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Serra at Yale

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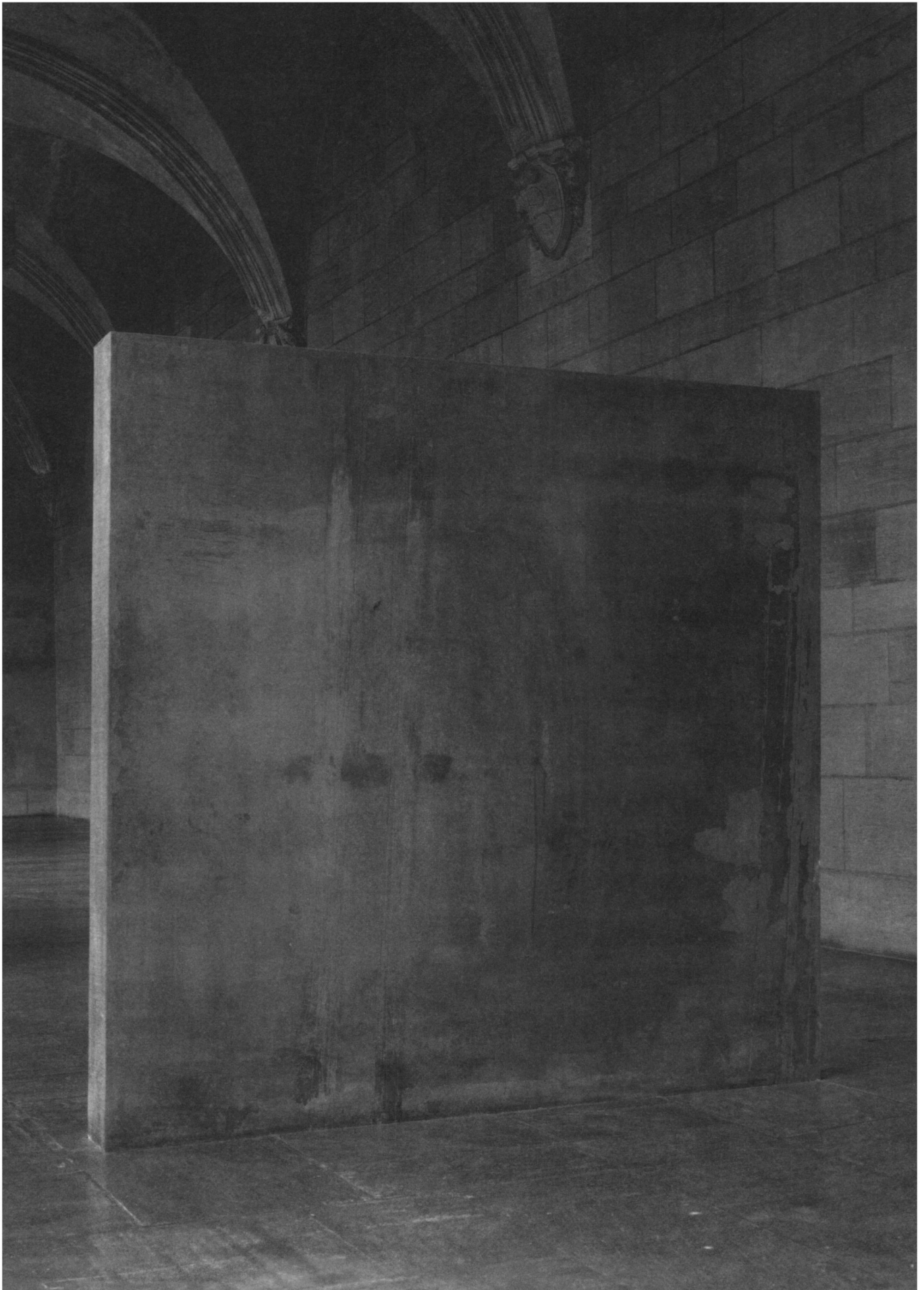
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Serra at Yale

RICHARD SERRA

In this essay I want to reflect on my personal history up to 1977. I cannot provide a linear depiction of who I am but rather will try to trace some fragments: memories retained, problems and questions posed, solutions attempted, contradictions confronted, changes that occurred in my development, and what accounts for those changes. I am aware, however, that analysis of personal history is always lacking, always insufficient to explain how or why work comes into being.

