X-SCREEN
Film Installations and Actions
in the 1960s and 1970s

Edited by

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The Expanded Field of Cinema, or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square
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Re: "The History We Need"

At the end of the 1970s, Malcolm Le Grice issued an urgent call to the avant-garde film community of "involved practitioners." It was time, he wrote, to step up to the plate and claim "the history we need."[1] Le Grice was writing from a double vantage-point, as a productive member of the avant-garde film world and a prolific chronicler of its history. The article "The History We Need" was the filmmaker's contribution to the catalogue of a major exhibition, Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910–1975, which presented a rare occasion to survey the history of avant-garde film within a museum context.[2]

Despite the frequent intersections between the art and film world during the preceding two decades, it is safe to say that film had always remained a stepchild of the gallery system. Le Grice thus must have been pleased with this sudden surge of attention from museum quarters. However, he also expressed clear misgivings about what he called the didactic, liberal mission of the museum, which is directed toward a non-committal, general public. Le Grice was troubled by a process of historicization that threatened to overrun a living tradition of filmmaking by fixing the relation of the past to the present, and suggested that a polemical stance had to be taken to resist the restrictive workings of such an apparatus of cultural administration: "*The History We Need* implies a recognition that a neutral and inclusive history is broadly impossible and that the historical enterprise should be aimed at aiding the development of contemporary practice."[3] Against the leveling of differences and contradictions within the

history of avant-garde film, therefore, Le Grice proposed maintaining a critical stance that views its relation to the past as permanently under construction and driven by the present needs of "involved practitioners." A polemical attitude needed to be adopted to prevent the avant-garde from entering a post-historical stage.

Why return to this moment? Is Le Grice's situation still the same as our own? There are clearly many reasons that prevent me from occupying the same discursive position that Le Grice did in 1979, beyond the mere question of our different professions. For one, I do not fully share his distrust of the workings of the museum, but understand the relation between the avant-garde and the museum in other, more dialectical terms. Nevertheless, I do find myself sympathizing with the filmmaker's dislike of any attempt to create a comprehensive picture of avant-garde history that ignores the inconsistencies and unfinished character of the avant-garde's project in the past to insure its direct continuity with the present.[4] The return *to* the past from the present and the return *of* the past in the present are never complete, but an interminable task of present-day critique.

In adopting Le Grice's problematization, I am clearly redirecting its aim. I am here faced with a museum exhibition, X-Screen, that presents a long overdue survey of the expansion of the field of cinematic projection. In no way am I suggesting that it duplicates the curatorial thesis of Film as Film. What this exhibition delivers—here not unlike Film as Film—is a cross-section of filmic practices that have never before been shown in

this combination. We are thus challenged to figure a way of mapping this dispersion without enforcing a false sense of homogeneity within a field of radically heterogeneous objects. This field might be termed "expanded cinema," but as I will show, this field shall come to cover more than is traditionally understood by that name.[5] Furthermore, to remain in the spirit of Le Grice, the mapping of such an historical terrain must be based on a "polemical" method that traces the movement of contradiction and dissent. In other words, this terrain needs to be shaped into a discursive field structured by a set of contrasting, enunciatory positions. It is from our place in the present, however, that the contours of such a discursive field will become intelligible. I am not offering an intellectual history of the period. What I do have to offer, instead, is a constellation of possible relations between objects, practices, and institutions that developed in the periphery of expanded cinema during the later 1960s and early 1970s. My argument is nevertheless intended at this stage to suggest no more than a provisional "order of things," and I shall take the liberty of ranging across a plurality of works and texts, leaving a more detailed examination of my examples for a future date.

Le Grice's text located one possible position within the discursive field in question. He identifies avant-garde film with an exploration of the fundamental limitations and properties of the film medium.[6] Film as Film was organized to provide a comprehensive overview of this "formalist" tradition. Le Grice did not disagree with the show's main thesis that avant-garde film adopted its formalist model of autonomy from a modernist practice of the visual arts.[7] In fact, formalist film could be seen as having saved modernism from total shipwreck, since the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s had already abandoned a modernist concern with the formal purity of the medium.[8]

The formalist story of the avant-garde is that of the radical negation of mass culture. Avant-garde film thus founded its proper identity on a complete rejection of commercial narrative film, the so-called "classical Hollywood cinema." Yet in all fairness to Le Grice, he was growing uncomfortable with this formalist story by 1979. He showed a concern that much of the current work by avant-garde film-makers contained the risk of turning into "simply recuperable formalist exercises."[9] Le Grice further argued that it was necessary to acknowledge that the very proposition of an autonomous film practice rested on historical conditions. The social function of institutions needed to become as much the focus of critique as the properties of the medium, according to the film-maker. Here, a hopeful sign could be found in the then contemporary shift away from anti-narrative tactics towards a greater concern with narrative structures and the activation of the spectator. In this context, Le Grice asked whether "all aspects of narrative are irrevocably embroiled with the repressive social function it has come to serve?"[10] I shall return to this question of narrativity in my postscript, but I would like to provide a few preliminary comments on the importance of this participatory role or "structuring act" (Le Grice) of the spectator, which I shall refer to as a performative model or strategy of filmmaking.

The performative strategy of the avant-garde may be profoundly absent from the formalist account of avant-garde film, but it had always been a prominent feature of the historical avant-garde, as in the Dadaist performances at the Cabaret Voltaire or Marcel Duchamp's gesture of 'selecting' a ready-made. It should thus not be surprising that in the neo-avant-garde circles of Fluxus a new prototype of performative film was quickly established at the outset of the 1960s. Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* (1964) fulfilled this

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role, although it was not widely recognized as such at the time.[11] This work consists of a roll of 16mm clear leader that increasingly accumulates scratches and dust with each successive projection. These markings on the film emulsion become automatically part of the next presentation, making each viewing of *Zen for Film* unique. At the same time, the film will never show more than what is literally present in the room.

Zen for Film suggests that performative film abolishes the purely reproductive function of film by activating the spectator as a participant and drawing attention to the actual context of the film screening. Many of the films in the X-Screen exhibition deploy the same performative strategy as *Zen for Film*, like Dan Graham's *Body Press* or Bruce Nauman's *Rotating Glass Walls*.[12] We may speak, therefore, of a performative series within the recent history of alternative film (to which I reckon both Le Grice's avant-garde, expanded cinema, and the so-called artist's film). Each of these films, moreover, literalizes the gallery space through their use of multiple walls as projective surfaces. Graham's *Body Press*, in particular, demands a room of a certain shape and size that will mirror the compressed situation of the original performers in the film.

