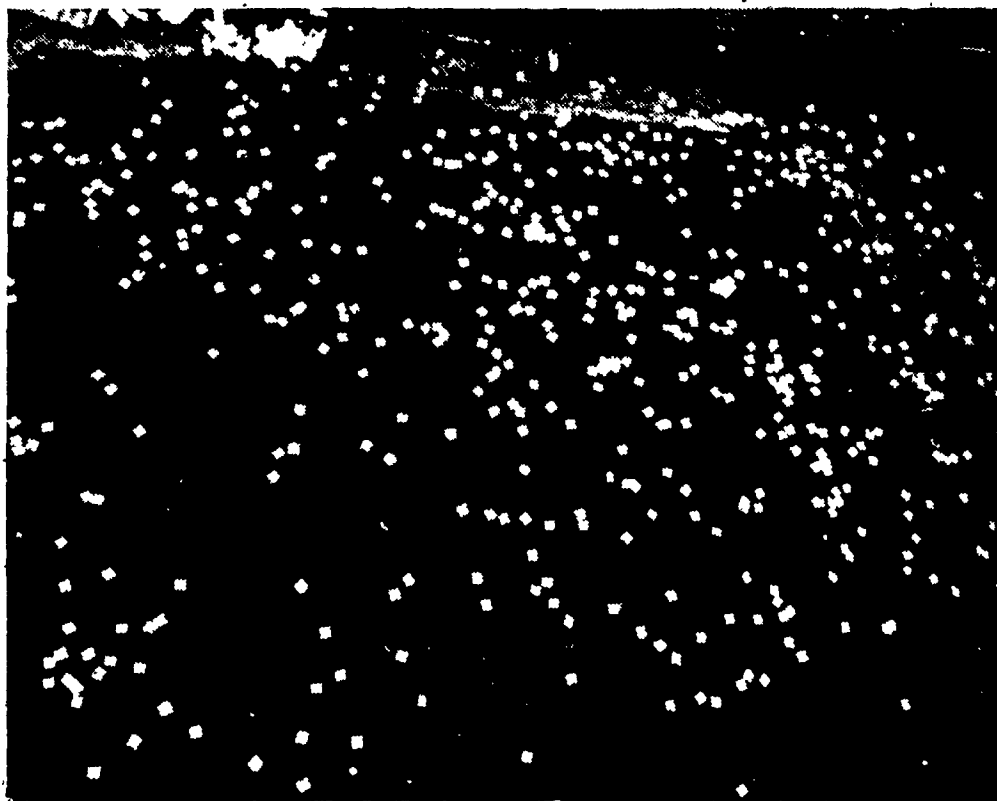


PLATE VI

to report the place and circumstances of the bottle's recovery.⁴⁶

3. "On July 23, 1967 Hans Haacke introduced over one hundred balloons into the atmosphere. The balloons were released one after the other, and apparently wafted away on the same air current, they form an undulating line high in the sky."⁴⁷

Documentation of Object or Being

A. Designation of Site and/or Documentation of State of Nature

1. Joseph Kosuth, presentation of "I. Matter in General (Art as Idea)." In photograph we see simple sign standing in a field. The sign contains in vertical order the following list of words:

"I. Matter in General
 374. Universe
 375. Materiality
 376. Immateriality
 377. Materials
 378. Chemicals
 379. Oils, Lubricants
 380. Resins"⁴⁸

2. Reported and photographed in an art magazine: Robert Smithson's "Aerial map proposal for Dallas-Fort Worth Regional Airport" 1967. What we see in reproduction is the aerial view of an urban area with the neat white lines drawn into part of it.⁴⁹

B. Designation of Person as Referent

1. Preliminary test for 65 foot vertical penetration executed in Whitewater, Wisconsin in 1970, by Dennis Oppenheim.

PLATE VII



Tests were performed to condition my body for a specific task, that of passing vertically through air and water from a 65 foot peak in Idaho. When using your body this way your best work is in direct proportion to the best you can do.

2. John Van Saun does piece called "Flour Drop" in a lot near the Edmonton Art Gallery, September 6, 1969. In a photograph there is a young man wielding a bat-like object, swinging it, breaking a container in the air. Some kind of dust appears to spew forth. All this is presented in a series of three photos accompanied by the title.⁵¹
3. "Situation" sent by Robert Barry to artist Stephen Kaltnbach: the instructions were to make something that is completely open, direct, explicit, without any obscurity or ambiguity. The result by Stephen Kaltnbach can be seen in Plate IX.⁵²
4. A piece by Michael Snow which consists of photos of the artist photographing himself before a mirror. The artist has placed a thin rectangular frame of tape in the mirror. He then photographs himself, tapes that photo onto the mirror, then photographs himself next to the photograph.⁵³
5. In the gallery space 82 ft x 26 ft, two rows of five tape recorders were placed across the room from each end. The actions, given below, were then carried out and reported on the tape recorders. For the duration of the exhibition, the reports were replayed in the order they occurred and then repeated (the tape recorders opposite each other are numbered in alternate for the width of the room.)

PLATE VIII

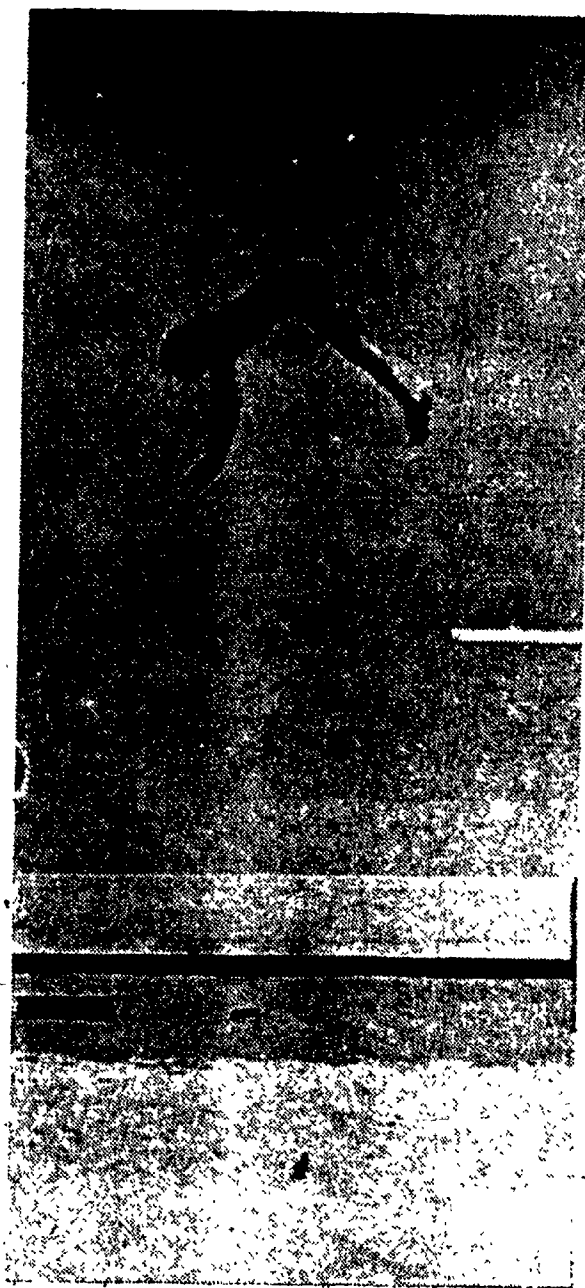


PLATE IX

Stephen Kaltanbach

EXPOSE YOURSELF

Studio International, August 1970

p. 34

PLATE X



Roelof Louw

1. I have been standing here.
I have decided to walk to the position opposite.
- 2-9. I have walked to this position.
I will walk to the next position.
10. I have arrived at this position.
I intend to return to the previous position.
- 9-2. I have arrived at this position.
I intend to return to the next position.
1. I am in this situation.
I am going to complete another stage.
- 2-9. I have completed this stage.
I am going to complete another stage.
10. Again I am in this position.
I am going to return to the preceding stage.
- 9-2. I have moved to this stage.
I am going to return to the next preceding stage.
1. I have now completed this event.
I am going to repeat another sequence.
- 2-9. I have completed this part of the
sequence. I am proceeding to the
next part of the sequence.
10. I have now completed the final sequence. ⁵⁴

Presentation of Act or Process

Self-Occluded Natural Systems, Alive in Parenthesis; They Seem to be
Impotent and to Have no Repercussions Beyond their Immediate Settings -
They May, However, Greatly Affect Spectators

1. When asked if he would be interested in participating in an exhibition
at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario, German artist Hans Haacke
submitted the following proposals:

"For the sculpture court:

- a) place several water atomizers at the ceiling creating
fine rain; a circulating pump returns the water to
the ceiling
 - b) seal off court with transparent material and make huge
aviary of it.
- or
- c) place many oscillating fans on the floor and float many
chiffon sails on their currents, making the space like a
huge sailboat. ⁵⁵

2. For another space:

a large cage containing fertilized eggs being incubated by heat exposure; chicks being hatched and pecking their way through the shells. The hatching was documented with a camera.⁵⁶

Presentation of Dead Fragment or Thing

Extracted From its Natural Setting, Normal Use

1. Michael Snow produces "Press" in 1969. In this piece man-made objects like gloves and rubber bands were clamped between plastic squares. Each square held a different material.⁵⁷

2. Reported and documented in a magazine.

"Montreal artist Mervyn Dewes placed 17 piles of dirt on the floor of the Saidye Bronfman Centre. Each day he carried one pile from the centre to Sir George Williams University. This was during the 17 day show entitled 45°30'n - 73°36'o.⁵⁸

PLATE XI



CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF CATEGORIES

Documentation of Act or Process, Direct Intervention into Ecology

Bill Vazan's piece, a beach transformed by five thousand feet, is curiously unspecific. To begin with, one wonders where this piece is actually located. This brings into consideration questions of originality. There is the documentary photograph printed in Vie des Arts; more accurately, there are at least several thousand of such photos, as many as there are issues of Vie des Arts. Then there is a kind of square in the sand made by imprints of human feet.