One of my earliest recollections is that of driving with my father, as the sun was coming up, across the Golden Gate Bridge. We were going to Marine Shipyard, where my father worked as a pipe fitter, to watch the launching of a ship. It was on my birthday in the fall of 1943. I was four. When we arrived, the black, blue, and orange steel-plated tanker was in weigh, balanced up on a perch. It was disproportionately horizontal and to a four-year-old it was like a skyscraper on its side. I remember walking the arc of the hull with my father, looking at the huge brass propeller, peering through the stays. Then, in a sudden flurry of activity, the shoring props, beams, planks, poles, bars,

keel blocks, all the dunnage was removed, the cables released, shackles dismantled, the come-alongs unlocked. There was a total incongruity between the displacement of this enormous tonnage and the quickness and agility with which the task was carried out. As the scaffolding was torn apart, the ship moved down the chute toward the sea; there were the accompanying sounds of celebration, screams, fog horns, shouts, whistles. Freed from its stays, the logs rolling, the ship slid off its cradle with an ever-increasing motion. It was a moment of tremendous anxiety as the oiler en route rattled, swayed, tipped, and bounced into the sea, half submerged, to then raise and lift itself and find its balance. Not only had the tanker collected itself, but the witnessing crowd collected itself as the ship went through a transformation from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure, free, afloat, and adrift. My awe and wonder of that moment remains. All the raw material that I needed is contained in the reserve of this memory.

At about the same time I began to draw to compete with my older brother for the affection of my parents. It was an activity that nourished — albeit unformed at the time — an interior life that both my parents supported. Every night after dinner I would draw with pencil on butcher paper; battle scenes of the second world war, fishing boats

Richard Serra, *Stacks*, 1990. Rolled steel, two elements, each 236 x 244 x 25 cm. The Katharine Ordway Fund. 1990.2.1

out on the ocean which I could see from my bedroom window, and animals of every description; our house was set in rolling sand dunes a half mile from the zoo. Personal history is subjective. It tries to verify that which it has lived, that which it has seen, that which it knows. In a sense our understanding of history is always autobiographical. Origins are important as a source for all of us no matter what we do. The joy of drawing at an early age gave me the confidence to have faith in my potential and to understand that imagination, and invention — private thoughts scribbled on paper — are instruments of knowledge. At this point precursors did not exist, marking was unmediated. The only person I had to insist on was myself. The concentrated effort that I could give to individual drawings provided a mental and physical place that gave me a sense of self and I trusted that something would come of it. Reinforcement, a positive response from my parents, teachers, classmates, was an encouragement that I sought. The more I received the more my need increased. Recognition can be motivation.

I understood that drawing was like writing in another language. I have never felt that drawing per se is inadequate as a device, even though I'm aware of its limitations and conventions. As an activity it is sufficient within itself and as such has nothing to do with any other mental or physical activity. It is the most conscious space in which I work. Drawing gives me an immediate return for my effort and the result is commensurate with my involvement. The give and take is instantaneous.

There are many modes of organizing perception and they constantly change in dominance, century by century, if not decade by decade. Drawing, photography, model making, writing, video, filmmaking, painting, sculpture, optics, mathematics, language, computer-generated images, or a combination of any and all of these, to name but a few, are applicable. There are no correct procedures, no qualitative prescriptions,

no assured strategies, just as there are no absolute standards for aesthetics; however, there are periods in history when particular ideas dominate. Starting with Duchamp, medium-specificity in the traditional sense was debunked along with any claim to autonomy. But no one artist ever changes the direction and procedures of art-making for successive generations. At the moment pluralism reigns with installation art being the most pervasive. The presentation usually takes the form of a media spectacle that mimics commercial display and marketing techniques. Installation art responds to an image-saturated consumer culture and more often than not resorts to entertainment strategies. The revamped iconography of surrealism still works to attract viewers. There is nothing cheaper than cheap surrealism. It too easily feeds an audience's desire for instant accessibility. Collage is usually the vehicle for the message. The proliferation of collage continues to mask the lack of structure in favor of a derivative pictorialism that exploits the easy juxtaposition of diverse materials for metaphorical effects. I have always mistrusted collage, with a few exceptions. Not all artists are interested in technocollage. There is ongoing interest in medium-specificity.

The possibility of understanding early influences that give form to later questions often arises out of ordinary, unexpected observations which at a young age you cannot explain. Direct experiences that confound you can pose unanswerable questions that remain with you; often they crystallize into well-defined thoughts that gnaw at you, that you cannot shake until you do something about them or with them. One such formative experience that I can easily recall — I am speaking of my life between ten and fifteen years of age — occurred while walking a two-mile stretch on the beach where the waves break and roll along the edge of the shore. On my way back along this stretch I would play the game of retracing my footprints in the sand. As I followed

my own tracks it brought the shoreline I had just passed into a new focus, in reverse of course, for what had been on the right was now on the left. It piqued my interest in that what I was looking at now was entirely different from what I had just seen. The experience of walking in one direction had little to do with the experience of walking in the reverse direction. Analyzing and questioning the contradictions in what one sees has remained a source for structuring thought. To see is a way of thinking, and conversely, to think is to see. An image of thought is not like a picture or a representation but rather an experience in relation to time, in relation to what has been and what's yet to come. Visual thought is often found in the voice of memory. The problem becomes one of how to activate memory and make buried material available, to learn how to re-scan what has been rejected or suppressed. If memory is to function recollections must be triggered again and again to rediscover the trail of forgotten footprints. However, latent memories, those that you don't consciously attempt to recall, often act as a catalyst in a given context or in relation to the specifics of an object, a material, or emotion. I depend on walking and looking, simple observation. Observation melds into memory. In a sense perception becomes instantaneous memory. The interrelationship between direct experience, observation, analysis, and memory for me constitutes the basis for invention. When I imply that invention occurs due to that interrelationship I don't mean to characterize the dynamic as a simple causality. Perception and recollection are interdependent.

