

I DO NOT WANT TO TALK

AN ESSAY ON THE THREEFOLD OF

ARTISTIC LABOR,
SCULPTURAL AWARENESS
AND PUBLIC PERCEPTION

(EMPHASIZING ROBERT MORRIS'S
ANTI-POSITIONING IN POSTWAR
ART HISTORY)

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"I do not want to travel to distant places to give talks about art I made half a century ago. Minimalism does not need to hear from me. I do not want to travel to distant places to give talks about art I made yesterday. Contemporary art is making enough noise without me. I do not want to be filmed in my studio pretending to be working. I do not want to participate in staged conversations about art—either mine or others, past or present—which are labored and disguised performances. I do not want to be interviewed by curators, critics, art directors, theorists, aestheticians, aesthetes, professors, collectors, gallerists, culture mavens, journalists or art historians about my influences, favorite artists, despised artists, past artists, current artists, future artists. A long time ago I got in the habit, never since broken, of writing down things instead of speaking. It is possible that I was led into art making because talking and being in the presence of another person were not requirements. I do not want to be asked my reasons for not having worked in just one style, or reasons for any of the art that got made (the reason being that there are no reasons in art). I do not want to answer questions about why I used plywood, felt, steam, dirt, grease, lead, wax, money, trees, photographs, electroencephalograms, hot and cold, lawyers, explosions, nudity, sound, language, or drew with my eyes closed. I do not want to tell anecdotes about my past, or stories about

*the people I have been close to. The people to whom I owe so much either knew it or never will because it is too late now. I do not want to document my starting points, turning points, high points, low points, good points, bad points, stopping points, lucky breaks, bad breaks, breaking points, dead ends, breakthroughs or breakdowns. I do not want to talk about my methods, processes, near misses, flukes, mistakes, disappointments, setbacks, disasters, obsessions, lucky accidents, unlucky accidents, scars, insecurities, disabilities, phobias, fixations, or insomnias over posters I should never have made. I do not want my portrait taken. Everybody uses everybody else for their own purposes, and I am happy to be just material for somebody else so long as I can exercise my right to remain silent, immobile, possibly armed, and at a distance of several miles."*¹

The passage cited is Robert Morris's all-purpose document for replying to invitations for giving a public lecture. As he clarifies himself, "[...] as an aging artist I am still on occasion invited to these stupid shindigs. For years I made up excuses for not showing up."² It's a truly sympathetic way of unchaining oneself from the expectations and obligations that are imposed on artists nowadays, namely, the idea that artists offer guidance to the interpretation of, or even explain, their work. Morris has always shown himself a great opponent of an overtly explanatory approach to art. This emerges profoundly in his writings, but also in his unrestrained exploration and diversification of art and its modes of production. Morris does not want his work to be seen from a singular perspective, and neither does he abide by

an art history based on period and style. Perceived as a pioneer of Minimalism, Morris has produced works that can be associated with Minimal Art, Concept Art, Land Art, Anti Form, Process Art et cetera. Keeping his practice in constant evolution, Morris is, in a strange way, tolerant and submissive to everything that is bigger or smaller than him, while at the same time he remains ungraspable for the orthodox practitioners of art history.

This essay will look into Morris's positioning, —or, better said, anti-positioning —in postwar art history, and how his relentlessly fluctuating attitude is relevant for contemporary practice. The first part of this essay will primarily follow the volume *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, which was published in 1993. It contains

his fourfold essay "Notes on Sculpture" (1966-1969), in which Morris discusses the fundamental intentions of mid-sixties installation art, nowadays conceived as Minimal Art. This series of essays also describes how the seemingly simple gestures made by Minimal artists make the work a function of the relation between sculptural object, space, and the viewer. Furthermore, this part will discuss Morris's essays "Anti Form" (1968) and "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated" (1970), in which Morris tries to reveal the unification of the creational execution and the artistic result. By emphasizing a production process and method that are dominated by chance and determinism, Morris proposes a totally different approach to art-making. His refined, but processual, work connects to an analysis of behavior in making, language as a system, and the mingling of object-based and performative arts. Here, I am curious to detect Morris's intentions regarding his versatile approach in the use of medium, material and context. In the second part, I will 'test' Morris's position by revisiting it from a contemporary perspective. With the discussion of Morris's writings in hand, I will discuss and compare texts by contemporary voices in art discourse and practice, like Rosalind Krauss, Jeff Wall, and Andrea Fraser. My ambition for both parts is, firstly, to offer insight in the elaborate writings of a very honorable artist, and, secondly, to flesh out the contemporary relevance of Morris's benefaction to an art-form that is significantly process-based.



Figure 1: Robert Morris "Continuous Project Altered Daily", 1969
Earth, clay, asbestos, cotton, water, grease, plastic, felt, wood, thread waste, electric lights, photographs, and tape recorder, dimensions variable. Installation at the Leo Castelli Warehouse, New York, March 1-22, 1969.

PART ONE

THE LITERALITY OF SCULPTURE,

THE THREE L'S,

TRANSMITTING A BODILY CONFRONTATION,

AN ENDS-MEANS HOOKUP,

AND PROBLEM-SOLVING.