The picture is printed on the magazine's page. It is unspectacular, small and greyish. It is characterized by a grainy, black and white texture. A flatter grey expanse appears towards the top. There are some visually undulating shapes. The photograph seems to be divided into several areas characterized by various textures, but no individual aspect dominates. And no invisible lines of force emerge, for the texture, though slightly varied, has an overall quality. The image contains indifferently different patterns.

Then there is the scene itself. There is the sand and water and invisible air. This scene obviously extends beyond the frame of the photo; there is nothing inevitable about the fact that the photo cuts off exactly this particular rectangle of life. The edge of the photo does not seem to be exactly related to any "edge" the sand or water might have.

There is yet another important element in this work. That is the information accompanying the work and provided by the artist, "a square area of beach transformed by prints made by 5,000 feet."

There is little that is sensuous or emotional about the actual photo, even less in the visual image of the words. The words have meaning but they express nothing. The photo shows a past state and the words make a statement - presumably of fact - concerning something that happened in that past state.

According to my concept, the Art Symbol is the experience. Yet, here we have a work of art in which the weave of elements, of line and texture do not add up to a unified experience. First we observe the photo, then we read about it, and perhaps, thirdly, the photo is in some way transformed in our minds. But the form we can see and touch refers to something beyond itself. I'm reminded of reproductions of art works in art history books. We never doubt whether the famous paintings which appear on the pages are actually there before us. Yet, in the case of Vazan's work, we are not sure, the page may be the work.

Suzanne Langer wrote, "visual forms . . . do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously, so that the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision."⁵⁹ Vazan's piece seems divided - between past and present, and between the immediate reality of the photo and the actual sand and water which is somewhere else. There is the relative permanence of the magazine reproduction as opposed to the impermanence of footsteps in the sand.

The texture of the sand can be associated with art elements. The sand is almost more than form; it's as though I were looking at a canvas with paint on it. This area could easily be a pre-Art Symbol.

The rather specific quality of the form of the sand seems to contrast with some aspects of the act of making the work itself. It is as

though the artist did not articulate something. Instead, in a sense the work "articulates" him. Through it we learn of his existence, it is indeed a "footprint" left by a decision as well as by a subsequent action.

What we have before us is very strange. Unlike the navy flags, it does not have a corresponding code or interpretation. And unlike the Art Symbol it does not enter into a total relation; the form is too ambiguous, divided as it is between past reality, and the present photodocument. The work may merely be a sign of a being and of a past event.

The one "thing" that appears quite specific is the act itself, and curiously, the artist. Though visually absent, he is very much present through the traces of his activity. But there is no sense, on the part of the viewer, of inevitability. That this area was "transformed" with 5,000 human feet is highly - almost hilariously - arbitrary.

Lawrence Weiner's "work" exists and is rooted in the future rather than in the past. While Vazan shows us visual elements at one remove, Weiner eliminates them altogether. There is no pre-Art Symbol because of the absence of form. It's as though form had been entirely removed from the plane of external reality and withdrawn into the mind.

I am reminded of the Ideal theory held by Croce and Collingwood. Within this theory ". . . the work of art consists in an inner state or condition of the artist, called intuition or an impression: secondly that this state is not immediate or given, but is the product of a process which is peculiar to the artist, and which involves articulation, organization, and unification: thirdly, that the intuition so developed may be externalized in a public form, in which case we can have the

artifact which is often but wrongly taken to be the work of art, but equally it need not be.⁶⁰

The problem is that Weiner's statements are so impersonal, simply instructing how to accomplish something. They evoke no memories, elicit few associations. Related are simple acts. Earth is to be removed from the ground. Perhaps there are some tensions felt by the viewer who imagines doing one of these tasks.

Weiner's "Statements" convey no sense of something visually articulated or emotionally moving. The work communicates not with a feeling level but with knowledge; we understand the words, but there is no palpable mental picture in our minds. For instance, in the statement concerning "the removal of an amount of earth from the ground," we probably do not see or imagine the personality, facial features, or garb of the person who will do the work.

Of course the piece may not include physical embodiment or exertion of energy. Perhaps what we see - the printed "Statement" - is in large part the work; the Pre-Art Symbol would be somewhere between the paper surface and our psyches rather than altogether external and tangible. Could the form have to do with some kind of identification with the action outlined in the statement? Could it be that each step in the simple process proposed could be considered a unit in a composition, and if so, what and where is the structure of this composition?

Ian Baxter's tree ring piece looks more like an Art Symbol. There are contrasts - between dark, strong line of the river, and the soft, white texture of the snow.

But this work has several layers of references. First there is the

snow scene itself somewhere in the past. Secondly there are the shovelled out rings which (this we read) relate to annual tree rings. We also are fairly sure that the rings in the snow did not occur naturally, but were created by someone, presumably the artist, wielding a snow shovel. And the tree rings can evoke associations which have to do with forests, growth, sap. So, in reality, Baxter's piece is incredibly complicated.

We experience the curves, the texture of the snow, but there is a great deal that we "read." It's as though this work stood to what it expresses somewhat in the same way a black-and-white diagram with the name of the colours written in stands to a coloured picture, whereas in an Art Symbol the relation is more like that of a coloured reproduction to a coloured picture.⁶¹

The black and white diagram may help us to imagine a nonexistent state, but it would not be part and parcel of that state. It is not the total imaginative activity.

The rings in the snow reproduce natural rhythms or sequences of growth. The human will to act - to produce such a piece - contrasts with the kind of "will" embodied in a tree. Both tree and man "decide" to move or act - but the "decision" on the part of the tree is automatic and instinctual while the man's action is conscious.

This piece highlights the question of articulation, for the artist has partially relinquished his decision-making process to the growth of a tree. One might look at Baxter's tree rings in terms of "found processes" rather than found objects.

This work has certain clear structures - the concentric circles

penetrated by the black river. But there is an overall lack of specificity because the edge of this work remains indefinite. The edge may be determined by visual tensions set up by the circles and the river. But since this piece emphasizes - or strongly relies upon - natural growth, the notion of "edge" might be related to the beginning and end of the tree's growth. Perhaps this work's real picture plane is defined by Nature's expenditure of energy. The duration of this expenditure becomes the "length" and "width" of the work.

Initially Michael Snow's piece calls to mind a pre-Art Symbol. Its specificity is underscored by a frame around the outer edges, and within the frame are carefully positioned clusters of form. The relationships between these forms - the geometry of concentric rectangles and the play of organic shapes representing the artist's head - produce the kind of structure associated with organic unity composition. The dominant aspect of the structure emanates from the visual tension elicited by the central cluster of four photos and a much smaller set of photos inserted in the upper left hand corner of the mirror setting.

But Snow's piece does not have unity. It comes apart in several different ways. For example let us look at the tape frame which is on the mirror and parallel to the work's physical edge. This tape guided the photographer, Snow, when he took pictures of his own reflection in the mirror. And visually it holds the work together by giving it continuity - it echoes the outer frame. However, it also marks a division point, between past and present. Its immediacy (it is of this world right now) contrasts with the second hand reality captured in the photos. While the tape exists on its own, the materiality of the photos denies itself and I focus on the "action" in the pictures.

As I continue to examine Snow's work, it becomes increasingly hard to concentrate on any given form. The ambiguity of this situation brings to mind the examples in Chapter I of a large raw canvas with a small, square painted surface in one corner. Where is the form through which that "beam of light" - the Art Symbol - may pass? In Snow's piece it is perhaps the mirror area that is analogous to the raw canvas. The mirror is large in proportion to the work, and it constitutes an indifferently different visual field.

The photo areas look more like "art" with their gradations and black and white contrasts. Yet, both photos and mirrors are enclosed in the art context of a frame. Initially they all looked like a pre-Art Symbol.

The tape and the mirror are the most immediately present forms in this work. Yet, these lack dominant structure - and the mirror is constantly changing because of the moving reflections. The central cluster of photos is the most stable, complicated, and structured component. Yet, it lacks the immediacy necessary for total imaginative activity because the photos really "read" as documents more than they are felt as articulations of emotion.

It could be speculated that here I am confronted by a new kind of organic unity composition, that instead of being based upon tensions perceived and raised to an emotional level, the composition results from irreconcilable conflict between two conceptual approaches. A clearcut choice is impossible because the signs pointing in either direction intrude upon one another. The photos are separate from the mirror, yet very much part of it. It is as though the feeling evoked by such a piece does not originate at a pre-thinking level as does an Art Symbol,

but rather begins with ideas and the desire to choose one of them. Perhaps it is paradoxical once again that there may be emotion aroused by this cognitive tension.

