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MINIMALIST LEGACIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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MASTER OF ART THESIS

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Aileme...

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MINIMALIST LEGACIES IN CONTEMPORARY ART

ABSTRACT

In the 1960s and 1970s, minimalist artists relentlessly challenged the definition of modernist art and tradition. The minimalists initiated a new interaction process between the art object and the viewer to de-institutionalize art and integrate it into everyday life. This process, which we can also define as the transition from modern to post-modern art, has led to a change in the ontology and aesthetics of the art object. Asserting a post-medium understanding against the medium-specific art form of the late modernist period, minimalist artists severed the relationship of the art object with the medium. They avoided optical concerns, contrary to the formalist tradition, which is one of the main distinctions of three-dimensional art. This counter stance shed new light on the relationship between space and object, transforming the subject-oriented way of thinking of modern aesthetics into an object-oriented way of thinking, revealing a democratic relationship with the viewer immanent to the experience. This relationship enabled the critical analysis of minimal objects in the individual practices of post-1970s contemporary art, making it possible for art to expand into the social space. This thesis attempts to map the logic of how this diversity expanded after minimalism, focusing on the dialectical relationship of modernist art itself, which minimalism both refined and ended.

Keywords: Medium Specificity, Post-Medium, Non-Site, Site-Specificity, Minimalist Legacies, Contemporary Art.

GÜNCEL SANATTA MİNİMALİST MİRASLAR

ÖZET

1960’larda ve 1970’lerde, minimalist sanatçılar modernist sanatın tanımına ve geleneğe aralıksız meydan okudular. Sanatı kurumsallıktan çıkarmak ve günlük yaşamla bütünleştirmek amacıyla sanat nesnesine izleyici katılımını sağlayan minimalistler, böylelikle sanat nesnesi ve izleyici arasında yeni bir etkileşim süreci başlattılar.

Modern sanattan post-modern sanata geçiş olarak da tanımlayabileceğimiz bu süreç, sanat nesnesinin ontolojisi ve estetiğinin değişimine neden olmuştur. Geç modernist dönemin medyumlara özgü sanat biçimine karşı medyum-ötesi bir anlayış öne süren minimalist sanatçılar, sanat nesnesinin medyum kategorileri ile ilişkisini kesmiş ve ‘üç boyutlu’ sanatın ana ayrımlarından biri olan biçimci (formalist) geleneğin tersine, optik kaygılardan uzak durmuşlardır. Bu karşı duruş, mekân ile nesne arasındaki ilişkiye yeni bir ışık tutarak modern estetiğin özne odaklı düşünme biçimini, nesne odaklı bir düşünme biçimine çevirerek izleyiciyle deneyime içkin demokratik bir ilişki açığa çıkarmıştır. Bu ilişki, 1970 sonrası çağdaş sanatın bireysel pratiklerinde minimal nesnelerin eleştirel analizine olanak sağlayarak sanatın toplumsal uzama doğru genişlemesini mümkün kılmıştır. Bu tez çalışması, minimalizmin hem rafine ettiği hem de sonlandırdığı modernist sanatın kendi diyalektik ilişkisine odaklanarak, bu çeşitliliğin minimalizden sonra nasıl genişlediğini haritalandırmaya çalışır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Medyum Özgüllüğü, Medyum Sonrası, Saha Olmayan Saha, Mekâna Özgülük, Minimalist Miraslar, Güncel Sanat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

I will discuss minimalist legacy in three parts. The first part is the historical development of minimalism. The second is minimalism between the 1960s-1970s, and finally, the analysis of selected works from contemporary art.

Under what artistic and social-political conditions did minimal art emerge, and what is minimalism's place in art history after the early 1960s? What are the contributions of minimal artists to the concept of art? What are the effects of minimalism on the discourses and practices of contemporary art?

While tracing the art forms that have been influential in the historical development of minimalism, in this context, the medium-specific conditions of Modern Art and their counterpart, post-medium conditions, will be examined. The focus here will be on movements and artists who approach art from two different perspectives: aesthetic and ontological. Minimalism gained importance in the early 1960s. Minimal artists took the traditional formalism of modernist art in a different sense and presented this understanding as a new set of proposals. With its spatial constructions and active role with the viewer, minimalism created a new avant-garde break in Modern Art. With its unique strategies, it inverted the object-subject relationship and thus offered a new perspective on the general problems of modern philosophical aesthetics.

However, as art history has become limiting with the desire for '-isms,' minimal art has become a limiting stylistic art form. Nevertheless, these artists, each claiming individuality, explored different aspects of art.

In this respect, minimalism marked the began art movements such as Post-minimalism, Land Art, Performance Art, and Installation after the 1960s.

Therefore, the concepts and procedures that emerged with minimalism have turned into definitions that can be referenced in post-minimalist and post-conceptual art. In this sense,

post-1970's minimalism is a historically critical analysis and conceptualization of the minimalist phenomenon in contemporary art. This phenomenon includes the publicness of minimal objects and expands from object to space after the 60s. From the 70s to the present day, it bequeaths the socio-political spatiality of art. From this perspective, minimalism and its legacies in contemporary art are essential issues.

The development of minimal art is attributed to the reductionist tradition of art. Reductionism is evident both in abstract art and in the Duchampian examples of the avant-garde. This reductionism was influential in American art after the war. Abstract art within the period of Aesthetic Modernism has similar relations with post-war American Abstract Art. Therefore, aesthetic modernism was replaced by medium-specific modernism in American Art.

The critic and art historian Clement Greenberg introduced the idea of medium-specific modernism in American Art. Greenberg argued that the content of most avant-garde paintings is the flatness which is the main characteristic of the painting medium. This discourse showed American abstraction and American Art as a continuation of the Western artistic tradition. Greenberg's accepted canonized hegemonic pressure was abandoned by a new generation of artists after a while, becoming a negation.

These artists included painters such as Kenneth Noland, Ad Reinhardt, and Frank Stella. Opposing the metaphysical content and illusionism of Abstract Expressionism, these artists discovered new structural features in painting and made abstraction independent of content. During this period, when the final point of the purification of modern painting was reached, they emphasized the objectivity of painting by giving clues to the transcendence of the boundaries between mediums.

This path paved by painters such as Stella and Reinhardt, considered minimal painters, led the artists who came after them to reject illusionism in the early 1960s and leap into three dimensions. Among these young artists, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Dan Flavin turned the subject-centered way of thinking that had prevailed in modern art by adopting a form of expression that emphasized the objectivity of form, away from

formal concerns about the object. Minimalist artists' artworks and the texts they wrote to express themselves were harshly criticized by the modernist art advocates of the period. Michael Fried, whose views on modern art were in line with Greenberg, wrote the text *"Art and Objecthood"* (1967), in which he defended the distinctive features of modernism against minimalism. In this text, Fried argued that minimalism was a corrupt art, claiming it established a theatrical relationship between the object and the viewer. Fried's negative seal on minimalism led to minimalism associated with theatricality for many years. However, in contrast to Fried's negative reference, theatricality has become a favorable consideration in installation practices in contemporary art.

The Minimalists' distinction with the modern sculpture of the period stems from their structural combination of forms to create a sculptural composition and the mass production of ready-made elements. This structuralism also affects the aesthetic relationship of the objects with the audience. Minimal objects tend towards a consensual understanding of what we might call the cultural sphere. In the 1970s, artists critically analyzed this situation and proved that minimal objects were aesthetically blocked. The newly developing minimalist tendency is characterized by artists shifting the focus away from the object and problematizing the surrounding space.

The problematization of space led to the emergence of concepts such as spatiality, therefore art realized in virtual spaces entered the public site. This development later led to institutional criticism of art institutions, revealing new minimal approaches to the viewer and perception. This taught artists to depart from the structuralism and rhetoric of minimalism by expanding the formal possibilities of the minimal object.

The sociopolitical and anti-metaphysical critique of minimal art is implicit in these ways of thinking. This tendency, called post-minimalism, is oriented towards manipulating raw material against the production of minimal objects inherent in the factory technique and the division of labor of the assembly line. This tendency institutionalized theatrical aesthetics by focusing on physical objects and events in time and space.

At the same time, the interest in linguistics in this period expanded the field of art and led to the consideration of art through contexts. Robert Smithson is an actual example in this regard. Resisting the desire to categorize art, he played one of the most significant roles in developing the art of the 80s and 90s by combining art practice with different mediums and categories. Presenting natural sites in virtual sites with the concept of the non-site, the artist expanded the aesthetic space of art by establishing a metaphor between different sites. Smithson's legacy and minimalist practice has dramatically influenced contemporary art, creating a tendency to consider site-specificity, art, and aesthetic experience in political and social contexts. In this sense, strategies such as installations have semantically loaded the spaces and echoed the knowledge of cultural, political, and social contexts outside art in aesthetic reflections. As the final chapter of the thesis, I will analyze this expansion in contemporary art and try to make visible the effects of minimalist legacies on contemporary art.

2. MEDIUM-SPECIFIC CONCEPTIONS IN MODERN ART

Arts and mediums have been developed in different ways by cultures and civilizations over time. For example, the Romans distinguished disciplines such as grammar, logic, geometry, astronomy, and music by creating the distinction of "*artes liberales*" based on the hierarchies of knowledge in Ancient Greece.

In the Renaissance, painting and sculpture were considered specific and separated from technical arts such as carpentry and blacksmith. In the eighteenth century, the characteristics of the skills began to be defined.

The primary historically known source on mediums is the essay G.E. Lessing's "*Laokoon: The Limits of Poetry and Painting*" (1767, London, England, J. Ridgway & Sons.) Lessing's conception of art focuses on the creative expression of classical and literary forms. In his text, Lessing discusses the differences and boundaries between the visual arts and the literary arts, arguing that each art has its unique form of expression and that these expressions cannot be compared. (G.E Lessing, 1836)

The discussion of the medium as one of the foremost art topics emerged with Modernism. Modernization caused all fields, from mathematics to architecture, to focus on their unique specificities and led to the questioning of disciplines by revealing distinctions and boundaries. Later, the concept of "*l'art pour l'art*"¹ emerged in nineteenth century art. Art's aim to exist independently is emphasized, arguing that skill was valuable for the aesthetic experience rather than as a goal or objective.

The beginning of aesthetic modernism is the negation of literary art and the association of aesthetics with art, leading to the transformation of art into an ideology of autonomy. However, these aesthetic qualities are inherent in the historically recognized and evolving structures of art. In this way, Early Modernism inherited a plurality of historically distinct arts from academic art. In contrast to technical skill-based art education and traditional academic art forms, aesthetic art is about the experience of beauty, emotion, and sensation.

¹ Art for Art's sake.

Therefore, aesthetic modernism represents an understanding of art that questions the traditional rules of art and departs from established norms.

According to Peter Osborne,

Aesthetic modernism negated the system of social dependencies constitutive of the academic art of the first half of the nineteenth century on the basis of an affirmation of artistic freedom via the aesthetic concept of art: "free" or "autonomous" aesthetic art. (Osborne, 2021, p.122)

And in this sense, *"art for art's sake - the negation of dependency"* - was the modernism of aesthetic art. "Aesthetic" was here an extended word used to mean freedom. Inherent in the structures of academic art versus quasi-Kantian aesthetics, aesthetic modernism was redefined as a critical perspective beyond positive knowledge (the autonomy of judgement), which is purely intellectual, in contrast to Kant's metaphysically insufficient concept of aesthetics as rational doctrine. Despite Kant's definition of aesthetics as the judgement of taste, Friedrich Schiller, in early Romanticism, tried to determine the social function of aesthetics based on Kant's ideas. According to Ranciere, against Kant's doctrine of self-deterministic aesthetics, Schiller put forward sensory (aesthetic) experience, which promised a new world of art and a new hope of life for individuals and society.

Ranciere summarizes this context in three points.

First, the autonomy staged by the aesthetic regime of art is not the autonomy of the work of art, but the autonomy of a mode of experience. Secondly, "aesthetic experience" is an experience of "multispecies"; hence, it is for the subject of this experience and negates a certain autonomy. Thirdly, the object of this experience is "aesthetic" insofar as it is not art, or at least not only art. (Ranciere, 2000, p.111)

Indeed, the affirmation of aesthetic autonomy also gradually takes the form of glorifying the absolutization of the artist. Aesthetic autonomy emphasizes the freedom and autonomy of art, independent of external factors such as the meaning or value of works of art, the artist's intentions, or social and political contexts.

This emphasized evaluating the work of art for its unique aesthetic qualities. In this sense, aesthetic modernism is often associated with experimentation in art, abstraction, geometric order, forms, and color exploration, allowing for formal narrative. At the same time, this period, which emphasized emotional and sensory experience with movements such as Impressionism, Cubism, and Abstract art, led to a move away from traditional depiction or imitative approaches.

The aesthetic modernism is also a prototype of the avant-garde in art. Therefore, historical avant-gardes, which developed against aesthetic autonomy, tried to take over daily life socially and politically against aesthetics. As Osborne points out, the art tradition as aesthetics finds its expression in an understanding of aesthetics that traces its concrete critical conditions from Kant's nineteenth-century aestheticism to Gotthold Lessing. This tradition extended to post-war American modernism and was developed and continued by critics such as Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. (Osborne, 2021) Greenberg's medium specificity in American art is in the logic of aesthetic modernism. Greenberg sees mediums as irreducible experiences and mediates them with aesthetics. Therefore, Greenberg's closed-logical interpretation of art aimed at reflecting the various aesthetic specificities of the arts. In doing so, Greenberg insists on the awareness of bringing the content of the painting to the surface, which is a fundamental characteristic of the medium of the artwork. In this way, he wants to justify abstraction as fulfilling a historical tendency. We can therefore see post-war American art as a displaced repetition of a series of aesthetic modernism. As we have seen, the beginning of this historical relationship involves aesthetic modernism and the purification of mediums.

Narratives in which art is distanced from the practice of life - autonomous, in which form problematized against content - gained dominance.

2.1. The Development of Abstract Art

The term 'abstract' concerning abstract art is quite inclusive in that it characterizes diverse and different historical periods. In art history, the historical development of abstract art is analyzed as the logical outcome of the aesthetic relations of artistic movements. Although many art historians and critics have put forward different arguments and

narratives about this development, we can argue that the most crucial feature of abstraction as an artistic and intellectual practice with multiple expressions beyond the visual arts is its capacity to reflect on itself. In this sense, abstract art emerged in aesthetic modernism. Abstraction reflects the various versions of itself that existed from the beginning: contradictions, rifts, and exceptions, even within the same work, are typical features of abstract art. Thus, the various versions of abstract art have been characterized by ideal and matter, transcendence, and structuralism. Within the theory of aesthetics, the development of modern painting is historically analyzed in terms of the medium's purification from all worldly representational and illusionistic excesses. Moreover, this process, which involves a long history, witnesses the emergence of different forms of expression in abstract and the canonization of the formalist tradition. Various historical texts on abstraction discuss aesthetic characteristics and structural approaches that adopt visual codes derived from modernist abstraction. In this sense, one example of the development of abstract art is Alfred H. Barr's intertwined graph of artistic modes of expression, in which each artistic movement is the logical consequence of the aesthetic modes of expression of previous trends. (Figure 1.1.)

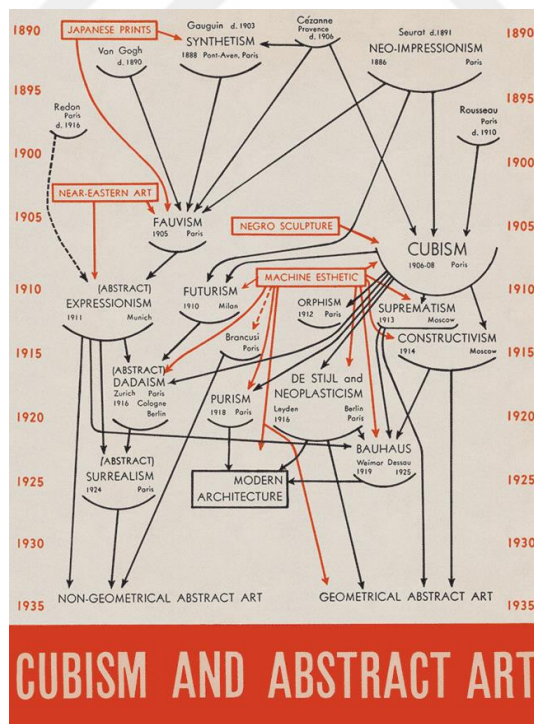


Figure 1.1 Barr's Diagram on the development of art movements. 1936 (Source: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2748_300086869.pdf)

In his essay "*Cubism and Abstract Art*" in 1936, Barr explains the historical development of abstraction in art from Impressionism as follows:

The first and more important current finds its sources in the art and theories of Cezanne and Seurat, passes through the widening stream of Cubism, and finds its delta in the various geometrical and Constructivist movements which developed in Russia and Holland during the War and have since spread throughout the World.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.417)

Barr's flowchart of the aesthetic relations of artistic movements allows us to distinguish different traditions in abstract art. While the tendency towards abstraction in the first stream can be said to be structural and geometric, based on simplicity and logical calculations, the second stream, in contrast to the first, is intuitive and emotional, organic, and biomorphic rather than geometric in its forms, and at the same time decorative and mystical.

Clement Greenberg's post-war art criticism is another assessment of abstraction. According to Greenberg, this kind of painting tradition, which began in post-Manet Impressionism, has developed technicality based on the characteristics of the painting medium.

Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that care to be acknowledged openly. Manet's paintings became the first Modernist ones by the virtue of the frankness with which they declared the surfaces on which they were painted.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.818)

Greenberg's analysis focuses on the technical developments of the most successful paintings of the centuries and provides a logic of action. This logic also allows for the narrative that American abstract art continues the legacy of the European abstract art tradition.(Gilbaut, 2009) The art of abstract painting, which develops away from worldly representations under the umbrella of aestheticism. In this sense, abstraction is constantly integrated with philosophy and deserves a philosophical status, according to some. The tradition of abstract art, which does not seek depth in a perspective-dependent search as

in the ancient arts, on the contrary, seeks it in existence itself, in a philosophically lifelong range of experience. Therefore, abstract art is a universal quest that integrates presence with visual tools such as depth, color, and form.

2.1.1 The metaphysical content of abstract art

According to Bonfand, the commitment to metaphysics in different periods and individual practices of abstract art appears as referring to the superiority of instinct over theory when analyzing abstract art.(Bonfand, 2015, p.147)

Indeed, the similarities between late modernism's early and abstract works are the metaphysical commitment that gives birth to art practice. The common point of this commitment is abstraction as the only way to achieve a formally pure aesthetic.

Abstraction has led to the prominence of imagination in art instead of life practice, representation, and rhetoric. Thus, abstract art, shaped around transcendental concepts through ideas against the reality of life, has led artists to move away from a mimetic relationship with the world and often resort to spiritual concepts. At the same time, abstract artists aimed to reach 'pure' art by reducing art to its starting point with some grounding, such as emotion, spirit, and purity. The first analysis of the concept of abstraction took place with the book ''*Abstraction and Emphaty: A Contribution to the Phychology of Style*'' (1997, Michigan, Ivan R.Dee) written by Wilhelm Worringer in 1908. "*Einfühlung*" (Empathy), a concept Worringer developed from Theodor Lipps' aesthetic theory, indicates a synergy between human existence and the world. Worringer associated abstraction with this concept and stated it as follows;

The condition for the breakthrough of empathy is a relationship of complete and successful trust between human and external phenomena; the breakthrough of abstraction, on the contrary, is the result of a great inner anxiety in human provoked by the phenomena of the external world, and in the field of religion it means that every vision takes on a strongly transcendental color.(Worringer, 1997, p.10)

Worringer's association of abstraction with "*great inner anxiety*" can be interpreted as the uncertainty of existence felt as a threat. In early abstract art, this dimension of anxiety is

also revealed in the artists' texts. While Hans Arp is described as "*(...) trying to get closer to that inexpressible truth (...) that concerns humanity and eternity (...)*" Similarly, Kandinsky, speaking of art mediums, says, "*(...) they reflect that great darkness (...) which arises without warning (...)*." (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 309,110)

Similar expressions by abstract artists show inner restlessness and boredom aroused by the world's phenomena. However, that boredom was philosophically associated with the modal of possibility. According to Antmen, the abstraction of this period finds its origins in the thoughts of Plato, who distinguished between the world of ideas and the world of appearances, arguing that unchanging realities belong to the world of ideas. In contrast, formations consisting of shadows belong to the world of appearances. (Antmen, 2008, p.82)

In this context, abstraction in early period is about removing and freeing itself from its attachment to life. Accordingly, the abstract artists of the 1910s explicitly sought aesthetic emotion in plastic expression. Although this period contained the anxiety of the search for knowledge, artists with this dimension of anxiety pursued abstraction.

Heidegger's famous concept of Angst can explain the philosophical equivalent of this mental state. Heidegger's philosophy is known as the ontological difference between being and beings. So, he puts this idea in terms of the experience of modernity: Being is always hidden: It cannot come fully into being and retreats behind everything that directly confronts us. (Harman, 2022, p. 147)

This philosophical proposal relates intellectual opposition between subject and object to metaphysics and uses the concept of "Dasein" to emphasize human existence. Therefore, the difference between the medium and the message in the context of twentieth-century art establishes a relationship with Heidegger's phenomenon of being. This relationship emerged as a conceptual in the context of abstract painting, with the suppression of surface or content in favor of depth.

On the other hand, the art of the modernism sought through abstraction the indefinable or the unrepresentable in this sense.

2.1.2. Abstraction in the early 20th century

Abstraction broke the tradition of art history to uncover the pure aesthetics deep within the essence of painting. It witnessed the establishment of abstract painting, where comparison with the past was no longer possible, and traditions were transcended. In this sense, we can say that Impressionism, as a movement inspired by nature, gave the first clues to abstraction.

According to Greenberg, the Impressionists had begun to liberate the medium of painting from the influence of other mediums, especially sculpture, by directing it to its characteristics. Greenberg expressed this:

The Impressionists began to demolish shading and modeling and everything that evoked sculpture, not in the name of the color, but in the name of the pure and purely optical.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.820)

As Greenberg states, the Impressionism movement was concerned with creating form through colors. The works that gain form through light and color are transformed into works of art by adding spirituality and ceasing to be material entities. With their 'unfinished' images of forms and depths, the Impressionists endeavored to capture physical reality in all its authenticity. Therefore, this attempt led the art of painting away from its mimetic relationship with the world and to establish its existence. Impressionism influenced the Cubism movement that came after it by using color in a deformed manner, often in an artistic way.

However, with the deformation of colors within, Cubism shifted to the world of objects, and the naturalism of Impressionism was deactivated, further paving the way for artworks to move away from a mimetic relationship with nature. Following this development, the emergence of collage and other cubist techniques and the use of actual materials in art made it possible for works of art to move towards an autonomous existence without imitating the world. Art, which began with Impressionism and gradually moved away from the illusionism and representation of historical painting with Cubism, created a new pure art form with abstract art, free from the naturalism of Impressionism and the

idealized images of Cubism. While shaping itself, early abstraction benefited greatly from Cubism's collage, its autonomization of the painting surface, and its design of the character as planes. Therefore, Cubism's pictorial structuring based on geometric shapes and sharp lines greatly influenced abstract art. However, the abstraction understanding of both movements is quite different.

Bonfand explained abstraction in Cubism as follows.

In Cubism, the object, broadly conceived, dictates to the artist the rules of deconstruction and reconstruction (...) Cubism proposes an object of n strength: Any bottle of rum is treated according to various positional experiences at different moments, and its image becomes more powerful than the object itself through the collage that reveals its reality. (Bonfand, 2015, p.13)

Therefore, we can say that Cubism's abstraction is about creating idealizations over daily objects, and this is the creation of a new 'ideal' being by the abstracted object. Abstract artists directed the Cubists' abstraction of daily objects towards entirely tangible forms and pure abstraction through forms and shaped their works of art around transcendental concepts of ideals. According to Bonfand, such a process, in which geometry originates in early abstract art after Cubism, *"deserves to be called idealization insofar as it creates a new, 'ideal' entity rather than touching any part of reality."* (Bonfand, 2015, p. 13, 14) This idea reveals its basis in abstraction through the 'language of forms and colors.' Wassily Kandinsky, described the foundations of abstraction in his article *"Concerning the Spiritual in Art"* in late 1911.

The constantly growing awareness of the qualities of different objects and beings is only possible given a high level of development in the individual. With further development, these objects and beings take on an inner value, eventually, an inner sound. So it is with color, which if one's spiritual sensitivity is at a low stage of development, can only create a superficial effect, an effect that soon disappears once the stimulus has created. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.111)

In the rest of the text, Kandinsky analyzes the emotional reactions of pure colors. In early abstraction, the abstract paintings of the period's artists, endowed with inner necessities - as Kandinsky put it - were transformed into formations of form and color, which simultaneously relate to the universal essence of life.

2.1.3. Form and color formations in 20th century abstraction

In the early 20th century, abstract painters sought the plastic expression of aesthetic emotion through the universal rather than the individual.

Abstract art is not art concerned with external appearance. On the contrary, it is about the reflection of subjective sensations and imagination in painting. In this regard, Fer mentions that when we examine the works of Piet Mondrian, a natural tension emerges between personal and universal appearance.

(...) A tension or division that should be a matter of representation. Binary oppositions do not exist happily, but on both sides of a fragile line between the sacred and profane, between art and decoration, between what can be left in and what must be left out.

(Fer, 1997, p. 36)

In this sense, when we examine the artist's painting *"Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, and Gray"* (1920), we can see that the black lines in the work are terminated briefly before reaching the edge of the painting as if it is necessary to adapt and change the horizontal and vertical line scheme in each painting instead of adopting and proving a universal rule. (Figure. 2.3) Mondrian creates tension in internal and external meanings with his unfinished lines. The composition of the painting is, therefore, conceptually based on the struggle between the objective and the subjective.