The work of Robert Morris has been typically designated by the label Minimal Art. Although this term was used by art critics more than by artists, it has spread the now-common idea of Morris's work being devoid of all symbolical and discursive meaning. Minimalism, it is often said, represses all content matter that does not derive from the material facticity, the matter-of-factness, of the work itself. Minimal Art cancels out any mimetic, symbolic or expressive function of the work. However, the clichéd idea that Minimalist Art is 'meaningless', namely, that it declines all external values, is fully absent in Morris's work. In fact, the artist has consistently refuted the idea that his work has no content; he has only differentiated his work from those meanings and experiences usually (and historically) associated with painting. In

view of his group of seven grey-painted, plywood polyhedrons, shown first in 1963 at Green Gallery in New York, Morris stated that the sculptures need to be experienced and understood on a total different level than painting, which is historically associated with mimetic, symbolic and expressive functions. The tactile nature of sculpture, so Morris indicates, should very clearly be distinct from the optical qualities that are at the base of painting. Morris contradicts the literality of sculpture to the illusionism in painting, in "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1" (1966). A sculpture should therefore not be hung on a wall, since it will try to deny gravity. To perceive a three-dimensional object, it is essential to place it on the ground. This also evades the limitation of multiple ways of viewing since the floor is shared with the viewer, who is now able

to walk around the object and sense its mass and tactility.

Color, Morris continues in the same essay, is bypassed for the reason that it is essentially an optical addition to the shape. The physicality of sculpture would bow down whenever color is used. Even the color issued by materials like wood, for Morris, distracts viewers from experiencing the physicality of the work; neutral colors such as white or grey were therefore applied instead. On the other hand, the same argument is used by Morris for the most immaterial influence to the sculptural surface, which is light. But as immaterial as light is, it is also naturally part of the space like for example the floor is. The coincidence of light changes the perception of sculpture constantly but is embraced for its quality to confront the viewer with the temporality of experiencing a three-dimensional shape.

Morris rightfully stated, "[s]implicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience."³ The sensory experience of a gestalt is enlarged by the simplicity of the shape. The elementary three-dimensional shapes like cubes or pyramids are best perceived as a whole. The viewer will instantly sense a simple polyhedron as a solid volume. This does not mean that the perception is less strong. The complexity in shape is obviously harder to grasp with the senses, and will cause a fragmentation in perception. The elementary shapes are more accessible to sense as a whole and therefore as factual. For this reason we can see a very strict use of principal shapes in Minimalism.

If "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1" advocated a direct, immanent experience of the work, which is contrasted to the more mimetic or 'indirect' meanings historically coupled to painting, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2" is mainly dedicated to size and scale in sculpture. "The awareness of scale is a function of the comparison made between that constant, one's body size, and the object."⁴ The Minimalist sculpture seems to fall in between the size range of either monumental – or ornamental. Both polarities, the monument and ornament, engender a different perception of the object. The ornamental has an intimate quality since its detail requires a closeness of sight and examination. This notion, for example, can be found at the doors of the Baptistry of Saint John in Florence, which are profiled with a number of fine bronze reliefs that each portray biblical episodes. A door is an architectural element that has an intimate quality to it since it requires touch to be opened and is passed along with little distance. A monumental piece, on the other hand, requires spaciousness to be perceived as a whole. Huge public squares and long stretched streets introduce monumental pieces, which reaches high above the viewer. A monumental piece is usually looked up to and is related to publicness rather than intimateness. This does not mean that a monumental piece requires less of a bodily endeavor to perceive it. One could say that a monumental piece requires even more of a physical approach since it literally requires distance and a moving around to see as a whole.

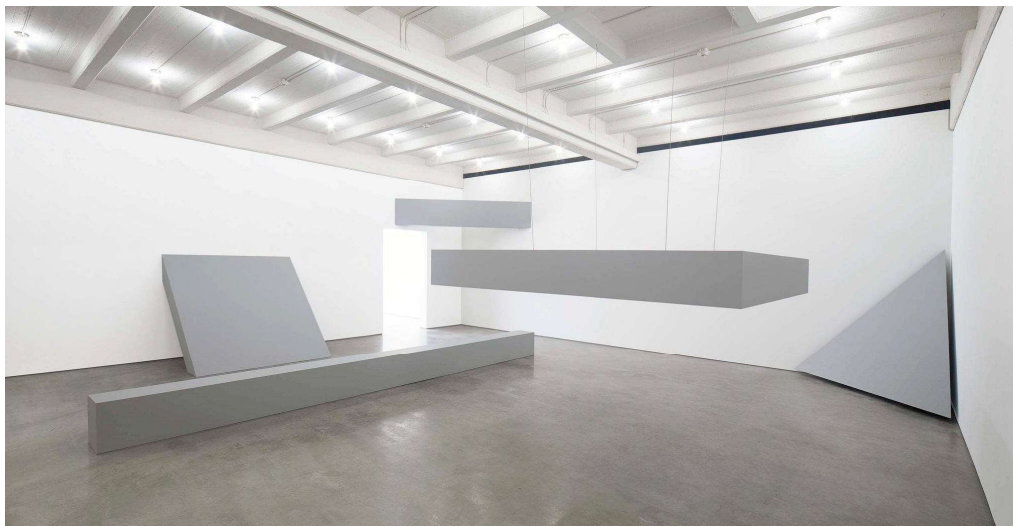


Figure 2: Robert Morris, Installation view (Floor Beam, Wall-Floor Slab, Corner Beam, Cloud, Corner Piece), 1964-2016
Painted Plywood, dimensions variable
Dia Art Foundation