So far my discussion of this work has had to do mainly with form. But time is also emphasized - expressed? - in several ways. The viewer's reflected image brings the work into a present tense which seems alien to expression.

Viewing an Art Symbol involves at the very least two time levels - 1) the present, and 2) the intense, subjective present of the act of fusing and entering into relation with an Art Symbol. This is at the same time a specific type of "present" which is characterized by the viewer's ability to erase mundane details of everyday life. However, my reflection in Snow's piece increasingly rivets me to the mundane present of the room; it's as though (to recall an example from Chapter I) I were looking at a painting protected by a sheet of glass. But instead of disappearing as I focus on the painting, the reflection grows more vivid until it overwhelms the entire work.

There is a special tension in Snow's piece relating to its specificity in time. Its "art" appearance and frame place it in a subjective present while the mirror and the reflections pull the form back into the flow of everyday events and objects. And paradoxically, as Snow's piece comes into focus, and as my involvement in it grows, the more I'm also reminded of the room (gallery) around it. And I see my own real reflection in the mirror. Perhaps other objects in the room can be subsumed "within" Snow's open arrangement. So specificity of time and space are closely related to one another.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, Snow's piece does emphasize past events. There is the step by step process of the artist taking pictures of himself taking pictures. And in this sequence of action, nearly all the documents presuppose a previous or past action - that is also documented. And all this from its inception is documented in photographs.

While various components and their relationships hint at an Art Symbol, Snow's work gradually reveals itself to be a group of signs indicating various stages in a process. Instead of this being an Art Symbol, in which meaning and symbol are bound into a one, this piece is a process in which the process and its product are bound into a one. It is a process whose goal is to show the process. But process involves time, and each photo marks a moment in time, all the photos become a scale of time; in fact it may be that the real form of this piece is not at all tangible or visible; it may be that the pre-Art Symbol has to do with the shape of the unseen "areas" between the visible markers. In a sense the tape and the photo documents become negative space - they are structure such as that to be found in certain multi-unit compositions where the intervening spaces are what "hold" the works together. This work may represent a curious reversal. Here, the more tangible a form is, the less it is likely to be congruent with an Art Symbol.

Documentation of an Art or Process, Introduction Into Environment of
Man-Made or Contrived Objects - Which "Perform" But only With the
Assistance of the Out-of-Doors

If we accept the photo-image of Les Levine's "Process of Elimination" piece as the form as well as the art object itself, then we are indeed

confronted by a composition. The photo is characterized by contrasts strong enough to be called structure. There are clearly defined light areas contrasting with darks; the texture of the field upon which Levine placed one hundred plastic units contrasts with the verticality and tactile qualities of the buildings in the nearby background.

However, it is difficult to fuse with, or enter into total imaginative activity with this unity; there are too many distractions (remember the example of reflections in glass). The title itself along with the accompanying information outlining what Levine did are more than mere decoration, they impinge upon the work. In a sense they divide the work up. For it now appears that we have two kinds of symbols; the photo, seen purely as a composition, expresses the information on the other hand does not "contain" its meaning. It refers to something beyond itself. In this case - with two types of symbols - the work does not coalesce into an organic whole or unity.

But let us discount that the photo is a composition, regard it as yet another symbol somewhat akin to our example of the navy flag; its meaning is not - as in the Art Symbol - intrinsic to it, but rather must come through interpretation. We scan the photo image and our minds put together the flat inflections of light and dark. There is a kind of multi unit composition sculpture with some contrast brought about by the different angles of white edges to one another. Because there are so many white units, no dominant structure arises and the piece remains indifferently different, or what we might classify as a texture.

Of course we are not actually in physical presence of the work; much in the same way that we study reproductions in art history books, we are

endeavouring to "picture" Levine's piece and the circumstances under which it occurred.

But it is difficult for us to get a solid foothold in order to enter this work. Remember that for a form to in part partake of an Art Symbol, at least some portion of the Art Symbol must coincide with or inhere in a form of fairly clearly defined shape. But in Levine's piece shape seems to constantly elude us; where is form's edge? Not the limits of the photo - after all Levine's piece involves action extending in space and time far beyond the area of city we are allowed to see; the photo is but a small fragment of whatever the whole piece may be. It seems to lack specificity of time and place.

There is one very powerful contrast, but rather than being between two forms or elements, it is between the hard, concise quality of the information given by the artist, and the amorphousness of the process itself.

Since the piece is at a second remove (we have to "picture" it) much is left to our imaginations. Each viewer is forced to rely on his own mental images in relation to the piece and how it came about. Thus there is little or no articulation. This also results from the lack of clearly defined shape or form. For an Art Symbol to occur, there must be present some clearly defined shape or form - or surface - in which part of the Art Symbol can inhere. It may be that we all "get" the same ideas from the information, that we even see and understand the photo in very much identical ways. However, the unseen act of the artist distributing the plastic units and their subsequent disappearance leaves much to each viewer's whim.

However there are present some elements relating to qualities of an Art Symbol. The process of units being blown away has a trace element of sensuality. Perhaps we can identify with the artist's physical gesture or with the motion of a piece being carried away; this could constitute a feeling. However, overall the work seems nearly devoid of emotion - except for the possibility of one major contrast, between the field nearly covered with plastic units and the imagined field empty later on.

Perhaps the structure of such a piece is not so much related to form as it is to changes in types and feelings of activities; if this is so, then it is plausible to think in terms of a three unit or three element work.

1) The artist having intentions which constitute a certain feeling which then passes into another felt experience, that the artist feels when he actually consummates the idea. 2) Wind and various people coming by and sometimes removing units. 3) Units after having been removed going to their separate fates. As they move away, the units lose their connection with intentionality.

Unlike Levine's work, Hans Haacke's gesture of tossing one hundred plastic bottles into a river is - as far as I know - accompanied by no visual record; we know of this act merely via written language. There appears to be nothing even remotely resembling an Art Symbol immediately present.

Again it is possible to find certain attributes of Art Symbols if we attempt to "picture" the work. The notion of the river has - for me a kind of natural resonance (see Chapter I on feeling and form). And we can think of the bottles carried down the river in undulating movements. Perhaps we can find the river on a map; it curves and bends, widens and

becomes thin. The river becomes a linear element and - if we stretch our imaginations - a dominant structural element dividing two land masses and, to a certain extent, giving them shape. We could consider the possibility that in this piece form is not immediately present, but is variously distributed. However the drawn out process of viewing such a work is not specific enough to allow for a real unity.

Yet, there is a kind of totally intangible form; really more a parenthesis than a shape. It is stated that the bottles were placed in the river on September 5, 1969, and there was a request that finders report the place and circumstances of the bottle's discovery. Of course one side of this "form" remains vague, almost open-ended. It is interesting to note that the viewer is invited not to fuse in an experience of total imaginative activity, but simply to become one of many objects - or wills - participating in a somewhat shapeless process.

In another piece, Haacke introduced over one hundred balloons into the atmosphere. This piece is documented by a photograph (see Plate VII page 43). Upon seeing this image we are carried away by a feeling of natural resonance elicited by a sense of height and vastness and the balloons themselves being swept away. This work arouses an imagined Romantic vista characterized by vagueness, and great distances. Of course, we are viewing the work from a second remove - the photo and accompanying information.

The balloons perform with the assistance of natural wind currents. It is as though there were two artists, Haacke and the wind. So the process might be said to encompass two states: the conscious intentions of the artist, and the unconscious being of the air currents.

We wonder whether this work has form other than the photo or the balloons themselves. Curiously, this piece may be imagined to have had a fairly stable configuration - perhaps almost an articulation. The balloons released one after another and flowing into the distance are not perfectly regimented, yet seen in the photo as a whole, they form a line; I think here of dynamic composition - a kind of unity through and in spite of flux.

What we see is a line with junctures where tension swells up slightly - the balloons suddenly crowd each other a bit more - and then subsides - their procession slackens.

Of course all along I am picturing something which I never actually saw. The balloons become points in this line; in a sense they become "invisible" and the two "edges" of the sky they divide come into focus. I am reminded here of my experiment with pins and white sheets of paper. The pins become points which convey a new awareness of the presence or being of the sky. Like the pin they threaten to disappear into a more total experience or unity. The problem is that while the white paper had clear shape, the sky in Haacke's piece is apparently infinite with the balloon line disappearing into the horizon. It would be interesting to remove the visual field as form from external reality almost altogether; perhaps the shape of form is that "framed" by our fields of vision.

Documentation of Object or Being, Designation of Site and/or

Documentation of State of Nature

Joseph Kosuth's piece, "I. Matter in General," does not seem to express anything. It does not matter a great deal whether we accept the

photo or the items photographed as the bona fide work of "art."

Unlike in some of the other pieces discussed, this work does not exist in a specific time or duration; no one begins or finishes an act - except of course the work itself which we read was executed in 1968. And the fact that "it" is now in a personal art collection indicates that the photo in the magazine should be considered as a mere reproduction. Thus the work does appear to have specificity of place.

As far as specificity of time, I am a bit less certain; the work is present at its site, but there is a strong emphasis upon the date it was executed. Is the piece primarily now or then? Perhaps the dominant point is the moment of inception.