Mondrian's paintings during the Neo-plastic period consist only of linear compositions and primary colors. His paintings, the vertical and horizontal lines characteristic of linear design carry the mystical significance of geometric symbols due to his interest in theosophy. Against this content background, orthogonal forms are essential in Mondrian's abstraction. At the same time, the reduced primary colors found in checkerboard-shaped picture compositions constitute the syntax of all his works. As Moszynska notes, the mystical philosopher and mathematician M.H.J. Schoenmaekers' 1915 book *"The New Image of the World"* significantly influenced Mondrian's art in this sense. Schoenmaekers' text revealed a universal essence by associating the mysticism of orthogonal forms with colors.

The three primary colors are essentially yellow, blue, and red. These are the only colors that exist (...) Yellow is the movement of the ray(...) blue is the color opposite to yellow(...) Blue as a color is the sky, the line, the horizontality. Red is the mating of yellow and blue... Yellow spreads, blue 'retreats' and red floats. (Moszynska, 2004, p.54)

These essential elements in Mondrian painting express the construction of cosmic relations, that is, the universal. Therefore, the opposition between the individual and the universal is expressed through plastic means and composition.

According to Duve, the idea that there is such a thing as pure, color-whether an act of faith or a profession of hope-as, a transcendent foundation that allows for the plurality of all empirical colors-is what animated purism as a regulative idea.(Duve, 1996, p.156)

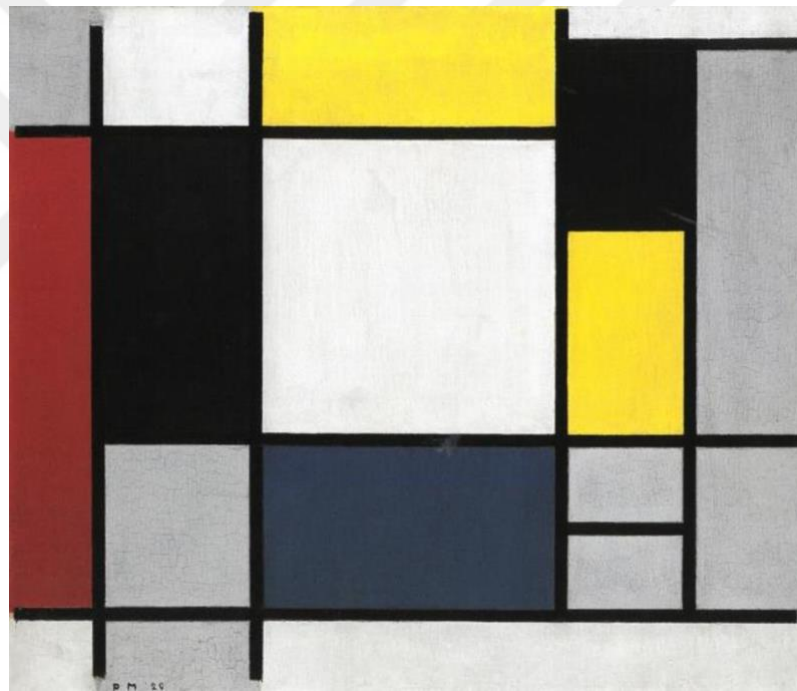


Figure 2.1 Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Yellow, Red, Black, Blue and Gray*, 1920, Oil on Canvas, 51.5 X 61cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

In the abstraction of this period, Kazimir Malevich, like Piet Mondrian, believed that painting had the power to transport the individual to a higher realm of consciousness and that only abstract means were suitable for achieving this. For Mondrian, "*pure plastic painting*" and for Malevich, "*non-objective*" form had the advantage of bearing no resemblance to the materialist spirit of the natural world of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in the 1915s, Malevich declared a zero degree that enabled him to develop a

language of colored forms with his Suprematist works. In his 1919 article "*Non-Objective Art and Suprematism*," he expressed essential elements of Suprematism by stating the relationship between color and form: "*Everything we see arose from the colour mass transformed into plane and volume.*"(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.326)

The relationship between color and form in Malevich's paintings is related to the universal, as in Mondrian's paintings. This way of thinking, which belongs to the abstraction of this period, carries a universal idea, the soul's individuality. This idea, which is at the center of abstract art, is about expressing a reality of truth through the composition of rectangular color planes against the shift of the color and form relationship created by the object-oriented collage of Cubism to the field of representation. In this sense, Malevich's Suprematism abandoned the interventionist approach of Cubist collage and focused more on a pictorial collage. For the visual collage to emerge, Malevich brought it to a new stage by incorporating the medium and space into the colors' changing intensity.

In 1974, in an intriguing analysis of Malevich by the minimalist artist Donald Judd, he argued that the artist's work showed '*no doctrine about geometry itself*' and that the same could be said of his use of color. In examining Malevich, Judd wrote in terms of the continuing importance of independent color possibilities from the point of view of minimalist concerns. He argued that while most people think of color as less important than form, Malevich allows '*both aspects, color, and form, to become clear at once.*'(Judd, 1975, p. 211)

At the same time, Judd's analysis indicates that Malevich's abstraction is independent of Cubism's geometric and analytical abstraction, revealing color and form at the same time. Therefore, Judd's interest in Malevich stems from the fact that he pioneered a holistic understanding by matching the form and colour that finds meaning only in itself.

Malevich's interest in poetry and linguistics, another of his preoccupations, reveals this paradigm of his abstraction. Influenced by poetry, Malevich considered the perception in a work of art as an organized whole that needed to be analyzed just like a text, a mystical position against rationality that allowed forms to be liberated from their meaning, just like words and sounds.

In this sense, in his artistic practice, Malevich made sure that the square forms in his paintings were slightly tilted to emphasize their sharp simplicity through *ostranenie*² and to be stubbornly read as 'one.' These qualities are evident in the work ‘*Suprematism 18th Construction.*’ (1915), (Figure 2.3)

For Malevich, the colored forms in his paintings are one of the surest ways to achieve a wordless, expressionless communication style in his medium, so he intuitively highlighted the forms rather than defining them as geometric shapes. The first appearance of these colorful forms was at the "0.10" exhibition in Petrograd in 1915.

Malevich declared the zero degree of color and form, leaving the visual space of Cubism and arriving in real space for the first time. As Fer notes, the spatial register of Cubist collage continued to support the geometric abstraction of the Russian avant-garde in this sense long after figuration had been abandoned. (Fer, 1997, p. 9)

However, Malevich opened a completely different page in art history by emphasizing intuition against the analytical abstraction of cubism with his "*Black Square*" (1915) (Figure 2.4) painting. "*Black Square*" appears as nothing outside of sensibility. Malevich, who clearly defines the square as emotion and the white ground as the space beyond this emotion, reminds us of Heidegger's phenomenon of being, which he refers to as nothing in anxiety. Malevich's relation to Heidegger's phenomenon of being is to develop the content of time by deepening the artist's existential understanding of the romantic conception of a design. In this direction, Malevich brought deeper meanings to 'pure' forms in his later artistic period, leading him to carry the degree of zero to a more advanced dimension than his previous works.

² Defamiliarization, is an artistic technique that coined by Russian formalist. Term is about presenting to audiences common things in an unfamiliar or strange way so that they could gain new perspectives and see the world differently.

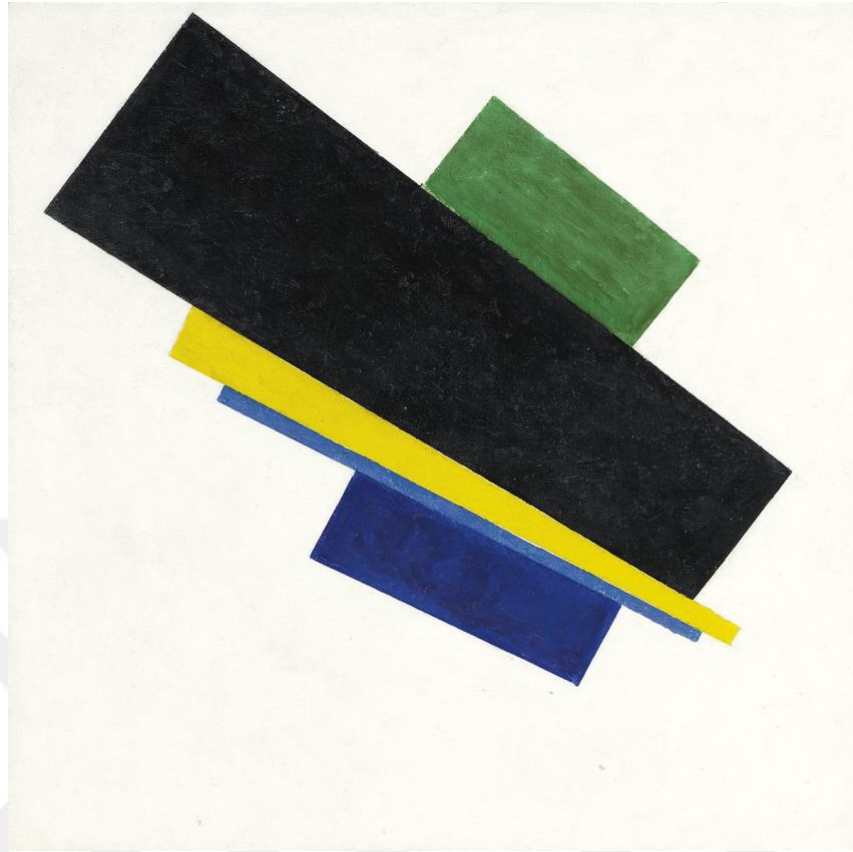


Figure 2.2 Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematism 18th Construction*, 1915, Oil on Canvas, 53x53 cm, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. (Source:

This has led the artist to produce paintings that show nothing but the slightest tonal variations and the sensory traces of brushstrokes, allowing them to dissolve themselves in the architectural space. Malevich tended to analyze the cosmological creation of nature through pure action. Accordingly, in his 1927 article on Suprematism, Malevich explained non-objectivity as follows:

Art, thanks to Suprematism, acquires its own pure, non-functional form and begins to carry the supremacy of non-objective feeling, revealing a natural world order, a new philosophy of life. It recognizes the non-objectivity of the world and is no longer an illustration of the history of changing manners/culture.(Antmen, 2008, p.94)



Figure 2.3 Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915, Oil on Linen, 79.5 x 79.5cm, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Malevich clearly stated that he was searching for a kind of spirituality against the materialist world. Therefore, Malevich constructed his paintings as non-verbal communication in forms pregnant with meaning. In this sense, abstraction introduced a new aesthetic principle that were claimed to be generalizable as a way of thinking about art, as opposed to a skill limited to a craftsmanship.

2.1.4. The monolithic language of modern abstract sculpture

What is the goal of abstractionists who use only formal language to go beyond the appearance?

According to Duve, this language of the abstractionists aims to make visible the essence of a painting, which they assume to be familiar to all paintings and universally defined regardless of style or period, by purging it of everything that is not a painting.(Duve, 1996, p. 153)

In this sense, they eschewed their predecessors' art forms that associated the art of representation of nature with the world of objects, preferring only 'purified' abstract means to transport the individual through painting to a higher realm of consciousness. Artists who aimed to purify the essence of painting as a technique in painting itself, where the structure of matter is hidden in depth and to extract some aspects from it, opened the way for such a reduction to the broadest conception.

In the art of sculpture, Constantin Brancusi used materials in their raw form by obtaining polished, glossy surfaces. In this sense, he sought pure formal expression to capture the vital essence of objects. We can say that the forms in Brancusi's sculptures are 'simulacra of nature' like the pure colors of abstract painting. This is because the pure forms of nature inspire the artist and continue his art in the field of representation. Brancusi used the traditional methods of the sculpture medium for the holism of the form, but in contrast to the incomplete internal relations of sculpture, he used pure, simple shapes.

Therefore, Brancusi's interest in form as a surface manifestation presents a monolithic tradition. There is a distinction between the universal and the individual, and this is part of the Platonic understanding of the world that permeates twentieth-century abstraction. In Brancusi's sculpture, this way of thinking is done by rejecting the external form in favor of the more vital essence. Materiality is a negation, and the specificity and contingency of matter cancel the essential spiritual potential, thus making materiality also a negation. For example, the pedestal reveals its status in the 1927 stainless steel sculpture "*The Newborn II*" (Figure 2.5). The form on the polished surface of the pedestal creates a certain symmetry through reflection. At the same time, the reflection on the pedestal creates an illusion in the space of the sculpture. Brancusi, who began to break the traditional dependence on sculpture by its pedestal, made a significant transition in the art of sculpture. Brancusi created a relationship between the spectator and the sculpture

by creating reflections. This situation allowed the sculpture to rise to a romantic world beyond its positioning in any specific place.



Figure 2.4 Constantin Brancusi, *The Newborn II*, 1927, Stainless Steel, National Museum of Modern Art.

Brancusi, who glorified pure material with his sculptures and brought them to a level where they could reflect their surroundings, articulated the base and other parts of the sculpture with their specific conditions and melted each piece into each other. Therefore, the sculpture appears to consist only of the ground.

Hans Arp, another important example in the art of sculpture, started to make abstract sculptures by leaping to three dimensions after his abstract paintings. A similar repetition can be exemplified by the minimalists turning to three dimensions after American abstract painting. The reason for such a transition is related to the idea that the conventions of abstract painting could be overcome in both periods. Arp intervened on the canvas surface with different materials to go beyond the geometric planes of abstract painting. This revolves around the issue of overcoming the limitations of the medium. Just as Malevich tested abstract painting for many years and reached the zero degree, Arp tried to get a new perceptual experience by pushing the two-dimensionality of painting;

with this interest in the integrity of three dimensions, Arp emphasized experimentalism firmly rooted in nature. In 1963, when he was still an art critic, the minimalist artist Donald Judd wrote the following about Arp's works exhibited at the Sidney Janis Gallery in Arts Magazine:

(...) One of the interesting aspects of sculpture, which is still valid, is that it is a whole that is not part of a good part. The projection can never be explicitly thought of as other, smaller units; even the partially separated sections are kept from being secondary units within or added to the larger one. This apparent lack of parts forces you to see the part as a whole. (Judd, 1975, p.92)

Judd's statement reveals an interest in the monolithic structure of modern abstract sculpture in postwar American art. Indeed, this interest manifested in minimal objects' formal reductions and simplicities.

Both Brancusi and Arp led to a rethinking of modernism's once dominant evaluations of sculpture. Indeed, this debate, in which the pure form or materialist aspects of sculpture are discussed, has led to the development of a materialist orientation of the sculpture or object in minimalist art, embedded in its support and specific to its place. Therefore, the effort of European abstraction to purify forms and minimize content continued to be developed in a different direction in American art.

Whereas abstract art, as a symbolic register opening powerful fantasies in the modern imagination, problematized pictorial space, and non-objective forms, abstraction in the mediums of twentieth-century American art revealed a tendency towards a gradual de-contextualization and the discovery of new compositional features. This tendency, which repeats in a certain pendulum logic, was emphasized by Clement Greenberg and the medium-specific character of modern art. This relationship, which points to a conflict between the specific and the general (art) with the emergence of abstract art after cubism, was a repetition in American art.

2.2. Another Form of Aesthetic Modernism: Medium-Specific Modernism

After 1945, the center of modernism shifted from the European continent to the American continent. It initiated the international domination of American art through the art

institutions of the United States. This process witnessed the institutional rise of new avant-garde movements after American museums appropriated the European avant-garde. Therefore, considering historical developments, this period enabled the narrative that American art was the true continuation of the "Western" art tradition in the post-war period. The dominant version of this periodization in artistic terms, Clement Greenberg, took the history of modern art in a different direction and emphasized abstraction. Through Greenberg, this integration of American art into modernism was realized in a way that saw modernity as a limiting condition rather than an essential characterization.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.773)

As a modernist and formalist³ critic, Greenberg's point of view is to establish "*l'art pour l'art*" to disassociate art from life rather than the integration of art and life by avant-garde movements. It is also about historically associating the technical development of mediums with modernism. Aesthetic modernism is critically oriented toward the aesthetic definition of art mediums. Similarly, Greenberg, based on an ontological claim to an ontological plurality of the arts, articulates each artistic medium as an irreducible element of the experience. According to the critic, this historical feature of modern art needs to be defined regarding the medium's limitations.

The flatness is about the rejection of illusionistic interventions. Therefore, this quality guarantees that the painting is free from representations. Thus, the generalization of the arts in modernism to encompass their specific aesthetic characteristics is based on the self-experimental purification of mediums. This period, which begins with the universalization of the purity ideals of primitive art, represents a search for truth. In this sense, regarding the purification process of painting, Greenberg states that in the art of painting, the replacement of primary colors by instinctive colors, and the replacement of the contour, which is not found in nature, began with the emergence of a third color as a line in painting. According to Greenberg, this process results in the painting's flatness, becoming increasingly shallow against the illusionistic historicity of

³ Greenberg's formalism represents a tradition linked to G.E Lessing, Heinrich Wölfflin, Roger Fry and is not devoid of judgments and hierarchies about art. Greenberg's arguments are aimed at highlighting the basic convention of flatness in painting, which corresponds to a particular judgment of taste that privileges the modern art tradition.

painting. Flatness is the defining essence of painting, is a traditional limit in developing the history of painting. Greenberg expressed it as follows.

In the processes that helped painting to critique and define itself in the Modernist period, the inevitable flatness of the support, the most fundamental thing, was a problem. Only flatness was unique and special for that art.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.818)

According to Greenberg, the history of pre-modernist painting concealed "*flatness*," the medium and purity of painting, under illusionism. Therefore, the success of a modernist painting is not the abandonment of the representation of known objects as a principle, but the abandonment of illusionism, the space in which three-dimensional objects can reside. In analyzing this process, Greenberg drew attention to the relationship between sculpture and painting as two mediums. In art history, painting, influenced by sculpture, created realistic illusions using shading and modeling. For a long time in art, illusion has been used to evoke a sense of depth and volume in the viewer.

For Greenberg, the development of the content of modern art also depends on the specificity of mediums. Content is a quality that somehow refers to the medium. In this sense, Greenberg, who is against the content being more evident than the medium, argued that it should be dispersed within the form. Therefore, the medium should be such that it cannot be wholly or partially reduced to something, not itself. In explaining this, he refers to the concept of imitation. This is the origin of the abstraction, and the artist, withdrawing himself from the (mundane) subject of everyday experience, turns his attention to the medium. The artist's orientation toward the medium involves spaces, surfaces, shapes, and colors. In this sense, the form of a work of art guides its content. The form derives from the importance of the medium, and it is through the form that the nature of the medium and the reflection of art in the medium is realized. In this sense, according to Osborne, Greenberg is a medium-oriented structuralist. In his view, early modernism is a construction of continuity based on the discovery and autonomous development of form in the historically recognized arts in the context of depicting life. (Osborne, 2021, p.125) Greenberg's insistence on the stable medium-specific character of modern art is, in its way, a necessary counter to claims that modern art is becoming increasingly "*free*." For him, through the rule-bound character of the medium, each artistic discipline provides a

logical sense of order that can balance and control the best artistic feeling in the works. This order allows aesthetic forms to take center stage in art while content is relegated to the background. Therefore, for Greenberg, the flatness of the painting plays the role of a deep background. This quality begins with suppressing surface, ontic, or content in favor of depth. Greenberg expressed this issue as follows:

Quality, aesthetic value in inspiration, vision, "content," not in "form." ... Yet "form" not only opens the way to inspiration; it can also act as means to it, and technical preoccupations, when searching enough and compelled enough, can generate or discover "content". . . . That "content" cannot be separated from its "form." (Duve, 1996, p.210-211)

For Greenberg, therefore, the moment form enters painting, it transforms the conventions of modernist painting into a visual, definable appearance. In other words, this convention creates a constraint that pressures the aesthetic judgment of the artist and the audience, which is reformulated in each case. From the nineteenth to the twentieth century, modernist painting increasingly broke the medium's resistance to the point where little remained but its flatness. The critical taste accompanying part of this history, from Jackson Pollock to Morris Louis, has likewise capitulated. However, Frank Stella's monochrome works in American abstraction have refused to accept this situation. With Stella, American abstraction realized another "*zero degree*" of modern abstract painting. In the late 1950s, Stella's minimalist paintings brought the purification of modernist painting to a climax by reducing the medium to its parts. This confronted the art of the early 1960s with a transition from the specific to the general. Therefore, Greenberg's statements on the effort to increase the expressive resources of the medium became a reference point for the minimalist painters in the late 1950s. Although the minimalists negated Greenberg's normative ideas about modern art, reading modernism as a reduction process was nonetheless interesting to them. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.857)

In this sense, Greenberg's statements on the limitations of mediums were intended to affect the audience by emphasizing physicality and purity. By emphasizing pure plastic qualities in art, the medium and its rules rendered its intrinsic values visible, and in this way, the works gained autonomy. However, in the following years, the validity of Greenberg's arguments about the autonomy of modern art was soon negated. These reactions generally stem from the fact that Greenberg's analysis of modern art and the art

of the period he was at the center was based on a retrospective logic of development. Critic Michael Fried, a colleague of Greenberg's at the same time, put forward different arguments in this sense. Although his ideas on medium specificity was the same with Greenberg, he emphasized different approaches to the painting medium. The most important of these is, contrary to Greenberg, the purification of painting takes place in shape rather than flatness. In this sense, Fried claimed that the development of American abstraction was oriented toward shape. He wanted to correct Greenberg's evaluations of modern painting. In the late 1950s, the painters in American abstraction that Fried highlights in his texts gave clues to the process leading to the objectification of painting through shape.

2.2.1. A sublime fiction: American abstraction

After the war, Greenberg's theory of modern art became a starting point for the Abstract Expressionism movement of American art. As Greenberg pointed out, one of the essential tools of Cubism was composition, and the abstraction that developed after Cubism gradually became free of these tools with American abstraction. This new abstraction style involved a rejection of compositional balancing and narrowing the work. This led the European abstraction to move towards a different pattern of affirmation with an outdated and Cartesian sensibility. Although Abstract Expressionism or Action art, removed the logic of composition from painting to a certain extent, but Greenberg criticized this art movement in his 1962 article "*After Abstract Expressionism*".

Like so much of painterly art before it, Abstract Expressionism has worked in the end to reduce the role of colour: unequal densities of paint become, as I have said, so many differences of light and dark, and these deprive colour of both its purity and its fullness. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 829)

Greenberg highlights in his statement that the style that emerged in Abstract Expressionism reduced the role of color and turned towards compositions based on the difference between dark and light. The critic attributed this, to some extent, to the intensity of academic Cubist painting as an influence. However, according to him, three

artists in Abstract Expressionism stood out through their break from Cubist influences: Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Clyfford Still.⁴

In Abstract Expressionism, how paint is applied to the canvas surface causes a density to appear on the canvas surface after a while, revealing a production of action. However, Newman, Rothko, and Still, far from the show of activity in Abstract Expressionism and independent of the density on the painting surface, emphasized the openness and color that Greenberg found more positive. The way all three artists achieved this openness in painting, Greenberg argued, was through "*transitions between color tones*." (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.829)

Moreover, Newman and Rothko's large canvas sizes and the presence of uniform colors in their paintings the assurance of purity in painting. The 'openness' suggested by Greenberg is quite evident in Newman's '*Onement I*' of 1948 (Figure 2.6). In this work, Newman divides the space in the painting by painting evenly, and the strip of tape in the center of the painting creates a space that is pushed back into the space of the painting—the wide plans on both sides of the painting function as repoussoirs.⁵

⁴ These three artists were distinguished within Abstract Expressionism as Color Field painting.

⁵ A style that stands out on the left or right side, allowing the audience to fix their eyes on the composition. It became popular in art history with Baroque and Mannerist paintings. It can be seen especially in 17th century Dutch landscape paintings.



Figure 2.5, Barnett Newman, *Onement I*, 1948, Oil on canvas and oil on masking tape on canvas, 69.2 x 41.2cm, Barnett Newman Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The band in the center of the painting has a gestural quality in which brush marks are visible, but by the 1950s, Newman began to eliminate such gestural features in his paintings. These equally large colored plans and bands are used as a spatial tool in Newman's paintings.

Newman created depth and space in his paintings with gently fluctuating colors. In the same period, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski also used this optical illusion to create depth in their paintings. This illusionism in painting both contains and disperses the painting surface. In a sense, this method, which gives the impression that the painting is opening from behind by giving depth through color and form, directs the viewer to the experience of color and shape without rejecting the flatness of the painting surface. But this participation is more spiritual than physical. For Newman, his works and the viewer

are autonomous entities that must be kept separate. The viewer becomes involved in Newman's paintings through the subject matter.

In his writings on phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty, who was highly influenced by the artists of this period and later by the minimalists, exemplified the depth that emerged with the combination of form and color, with Cezanne's turning towards space through the search for depth in his paintings. Suggesting that there was a metaphysical quest behind Cezanne's search, Ponty states that after the artist's pictorial experiments in his middle period, things began to move in space, and he discovered the encounter of color with color. Therefore, Ponty implies that space is not a problem of line and form but also and equally a problem of color.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.812) The emphasis on color in early European abstraction was mainly concerned with the 'simulacrum of the colors of nature.' Still, American abstraction foregrounded color as a problem of dimensionality, differences, and materiality.

The abstractions of artists such as Newman, Rothko, and Noland in the 1950s differed from the European tradition of abstract art in that they extended the easel tradition, color theories, and metaphysical content of early abstract art and problematized it through different formats and extra-painterly relationships. At the same time, the dimension of metaphysical concern in European abstraction doubled in this period with artists such as Newman, Rothko, and Still. Referring to mythical concepts in their works, the artists shaped their paintings with the notion of 'sublimity.' Therefore, these artists, who worked in gigantic formats as if to make the spectator feel the content and sense of psychical space in the painting and to leave the audience under the invasion of color, implicitly put forward the view of the sublime: gigantism, excess, seriousness, and simplicity extending towards the absolute. This simplicity creates an effect that neutralizes the painting surface on the one hand and captures and drags the viewer through space on the other.