Morris was as much interested in sculptural forms as its effects on the viewer. This becomes very evidently in his *Untitled (L-Beams)* of 1965. The three pieces are all identically the same but positioned in different orientations. One is standing up, one is laying down and one is balancing on its side. Walking around the configuration of sculptures, the viewer would notice that the highest point of the upstanding L would reach just above their heads, with a length of just under two and a half meters, while the laid-down L could almost entirely be seen from above, its height being just 60 centimeters. The viewer would have to mentally unpuzzle the relationship of the objects, and also whether these forms are in fact identical or not. Morris would initially have imagined to fill the space with much more L-Beams, whereupon they could be orientated in an endless possibility of variations. He would soon notice, though, that there would eventually be only three possible orientations without imitating a previous one. Due to the simplicity that is inherent to the shapes, the basic decisions about the object, like size, proportion, surface and placement, become essential for the particular quality that the work ought to generate. Thus viewers are left with questions: Why has Morris chosen to show three versions? How do the three installations relate to the same 'ground form'? Are we looking at one object, or at three? (Interestingly, a similar question, now in relation to the object and its varying representations, is posed by

Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Chairs* (1965), comprising of a chair, its life-size photograph, and its textual definition. The correspondence between Kosuth's and Morris's works alone challenges the categorization of the L's as Minimalist.).

In her book *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (1977), Rosalind Krauss very accurately describes what is at stake in the paradoxical perception of the three L's. As she writes, "no matter how clearly we might understand that the three L's are identical (in structure and dimension), it is impossible to see them as the same. Therefore, Morris seems to be saying, the



Figure 3 Robert Morris, *Untitled (L-Beams)*, 1965
Painted plywood, 243,84 x 243,84 x 60,96 cm
Green Gallery New York

'fact' of the objects' similarity belongs to a logic that exists prior to experience; because at the moment of experience, or in experience, the Ls defeat this logic and are 'different.'"⁵ Krauss even goes so far in saying that a privacy of the psyche is reduced while experiencing the L-beams of Morris. The physical perception of the sculpture inevitably collides with the mental projection of an idealistic preconception, and the surface of the sculpture mirrors this. Indeed, Morris tells us much about the way we experience objects that are all around us, in urban landscape, social interaction or digital

media. "The known constant and the experienced variable."⁶ While we have an 'idea' of objects and environments, the true experience often contradicts what we think we see, causing a feeling of chaos and confusion. Exactly this dual type of experience, this confrontation of 'mind and body' (to invoke the title of a Morris retrospective of the early 1990s), is central to Morris's work and especially to his L-Beams. The experience is not so immediate as one would foresee with these straightforward gestures.



Figure 4: David Weber-Krebs, *Performance (Robert Morris revisited)*, 2015
Screenshot of video documentation
De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam

To understand the origin of the 1965 L-shaped pieces, we have to look back at one of Robert Morris' first sculptural works, *Two Columns* of 1961. This piece most certainly derived from a piece called *Column*, he made for a concert organized by the minimalist musician and composer La Monte Young in the Living Theater, an experimental theater association based in New York City. A column, sixty by sixty centimeters wide and two and a half meter high, would be stationed behind the stage curtain. As the curtain would open and reveal the column, it would stand there for three and a half minutes. Out of nowhere, it would then tip over,

and rest on its side for another three and a half minutes, whereupon the curtain would close again. (Little known was, that Morris intended to stand inside the column and push to make the transition. Due to an unfortunate rehearsal, on the morning of the performance, the injured artist had to come up with another solution to make the column tip over.)

A quite rigorous expression of Morris, who had been developing a great interest for theater and dance. With *Column*, the artist for the first time explored the idea that making art was somehow a record of the performance of the artist. In other words, the artist

transmits a bodily confrontation, through the sculpture, onto the viewer. Thus, the sculpture is to be perceived as it were 'alive'. This idea is fed by the performative charisma that Abstract Expressionists had attained in the fifties. Morris states that "of the Abstract Expressionists, only Pollock was able to recover process and hold on to it as part of the end form of the work."⁷ Morris believed that there were many forms of art to be found within this process of art-making, forms that are usually relinquished or made subsidiary to the finalized object. For a long time, the process of art-making has been ignored in favor of the result, the 'masterpiece'. To reveal the process not just would give away the secret of the artist, it would also involve challenging the status of art as a collection of masterpieces, since, now, art would be rethought according to all parts and means involved in the making of the work. Moreover, to think about work in terms of process and production is to rethink the emphasis of art on the strictly visual; is to include the temporal, material and perhaps even haptic features of the work. "Pollock's recovery of process," Morris writes, "involved a profound rethinking of the role of both material and tools in making. The stick that drips paint is a tool that acknowledges the nature of the fluidity of paint. Like any other tool, it is still one that controls and transforms matter. But unlike the brush, it is in far greater sympathy with matter because it acknowledges the inherent tendencies and properties of that matter [...]. To think