There was one particular incident that became an epiphany of sorts in that it radically changed the course of my work. When I was in my early twenties while living in Florence on a Fulbright grant, I made a trip to Madrid to visit the Prado, where I first encountered Velazquez. The painting left me dumbfounded, and the more I thought about it the more confused I became. The painting opened up countless interpreta-



Fig. 1. Diego Rodriguez Velazquez (1599–1660). *Las Meninas* (with Velazquez' self-portrait) or *the Family of Philip IV*, 1656. Oil on canvas, 276 x 318 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid. Photo: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

tions, none of which seemed to answer the questions posed by its perspective. On the drive back from Madrid to Florence I could not stop thinking about the space of the painting. I could not grasp its construction, especially in relationship to the location of the two figures, the royal couple, appearing almost dead center in the mirror. Assuming that they are the subject of the painting, in the painting they can only be situated by projection into the actual space, that is, the space where I stood looking at the painting. In effect, I had become implicated in the painting as a surrogate for the subject of the painting on the easel, and Velazquez is definitely looking at me. Then there is the figure in the stairway seen through the open door to the right of the mirror at the upper far rear where the light is being admitted, who is looking out at me and looking at the painting

in the painting. At one point I found myself attempting to project from this spectator's location: looking at the backs of everyone while essentially looking at myself, while I am simultaneously looking at everyone in the painting frontally: double voyeurism.

There is a circuitry set up in the space which I could not comprehend unless I thought about the literal canvas as a spatial split, that means the canvas functioning as a cross-section through the actual space in front and the illusionistic space behind. What I took away in my mind's eye was not an image but a space consisting of the illusionistic space of the painting and the projected space in front of it, two volumes juxtaposed, two rooms, here and there and over there and here. This concept of space differs radically from traditional strategies that implicate the viewer in the content of a painting. In this instance my location in front of the painting became part of the space of the painting.

This concept of space implied something other than painting: a model for thought that challenged my notion of the viewer and the viewed, or more precisely the relationship between subject and object. The painting forces you to self-consciously participate in its reflection by including you on an equal footing within its space. Finally, this painting does not attempt to represent real space but rather sets up a perspective model with all its built-in contradictions and artifices exposed if not exaggerated. Far from understanding or fully grasping its meaning, the painting helped me to see and to question the shift between subject and object.

This shift between subject and object became an issue for me — if not the main issue — that began to preoccupy my thoughts. The problem that the space of *Las Meninas* posed became an obsession. It was not Velazquez's virtuosity nor the poetic breath of the statement that challenged me. I returned to Florence and immediately threw all my canvasses in the Arno and began to juxtapose stuffed animals and live animals

in cages. My initial steps into the reality of three-dimensional space had begun and my painting days were definitely over.

At a certain point it was necessary for me to construct a language based on a system that would establish a series of conditions that would enable me to work in an unanticipated manner and provoke the unexpected. I wanted to be able to involve myself in a process of working without having to project an outcome while at the same time trying to determine the limits of an idea. When you deal rigorously with process, you don't concern yourself with the end result. I decided to write down a list of verbs and enact them as designated activities in relationship to material, place, mass, gravity. I was going to use anything in relationship to anything as long as it was attached to a verb.

THE LIST:

to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to dapple, to crumple, to shave, to tear, to chip, to split, to cut, to sever, to drop, to remove, to simplify, to differ, to disarrange, to open, to mix, to splash, to knot, to spell, to droop, to flow, to curve, to lift, to inlay, to impress, to fire, to flood, to smear, to rotate, to swirl, to support, to hook, to suspend, to spread, to hang, to collect —

of tension, of gravity, of entropy, of nature, of grouping, of layering, of felting —

to grasp, to tighten, to bundle, to heap, to gather, to scatter, to arrange, to repair, to discard, to pair, to distribute, to surfeit, to complement, to enclose, to surround, to encircle, to hide, to cover, to wrap, to dig, to tie, to bind, to weave, to join, to match, to laminate, to bond, to hinge, to mark, to expand, to dilute, to light, to modulate, to distill —

of waves, of electromagnetic, of inertia, of ionization, of polarization, of refraction,

of simultaneity, of tides, of reflection, of equilibrium, of symmetry, of friction —
 to stretch, to bounce, to erase, to spray, to systematize, to refer, to force —
 of mapping, of location, of context, of time, of carbonization —
 to continue.