Painters such as Newman, Rothko, and Still, who differed from Abstract Expressionism with these qualities and are known as the Color Field movement, turned the direction of painting back towards the purification of modern painting and the flatness of the painting surface. But purification here is not in the same sense as European abstraction.

The metaphysical content of European abstraction was usually expressed through geometric forms. These geometric forms are less successful than American abstraction in achieving metaphysical content through their uniformity. The reason for this is that painters like Newman, addressed the possibility of a new art in which 'form could be formless,' in which the mystery of the sublime could be asserted. And this possibility wanted to break its ties with European abstraction.

2.2.2. Monochrome painting and objecthood

After Color Field, a new generation of painters took a more literal approach to the purity ideal of modern painting. Literalism stems from the stripping of the picture of content, from basing the question of flatness on form, and in this sense from the introduction of a new style of structure. In a 1966 article published in *Artforum*, Michael Fried evaluated what he considered technically significant developments in the painting of the previous two decades. Analyzing the emergence of Stella's pictorial procedure, Fried first notes the unexpected importance of shape in the pre-Stella paintings of Noland and Olitski. At the same time, Fried wanted to correct the essentialism and development of Greenberg's evaluation of modern painting. In this respect, Fried portrayed 'shape' as the silhouette of the support (literal shape) and as a medium through which the contours of the elements in each painting harmonize.

This was a mutualization of the rectangular shape of the painting's support and the rectangular shape of the surface, which was already becoming evident in artists such as Rothko, Still, and Newman. Shapes and surfaces were appropriately contained within a rectangular plane while simultaneously creating harmony by being subject to unity. This 'literal' treatment of painting necessitated the simplicity necessary to emphasize the shape of the painting's support. At the same time, this simplicity was used by some painters to limit possible arrangements within the painting. Shortly before 1960, a new structure was discovered in American abstract painting based on its shape, not its flatness. Artists such as Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland brought shape into relation to the structural form of the painting.

Moreover, the importance of these painters was highlighted by their resistance to the types of meaning models in their paintings. Therefore, they could open up a specific theoretical space for pure, content-free abstract paintings, excluding any content in a purer and more literal take on "*Art for Art's sake*." On this subject, in the article first published in *Art International*, Reinhardt stated;

No lines or imaginings, no shape or composings or representings, no visions or sensations or impulses, no symbols, signs or impastos, no decoratings or colorings, picturings, no pleasures or pains, no accidents or ready-mades, no things, no ideas, no relations, no attributes, no qualities - nothing that is not of the essence.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.869)

With this almost nihilistic approach to abstraction, Reinhardt states what the new abstraction is and what it is not. Similarly, Stella described his paintings as "*non-relational*" to distinguish them from other relational endeavors. Compared to their Abstract Expressionist predecessors, such as Newman, these artists sought new content with their non-metaphysical, impersonal, and neutral paintings. This language is also evident in the works of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns in the early 1950s. Both artists purified the metaphysical content and autonomy and gave hints of the objecthood of painting. However, their search for objecthood is not 'painterly' like Reinhardt's or Stella's.

Rauschenberg's "*White Painting (three panel)*" (Figure, 2.7) monochrome canvases of the exact dimensions that exhibited at Betty Parsons Gallery in 1951 were intended to challenge the prevalent content of American abstraction of the period. With his roller-painted canvases used to paint interiors, Rauschenberg challenged the sanctity of the autonomy of work of art and the notion of personal expression by stating that "*another person must repaint these works to remain intact*." (Moszynska, 2004, p.198)

Although Rauschenberg is often considered part of the Pop movement, his early works formed a conceptual bridge for later abstractions in America.

The same content can be observed in Johns three series "*Flag, Target and Number*," exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1958. Showing his paintings to open people's eyes to ordinary images. In this sense, for Johns, the flag and the target were "*things that were*

both seen and not looked at, not examined."(Moszynska, 2004, p.200) The difference between these two approaches at this period, clearly that one 'painterly' involves the full and centered two-dimensionality of the color and avoids referring to anything outside the space of the painting. In contrast, the other 'conceptual', emphasizes the work's name and literary connotations to extract an object from the image. So clearly, for Johns if the target is an object, then the painting is an object. But rather to different approaches, both have something in common: a confrontation with the painting or medium. What is explicitly protected is the authority to produce art, which has severed its ties with the craftsmanship and traditions of art. So, the common is, a question of the relationship between medium and art, in other words, between the specific and the general.



Figure 2.6, Robert Rauschenberg, *White Paintings (three panel)*, 1951, 182.88 x 274.32 cm, Latex house paint applied with a roller and brush on canvas, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Frank Stella is a key figure in testing the medium in the painterly approach. By moving away from color and focusing on structural problems, he produced 'non-relational' compositions to avoid the equilibrium of earlier geometric abstraction.

Stella identified the problems in the medium of the painting of the period as spatial and methodological in a speech he gave at the Pratt Institute. According to him, the first of these problems was the relative composition of European painting, while the other was the attempt to avoid the illusionistic space in painting. In this sense, Stella attributed the solution he arrived at in his practice to pushing the illusionism out of the painting by using regular patterns and color intensity, and he said that he achieved this explicitly by using the technique and tools of the whitewashers. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 866)

The internal logic of Stella's words can be observed in his monochrome series. Although one of the most well-known works in the series, "*Die Fahne Och! (Flags High!)*" (Figure 2.8) from 1959, refers to the official anthem of the Nazis. The reference is more formal than thematic: the painting is large, like a flag, shaped like a swastika, or even a fascist uniform.



Figure 2.7, Frank Stella, *Die Fahne Och!* 1959, 308.6cm x 185.4 cm, Enamel paint on canvas, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

The painting is made with black enamel on canvas, and the smooth surface is interrupted by a series of stripes that cross the diameter of the canvas and extend with it. The direction of the lines is in a cruciform format determined by the shape of the support. At the same time, there is a remarkable degree of rigor and simplicity. Since the lines neither mark contours nor create forms, the distinction between figure and ground almost completely disappears. In his article "*Specific Objects*" (1965, New York) on Stella's paintings, Donald Judd states that the surface of the paintings is quite far away from the wall and simultaneously parallel to it. That space does not stand out due to the unusual unity of the surface. Therefore, he states that the dominance of order in the paintings, like the dominance of continuity, is that 'one thing follows another.' (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.872)

Stella's paintings' seriality soon manifested in minimalist three-dimensional works. In this sense, Stella's monochrome series was a seminal shock to the emergence of minimal art. This series made Judd consider Stella's paintings "*specific objects*."

That means Stella's works are neither paintings nor sculptures, but they are closer to painting. This is related to the fact that abstract painting has been testing the zero degree from the beginning. According to Duve, this test, which began with predecessors such as Malevich in the history of abstraction, leads us to a single point: the blank canvas.

Greenberg recognized this problem even though he combined aesthetic judgment with formalism and the doctrine of specificity with modernism, and in his article "*Abstract Expressionism*," (Art International, 1962) he stated;

By now it has been established, it would seem, that the irreducible essence of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norm: flatness and the delimitation of flatness; and that the observance of merely these two norms is enough to create an object which can be experienced as picture: thus a stretched or tacked up canvas already exists as a picture- though not necessarily as a successful one. (Duve, 1996, p. 220-221)

Greenberg's statement is a matter of choice between art and non-art. However, Greenberg has set a limit to success, which is evidence that aesthetic judgment is essential to him. The blank canvas is such that it exists simultaneously as two mutually exclusive works of art: either it performs as a ready-made when seen for its representation of flatness, or it performs perceptually, based on the history of modern painting. The first is realized

through Duchamp's ready-made works, and the second betrays Greenberg's criteria for a successful painting. In Greenberg's rules, this successful painting must remain on an optical level and contain no allusion to external experience. But Stella's works shares an ontological claim that painting is defined by its formal qualities that exclude any symbolic subject matter. This assertion aligns with Greenberg's criteria for modern painting, i.e., the limiting conditions that a surface marked by the basic norms or conventions of painting must meet to be experienced as a painting. Although Greenberg did not want to confront Stella's art, Stella turned Greenberg's evaluations of modern painting into a kind of theory through his work. However, we can say that monochrome is in the middle of a struggle between the infinity of modernist painting and the impossibility of the blank canvas to determine its legitimacy. In abstraction from the 1920s to the 1950s, monochrome, an inheritor of Suprematist and formalist painting, reaches its peak at the purest moment of painting.

Now let's examine how Stella adhered to and violated the conventions of modern painting. In 1966, Greenberg's contemporaneous colleague Fried, in an essay evaluating what he considered to be technical developments in the painting of the previous two decades, had this to say about Stella: "*(...) Stella was able to establish that the literal shape determines the structure of the whole painting in a completely self-evident way.*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 838)

As Fried notes in this passage, Stella's abstraction was objective only in the sense that it referred to the painting itself, that is, to its composition (the shape of the canvas), and this transgressed the boundary of historical painting, which took shape on the surface. With works in which the canvases are shaped from the rectangle, Stella reveals the lines from the shape of the frame, thus revealing the dependence on the support of this constant feature of the paintings. According to Krauss, these works of Stella's clear the illusionistic field with the effect of a surface that constantly shimmers with the mark of its edge; it achieves a flatness that is a rigid representation of the picture field as purely external. (Krauss, 2021, p. 300)

Stella's works foreground objectivity as they produce a 'condition of non-art in opposition to the ontological meaning of the painting. What appears to be emphasizing surface

features and increasing the flatness of the painting seems for minimalist artists to highlight the true objecthood of painting - especially in light of Stella's insistence on the non-referential intention of his work. In this sense according to Mozyńska in her book *'Abstract Art'*, (2004, London) Stella stated the following;

The only thing I want to get from my paintings and the only thing you get from them is that you can see the whole idea without any confusion... What you see is what you see. (Mozyńska, 2004, p.202)

This last sentence *"What you see is what you see"*, which suggests that meaning derives not from the painting's capacity to point to non-existent events or values, but from the very existence of the painting itself, has become a reference point for post-Stella artists concerned with the autonomy of the artwork.

This point establishes an essential relationship with the blank canvas as the conventions of modern painting meet monochrome and objective painting. In this case, Stella's painting remains only an object if it is not recognized as a monochrome painting and vice versa. Therefore, as Duve notes, this distinction will either eliminate aesthetic judgment and formalism due to mere identification of the making and appreciation of art based on the conceptual logic of modernism or aesthetic assessment will remain. (Duve, 1996, p.222)

Indeed, the second option is essential for critics like Greenberg and Fried. Thus, the literalist rejection of aestheticist modernism in American abstract art, formulated by Greenberg and defended by Fried - in his terms - stemmed from a search for a core, a desire to strip the non-essential from the work of art. Thus, the reduction of modern painting, led to the emergence in the late 1950s in which the traditional boundaries between mediums were transgressed. Seeking unified, anti-illusionistic form of work in line with the modern art tendency, the minimalists proposed the replacement of illusionism with real relationships in literal space, which painting had to offer as a convenient means to erase relative composition gradually.

From Impressionism to American abstraction, modern painting, with its purification by turning towards its specificity, ended in the late 1950 with the monochrome works of Stella. It turned into a negation in itself. Thus, the reduction of the painting left behind only its object character.

2.3. Post-Medium Insights: Art as Ontology

Post-war American art, shaped by Clement Greenberg, is mediated by the concept of aesthetics through the redefinition of the medium. But as we have seen, Greenberg's criteria for modern art hinted at the post-medium practices that would come with the deliberate transcendence of artistic disciplines in the late 1950s. A very similar situation took place in the early twentieth century. The limiting the aesthetic judgments of art to the conditions of the medium became an actual problem with the emergence of historical avant-garde movements. This period became the basis of a modernist tradition in American art as an alternative. Therefore, avant-garde's questioning of the essence of art and its expansion of mediums was institutionalized in the neo avant-garde of the 1950s. According to Osborne, these points are based on two distinct traditions of art since the end of the eighteenth century, the distinction between "art as aesthetics" and "art as (historical) ontology." (Osborne, 2021, p.77)

The ontological tradition of art begins with philosophical Romanticism and extends through the revolutionary Constructivism to conceptual art and the post-medium. It finds its critical conditions in truth of art. This theory historically reveals this negativity in the 'new' concept. It is a constitutive negation that forms artistic meaning as a determination of contemporaneity itself. These points reveal the same post-autonomy of Constructivism towards the experimentalism of art and Marcel Duchamp's approach towards the abandonment of craft in favor of aesthetics and art's mediated comprehensiveness. Both art forms negate the traditional mediums. These two approaches offered options for North American and Western European artists in opposition to the dominant modern formalism in their time. Either the continuation of art as medium-specific under aesthetic judgments or the anti-aesthetic treatment of art as post-medium.

According to Foster, the artists of the 1950s and 1960s inherited two distinct legacies from these movements. The first is the Dada's ontological definition of the aesthetic categories of the art institution or its attack on formalism. The other is the constructivists' social transformation of art by materialistically linking it to revolutionism. (Hal Foster, 2009, p. 30) The archaic materials of traditional art were, therefore, definitively

abandoned by the 1913s. However, in the 1960s, due to the epistemological questioning of the ready-made and Constructivism, sculpture, just like painting, as Buchloch put it in his book '*Michael Asher and the Conclusion of Sculpture*' (1981, Montreal) faced the "*liquidation of its discourse as sculpture.*"(Buchloch, 1981, p.56)

The artists of the 1960s consciously made possible the institutionalization of historical avant-gardes. Constructivism's materialist approach and sociality shaped formal methods in young American art. On the other hand, Duchamp's legacy of the ready-made became the central tradition of twentieth-century art, rejecting traditional artistic methods until the "post" movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond.

2.3.1. Constructivism and collective experimentation

The idea of the 'universality' of early abstract art was realized in another way in Russian Constructivism. With Constructivism, art turned towards design through forms, bringing utilitarian formations to art. Constructivism is another paradigm of abstract art in that it is oriented towards three-dimensional formations as opposed to the two-dimensionality of abstract painting. Contrary to the individual aesthetic values of abstract art, this paradigm had the idea of centering the practice of life for society. Constructivism therefore integrated art into industrialization as part of the modernization process. The approach of Constructivism, considered a historical avant-garde movement developed against traditional mediums in three-dimensional space, is aimed at fundamentally changing the ontology of art. The plastic revolution realized by Constructivism monumentalized a new political order. This legacy brought to the surface a new idea of Constructivism in the art of the 1960s and 1970s.

In the early 1920s, cubist pictorial compositions and collages significantly influenced future artistic formations. The first of these, as seen in the first chapter, is the beginning of the spatial development of abstract painting under the influence of cubism. The second is Constructivism's interest in the construction principle as applied in the Cubist reliefs of Picasso and Braque. According to Osborne, this process became evident as a general principle of artistic production - independent of a critical dialogue with traditional forms

- only through Vladimir Tatlin's deliberately abstract carved reliefs of 1914-1915. This laid the formal foundation for the future constructivist movement. (Osborne, 2021, p.228)

In Russia in 1914, Tatlin exhibited a series of "counter-reliefs" inspired by Picasso's reliefs. Tatlin's reliefs are rectangular and hung on the wall. At the same time, they are composed of separate but interconnected components. According to Rosalind Krauss, Tatlin's reliefs have a symbolic value in their anti-illusionism and their position in revealing the materials from which they are made. (Krauss, 2021, p.80)

Placed at the corners, the reliefs, which go beyond the bounding rectangle of the traditional relief with indeterminate borders and spatially ambiguous. Although these are not easily movable, self-supporting objects, their forms are specific to the wall, the space on which they are hung. The walls are part of the sculpture, they fulfilled their integral role in the work. Therefore, the point of departure in Tatlin's reliefs is an interest in the qualities of materials and their contiguity in space. According to Osborne, Tatlin's logic of 'construction' concerning structurality necessitated a particular type of material because it presupposed the independent unquestionability of the components as self-sufficient objects or units. This type of material is fundamental to the social meaning of construction. The technologies of mechanized production and the division of labor.(Osborne, 2021, p.228)

This interest in construction led to the emergence of the construction concept in the later period of constructivism: embedded in a collective logic of 'social construction' in Russian art, the progressive phenomenon of modernity.

Therefore, although constructivism is nourished by cubism and abstraction away from function (the autonomy of art), it has drawn its conceptual form as the experimentation of a 'post-autonomous' art. Underlying this relationship is a dialectic of constructivism, and this debate is essential for making sense of the art movements of the 1960s.

The abstraction of the early twentieth century was oriented toward the aestheticization of life itself with an idealist tendency. Suprematism, in this sense, does not offer any social utilitarianism. The point separating abstraction became evident in Petrograd's "0.10" exhibition. While Malevich was looking for cosmic harmony toward transcendentalism in his art, Tatlin was looking for literal mechanical harmony. Therefore, ideal forms, ideas, and concepts for one and means of production for the other. According to Gray,

the main issue of this opposition between the two artists was the autonomy of art. (Gray, 1986, p.271)

Malevich maximized the autonomy of art and saw art as an autonomous field outside science and philosophy. However, Tatlin, who identified art with industry and production, destroyed the autonomy of art. This issue of autonomy, which permeated the emergence of Constructivism and its aftermath, led to the search for the aesthetic function of art in new creative phenomena.

According to Osborne, the first of these, in the early period of Constructivism as an experimental singularizing art field, staged the avant-garde ideology in its most abstract, non-conceptual, aesthetic form. The second, later on, a collaborative practice of socialism especially by the First Working Group of Constructivists⁶, has meant integrating industry, which underpinned the principle of artistic labor, with social labor.(Osborne, 2021, p.228-229) The symbolic significance of a pre-Constructivist works allows us to read this dialectic.

Tatlin's counter reliefs embodies a prominent concern of early twentieth-century modern artists. This concern is about how non-representational forms can directly convey emotions. However, Tatlin's later works departed from this line, turning towards functionality as an attribute of communist expression. The opposition between function and non-function is evident in also in Naum Gabo's version of constructivism. This version of constructivism carries a precise analysis of the structure of the form of an idea or image and its internal, spatial consequences. Against the political revolutionism of Tatlin's art and its literal use of materials, Gabo's constructivism is explicitly oriented towards a 'transcendental' reality under formalism.

One of the reasons for this, according to Krauss, is that Gabo sees that the analysis of matter is made from the intersection of the simple, flat planes of the object and that the construction of the object depends on an aesthetic position in which it can point directly to a precise geometry.(Krauss, 2021, p.82)

⁶ In 1921, Aleksei Ran, Rodchenko and Stepanova founded the First Constructivists working group. The aim of this group was to use their artistic production to create designs that were functional in the everyday life of the working class; they believed that as artists they should work for the revolutionary transformation of society.

The basis of these ideas is the structural principal Gabo calls "stereometry." Gabo began to use stereometric devices in his works around 1915, when he started to make figurative sculptures. At the same time, the thrust of these works by Gabo is directed toward the conceptual penetration of form. It should be read as residing in a specially conceived space and appear conceptually transparent. It should provide the audience with a summary of all the separate points of view he or she will have when traveling around the outside of the object. Gabo's sculptures are autonomous art objects of this quality, and aesthetic judgment is still valid. However, according to Moszynska, Gabo's long-term intentions were never functionalist in the same sense as the Soviet Constructivists who followed Tatlin. Believing in the experimental basis of art and the pursuit of knowledge as an ennobling aspect of human endeavor, Gabo did not think that art should have a socially functional purpose. (Moszynska, 2004, p. 77)

In this sense, even models such as *"Column"* (1923) (Figure 2.9), which were planned to be recreated on an architectural scale, meant that the aesthetic intentions behind their work were not in line with the ideals of Soviet Constructivism. However, in contrast to Gabo's *"Column"* in the same period, the condition of literal space and literal materials in Tatlin's art results in a work that, according to Krauss, ideologically opposes Gabo's art on two points: *"Monument to the Third International."* 1919-20 (Figure 2.10)

In contrast to the core-specific structurality of the object found in Gabo's constructions, the structure of Tatlin's object is shifted from the interior to the exterior. Krauss states this as follows:

Rather, the surface carries the logic, and a visual combination of the meaning of the external structure and the experiential center of the work resolves the notion of a dualistic distinction between inside and outside. (Krauss, 2021, p.87-88)

This passage by Krauss hints at the temporal presence of Tatlin's constructivist work concerning the experience of it. In this sense, while the transparency of Gabo's *"Column,"* grasped at a glance, offers the spectator a perceptual synthesis. But Tatlin's tower is concerned with real-time experience. The audience who will experience the tower that slowly rotate will occupy rooms by their bodies. In this way, the tower's dimensions address a temporal experience of previously unknown dimensions and are concerned with a historical process of socialist development rather than transcendental temporality. It is

oriented towards a collective experience rather than a personal meaning. Also, the difference between Gabo and Tatlin's versions of constructivism crystallizes into revolutionary and anti-revolutionary aspects of formalism in general. Gabo's formalist perspective implies an attempt to legitimize his work as a self-sufficient entity without any other cause. This is clearly at the center of modern art thinking. It is subordinated to the artwork's autonomy under an abstract philosophy. But the formalism of Tatlin's version of constructivism, according to Osborne, destroyed traditional artistic mediums' consensual, symbolic qualities as a condition for re-articulating their material components based on complete freedom of relations (aestheticism). This led to an opposite possibility, the practical use of forms (rationalization). (Osborne, 2021, p.53)



Figure 2.8, Naum Gabo, *Column*, 104.5 x 75 cm, 1920-1, Perspex, wood, metal, and glass, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Therefore, the indifference to the conventional uses of art and the meanings of materials, as manifested in the art of constructivism, is a condition. This condition manifests itself in both aesthetic and anti-aesthetic instrumentalization. The dialectic of aesthetics versus

anti-aesthetics inherent in modern art and constructivism as modern art took the form of repetition in the contemporary art of the 1960s, leading to the return of the avant-garde. This was due to the recognition that post-1945 art could no longer be identified with modernism in terms of being formal, aesthetic, and medium-specific. In this sense, minimalism partially repeated the constructivists' disruption of the formalist categories of the art institution. Modern aesthetic arts want to purify art from life. Therefore, modern formalist arts wish to preserve the autonomy of art, while avant-gardes want to transform this autonomy. In this sense, minimalism, which consciously refers to the historical references and legacies of the avant-gardes, has turned to constructivism as a method of struggle. Although the early phase of minimalism, or until post-minimalism, produced a new discourse based on rationality in formal construction, the social manifestation of constructivism occurred in the 1970s with the critique of the minimal object.



Figure 2.9, Vladimir Tatlin, *Monument to the Third International*, 1920, Moscow.

2.3.2. Duchampian approaches and the readymade

By raising the function of art as a question, Marcel Duchamp challenged the conventional tendencies of art. He put forward the most potent refutations against specific essential or classical characteristics shared by art. By paving the way for speaking another language against modern art, Duchamp created a shift in art from appearance to comprehension. This change was directed against the formalism inherent in the traditional art mediums, against the problem of morphology and the autonomy of the aesthetic understanding of art. Duchamp is considered an iconic example of twentieth-century readymade art. He is best known for his 1917 work "*Fountain*" (Figure 2.11), also known as "*The Case of Richard Mutt*." A readymade is a daily object selected and often modified by the artist and then presented as art. A readymade is, therefore, an act of 'selection' that has no control over the artist in its making, does not bear the stamp of an act of creation, and does not appear as an object from expressionist matrices.

This action is a move towards the 'work of art' that raises questions about the art. One of the answers offered by the readymade is that the work can be a question, not a physical object tied to the artistic craft. Therefore, artmaking can be rethought as a legitimate form of speculative questioning. This question posed by Duchamp is directed against art and, therefore, implicitly against the autonomy of art. This question is answered when Duchamp sends the urinal, a mass-produced object signed under a false name, to the "*Society of Independent Artists*" to test the art institution, and the work is rejected. The Society of Independent Artists was founded in 1916 with the slogan "*No jury, no prize*" and to create opportunities for anyone who wanted to gain the status of a professional artist with a very accessible and unregulated approach, in contrast to American conservative art institutions. (Duve, 1996)

Although all of the artworks sent to the exhibition by the artists were exhibited, not a single work was exhibited: "*Richard Mutt's Fountain*".



Figure 2.10, Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz.

This attitude of the Society, which aims for a new artistic awareness against the institutionalized authority of traditional art forms, is quite ironic. According to this attitude, R. Mutt's fountain is not a work of art by any definition.

This rejection resulted in Duchamp's resignation from the association's leadership, but at the same time, the artist's question was answered. Although the Society of Independent Artists aimed to create unusually jury-free and more accessible conditions in art, aesthetic judgment still represents a challenge. According to Osborne, the aesthetic indifference of Duchamp's work emerges as the difficulty between the ontological meaning of a relatively fixed (transcendentally bounded) plurality of arts mediating between art and individual artworks and the aesthetic substance of artworks. (Osborne, 2021, p. 126)

In this sense, Duchamp's avant-garde provocation points to a challenge to art's framework or general order. Duchamp's negation of this framework is directed against the aesthetic institution of art and the category of individual creation. According to Bürger, with "The Fountain," Duchamp signed a false name on an ordinary mass-produced object to mock

the artist as the producer of artwork. This transcendence is about questioning the artist's role and reception in society. (Bürger, 2010, p. 108)

In this sense, Duchamp's reaction to the individual nature of artistic production is not to collectivize artistic production but to negate the category of unique creation.