that painting has some inherent optical nature is ridiculous.”⁸ This statement does not fully comply with the carefully fabricated and highly polished minimalist sculptures of Morris. Sculptures that were usually industrially manufactured to neutralize any signs of the artist hand. Any trace of the artist hand, and thus the making process, was left out in order to avoid any distraction from its literality. But it was probably this literality, this realness, that had led Morris to introduce a totally different approach in his art making. He articulates this approach in his contribution to the April 1968 issue of *Artforum*, an essay entitled "Anti Form." "In some cases these investigations move from the making of things to the making of material itself," he writes. "Sometimes a direct manipulation of a given material without the use of any tool is made. In these cases considerations of gravity become as important as those of space. The focus on matter and gravity as means results in forms that were not projected in advance. Considerations of ordering are necessarily casual and imprecise and unemphasized. Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied, as replacing the matter will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion. It is part of the work's refusal to continue estheticizing the form by dealing with it as a prescribed end.”⁹ As this text indicates,

Morris aimed to avoid subjective control over the material outcome and the 'look' of his pieces. The manipulative act of the artist's hand could easily be replaced by a dozen alternative ways to act but also another dozen other hands. This would not seem reliable enough for Morris. He would rather rely on the physical characteristics of the material and its surrounding. The dropping of a piece of felt cloth on a floor would result in a shape that corresponds with these

internal characteristics. Another example of this specific approach would be Richard Serra's *Plinths* from 1967. Serra would throw a fair amount of liquid lead into the corner of his studio, which would harden in contact with the wall and floor. The process would be launched by the artist where after the decisive formal task would be handed over to the incidence of the material itself. The sculpture would make itself, leading to an end-means hookup.



Figure 5: Robert Morris, *Untitled (Pink Felt)*, 1970
Felt pieces of various sizes, overall dimensions variable
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Panza Collection, 1991

Morris has described how ends and means have progressively come closer in art of the 20th century, in his essay “Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making” (1970). First of all, we can regard the making of art as a form of behavior. Psychologists, like Morse Peckham, have looked into the way artistic behavior can function in a social or didactic way. Morris is more so interested to see art making as a form of behavior *an sich*. He compares this view to the anthropological examinations of the building structures found in the Machu Pichu: “the significant meanings of this monument are to be sought in reconstructing the particular building activity – and not in a formal analysis of the architecture.”¹⁰ The structure of this century-old city can tell us a lot about the history of South America, its religion, social values et cetera. As so the way it is build is a subject matter on its own. So the question raises, why are the activities embodied in the process of art making not recognized as forms of behavior in itself and especially not spoken of when art is discussed? Besides, in Morris words, “the simple fact that those who discuss art know almost nothing about how it gets made,”¹¹ there is something going on, that lies a bit deeper than being ignorant towards a creative process. In our culture there seems to be a natural habit to disconnect ends and means. If we look in other forms of behavior that correspond with art making, we can find a same kind of opposition. Art, being a form of communication, correlates with language for example. Linguists have been very busy with binarism hiding in myths and stories. People seem to be attracted

to polarities. Good and bad, high and low, beginning and end et cetera. A tendency towards one or the other. At the same time this binarism structures the system of language effectively. We strive through clear distinction and a structure which aims to reduce the arbitrary.

Given the correspondence of language and art it is not strange to see that also art making clinches on systematic methods. Some postwar artists were looking for ways to reduce the arbitrary by seeking systems according to which they could act. One of the first to do this was John Cage, who actually systematized the arbitrary itself. A structural organization was applied in order to implement his work with chance. The system was not perceivable in the final product so we could say he still kept a division between the end and means. As stated before, it was probably Jackson Pollock who first applied a systematic method of working, which could very much be perceived in the final product. Although Pollock did not necessarily develop a preformulated logical system, but rather let natural laws take over, he was very aware of the limitations and possibilities within the interaction between his body and the material. It might be Jasper Johns who found a way to very literally hook up his systematic working process with the end image, for example, in his *0 through 9* paintings of 1961. To feed an artistic process with such systematic methodic reduces the subjectivity to a minimum, while the outcome might eventually be vague and confusing, and therefore raises the arbitrary for the viewer. “It is as though the artist wants to do the most

discontinuous, irrational things in the most reasonable way.”¹² It is important not to forget that the disorientating experience is posed to the viewer, not to the artist. But the semiotic function is binary. After the disorientating encounter of the piece the viewer will recognize order and identify a pattern, which is anyhow a projection. This is the finalization of the piece, the perception, projection and the provision of meaning by the viewer. This is beyond

the artist’s control. For the artist will the disorientating experience, the arbitrary, and the motivated production process generally go hand in hand. One could state that in the moment of exposing an artwork it presents itself with a minimum of order and structure while its production has been implicated with the biggest order and structure.