The Verb List established a logic whereby the process that constituted a sculpture remains transparent. Anyone can reconstruct the process of the making by viewing the residue. The sculptures resulting from the Verb List introduced two aspects of time: the condensed time of their making and the durational time of their viewing.

Both tasks and materials were ordinary. I was tearing lead in place, lifting rubber in place, rolling and propping lead sheets and melting lead and splashing it against the juncture between wall and floor. It was experimental and playful. It wasn't the question of how to accomplish this or that, nor was it the question of making it up as I went along, but it was rather a free-floating combination of both. I cannot overemphasize the need for play, for in play you don't extract yourself from the activity. In order to invent I felt it necessary to make art a practice of affirmative play or conceptual experimentation. The ambiguity of play and its transitional character provides a suspension of belief whereby a shift in direction is possible when faced with a complexity that you don't understand. Free from skepticism, play relinquishes control. However, even in play the

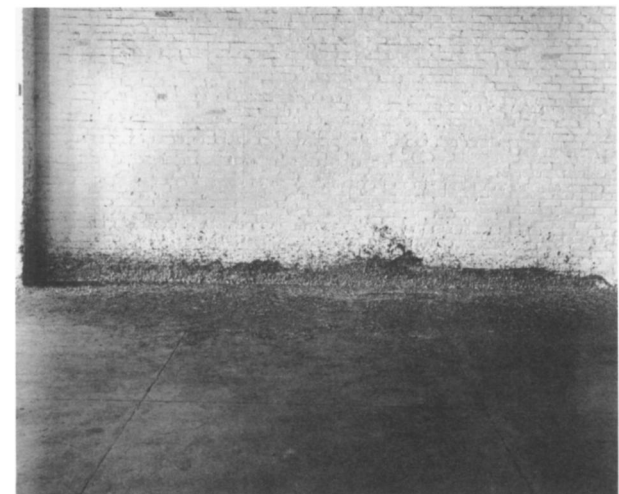
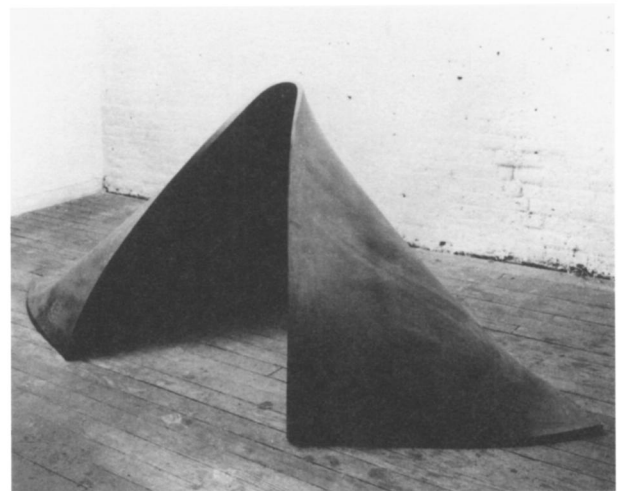
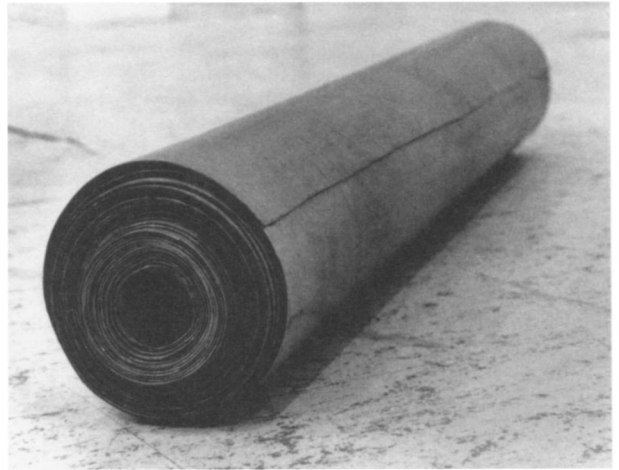


Fig. 2. *Thirty Five Feet of Lead Rolled Up*, 1968. Lead, approx. 152 x 731 cm. Private collection, Chicago. Photo: Peter Moore.

Fig. 3. *To Lift*, 1967. Vulcanized rubber, 91.4 x 203.2 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo: Peter Moore.

Fig. 4. *Splashing*, 1968. Lead, 548.6 x 792.5 cm. Installed Castelli warehouse, New York. Photo: Harry Shunk.

task must be carried out with conviction. It's how we do what we do that confers meaning on what we have done.

One of the problems that I have observed in teaching is that it often tends to repress anything resembling play. That is one reason why teaching becomes academic.