At the same time readymades preclude the analyticity of any formalist aesthetic signification, while the viewer, when confronted with a readymade, constantly returns to the beginning of the question 'why.' Duchamp's readymades create a sensory presence in artworks that elicits a visual response. In this way, a series of questions are posed to the flow of aesthetic discourse to which no definitive answer exists. Aesthetically specific sensory perceptibility was therefore explored in Duchamp using shocking avant-garde devices; according to Harman, the consequences of this shock effect are more social than aesthetic. (Harman, 2022, p.208)

Duchamp's questioning of aesthetics is directed towards comparisons of what can be considered art in art, that is, art mediums and the ontology of the art object. Therefore, he aimed to change the perception of art on a social basis.

This is related to questioning traditional production techniques after the emergence of reproduction technologies in the early 20th century. Duchamp's ready-made work based on mass production is intended to eliminate the halo of unique works of art produced by traditional methods. In his article *"The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"*⁷ Walter Benjamin analyzed this situation as a symptomatic process that extends beyond the field of art.

The reproduction technique detaches the reproduced object from the field of tradition And it reactivates the reproduced object by allowing the reproduction to meet the person who owns or listens to it in its situation. These two processes cause a significant shake-up in tradition and are closely linked to contemporary mass movements. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 559)

As Benjamin puts it, Duchamp's Readymade raises disturbing questions about the nature of art and, therefore, art practice by defining the mass-produced object as the product of a collaborative approach in a world that prizes individuality. In this sense, Duchamp's urinal is about whether non-art can be accepted as an art category. According to Osborne,

⁷ First time published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* magazine at 1936, New York.

Duchamp's abandonment of the craft of painting in his art practice is radicalized by the abandonment of craft (techne) in general. (Osborne, 2021, p. 127)

In this regard, Duve has argued that in his book '*Kant After Duchamp*' (1996, Massachusetts) as the process that emerged in Duchamp's art as he began to abandon cubist painting, precisely the act of making in art, was, in fact, an act of 'choosing.' He linked the algebraic action (based on comparisons) inherent in Duchamp's skill with the reductionism of modern abstract painting. He argued that this organizing idea is related to the art of painting in Duchamp's readymades.

This swing of the pendulum is a symptom. Not only does it indicate that some hidden solidarity must exist between these two trends which apparently negate each other; it also calls for a reexamination of the art-historical context in which the readymade appeared, as an offspring of Duchamp's abandonment of painting. The birth of abstract painting is the relevant context, and as such, it is theoretical and aesthetic as well as art-historical. It revolves around the issue of specificity—or purity—attached to the word "painting." (Duve, 1996, p. 151)

In the continuation of this passage, Duve refers to the redefinition of abstract painting as transhistorical and universal, and according to the author, this attempt at purification points to a new desire for nomenclature and generalization (an effort to expand what is considered artistic and to annex ordinary non-artistic matter).

This tendency peaked with the founding of abstraction, in which a whole generation of painters had the strongest feeling that they had suddenly abandoned all their traditions to leap into unknown territory where the comparison with the past was no longer possible. In this sense, if the word art means making and making means choosing, then art means choosing. Duchamp's act of choosing also has a quality that makes the artist, not the art, the focal point. Duchamp's chosen objects become sculptures only when you take them as art. The common denominator of artist is that the work becomes pregnant with meaning. Duve says this situation shows that the general (generic) comes before the specific (specific). An organizing idea allows for a comparison between things that exist in the world and things that are candidates for the title of art because they are part of a particular craft traditionally recognized as an art form. (Duve, 1996, p.154)

The ground on which objects are constructed in these significations is a model of consciousness. At the most abstract level, the traditional painting appears as an argument about the nature of vision, as in ready-made works. Therefore, the change that emerges in twentieth-century art is to replace the question of beauty in modern aesthetics with the question of 'what can be called art.' This change brought about a difference in the ontology of art or the mode of being itself. Duchamp's fight about the relation of art to aesthetics constructed in the contemporary art of the 1960s what Osborne calls "*a new type of artistic function that refuses to present objects that are deemed appropriate to the gaze of the beholder.*" (Osborne, 2021, p. 63)

Duchamp's questioning of the aesthetic function of art with ready-made works as a reference in the late 1950s and 1960s, the artists of the period created a change against the formalist art criticism of the period by creatively analyzing the boundaries of the historical avant-garde. The negation of the medium in minimalism also manifested itself in the ontological negation of the art object. This negation in minimalism, as in Duchamp, is directed against the retinal/optical character of formalist art under its aesthetic judgments but also against the works that are considered modern art objects. This attitude, which developed against traditional formalism after Duchamp, enabled the development of content (discourse) against the gradual prioritization of form over content in art.

In this sense, Harman evaluates traditional formalism as follows,

A fundamentally taxonomic process that presupposes that certain kinds of beings are always candidates to be works of art, while some other kinds can never be." Traditional formalism has therefore clearly contributed to the future by expanding our understanding of what can be considered art. (Harman, 2022, p. 210-211)

Duve presented this situation as a historical repetition in his book dialectical abandonment of painting as a pendulum with Frank Stella and Donald Judd's absolute purification of painting, leaving only its object character.(Duve, 1996)

This situation, which appears as a hidden burden of the aesthetic regime of art, brings to light the issue of art becoming a discourse. This is the acceptance of the everyday, ordinary in the practice of life as art against the privileged zone of the aesthetic canon.

Although the avant-garde's goal of integrating art and the practice of life, which lies at its core, is linked to the presentation of the perceptible or unrepresentable, as in aestheticism, on the other hand, the original avant-garde tools have been used depending on this condition. Indeed, the elaboration, transformation, and development of this contradiction and challenge became the critical problem of the post-war art movements.

In this sense, if we want to talk about the point at which the minimalist three-dimensional of the 1960s met non-art, we cannot limit it to a formalist/formalist ideology specific to aesthetics. The possibility raised by Duchamp's urinal from a non-artistic source in 1917 triggered the minimalist artists' everyday objects to turn towards a non-artistic situation by breaking the distinction between the art world and the everyday world.



3. MINIMALISM BETWEEN 1960-1970

3.1. Minimalism and Post-Medium

The purity ideals of abstract painting were transformed into the reality of a specific object in American abstract painting in the 1950s. For Greenberg's normative assessments of modern art, in the late 1950s, art entered a period where the boundaries between mediums were crossed. At the same time, the other side of this rupture was realized with the efforts of historical avant-garde conceptions such as Duchampian Dada and Russian constructivism to integrate art and life practice. Therefore, historical avant-garde legacies became reference points against the Greenbergian formalism of the period. Greenberg's formalist understanding of the avant-garde nevertheless envisioned autonomy. Against such a point of view, the period's artists realized a historical turning point in which, as Foster puts it, "*formalist autonomy was both achieved and shattered*." (Hal Foster, 2009, p. 84) Therefore, minimalism emerged as a 'counter-memory' in modern art, but not by breaking away from modern art.

Greenberg's assessment of modern art as a project of self-purification, and thus the reading of modernism as a process of reduction, appealed to the representatives of the minimalist generation in the 1950s, who nevertheless reacted to the Greenbergian view on everything else.

About the minimalists who were attracted to Greenberg in this regard, Harman stated the following:

They share, for example, Greenberg's interest in the pictorial illusion of three-dimensional space that dominated Western painting from Cimabue and Giotto to at least Manet. (Harman, 2022, p. 89)

Thus, the minimalist artists accepted the implication that modern art tended to gradually erase relative composition in search of a more unified, less illusionistic work.

This mobilized against the continued vitality of painting as a viable medium and suggested substituting literal relationships.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.857)

Behind this emphasis on unity, particular views were expressed by the minimalists. One involves rejecting the related forms of Cubist composition and simultaneously narrowing the work towards an agreement that is no longer the sum of its parts in the traditional sense. This has led to substituting a "non-relational" condition for modern art's means of producing relations, such as composition.

As Foster points out, the minimalists' insistence on a single form that takes over the work experience and eclipses any sense of its constituent parts is seen as a response to the rejection of "*a priori systems*." (Hal Foster, 2016, p.537)

This rejection aims to eliminate a sense of idea and intention that existed before the making of the work in such a way that it appears to lie within the object. Eliminating this conception of illusionism essentially means avoiding the aesthetic ties of idealism. In a sense, this makes sense of how the minimalist works of the 1960s reveal their exteriority on an abstract surface.

Hence, the minimalists insisted on simple interpretations without hierarchy and logical termination by eliminating the deceptive appearances and internal imperatives of modernist art forms. One of the reasons for this is the interest in the phenomenological way of thinking connected to the experiential/empirical that emerged in high modernism. According to Harman, in American abstraction, Greenberg and Fried, with their criticism, prioritized the object over the subject by inverting Kant's subject-oriented position, which was far away from the object itself. (Harman, 2022, p.90) From this point of view, the minimalists' interest in phenomenology was also directed toward the relations between the object and the subject in a specific situation within the three dimensions.

Merleau-Ponty, whose work in phenomenology influenced many artists of the 1960s, explained this kind of experience as follows:

To know how to achieve something, it is enough to see it. Even if we don't know how it is processed in the nervous mechanism, the mobile body belongs to the visible world and can therefore be governed by sight. It is also a fact that vision is suspended in movement. We only see what we look at. (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p.32-33)

This was revealed in minimalist works by breaking the anthropomorphic perception of the object's relations in literal space, as opposed to the spaceless realm of modernist sculpture and the illusionistic space in painting. This interest in the body and the spectator sought to dismantle the condition of the autonomy of the modern art object based on the separation of subject and object. Therefore, the minimal object recognizes the subject and object in a unified relationship without breaking.

Minimalism, which transcended the medium comprehensiveness of modern art in the early 1960s, led to a rethinking of the basic terms of modern aesthetics. This change is directed towards the aesthetic autonomy of Greenberg's formalist theory of art. This process, which led to an ontological change in the work of art, was quickly attacked by the defenders of modern art. In the mid-1960s, minimalist discourse gains prominence with the texts of Donald Judd and Robert Morris. However, Michael Fried's *"Art and Objecthood"* (1967, Chicago) a critical essay against Judd and Morris' arguments, offered an abstractionist assessment of modernism and its distinctive features in the face of minimalism. These three texts reveal the unrecognized claims and contradictions of the minimalist discourse.

3.1.1. Specific object and sculpture

In the 1960s, artists who tried to create their art writing against the hegemonic figures of modern art, such as Greenberg and Fried, began to go beyond the limits of formalist art writing. Their texts transformed the determinism of art into a collective historical act. This led to an essential categorization of art after the decline of the dominance of the medium, shaping the space of conceptual interpretation. The first texts to emerge in this sense were by Judd and Morris, against both the categorical imperatives and historicist tendencies of modernism.

These texts, well-known in minimalist literature, are essential for shaping the early discourse of minimalism. These texts by both artists offer different scenarios in which minimalism is constituted in complex relationships with late modernist discourse. Judd's article *"Specific Objects"* was written in 1965, the year in which, as Foster notes,

Greenberg revised and published his article "*Modern Painting*,". (Hal Foster, 2009, p.73) In this sense, Judd's assertion in his text that the new works are a new category called "*three-dimensional work*" reveals the intention that with a new way of life, something entirely new is necessary - something that painting, and sculpture could never be. In his text, Judd sets out a position that includes a clear opposition to Greenberg's normative evaluations of modern art:

Three-dimensionality is not as near being simply a container as painting or sculpture have seemed to be, but it tends to that. But now painting and sculpture are less neutral, less containers, more defined, not undeniable, and inavoidable. They are particular forms circumscribed after all, producing fairly definite qualities." (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.870)

As Judd states in this passage, the new three-dimensional work is such that it transcends the obstruction of the essences and rules that define modernist painting and sculpture as defined by Greenberg. The three-dimensional work has become a lawsuit against modern art in that the rectangular shape of the painting determines the constructions within it, and the plane expresses the end of the painting, or that the proximity of sculpture to form creates a boundary. On the one hand, this attempt developed Greenberg's assumption about the neutral character of modern painting, transcending painting altogether to the creation of objects in genuine, authentic space. Essentialism is always implicit in Greenberg's assessment of modern art as a process of self-purification. This is because through the rectangular character of the painting, it pushes the elements within it into a compositional logic that creates harmony with this character. In this sense, Judd emphasized this rectangle in the works of the Abstract Expressionists. Rather than the harmony of the parts inherent in the compositional logic of painting, this pictorial quality, which is subject to lesser parts and unity, makes visible the ontological reduction of painting to a single entity. However, Judd points out that this entity has a limited lifespan in painting. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.871)

One of the main problems Judd wants to point out in this sense is that although the medium specificity of the painting is used in American abstraction in a way that is inherent to the rectangular shape of color and form and the flatness of the canvas, the result cannot break away from illusionism with the space that the painting inevitably creates. Nevertheless, the fact that Abstract American painting moves away from

illusionism is a quality to be taken as a reference for Judd. As a matter of fact, according to Judd, Stella has proven this, and in this sense, as he has already stated about Stella's works, "*the new work is more like sculpture than painting, but it is close to the painting.*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.872)

This sentence characterizes the development of Abstract American painting to a more advanced stage than sculpture. According to Judd, the sculpture of the period still has anthropomorphic and compositional qualities; in this sense, it shifts to the field of representation by creating specific images. However, Judd also references different interrogations of sculpture in the later part of the text.

For example, Claes Oldenburg's work's dependence on the environment, the simple monolithic structures of Arp and Brancusi's sculptures, the fact that Duchamp's ready-mades appear at once rather than part by part, the different images of neo-dadaist Rauschenberg and Johns' reliefs and objects, and finally Stella's shaped canvases.

According to Foster, Judd's premises suggest that painting and sculpture have become determined forms, and that the tradition of form cannot be carried further, thus rejecting Greenberg's rules. (Hal Foster, 2009, p.74)

Indeed, according to Judd, limits of mediums characterize the established forms of modern art, and the only way to avoid this is to turn to three-dimensionality, whose nature is not already set. Judd elaborates on this as follows:

Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, ceiling, room or exterior, or none at all. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.873)

As Judd points out in this passage, using three dimensions is not a specific use of form. The world of objects is, therefore, a more formally bounded possibility.

Judd's radical challenge to the legitimacy of conventional categories of medium is quite striking in a single sentence later in his essay: "*A work needs only to be interesting.*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.873) This sentence is a reference to Greenberg. Foster explains Judd's "interest" against the concept of "quality," which is frequently seen in Greenberg's criticism, as follows:

Whereas quality is judged not only by the criteria of the old masters but also by the criteria of modern artists, interest is marked by disruption of aesthetic categories and certain forms. (Hal Foster, 2009, p.74)

Therefore, Judd's word "*interest*" refers to avant-garde heritage and aesthetic freedom based on critical research. Like Judd, Morris' essay adopts a three-dimensional approach to sculpture in "*Notes on Sculpture 1-2*" but retains the concept of sculpture. In contrast to the relationship of Judd's specific objects to American abstract painting, Morris' minimalist scenario is quite different.

In the interest of differences, it seems that some of the distinctions of sculpture has managed for itself be articulated. To begin in the broadest possible, way it should be stated that the concerns of sculpture have been for some time not only distinct from but hostile to those of painting. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.874)

Morris's argument is aimed at separating sculpture from painting, which brings together the positions of Greenberg and Judd. In this sense, in contrast to Judd's interest in illusionism, Morris's approach shows an interest in gestalt theory and the constructivist legacy. In this context, Morris emphasizes constructivist sculpture's non-representational and literal character and states that the art of the day maintains the same character of non-representational. Drawing attention to the importance of gestalt effects concerning three dimensions, Morris implies that these effects provide a new boundary and freedom for sculpture. Therefore, according to Morris, the interlocked and inseparable quality of the parts of the gestalt is in a more privileged position than the object as one of the foundations or values of sculpture. According to Foster, Morris's minimalism involves the contraction of sculpture towards the modern pure object and its unrecognizable expansion on the other side. (Hal Foster, 2009, p.78)

Morris also focuses on this paradoxical situation, placing the minimalist work based on the scale of the human body between object and monument, referring to the statements of architect and artist Tony Smith.⁸

⁸ Morris quotes the following interview in which Tony Smith answers questions about his sculpture *Die* (1962):

Morris states that the quality of scale reveals the function of a comparison between the human body and the object. In this sense, Morris' awareness of the space created by scale is directed toward the viewer's experience. According to Foster, Morris's definition is intended to explore the limits of sculpture by inverting the reaction between subject and object. (Hal Foster, 2009, pp.78-79) Krauss offers another interpretation of Morris's awareness.

Insofar as sculpture constitutes a constant analogy with the human body, Morris's work orients itself towards the meaning projected by our bodies and questions the relationship of this meaning to the psychological idea of intimacy. (Krauss, 2021, p.303)

Krauss's interpretation is entirely accurate. Because Morris states in his text that in this sense while evaluating the object from various positions under varying conditions of light and space, the image of the object reflected in the human mind enables him to see the equivalent in the existential reality of the object.

At the same time, Krauss' concept of "*psychological intimacy*" can be used to Duchamp's Readymade. Morris, along with Duchamp, demands a heightened reflection on the performative participation of the audience, which is a characteristic of any aesthetic object's relationship with space and with the form of the sculpture. According to Morris, Gestalt offers this possibility, in which the viewer experiences the object from different positions. This is quite evident in his early work (1965) called "*(Untitled) L-Beams*". (Figure 3.1) With this work, Morris showed that there is a distinction between our perception of objects and the real object. While viewers perceived the beams as having different shapes and sizes, they were the same shape and equal size.

Morris's early minimalist discourse is therefore oriented toward a monolithic and self-defining model implied by Gestalt. This model relates to phenomenology. According to Harman, phenomenology is oriented towards the insight that for every object there is always a tension between the object and its qualities. (Harman, 2022, p.109).

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

Answer: I was not making a monument.

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

Answer: I was not making an object. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.876)

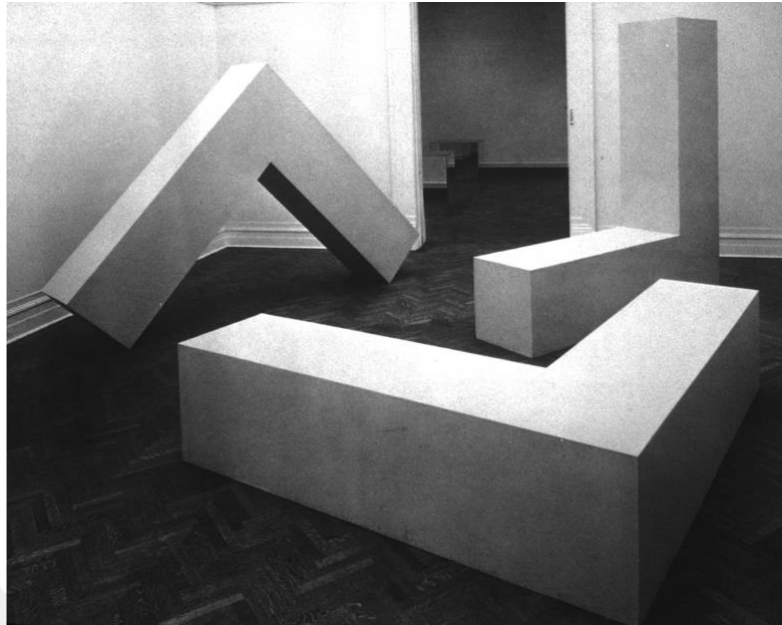


Figure 3.1 Robert Morris, (Untitled) L-Beams, 1965, Plywood, Dimensions variable, photograph from Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculpture exhibition, Jewish Museum, New York.

To summarize, despite all their differences and similarities, both Judd's and Morris's texts aim to depart from the categories of modern art, defined as painting and sculpture, to transcend them and take the name of art. For this, Judd calls her text "*specific objects*" and reinforces this with the word "*interest*." Morris, on the other hand, emphasized the self-defining qualities of the new minimal work. Duve comments on these attempts by both artists as follows:

Both Judd and Robert Morris insisted on the unrelated, uncomposed forms that minimalism espoused, on the integrity, compactness, and objectivity of their Gestalt, on the reality of the time and space in which they were experienced, and on the stubborn reality of their materials. (Duve, 1996, p.234)

The conception of three dimensions in its own space is to carry the origins of the meaning of minimalist works outside. This innovation revealed a new way of relating to modern formalist art's established rules and thinking methods.

This way of thinking, emerged with the discourses of Judd and Morris, put the established terms of modern aesthetics under pressure and led to a rethinking of the concepts of aesthetic autonomy and the work of art. Indeed, Michael Fried ironically canonized

minimalism while trying to defend formalist modernism against this new way of thinking in the 1960s.

3.1.2. Modernism, theatricality, objecthood

As one of the most famous critiques of minimalism, Fried's article "*Art and Objecthood*" (1967, Chicago) provides a straightforward reading of the artistic rupture of the 1960s between modernism and contemporary, Fried's defense of medium specificity against minimalism and the value of aesthetic experience as a whole, which is essentially grasped independently of time and place, was directed against competing interests that attempted what he presented as not only an aesthetic but also a moral compromise. Moreover, modernist aesthetics in this period is intertwined with ethics as Fried conceived it. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.858) The precepts of abstractionist modernism emphasized by Greenberg and Fried were replaced by a new regulatory idea of the contingency of contexts, of art as independent of mediums, as artists of the period deliberately transcended traditional distinctions between mediums. Thus, Judd and Morris's statements in their texts led Fried to recognize minimalism's threat to formalist modernism. Focusing on the fact that minimalism is ideologically both a result of and independent of the modern art tradition, Fried criticizes both artists' discourses on painting and sculpture.

First, Fried calls Judd's interpretation of the illusionism of the medium of painting a "*literalist*" attitude and then focuses on the shared perspectives of Judd and Morris.

Above all, they are opposed to sculpture that, like most painting, is 'made part by part', by addition, composed' and in which "specific elements ... separate from the whole, thus setting up relationships within the work.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.882)

Fried exemplifies this attitude of both artists with their opposition to the works of the sculptors of the period, David Smith and Anthony Caro. Smith and Caro are the artists who, for Morris and Judd, continue the anthropomorphic compositional logic in sculpture. In this sense, they are the artists they use as negative references when defining the point of view of minimalism. Therefore, minimalists assert the values of wholeness, unity, and indivisibility against this sculptural form. Fried implies that the critical factor

of this attitude is actually "*shape*." (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.883) Fried wanted to correct Greenberg's theory of 'flatness.' Instead of flatness, Fried based the development of modern painting on the shape, a dominant physical or literal characteristic inherent in the painting medium, which manifested itself in the paintings of American abstractionists such as Stella and Noland, starting with Manet. According to Fried, the shape, which should belong to the painting, is, in this sense, a pictorial factor that enables the painting to overcome its objecthood.

However, his characterization of the minimalists as "*literal*" stems from the fact that they attribute everything to shape, which is a given characteristic of objects, a kind of object in itself. This is a tautology based on "*what you see is what you see*," as Stella puts it, and as Juliane Rebentisch points out, as a positivist conception, it is independent of any question of the meaning embodied in the work. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.50) In this context, the positivist assumption of the minimalists regarding the facticity of material that can be grasped independently of meaning is, contrary to Fried, about discovering and reflecting objecthood. According to Harman, Fried began to sense the danger of producing nothing but literal objects from around 1960 onwards, as he records in his essay "*Art and Objecthood*" (Harman, 2022, p.92) Fried states in his text:

In any case, a sharp contrast between the literalist espousal of objecthood - almost, it seems, as art in its own right - and modernist painting's self-imposed imperative that it, defeat or suspend its own objecthood through the medium of shape. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p. 883)

As seen in Fried's statement, an understanding of art inherent in the development of modern art can postpone objecthood and, in this sense, transcend the literalism of the minimalists. This shows us that Greenberg's concept of "*quality*" is also valid for Fried. Therefore, Fried's literalist adoption of objecthood is, in his own words, "*nothing more than the assertion of a new genre in theater, and theater is the negation of art*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.884). Fried explains why he considers minimalists to be literalists in this sense as follows:

Whereas in ancient art, 'what is to be taken from the work is strictly within it,' the literalist experience

of art is an experience of an object in a situation - indeed, by definition, an experience that includes its owner. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.884)

As can be seen, Fried claims that the existence of the minimal object is concealed, and therefore it is an existence that produces a "*situation*" that does not belong to art. According to Fried, the minimalist object externalizes the subject and distances viewer from itself. For Fried, this situation creates a "*stage presence*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.885).

Fried also gives us a formalist analysis of this argument. He argues that the scale of minimalist works is close to that of the human body and that their formal features, which are disconnected, unifying, and totalizing in a tendency towards order and symmetry, resemble entities, beings, or other persons encountered in everyday experience. For Fried, the reference for all these features is nature, and the apparent hollowness of minimalist works, that is, the fact that they have an interior, is, according to the critic, clearly anthropomorphic. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.886)

As Harman notes, Fried, in any case, wants to exclude two different things from the field of high-quality, contemporary art: (a) the whole situation of the work and (b) the viewer of the work, the viewer that encounters the work. However, according to Harman, he never explains it this way because Fried sees the situation and the viewer as essentially the same thing. (Harman, 2022, p.93)

Therefore, Fried's assessment of the minimalists as literalist theorists stem from his assertion that they have an anthropomorphist idea of implicit or hidden naturalism. In this sense, Fried gives the example of Tony Smith and mentions that the artist considers his sculptures as presences. According to Foster, although Fried speaks of anthropomorphism in minimalism, his main aim is to present minimalism as "*incorrigibly theatrical*" because, according to an essential hypothesis of "*Art and Objecthood*," "*theater is now the negation of art.*" (Hal Foster, 2009, p.80)

In this sense, In Fried's discourse on theatricality, we need to know that it is related to Brechtian and Artuad theaters. This discourse is both in relation to the aesthetic

relationship between the spectator and the art object, and in the sense that theater, as a medium specificity, does not fuse with any other medium.