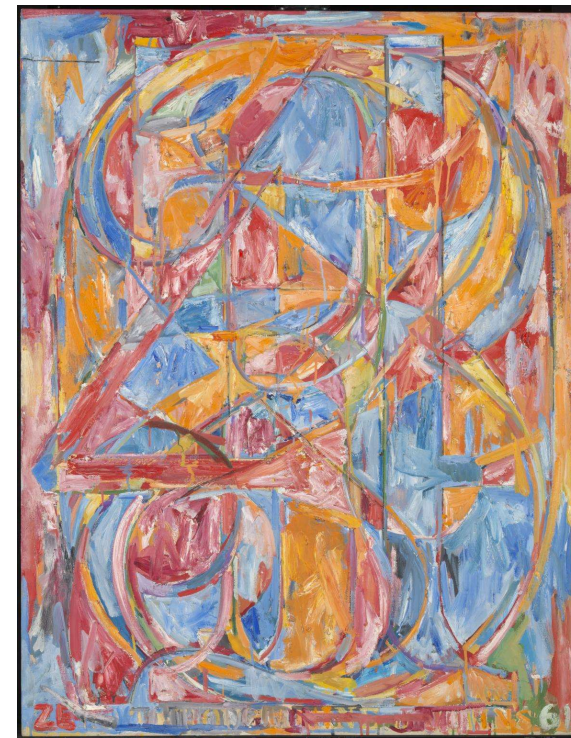


Figure 6 Jasper Johns, *0 through 9*, 1961
Oil paint on canvas, 137 x 105
Tate London



Figure 7 Robert Morris, *Arizona*, 1964. Reconstruction featuring Andrew Ludke, 1993
Screenshot of video documentation
Television Studio, Hunter College, New York

Lastly, in the same essay, Morris mentions how the division between ends and means not only is reduced within the plastic arts, but furthermore in time related arts. As he writes, "there have been recent moves made to reduce that existential gap between the studio preparation and the formal presentation. Some theater and dance work now brings rehearsal and literal learning sessions for the performers into the public presentation. One could cite other instances in film and music where the making process is not behind the scenes but is the very substance of the work."¹³ Morris does not dive much deeper into

this subject matter, but more so concludes the essay with the beforementioned observation. We know that the transition to his minimal sculptures have directly been facilitated by his 1961 theater performance *Column*. Insight on why and how he got interested in the performative arts like theater and dance, is given in other writings published around that time, like Morris's short essay "Notes on Dance" (1965). In this text, he states that the each of the five dances he had made "attempted to solve what was at the time seen as a problem or set of problems."¹⁴ He describes how the problematic has

by swinging overhead in a fully lighted room a small light at the end of a cord. The lights in the room fade as the cord is slowly let out until finally in total darkness only the moving point of light is visible as it revolves in the large space above the heads of the audience."¹⁵

It's indisputable that Morris's oscillating approach in examining production process versus the finished piece has magnificently contributed to the sharpening of the modalities in artistic labor, spatial and sculptural awareness and public perception. Traversing between experimental performances in theater, Minimalist installation art in museal context, establishing terms as Anti-Form and Process Art, and even journeys in to Land Art, Morris seemed to be anything but a formalist. His writings, which are determinate and precise, give a great inside in how Morris interests and focus shift from, for example, language to architecture and theater to behavior. Why Morris kept deviating in discipline and context is a hard question. Possibly he enjoyed doing the unexpected or he would get tired of doing the same thing over and over. We cannot know and possibly will never know the motives and reasons of Morris; after all, he consciously does not speak about the meanings of his own work, only about 'sculpture' or 'art' in general, let aside give us hints of why he does what he does. What is certain, however, is that Morris developed his work and practice around a great range of interests, and that he was entirely tolerant as to alternative readings of, and perspectives on, his work.

served as syntax in making the dances. Morris wanted to find a way to avoid the antigravitational qualities, which traditionally are the foundation of dance, but still deal with investigation of movement in space and time. The focus should be on the literality of the body, its weight, its reach, and its ability to operate. The objects used in his dances, for example a cord with a small light attached to the end, did not obtain a distinct interest by Morris. He saw these object as pure means for dealing with the specific problems. "The establishment of a focus shifting between the egocentric and the exocentric could be accomplished

PART TWO

ANTI-DEPICTION,

CONCEPTUAL REDUCTION,

INTERNALIZED INSTITUTION,

AND THE ART EVENT.

The transition from the plastic arts to a domain which is tolerant to new forms and external influences, has been described by Jeff Wall in his essay-lecture "Depiction, Object, Event" (2006). Wall discusses three art-historical episodes that issue what he considers the gradual, historical development from depiction to object to event. Opening the essay, Wall discusses long-established and common forms of art, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, the graphic arts, and photography. Traditionally, these art forms also happened to all be depictive

forms of art. "Modern and modernist art is grounded in the dialectic of depiction and anti-depiction, depiction and its negation within the regime of depiction," Wall writes. "The self-criticism of art, that phenomenon we call both 'modernist' and 'avant-garde', originated in terms of the arts of depiction and, for the hundred years beginning in 1855, remained within their framework."¹⁶ The quality of the work was determined by the ability to capture movement from reality and perhaps even to suggest it, without actually embodying it. The work of art was

motionless and essentially admitted its own limitation. From the 1950s onwards, artists gradually started avoiding this type of representation and moved away from depiction, towards the object. It was art critic Michael Fried who posed objection to the transition from the pictorial arts to the 'specific objects' of the Minimal Art. Fried, having an expertise in late eighteenth century painting, demonstrated against the Minimal Art by stating it was a form of art which neglected its own autonomy. He faced absorbing quality conducted by an artwork against the theatrical detachment of the artwork and its audience. The last aiming at Minimalist tendencies of making the viewer aware of a shared experience in observing and mentally constructing an image. Fried refused to admire any of this, but at the same time, it was his extensive criticism which became the most accurate formulation on Minimal Art's intentions. Unintentionally, Fried announced the future chapter in the history of art: "I want to make a claim that I cannot hope to prove or substantiate but that I believe nevertheless to be true: viz., that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such - and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such. [...] The success, even the survival, of the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre."¹⁷