Form in the work we see reproduced in the magazine is unified, and there are some clearly defined geometric shapes, namely the rectangle of the sign itself. But the artist has not attempted to orchestrate elements such as line and texture. The work was apparently built simply to make the words clearly readable - it is what it looks like, a sign. We don't immediately feel this sign, we read it - a symbol similar to the navy flags.

But once having accepted that this piece is indeed not an Art Symbol, it would be interesting to continue to examine it more on its own terms; there are contrasts between degrees of specificity, or to put it another way, between distances from concrete, external reality.

Nouns such as "chemicals," "resins," and "oils" are more specific than nouns such as "materiality," "immateriality," and "universe." Some of these latter words do not even refer to things but rather to states of being. If, in dealing with Kosuth's work, we still insist on

relating form to Art Symbol, then the Art Symbol must be entirely detached from form - perhaps it can only be posited, really a state of being located only within the artist's own head.

Documentation of Object or Being,
Designation of Person as Referant

Unlike Kosuth's piece, John Van Saun's no longer exists, at least not as we see it in the magazine photograph. Again, we view a work from a second remove - in a sense, we are confronted not by the concrete embodiment but rather the shadow of the work. We see something that existed in the past in a photo. However, this shadow does not assume the appearance of a unity (variety in an organic one) but rather the rather vaguely perceived outlines of a diagram. The work is more a clue than a presence. We do not become part of a steady stream beaming from artist through art object and absorbing viewer. Instead, we assume the stance of curious and perplexed onlooker trying to make sense of something.

There is tension - even conflict - of a kind. In the photo we see the artist flexing his arms and swinging a bat. On a figurative level we can perhaps identify with the artist's own movement, the buildup and release of tensions at the moment the bag of flour explodes. It may be that even the imagined sound could be said to emotionally colour some sort of wholly psychic composition.

This work possesses a kind of articulated time. There are three photos showing the artist approaching his task, acting, and backing off. The central theme is just that one action did take place. The physical act of the artist also has a type of unity recalling the comparison of

composition and natural forces in Chapter I. Van Saun's gesture can be imagined - maybe even felt or identified with - as a modulated flow and release of energy; it is a unity in that it is an organic cycle of felt events. This cycle or flow could be related to the notion of articulation. Instead of exerting control over a whole field - picture plane - the artist makes a decision and lets the consequences of that decision take their own courses.

It is to be wondered whether this is expression or merely symptomatic. The artist's swinging arms do not express or even embody expression; what we see is merely a mechanical relationship between body and intellect - the decision-making process.

Dennis Oppenheim's gesture has a goal. Recall that this piece is a preliminary test in preparation for a 65-foot vertical penetration. "Tests were performed to condition my body for a specific task, that of passing vertically through air and water from a 65 foot peak in Idaho. When using your body in this way your best work is in direct proportion to the best you can do."⁶²

If there is a constellation of feeling or emotion being articulated the viewer is not aware of it. The artist's body articulates an action - but we are not in the presence of that action; we are merely told about it. The structure and contrasts of this piece seem to reside in states of being. Perhaps the edge or constant of the piece can be understood as being the project itself. There is the artist's potential (put vaguely as "the best you can do"). There is thus the contrast or relationship between an ideal state ("the best you can do") and a more concrete reality ("your best work"). This may be the dominant contrast.

In a sense, form is the designated task, the most tangible - or most dominant - aspect of the work. The artist may merely be a tool, his body merely signals - or underscores - the carrying out of a process. The body becomes a marker, serving somewhat the same role as Haacke's string of balloons.

We might propose a partially invisible structure consisting of potential versus reality; task versus preparations; artist's body versus preparations - all set or grounded in necessary preparations and gestures.

In the case of Stephen Kaltnbach's typed two-word command, "Expose Yourself," the page of the magazine in which it appeared must be considered as part of the work. There is a special spacing or layout within the page that indicates that the work possesses some immediate, visual properties. Perhaps the wide white areas are a kind of illustration - clean, clinical zones where the viewer either feels exposed or can be exposed.

Yet, we are not permitted to fuse with the work. Work and experience do not seem as one - the work is divisible. On the one hand the form itself, on the other the highly provocative order "Expose Yourself" that takes us back out of the work and into the real world. We are reminded here of the example of the viewer and his reflections in the glass covering a painting. Now, instead of mentally erasing those reflections, the viewer is overwhelmed by them and hence by the general, real life activity in the room itself. In all this the Art Symbol is lost, it seems to dissolve.

We witness a curious inversion; instead of an art work becoming

specific in an indifferently different continuum of experience, an object becomes or points in the direction of that indifferently different continuum; little is expressed, and it is up to us to articulate our reaction - or ignore the command.

Documentary of Object or Being, Designation of Person as Referent

Initially it is the artist himself who appears to dominate this piece. All the information coming from the tape recorders "points" to Roelof Louw - his present location, where he intends to go, and where he was. Of course this play on time is more complicated since when we hear about a plan it is already in the "real" past. In fact, just as in art there are two realities (remember the example of the reflections on glass over a picture and our ability to mentally erase them). In Louw's work there is the real now and the now existing within the context of the piece.

But we wonder what that context is. It is in part the tape recorders, except that they play merely a support role. Apparently it is not that important whether we notice them; they are merely tools and what really counts is the recorded voice of the artist - the invisible but plainly audible "I" of the work.

We might relate the machinery to the back of a painting which is form, but obviously not an Art Symbol. It is also a form with which an Art Symbol is not likely to fuse - it is not pre-Art Symbol. But then where is the area comparable to the front of the canvas? Maybe the closest form to that is the invisible form of the artist - who in the work sometimes exists in the future.

The network - a set of crisscrossed lines - of trajectories made by the artist when he executed the piece by walking around and periodically registering his position, may be thought of as a kind of compositional structure. This would perhaps relate to a traditional, closed unity composition. But we would have to imagine this composition, like a great rectangular network, with an undulating surface submerged in varying degrees in the past and in places burgeoning up into the future. Time itself may be comparable to the Pre-Art Symbol face of a canvas through which the beam of Art Symbol penetrates.

Yet, there are other complications to consider. Even if we think of the "edge" of this work as being time, rather than visible shape, there is the problem of the relation of the "I" in the piece to the "I" outside the piece - for inside and outside remain extremely ambiguous. Is there any difference between the "I" within and that which is outside? Or does the work continue like an unravelling sweater into the artist's life trajectories elsewhere?

If this piece's form is indeed time, then pattern may be the artist's movements and the vibrations of the sounds made by his voice as registered on tapes. Maybe we could go so far as to say that dominant structure is the "I" when it announces its "location" as being the present.

We may decide to think of not one "I" but many "I's" - a kind of multi-unit composition with each unit possessing the same imagined physical traits but widely varied in terms of location in time and levels of intentionality ("I will walk to the next position" versus "I have arrived at this position").

Instead of actual visual tensions, we imagine the "temporal canvas"

to be laced, with that inexplicable thing, a living being. The crisscross patterns do not touch the sensitive strata below intellect in the spectator; maybe what happens is closer to but not the same thing as natural resonance. The mysterious "I" of the artist seems to touch our own inexplicable senses of being. The relation is purely ineffable.

Yet, overall there is little sense of intentionality moving directly between object and viewer. It is more as though the piece's meaning moved or existed parallel to the spectator who can check it for signs of life activity and perhaps identify with some of the time states.

Presentation of Act or Process, Self-Occluded Natural Systems, Alive
in Parenthesis; They Seem to be Impotent and to Have No
Repercussions Beyond Their Immediate Settings

Form in Hans Haacke's incubation piece seems to be clearly delineated. There is the cage or container itself. There are elements such as the texture of the straw and the range of tactile qualities from the glass of the cage, the softness of the hatching birds' down, the brittle, curved hardness of the egg shells which when broken have jagged white edges. Contrasts and hints of structure abound. We are witness to a veritable collage of forms and materials. This might even add up to a dynamic, multi-unit composition. Or perhaps we could imagine each step in the incubation process as being a unit, hence a multi-unit composition with the units - and structure -

distributed over time rather than space.

Haacke's piece has form of the tangible kind. But there is another fairly definite "form" which exists parallel to this - the time of the work. In Chapter I we spoke of specificity of time in terms of a viewer's sense of oneness in relation with a work. In Haacke's piece specificity of time does not relate so much to this fusion as it does to the longevity of the work itself. In a sense, when we view this piece we do not "see" its entirety; future and past are part of the form. We observe only a segment of the work.

So we don't see the whole form. It is as though form were sectioned or fragmented in time. If there is in fact a whole form, it is not primarily a visible form, but a form partially in our heads consisting of knowledge - the understanding that the incubation process is ongoing and will terminate in the future.

We might try to change our definitions a bit. For instance, recall the beam of light moving through a shape, my analogy to the Art Symbol experience. That beam of light had the quality of a unified, articulated set of interwoven feelings and/or emotions. Now, in Haacke's work that beam of light between object and viewer might be said to connect with a dynamic, invisible form - call it a line - which is the cycle from past to future. Actually I do not know why this cycle has to be ultimately viewed temporally. It is simply a unity.

It is possible that the so-called invisible evokes feelings; there are after all strong, tangible elements in the incubation piece to make imagining the ebb and flow of the natural cycle more than a mere study in abstraction; there is written information, but there is also the startling physical presence of the eggs and later the chicks.