And Fried's critique point is that the minimalists' anthropomorphism is mediated. It is to show the theatricality created by the specific situation between the minimalist object and the subject as an "*incurable*" disease. In this framework, he characterizes theatricality as "*the end of art*" instead of the essence of art, as Tony Smith expressed in an interview with Samuel Wagstaff Jr. about his experience on the New Jersey Turnpike. Smith described this experience in the discussion as follows:

This car ride was an enlightening experience. The road and much of the landscape were artificial, though I wouldn't call it a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first, I didn't understand what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from the views I had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.803)

As seen in Smith's statements, the resulting sense of experience is inadequate in terms of art because, for Fried, it is something temporary that belongs to everyday time. Fried explains why this is not art by relating it to minimalist objects as follows;

It is explicitness, that is to say, the sheer persistence, with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject - makes him subject - and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood.''(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.887)

Fried's critique of Smith appears to critique the modern subject-object relation. As Rebentisch notes, Fried's critique of Judd's word "*interest*" should be understood in this context as a critique of leaving the dematerialized art objects at the mercy of the viewer's interest, which is constantly called upon to reflect what is presented to it as given.(Rebentisch, 2012, p. 49) From Fried's point of view, art aims to transcend the literal in the depth and fullness of symbolic meaning in the same way that painting transcends its objecthood through the specificity of its medium. Minimalists, by contrast, positivistically insist that the symbolic meaning of objects is isolated and literal, independent of the spectator's relation to the concrete appearance of the artwork. Thus, like Smith's experience, minimalists assume the demonstrability of the visible,

independent of any question of the meaning embodied in the work. In this sense, Fried's characterization of minimalist objects as "*stage presence*" is reminiscent of an actor appearing on stage to play a role. In this case, the actor becomes a double entity, himself and his role. As Fried puts it about Smith's experience, the "*work of distancing, isolating, making him a subject*" stems from the fact that he also sees minimalist objects in terms of human characteristics that emerge from their objectivity. For Fried, this presence is the inexhaustibility, the infinity that minimalist objects reveal. Therefore, in contrast to minimalism, the "*instantaneity*" of modernist artifacts, which are fully visible at every moment, is admirable for Fried (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.890)

Fried cites the works of sculptors such as Anthony Caro and David Smith as positive examples of minimalism for these qualities of modernist works.

As Fried states, the experience that minimalists reveal through their works lasts over time, and such a representation of infinity is subject to an indefinite duration. However, Krauss puts it, there is no moment when a viewer suddenly gains insight into minimal objects. These objects exist only in the users' own time; the temporal open-endedness of their use constitutes their existence. (Krauss, 2021, p.231)

In this sense, Fried reminds us again of Smith's journey on the highway and Morris's statement in his essay "*Notes on Sculpture*" that the experience of the work necessarily exists in time, and he argues that the minimalist interest in the duration of the experience is theatrical.

The literalist preoccupation with time - more precisely, with the duration of the experience - is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theater confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of time; or as though, the sense which at the bottom (...) (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.890)

In contrast to the theatricality of the minimalists, Fried stated about the sculptures of David Smith or Caro (Figure 3.2) that "*the work itself is wholly manifest.*" He argued that these sculptures are experienced as immediacy, as constantly and wholly present. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, pp.890-891)

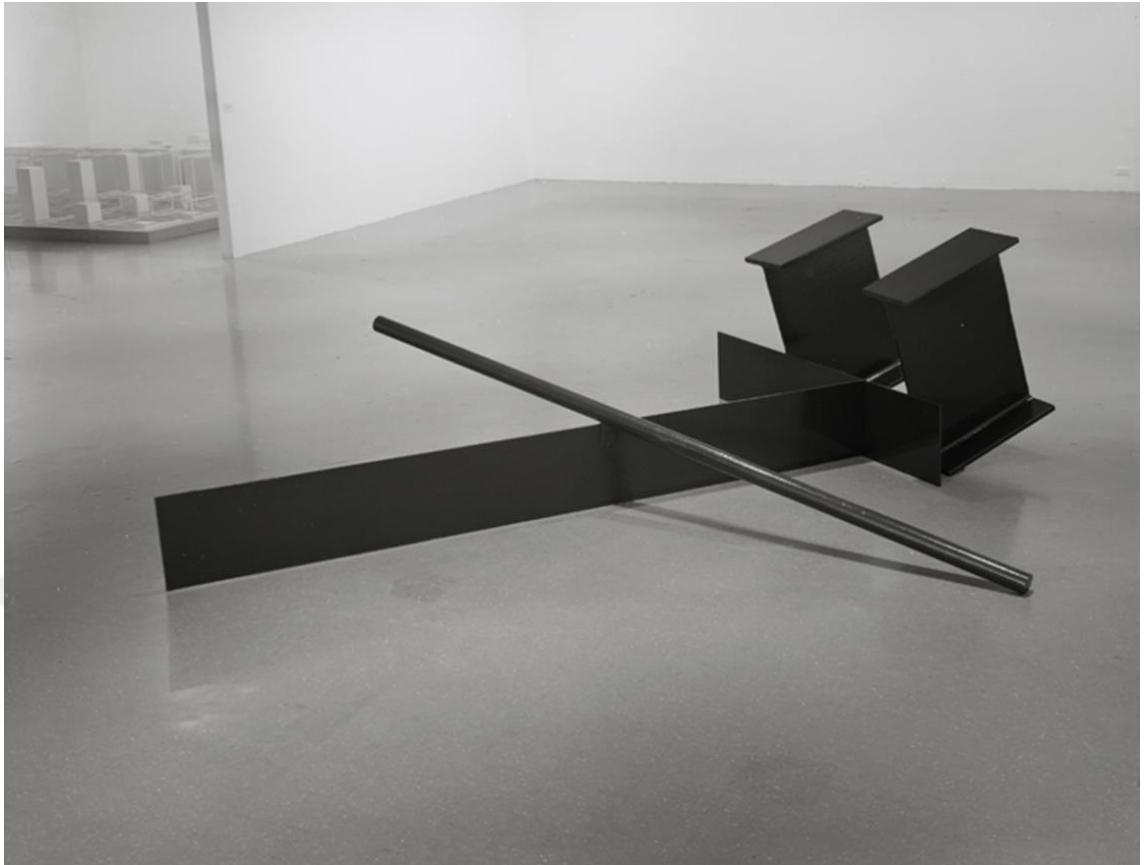


Figure 3.2 Anthony Caro, *Frognal*, 1965, Painted Steel, 89.5 x 368.8 x 305.3 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In this sense, Caro and the sculptors who followed him represent an art of sculpture that is more than a mere object, an art that takes on meaning. And for Fried, modern painting or sculpture beats theater in terms of presence and immediacy.

However, Rebentisch in her book '*Aesthetic of Installation Art*', (2012, London) has this to say about this. Unlike the sculptures of Smith or Caro, which Fried cites as examples, there is no such thing as non-theatrical art due to the structure of art. Rebentisch argues that this is because, even in the case of a Caro sculpture, the experience of symbolic meaning, whose depth and fullness instantaneously and decisively, convincingly transcends the materiality or objecthood of the sculpture, is nothing more than the expression of a fetishistic exaggeration of the object through its metaphysical interpretation. However, since the ordinary objects of minimal art seem to resist such hyperbole, they reveal with particular clarity the dual nature of aesthetic objects. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.53)

We can therefore argue that Fried's insistence on the "*theatricality*" of minimalist works is aimed at the ambiguity of the discovery of objecthood. Indeed, Caro and David Smith are Fried's favorite artists because their sculptures reveal the aesthetics and conventions of modern art. In this respect, for Fried, the literalist position of the minimalists is alien and shows a contradictory sensibility. From this perspective, the demands of art and the condition of objectivity produce a direct conflict. For Fried, the object, not the beholder, should be the center or focus of the situation in the work of art. At the same time, the situation itself must belong to the beholder. But minimalist works must somehow confront the beholder and are placed not only in the beholder's space but also on his or her itinerary.

Therefore, minimalist works cannot be separated from the beholder. Harman argues that despite its conflict with the term Fried formalism, this fundamentally Kantian way of looking at art represents both a central insight and a central dogma. This insight concerns the autonomous formalist emphasis in art, and autonomy ultimately means the non-literal and, therefore, non-relational depth of art. (Harman, 2022, p.94)

The minimalist object makes it challenging to determine where its formal or content-related significance lies precisely. The double legibility of minimalist works through their theatricality makes them structurally uncanny. What is therefore called into question is the possibility of a relationship with the object, whether positivist or symbolic, that can somehow be understood as instantaneous. In this sense, the emphasis on suspicion that emerged with minimalism subverts the modernist art's attitude towards convincing, while at the same time revealing what is conditional instead of seeking what is essential in art. Therefore, this situation makes a temporary distinction between formal, modern, avant-garde, and postmodern art, which has a long-term course in art. Fried's statements on theatricality and the temporality of the term, which he used in a negative sense, were reversed and reevaluated in the late 1970s, and its place and power in the late modern scheme continued. Therefore, the concepts that Fried presented as a bundle of negativities of minimalism in his critique led to the canonization of minimalism as an art of perceptual analysis between object and subject in the following years and prepared a further study for these conditions of perception in the later periods of contemporary art.

3.2. The Seriality of Minimalism

In the 1960s, minimalist artists disrupted the formalist categories of the art establishment of the time. In this context, there are specific methods behind minimalism's break with modern art. The first of these methods is the anti-compositional and non-relational series that used by Frank Stella. Minimalist artists continued to explore and develop this formation in their three-dimensional works. But it is not only about anti-formalist concerns for minimalists. According to Foster, there is a logic in finding local connections between the art forms and socio-economic conditions of the 1960s and relying on assumptions about the similarity of reflections or the mechanics of reactions. These connections are therefore provided in minimalism by a formal and structural analysis of the legacy of mass production and readymade. (Hal Foster, 2009, p.93)

With Duchamp's introduction of the readymade to art in the 1910s, a possibility emerged that did not need the emphasis inherent in the psychological intimacy of the artist. With the readymade "*Fountain*," Duchamp separated the artist and the maker and declared the exteriority of the resulting situation. He prevented the work from functioning within the grammar of aesthetic personality. The artists who embraced this legacy in American art rejected the inner psychological space of the artist, the internal meaning model, which was shaped on the surface of the canvas against Abstract Expressionism. This is because the forms shaped by the artists on the canvas depend on an intense inner experience when it comes to Abstract Expressionism. Therefore, Abstract Expressionists demand that the outer surface of the work be viewed as a map of the personality. This inner space shaped from the surface of the canvas is just like the artist's physiognomic outer and psychological internal space. It should be kept in mind that the Minimalists speak of illusionism in the context of this dual meaning.

This inaccessibility of illusionary space and the intense experience of the intimacy of the individual self is a model of meaning that is no longer reliable for minimalists. For Krauss, this language and meaning problem helps us see the positive side of minimalism's efforts. To refuse to give the work of art an illusionistic center or interior space, minimal artists, far from denying the meaning of the aesthetic object altogether, reassess the logic

of a particular source of meaning. This is the appearance - to continue the analogy with language - that meaning originates in the public rather than in an individual space. (Krauss, 2021, p.298) The Minimalists transferred this analogy to the visual medium with industrial objects in systematic series. In his article "*Specific Objects*," Donald Judd mentions this repetitive logic of mass production both in his works and in Frank Stella's paintings as follows:

Order is not rationalistic and underlying but is simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.872)

This order (seriality), applied in Stella's minimalist two-dimensional works, is one of the ways of clearing out from the traditional compositional logic of European formalism. This compositional logic is associated with Cubism. In this sense, Stella stated about European formalism that the basis of all their ideas is balance; you do something in one corner and balance it with something in the other corner. (Battcock, 1968, p.148)

And the relational formations of European art, for Judd, a philosophy of rationalism;

All this art is based on pre-constructed systems, a priori systems, and this is a particular kind of thinking and logic that is now discredited as a way of finding out what the world looks like. (Krauss, 2021, p.280)

What the minimalists oppose in this sense is the illusionism and compositional conventionality of modernist sculpture and painting, from which three-dimensional work is influenced, and the rejection of sculptural forms as a source of meaning. Behind the abstract formations of modern sculpture, there is always an interior. From this interior emerges the sculpture's life, a model of importance. This sculpture, which Judd refers to as "*rational*," is the kind of order and constructive principle that he attributes to an idealist philosophy of art. For Judd and many artists of the 1960s, these qualities represented a continuation of exhausted habits in art. Therefore, this situation also shaped the criticism of minimalist artists towards the work of their contemporaries.

In this context, the distinction between the sculptors of the period can be seen in Judd's statement about the sculptor Mark diSuvero:

Di Suvero uses beams as if they were brush strokes, imitating movement, as Kline did. The material never has its own movement. A beam thrusts, a piece of iron follows a gesture; together they form a naturalistic and anthropomorphic image. The space corresponds. (Judd, 1975)

Judd's statement about diSuvero draws attention to the sculptor's use of expressionist pictorial forms in his compositions. (Figure 3.3)

Therefore, he states that the materials used are constructed in a formalist way, contrary to their dependence on their conditions. This formalism is about showing the interior space of the sculpture, that is, that the artist shapes it. According to the minimalists, these illusionistic features reflected in sculpture are also quite evident in the works of sculptors such as Anthony Caro and David Smith, in addition to diSuvero. The common point of all these sculptors is the harmony of the individual elements used in their sculptures with each other; as Fried states about Caro's sculptures, they have a "syntactic" ⁹quality. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.888)



Figure 3.3 Mark diSuvero, *Ladderpiece*, 1961-62, Wood and Steel, 189 x 465 x 300 cm . Museum of Modern Art, New York

Caro, who Fried defends against the theatricality of minimalism in his text is a critical artist who refers to the juxtaposition of each aesthetic element. Of course, these qualities

⁹ Fried here relates Caro's work to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of linguistic meaning as a function of pure differential relations between inherently meaningless elements.

of Caro, which Fried praises, directly oppose the minimalists' interest in gestalt and holism. Behind this interest, the nature of meaning and the subject's position is crucial. This problem is evident in the exhibition "*Primary Structures*," curated by Kynaston McShine at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966. The exhibition was designed to showcase the contemporary sculpture of the period, bringing together forty young artists from both sides of the Atlantic with pioneering figures of modern sculpture, such as Anthony Caro and Tony Smith.

At the entrance to the museum, visitors were greeted by Caro's "*Titan*", a low, asymmetrical sculpture of welded beams, and Caro's student David Annesley's "*Swing Low*" a sculpture of part-by-part construction. In the courtyard directly opposite these sculptures was Tony Smith's sculpture installed "*Free Ride*". (Figure 3.4) The exhibition was one of a series of attempts to give a name to the simplification of these forms of sculpture of the period and to give a name to this increasingly pronounced attitude, and for this purpose, the exhibition used the term "*Primary Structures*." (Hal Foster, 2016, p.537)



Figure 3.4 Tony Smith, *Free Ride*, 1962, Painted Steel, 203.2 x 203.2 x 203.2 cm, *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptors*, Jewish Museum, New York.

As James Meyer points out in his book ‘*Minimalism Art and Polemics in the Sixties*’, (2004, New Haven and London) the design of this exhibition represented the stylistic difference in the achievement of British and American art, which attracted the most attention from critics of the period. (Meyer, 2004, p.13) This difference is evident when considering the artists' works participating in the exhibition. In this sense, the artists brought together in each museum gallery included different approaches of the period and, in this sense, a broad survey of contemporary sculpture.

For example, Caro and his students from St. Martins (David Annesley, Gerald Lain, Isaac Witkin) crystallized a particular formal style. Differences also emerged between the New York group of American artists (Robert Morris, Robert Smithson, Sol LeWitt, Tony Smith) and the artists represented by the Park Place Gallery (Robert Grosvenor, Peter Forakis, Forrest Myers). In contrast to artists such as Morris, Carl Andre and Judd who are usually associated with minimalism and the 'minimal look' with a reductionist tendency, the artists referred to as the Park Place group represented a simpler form of 'Primary Structures.'

But for all the differences in the three dimensions, the exhibition has many commonalities, from fiberglass and sheet metal to smooth, glossy surfaces and simplified geometries. In addition, the high ceilings and large dimensions of the museum galleries contributed to the fact that all these pedestal-less sculptures and objects, which were constructed according to the viewer's body and the size of the gallery, emphasized concerns such as space, volume, movement, and light, which became increasingly prominent in the art of the 1960s. Therefore, the exhibition "*Primary Structures*" represented a transition from the traditional pedestal scale of sculpture to the architectural scale.

The artists in the exhibition participated in a symposium titled "*The New Sculpture*" organized at the Jewish Museum. During the discussion moderated by Kynaston McShine, di Suvero stated that Judd "*cannot be considered an artist because he did not produce the work himself.*" (F. Judd & Murray, 2019, p.94)

Behind this statement is the question of whether the reasoning of modern art can be applied to minimal objects. This reminds us that, as in the case of Duchamp, the readymade cannot be considered a work of art because the Society of Independent Artists rejected it. In both cases, there is a selection and manipulation of materials, not a making of them.

The industrial pieces that make up the works of sculptors such as Caro, David Smith, and diSuvero refer to the juxtaposition of aesthetic elements. They, therefore, represent an ideal order. Their sculptures, articulated with specific parts, refer to what the artist is thinking, not the viewer. Fried's defense of Caro's art against the minimalists stems from this. According to Fried, the spectator should be "*absorbed*" in a work of art but not fused with it (Fried, 1988). In the objects of the minimalists, the focus is on a viewer who perceives only simple material phenomena. This perception is realized through physical participation. There is no underlying model of meaning in these objects. Meaning only occurs in the unity of object and subject.

The repetitive configuration of mass-produced objects does not allow for hierarchical relationships between parts. Therefore, they are not a composition determined by logical termination. In this sense, minimalism differs from other three-dimensional works of the period in that the opposition of illusionism (physiognomic exterior and psychological interior) leads to all geometric objects, colors, seriality, and industrial fracture. Minimalist objects go far away from the logic of a sculpture with internal relationships, reminding the subject that they are in the same space. At the same time, they shake the viewer's self-concept. Therefore, we must evaluate minimalism in its own time to make sense of this situation. Minimalism is against modernist art and its culture by asserting the physical here and now. Minimalism constructed this analysis of perception in the formal and structural model of the readymade. Minimalist, industrial objects are constructed in series with mass-produced materials inherent to the socio-economic order, like the "*continuity*" Judd refers to. This seriality is based on technical production rather than the motifs in abstract examples of modern art. Therefore, a semiotic model of meaning based on description or expression is shattered. Minimalism, with its systematic serial objects, integrates us with our second nature that has developed since the Industrial

Revolution. Therefore, minimalist artworks create negative space in the face of an aesthetic autonomy. This is based on the environmentalization of the work of art.

However, the environmentalization is based on the display of industrial forms in the early 1960s, based on the interior space. But, towards the end of the 1960s, an accelerated technologicalization of all aspects of everyday life and far-reaching social and political changes prepared the conditions for further perceptual analysis of minimalism. Some artists shifted their focus from the object to the space surrounding it and addressed the minimal object in its social and political contexts.

This is because the industrial mimesis of minimal objects has a rational logic and registers the lack of productivity and social incapacity of art. In a sense, minimalism's attitude towards the self-referentiality of the work of art ironically perpetuates self-referential characteristic of modernism. Therefore, the analysis of the influence of minimal objects on behavior is interpreted not only in terms of the construction of situations but also in terms of the construction of social relations and practices, expanding from the non-utilitarian interior to the utilitarian city.

3.2.1. The reality of the works of art after the decline of modern art

The fact that works of art exist points to the possibility of the non-existent. The reality of works of art testifies to the possibility of the possible.

Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*
(1984, London)

Underlying the shift in focus away from the object at the end of 60s, the desire is to move further away from the conventions of modern art. This is related to a turning point of the 1960s when the hegemony of modern art theory was shattered. Therefore, the growing tendency is for the artist to move from being the producer of art objects to be the manipulator of signs and for the viewer to move from being the passive spectator of aesthetics to being the active reader of messages. As Greenberg argues, the practice inherent in modern art mediums is directed to be interpreted by the viewer by hiding the

content behind the forms. Or, in Fried's words, the viewer is "*absorbed*" by the work. Therefore, the work is an autonomous existence that makes the content felt through its formal components separate from the viewer. It is also a romantic conception as temporal existential. The metaphysical content of American abstraction, which lasted until the 1950s, is integral to Heidegger's philosophy. In Heidegger's terms, "*Dasein*," which, unlike the subject, is always a being in the world, is about existentially deepening the romantic conception of thought and radicalizing the sense of temporality.

Since the industrial revolution, however, there has been a contradiction between visual art based on craft and the industrial order of social life. The public qualities and temporal now-presence of minimal objects have neutralized this contradiction between individual aesthetic creation and collective social production. This transition is related to the revitalization of the constructivist metaphor in the art of the 1960s. It is a perspective of the transition towards inner experimentation on forms, away from life but, in reality, towards a social function. However, the fact that the minimal series expressed industrial forms, after a while, placed them in the temporality of mass culture, from which art used to be distant, and caused them to become a signifier of production and consumption in advanced capitalism. In other words, they became mere aesthetic experimentation of industrial mimesis. Mass production has spread to all sectors of social life with mass culture. Therefore, minimalism inevitably became a symbol of American cultural authority and industrial technology using geometric forms limited to industrial and commercial materials. Judd's "*Untitled (four units)*" (Figure 3.5) is made of galvanized iron and painted aluminum, Morris's "*Untitled*", a cage-like reproduction of steel wire, and Carl Andre's "*Zinc-Zinc Plain*", which emphasizes industrial mediocrity, are also associated with other social, economic, theoretical and political ruptures that took place in the 1960s. Moreover, the US's involvement in the Vietnam War and its acceleration of industrial production affected the perception of minimal objects in the political order. However, in this process, the social tendency towards rights and freedoms and opposition to the war has also shaped these criticisms by the absence of minimalist artists. For example, according to Anna C. Chave in her article "*Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power*," Carl Andre stated the following in this regard:

My art will reflect not necessarily conscious politics but unanalyzed politics of my life. Matter as matter rather than matter as symbol is a conscious political position, I think, essentially Marxist.(Chave. C, 1990)

Andre's unwillingness to explicitly associate his art with other social, economic, and political ruptures, as in his statement, makes a post-structuralist logic visible. But it is still problematic in a way that proclaims the neutrality of the work of art. But how to overcome the self-referential structure of modernist art? The only solution here is social construction, a combination of formalism and productivism. Therefore, minimal art, which moves from the interior to the urban space, positions its experimental character based on the analysis of perception right into life. This is due to the contradiction between the cultural formal level of the minimal artwork and the social art space. Minimalism's negation of the immanent expression of materials and its dependence on a certain tautology subordinated this art form, or the artworks of the 1960s, to a political functionalism turned inward against the social relations of autonomy.

Therefore, the most important element that subordinates the dysfunctionality and utilitarianism of art is its lack of expression, which stems from the minimalists' literal approach to art. Literalism has distanced minimal artists from the conventionality of modern art but also deprived them of art's ability to produce context. The idea of structuralism in the late 60s brought back the problem of context to art and enabled the textualization of art.

According to Craig Owens in his essay "*The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a theory of Postmodernism*", the problem of context is not about producing images, but rather about imprisoning them, that is, claiming what is culturally meaningful and acting as their interpreter.(Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.1078) From the beginning, minimalist artists supported their works with texts and created an allegory. This allegory determined the structures of minimalist works. Allegory is composed of *allos*: other and *agoreuei*: to speak. In other words, it does not bring back an original meaning but adds another meaning. The interest in structuralist thought in the 60s crystallized in minimalism an understanding of the whole from the part, a form of apparatus made up of many elements. In this context, structuralism, which allows us to examine the cultural system as a whole, is rooted in the rules of linguistics. It tries to explain the cultural structure with a model

based on language and its function. This makes use of the association and contrast relationship that exists in language.



Figure 3.5 Donald Judd, *Untitled (Four Units)*, 1969, Clear anodized aluminum and blue Plexiglass, each 48 x 60 x 60 cm with 30.5 cm intervals. Saint Louis Art Museum. New York.

The serial structures of the minimalists can also be read in this sense. The following of one thing after another is related to the projection of the structure as a sequence - either spatial or temporal or both. They, therefore, correspond to the counter-narrative character of allegory. The Minimalists did this by using industrial mimesis, bypassing artistic genius and not symbolizing anything. Thus, the viewer's approach gives meaning to the object, and the presentation of the object conditions this. This allegorical narrative based on the beholder's activity lifts the veil on the real sense. Therefore, the use of language as a structure of differences, conceived as a closed system referring to the world, has led to a tendency to think in terms of practices. Site-specific art, Body art, and performances use literal spaces and bodies as a basis on which to place the sign. The dematerialization of art, as highlighted by Lucy Lippard in her article "*Dematerialization of Art Object*," is that although concepts are less object-based, they still result in physical phenomena. (Lippard, 1997, California) Lippard's point in her text is that visual art is a quest to

discover how to express more with less. The decentering of the object, or dematerialization as Lippard calls it, at the end of 60s related to the artist's exit from an existence that produces works of art, the author's death. Therefore, in the tendency called post-minimalism, the central subject status of the artist in art evolved into the possibility of making art that problematizes the habits of viewer. On the other hand, site-specific art practice reverted to the functionality of constructivism and, in this sense, emphasized site practices that inform society.

3.3. Beyond Objects

If one recognizes own unmediated visual field, what is seen?

Robert Morris

In the late 1960s, new artistic trends emerged from the abstraction and ready-made legacies of modern art—these art movements' predominant and unifying features shaped different individual practices in minimalism. These years of increasing conceptualization of art led to a critical analysis of the early years of minimalism. By the mid-1960s, minimalism began to be seen as a normative art form.