This brings us to a basic problem that emerges from a formalist paradigm of avant-garde film: it cannot clearly think through its relation to institutional conditions. Clearly, another genealogy of film might be written that considers the possible *usages* of film for the avant-garde at large. In other words, what we need is a history of avant-garde practices of film, rather than a history of the discipline of avant-garde film. We should not forget, for instance, that in 1964 Nam June Paik operated primarily within the context of the visual arts, even though his work existed on its margins. Most significant, however, is the fact that the artist did not care to present the profes-sional profile of a filmmaker. As a result there is no place for *Zen for Film* within the conventional histories of avant-garde film. Before I consider in greater detail what such an alternative genealogy of film practices might look like, let me note a particular ambivalence of the formalist position as it surfaces in Le Grice's text that is directly relevant to our present topic. He intimates that he has certain misgivings about the art world, yet he acknowledges that the history of avant-garde film in which he includes himself is dependent on the history of modernism. The art context thus first comes into view as a legitimizing or validating framework, and second as providing a convenient space where an "exploration of presentation and projection formats" (i.e. expanded cinema projects) might take place.[13] But he concludes in 1979 that "neither the current institution surrounding cinema nor that related to the presentation of the plastic arts has forms which suit such a concept of presentation."[14] I would counter, however, that his reliance on a formalist model of the avant-garde leads to the fatal omission of a fundamental aspect of the avant-garde project, that is, the development of a highly *concrete* mode of institutional critique.[15]

This discussion begins to give greater form to the problem with which we are currently faced, a problem that I consider twofold in nature. On the one hand, there is the question of avant-garde trajectories. For instance, we might ask of the artists assembled here whether they all traveled down an identical path in order to arrive at the same place? To argue for the existence of a familial relation between works on the basis of mere morphological similarities can easily lead one astray. On the other hand, our problem concerns the question of institutional context. For what kind of site were these works designed, we might ask. Yet this question should not automatically lead to the conclusion that the frame determines

the work. It is the frame as such that many of the works problematize. To provide two examples: Marcel Broodthaers' *Le corbeau et le renard* and David Lamelas' *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)* point to a complex network of shifting relations between the public spheres of the gallery and the information media. I shall not be able to take up such issues in relation to all the works present, nor shall I pretend to be exhaustive in my discussion of the works I do mention. All the same, by the end of our exercise I hope to have at least answered Le Grice's call, which still echoes in the present.

The Forks in the Road

Is the formalist version of avant-garde film the only historical narrative available to us? Obviously the answer must be no. There is, for instance, the more compelling narrative of "The Two Avant-Gardes," the title of an influential essay by Peter Wollen first published in the pages of *Studio International* in December 1975.[16] In his text, Wollen distinguished a political branch of the avant-garde from a formalist branch. The former tradition of avant-garde film was founded in the era of Soviet cinema with Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, and returned in the sixties in the work of filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard. The political avant-garde, as Wollen argues, was not committed so much to the presentation of an alternative worldview, but to the development of a politics of the signifier, which could subvert the mediation of meaning within the dominant systems of publicity. It is clear that a linguistic model of critique was of the order of the day, and Wollen identifies in films such as Godard's *Le gai savoir* (1968) a semiotic counter-strategy that subjects the ideological process of signification to an analytic of deconstruction and re-combination. Wollen's strategic model of the sixties avant-garde relies particularly on Julia Kristeva's notion

of intertextuality, but in general it works off the dualism between "text" and the "visual," while obviously privileging the former term within the binary set.

The "language" of cinema, Wollen argues, constitutes the front upon which the symbolic order of capitalism might be contested, while a formalist or purely "optical" cinema will remain mired within the realm of the imaginary. (The same argument operated within the contemporary field of conceptual art, which literally replaced abstract painting by printed panels). Wollen thus accepts the exclusive association of the formalist tradition of avant-garde film with the essentialism of modernist painting. The formalist film avant-garde started out imitating the effects of painting, as in the abstractions of Oskar Fischinger, but was ultimately pushed into a position of radical self-referentiality or tautology: film-as-film. At this point, the totality of avant-garde history stands to become absorbed within a formalist framework. Wollen goes so far as to suggest, for instance, that Vertov's films are exclusively valued as an example of "pure film" within the American context of the 1960s—a somewhat hasty conclusion, as we shall see.

"The Two Avant-Gardes" does address—if only briefly—the institutional and economic framework in which the filmmakers produce and distribute their work. Wollen notes that the political avant-garde remains more dependent on the existing commercial institutions and a collective form of production, which is seen as its strength and not as a form of co-optation from the perspective of a formalist position. The strategy of the political avant-garde, in other words, implies that the institution of cinema needs to be subverted, if not defeated, on its own terrain, while the formalist avant-garde views any interaction with the commercial system as a form of defeat. The formalist avant-garde, therefore, organized
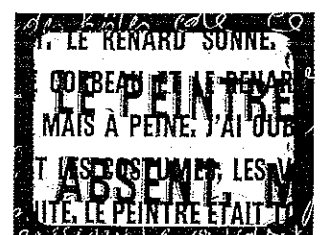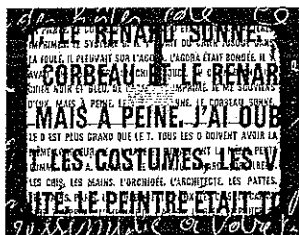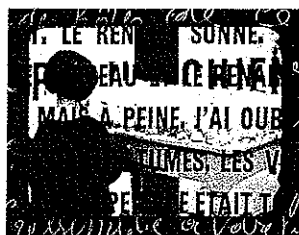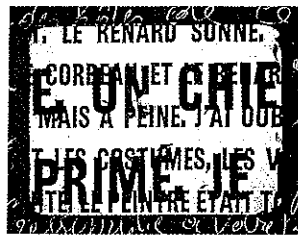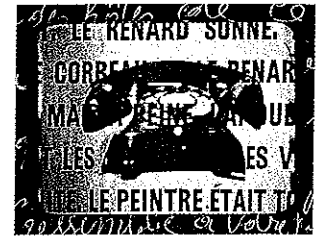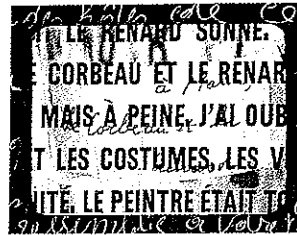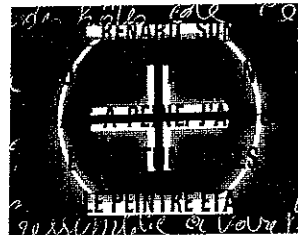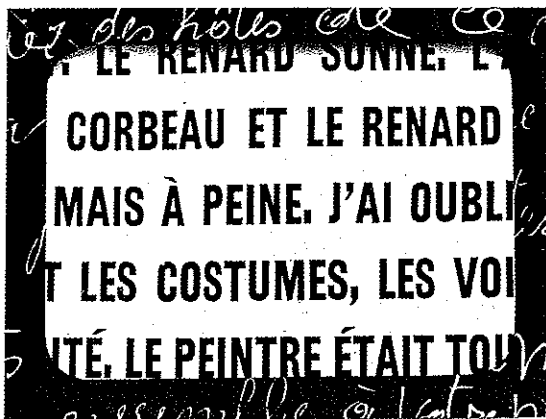
122 Marcel Broodthaers, *Le Corbeau et le Renard*, 1967
Photo: Maria Gilissen, Courtesy of La Fondation Broodthaers

its own institutions of production and distribution, such as film festivals, film houses, and co-ops, which were not only established in opposition to commercial cinema, but also created a widening rift with the art world. Nevertheless, the formalist tradition continued to rely on notions of artisanship and authorship that derived from the modernist practice of the visual arts.

In sum, Wollen demonstrates that there is an uneven development of the two avant-gardes, which have become detached at the ideological and institutional level of production and reception. This observation leads Wollen to a rather pessimistic conclusion. It would be desirable, he admits, to bring about a convergence of the two avant-garde traditions, but such an event is highly unlikely; due to the vast differences between the two avant-gardes, such a wish can only remain a utopian dream.