The "nonsense" of play and its sheer pleasure does not exclude a certain paradox: Need I take a self-reflective, distancing look at what I am doing or continue to play? The paradox arises when you start contemplating whether to disengage from the experimental and make distinctions or judgments, or to accept all transitional outcomes as satisfactory. I wanted to dissociate the intention of the action from any a priori designation of meaning. It was a method to attack the orthodoxy of the dictates of form-making. I ended up with a variety of residues on the floor and against the wall of my studio. During the process I had not made any distinctions since I was laboring under the assumption that anything goes. I did not consider how the results of the process would look, and I had a difficult time even later when trying to apply aesthetic judgment. Recognition takes time. The fact that process takes precedence over results does not necessarily guarantee that something new will emerge. Transgression is difficult to visualize let alone conceptualize. Transgression usually occurs through practice not theory.

After I had been experimenting for two years, I had time to analyze and sort out what I thought was worth pursuing. There are solutions that occur in the process of experimentation that make more sense than others, namely those that rely on the greatest economy of means and depart from established norms. Some solutions are obvious in their resoluteness. Looking back at the *Scatter Pieces* and *Tearing Pieces* I realized that I was still laboring in the pictorial convention of figure-ground. From above, the floor could be viewed as a flat canvas and the elements on it as figural. The material that was dispersed did not address the problems

posed by elevation. Here arises the contradiction in experimentation. Experimentation does not automatically rid the work of the traditional and inconsequential.

I began to realize that working with gravity as a force was a way to attack the stability of form. I decided to establish conditions of gravitational balance where the necessity for every part in a structure was self-evident and where there were no fixed joints. In terms of the logic of traditional methods the working process was unregulated, for sculpture had never been constructed with the apparent potential for collapse where the proposition to do also contained the condition to undo. Gravity is both a structuring and a de-structuring force. Forms can be held in an arrested motion when opposing gravitational forces are in equilibrium. Gravity as a structuring device allowed for countless unknown configurations. The learning process was predicated solely on doing and making. "The things we truly know are those that we make ourselves, or discover or experience ourselves." This aphorism attributed to Vico is an axiom that I subscribe to. Often common sense in decision-making must be put aside to allow new connections to occur and to allow for possibilities that do not already exist. There are moments when you need to see your work anew to "un"-familiarize yourself with what you are doing in order to avoid your blind spots.

Employing gravity teaches great lessons in structural dynamics. It becomes obvious that the transmission of load-bearing need not relate only to the perpendicular. There is a vast range in systems of energy transfer from compression, to tension, to oblique forces, to the cantilever, to the gravitational principles of topological surface organization and their load-bearing capacities. The tectonics of the lead props rely upon and reveal the most basic of engineering principles, which are stability and instability, balance and the tendency to overturn. Pieces such as *The Blob* and *To Lift* demonstrate the effect of gravitational forces on a flexible sheet of

rubber. I have consistently attempted to make tectonics transparent, not as an ethical or logical imperative but as a matter of the common sense of building. Principles of construction that fulfill their function under given limitations are open to anyone's inspection. I am not concerned with engineering tectonics for art's sake. Spectacular tectonics either fetishize detail or overemphasize the scenography of structure as an end in itself as evident particularly in postmodern architecture.

Perception, thinking, doing are historically bound and differ for each of us. The nostalgic notion of the blank page, of the empty canvas, is a bogus idea. It's an illusion to think that we can clear away history and start with a clean slate, although experimentation might be a way to avoid the dilemma. It is the function of art in particular to open up unseen ways of seeing. Rebelling against history is no different than rebelling against your own acknowledged solutions. However, our capacity to calculate alternative solutions is limited by our antecedents and conditioned by them to the degree that new meanings are often obscured. You might say overcoming history is the same as overcoming self-imposed restrictions. It is important how one values solutions. Solutions are temporal, and every solution contains the kernel of the next problem. Work comes out of work. Critical skepticism, analyzing contradictions while you are working, can lead to a loss of confidence. This can be a productive loss in that it opens the possibility of recasting problems from a new vantage point or reevaluating the rules to find a way out of a given limitation.

Let me give you an example: The initial *Splash Piece* involved melting approximately half a ton of lead and ladling it into the juncture between the wall and the floor over a thirty-five-foot length. Subsequent works followed the same procedure, with the difference that after the lead hardened it was overturned and removed away from the wall, one cast after the other. At one point I decided

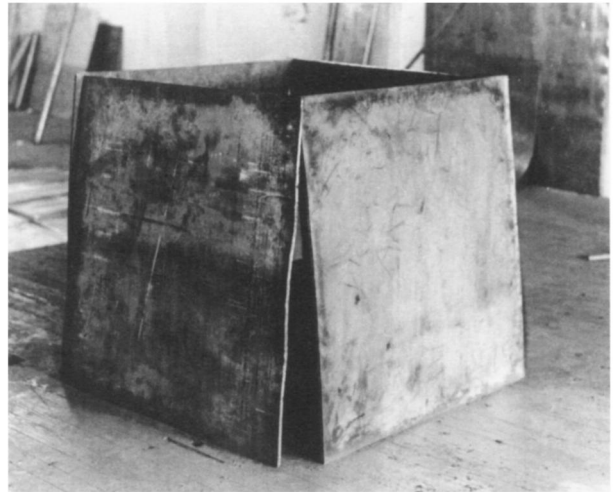


Fig. 5. *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)*, 1969. Lead antimony, four plates, each 122 x 122 x 2.5 cm. Collection: Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the Grinstein family, Los Angeles.