Criticism is usually directed at the fact that minimalist objects contain rigid structural rhetoric with a production style inherent in the industrial technique. This form of craft, which leads to the production of objects in accordance with space, makes visible a uniform order between objects and space. The focus of the 1960s was to reconfigure the object as art by transcending the limitations of modern art's mediums. However, once the objects' distancing from illusion, allusion, and metaphor was finalized, minimalism came to imply a limited self-referential artistic canon. Therefore, the progress of minimalism was realized when it began to criticize itself. In this context, the first retrospective criticism was expressed by Morris. In his essay *"Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects"*, Morris defined this period as *"the art of descriptive images."* (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.931) Morris's use of the word depiction implies that minimal objects fix the political and artistic order of the day and subordinate society to this form. In this sense, depiction implies that materials remain in the background by making forms dominant. Therefore, Morris wants to emphasize in his statement not the making of objects but the processes

of manipulating materials. Georges Bataille's notion of "formlessness" ("*informe*") is precisely about pointing to this. Bataille states the following about this concept in his essay "*Critical Dictionary*".

A dictionary must start from the point where it is no longer concerned with meaning, but only with the use of words. Formless is, therefore, not just an adjective with a certain meaning, but a term that serves to oppose, implying the general demand that everything should have a form. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.520)

The minimalist tendency of the early 1970s, therefore, extends into the peripheral vision to move away from its closed form with a hidden focus at the center of the specific object. Following this developing trend of minimalism since 1968, art institutions have emphasized specific titles in exhibitions to make sense of these practices.¹⁰

The new tendencies that are developing, no matter how different, prioritize two questions. First, can one move towards abstraction and realize the zero degrees, the limit of the artwork's materiality? And secondly, in line with the Duchampian approach, whether the artist's intentionality can be reduced. The answers to these questions are varied. Therefore, in certain examples, we can observe that the legacies of two different reductionisms are equalized and used.

In Robert Morris's 1968 work "*Untitled (Tan Felt)*" (Figure 3.6), he emphasizes the shaping of the form according to the space with felt strips and yarn waste.

Lynda Benglis's sculpture "*Quartered Meteor*" is formed by lead casting after molding layers of polyurethane foam applied to the corner of a gallery space. Reminiscent of the appearance of cooled lava, this sculpture is a deliberate attempt to disrupt the material presence of objects and render them uncanny.

Richard Serra's performance "*Splashing*" (Figure 3.7) allowed the space to shape the lead splashed by the artist.

In "*Twelfth Copper Corner*" Carl Andre associated metal copper plates with the gallery space, emphasizing the material's natural properties. The common point in the different

¹⁰ "*Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*" at the Whitney Museum and "*When Attitudes Become Form*" at Kunsthalle Bern.

practices of these artists is the transformation of the object from a static, idealized medium to a temporal and material one.

This tendency is directed towards the material's intrinsic properties, which form spontaneously without the artist's intervention as the means of a specific intention. At the same time, we can observe a tendency towards biomorphic forms in contrast to the sharp-edged objects of minimalism. Therefore, in contrast to minimalism's aggressive spatial presence of objects produced in accordance with the rational shape of space, post-minimalism expressed a decentralized, flexible tendency that prioritized the process of creation over the final result.

Abstract painting's dream of realizing the blank canvas and Duchamp's presentation of an everyday object as art by making himself an intermediary led to breaking the chain linking the artist and the work in 1970s minimalism. Moving away from a strictly geometric structure, the artists manipulated the materials. This resulted in the space giving form to the form rather than the artist giving form to the object. The theatricality of minimalism made it possible for the work to become independent from the artist for the viewer's interpretation. The stage at this point emphasized the changeable raw material without finalizing a work according to time or space. It has produced energy that has changed the perception of art by moving away from the craft of object production and basing it on the process of matter.



Figure 3.6 Robert Morris, *Untitled (Tan Felt)*, 1967-69, Felt, Dimensions variable, Tate, London.

The change here is that the artist has turned himself into a medium/mediator of the sensible, as opposed to modern art's treatment of the artist as a subject who produces works of art. Therefore, with the emergence of an art-making possibility that further questioned the relationship between art and the viewer, this mediating activity of the artist soon shifted from outside the gallery space to the public space. Behind this idea was a newly developing institutional critique. This period was linked to the problematization of the context of art and the analysis of the conditions surrounding its production. In other words, the idea that virtual spaces such as galleries and museums give form to the forms produced was emphasized as a component of the work. In this situation, artists who addressed the centrality of the art practices produced by institutions such as galleries and museums and their socio-economic contradictions produced forms that questioned their existence.



Figure 3.7 Richard Serra, *Splashing*, 1968, Lead, Castelli Warehouse, New York.

In contrast to the work's existence as a static icon, a point that is shaped according to time and space has been reached. The problematization of the object with the physical assumptions of space has led artists to focus on topologies that constitute space, such as gravity, changing light, and the beholder's field of vision. Therefore, this is the treatment of spaces such as galleries and museums as neutral spaces. While the Euclidean forms of Minimalism in the 1960s were tied to the overarching architecture of galleries, postminimalism emphasized the more complex relationships of social spaces. This opposition transforms the first tendency into a conscious act of perception, while the second reveals itself as a complex and contradictory model of social and psychological perception. The perspective of the postminimalist tendency is perhaps best summarized by Merleau Ponty's statement:

When I see the ceramic at the bottom of a pool in the water, I do not see it despite the water and its reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, if there were no reflections of sunlight, if my seeing the geometry of the ceramic were not embodied in this way, then I would not see it as it is and where it is - that is, I would not see it beyond any identical, specific place. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.813)

Hence, postminimalism's interest in an experiential and phenomenological definition of

space has led to an expanded field analysis through materialist investigations of institutional critique. This tendency tended to produce a partnership with the body, outside the interrelated spaces surrounding the ideological system of art and aspired to the formation of a free social space by realizing a transition into life.

3.3.1. Transition from series to site-specific works

Minimal objects produced for the aesthetics of the gallery space led the viewer to explore their relationship with space. The focus shifted away from the sculptural object and closer to strategies that challenge the assumptions and fixities of space and location. This questioning of sculpture's relationship with the underlying spatial orders has led to a shift away from the virtual space of the artwork (gallery, museum) and made a transition towards urban and rural spaces possible. Behind this transition is the idea that the object depends on the position of the performance it produces with the viewer. Therefore, this performance is related to aesthetic, political, institutional, and geographical discourses. The concept of "site-specificity" that emerged with minimalism makes sense in this process. That is, it can be defined through the qualities and meanings produced in certain relations between the position occupied by the object. To understand site-specificity, it is necessary to remember that sculpture has functioned throughout the ages concerning its presentation as a monument. In the late nineteenth century, sculpture was performed to mark a momentary representation of a real space. The monumental sculpture removed representations such as battlefields, tombs, heroic figures, pietas, etc., from the ground of the space and used the sculpture's pedestal to establish the representation's symbolic nature.

This pedestal connected the sculpture to a real space, architecture, and landscape. Therefore, monuments were found as formal organizations far from physicality, establishing the autonomy of the symbolic space. However, there have been attempts to break away from this autonomy in history. Tatlin's version of constructivism rejected this autonomy by using anti-aesthetic materials at the social base, while Duchamp's ready-made, mass production eliminated the independence of the work of art. Minimalism, on the other hand, overcomes this autonomy through the transference between body and

place. Douglas Crimp, in his book *"On the Museum's Ruins,"* stated that site-specificity is a condition of such reception and concluded that the radicalism of minimalism "lies not only in the displacement of the artist-subject by the viewer-subject but also in the way this displacement is secured through the marriage of the work of art with a particular environment." (Crimp, 1993, pp.16-17)

Site-specificity, as Crimp defines it, is not about analyzing the minimalist object in its designated position but rather about shifting the viewer's focus toward the object itself and the space in which it is positioned. In this regard, Richard Serra's statements regarding removing Richard Serra's sculpture *"Tilted Arc"* (Figure 3.8) in front of Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan have opened up an important debate. Serra stated that *"to change the location of the work is to destroy it"* and underlined how important the site's function is for the work. (Serra, 1994, p.194) This interest in the function of the work in the public sphere is related to a new idea of constructivism that took shape in the 1970s. According to Foster, Serra and his generation emphasized the situational aspect of the work through the direct display of industrial materials, processes, and places, away from the mystery of quasi-materialist conventions. (Foster, 2022, p.216)



Figure 3.8 Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc*, 1981, Steel, 365.7 x 3657.6 x 30.45 cm, Destroyed. New York.

Like the logic of Constructivism's literal use of materials, Serra demystified the structure of modernist models. Although his site-specific works are defined as sculpture, Serra has a differentiated understanding of sculpture. Serra's site-specific works melt the concept of sculpture into disciplines such as painting and architecture, leading to the questioning of these concepts and disciplines. He does this by resisting the ground-shape relations of painting but at the same time using an element of painting to frame the location of the work. He shares the same aspect with architecture in prioritizing the structural but criticizes architecture by rejecting the scenography. This structuralist way of thinking in the art provides us with a model that helps us to relate social forms logically. This model shows that a set of opposing concepts can expand without changing the character of each other.

In this sense, Serra often uses historical forms of depiction in art and architecture to proclaim the return of cultural memory. Serra's site-specific *"Strike: To Roberta and Rudy"* (1969-71) is like a preliminary study of *"Tilted Arc"* adapted to the interior. Twenty-four feet long, 8 feet high, and 1 inch thick, this steel plate is installed on the corner wall of the space, just like Tatlin's corner reliefs. The radical quality of Tatlin's reliefs transcends the illusionistic space in their dependence on literal space, revealing the materials from which they are made. Serra seems to have taken a cue from the partitions of the cubist constructions of these reliefs and placed his work more minimally but in a way that makes the illusion of spatiotemporal space more palpable. *"Strike"* divides the volume of the space in two, with its partition-like plane protruding from the corner of the space, causing the viewer's perception to change while traversing the space constantly.

It is also necessary to remember what Serra means by the word *"Strike."* Serra has used language to allow materials to express their existence. The list goes on to include rounding, cutting, twisting, bending, shortening, and so on, indicating a specific action to be performed on the material. The verbs on Serra's list are used as signs or allegories in his physical works. In other words, the use of language leads to imagining space as a social and political structure as well as a physical one. Serra's *"Tilted Arc"* and *"Strike"*

aggressively cut the spaces they are installed in two. Therefore, these cuts express the social divisions and exclusions often hidden in tamed public spaces. In this sense, site-specificity underlines the dysfunctional status of public spaces or places. Therefore, we can say that Serra's site-specificity is a practice based on movement and image with phenomenological content. In addition to working against the physical and sociopolitical conditions of space, some artists address space itself as another medium, as another language. In other words, working against space coincides with working against the illusion of artistic autonomy: 'based on the creation of negative space.'

An important site-specific work of the 1970s that questions the assumptions of space and location through institutional critique is Michael Asher's *"Pomona College Project"* (Figure 3.9)

This project, which lasted about a month, focused on the structural and architectural form of the institution. Asher added walls to the gallery's rooms that changed the shape of the space, transforming them into enclosed isosceles triangles. He also removed the doors of the institution, allowing the museum to remain open all day and night, eliminating the fixity of the space as a gallery. Changes in light throughout the day are reflected on the wall surfaces and reduced to shifting perspectives caused by the spectator's own movement. In addition to its aesthetic qualities, this experience, which is like entering into a minimalist object, has carried the project into a sociopolitical sphere with the condition that the space remains open twenty-four hours a day.

Focusing on the oppositions between an autonomous space and a public space, this work was directed towards the public street experience, which was presented as a picture through a square opening while the spectator's back was turned to the minimal configuration of the gallery space. This violates the autonomy of virtual spaces such as galleries and museums, which are perpetuated by the conditions surrounding them.

Asher's intervention is therefore a commentary on the assumptions of the autonomous art spaces and a critique of the institutional apparatus of these spaces that mediate the commodification of minimalist objects. This project is a site-specific intervention and a questioning of the position of the art object and the conditions surrounding it.



Figure 3.9 Michael Asher, *Pomona College Project*, 1970, Installation, Viewing out of gallery toward street from small triangular area, Pomona College Museum of Art.

Therefore, in the "*Pomona College Project*", Asher conceived of space not only physically but also as a cultural framework defined by the art institution. Therefore, he deconstructed a normative tradition that serves an ideological function by integrating space itself into everyday life.

Daniel Buren, who came to the fore with his site-specific works in the 1970s, expressed his approach to spaces such as museums, studios, galleries, and art markets as follows:

Whether the place in which the work is shown imprints and marks this work, whatever it may be, or whether the work itself is directly—consciously or not—produced for the Museum, any work presented in that framework, if it does not explicitly examine the influence of the framework upon itself, falls into the illusion of self-sufficiency—or idealism. (Kwon, 2002,s.13-14)

As Buren's statements suggest, to be site-specific is to decipher or recode institutional traditions. It is to reveal how they are shaped to modulate cultural and economic values

and to address the illusion of autonomy of art institutions in relation to the socioeconomic and political processes of the day.

Forms of site-specific institutional critique were realized in relation to the architecture of the exhibition space in works such as Mel Bochner's *Measurement Series* (1969), Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963-1968), Lawrence Weiner's *Wall Cutouts* (1968) and Buren's *Within and Beyond the Frame* (1973). Bochner's notation of the dimensions of the walls directly on them insists on the material reality of the gallery walls as framing devices, Haacke's minimalist art object emphasizes the humidity level of the gallery, leading to a mimetic configuration of the object, Weiner's cutouts in the walls of the neutral white cube revealing its fundamental reality, and Buren's vertical striped paper pieces that transcend the physical boundaries of the gallery. All these works are intended to reveal the meaning and impact of the apparatus in which the artist is situated. At this point, it is important to note that the critical function of site-specific art is directly tied to a critique of the medium-specific concerns of modern art. Unlike modern works, which give the illusion of being autonomous from their environment and critically function only in the language of their medium, site-specific works emphasize the comparison between two separate languages.

3.3.2. Expanded fields

It seemed that there had been a reality there which had not had any expression in art.

Tony Smith, 1966

Site-specific work was not only a return to traditional sculpture's acknowledgment of its own space, but a return to its conception as a virtual space of representation, a cultural framework defined by art institutions. If minimalism returned a physical body to the viewing subject, institutional critique insisted on the social matrix of class, race, gender and sexuality of the viewing subject. In this sense, Kwon in his book *'One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity'* (2002, London) states the following about the notion of site-specificity.

If late capitalism's search for spatial identity in the undifferentiated sea of abstract, homogenized

and fragmented space is a feature of the postmodern condition, then extended efforts to rethink the specificity of the relationship between art and space can be seen as both a compensatory symptom and a critical resistance to these conditions. (Kwon, 2002, p.8)

This problematization of space emerges through architecture's contribution to contemporary art criticism. Post-conceptual artwork develops its ontology in revealing the spatial dimension and its critical paradigm away from the modernism/postmodernism opposition and away from the media-specific modernism, conceptual art and post minimal art movements. Such a point of view sees art as a kind of collection of different mediums, all discrete, operating at different degrees of abstraction. (Osborne, 2021) The art space of such works is not simply a matter of an art institution, but an art space closer to what Deleuze calls "any space". In *"Cinema 1: The Movement-Image"* (1986, Minneapolis) Deleuze states the following;

Any space is not an abstract universal that is always and everywhere. It is only a completely singular space that has lost homogeneity, that is, the principle of metrical relations or the connection of its parts, such that connections can be made in infinite ways. It is a space of virtual unification conceived as a place of pure possibility (Deleuze, 1986, p.109)

Deleuze derives *"any space"* as a kind of cinematic space and emphasizes it as the space of the affect-image, one of the three types of the movement-image. Any space is the genetic element of the affect-image and always has two states, each contained in the other. These are disconnection and emptiness. These concepts relate to the concept of time. A very important example of this in art practice is Robert Smithson. Smithson shifted the expanding field of sculpture from public space to barren and isolated areas, and conceptually supported his site-oriented work with different forms of ready-mades such as film and photography. Smithson's significance, therefore, stems from the fact that in his own time he put forward a transcategorical practice. This practice is based on the investigation of these categories in the face of the transcendence of medium categorization by artistic practices in the 1960s, and the investigation of the categorical consequences of this result, namely the destruction of medium categories.

This questioning is about the dependence of object production on raw materials. Smithson considers the objects of minimalism produced by industrial craftsmanship with the temporality of the raw material. He searches for the raw material of technological production in the ruined sites of prehistory. What he encounters here are abstract grids containing unfinished raw materials rather than materials commodified by industrial production. In his text "*Situational Aesthetics*", Victor Burgin recognized the expansion of minimalism in this direction and stated the following.

Recent attitudes towards materials in art are based on a growing realization of the interdependence of all materials in the ecosystem of the world. The artist tends to see himself as an organizer of existing forms rather than a creator of new materials and may therefore choose to subtract materials from the environment. As art is increasingly seen in terms of behavior, materials will be seen in terms of quantity, not simply quality. (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.942)

Burgin's statement summarizes the artist's gradual transformation from an object producer to an intermediary. This mediation can make sense of the new classifications of hybrid fields in the late 1960s. This position leads the artist to make logical connections between practices and the possibilities of moving from one position to another. In other words, it allows the focus to move away from the intrinsic rules of the given medium as a physically bounded three-dimensional object and closer to cultural conditions that are much larger than the medium and are now seen to stabilize it.

Hence, Smithson's art practice is in this direction. For him, "*the earth's layers of soil are a tangled museum.*" (Harrison & Wood, 2011, p.927) The raw material of the art object produced throughout the ages is embedded in geological time and the earth's crust. This temporal river floats in the ruins of art history and is a place where distant futures meet distant pasts. We can see this context in Smithson's "*Partially Buried Woodshed*" (1970). Smithson intends for the woodshed to return to the earth as a substance. Smithson's questioning of raw material and time is also seen in his famous "*Spiral Jetty*" (1970) and a year later in "*Spiral Hill*" (1971). As Osborne notes, the processes of negotiation in the construction of these three works, and the 1971 film recording the construction of Spiral Jetty, are important in the reception of Smithson as an ethnographer, commissioned journalist or cultural laborer (Osborne, 2021, p.160). Smithson's work has consistently

been linked to the historicity of sculpture by critics such as Krauss. In the essay *"Sculpture in the Expanded Field"* (1979), Krauss attempted to categorize Spiral Jetty in a scheme she organized. (Figure 3.10) Krauss' *"Expanded Field"* offers a theoretical advance towards an expanded notion of the traditional sculptural paradigm. And in this sense, it posits a multiplicity of non-sculptural locations. Here there are two categories, landscape and architecture, that produce the possibility of sculpture. However, in an interview published in *Artyearbook* in 1967, Smithson stated;

The categorization of art into painting, architecture and sculpture is apparently one of the most unfortunate things that has happened to us. All these categories are now being divided into more categories; it looks like an endless avalanche of categories. (Flam, 1996, p.48)

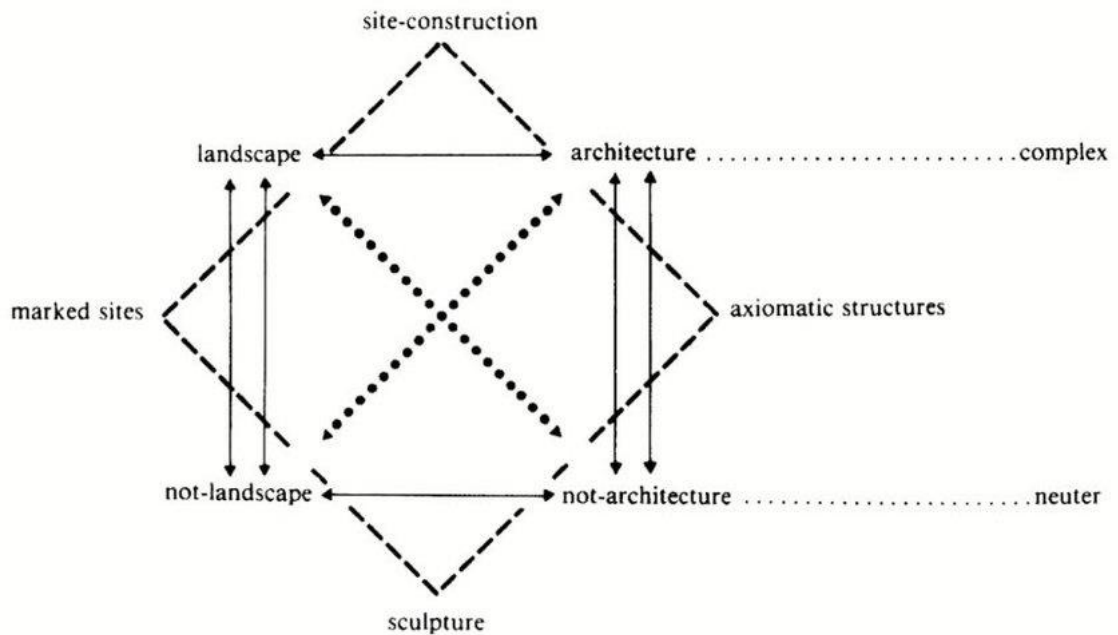


Figure 3.10 Rosalind Krauss, Expanded Field diagram, *Sculpture in Expanded Field*, October, 8, p.37

Smithson and many artists of the 1960s therefore rejected the *"ism"* of art criticism. Since the 1960s, artists' tendency towards pure perception has been staged in different ways. To try to define them again in terms of sculpture would be to limit the uncategorizable multiple trajectories of these artists and their associated individualism. In this sense, the critical importance of Smithson's work lies in its contribution to the establishment of what Osborne calls *"post-conceptual"* art. Osborne states the following about Smithson;

This is not a claim made at the level of style, medium, movement or periodization. For all his affinities - and temporary pragmatic alliances - with various movements of the 1960s - notably minimalism, conceptual art and land reclamation or land art - Smithson was the most individual artist. (Osborne, 2021, p. 165)

If, as Osborne suggests, Smithson's practice is transcategorical, then defining his work as "*sculpture*", however broadly, takes on a conservative appearance. Nothing explains the error of interpreting Smithson's work as "*sculpture*" more than his own concept of "*non-site*".¹¹ For Smithson, the concept of non-site is a site that represents other sites, sites that should reflexively represent their own character as such sites. Therefore, the investigation of non-sites as sites also presupposes institutional critique. Such an approach analogizes the relation of the non-site to the site with the relation of language to the world. The effect of this dialectical approach leads to the dematerialization of the site at a stage when new significations are produced. In this way, the new status of the site is projected beyond the actual site, which is the dialectic of experience. Works such as "*A Non-Site, Pine Barrens, New Jersey*" (1967), "*A Non-Site, Franklin, New Jersey*" (1968) (Figure 3.11), "*Mono Lake Non-Site (Cinders Near Black Point)*" (1968), respectively, are constructed in such a way as to allow the viewer to navigate through photographs, texts, raw material samples and maps of each element of the non-site. As Nick Kaye points out, the non-site marks unavailability of site as 'presence' or 'object, prompting a rhythm of appearance and disappearance which challenges the concept of the site as permanent knowable whole. (Kaye, 2000) Even to the extent that non-Site places the idea of an artifact on a specific space, it threatens to eliminate precisely that limitless condition that Smithson was trying to map.

Here, in fact, non-Site reproduces the gallery's contradictory attempt to remember and thus delimit 'differentiated' space. Thus, where the experience of space is one of limitlessness, unspatial establishes itself as a limiting mechanism, a differentiation, the effect of which is to erase space rather than reveal it. By transforming the entire non-site into an exhibition, Smithson allows the viewer to read the relationships between the

¹¹ Smithson generates "non-site" from the word "non-sight", out of sight, in a pun against formalism. Therefore, the museum and the gallery are recoded as both a site and a negation of sight/seeing.

components. Smithson's use of the gallery space both as a reference for interaction and as an orientation to another space beyond its boundaries has contributed significantly to the subsequent exhibitions being treated as a distributive unity. As Osborne notes, non-Site is the re-coding of the museum/gallery as both a negation of "site" and a negation of "sight/seeing", with non-sight being the generative conceptual outcome of a pun on Smithson's early opposition to formalism within minimal art. (Osborne, 2021, s170)



Figure 3.11 Robert Smithson, *A Non-Site, Franklin, New Jersey*, 1968, Holt/Smithson Foundation, May 2020.

That is, the negation of the site outside the gallery through the negation of the appearance of the gallery in terms of the appearance of the site. Rooted in the minimalist opposition to idealized or objectified processes, this attitude has at its core Fried's notion of theatricality as articulated by Tony Smith about the partially constructed New Jersey

Turnpike. Smith's experience of the artificial field also represents a starting point for Smithson. This dialectic of the field leads to the dematerialization of the field and ultimately the new status of the field is projected beyond the actual field. Experience here is therefore the material for this dialectic.

In his 1972 article "*Spiral Jetty*" Smithson tabulated site and non-site and helps us make sense of this dialectic.

<i>Site</i>	<i>Non-Site</i>
1. Open limits	Closed limits
2. A Series of Points	An Array of Matter
3. Outer Coordinates	Inner Coordinates
4. Substraction	Addition
5. Indeterminate (Certainty)	Determinate (Uncertainty)
6. Scattered (Information)	Contained (Information)
7. Reflection	Mirror
8. Edge	Centre
9. Some Place (physical)	No Place (abstract)
10. Many	One

(Smithson, 1972)

Smithson's focus forces a constant return to the non-site in favor of an immaterial and unusable antithetic definition of the site. The relation of the non-site to the site is here not a simple or fixed opposition, but a dialectical movement. The non-site is therefore about a dialectical movement towards the unresolvable site, and thus about questioning the status and solidity of both the non-site and the site. For Smithson, this is a dialectic of place and functions as a mirror between sites, doubling itself temporally and spatially. As a consequence of his analysis of pure perception, which is found throughout minimalism, Smithson has created a kind of transcendental aesthetics without categories.