Figure 8: The Theater of Eternal Music performing at The Living Theatre in 1965. From left to right, Tony Conrad, La Monte Young, Marian Zazeela and John Cale

Besides the anti-depictive trends, Wall also mentions that reduction was the central term throughout the sixties and seventies. The turn to the purely formal expressions of the Minimal and even more so the materialistic absence of the Concept Art demonstrate this. Wall speaks about "*conceptual reduction*," addressing how artist like Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner moved passed the rhetoric of the Minimal by diminishing the object. "Object and work are superseded by their replacement with a written explication of why the written explication itself cannot be denied status as a generic instance of art—and furthermore why logically and historically, this text not only cannot be denied such status, but is in fact the only entity that can authentically possess it, since it alone has become, or remained, art while having ceased to be a specific 'work of art'. This reduction renders everything other than itself a member of a single category, the category of less historically and theoretically self-conscious gestures—mere works of art. From the new judgement seat of strictly linguistic conceptual art, all other modes or forms are equally less valid. All are equivalent in having fallen short of the self-reflexive condition of the reduction."¹⁸

Due to the elimination of possible alternatives within the visual arts by the Concept Art, the only way out for artists was to invest in other areas of cultural activity. This is the third field that Wall describes, the event. In Conceptual Art, it was no longer necessary to relate to reality by means of a physical work of art; a single idea sufficed. Artists had been given the opportunity to take cultural processes from their surroundings and introduce them in the field of, and as, art. These cultural processes are time- and space-bound and in one way or another have a social function. Artists imitate the processes in reduced form, which in turn

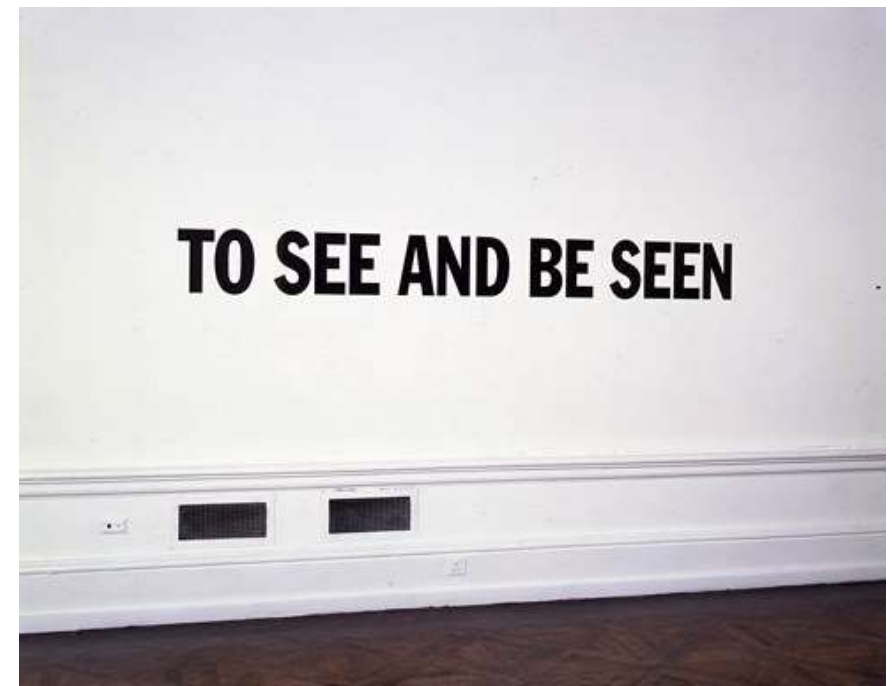


Figure 9: Lawrence Weiner, "TO SEE AND BE SEEN", 1972.
Installation:, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1993
Photo: David Heald

leads to what we can best describe as events. Plain image or object was no qualification of art, the focus shifted to the incident of the artwork. Evidently there were correlations to be found on the border of visual art and performance arts. I have mentioned Morris's dances of course, in which the actions were executed with the least amount of dramatics or mishmash. But one could also consider John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), which parallels Robert Rauschenberg's *White Painting* (1951) considering its silence. Because of the affinity with the art of movement, the idea raised that an event can attain the status of an artwork

just as effectively as, for example, the ready-made object did. From this logic, the focus on time-bound works has made its appearance in the visual arts. A well-known case of this is Andy Warhol's Factory, the workshop where pieces of art were constantly produced, while the essence of the artwork laid not in the pieces that were made but in the process that persisted. "As ends and means are more unified, as process becomes part of the work instead of prior to it, one is enabled to engage more directly with the world in art making because forming is moved further into the presentation," as Morris declared.¹⁹