Fig. 6. *I-I-I-I*, 1969. Lead antimony; four plates, each 122 x 122 x 2.5 cm; pole: 213 cm. Collection: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen, Dusseldorf. Photo: Peter Moore.

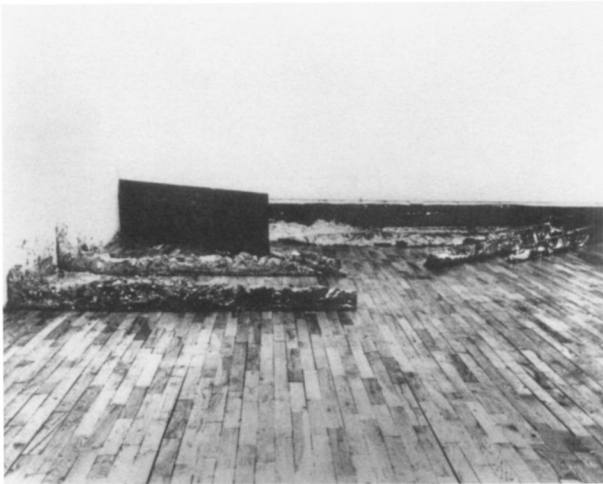


Fig. 7. *Splash Piece: Casting*, 1969–70. Lead, 48.3 x 274.3 x 454.7 cm. Collection: Jasper Johns, New York.

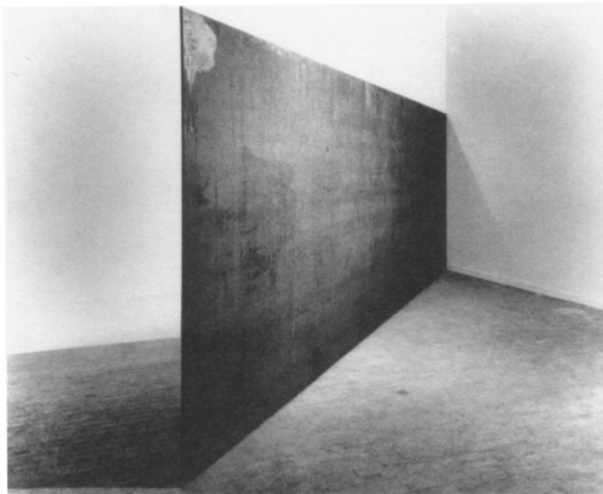


Fig. 8. *Strike: To Roberta and Rudy*, 1969–71. Hot rolled steel, 243.8 x 731.5 x 2.5 cm. Collection Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Photo: Peter Moore.

to cast the floor and wall space of a corner. Having decided to cast the corner, I could foresee a contradiction that was going to arise. The overturned right-angular casts would mirror the corner and delineate a square or a rectangle on the floor. I didn't want to make a form that would read as an object. I thought I had found an alternative solution by propping a small lead plate—one foot by about four feet—into and bisecting the corner in order to cast against it and thus overturn forty-five-degree triangles. But in so doing I had interfered with the purity of the process. By introducing the lead plate I was adding an external element to the conceptual framework of the proposition, which gave me serious doubts. However, what I found was that once the plate was wedged into the corner, bisecting the corner, the plate remained freestanding. Once I thought it through I understood that I could use the plate device to construct not only the space of the corner but also the space of the room, to declare the entire room as the space of the work. The lead plate propped into the corner was a structural device that introduced the possibility for a major shift in scale and material. If there is doubt, if you are suspect, your anxiety will feed your appetite, your aspiration. Doubt as an attitude is produced by a desire for change; consequently the content of your doubt continually changes. Once you stop doubting you might as well stop working.

I realized in 1970 that my studio days were behind me. I needed industrial riggers to accomplish the task of erecting *Strike*, which meant moving a steel plate—eight by twenty-four feet, one inch thick—into a corner. You might be asking yourself, where did this guy get the nerve to make a shift from a small lead plate to moving several tons of steel? The answer is simple enough: I had worked summers in steel mills when I was seventeen and eighteen years old and had no fear of handling large plate. The lead plate that had so annoyed me as an excess in the context of the *Casting* piece led to a series

of steel corner-plate room installations that completely altered my aspirations. It opened up the venue of large-scale site-specific installations.