Must this be the case? Let there be no mistake: Wollen's essay made an indispensable contribution to the 1970s debate on the intersection of the fields of film and art by helping to resuscitate another model of the avant-garde.[17] However, "The Two Avant-Gardes" also reproduces certain blind spots that were already endemic to the formalist model it so resolutely opposes. Wollen acknowledges the importance of grounding the avant-garde in a specific institutional context; otherwise it may seem that the avant-garde is only engaged in a free play of the signifier, rather than investigating a politics of the sign. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that in discussing the intertwining between the traditions of art and film he omits an account of the strategy of *institutional critique*, which is first developed within the domain of the visual arts during the period of Dadaism. Had he not succumbed to this oversight, then he might have noted that the convergence between the two avant-gardes was no utopian wish, but already a reality in 1975. Further-

more, this convergence, if that is the proper word, was realized on the very grounds that are treated with so much suspicion by both Wollen and Le Grice, that is, the space of the gallery.

Consider Dan Graham's *Homes for America* (1966) or Mel Bochner's *Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse* (1968). Interestingly enough, these works are not films in any strict sense of the word. They were published in the pages of art magazines, yet employ the same strategy of intertextuality that Wollen discovered in Godard's films. *Homes for America* and *Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse* weave a complex, superimposed pattern of different textual genres. They masquerade, for instance, as the combined product of art history and sociology (*Homes for America* as a treatise on the "expanded field" of suburban tract-housing) or film criticism (*Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse* as a démontage of *Alphaville* that disperses Godard's film across a vast textual grid), but neither work fully nestles in one discursive position. The effect of these magazine works is to create, as the artists indicate, an endless feedback loop between the viewer/reader and the viewing/reading context.[18] *Homes for America* and *Alfaville, Godard's Apocalypse* not only intermix different critical discourses, but also employ different avant-garde strategies at the same time: the ready-made (by way of pop art), seriality (by way of minimalism), and montage (by way of cinema). Finally, it was Godard and his notion of the "film-essay" that both artists cite as a guiding principle behind their magazine pieces. By the late 1960s, Graham and Bochner had succeeded in outlining a discursive field of practice that was suspended between the binary terms formalism/politics and art/film. The intersecting dimensions of this field were visualized by inventing a hybrid genre that we might call "typofilm" in contrast to the "typophoto" of the historical avant-garde.[19]

Another example of the convergence between

the two avant-gardes, more familiar to a visitor of the current exhibition, is Marcel Broodthaers' multiple, *Le corbeau et le renard*, a work he submitted in 1967 to the Experimental Film Festival in Knokke. This was his second submission to the festival; he had also been present in 1958 with a short film called *La clef de l'horloge*, a film inspired by the assemblages of Kurt Schwitters and shot in the style of a Surrealist cinema-poem. Although highly accomplished, this earlier work did not step outside the existing conventions of experimental film; indeed, despite its link to the political "wing" of the historical avant-garde (e.g. Dadaism and surrealism), it fits more in the domain of formalist film. *Le corbeau et le renard*, however, did not fulfill the same set of expectations. In fact, *Le corbeau et le renard* was not immediately acknowledged by the organizers of the Knokke film festival as being a film at all. (It appears that a whiff of the scandal surrounding "The Richard Mutt Case" had drifted towards *Le corbeau et le renard* in 1967.)[20]

In *Le corbeau et le renard* several disparate objects—flowers, a rubber boot, inscribed glass jars, photographic cutouts of people (e.g. René Magritte, Broodthaers' family) and objects (e.g. a telephone)—are arranged on horizontal shelves before the camera. The hand doing the arranging, however, remains invisible. The shelves are anchored against a vertical panel upon which a fragmentary text is printed, which was composed by Broodthaers. The rapid montage makes the objects seem to flash in and out of existence against the typographical background. Letters, words, and objects constantly exchange places in this dynamic field of layered reproduction without any narrative order accruing to their seemingly random appearance on screen. Inexorably, however, the camera tracks back-and-forth across the shelves, scanning the clipped lines of the text. The camera appears to be en-

gaged in a mechanical task of reading; a task, however, that lacks an obvious horizon of intention or the firm guidance of an authorial voice:

> I withdraw the object from its normal context, I insert it in another…Is it a poem? Is it a painting? The film *Le corbeau et le renard* is an exercise in reading.[21]

The apparent source of *Le corbeau et le renard* is La Fontaine's well-known fable. Yet this recognition does not deliver any solace to those readers who search a closure to this reading exercise. How could there be? Broodthaers' text was, namely, "made up of clichés, borrowings from elementary writing lessons and personal inventions."[22] Broodthaers employed, in other words, the same device of intertextuality that Graham and Bochner were discovering for themselves around the same time. Yet, as Wollen stressed, it is important that the strategy of intertextuality does not result in a free play of the signifier. No symbolic order of the sign might win out in *Le corbeau et le renard*, but its indication of specific social institutions and their ideological function is evident. The fable, for instance, refers to a nationalist ideology of cultural heritage (the poem's memorization was a fixture of the French-language school curriculum)[23], but the fable also evokes an outmoded type of social criticism (the timeless and universal mode of address utilized by the seventeenth-century moralist).[24] Then again, the text is also a "formalist" exercise in writing: it contains highly self-referential passages, which, for instance, provide typesetting instructions: "*Le D est plus grand que le T. Tous les D ont la même longueur.*" In other words, the communicative function of this "typofilm" is continuously disturbed:

> *Le corbeau et le renard. Le corbeau sonne. Le peintre est absent. Le renard sonne. L'architecte est absente. Même jeu. Le corbeau et le renard sont absents. Je me souviens d'eux, mais à peine [...]*[25]

If this wasn't enough to unsettle the viewer, Broodthaers had the film projected on a printed screen that also bears the imprint of his text. This superimposition renders the apparent relations between figure and ground highly indeterminate. The net result of all the different devices of fragmentation and defamiliarization marshaled by Broodthaers is to cause the boundaries between the different media to become permeable and diffuse. These boundaries are not deleted, but dislocated in a dialectical play of negation without end:

> On a special screen—in photographic canvas—the book becomes a film, the film becomes a painting (the screen). It is on an image (which summarizes the film) that all the film's images are projected. This is not a film.[26]

This description of the perceptual and textual operations of mediation in Broodthaers' work can be recast by demonstrating how it opens onto the stage of semiotic displacement that Roland Barthes so vividly described in his "Third Meaning."[27] My reasons for pulling yet another theoretical system into the orbit of our present discussion shall become fully clear by the end of my text, but for now it will serve a more limited purpose. Broodthaers' film, as we have seen, is a strange amalgam of still and moving images; an animated picture of still photos and static letters with no transitions, only sudden breaks. Here lies the connection to Barthes: in the essay in question, the author explores his own fascination by the phenomenon of the movie-still (particularly those of Eisenstein's films). He describes the still as a kind of *quotation*, "at once parodic and disseminatory."[28] This citation does not refer to the narrative order of the movie; it is not a sample from an organic whole, but the trace of a permutational and plural level of the text that cannot be captured at any symbolic level of signification. The still is a fragment that implies the multiple possibilities of meaning production that are passed over and suppressed by the narrative logic of the movie. Narrative cinema can choose only one symbolic strand to thread through the apparatus; it can elect only one text among many others. The analysis of the still thus evokes what Barthes calls another scene, namely that of *counter-narrative*. Likewise, *Le corbeau et le renard* can be thought of as a literal *mise-en-scène* of this counter-narrative. *Le corbeau et le renard* performed its work on two different institutional stages—first the film festival, second the art gallery—but there is no final way to install or "read" the multiple. It comes in a box with several loose items awaiting assembly but without instructions: a film reel, text panels, photographs, two printed screens (one shaped as a TV screen and the other in a regular format). The owner of such a work must come to his or her own understanding of the nature of the performance that is required.