Figure 10: Michael Asher, "Installation Münster (Caravan)"
 Parking position: between Siegelkammer and Pferdegasse.
 Skulptur Projekte Münster

According to Andrea Fraser, the failure of the avant-garde is inevitable, because their means could never measure up to the goal they wanted to achieve. In her essay "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" (2015), she states, "It is artists – as much as museums or the market – who, in their very efforts to escape the institution of art, have driven its expansion. With each attempt to evade the limits of institutional determination, to embrace an outside, to redefine art or reintegrate it into everyday life, to reach "everyday" people and work in the "real" world, we expand our frame and bring more of the world into it. But we never escape it."²⁰ Fraser

speaks about the institute of art as a trap without possibility of breaking out. But the institute of art should not be seen as a building or object but as a social universe. She specifies this idea on the basis of Michael Asher's *Installation Münster (Caravan)*, which was on display every ten years from 1977 to 2007 at Skulptur Projekte in Münster. The work consists of a rented caravan that is parked every week on different sites in the city during the exhibition. In the museums, which serve as reference points for the exhibition, visitors could find information about where the caravan could be viewed that particular week. On the location itself, however, there was no indication

that the caravan was art or had any connection with the exhibition. For the coincidental passer-by, it was nothing more than an ordinary caravan. "What Asher thus demonstrated is that the institution of art is not only "institutionalized" in organizations like museums and objectified in art objects. It is also internalized and embodied in people. It is internalized in the competencies, conceptual models, and modes of perception that allow us to produce, write about, and understand art, or simply to recognize art as art, whether as artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors, or museum visitors. And above all, it exists in the interests, aspirations, and criteria of value that orient our actions and define our sense of worth. These competencies and dispositions determine our own institutionalization as members of the field of art."²¹ An artist cannot escape the world of art because this world is inside the artist. It is a psychic isolation that ensures that everything that the artist does falls under the heading of art. Of course, the artist has a choice that he or she does not come along, but in fact lies to himself by opposing the institute of art. At this moment the artist simply cannot escape the limitations of autonomy within art. It is therefore the limitations that become certain, and maybe even the quality of art.

Art does not withstand in a hermetic condition. It will have to go outside to confront the world in which utility is the indicator of value and, essentially, the reason for existence. The beauty is that the contemporary artist has the freedom to walk the line that separates these worlds. A successful artist will therefore also act according to the forms of behavior that both worlds require of him, with the risk to always undergo a certain isolation. Not fully in the one, neither in the other but always in between. You could call it chameleonic, fragmented or even schizophrenic, in any case the artist chooses himself as he decides to enter the domain of the artistic. This is different for the museum visitor, art collector or critic. They also attach themselves to the institute of art on a voluntary basis, but have a much clearer function or task once inside. The artist's activity can, after the many departures and returns of traditional forms, but also taken the exponential growth of new forms in the past hundred years, no longer be captured within the walls of the studio. The job description of the contemporary artist goes far beyond making images. Developing plans, giving lectures, applying for subsidies, maintaining a website, expressing an opinion and of course mingling with colleagues at a tactically selected event... it is part of the job. Therefore, it is not surprising that the big names in the art world operate as a company, the artist works together in a team of specialists who operate in name of the artist's studio.

It is self-explanatory that the biennials and other major art events are dominating the perception of what art is

today. Precisely these large-scale events underline the social character of contemporary art, exploiting "events containing events, platforms inducing event-structures—tentative, yet spectacular models of new social forms, rooted in community action, ephemeral forms of labour, critical urbanism, deconstructivist tourism, theatricalized institutional critique, anarchic interactive media games, radical pedagogies, strategies of wellness, hobbies and therapies, rusticated technologies of shelter, theatres of memory, populist historiographies, and a thousand other 'stations', 'sites', and 'plateaus'," as Wall listed it. Not to forget the astonishingly

high number of visitors attracted to these gigantic happenings. It offers a perfect platform for art that admits its audience. Art is no longer self-contained but is fed by social, political, economic and cultural interpretations. In addition to this, it is tested to what extent the event brings out a spectacle. The traditional quality requirements of the work seem far-fetched, while not aggressively abandoning or negating other forms, like the Concept Art had done at the end of the sixties. You could say that the depiction, albeit more in the representative sense than the illustrative, has made its return. The representation of events, as reduced forms of interactive

processes that have been taken directly from the "real" world. The event seems, regarding the absence of a predefined format, to have developed into the ultimate contemporary art form. Contemporary art seems to have fought itself free from the eternal discussion about autonomy. The medium-based thinking was broken down by the avant-garde, in order to achieve unlimited conditions in the production of art. However, they failed to create a freer situation. Any discussion that takes place within the boundaries of art will only be able to broaden the domain of art, but never break borders.