It was already obvious to me and everyone else regarding the molten-lead splash pieces which were ladled into the juncture of wall and floor that they were site-specific and to remove them was to destroy them. The site was integral to the work and I pursued that aspect with the steel-plate installations. I don't want to elaborate at this point on the problems that site-specificity can cause, the extreme being the destruction of *Tilted Arc*. Suffice to say that there is always going to be a contract between the producer and the client and there is no way around the circuitry of a social or political power structure. To realize urban and landscape sculptures I understood that without institutional or private support I would be confined to studio production. It was Joe Pulitzer who in 1969 commissioned the first site-specific landscape piece allowing an untested, untried, unknown young artist to build a permanent work on three acres of land in St. Louis. This opportunity allowed for a breakthrough that I could not have foreseen.

Prior to working on the Pulitzer project I had spent the better part of six weeks in Japan studying the Zen temples and gardens of Myoshin-ji in Kyoto. The primary characteristic of both the temples and the stone gardens is that the paths around and through them are curvilinear. The geometry of the plan prompts walking in arcs. The articulation of discrete elements within the field and the sense of the field as a whole emerge only by constant walking and looking. Other temple gardens are laid out to be seen from a viewing porch. But once again the entirety of the garden landscape is revealed only as one walks the length of the viewing platform. In all instances perception is based on time, motion, and meditation. The Japanese gardens and temples reflect the concept of *UJI*, or *being time*, wherein the fusion of space and time is fluid and in permanent



Fig. 9. *Tilted Arc*, 1981. Weatherproof steel, 365.8 x 3657.6 x 6.4 cm. Collection: General Services Administration, Washington, D.C., installed Federal Plaza, New York, destroyed 1989.

Fig. 10. *Pulitzer Piece: Stepped Elevations* (detail), 1970–71. Weatherproof steel, 3 plates: 152.4 x 1226.8 x 6.4 cm, 152.4 x 1399.5 x 6.4 cm, 152.4 x 1541.8 x 6.4 cm. Collection Emily Pulitzer, St. Louis. Photo: Shunk-Kender, New York.

flux. Void and solid are seen as one in the same and experienced as *MA*, as the sense of the simultaneity of all existence. A parallel to this concept can be found in the phenomenology of perception or preobjective experience as articulated in existentialist philosophy of which the Minimalists as well as the artists of my generation were well aware.

Kyoto defined my way of seeing. The perceptual space of the Zen garden reveals the landscape as a total field, its organization based on the assumption of a perpetually moving viewer. In these gardens the meaning of form can be derived only from movement, from the rhythm of the body. The focus is never on the isolated sculptural object but on the syncretistic complexity of the whole. This concept of space is essentially different from the traditional Western concept that is based on central perspective arranging all objects on converging lines emanating from the eye of a static viewer. After visiting Kyoto the necessity of dealing with landscape in terms of the totality of the field — not simply in terms of placing an autonomous object in the field but seeing things amongst things — gave rise to new meanings, became the issue. At that time I did not know how I was going to translate my experience of the Zen gardens into my work. I had a great admiration for both Heizer and Smithson, who were breaking new ground in sculpture while continuing an involvement with the American landscape that had begun with Thoreau and Whitman, followed by the painters of the Hudson River School and countless American landscape photographers. I was not drawn to the romanticism of that tradition. Fresh from Japan I had other ideas.

In all my landscape pieces I want to establish a dialectic between one's perception of the place in totality and one's relation to the field as walked. The result is a way of measuring oneself against the indeterminacy of the land. No matter which elements I use — blocks or plates — they always relate to continually shifting horizons in the topology of the land. The edges of the sculptural ele-

ments establish a horizontal measure and cut into the vision of space. The cut is not a cut that defines the limits and shape of an object in space; the cut is a cut into space against which one perceives volumes and voids in the context of the land and establishes a relationship of the body to the horizon and beyond. Meaning arises from the perception of a viewer moving across and through the context of the land. The indeterminacy of the shifting horizons and elevations never coalesces into one defining image. There is no closure to the experience. There is no hierarchy of views, no center, no inside, no outside. There is no single privileged location from which best to understand the work. Space and time become functions of each other. Space and movement become inseparable from each other.

This is probably the least known aspect of my work but it may be the most consequential.

In order to organize ways of structuring the landscape I needed to rely on procedures that would enable me to react to the specifics of the elevation. The process of organization invariably starts with viewing the landscape in relation to a network of horizons and perspectives. Walking and looking sometimes takes several days, other times it means revisiting the site time and again over years. My personal analysis of the site is followed by a professional survey of the land for the purpose of producing a topographical map. The topographical map has proven to be an invaluable tool, for the map measures and gives a precise scale to the specificity of a particular area of land. Once in hand elevations and distances can be correlated to perception. The directional flow and undulation of the land can be analyzed over the entirety of the distance and down to the precise location of single points.