The imaginary line in time may evoke feelings but does it articulate them? We can gaze upon a tree branch and feelings or emotions may emerge; I suspect, however, that in such a case it is almost entirely the viewer who generates the feelings whereas in the Art Symbol the experience has a more reciprocal, two-way quality. The tree branch does not articulate emotion. Nor does the imaginary line of the temporal cycles of incubation. Its movements lack a quality of intentionality, nothing is communicated; the line doesn't in itself blaze into an experience that is equally someone else's - the artist's? - experience. The line is a symptom, not an expression. But, to take things even further, the line may serve a role as a contrasting element. That this imagined line is not charged with intentionality, that in fact, it can be understood as a symptom, contrasts with the conscious decision-making process of the artist. In a sense the decision punctuates the line.

A number of Haacke's works have merely taken the form of proposals.

These involved enclosure, the creation of semi-ecological systems within gallery or museum spaces. As in the incubation piece, there was - or could be - strong contrast between notion of inside, outside; perhaps in some of the proposed work there could be a kind of perceptual inversion with inside actually becoming outside.

Haacke proposed sealing off a sculpture court with transparent material and making a huge aviary out of it. Of course, here the work has to be largely imagined. We are not even sure whether the work is meant to be actually executed, thus what we have in our minds is vastly more important than tangible, or perceivable reality.

Also important is the fact of the artist's decision, his thinking up of a piece. It is as though the work was not really an Art Symbol but rather an indication - even just a symptom - that a thought process had occurred. Perhaps this work's structure lies somewhere in the space separating the complicated, imagined events and the fact that a psychic movement occurs - the specificity is of this moment between the experience of an indifferently differentiated continuum of being and the making of a decision. Though a decision is a proposition and, unlike an Art Symbol, can be contradicted, the psychic movement towards a proposition is - I suggest - ultimately rooted in a lower strata, feeling.

Presentation of Dead Fragment or Thing Extracted

From its Natural Setting, Normal Use

There is clearly defined form in Mervyn Dewe's dirt piece - the conical piles themselves. Each pile is a unit in a composition which cannot be viewed all at the same time. It could be considered a multi-unit associational composition. The units can be associated - or linked - with each other through their consisting of the same, distinctive material. But the material - dirt - could also be associated with dirt in the out-of-doors environment. If in fact, the work is connected in some way with the less defined dirt outside, then the overall piece loses specificity. Or, the specificity of the cones of dirt is overwhelmed by the vagueness of dirt elsewhere in general.

Also contributing to this work's quality of unspecificity is the impermanence or instability of the units. The dirt is not baked or glued together. Its form is not fixed and could easily be broomed away. And the conical form actually is changed temporarily at regular intervals;

every day Dewes transferred one pile from one exhibition space to another.

This work seems to represent a kind of pre-Art Symbol. The dirt is like the pigment before it is mixed with glue and employed as paint. Emphasized is the process of preparing a painting rather than the process of expression. Seen in this way, the dirt is not an Art Symbol, it bears or partakes of no meaning. Rather, it is a signal - like a semaphore it indicates that "artistic" activity may occur in this general location.

But there is still more to this piece. There is a curious kind of unity which I have not yet explored. The "art" work and the process by which it is produced are intertwined. Remember that over a period of time the artist carried the dirt from one place to another. This was emphasized in the information accompanying the piece. And in the magazine it was apparently not sufficient to just show a photo of the dirt. Included is a description of the simple time system developed by the artist. Yet, there is nothing extraordinary about the system - one pile transferred over given distance every twenty four hours - except its striking ordinariness and unimportance.

I do not sense that within this system there is purposefulness of the kind related to intentionality. Once a decision was made and the process set in motion, the artist does not share in an expression, he simply becomes another dumb, mechanical element.

Perhaps the artist can be "seen" or imagined as a point or line. And while that point or line appear to express nothing, they are nevertheless alive - while an Art Symbol seems to have life, but is to a large extent dead.

We might approach Dewe's piece from an unexpected angle: it does not appear to have the kind of clearly defined form likely to partake of an Art Symbol. But we could attempt thinking of the artist's activity as a form with definite intervals, beginnings and endings. Perhaps we could look for tension between the dumb acting out of the work and the decision which initiated the piece. But this tension would not be produced by two opposing, partially visible elements or units. It is actually between two signs - the transferring of dirt indicates a preconceived job which then merely requires carrying out, the fact that this job is clearly described indicates that the artist took a decision. It could be argued however, that we never feel the job (unless we identify with it) nor the decision. All we have is clues - or signs - that such processes of contrasting psychic quality did in fact occur. If the emphasis is on qualities of mental activity rather than sensual qualities orchestrated within materials, then what we see may be a kind of canvas with edges - the dirt.

CONCLUSION

The "proposals," interventions, and word pieces of the late sixties and early seventies were for many people a way of continuing to be an "artist." It seems to me that at that time the artist's identity was under siege - and to a more than usual degree in recent history. Many artists, and I suspect nearly all those surveyed in Chapter II, felt that to further arrange shapes, to go on orchestrating plastic elements, was demeaning - the artist would become trivial, a creator of decorative trinkets rather than the aspired to arbiter of world views.

Yet, it was important to remain within the orbit of art; after all what else could one do? One had to maintain domicile somewhere within art, perhaps the only matrix for the creative impulse. Consequently, numerous artists began putting down their brushes; many like Kosuth sought to discuss form instead of moulding it. Others, like Haacke, staged demonstrations in which the Art Symbol was eliminated but the action nevertheless stayed related to the medium of art through art magazines and galleries where photo-documents were displayed. In various related ways disaffected artists established themselves in a kind of holding pattern; like the creators of "air-art" such as Haacke, they launched themselves into pure and somewhat fictive essences, but ironically often well within sight of a familiar old field.

The emergence of apparently "non-visual" works seemed to signal - as well as result from - a profound identity crisis on the part of artists torn between creating objects and - it's become corny to say it - trying to somehow use art as a medium relating man to his roots. But whatever

the causes were, the late sixties and early seventies did appear to be a time of painful assertions and denials. As though to make up for some kind of personal shortcoming or loss, some artists - such as Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden - produced abstruse essays which, aside from their actual texts, seemed to declare that art does not need an audience, that like advanced chemistry and nuclear physics, it is not a spectator sport but rather a serious and specialized field of inquiry.⁶³ While such artists tried to annex art to science, others, such as Oppenheim, Haacke, and Levine, became what might be called "art workers." It almost seemed as though they, serving as the new lay priests alongside social workers and psychologists, would transcend religion and science by descending, jeans jacket intact, into the street.

The contractions and expansions, the swing between isolationism and democratization, produced pain, but they also seemed to presage the birth of a new art. And perhaps - it seemed possible at the time - even a new era to supersede and eclipse the present electronic society.

Some artists, and especially Joseph Kosuth, were producing an art whose sole aim was to examine the premises of art. I find Kosuth's work among the strongest and least compromising of the period - I agree that renewal can only come through studying and restructuring - perhaps even unstructuring - the very premises within which artists are often blindly working. I think that artists have failed to sustain such an examination and that today's art, if it is not to become wholly decorative, must continue, or recontinue; the autopsy on art which was undertaken in the late sixties by artists who, like Kosuth, were questioning the sociological as well as visual significance of picture-plane and stretcher.

At its most extreme, Conceptual Art was not only a respiteful holding pattern and a thoughtful delving into art's foundations, it was seen by some artists and observers, me among them, to have truly epiphanic possibilities. But these possibilities for change would have to begin within sight of a familiar field, and that field which relates to my "expectations" in Chapter I is formalism. I think that the only way for art or an art work to say something is through articulation - an art form must in some way be a code communicating somewhat the same experience to two or more people.

What I would like to see is an art combining the symbolic (communicating role of the old Art Symbol) with a new kind of form. For example, would it be possible to produce an art which does not rely on shapes but which nevertheless manages to orchestrate feelings or convey to another person the quality of human experience? So far, such an art has - as far as I know - not come into being. In short, I felt and still feel - that art can extricate itself from its present state, characterized by lethargy and a kind of frenetic narcissism, by inventing a new definition of form. It seems to me that older, even seemingly outmoded notions, such as that of form as a tangible object external to the viewer, continue to have a woeful effect on art and its ability to convey new perspectives on the human experience.

Some of the artists - namely Haacke, Louw, Kosuth, and Levine - were intent upon what might be called the "collapse" of form; it is as though these artists wished to shut down objecthood altogether.

Besides analyzing art, one goal on the part of artists like Kosuth - who were experimenting with impermanence and were fiddling with the concept of originality - was of course to remove art from its role as

high class commodity.

But, I believe that ultimately it was not the destruction or disappearance of form that such artists sought. For if form were completely eliminated, so art would disappear. I believe that art is a human impulse, that it represents a need to symbolize that is on a par with a need for sex or food. It seems to me that if this vague but terribly necessary thing were to be entirely taken over - or replaced - by discursive (written) symbols, if - to refer to my example in Chapter I - the navy flags were to be read primarily as an interpretable code, then art and many types of literature would merge. In fact, many current art "objects" - I think of some of Oppenheim's latest works - are in my opinion really a form of art criticism.⁶⁴

At its least significant, art that is essentially discursive becomes a piece of poetry or literature dressed up with a few plastic flourishes. I think here of some of the seductive graphics which have been spun off from nonvisual projects by the likes of Sol Lewitt and Christo.