Figure 11: Still from *The Square* (2017) directed by Ruben Östlund

“Nevertheless I find myself here and talking. What shall I talk about? First everything. Then fragments, questions, doubts, memories and more questions. Everything in the universe is at the fundamental level, so far as we know, made up of particles in fields of forces. Although more recent theoretical speculations about space-time involve holographic projections, the surfaces of black holes, and infinitesimal vibrating strings, I will here draw on the earlier model of fields and particles for my metaphors. But from such speculations about physical existence, vanishingly evanescent as they are, how, asks John Searle, do we account for consciousness, free will, language, hatred, voting, money, and the millions of other things that make up our lives? I think that I decided to come here and talk, but I also think I could have said no, that it was my choice. I take free will for granted. But I also think that above the quantum level where all is chance, at the macro level, every event has a necessary and sufficient cause. My belief is suspended in a contradiction between causality and free will. There is no solution. For some things there may be no answers. So much for everything”²²

This is a passage from Robert Morris's lecture performance "A few thoughts on bombs, tennis, free will, agency reduction, the museum, dust storms, and labyrinths" at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts on November 15, 2013. It is the response Morris posed to his all-purpose document for replying to invitations for giving a public lecture, which he wrote two years earlier, and which is cited in the beginning of this essay. Morris did actually perform a public lecture, in which this response was publicly enunciate, after Morris had reiterated the antagonistic passage. What makes me very fond of Robert Morris is that he, genuinely, is not taking in a position. All the stuff he wrote, all the stuff he made, and all the stuff he eventually said becomes, as soon as it leaves him, public domain. This allows the public to respond to these matters, but just so, allows Morris himself to do so. It is a distinct contradiction to speak about why you don't want to speak, but Morris stresses that a human being is no different from a tree or a star, on the level that everything is in progress. I find Morris's statement, about his belief being suspended in a contradiction between causality and free will, one of great courage. It's exactly this aspect which also is the establishment of the quality in his work. Morris respects the privacy of will although the will is presumably not autonomous and must be provoked to emerge.

The first part of this essay is focusing primarily on the threefold of artistic labor, sculptural awareness and public perception, to present it in very stiff jargon. For me, however, did Morris

manages to create art which is confronting the animative processual features with the presented result. An art which is alive, just like the artist in the studio is alive. Morris is relentless in questioning the limits of art and challenges the idea that art is a sacred concoction by the artist, "art is, at a very simple level it is a way of making."²³ The process of realizing the work should therefore be seen as more meaningful than the completed object itself. I believe that this is at stake in all of Morris's work. Whether the work is an object, a space, a movement, a dance, a writing, a lecture, a photograph or a brochure, the route towards the destination is worth most.

How is this relevant for the present time and contemporary art practice? Obviously the second part of this essay reaches out the declaration of the institute of art. The imperative condition for the appearance of art as art, thus, inevitably brought about, and impossible to resist. Is this a tragedy? I don't think so. Does this confine a free will? I don't think so either. What we can learn from Morris is that the most important pursuit of the artist is to create a situation in which your own interest and aspirations can thrive. Furthermore, a resistance to commodity and limpidity is also promoted by Morris. The way he fluctuated in discipline, moving from theater to sculpture, Process Art to Land Art, from very conceptual pieces to materials that shaped them self, assured Morris not to be subsumed and classified into art categorization. I believe that nowadays, meaning is generated by the terminology of art. Every megalomaniac business needs art to keep an eye on

them and at the same time justify their cause. In this essay I have not managed to meditate very thoroughly on the topic of Institutional Critique, but do consider a little resistance against establishment suitable in a time where the commodification of everything, not only art, is making ludicrous turns. I don't think boycotts or activist demonstrations are the appropriate way to exercise this resistance, though. The contemporary conditions of art are made up out of unavoidable requirements which are to be endured. I would like to see a world in which these artistic requirements are confronted with the necessities that we already have to put up with as a human being. So sleep during your shitty job as a museum guard, make love to a generous funder, organize breakfast, lunch, dinner and drinks in your studio and attend an opening in your sweatpants.

¹ Robert Morris, "Looking for Silence," 2011, online at <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2011/09/23/robert-morris-on-silence/>, (accessed 5 May 2018).

² Idem.

³ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 1," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts), 8.

⁴ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 13.

⁵ Rosalynd Krauss, "The Double Negative: a new syntax for sculpture" in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (The Viking Press, New York), 267.

⁶ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 2," 17.

⁷ Robert Morris, "Antiform," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 43.

⁸ Idem, 43.

⁹ Idem, 46.

¹⁰ Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," in *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 73.

¹¹ Idem, 73.

¹² Idem, 83.

¹³ Idem, 91.

¹⁴ Robert Morris, "Notes on dance", in *Robert Morris* (The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts), 16.

¹⁵ Idem, 3.

¹⁶ Jeff Wall, in *"Depiction, Object, Event"*, Hermes Lecture 2006, 12.

¹⁷ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago), 148.

¹⁸ Jeff Wall, in *"Depiction, Object, Event"*, 18.

¹⁹ Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," 92.

²⁰ Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique", in *Artforum* (September 2015), 104.

²¹ Idem, 103.

²² Robert Morris, "A Few Thoughts on Bombs, Tennis, Free Will, Agency Reduction, the Museum, Dust Storms, and Labyrinths." In *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (2015)

²³ Robert Morris, "Some Notes on the Phenomenology of Making," 71.