The structural logic at work in *Le corbeau et le renard* is not synthetic in nature, but more disseminatory. A paratactic order, that is, which holds things apart, rather than a syntactical order, which contracts them. On an invitation card to Broodthaers' first gallery exhibition of *Le corbeau et le renard* Broodthaers described the contents of the edition as follows: "*1 image + 1 manuscrit + 1 film + 2 typos + 1 image + 1 boîte + 2 objets + 1 écran et encore des autres éléments.*" *Le corbeau et le renard* is not the sum total of its individual parts, but a series of plus signs that have no final equation. We encounter in *Le corbeau et le renard* a *multiple* in the truest sense of the word: multiple texts, multiple techniques, and multiple sites.

The Wrinkles in the Map

Thus far, I have established that there is a "third" avant-garde located somewhere *between* the formalist and political avant-gardes. Let me

adopt a more appropriate term, and call this third avant-garde "post-minimal film." We have already seen that the term "film" itself needs to be employed in a highly flexible manner. Dan Graham, for instance, designed several works—film installations, magazine pieces, a cinema auditorium—that are all connected to the cultural field of cinematic practice in the broadest sense. Indeed the possibilities explored by post-minimal artists within this expanded field of film are legion. Marcel Broodthaers, as I have demonstrated, provides another pertinent case of an artist who made several hybridic works that are located on the perimeter of the cinematic medium, like books, posters, and slide projections. After *Le corbeau et le renard*, Broodthaers created even more elaborate *mise-en-scènes* for the production and projection of films. A screening organized by the artist would typically include a sampling, in ever different combinations, of his own prolific output as a filmmaker, but could also contain various types of found material, such as publicity reels. There are two installations by Broodthaers that particularly deserve to be mentioned here, if only in passing. Although it is a sheer impossibility to size up these installations in a few words, I would wager that they accomplished a rare feat in placing not only the apparatus (of the cinema or the gallery) but the very intersection between the cultural relations of production and reception on display.

My first example concerns the *Section cinéma* of Broodthaers' fictional *Musée d'art moderne*, which exhibited his editing equipment and various props he used in his films. The *Section cinéma* also housed a regular film program that included, among other items, newsreels, a Charlie Chaplin short, and his own *Une discussion inaugurale*. The latter documented in a fragmentary style the first "opening" of his *Musée d'art moderne* on September 25, 1968, during which the artist's

studio doubled as a museum through the addition of packing cases and postcards of famous paintings.The *Section cinéma* literally represents a cross-section of the strata of art and publicity. Broodthaers conducts a kind of media archaeology on his own work and culture at large, labeling his finds with a binary number system in an effort, as he famously commented, to ruin the destiny of things.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to the film *La bataille de Waterloo* (1975), which was shot on the location of *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers*, an installation by the artist at the ICA in London. The piece, as he dryly explained, was meant to illustrate "the relationship of war to comfort."[29] Yet *La bataille de Waterloo* functions on two levels at once; it is not only a record of the show, but it also presents itself as a fiction film, complete with a Wagnerian soundtrack. The gallery décor doubled as a film studio, since all the objects that Broodthaers put on display were rented props used by the movie industry, including a set of klieg lights which illuminated the rooms.[30]

The point of these examples is to underscore that post-minimal film constitutes an expanded field of filmic practice that cannot be defined in terms of the film *medium* alone. At the same time, it would be incorrect to state that this "other" avant-garde of post-minimal film is formed by an actual *convergence* of the two film avant-gardes as desired by Wollen in 1975. Post-minimal film, rather, is located somewhat *to the side* of his two avant-gardes. That is to say, post-minimal film is the product of an avant-garde genealogy that belongs to the proper domain of the history of art, even though this avant-garde is beginning to spill across the traditional boundaries of the art world. The formalist avant-garde (not to speak of the political avant-garde) asserted its independence, or at the very least its neutrality, versus the institutional domain of the gallery and the museum.

Marcel Broodthaers, *Section Cinéma (Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles)*, 1971
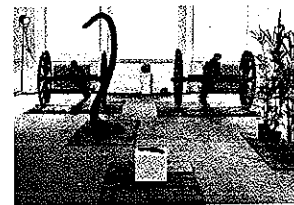
Marcel Broodthaers, *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 19th Century Room*, 1975
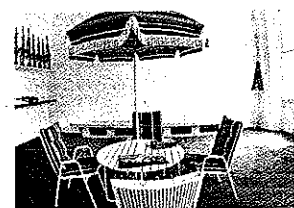
Marcel Broodthaers, *Décor: A Conquest by Marcel Broodthaers, 20th Century Room*, 1975

But how are we to comprehend this expanded field of post-minimal film? Can we determine the outer contours of its field of operation? Can we discover the rules that internally structure its discursive space of distribution? In short, what is the topography described by post-minimal film?

At this moment we may recall one topographical map of the intersection between art and film that is already at our disposal. I am referring to the notion of expanded cinema, but I have also insisted that this notion is lacking in discriminatory precision. Indeed, the term expanded cinema operates less as a detailed map to a historical period wherein we may orientate ourselves, than as a kind of vectored space that cuts across a whole swath of heterogeneous practices. These might include, to consult the checklist of X-Screen: Vito Acconci, Marcel Broodthaers, Dan Graham, David Lamelas, Bruce Nauman, next to Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Ken Jacobs, Kurt Kren, Malcolm Le Grice, Carolee Schneemann, and Gottfried Schlemmer. The advantage of "expanded cinema" as a term is that it rejects the conventional boundaries between the domain of the visual arts and independent or alternative film. This is a necessary move, since we are now able to survey a totality of responses to a similar set of problems concerning the relationship of spectator to screen, and the performative possibilities of film. The disadvantage of the concept of "expanded cinema," however, lies exactly in how this impression of *totality* is organized. Expanded cinema relies on the common denominator of the film medium (even though other media are enveloped in its environment). That is why I have suggested that expanded cinema forms a vectored space. In other words, expanded cinema remains largely impervious to the acknowledgement and registration of differences in kind.

We need, therefore, to take another look "over our shoulder," as it were, at an adjacent field of expanded practice in the 1970s, namely that of sculpture. Writing in the same year as Le Grice, Rosalind Krauss published her celebrated essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."[31] This essay is rightfully famous for introducing a new method of structural analysis within contemporary art criticism, which she used to examine post-minimalism and its radical shift away from a modernist ontology of the medium. Modernism, as Krauss argued, came to an end in post-minimalist practice since the latter "is not defined in relation to a given medium—sculpture—but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium—photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself—might be used."[32] Now, film can be added to Krauss's list of optional media within post-minimalism.[33]

Krauss described an elegant device to map out the "logical operations" that structured the practice of post-minimalism. The so-called Klein square originated in mathematical theory, but had also been annexed by structuralists during the 1960s.[34] Of course, the apparent simplicity of the semiotic square masks a greater complexity, but a brief demonstration of its basic operation will suffice for our needs. To construct the square one first needs to select a set of binary terms A versus B. This original dichotomy is plotted on the "complex axis." The second step is formed by inverting this original opposition so that a second set of oppositional terms is produced: non-A versus non-B. This dualism is entered on the "neuter axis" and it represents, in Krauss's words, the sum of the neither/nor or a position of pure negativity. When this four-fold set of contradictions is projected within the figure of a square, a discursive field is mapped out that both expands and closes the possibilities of contradiction that were contained in the original binary set.