4. STAGE PRESENCE: MINIMALISM AND INSTALLATION

At the 1970s of art turned against the decontextualization of artworks. In the art of the nineties, this artistic turn began to allude to a critical characteristic introduced by subcultural movements, by focusing on postcolonial and socio-political contexts. This is about exposing the cultural and social assumptions that underpin the reception of art. Thus, the concept of aesthetic autonomy has played almost no role in artistic practice from the nineties to the present day.

Since then, site-specificity, rather than an artistic concept of exhibition space and its rules, has been placed in cultural, political, and social contexts, in contrast to the neutrality of art and the aesthetic experience associated with it. This is because it is about recognizing the constitutive role of non-site in all sites now that a dialectical understanding of the site has become widespread. (Osborne, 2021, s.215) In this sense, installation art has become of the idea that public participation is a fundamental requirement. And the installation semantically loads the specific space in which it is presented, so that the space resonates in aesthetic reflection with the knowledge of cultural, political and social contexts that are outside the field of art.

No art form today more clearly represents the development towards a socially engaged art than installation. In this sense, installation seems to be a result of the theoretical development of minimalism. This movement, which expanded the dimension of art from the 1960s to the 1970s, dragged art from the physical boundaries of virtual spaces to social spaces with its tendency towards publicness of objects and social phenomena. According to Rebentisch, installations are context-sensitive with regard not only to the spaces in which they are exhibited but also to the social frameworks that influence the reception of art in general. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.221)

Minimal art did this first by transcending the self-referential formalism of modern art, then by expanding the spatial ontology of the artwork through the textualization of art, and finally by creating an archive of the social use of form. Its legacy for contemporary art is therefore a spatiality defined by the relations between materials, forms, and practices that aesthetic autonomy has played virtually no role. This legacy has given an

artistic expression to the rationality of the art institution through institutional critique and has emerged within the culture industry through its criticality in socio-economic forms. Therefore, since the late 1980s, the internationalization of contemporary art has turned towards an updated anthropological problematic of the plurality of cultures and the universality of meaning. In this respect, art has been institutionalized as social-spatial conditional, making art institutions the carrier of the social structure of art and artistic thought. However, a critical art production has continued with the artists' individual works and the introduction of various concepts, narratives and theoretical procedures.

Reflection on the social field of art requires reflection on the real field of art within the art environment. Therefore, as important as this reflection is for the phenomenological concept of situatedness, it is also irreducible to sociological definitions of the field of art. This is because art thematizes a double context and site-specific installation practice mediates this doubleness by projecting social contexts onto works of art. In the opposite case, the aesthetics in question is similar to the logic of modernism. That is, confronting objective truths with subjective experience. Minimalism's testing of this relationship from the beginning enabled the development of the critical point of institution critical site-specific works in the seventies and installation art of the nineties, which positioned itself in broader social, political, cultural and economic contexts, thus preparing a broader aesthetic perception without recourse to subjective experience. This point strengthened the experimental relationship of art with architecture, producing a form of artistic spatiality that is beyond objects but still connected to them. According to Osborne, the infinite expansion of the possible material forms of art as a result of the destruction of the medium provided a self-awareness of the conceptual character of art in force in the appropriative relationship with architecture, which paved the way for the proliferation of individual artistic realizations and the transformation of the spatial ontology of the artwork. (Osborne, 2021, p.214) This expansion is in a way that problematizes precisely where such a work of art should be positioned.

In the following, I will examine how this expansion has occurred through specific artists, and how these examples provide the social relationship necessary for the concept of art by intrinsically linking the notion of the artwork to the aesthetic experience.

4.1. Recombination of Symbolic Forms of Minimalist Sculpture in Liam Gillick's Works.

Liam Gillick's artistic research foregrounds a particular history of labor that has long manifested itself in the production of objects for both the material and the immaterial. Gillick's work approaches the problem of the interrelation of artistic labor and its form and content. Here an articulation and negotiation of the conditions of critical artistic practice in post-fordist society is legible, in which autonomy is both maintained and constantly threatened by cultural logics. Gillick's aesthetics emerges both closer to and further away from the non-aesthetic side of institutionalism.

In his own words, his work has 'multiple points of entry', but he is best known for his installations and books.(Gillick, 2009, p.100) Developing fictional scenarios and spaces using locations ranging from offices, airports, conference centers and factories, he invokes minimalism and modernist visions of utopia as his historical antecedents. The materials he uses in his installations evoke the minimal vocabulary of Donald Judd, while his composite interiors of planes and platforms call to mind Piet Mondrian. In his practice of art, Gillick asks what has become of the utopian impulse in the face of the ever-changing competitive networks and configuration of the neoliberal world.(Gillick, 2006)



Figure 4.1 Liam Gillick, *Consultation Filter*, 2000. Anodized aluminium, plywood, Formica. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Consultation Filter*, Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, 2000

Taking the concept of design in this direction, the artist questions the historically resistant and progressive imagination of design in relation to consumer culture. He explores the possibility of the revitalization of Utopia as an idea of an expanded concept of design, characterized by a continuous transfer between exhibition practice, replicating a scenario that is already at work in his work between published text and installation. In this sense, his modernist typographies and geometric configurations reveal a remarkable stylistic consistency.

In his statements on the nature of contemporary capitalism, Gillick characterizes neoliberalism as 'chaotic'. This brings to mind Deleuze's notion of 'dense multiplicity' and reminds us of the difficulty of tracing the field of material and immaterial flows of the global neoliberal order. (Gillick, 2006, p.157) In this sense, by bringing together references to modernist abstraction and minimalism, and by superimposing historical forms, Gillick emphasizes that the visual form of abstract art is gradually moving from being a manifestation of thought to becoming design. Gillick's forms narrate and enact the completion of this trajectory. At the Air de Paris exhibition in 1998, he divided part of the exhibition space with a partition made of plexiglass and aluminum, clearly demonstrating how he combined modernist abstraction and minimalism.



Figure 4.2 Liam Gillick, *Big Conference Centre Legislation Screen*, 1998. Anodized aluminium, Plexiglas. Installation view, *Liam Gillick: Up on the twenty-second floor*, Air de Paris, Paris, 1998.

Gillick's installations and objects thus examine the material environment and render the forms of post-fordist society dysfunctional. In a way, he underlines how social forms have been rendered dysfunctional by the neoliberal regime. Gillick does this by highlighting the dialectics of abstraction between the material sensory and the immaterial conceptual, arguing that abstract form finally surrenders its particularities to the universal dictates of instrumental reason.(Roberts, 2013, p.198)

Gillick's artistic practice, has explored how art is used to advance a wide range of social and ideological goals and to subvert and exploit the material and political structures that order contemporary life. At the Venice Biennale, he continued this aspect in a situated practice that is site-specific in both conceptual and physical terms.

In this sense, Gillick's practice of object and design stages the liquidation of the resistant possibilities of abstract form, questioning once again the postmodern surrender and historical closure. At this point, if we reflect on the discontinuity of history and the allegorical thickets of modernism, it articulates its own contingencies and the possibility of radical historical rupture or at least piecemeal renewal.

At the 2009 Venice Biennale, Nicolaus Schafhausen together with artist Liam Gillick *"How are you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks,"* (2009) points to a potentially dangerous situation in the role of artists within art institutions. Together with the curator of the German Pavilion, Schafhausen, Gillick criticize the deep history of nationalism that lies at the roots of the Venice Biennale. Schafhausen invited Gillick, who is neither German nor living in Germany, for several reasons. The first reason is to question the ideals of this building and its social form, with its monumental interior and imposing facade. The other reason is to subvert the historical emphasis of both the German nation-state and the Venice Biennale on national identity. As Rebentisch notes, not only have curatorial questions increasingly entered the scope of the artist's production, but the relatively recent emergence of the figure of the curator and the establishment of curatorial work programs have also been influenced by a growing awareness that the double contextualization of art touches the domain of the artistic phenomenon itself. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.222) Therefore, with this site-specific installation by Gillick and Schafhausen, we can observe a reflection on the double localization of art that clearly mediates between

two poles. This site-specific installation thematizes the intertwined real and social spaces of art, reflecting the institutional, social and historical conditions surrounding it through a formal intervention in a specific architecture.

The Venice Biennale is designed for international participating countries to represent themselves as nation-states every two years. Therefore, it started out to place nationalism on the world stage. However, after a while the Venice Biennale abandoned its emphasis on national identity. We can argue that this is thanks to institutional critique in contemporary art. According to Osborne, institutional critique is an art of direct practice, restricting itself to an autonomous field where it is the only form of practice and the only social use value. Osborne puts it this way;

The very existence of this criticism within the institution - the institution's acceptance of institutional criticism - negates its practical function, if not its intellectual value. Institutional criticism thus strengthens and develops the institution of art. On one level, this appears as failure: the liquidation of the desire to be directly social or directly practical, the deepening of a sense of the social impotence of art, even in its own highly restricted sphere. (Osborne, 2021, p.236)

However, Gillick and Schafhausen's collaboration somehow mediates this existing irrationality through architecture to include social relations and institutional practices, thereby making explicit the formerly suppressed social aspect of the ontology of the work of art. To make sense of this, we need to go back briefly to the 1960s.

After the early 1960s, the place of architecture in art history and the spatial ontology of the work of art were transformed. This problematizes the place where a kind of work of art should be in relation to the self-awareness of the conceptual character of art in force in the appropriative relationship with architecture. If the site-specific art forms of the late 60s used architecture as a model, it was because they were oriented towards grasping socio-political spatiality in a dialectic. Smithson's or Graham's¹² dialectical conception of sites (recognizing the constitutive role of non-sites in all sites) reveals the plurality of spatializations in this sense. These examples have produced a form of artistic spatiality that is beyond objects in their experimental relationship with architecture, but at the same time dependent on objects. Therefore, we can say that the expansion here is a further analysis of the objects of minimal art. It is a spatiality defined by the relationship between

¹² Graham's *Homes for America* in 1966-67 and *Alteration to a Suburban House* in 1978.

practices, forms and materials, that is, an infinite expansion of the possible material forms of art as a result of the destruction of the categories of medium by minimal art in the 60s. In this sense, we can say that architecture's contribution to contemporary art criticism, as Osborne suggests, lies in its clarification of the spatial dimension of the ontology of the post-conceptual work, and in its three-stage movement from a medium-specific modernism to a post-conceptual art (mediated by architecture), shifting the direction of the narrative of critical paradigms away from the modernism/postmodernism pair.(Osborne, 2021, p.221)

Here, through conceptual art, a shift from minimalism to institutional critique has taken place, and at the same time a shift from a formal non-utilitarian understanding to a utilitarian one has occurred. In other words, there is a move away from an autonomy responsible for social helplessness of minimal objects. It is in this context that Gillick's work focuses on forms of social exchange, the reciprocal action within the aesthetic experience offered to the beholder, and the processes of communication as concrete means of binding individuals and clusters of people together. In this sense, Gillick's art involves a constant examination of the logic of contemporary production, and his objects and installations record a tendency towards the abstraction of content and form inherent in the wider world of commodity production. His three-dimensional works in particular exhibit the indivisibility of form and content of the minimalist heritage and enliven it with the language of abstraction as it has been historically understood.

Gillick uses this language in a way that moves between subjects and objects, concealing meaning but also revealing it in a different way.

For example, Gillick's intervention in architecture and in space at Venice Biennale, is reminiscent of Michael Asher's Pomona College project of 1970. Like Asher, Gillick removed all the doors at the entrances and exits of the building and created a threshold with strips of colored plastic often found in butcher shops or factories. By removing structural partitions throughout the building, Gillick disrupts the classical symmetry of the space by installing a vast network of raw pine kitchen cabinets and countertops that curve into the space through interior doors. (Figure 4.3)



Figure 4.3 Liam Gillick, *How you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks*, 2009, German Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennial.

We can say that this is because, as the title of the exhibition ‘*How are you going to behave?*’ implies, the audience is immersed in and experiences the installation through ambiguous and countless possibilities. Therefore, the artist brings the structure, which carries a sublime and hegemonic representation, into a dialectic with ordinary materials. This relationship proves that the installation cannot be exhibited in another space due to its connection to the space and context of architecture. Importantly, Gillick based the kitchen modules on Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky's design. Of course, this context may not be clear when you examine the installation because Gillick has constructed these modules in the language of minimalist objects, in a way that emphasizes blank surfaces. Therefore, just like the abstract-colored strip plastics that you pass through when you enter the space from the threshold, these modules are only used to make you feel a stranded between melancholy a twinned sense of historical contingency and possibility. (Figure 4.4) We can interpret this use of the modernist abstract universal language of

form and color as a reference to the present and the past. Gillick's formal language includes a geometric hard-edged lexicon of applied modernism. Through geometric abstraction, Gillick performs a re-temporalization of life as a temporal-historical form compatible with the structure of modernity itself. Gillick's attitude towards this legacy is contradictory, between melancholy and a twin historical contingency and possibility.

The artist asks what is the state of the utopian impulse in the neoliberal world of 'post-utopian modernism', and today, as a limitless field of ever-changing power networks, we seem to have witnessed the triumph of speculation over what is. Gillick's attitude towards this legacy is contradictory, between melancholy and a twin historical contingency and possibility. The artist asks what is the state of the utopian impulse in the neoliberal world of 'post-utopian modernism', and today, as a limitless field of ever-changing power networks, we seem to have witnessed the triumph of speculation over what is. (Gillick, 2009, p.111) In this sense, Schütte-Lihotzky's use of functional kitchen design also has a constructive context. Between 1926 and 1930, Schütte-Lihotzky was an anti-Nazi activist who pioneered the installation of simple wooden kitchens in more than ten thousand public housing apartments in Frankfurt. (Voorhies, 2017, p.96)

With these kitchens, Schütte-Lihotzky hoped that their functional form would enable women to spend less time on housework and facilitate their participation in professional life. This is of course a reflection of modernist utopian philosophy. In a mimetic but non-functional way, Gillick puts Schütte-Lihotzky's functional kitchen design into a dialectic for institutional critique. He therefore questions the production of autonomous art. This clearly includes critical exploration of Gillick's own historical engagement with the failure of the modernist social models of Schütte-Lihotzky and others, and their enduring impact today. Failed social utopias and hegemonic political forms in their opposition, Gillick reinforces this content with an animatronic cat in the corner above one of the kitchen modules.



Figure 4.4 Liam Gillick, *How you going to behave? A kitchen cat speaks*, 2009, Colored Plastic Stripes, German Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennial.

By creating a spatial experience with the kitchen modules with a cat telling stories about failed models of globalization and totalitarian architecture, Gillick and Schafhausen have met in the same ideal, demonstrating an intention that challenges the principles on which the Biennale is based. The merging of the interests of the curator and the artist, embodied in this new institutionalism, created the possibility of a double critique. This is a post-fordist tendency to quote and use abstract forms in the service of a conceptual proposition: A process in which the resistant forms of modernist abstraction are forced to make sense and put into the service of architecture and institutionalism.

Post-fordism required a reorganization of production processes and extends the abstraction of fordist production from the product by abstracting the material product from immaterial meaning and value. (Roberts, 2013) Gillick's installation responds to this process of relative abstraction and attenuation of the material and the immaterial, revealing the utopianism of Schütte-Lihotzky's revolutionist design, which was failed by the National Socialist regime. Gillick brings it up again in the form of an artistic expression in the historic building of the German Pavilion and presents an immanent

critique of the cultural regime of the present. According to Adorno, construction is the extension of subjective domination. It detaches elements of reality from their original context and transforms them to the point where they can again form a unity, a unity as internally imposed as the heteronomous unity to which they are externally subordinated.(Adorno, 1984, p.57)

By recombining modernist abstraction, minimalist sculpture and symbolic forms of institutionalism and management, Gillick presents institutional forms, histories, and relationships as artistic materials.

4.2. Theatricality and the Formal Language of Subjectivity in the Works of Tom Burr

Tom Burr, as one of the artists who was evaluated within institutional critique in the early nineties, has since been exploring the impact of public and private environments on the constructed personality by mediating his collages, constructions, and photographs with site-specificity. Burr engages with the issue of site-specific art through a non-autonomous and critical artistic practice. In '*An American Garden* ' (1993), (Figure.4.5) one of his first mature works in this sense, the artist relocated a site from Central Park to a park in the Netherlands that was used as an exhibition space. Reminiscent of Robert Smithson, this idea of non-site begins with a reflection on minimalist legacy and focuses on the complex, even contradictory role of site-specificity. We can see that Burr's historical models of site-specificity, focusing on the actual or perceptual experience of a singular space, are rejected in favor of a functional definition of space and place that is by definition non-place-bound in its concern with the relationships between different spaces. In this sense, both understandings of space and sculpture always imply such debates. Burr's relocation of the Ramble, a specific section of Central Park, to the Netherlands is about the intimacy of subjectivity in a public space. The Ramble, very close to the Metropolitan Museum, functions as a place for strolling, but also as a private meeting place for homosexuals. The reconstruction of this place in the Netherlands involves the de-architecturalization of a pre-existing space, but also the difference between the artificial and the real, in terms of the changes it can undergo in terms of the use of public space. (Baker, 2007)



Figure 4.5 Tom Burr, *An American Garden*, 1993, Sonsbeek Park, Arnhem, Netherlands.

The principles of construction and architecture complicate the contradiction between readymade and sculpture, a dialectic to which avant-garde sculpture responds (both harmony and opposition). In this sense, Burr uses the constructivist legacy to blur the opposition between function and dysfunction.

In 1995, one of his early works was constructed as a theatrical reconstruction, again using Smithson's form of landscape displacement. Circa 1977 (1995), (Figure, 4.6) this time installed inside the museum space in Zurich, was a representation of a moment in time, composed of representative vegetation and trash placed on the ground. Both temporal and spatial, this installation was a response to and commemoration of the historical loss of a queer space. The ambiguity of the artist's gesture places the site of memory as a temporal non-site within the museum space, subjecting it to aesthetic gaze rather than disappearance.



Figure 4.6 Tom Burr, Circa'77, 1995, Wood, Soil, Trees and found objects.

We can also call this kind of approach of the artist to places as readymade. However, Nicolas Bourriard has stated the following about readymade and these statements allow us to associate Burr's installations with readymade.

The artistic figure that emerged with the discovery of cinema. The artist moves his subjectivity-camera through reality, defines himself as a cameraman; the museum takes the place of the film reel, records it. With Duchamp, for the first time, art does not seek to translate reality through signs, but to present the same reality as it is. (Bourriard, 2018, p.167)

Thus, from Duchamp's ready-mades to Smithson's non-sites, there is a conception of a direct presentation of reality. We could also call this literalism, hence Fried's accusation of minimalist objects as stage presences. But minimalism and its contemporary version, the installation, reveal the reciprocal relationship of the aesthetic object as representer and represented: the double presence of the object as signifier and thing.

Rebentisch in this sense defines minimalist situation, cinematographic. Installations are particularly inclusive in that, among other reasons, they remain emphatically open as to what qualifies as part of the aesthetic object and what does not. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.182) Therefore, like the viewer of minimalist arrangements, the viewer of the installation experiences the installation as his/her own situation at any given moment. Because viewer makes the decisions itself. Unlike cinema, in installation it is not clear in absolute terms what the object of observation is supposed to be and what it is about. Moreover, the installation-style display of time-based art makes the distinction between the viewer's individual freedom of movement, the temporality of his or her experience and the temporality of the installation particularly clear.

In this sense, Burr's other projects in the nineties did not only focus on Smithson's displacements - the concept of non-site. By cataloging the minimalist forms of the recent past, he also established a continuous dialogue between the subcultural practices of the period and queer architecture. These practices are today often linked to their common fate of languishing on the brink of historical extinction. In 1994, with '*Unearthing the Public Restroom*', his installation on the sociopolitical transformation of New York City by bureaucracy connects the endangered architecture (confined and social space) of the city's public restrooms.(Baker, 2007, p.111) Another project, '*42nd Steet Structures*', (Figure 4.7) reminiscent of Robert Morris's plywood sculptures, reconstructs the vanishing environments of the city's sex shops in minimalist language, revealing the intimacy within public life.

Burr's fusion of minimalist forms with the architecture is also designed to utilize socially critical forms. In this context, Burr's work collides the directness of appropriation of a particular work of art with the opposing legacies of site-specific art and appropriation art. In a sense, this is due to the way in which the minimalist objects of the 1960s draw into a sociopolitical space by placing individual and social identities in opposition to the appeal of anonymous bodies. His interest in reorganizing the use and design of public space is evident in his recent site-specific project in New Haven.



Figure 4.7 Tom Burr, 42nd Street Structures, 1 Apr 1995 American Fine Arts, Co.

The project of Bortolami gallery, where the artist works, designed as part of the "Artist/City" initiative, is important for making sense of the artist's practice. The exhibition "*Body/Building*" (2017), which took place in the Marcel Breuer-designed Pirelli building (1969) owned by IKEA in New Haven, mapped the brutalist building of a modernist designer like Breuer with the history of the city and the building in relation to his own artistic development. (Figure 4.8) Born in New Haven, Burr focuses on the built environment of the city where he grew up, addressing questions of subjectivity and the body, and questions of his own identity. In doing so, Burr brings together images of important figures who have shaped the city's past. Focusing on the influence of political and artistic figures such as J. Edgar Hoover, Anni Albers, Jim Morrison and Jean Genet on New Haven, Burr creates a social network that merges with own personal history. (Bronner, 2017)

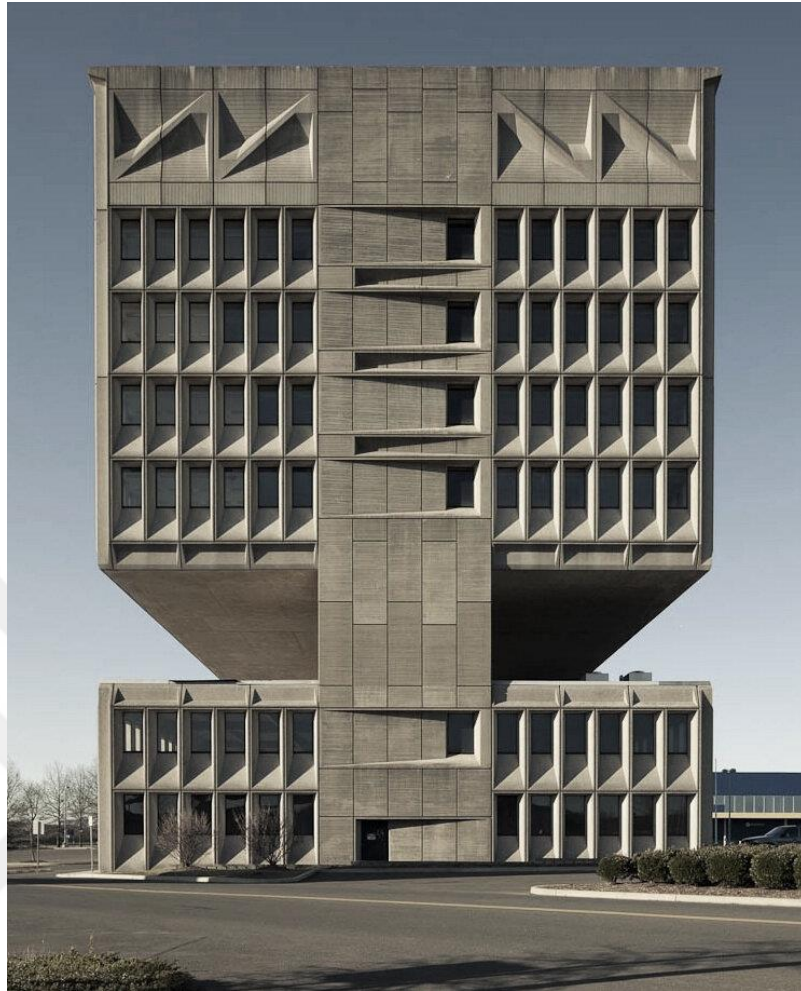


Figure 4.8 Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gatje, Piorelli Tire Building, Armstrong Rubber Company Building, IKEA ownership in 2014, 1970, New Haven, Connecticut.

In this sense, artist intersects the modernist and political developments in the city in the 1960s and 70s with these figures, bringing together the construction of their subjectivities with the construction of the building. Construction means the establishment of an object through the combination of pre-existing independent parts.(Osborne, 2021, p.309) Therefore, by identifying this concept with both a building as a structure and identity, the artist wants us to question how bodies culturally construct a building and a city, and how buildings and cities relate to our bodies and how buildings and the environment have an impact on our own construction. The title of the project, "*body/building*", reminds us of the importance of the body's activity in our own identity construction. As a symbol of the failure of modern utopias, Breuer's building forms the image of a concrete corpse for Burr. (Bronner, 2017)Therefore, this project inspires the artist with a question of

rehabilitation for the use of the building. In this sense, Burr thinks of the building as an object to be mobilized and the bodies as agents to be brought into a sensory experience with the materiality of the building. Burr suggests, there is a phenomenological connection between subject and object in minimalism: an image or theatrical situation created by the body interacting with the object. The images of produced autonomous forms reflected in our minds and their materiality in relation to our bodies cause subjects to acquire a certain value. These values therefore constitute specific units in Burr's aesthetic and social construction, especially as an artist. We can think of the formal language of subjectivity in this sense. Burr also demands this from the viewers who experience the exhibition. When the building was purchased by IKEA, Burr realized how the institution shaped its interior space with issues such as fire, capacity, and security. At the same time, IKEA already communicates these precautions to the artist. IKEA directs customers or bodies to specific home accessories and design departments in specific buildings in almost every country. While this orientation is an important factor for consumption, it is also important for safety measures in case of any situation. Therefore, Burr turns towards the questioning of factors such as space, bodies, and areas of use. A series of clothing and coat stands and personal belongings, resembling figures but abstract in their abstractness, remind us of the different uses of the space in the past, with vanished bodies filling the exhibition space. (Figure 4.9) Burr also creates a structure by covering the empty elevator compartment with a plywood sheet and plexiglass as a safety measure. The closed plywood areas are a factor for the safety of the viewer, while the transparency of the plexiglass is used to allow them to see the original granite details applied in the construction of the building. (Figure 4.10) The convex mirrors above this structure, often used in institutional spaces, catch the viewers as they pass by the structure and re-present the image of the space, reminding them that they are experiencing the space. Theater-like installations with railings contain monochrome photographs of figures and objects that have been influential in the socio-political agendas of the city.