Building site-specific works on private or public land poses problems hard to solve, consequences difficult to accept. Those who commission site-specific works — and there are few — want contractual assurances that



Fig. 11. *Snake Eyes and Boxcars*, 1993. Forged weatherproof steel, 12 blocks, 6: 213.4 x 104.4 x 104.4 cm, 6: 121.9 x 104.4 x 104.4 cm. Private collection, Alexander Valley, California. Photo: Dirk Reinartz, Buxtehude.

the work can be demolished if the land is sold and the next buyer wants to use it for a different purpose. It is a dilemma that one must accept if one wants to build site-specific works in private and public sites. I learned in the federal court that property rights supersede an artist's right to protect a work from destruction. Yet I still seek opportunities to realize site-specific projects and continue to live with the contradictions and problems they pose. I have never shared the romance of building works in the remote landscape. I have never found that satisfying. I would rather have the actual experience of the work at urban scale. I made a definite decision early on to avoid isolated sites. I prefer to be more vulnerable and deal with the reality of my living situation, which is urban.

I made my first effort to build in an urban context in 1970 with a work at 183rd Street and Webster in the Bronx. I embedded a circle of steel angle, twenty-six feet in diameter, into the asphalt. *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram, Right Angles Inverted* has



Fig. 12. *To Encircle Base Plate Measure: Right Angles Inverted*, 1970. Steel, DIAM. 792.5 cm; rim 20.3 cm. Temporary installation: 183rd and Webster Ave., The Bronx, New York. Collection: St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis. Photo: Peter Moore.

since been removed. The sculpture was placed in a dead-end, leftover street in a broken-down neighborhood. The only nearby housing was a block away. Except for wrecked cars there were open lots and empty space. There was no public. The only “public” use of the site was by local criminals who torched stolen cars. The art audience never made it to Webster Avenue. But even in being problematic the work in the Bronx clarified some basic issues: context, audience, property rights.

Terminal was the first permanent work that functioned in an urban context. It is a vertical construction of four identical trapezoidal steel plates, forty-one feet high, tilted on their axis. The sculpture is located in Bochum, a city in the industrial Ruhr region of Germany. One condition that I always look for in the placement of works in an urban context is a density of traffic flow. *Terminal's* location is ideal. It is placed on a traffic island adjacent to the streetcar tracks that front the railroad station. The sculpture interacts with streetcar, bus, as well as pedestrian traffic into and out of the station. *Terminal* was also the first sculpture which caused a political uproar after it was built. It split the city along party lines and engendered a dialogue that had more to do with politics than art. It also provoked public commentary graffitied onto the steel plates. Both the politicization of art as well as a particular form of public commentary are often hard to accept but are part and parcel of placing work in public sites. Site-specific interventions in public places produce new relationships within a given context. New perceptual experiences ask for a new behavioral orientation to a site and demand a new critical adjustment to one's relationship to the place. This process takes different manifestations reflecting the differences in a given public. Reception varies in terms of locale and is impossible to predict. Public reactions can amount to assault, political reactions can lead to destruction. We are all biased and have built-in prejudices, and based on those

have already concluded what is to be seen and what is not to be seen. If it is decided beforehand that a work will mean nothing to you, you will not be able to see it. This is the basis for censorship at every level. One way to escape this is a retreat to the sanctity of museums, but they carry their own set of contradictions. The major contradiction that I continue to live with, however, is that I want my work protected and preserved if possible, but I do not want to achieve this at the expense of losing public dialogue and interaction with urban conditions.

I consider space to be my medium. The articulation of space has come to take precedence over other concerns. I attempt to use sculptural form to make space distinct. I want to emphasize that I am not interested in form as pure abstraction. I am interested in form as a conjunction between space and matter. Matter, any material whatsoever, imposes its own form on form. To me Kahn's brick is still relevant.

Having chosen industrial steel as material requires that I employ the practices and procedures of the industrial process. I admit the work is disruptive. However, I want to direct the consciousness of the viewer to the realities of the conditions: private, public, political, formal, ideological, economic, psychological, commercial, sociological, institutional — or any of these combined. One way of making space distinct is to ground the spectator in the reality of the context. For me, the emphasis is on the work's ability to achieve this in sculptural terms. My response to a context is to use sculptural means that both reveal and are relevant to the connotative specifics of the context. Thought often arises from the physical conditions of a given context; in effect, places engender thoughts. Thoughts and ideas that derive from the experience of a specific context are different from abstract concepts that don't. You have to make connections while evaluating your experience within the specifics of the context: thinking on your feet, so to speak.



Fig. 13. *Terminal*, 1977. Weatherproof steel, 4 trapezoidal plates, each 1249.7 x 365.8 to 274.3 (irregular) x 6.4 cm. Collection: City of Bochum, Germany. Photo: Alexander von Berswordt-Wallrabe, Bochum.