In Krauss's example, for instance, the complex
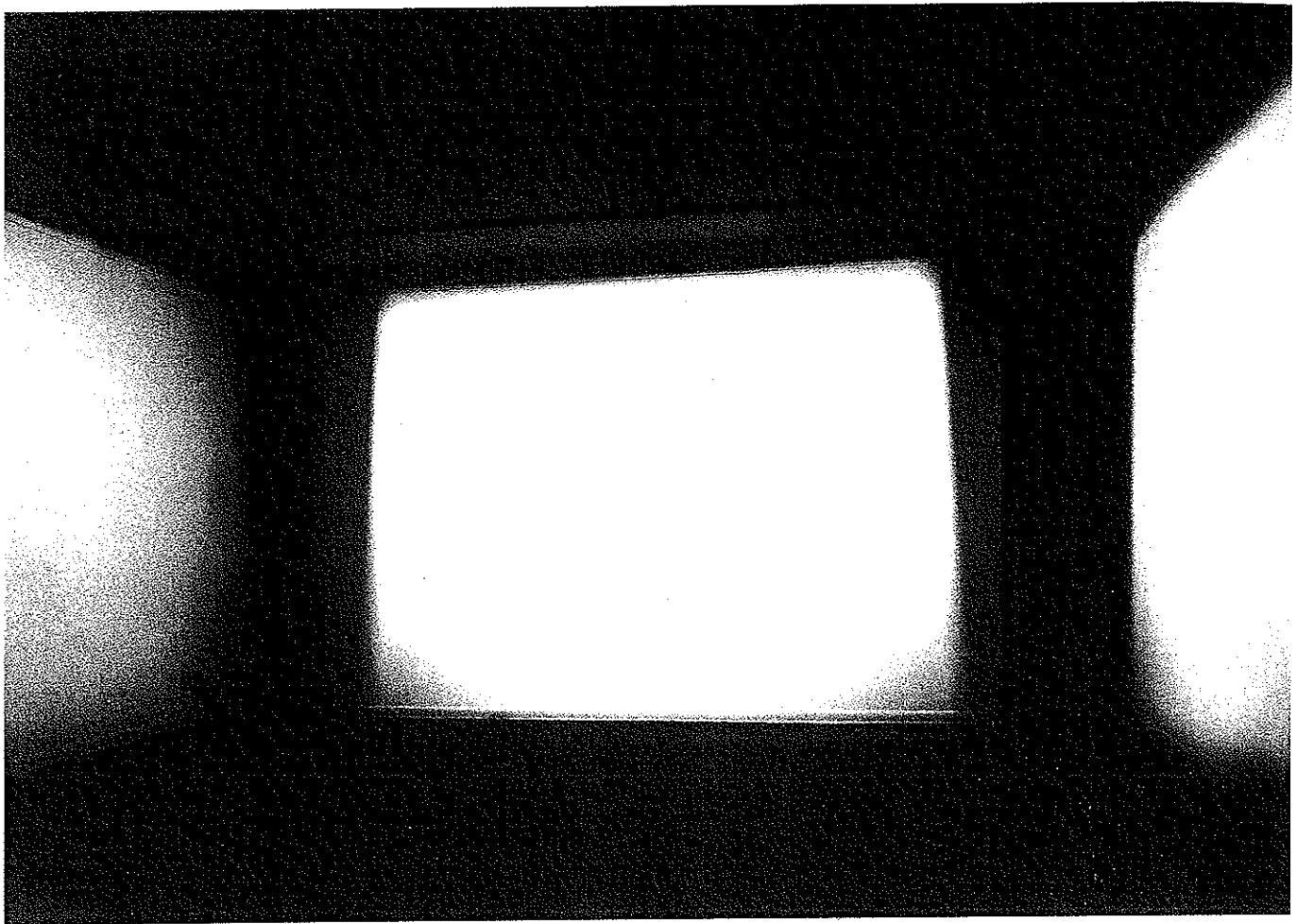
Bruce Nauman, *Rotating Glass Walls,* **1970**

In the early 1970s, Bruce Nauman conceives numerous works that deal with the physiology of perception. The film installation *Rotating Glass Wall* is made up of a space on the walls of which four film loops are projected. The films show how a glass plate is brought to rotate around the horizontal middle line. The shot is chosen so that the midline marks exactly the upper edge of the image, and the side edges of the glass are not to be seen. In this way, it is impossible for the observers to get any sense of size or a spatial orientation of what is shown. While the lower half of the rotating glass wall moves towards and away from the spectators (on opposite walls), its appearance fluctuates between a transparent "non-surface" and a three-dimensionally perceived, material body.

123 Bruce Nauman, *Rotating Glass Walls,* 1970

axis is formed by the contrasting terms of "land-scape" versus "architecture." It follows that on the neuter axis the opposition of "not-landscape" versus "not-architecture" will appear. Along the outer perimeter of the semiotic structure the different possibilities of sculptural production can now be located; possibilities, that is, which can be derived from the polarity between "landscape" and "architecture." It is actually the neuter axis and not the complex axis, however, that is truly paradigmatic for post-minimalism. The reason for this circumstance is that the opposition "not-architecure" and "not-landscape" defines the place of modernist sculpture, that is, the "home-less" nature of its objects which assert their independence of any social or natural framework. The expanded field of post-minimalism, in other words, is generated from a desire to escape this double bind of modernist sculpture. If we now move along the sides of the square to the position between "landscape" and "not-landscape," we will encounter the discursive place of "marked sites." Examples of marked sites, Krauss observes, may be encountered in the work of Robert Smithson, for instance his *Spiral Jetty*, but they are not limited to this artist's practice, nor does a marked site find expression in only one material form. Krauss refers, for instance, to the more ephemeral *Time Lines* of Dennis Oppenheim, which are traced in the snow and the photographs of Richard Long, which are taken during his walks in the wilderness. Finally, post-minimal artists are not necessarily limited to one place within the discursive field, but are free to move around its circumference; this in contrast to the specialization and stylistic unity of the modernist painter or sculptor.

I shall now leave Krauss's further elaboration of the structure for what it is. My own point is the following: starting from a dichotomy between a cultural and a non-cultural space, we can draw a kind of topographical map of the different strategic options that are open to artistic practice at a certain historical moment. This map is structured as a discursive field in which contrasting, enunciative positions are distributed. It is important to stress that at issue here is a set of neutral places of enunciation that may be occupied by any artist in succession. The artist can move around the square at will and is thus no longer identifiable with a certain style or specific medium. But the neutrality of this discursive model in terms of the social function of the spaces it maps needs to be questioned; the seductive clarity of its mechanism ultimately forms its drawback. Once every position is locked into place where is one left to go? At the end of the day, we can conclude that the semiotic square only produces this illusion of completeness at the price of certain exclusions.[35] However, the semiotic square can be treated as a useful heuristic tool. We may play a kind of game with it in order to organize the still unclear terrain of expanded cinema, starting from the position of formalist film. What are the oppositions that structure this category? While formalist film rejects classical narrative cinema in favor of a self-reflective attachment to the film medium, classical cinema suppresses the cinematic apparatus in service of the illusional completeness of its narrative universe. Hence, we might construct our complex axis of the opposition between "apparatus" (as a cultural term) and "world" (as a non-cultural term). A degree of semantic ambiguity clearly adheres to each term. The term "world" denotes an idea of reality as forming a unified whole. It does not matter, then, whether the ostensible totality of the real is thought to already reside at the level of the pro-filmic (as in documentary film) or is experienced only at the level of the projected image (as in narrative cinema). The term "apparatus" can refer to the assemblage of techniques and processes that define cinema

as a whole in its various incarnations. In this case, however, it does not matter to us whether "apparatus" refers to the suppression of the projection equipment (as in classical cinema) or the material properties of the medium (as in formalist film).