But the encounter between plastic language and different modes of discursiveness may not have to be a standoff. One of the real accomplishments of works, like those of Louw and Kosuth, has been to indicate what may be a new kind of art in which discursiveness and the Art Symbol are cunningly knit together, each one responsive to the other. It may be that a work may cease to be "art" or "writing" and become, instead, a fascinating and vibrant system of cross references - and I do not mean mere illustration either. I think Michael Snow's mirror piece points in this direction - it is neither art nor literature nor

criticism. It employs many kinds of clues and symbols, with, say, the real tape commenting on the nature of sensuality in tactile contrasts, and tactile contrasts seductively undermining the non-Art Symbol role of Snow's piece as a "statement". In Montreal, I think Pierre Boogaerts, with his Camera-art is moving into this field of inquiry.⁶⁵ But such work, I fear, is in real danger of being undermined - or subverted - by the need for its sensual qualities to remain subtle and undominating. The artist is often forced back into a small corner of the art arena, where gesture is reduced to some old fashioned and often used inflection of the plastic language.

But I had hoped for something more - perhaps something far closer to the epiphanic event to which I referred earlier. I feel that to eliminate form is to declare that no possibility for human contact or communication exists, it is to indulge in daydreams and phantasies about essences. And indeed artists like Levine and Van Saun seemed to be moving in this childish and nonproductive direction.

When I began this thesis I suspected that underlying the immediate "strangeness," the seeming lack of plasticity and symbolic meaning, there was in fact an Art Symbol and a composition. I sought "equivalents", for example the clue indicating the consummation of an act might produce or constitute a very special kind of feeling. The contrast between present and past tense might create an irony or tone which the viewer could "pick up" and convert into a sensation - and hence later into an emotion or feeling. It seemed to me that the new art might not simply be redefining the Art Symbol, it might also be redefining and relocating emotions within the viewer - perhaps these emotions were

"raised" to the level of thought, or thought was being related to experimental or emotional states.

I imagined an altogether new kind of field or picture plane which would not be divided by colour, line, and shape, but which would be punctuated by signs and clues, numbers and words - one would scan this field and gradually constellate a "surface" within oneself. However, this surface would be a felt experience.

It would be an experience elicited by, but essentially outside of the tangible components of the art work. The "surface" within the viewer would be punctuated with feelings emanating from or surrounding thought processes - for example, as in Van Saun's piece, the experience of making a decision would be counterpunctual to the experience of carrying out that decision. I imagined that types or modes of thought could be contrasted and orchestrated in such a way as to replace texture, line, and shape.

And I fantasized that some of the creators of "strange objects" listed in Chapter II would come forth with a radically new concept of "heroic" proportion. Here "heroic" would not be defined by large scale or dramatic perspective, but instead, by the largeness and depth of the human experience within the viewer's head.

At its extreme, this new object of greatly reduced scale would lead the viewer - the audience - to realize the interiorization of the universe. In other words, the object would self-effacingly point away from itself, and the viewer would experience, and paradoxically become unaware of (his "understanding" would be deeper than awareness - more like that of a child who has learned to walk and therefore is no longer

"aware" of gravity) opposing forces. While the old art was one of tastefully adjusted oppositions and contrasts, the new art - or Unity II - would be a clean field, open and ready for the creation of an entirely new life.

Indeed, many of the art works dealt with in this thesis move towards a type of smallness. They are what I call "open focal points." Here is an analogy to the idea of open focal point, and the thinking process involved in Lawrence Weiner's proposal involving "A removal of an amount of earth from the ground." Imagine someone holding a very neutral object in his hand. He wonders where he shall place it. The possibilities are infinite, and no possibility is inherently superior to any other. Now what is he to do? After all, he wants to discharge himself of this object; moreover he wants this gesture to articulate a question and a proposal. The question is, "why here, not there?" The proposal is "it might as well be there as here." Therefore he measures off three feet in front of his left toe and at the end he puts down his object. This plays down, indeed eliminates, the product - system exists for its own sake, and with no product to distract us.

The very arbitrariness of the data, the silliness of the system, makes the present location of works, like those of Baxter, seem tenuous and unnecessary rather than "right" and harmonious. The hereness of Levine's 100 plastic units merely conveys the notion that they could just as well be somewhere else. Such art works are very different from the traditional Art Symbol because of a radical divisiveness in which what is present merely serves as a sign to point elsewhere. Haacke's balloons can be seen as merely a "signature" on the limitless sky.

Levine had to employ insignificant, non-associative objects so that the viewer would not become engrossed in materials and so that the objects could point away from themselves, thus becoming "open focal points." And it is in the disproportion between process and product and between data and the events it defines that I detect a trace element of humour - largely unintentional on the part of the artists, I suspect. There is irony in the hardness of the facts and their arbitrariness - in Vazan's piece, why 5,000 and not 6,000 footprints? Why must Van Saun dive 65 feet? Does this measurement, 65 feet, relate in some subtle way to the artist's sensibility? In the case of Smithson, why the Dallas-Forth Worth Regional Airport and not O'Hare or Kennedy?

I attempted to find formal equivalents in apparently non-formal works by Levine, Haacke, and Vazan, but I did not succeed. I am even more disappointed by the fact that the artists themselves did not sustain such an attempt. In a sense, the work outlined in Chapter III was allegorical; it was not able to altogether shut down form - ultimately the artist has to work with something, even if it is his own body, and a photo-document printed in a magazine is still a tangible form. What some of the artists did was simply to make demonstrations. They simulated the dissolution of tangible form.

But perhaps one way of rejecting more traditional notions of form has been not through the dissolution of shape, but in the dissolution of the role of artist. To undertake a new vocation has not necessarily meant relinquishing the trappings of art altogether. As in the case of Les Levine, it has meant a readjustment of one's relation to art; the ties are loosened but they are maintained.

But once such a gesture was repeated it quickly became a parody of itself, which is exactly what happened with more recent attempts to create an art without clearly defined form. Even Christo, one of the few current artists still intervening into the environment with "non-art" materials, is beginning to imitate himself.

The artist wishing to produce an edgeless art found himself in a dilemma - on the one hand, he could not go on repeating the same gesture, on the other hand to give the gesture some decorations amounted not to style but to hollow stylistics. Style is the special character of human experience while stylistics implies a separation of statement and what it wears outwardly (Art Nouveau is stylistic).

The kind of art surveyed in Chapter II, and especially art under categories like Intervention into Environment and Occluded Systems has essentially atrophied and died off. Perhaps its role as an examiner of the premises of art was no longer needed; more likely its role was not heeded. That art became gesture indicated a change in the artist's identity - in fact what "works" like those of Haacke and Van Saun "said" - among other things - was that the artist could change his role or maybe that he must change his role in order to remove himself from the increasingly infertile area of the picture plane and set himself on a new trajectory. The dilemma was - could an artist change his role and still remain an artist. I now think that what Van Saun, for example, really said was - "I don't want to be an artist."

Conceptual Art was always more on the level of allegory or demonstrations - and once the demonstrations had been staged a few times, the impact wore off. Now, some of the proposals seem laughably pedantic, and in a recent article in Arts Canada, the author writes concerning

Les Levine has converted to the role of reporter without entirely letting go of his past identity as an artist.⁶⁶ But his "news" reports appear in art magazines and art galleries. The problem is that in refusing to declare himself as either reporter or artist he commits himself to a life of dilettantism.

His "articles" are dressed up and obfuscated by trimmings and expectations pertaining to the old Art Symbol. And there is no Art Symbol because, as a reporter, Levine wants to deal in facts. It is a confusing situation - and upon encountering his exposé on Eskimos in the gallery one wonders whether Levine is actually commenting on the role of art or on the role of the Eskimo. Perhaps the answer is neither.

Since Levine is neither really a reporter or an artist, he remains suspended in a vague, unfactual area somewhere in between; it's a safe area in that when challenged he can retreat in either direction. But on the other hand such ambivalence makes it hard to take any statement Levine may make seriously, either as art or news. And because we can neither take the art nor the news seriously, it is the artist's signature that assumes importance, and in a sense replaces form while the art work becomes but a peripheral gadget, a trademark.

A gesture like that of releasing 100 balloons into the sky had an enticing boldness to it. The artist seemed to say - and in this I agree - the traditional picture plane had become a tarbaby; if you touched it it might never let you change to new plateaus of creativity. The balloon piece said that the sky itself is the boundless picture plane. Or, to return the work to the psyche of the individual, the viewer's field of vision could be construed as a very personal picture plane.

Gilles Mihalcean's piece, "It is even a little sad in that it carries through what might have been one of those 'proposal' concepts of a few years ago: 'Take 300,000 golf tees and little red wooden balls . . .'"⁶⁷

One major triumph - though from the vantage point of a couple of years ago it would have appeared to be a small triumph indeed - was to introduce into the plastic language the element of absence. Of course absence - silence - has long been used, but what I mean here is an absence of a vastly enlarged scope. I think now of artists as diverse as Barry Le Va⁶⁸ and Dennis Oppenheim. Le Va's installations are multi unit, and to be fully "seen" require time on the part of the viewer; thus absence means absence at any one time of a unified space. Le Va's work is almost an "open focal point" - but it does ultimately relate to the shape and particular character of the room into which it intervenes.