Figure 4.9 Tom Burr, *Body/Building*, 2017, Phase 1, Installation view, Bortolami, New Haven.

The images on the monochrome photographs, at a specific time in their respective histories, i.e., at the time of the project, simultaneously create a narrative question about the relationship between the two histories, which can increase the comprehensibility of both. Burr has also used objects in this way, placing toilet and office doors that were used in the building's early history in specific places in the scenes and space, creating a theatrical experience and image of the past in the here and now of the objects. (Figure 4.11)



Figure 4.10 Tom Burr, *Body/Building*, 2017, Phase 1, Installation view, Bortolami, New Haven

Burr presents the socio-political developments in the past periods when the building was actively used to the viewer in the details of the objects. The text fragment of the Black Panthers on trial in the 70s on the parapet, images of J. Edgar Hoover and FBI agents, Jean Genet's May Day speech, photographs of Anni Albers and her rug patterns, all of these are reflected through the prism of political developments, the utopianism of modernism and the aspirations they represent, intersecting the time of New Haven and the building in the 1960s and 70s and the time of the exhibition. Burr uses the formal language of minimalism and its inherent theatricality to offer a contextualized reading of history.

4.3. Minimal Interventions on Memory and Space in Ayşe Erkmen's Works.

The space-oriented strategies that emerged in the 1960s can only be considered as methods for Ayşe Erkmen. However, unlike the object and material-oriented art of the 1960s, Erkmen does not have her own catalog of materials. Instead, the tendency to direct only materials and the emphasis on contexts has reached an expanding spectrum in Erkmen's art. Therefore, instead of a production based on a specific craft, Erkmen's focus on experience, which is evident in his approach that uses the elements that already

exist in the space, is on revealing the potentials that the space itself holds. This approach, which has been part of minimalism's analysis of space since the 1960s, is evident in an early work by Erkmen from 1995. Her work at 4th Istanbul Biennial "*Wertheim-ACUU*" focuses on the mechanical activity of a freight elevator. The project, named after the manufacturer of the elevator, moved up and down throughout the exhibition. The elevator itself is almost like a minimalist object. Both the materials, the surfaces untouched by thought and the rhythmic infinity of this elevator recall a minimalist object set in motion. (Figure 4.11)

Erkmen states the importance of the object in an interview as follows;

Yes, the object is important for me, to find the most urgent form of expression of thought... Although it is not always easy for me or the viewer to find the relationship between this form and thought. (Meschede, 2008, p.105)

Erkmen's approach to the relationship between form and thought also moves away from anthropocentrism. Giving agency to the material and acting together with the material also moves away from anthropocentrism. Therefore, Erkmen's handling of material and object constitutes a stage that tries to position the existence of things in the structure they reveal.

While the most urgent form of thought is sometimes a borrowed object, sometimes it can appear as an already existing object. Although Erkmen approaches the simple/industrial language of minimalist art, Erkmen's concerns are different; As Foster states, minimalism, as opposed to the transcendental meaning of the work, puts the examination of the work in the space in which it is placed, that is, in its existential space. (Foster, 2022) In Erkmen's practice, however, space does not have such a function: There is no special object, no special technique, no material brought from outside, no representation, there is the ordinary and everyday function itself. Therefore, Erkmen's work no longer concerns itself with the formalist problem of interior and exterior space in modern sculpture, nor does it encompass the minimalist understanding of space. The work actually makes sense through the relationship between invisible object, invisible space, invisible workshop, invisible technique.

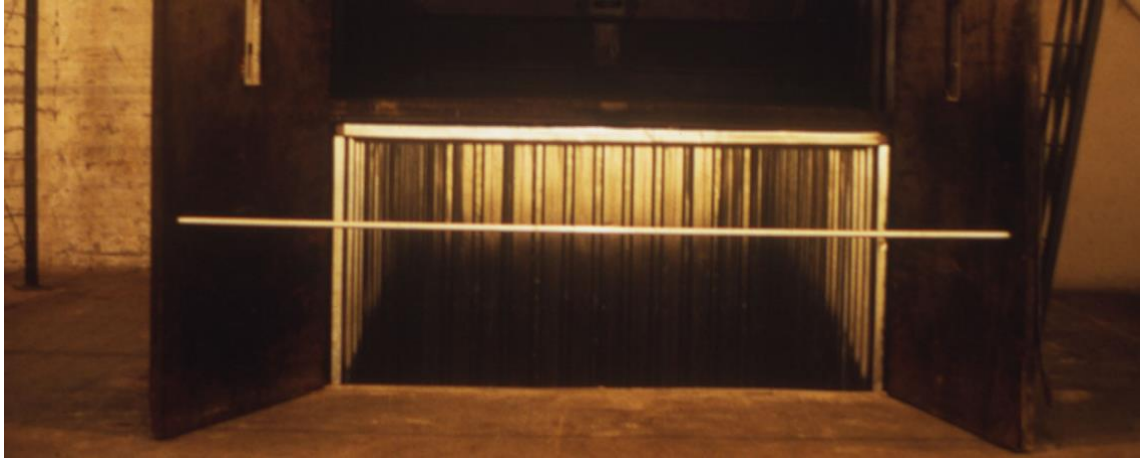


Figure 4.11 Ayşe Erkmen, 1995, *Wertheim - ACUU / Wertheim – ACUU*. Ayseerkmen.com

Contemporary galleries or non-sites constantly reproduce the multiplicity of social-image space by constantly changing their space through processes of reflexive absorption, distraction, beginning, end, repetition. This is the source of the meaning of the possibilities immanent in the experience of the work exhibited in the gallery in relation to time.

The notion of memory is important here because it allows the work to function as the concrete presence of pasts in the present. Ayşe Erkmen's artistic practice of addressing the transience and volatility of space through both a visual space and a larger space, the city, is highly relevant to this context. Examples from Erkmen's art can be observed that the artist's minimal interventions are directed towards the experience of revealing existing things as works of art rather than producing an object. In '*More or Less*', (Figure 4.12) a site-specific work from 1999, she uses the floor, which is part of the space itself, rather than a specific object of creation, to utilize the ordinary, everyday function. Therefore, far from a formalist interpretation of three-dimensional works, Erkmen adopts an approach reminiscent of the spatial interventions of post-minimalism.



Figure 4.12 Ayşe Erkmen, *More or Less*, 1999, Existing Elevator, 565 x 280 cm, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Germany

Meschede explains Erkmen's approach to space and object within the scope of this intervention as follows:

Ayşe Erkmen does not invent, she finds and reinterprets. In this work, in a room of the museum, on the floor, there is a hydraulic lifting platform for moving artifacts from storage and exhibition rooms. Ayşe Erkmen adjusted its motors so that the platform rises at a certain rhythm, but only until the thickness of the platform is visible and a rectangular shape appears in a corner of the room. (Meschede, 2008, p.70)

Erkmen's approach to site-specificity aims to address formal, architectural, political and cultural meanings through the idea of complete invisibility. Erkmen creates a simple and poetic action with a very minimal intervention, making the viewer an object of experience of the installation.

Aesthetic experience here therefore does not transcend the concrete empirical subjectivity of the subject of the experience, but rather reflects it in a certain way. Precisely because in this way the meanings that emerge in the work are never actually fought by the work, the subject is forced to reflect on its own productivity in the creation of relations of meaning.

Ayşe Erkmen's one of the last exhibition "*Ripple*" (2017) deals with just such a possibility. Erkmen is interested in the architecture of the exhibition space and the spatio-temporal use of the transformation that the surrounding Dolapdere neighborhood is under a transformation. The public realization of this transformation by the artist both inside and outside the exhibition space creates a unity of individual and collective memories. In this way the artist points the question of the speculative collectivity of the historical present. This is a question on the relation of memory and raised through the presentation of testimonies. In an interview with the *Unlimitedrag* newsletter, the artist stated following,

There is a big space and a small space in this exhibition. When I say big space, I mean Dolapdere and the 'transformation' process this area has gone through. There is a gallery that has moved to its new space in one of the buildings constructed within the scope of this project. Dirimart's new space is very big, but it also has big ambitions, so it is a space open to big exhibitions. (Vural, 2015)

As Erkmen states, two different spaces sharing the same temporal-space, but one private and the other public. The private space dreams of positive possibilities for the future in its new location. But is the other one the same? It doesn't seem so because Erkmen has damaged the drywall walls that mediate the non-site of the gallery. This damage is in a way that shows the trace of the violence left by the drywalls being torn away from the wooden walls of the space. The detached drywall is hung from the beams of the space and left to show their damage. (Figure 4.13) At this point, to make sense of Erkmen's work, we need to consider memory as the medium of historical experience. Osborne, who examines the concepts of memory and history in contemporary art, states that in modernism, the conception of memory was expanded metaphorically and psychoanalytic concepts such as trauma and melancholy were removed from the categories of psychic life and transformed into privileged terms of collective experience in the discourses of

cultural and political history. This expansion of memory originated in the culture of capitalist modernity, and because of the collapse of socialist conceptions. It corresponded to the effects of an existential and political experience. But the important insight here is explained by Osborne as follows;

An expanded conception of memory and a greater role for memory therefore holds out the hope of healing this rift, of making history, or rather particular histories - and here it is all about the "particular" - available as experience. In this view, history is only "real" or "lived" as memory. This amounts to a reversal of the genealogy of the concept of history. (Osborne, 2021, p.285)

If we adapt Osborne's statements to Erkmen's work, Erkmen inverts the restrictive romantic conception of memory with minimalist formal attitude and the minimal here-and-now of the objects. Rather than a type of memory of the past, Erkmen draws the bodies into the experience, relating the temporal-spatial conditions of two different spaces to the present and the future. It is about the future because Erkmen uses art, transcends collectivity beyond all the forms that actually exist. In this regard, artist brings different collectives, namely both the crowd living in the Dolapdere neighborhood and the collectivity of capital, into a dialectic and realizes the issue of memory in relation to history through the presentation of testimony.

To claim, as Erkmen does and Rebentisch does, that *"no space, least of all the white cube, will ever again appear simply neutral"* (Rebentisch, 2012, p.250) should not devalue the real distinction between installations that require only a generic framing in such a white cube environment and those that are indeed site-specific because they draw on historical and local narratives specific to the actual site.

Erkmen's practice involves an intense relationality in the context of art and life; therefore, instead of drawing its boundaries and describing it with sharp definitions, the experience itself allows for open-ended readings.



Figure 4.13 Ayşe Erkmen, *Ripple*, 2017, Drywalls, Dimensions variable, Installation view. Dirimart, İstanbul

Erkmen subordinates this dialectical context to artistic form by realizing it not as an artifact of cultural memory but through abstract constructed forms. Constructing the small room at the back of the gallery as a museum or gallery depot and placing here a series of metal objects based on the architectural form of the space, the artist utilizes the uncertainty of the variable existence of the stored inventories for their use.(Figure 4.9) Koselleck stated that the phenomenon that reorganizes the relations between the concepts of experience and expectation is not the extent to which expectations are met, but the extent to which they are exceeded.

However, the unexpected has the power to surprise and this surprise brings a new experience. Therefore, piercing the horizon of expectation creates new experiences. (Koselleck, 1985, p.275)



Figure 4.14 Ayşe Erkmen, *Ripple*, 2017, Installation view, Dimensions variable, Dirimart, İstanbul

Erkmen creates a horizon of uncertainty by abstracting the unexpected by reusing the elements of space. By problematizing the possibilities and probabilities of the space, artist directs the viewers towards the experience of the possibility of each of these situations and the future is projected. A mechanical sound accompanying the exhibition reinforces this uncertainty as a sound out a list of shops, restaurants, mechanics, in short, all the businesses in the Dolapdere neighborhood that may disappear with the transformation.

Therefore, the spectator, who is there, gains the possibility of being in each situation with possibilities. Erkmen phenomenologically shapes this existence between now and possibility, the practice of experimental negation by expanding the horizon between two simultaneously existing spaces.

5. CONCLUSION

With the emergence of abstract art in history, a wordless search for universality through forms and colors was exhibited. Universality symbolized a collective search between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but the formal search of individual practices in this direction exhibited a subjective activity separate from the collectivities of particular labor. Abstraction therefore gave birth to its own formalism to the extent that it was aesthetically experienced, far from being directly communicated by art. But it is also a mistake to see form as the proper content of aesthetic experience. Form constitutes itself aesthetically only to the extent that its elements enter into a tense relationship with meaning, that is, to the extent that it reflects the process of aesthetic experience oscillating between material and meaning. We can define this as a form of exchange. Therefore, the aim of art is to break down all a priori conventions on what is perceived. In this direction, Duve stated that reductionism is directed towards the changing relationship between the internal and external devices of the work, implying that abstraction is in the desire to realize the blank canvas.

What you do is intuitively apprehend the blank canvas's generic content, the one that is, to speak, perpendicular to its specific form. To call a ready-made canvas a Picture thus requires, and indeed utters, an aesthetic judgment. It is only liminally a positive judgment, however, because it is virtually impossible to tell whether what you value is the thing you are supposedly beholding or the tradition that has made this thing a plausible candidate for aesthetic judgment. (Duve, 1996, p.256)

Duve's passage is about explaining that the work of art is the totality of historical and aesthetic judgments that the artist proclaims through the act of realization. Duchamp's readymades against aesthetic autonomy are also intended to test this in-betweenness. By opening the art object to a form of interpersonal negotiation, Duchamp endeavored to shatter the criterion of aesthetic judgment in modern art. Aesthetic judgment is always final and closed to discussion, and in this respect, it is a denial of the dialog that brings the form to a productive position, a meeting place. In contrast to modernism's aesthetic relationship with the medium-specific and self-sufficient work of art, the avant-gardes desired everydayness, social space, that is, reality, far from aesthetic autonomy.

Constructivism, another paradigm of abstraction, could not stay away from this dialectic, and Tatlin's social and revolutionary use of functional forms against Gabo's transcendental formalism, which was far from function, showed the aesthetic distinction. Thus, there have been many theories in twentieth-century art that have discussed this romantic version of creation, but for various reasons have not completely destroyed its foundations.

While the reception of modernism in the United States was influential in the new world order established after the war, the inherited legacy was the reductionism of abstraction and the aesthetic modernism of the nineteenth century was re-established in the logic of a pendulum. In this regard, Clement Greenberg undoubtedly engaged in an ontological analysis of the specificity of the mediums themselves, arguing for form as the proper content of aesthetic experience. Thus, speculatively, Greenberg implicitly projected the system of the arts as fully coherent with aesthetics. (Osborne, 2021, p.125)

The issue of the medium (*techne*) and the transcendental elements of aesthetics were central to Greenberg's discourse on art, foregrounding the importance of the aesthetic judgment that makes a work of art successful against the conventions of modern art. However, the arbitrariness of limiting the aesthetic judgments of art to the conditions of a few historically contingent mediums has been strategically tested in different ways. It is no coincidence that from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century the work of art became more and more dematerialized. In the 1950s, this struggle against the establishment of a specific aesthetic spectatorship became the basis for an alternative institutionalization, following the temporal logic of the historical avant-gardes. In addition to reductionism manifesting itself in abstraction as purification and purification, more negatively, the abandonment of medium-specific crafts (*techne*) was inherited by different artists. In this sense, some of the artists in the 1950s adopted the approach of the transgressive avant-gardes and constructed an algebraic comparison, while others, with a more painterly approach, focused on the literal form and constructed their rhetoric on the object in different ways. However, what they have in common is to enable an experience different from the domains of practical and theoretical reason, which are far from aesthetic autonomy. In this way, the dialectical abandonment of painting or mediums became the foundation of a modernist tradition and the main tradition of post-1960 art

forms. This also makes the genealogical structure of minimalism visible. In this sense, the texts written by artists in the 60s and 70s against the defenders of modernist art retrospectively examined the aesthetic and ontological meanings of art. The equal realization of the unity of object and spectator after the destruction of psychic categories shows that minimal objects are intended for social exchanges.

Therefore, rather than expressing an autonomous and private symbolic space, minimal art emphasized reciprocal actions between the viewer and the object, and shook the aesthetic, cultural and political aims of modern art to its roots. Minimal artists' use of objects without any meaning for industrial mimesis turned modern art's understanding of the viewer on its head, replacing it with a model of the viewer as experiencer and part of the work of art. Here, the externality of minimal objects revealed by their meaningless surfaces is an important factor. At the same time, minimal artists created a memory against the a priori compositional form of formalism with the objects they created with materials brought together in series. The formation of this memory was realized through a trans-medium understanding that deconstructed the old art forms, despite the radical differences in the texts of Judd and Morris, the important figures of minimalism. The discourses of these artists were not accepted by the defenders of modernist art, leading them to argue that an ethical question about art had been raised. The disintegration of the distinction between subject and object in minimal art has been criticized by Fried for its emphasis on contingency or exhibitability. In this sense, Harman, in his review of Fried, has suggested that the critic can be characterized, though not as explicitly as Greenberg, as belonging to the generation of Kantian formalists in which the work of art is autonomous from most, if not all, of its surroundings, and in principle autonomous from its audience.(Harman, 2022, p.107)

In his essay "*Art and Objecthood*", (1967, Chicago) Fried defended an idealized work of art against minimalism and in this sense supported the formalist, autonomous and independent work of art, autonomous works of art that maintain their aesthetic independence in opposition to changes in the surrounding historical or political context. In this sense, he called minimal art theatrical as a literal point of view, subverting the unity of artworks in favor of the connection of spectator and object in a contextual system.

Given that aesthetic formalism requires mutual autonomy for both the work and the audience, minimal art insisted that the most important autonomy is that of the audience and the work, functioning as a newly unified hybrid.

Throughout the 1960s, minimalism's creation of a negative space in opposition to modern art was a movement based on the interior space, but in the late 60s, the association of objects in relation to the interior space was considered to represent a normative tendency, which problematized artmaking and space. With an interest in process, an expression of actions and processes came to the fore, which was not the focus of the object as the final product of art and craft, and Morris' concept of "anti-form" brought a new expressionism to the agenda, emphasizing process and time instead of an objective finished product. In this way, an art-making possibility was prepared for how social changes could be accelerated regardless of the perceived value attributed to the object of creation. Minimalism's specific issue of spatialization, which had been developing since the 1960s, led to debates about site-specificity (both inside and outside the museum and gallery). The revival of Constructivism's experimentalism in the 1970s, which was intrinsic to a social function, appropriated institutional critique as the new space of art, subjecting the minimalist tendency of this period to new forms of immanent spatialization within the practices of the functional or informative field. Therefore, the expansion of minimal art from the 60s to the 70s symbolized a transition from space to the city, from non-utilitarianism to utilitarianism.

Therefore, the art form of minimalism in the early 60s, which was embedded in the culture industry devoid of social construction, represented an autonomy in its later analysis, and in this sense, the minimal art of the 60s has been retrospectively called 'exhibition products'.

As Adorno argued in his book *"Aesthetic Theory"* (1984, London), the reflexive incorporation of social conditions into the immanent logic of works of art should not be conceived only negatively, as a restriction on a fundamental artistic freedom. Rather, this dependence gives the work both life and social substance. Minimal art's struggle with non-aesthetic materials is also aimed at preventing it from falling into the formal harmony

of modern art and determining the inclusion of the social conditions of reception in the immanent logic of artworks, revealing its social form through production technologies and techniques, as well as its content. According to Adorno, only if art has social content will the ultimate *"asociality" - the fetish-like, deceptive self-sufficiency of its product - function as "a particular negation of a particular society."* (Adorno, 1984, p.226) And this will lead to art becoming truly critical.

As Walter Benjamin commented in 1935, the loss of the aura of the post-culture industrial artwork undermined the autonomous sphere of art, describing the loss of its traditional autonomy as *"the only appearance of a distance"*. Therefore, it was precisely such a temporal and existential conception of art that came to the fore during the destruction of the conventional autonomy of art, of medium-based conceptions, known as the art of the sixties, from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. After Benjamin, Adorno's statement of the *'possibility of the possible'* about the reality of works of art is also meant to express a prospective transition to continuity or discontinuity of experimentation.(Adorno, 1984, p.132)

This reality symbolizes a space of experimental activity that assumes an intrinsic perspective on a social function. The practice of artists like Smithson or Graham in the 1970s, whose practice of the networked space of functional sites eroded the distinction between the site and the non-site, and took up informative forms of spatialization, is also related to their distance from the space of purely aesthetic experimentation and display. The important characteristic of these artists is that they combine the formalism of minimal art with the idiosyncrasies of productivism to address the concept of social construction. The aspect of influencing behavior in the early phase of minimalism was interpreted in the 70s in terms of the construction not only of situations but also of social relations and practices. Therefore, the change in the social relations of artistic production and the social character of the exhibition space after the 70s can always be seen as a comprehensive cultural form as objects of a new intention. On this Jamer Meyer has stated in his book *"Site Intervention: Situating Installation Art"* (2000, Minneapolis) the following;

The functional site may or may not incorporate a physical space. It certainly does not privilege this place. Instead, it is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all). It is an informational site, a palimpsest of text, photographs and video recordings, physical places, and things ... It is a temporary thing, a movement, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories.(Meyer, 2000, p.25)

The work is therefore a function that takes place between sites and points of view, a series of displays of knowledge and place. Here the site becomes a network of sites referring to another site. The site-specificity that emerged with Minimalism sharpens our reflection on the double localization of art by explicitly mediating between the two poles. Site-specificity thematizes the intertwined literary and social spaces of art, reflecting the institutional, economic, social, historical and political conditions that frame a particular architectural or landscape through formal intervention in it. In this sense, contemporary art is oriented towards compromises, relationships and coexistence.

As Bourriaud puts it in his book '*Relational Aesthetics*', (2018, İstanbul) today's artists conceive of their work in a tripartite way, involving both aesthetics (how can I 'translate' it materially?), historicity (how can I engage in the game of artistic references?) and sociability (how can I take a coherent position in relation to the current state of social relations and production?).(Bourriaud, 2018, p.70) If we accept that the artists discussed in the last section also find their formal and theoretical markers in minimalist art in a conceptual way, then these examples make use of all these as if they were utilizing a verbal platform. Hence, if we phase the development and legacy of minimal art up to the present day;

1. The environmentalization of interior-oriented painting and sculpture from the techné of modern art to the negative space creation of 1960s minimalism.
2. In the late 1960s, post-minimalism moved away from the object focus and desired the creation of social space.
3. The functional redefinition of the field based on an awareness of the constitutive role of urbanism and non-fields.

Today, the process of a work is not prioritized over the way it is materialized, and in contrast to some process art and conceptual art, examples from contemporary art avoid fetishizing the mental process at the expense of the object. Treating aesthetic experience as including the fundamental structure of space and time, along with the reflections between material and meaning, creates a form that ascribes politics to experience, as Ranciere puts it, politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and speak, (Ranciere, 2004, p.13) thus creating a cognitive consensual structure. In this sense, according to Ranciere,

The arts only ever lend to projects of domination or emancipation what they are able to lend to them, that is to say, quite simply, what they have in common with them: bodily positions and movements, functions of speech, the parcelling out of the visible and the invisible. (Ranciere, 2004, p.19)

The legacy of minimal art, therefore, is that in opposition to a formalist artwork that is detached from the audience and the rest of the world, it provides a transition from a given sensible world to another sensible world that defines different capacities and incapacities, different forms of tolerance and intolerance. The fact that minimalist artists in the past have presented forms as models of socialization is also related to public spaces and shared aesthetic experience. From the 1960s to the present day, different artists investing in the aesthetic vocabulary of minimalist art continue to explore and exhibit the process of meaning through objects. In this sense, what constitutes the artistic experience today is the juxtaposition of the gaze-persons in front of the work. On the other hand, the works that I considered worthy of special attention in this thesis allow us to live in the space-time they create in this way. Although today's installation examples are virtualized, external factors are not isolated from the context, but rather influence the processes of negotiating the conditions of access to the work. In this sense, public discursivity, as defined by Rebentisch, which necessarily complements aesthetic experience, also enters the art idiom. Rebentisch argues that the reception of artworks is not "independent of the society in which they are situated" and is therefore open to "concrete social contexts" and "concrete subjects, that is, socially situated individuals". This is most evident in site-specific works. (Rebentisch, 2012, p.267) . Hence, minimalism, and now installation, reveals a structural feature of all art, namely the double structure of the aesthetic object, called theatrical, as thing and sign, what Fried called "*stage presence*". Here, the

reciprocal relationship of objects with meaning and material is both an act and an appearance: the staging of something that is not given is both an act and an appearance. This performance revealed by minimalist art is now problematized in the deepest sense of the orientation of the beholder through installation art. It rethinks our exteriority to the spatial dimension of the work, not only by bringing its positioning function into play through our spatial orientation, but also by drawing us into an encounter regulated by the potential of space. The fusion of subject and object since the spatiotemporally experienced by Tony Smith on the New Jersey Turnpike teaches us today not only about the social formation of subjectivity, but also about the formation of aesthetic subjectivity.



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