Let us now assemble our semiotic square. On the complex axis we need to plot the opposition between "world" versus "apparatus," while on the neuter axis we must inscribe the inverted opposition between "non-world" and "non-apparatus." Although the neuter axis of pure negativity remains as yet hard to imagine—what indeed is a non-world?—let us explore where this strange proposition might lead us. Here is the empty square:
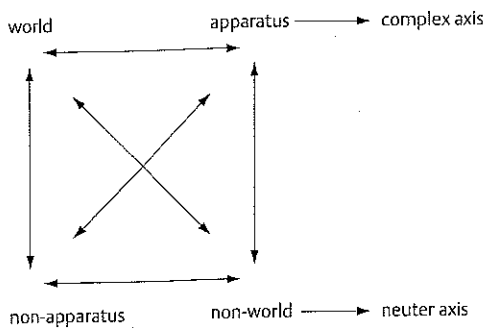
Along the periphery of this diagram, different possibilities of film practice will now become apparent. We have already located classical cinema and formalist film. But what of the position situated between "world" and "apparatus"? One candidate for this spot is Stan VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome*. According to the filmmaker, the *Movie-Drome* would operate as follows:

> In a spherical dome, simultaneous images of all sorts would be projected on the entire dome-screen... the audience lies down at the outer edge of the dome with their feet toward the center, thus almost the complete field of view is the dome-screen.

Thousands of images will be projected on this screen [...] It would be possible to compress the last three thousand years of Western life into such an aspect ration that we, the audience, can grasp the flow of man, time, and forms of life that have led us up to the very moment...details are not important, it is the total scale of life that is... in other words... using the past and the immediate present to help us understand the likely future.[36]

VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome* functions as a sublation of the "apparatus" and the "world"—the latter being conceived in terms of the totality of its visual output. In brief, the *Movie-Drome* constructs the "apparatus" as "world" and the "world" as "apparatus." The projection sphere expands, as it were, the cranial dome outwards: a kind of cerebrum saturated with audio-visual stimuli, wherein the horizontally inclined audience may indeed dream "the entire world picture," and its own self-alienation, in a psychotropic expansion of consciousness.[37]

A prime instance of the combination between "non-apparatus" and "non-world" is Peter Kubelka's *Invisible Cinema*. Originally conceived in 1958, *Invisible Cinema* was first built in 1970 for the Anthology Film Archives in New York. Although it was designed with a different client in mind, the *Invisible Cinema* was also well-suited for the Anthology Film Archives, a showcase for the formalist tradition of avant-garde film. (Clearly a slippage occurs between the positions of formalist film and the *Invisible Cinema*, but I designed the square in order to foreground such ambivalences and complications within the expanded field of cinema; an issue to which I shall return.) Kubelka described his projection space as follows:

> Ceiling, walls and seats were all covered with black velvet, the floor was covered with black carpeting, doors and everything

else were painted black. In the whole room, only the screen itself was not completely black. As a result, the screen and the film projected on the screen were the only visual points of reference. In a cinema, one shouldn't be aware of the architectural space so that the film can completely dictate the sensation of the space [...] Special seats were designed which shielded sight to both sides and made it impossible to see one's neighbors. The rows were elevated so that the row in front of the beholder did not interfere with the sight lines to the screen. A wooden structure rose above the heads of the people in the row in front and bent forward so as to hide the head.[38]

The cinema was constructed to create an environment of absolute darkness and silence in order to enhance the audio-visual experience of the cinematic medium in its most pure state. This viewing machine resembles nothing so much as a disciplinary apparatus: "the viewer sat upright [...] because, of course, the position of the body is very important to the mind."[39] Kubelka, however, preferred to see the cinema in terms of its enforcement of an ideal community of viewers, "a sympathetic community was created, a community in which people like each other."[40] The unruliness of the audience at commercial cinemas, who crunch on their popcorn or arrive too late, was banned from the Invisible Cinema, which instead intended to improve on the set up of the classical cinema by creating the "feeling of being in the dark mother's womb from which one would then be born into another world, the world of the film."[41] Not surprisingly the Invisible Cinema proved in the end a financial fiasco and it was dismantled in 1974.

The Invisible Cinema, therefore, was geared towards creating the illusion of a totally integrated, cinematic spectacle—"one screen, one sound source cinema"—that would be surveyed by a transcendental viewer. The projection space was geared to the presentation of "cinema art," such as the work of Carl Dreyer, or to the screening of more reductive modes of filmmaking, like Kubelka's own abstract flicker films, yet it could not accommodate any multi-media works or performative film pieces that draw attention to the actual architectural surroundings. Kubelka's ideal spectator sat utterly erect, exercising his concentrated skills of contemplation, savoring the formal properties of the work, in disregard of the distractions of narrative content, or the seductions of character identification. The spectator was transported to another world, but this world coincided with the surface of the film itself that was subjected to the critical judgment of the spectator. This other world in essence meant the non-worldly condition of filmic autonomy; this is symbolized in the Invisible Cinema by the lighting of the room before and after the film, which consisted of a strong lamp directed at the screen: "when you came in there was a radiating screen promising a coming event."[42]

I have thus identified four positions in the discursive field of expanded cinema: classical cinema, Movie-Drome, Invisible Cinema, and formalist film. The Movie-Drome opposes the Invisible Cinema, while the classical narrative cinema opposes formalist film. But are we not comparing dissimilar items? The first three are examples of a specific disposition of the projection space of film, whereas formalist film clearly does not belong to such an architectural category. On top of this, many formalist films could conceivably be screened in any of the three types of projection space, although Kubelka's cinema would be the most inviting place. Formalist film does not "sit well" in the spot of "apparatus" and "non-world." Indeed, the confusion emerges from the ambiguity of the

term apparatus as it has been applied. In the case of *Invisible Cinema* the apparatus of projection was made invisible to make the medium itself wholly apparent. The virginal white screen that the moviegoer encountered upon entering Kubelka's cinema symbolized the purity of the medium, just as the white canvas did for the modernist painter. One is reminded of the structural filmmaker Hollis Frampton, who once wrote that the white screen envelops all films: "We can never see more within our rectangle only less [...] if we want to see what we call more, which is actually less, we must devise ways of subtracting, of removing, one thing and another."[43] The light reflected off the radiant screen might help the spectators find their seats, as Kubelka intended, but it is not this literal function of the apparatus that is to be minded, but the transcendent quality of the light.

The opposite of the *Invisible Cinema* was the *Movie-Drome*, which was considered by its author to be an example of expanded cinema. Likewise, within formalist film one can go the way of Van-DerBeek or Kubelka. That is to say, formalist film (which reveals itself more and more as a less than felicitous term) is polarized between a strictly formal aspect, concentrating on what happens within the screen frame, and a more materialistic aspect, which steps outside the screen frame into real space. Le Grice, for instance, worked both sides of the contradiction, but let us consider the work of another artist to clarify this issue further.