The thing that initially struck me some years ago about the "strange objects" was in fact a sense of absence. The works hinted at theatre in the round except that they projected no shape - and other works using purely discursive codes seemed to be visually neutral; on the one hand some of the art suggested a world of possibilities without presenting any given possibility, and on the other hand, works like that of Weiner presented harsh facts. To go back to the analogy of Art Symbol as ray of light put forth in Chapter I, it seems that in the case of most of the works surveyed, this imaginary beam falls in a space somewhere between viewer and tangible form.

Most striking was the ambiguity of edge and the lack of a clearly defined shape. Released from old forms, the objects might not orchestrate

feelings to produce a symbol, but the new art could begin to act. Previously a great deal of art had been encased within the total imaginative activity, one contemplated the real room in which one stood, or one fused with the art work. In my chapter on "expectations" the either/or quality of this process is exaggerated. In fact one brings external reality in the form of memories of other art works and integrates or juxtaposes them upon the work at hand. But the division between the continuum of daily reality and the Art Symbol has been a problem for artists who wanted their art to act. One of the things demonstrated by Oppenheim, Van Saun, and Levine, is that artists, not art, act. To expect art to act involves what I think is a major confusion. It is as though one became angry because a character in a movie failed to do what one wished - the experience conveyed by an art work is in itself an action, even if it is not a visible or literal action. Curiously, authors of the "strange objects" who were protesting materialism often rejected formalizing because it was not literal or material enough. Many of the "strange objects" were really the very embodiments of the materialism they rejected. Paradoxically, it was this reliance on the literal and material that stood in the way of their evolution. At best they could hope to teach a few lessons and then fade back as footnotes of history, assuming the role of witty quip (Kaltanbach) or occasionally becoming manifestos.

In this thesis I attempted to discern form, or project it into works that actually appeared to have little in common with Art Symbols. I sometimes thought that if I rearranged my manner of perceiving I might even discover that in fact there had been feeling in form there all along.

For example some of the works under Person as Referent seemed to emphasize a decision and then the carrying out of that decision. I imagined that what appeared to be thoughts might also be interpreted - and maybe felt - as feelings. In other words, I sought equivalents. Could it be that an idea could be a form, that it might evoke or locate feelings? Could it be that the viewer's field of vision is the new contour of an art work? And what kept me from ever actually perceiving or experiencing a new kind of Art Symbol was a lack of inevitability. For example as the viewer moves, the image framed by his field of vision constantly changes. Therefore, his experience has very little correlation with that of others; though a personal experience may be triggered by the objects on view, no given human experience is expressed or articulated by the artist.

I thought, and continue to think, that a new, more vital art will ultimately have to be made within the realm of formalism. And I think that, because they are symbols communicating a similar experience to more than one person, the Rembrandt and Van Gogh cited in Chapter I are still superior to nearly all the works dealt with in Chapter II.

Curiously, in attempting to expand the meaning of formalism, the authors of the "strange objects" were not actually destroying formalism. In many cases I think it was simply being reduced to a pinhead.

Works by Vazan and Baxter still had to do with relationships of forms to orchestrate human feelings, but they fell far short of conveying a psychologically rich experience, the kind of experience conveyed by minimal art like that of Donald Judd as well as by Van Gogh or Delacroix. Rather than evoking the heroic, some of the open focal points wound up being just points - where one would have preferred to

see an entire face.

It is as though certain artists had decided that the only subject worthy of art is the inexplicable and ineffable "I - I am." This is a sanctum which could never be penetrated by traditional form - and perhaps there was a hope that this invisible area defended and contained man's only hope for not being polluted by taste and distorted by the compulsion to turn everything into another kind of form - a category. But the defensive reaction of many of the producers of "open focal points" resulted not in a new sense of human experience but in artistic autism. I feel that works in the section, Person as Referent, ultimately relate to the concept of "I am." And since this subject eludes all definition - one can only talk around it - the artist has nothing left to express. He can merely point; like Louw or Van Saun, or any encephalograph, he registers the existence of "interior activity." And the notion of a man is stripped bare, as though, on a not much more naive level, the artist were trying to use art as a litmus test for the soul.

Artists embarked on such an expedition into spirits and essences would probably set up their own type of criticism; the more trivial a meaning, the greater the intensity of expression, the greater the subject, the lower the level of expression - finally like Weiner's proposed "intrusion into this hole of a standard processed material," the artist goes underground. Unfortunately attendance at these bare bones burials becomes increasingly painful, and it is of no surprise that art magazines, such as the ones used for Chapter II have relegated documentation and diagram pieces to the status of footnote. Unfortunately essences tend to be dull, and symptoms are of more interest clinically.

than artistically.

The notion of the "I am" required a radical purity - which involved the leveling off of personal flourish and expressive qualities. Such purity reminded artists to tighten up, to economize their means. But the most interesting and beautiful aspect of the strict economy of means had to do with the artist's relinquishment of control - he could pull back, allowing individuality and personality to leave the picture altogether. I think here especially of the various intervention pieces listed in Chapter II.

Jean Dubuffet is a zero-degree painter who seems to plunge into and disappear within his sandy medium; but the Intervention artists seemed simply to plunge into a kind of essence, a fantasized universe, a nothingness. Dubuffet allows the material world, his medium, to partially take over and to direct the process of painting or making marks. And artists like Baxter (Tree ring piece) and Haacke (incubation piece) abdicate - or at least hint at the possibility of yielding creative control to natural process.

This letting go is probably the most valid statement made by any of the "strange objects." In Levine's distribution piece of 100 plastic units, the artist asks the natural elements to take over and abandons - disowns - his objects which travel - like common coinage - through human networks. The increasingly obscure (from the vantage point of the viewer) trajectories of these objects hint at the basic, though invisible interconnectedness of society. And possibly the interconnectedness of society and art.

This abdication of creative control required the extrication of

personality and the removal of the "artist's touch." Curiously, this withdrawal of personality tends to force the artist into the limelight. Since he produces almost no objects, and he eschews the personal in his compositions, it is paradoxically the artist's name that becomes important. Signatures on the environment become mere signatures; a star system in which one becomes famous for being famous is set up. This kind of fame is itself a comment on art (here one thinks again of Levine), but again I wonder how many times this comment can be made before it too becomes a form of "taste" in art. And having been made, such comments have in no way affected the star system in art - I recall that even a zero degree artist like Dubuffet continues to show objects within the gallery and museum context.

Some of the authors of the non visual art withdrew by diluting their decision making processes with the instinctual or organic "decisions" made by nature. The most interesting aspect of their art, besides the meaning of the abdication itself, is the contrasts set up between cultural and natural, with the cultural sometimes on the verge of being swallowed up. The strength of human imposed orders is measured against the unknowable (the tree's growth patterns can be recorded but never entered into or even identified with) inner necessity of plants - or chicken embryos. Haacke in his incubation piece, proposed the possibility that blind procreative forces can - and perhaps should - overwhelm individual artistic gesture; his production evokes an altar upon which nature is sacrificed to art at the same time that the artist yields creative control - if indeed there ever really was such a thing - and hence personality to nature.

In fact, many of the works surveyed in this thesis have qualities of the rite. That works characterized by visual dryness and a kind of discursive precision would be closely allied with the irrational or prerational notion of ritual appears highly contradictory, a basic conflict in terms. Yet, a piece such as Roelof Louw's installation of tape recorders combines intellectual decisiveness with intimations of dream and ritual gesture. While its layout is clear, the order and tape recorded movements evoke the cadenced mindlessness of ritual.

Such art seems to move away from formalism in two opposite directions - on one hand, artists like Kosuth, Levine, and Louw set out to solve problems rather than use forms to orchestrate feelings. And on the other hand, the works by these same artists depended upon the kind of direct, ritual fusion that transcends tangible form and is characterized by a state of ecstatic and not aesthetic relationship between viewer and object. Unfortunately both directions tended to be dead end. Problem solving became dull, and ritual could not avoid but to become either illustrative or a parody of the idea of ritual.

For to live, ritual requires a basic psychological contact between artist and society. In fact ritual is this dynamic contact and not the appreciation of interesting combinations of forms. In ritual, one form will ultimately suffice since form is but a point of departure. Of course ritual can occur on a more personal level, and I think that the asceticism of many of the proposal pieces and documentation relates to a kind of creative fasting - before they could reach new plateaus of creativity artists would have to return to a period before personal expression - they would have to disrobe art in order to later change its shape and meaning.

But ritual also implied a kind of Romanticism on the part of some artists. I am not sure, but I suspect that the emphasis on "essence" rather than tangible form had to do with young sensibilities tempered by disgust for materialism and ennui in a period that seems to emphasize sensation rather than sensuality. Curiously, it was a Romanticism that, while trying to cast off the yoke of earthbound - society-bound - form, sought relief in a new purity, a kind of classic absolutism.

Though the more radically pure statements made by Kosuth and Van Saun, among others, have not continued to live as art, they continue to outweigh more visual works by Vazan or Smithson which tend towards the sentimental restaging of ritual events; actually Vazan has in recent years produced stage décors that attempt to capture the "essence" of ritual rather than truly to elicit an essential elemental relationship with as yet unfathomed life forces. Vazan's 5000 footprints conveys the tritest Romantic expression - that of the "shifting sands of time." Smithson (in works not surveyed in Chapter II) also strangely alludes to ritual and its relationship with the Sublime.⁶⁹ It is an amusing fact that Smithson's work has roots in landscapes by nineteenth century artists like the American Frederick Edwin Church. Unfortunately, the impact of Smithson's vast projects is somewhat undermined - a real sense of scope and felt space is replaced by mere bigness. A proposal for such large works reads as mere nonstatement.

It seems to me that two major directions of the work surveyed in Chapter II were toward ritual and toward discursiveness. Another possibility is that art and art criticism would become indistinguishable. The trouble

was that many of the artists' statements remained cryptic and unclear; and once made, they did not continue to live, to shine forth as expressions of human experience. What they did was to herald the possibility of finding new "forms" with which to enlarge - or discover - entirely new experiences. And the elimination of effect - of decoration - was in many cases part of a campaign to clean out the older aesthetics which were and are pulling man back into comfortable, well travelled but somehow trite experiences.

I continue to feel that, like criticism, many of the nonvisual projects and demonstrations exist at the periphery of art. However, work by Kosuth, Oppenheim, and Van Saun (I refer now specifically to work outlined in this thesis) seems to often be secondary even to criticism, for which it serves as a kind of demonstration or lesson.

I believe that - whatever art is - it must articulate feeling, and it must articulate feeling using a form or forms which are at least in part nondiscursive. Yet, like many of the artists reviewed in this thesis I feel that formalism as we know it is rapidly wearing out, old forms are becoming old, and increasingly empty containers. What we need is a new formalism. I also found that my formalist criteria, when applied to the "strange objects" were reduced to a pinpoint - the jumping off place just before one arrives - or imagines arriving at - the inexpressable "I am" to which I earlier referred.

I am disappointed by the failure of artists to achieve a new definition of form, and I lay part of the blame at the feet of so-called concept artists who made radical gestures but failed - or were unable - to follow through. My own dream is for an art with very little tangible

or perceptible shape which nevertheless, using non-discursive language, conveys human experience rather than registers an "I am." My fear is that the Art Symbol is truly dead, and that, for artists wishing to speak of human experience, the only route now is criticism and literature. Or, as Jacques Ellul seems to say in his book The Technological Society, perhaps all that is left is to "bear witness."⁷⁰

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

* ¹"Inert Gas Series" by Robert Barry, illustrated in Ursula Meyer, Conceptual Art (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1972), p. 34.

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³Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1953), p. 40.

⁴Robin G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 40.

CHAPTER I

⁵Paul Ziff, Philosophical Turnings (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 95.

⁶Morris Weitz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics, ed. Francis Coleman (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), p. 89.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Suzanne K. Langer, Problems of Art (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1958), p. 174.

⁹Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 40.

¹⁰Charles Dewey, Art as Experience (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1958), p. 84.

¹¹Langer, Problems . . ., p. 223.

¹²"Steamer in a Snowstorm" by Joseph Turner, Collection of the Tate Gallery, London.

¹³Stephen C. Pepper, Aesthetic Quality, A Contextualistic Theory of Beauty (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 79.

¹⁴Clive Bell, Art (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1958) p. 18.

¹⁵Websters New Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Co.), p. 451.

- 16 "The Adoration of the Shepherds," pen and bistre drawing by Rembrandt, Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
- 17 "AM. July," by Jack Youngerman, The Corcoran Gallery of Art.
- 18 Arthur Berndtson, Art, Expression and Beauty (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 162.
- 19 Collingwood, p. 147.
- 20 "Portrait of the Artist with Severed Ear" by Vincent Van Gogh, Collection of Leigh B. Block, Chicago.
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- 23 Monroe C. Beardsley, Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958), p. 168.
- 24 John D. Graham quoted by Irving Sandler, "John D. Graham: The Painter as Esthetician and Connoisseur," Art Forum, VII (October, 1968), 51.
- 25 David Novros is represented by Bykert Gallery, New York.
- 26 Collingwood, p. 275.
- 27 Virgil C. Aldrich, Philosophy of Art (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 19.
- 28 Paul Valéry quoted in Richard Wollheim, Art and Its Objects (New York: Macmillan Col, 1968), p. 75.
- 29 Ibid., p. 31
- 30 Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic (New York: Noonday Press, 1968), p. 20.
- 31 Berndtson, p. 61.
- 32 Beardsley, p. 170.
- 33 Untitled aluminum and wood sculpture by Ronald Bladen shown at Jewish Museum, New York, 1965.
- 34 "Rainbow Picket," Mixed Media sculpture by Judy Gerowitz, the Jewish Museum, New York.
- 35 Drawing by Dorothea Rockburne illustrated in Robert Pincus-Witten, "New York," Art Forum, IX (September, 1970), 75.

36 "The Lake" by Agnes Martin illustrated in Kasha, Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," Art Forum, IX (June 1971), p. 72.

37 Kinetic constructions by Nicolas Schoffer, Musée d'art moderne, Paris.

38 Kinetic op art by Robert Savoie, Collection Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal.

39 Bridget Riley is represented by the R. Feigen Gallery, New York.

CHAPTER II

40 "Milan Project" by Dennis Oppenheim illustrated in Jack Burnham, "Dennis Oppenheim, Catalyst 1967 - 1970," Arts Canada, XXVII (August, 1970), 32.

41 "Beach Transformed by 5000 Footprints" by Bill Vazan illustrated in Laurent Lamy, "L'Art Conceptuel," Vie des Arts, Numero 64 (November, 1971), 33.

42 Laurence Weiner, "Works by Lawrence Weiner," Studio International, 181 (November, 1971), 127.

43 "Annual Rings 1968" by Ian Baxter is illustrated in Jack Burnham, "Dennis Oppenheim, Catalyst 1967 - 1970," Arts Canada, XXVII (August, 1970), 31.

44 Intervention into Nature by Klaus Rinke illustrated in Klaus Rinke, "Between Spring and Ocean," Studio International, 181 (March, 1971), 122.

45 "The Process of Elimination" by Lee Levine illustrated in Joanna Marsden Woods, "Lee Levine," Vie des Arts, Numero 56 (Autumn 1969), 41.

46 Proposal by Hans Haacke quoted in William Kirby "Place and Process," Arts Canada, XXVI (October, 1969), 39.

47 "Skyline" by Hans Haacke illustrated in Otto Piene, "Sky Art: A Notebook for a Book," Arts Canada, XXVI (June, 1969), 20.

48 "I. Matter in General," collection of Eastern New Mexico University.

49 "Aerial Map Proposal" by Robert Smithson illustrated in Robert Smithson, "Aerial Art," Studio International, 177 (April, 1969), 181.

50 "Preliminary Test for 65 Foot Vertical Penetration" illustrated in Jack Burnham, "Dennis Oppenheim: Catalyst 1967 - 1970," Arts Canada, XXVII (August, 1970), 35.

51 "Flour Drop" by John Van Saun illustrated in William Kirby, "Place and Process," Arts Canada, XXVI (October, 1969), 38.

⁵² Stephen Kaitanbach, "Expose Yourself," Studio International, 180 (August, 1970), 34.

⁵³ Mirror piece by Michael Snow illustrated for Gene Youngblood, "Icon and Idea in the World of Michael Snow," Arts Canada, XXVII (February, 1970), cover.

⁵⁴ Roelof Louw, "An Aesthetic Engagement," Studio International, 181 (November, 1971), 214.

⁵⁵ Proposal by Hans Haacke quoted by John Noel Chandler, "Hans Haacke: The Continuity of Change," Arts Canada, (June, 1969), 11.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ "Press" by Michael Snow illustrated in Gene Youngblood, "Icon and Idea . . ." Arts Canada, XXVII (February, 1970), 14.

⁵⁸ Seventeen Files of Dirt by Mervyn Dewes illustrated in Laurent Lamy, "L'Art Conceptuel," Vie des Arts, Numero 64 (November, 1971), 31.

CHAPTER III

⁵⁹ Langer, Problems . . . , p. 86.

⁶⁰ Wollheim, Art . . . , p. 31.

⁶¹ Ibid., 59.

⁶² "Preliminary Test."

⁶³ Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden quoted in Ursula Meyer, Conceptual Art (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co., 1972), pp. 96 - 103.

⁶⁴ "Echo" by Dennis Oppenheim illustrated in Max Kozloff, "Reviewing," Art Forum, XIII (March, 1975), p. 64.

⁶⁵ "Jaune Bananier" by Pierre Boogaerts illustrated in Galerie Optica, Camerart (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1974).

⁶⁶ "Eskimo Chain Gang" by Les Levine was shown at Galerie Gilles Gheerbrant, Montreal in June, 1976.

⁶⁷ David Burnett, Québec 75/Art:1, "Arts Canada", XXXIII (July/August, 1976), 14.

⁶⁸ Installation by Barry Le Va illustrated in Jane Livingston, "Distributional Sculpture," Art Forum, VII (October, 1970), 50.

⁶⁹ "Spiral Jetty Utah," by Smithson illustrated in Philip Leider, "How I spent my Summer Vacation," Art Forum LX (September, 1970), 49.

⁷⁰ Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 428-436.

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