Anthony McCall has explained that his *Line Describing a Cone* deals "with one of the necessary conditions of film: projected light."[44] It can, therefore, be slotted in the position between "apparatus" and "non-world" on our map. To view the piece, the viewers stand with their backs to the wall where normally the screen would be placed and look directly at the projector. Slowly a thin ray of light begins to curl around until,
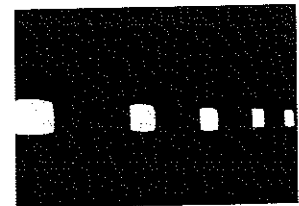
after thirty minutes, a complete circle is drawn, thus describing a luminous cone in depth as a kind of sculptural phenomenon. The work provides a perfect example of a performative mode of film experience: "The film exists only in the present: the moment of projection. It refers to nothing beyond this real time."[45] It follows that the artist had to be self-conscious about the proper manner of presenting this work. McCall has indicated that it was meant to be shown in either an independent film showcase or a museum space.

In other words, *Line Describing a Cone* straddles the institutional divide between the film and art world.[46] In essence, though, all that would be needed is an "empty room," which means that the work remains beholden to an ideal of relative autonomy.[47] The performative aspect of the screening does little to change this formalist condition of the work, but, as in my earlier example of a performative paradigm of film, *Zen for Film*, the institutional setting has been illuminated to a new degree. Both these works could be aligned along another axis than that of expanded cinema by, for instance, considering them in relation to Dan Flavin's fluorescent light installations. (Kubelka's use of the projector beam to provide house lighting in the *Invisible Cinema* begs to be considered in this context as well.) By doing so we once more enter upon the genealogy of post-minimal film which is connected to an avant-garde project of institutional critique.

If we now switch to another artist's work, namely that of David Lamelas, who is more directly part of this post-minimalist genealogy, it will not be hard to see how the strategy of "lighting" a particular site may initiate a more critical relation to or intervention within this site. Three early works of Lamelas, *Connection of Three Spaces* (1966), *Limit of Projection* (or *Light Projection in a Dark Room*) (1967), and *Situation of Time*, each
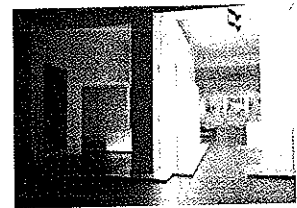
David Lamelas, *Connection of Three Spaces*, 1966

David Lamelas, *Situation of Time*, 1967

David Lamelas, *Analysis of the Elements by which the Massive Consumption of Information Takes Place*, 1968

explore different ways of illuminating, in more than one sense of the word, the darkened space of a room (respectively using the means of fluorescent light, a spotlight, and seventeen television sets). Lamelas would make his implicit stance of institutional critique explicit in *Office of Information about the Vietnam War at Three Levels: The Visual Image, Text, and Audio* (Venice Biennial, 1967), where the space of a press office was temporarily superimposed on the gallery space. The *Office of Information* thereby not only raised the issue of the autonomy of the museum, but also succeeded in problematizing the emerging administrative logic behind much contemporary conceptual art, particularly in its use of the mass media as a neutral conduit of pure information.[48] This strategy of institutional critique is continued in *Analysis of the Elements by which the Massive Consumption of Information Takes Place* (1968), which besides the use of mass media as the radio and newspapers, incorporated film for the first time in the form of a found commercial. The next step in Lamelas' evolving dialectic between gallery and cinema is his *A Study of the Relationships between Inner and Outer Space* (1969), which forms the first in a series of films that he would make during the course of the coming decade.

I believe that *A Study of the Relationships between Inner and Outer Space* is not only an admirable film in its own right, but an essential object to consider in the context of expanded cinema. This might seem surprising, considering that it consists of a documentary film projected on a normal, rectangular screen. However, *A Study of the Relationship of between Inner and Outer Space* casts an ironic look at the then contemporary rhetoric of "expansion." Lamelas' film leads the spectator out of the inner confines of the gallery to the far reaches of space exploration. By drawing ever widening circles, the film analyzes the activities within the periphery of the

enclosed space of the gallery (The Camden Arts Center) and, subsequently, within the urban boundaries of the city of London. In a deadpan style, the camera records various architectural characteristics of the gallery (physical size, lighting, features, acoustics), daily activities (opening doors, switching off of lights, cleaning, walking, sitting, etc.), and the tasks of the staff members. The spectator is then treated to an exposition of the topographical structure of London, its meteorological zones, and systems of transportation and information. The film concludes by investigating the consumption of information by randomly interviewing six passersby in the street about the global event of the day: the first landing of an American astronaut on the moon. In all its mockery of the "new frontier" of space exploration, Lamelas does not forget one essential fact in his film: institutional critique is not performed by an act of negation, but rather consists of a 'study of the relationships between inner and outer space," to mimic the film's title. Institutional critique appears to operate on both sides of the divide at the same time, but never places itself wholly external to it. It also follows that such a transgressive mode of critique can never come to an end, but must evolve with the historical changes in the social function of institutions and their technological means of operation.

Modernist art and formalist film shared a will to lock themselves in a closed space, whether this space consisted of the white cube or a black box. The "outside" had been gradually abandoned to the hegemonic rule of Hollywood's culture industry. Inside the "warm collectivity" of which Kubelka spoke would seek refuge from a world that had come under the sway of the commodity fetish. Kubelka's family of individuated spectators that lingered in the dark womb of his cinema represent the after-image of a luminous outside that
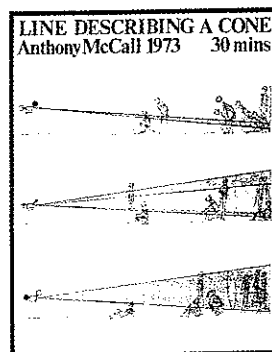
Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973

Line Describing a Cone deals with one of the elementary conditions of film: the projection of light. On one wall in a darkened room, a film over 30 minutes long showing the drawing of a circle is projected. Artificial fog makes the light beam of the projector clearly visible. The beam continuously develops from a line to a complete cone as the circle on the wall is slowly closed. The spectator thus experiences light not as the mere bearer of coded information made visible on the screen as an illusionary image. Moving free in the room, he or she interacts with a light figure that indexes no reality beyond the here and now.

LINE DESCRIBING A CONE
Anthony McCall 1973   30 mins

124 Anthony McCall, *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973
Photo: Peter Moore, Artists Space, New York, February 15, 1974
©Estate of Peter Moore/VBK, Vienna/VAGA, NY

125 Announcement for *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973
28 x 21,6 cm
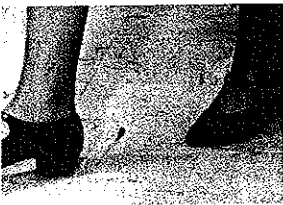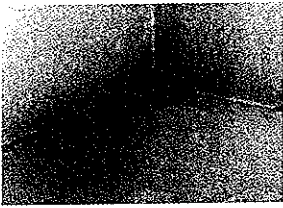
David Lamelas, *A Study of the Relationships Between Inner and Outer Space*, 1969

was now distant in time and space, namely the ninetenth-century ideal of an inclusive and transparent public sphere, where every citizen possessed equal access to the (printed) means of discursive exchange. The demise of this literary public sphere (never more than a bourgeois dream itself) is deliberately evoked by Broodthaers in a scribbled note added to the edition of *Le corbeau et le renard*, Marcel Broodthaers had scribbled "*L'homme de lettres manuscrites, l'homme de lettres imprimées, la femme de lettres, le garçon de lettres, la boîte aux lettres etc... une famille de lettres.*" *Le corbeau et le renard* thus places itself as another note in the margin between the museum and the public media sphere, like *A Study of the Relationships between Inner and Outer Space*.

It was rapidly becoming clear in the 1960s that the Hollywood paradigm of classical cinema that was perfected during the 1940s and 1950s was losing much its pre-eminent status as the prime apparatus of homogenization in the public sphere. Not only had television arrived on the scene, but the shifting dynamics of a globalized marketplace challenged the critical notion of the culture industry, which sought to capture the disciplinary arrangement of society as a whole in the one image of Hollywood cinema. During the 1960s the media public sphere underwent a massive transformation that restructured the relations between spectators and spectacle. A transformation that further expanded the reach of capitalism into everyday life, for sure, but also providing new creative opportunities for resistance.[49] No longer could the idea of a standardized audience hold its own: the viewer as the passive consumer of the Hollywood product, the viewer as the dupe of the manipulative practices of the culture industry. A globalized mediascape enforced the need of the entertainment industry to develop a greater diversification of outlets and products.

Certainly this would lead to the establishment of new forms of domination, but I cannot subscribe to the dystopian view of Paul Virilio who, for instance, exclaimed in 1984 that we are "now plunged into the transpolitical pan-cinema of the nuclear age, into an entirely cinematic vision of the world." He continues:

> The extraordinary commercialization of audiovisual technology is responding to the same demand. For videos and walkmans are reality and appearance in kit form: we use them not to watch films or listen to music but to add vision and soundtracks, to make us directors of our own reality.[50]

The ever-greater penetration of the media into everyday life (and the museum) is apparent, but we need not become gloomy over the loss of a phenomenological life-world of authenticity to understand that there is a new arsenal of media weapons at our disposal. What of the re-appropriation by post-minimal artists as Dan Graham and John Baldessari of Super-8 loop projectors that were meant for traveling salesmen? What of a similar *détournement* of hand-held film cameras that were destined for the mass market of home moviemakers? These cameras came cheap and were accompanied by a cheery little pamphlet explaining the proper use "of your new possession." Such post-minimal strategies do not compute with Virilio's vision of the world converted into a portable apparatus, nor does it compute, for that matter, with the former hope of independent cinema that an army of "ten-year-olds are now filming eight millimeter serials—mostly science-fiction, I am told—in their backyards."[51]

A Topology of the Screen

What is the history we need? I have argued that such a history would not only consist of drawing a more detailed map of the successive sites explored by expanded cinema. We also

need a better understanding of the ideological operations that structure this spatial field or topography. In other words, to what extent does the terrain of expanded cinema overlap with an avant-garde project of institutional critique? I have also indicated that we have been somewhat short-changed by the very concept of expanded cinema: not all works that critically engaged the "logic of expansion" which gripped the combined art/film world of the sixties and seventies adhere to the category of expanded cinema, nor, for that matter, to the very medium of cinema.

What we need is not a topography, but a topology of expanded cinema. Our main task now does not consist of charting the finite distribution of discursive positions within the closed boundaries of a cultural field, although we need to pass through such a stage of analysis. By topology I mean a more dynamic understanding of the field of filmic practice, a transgression of the physical and ideological boundaries of things, a performative activity that will open onto the realm of publicity, without being absorbed by it, an oscillation on the boundaries. As Graham once remarked to me, "my position is always in-between. It's structuralist anthropology and McLuhan at the same time."[52] He then on to suggest another dominant mathematical metaphor of the time, not the Klein square but the Möbius strip, which figures within a particular branch of mathematics called topology. "Topology is a very 1960s idea, that the inside and outside were the same surface and that you could make a loop, like a Möbius strip, identifying inside and outside."[53]

A topological field is thus a space in flux; it engenders a constant inversion of its boundary surfaces, a kind of temporal spacing in which different discursive positions can come to overlap. Such confusion on the boundaries, for sure, is not just another way of speaking about intermedia. In a topological practice the boundaries between

things, people, media, and spaces are not dissolved, rather they are marked in all their materiality in order to be transgressed. A topological practice of film does not project a simulacral world in which all differences are erased. The world does not become one seamless interface, as in Virilio's conceit of a "factitious topology in which all the surfaces of the world are directly present to another."[54] VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome* comes close to realizing Virilio's model of such a factitious topology. I would ask that we think more in terms of the superimposition of media in *Le corbeau et le renard*, its constant switching around of enunciative markers of place and time, its endless dance around the positions of authority (the raven) and subversive wit (the fox). I repeat:

> Le corbeau sonne. Le peintre est absent.
> Le renard sonne. L'architecte est absente.
> Même jeu. Le corbeau et le renard sont absents.

This interfolding of inside and outside space is well-demonstrated in Graham's film work. One might immediately think of his double screen projection *Body Press*, which literally turns the gallery space into a Möbius strip with its multiple inversions of the perceptual and corporeal relations between cameras, performers, screens, projectors, and spectators. In a lesser known example, *Sunset to Sunrise* (1969), the camera traces out a spherical volume—like the actual shape of VanDerBeek's *Movie-Drome*—by circling upward towards the zenith and then spiraling downward again. The revolving movement of the camera, however, does not have the effect of consolidating the spectator's position within the sheltering dome of the sky, but quite the opposite. The spectator will appear to be simultaneously situated on the inside of the celestial dome and on its other side, much like the earth, as Graham noted, which revolves around its own axis but also around the sun. To confound the

spectator even more, there is a temporal elision at the core of the film that erases the temporal interim between sunset and sunrise. The radical distance of *Sunset to Sunrise* from VanDerBeek's dream of compressing three thousand years in the spatio-temporal continuum of his *Movie-Drome* needs no further comment.

Ultimately, one work by Graham would have a fundamentally effect of destabilization when entered upon the topographical map of expanded cinema. It does not simply close the already mentioned series of classical cinema, *Invisible Cinema*, and *Movie-Drome*, but throws the series into a state of disarray. This work, as yet unrealized, except as an architectural model, goes by the neutral name of *Cinema*:

> A cinema, the ground level of a modern office building, is sited on a busy corner. Its façade consists of two-way mirrored glass, which allows viewers on whichever side is darker at any particular moment to see through and observe the other side (without being seen by the people on that side). From the other side, the window appears as a mirror. When the light illuminates the surface of both sides more or less equally, the glass façade is both semi-reflective and partially transparent. Spectators on both sides observe both the opposing space *and* a reflection of their own look within their own space.[55]

Within this curious structure, nestled in the corner of a corporate building, all positions of authority, identification and voyeuristic pleasure, become exchangeable; they become, in other words, *neutralized* in succession, but not permanently cancelled. This space is neither utopian nor dystopian, it lies somewhere in-between, in a chiasmic, fluctuating experience of a space that functions as "an optical 'skin' both reflective and transparent inside and outside."[56] In this *Cinema*

all films, formalist or commercial, will be transformed into topological film.

Postscript

It might seem that I had already reached my conclusion by rapidly spiraling inwards to the site of Graham's *Cinema*, but at the same time our focus has shifted. The reader will have noticed that the *Cinema* project is highly sensitive to its setting in an urban and architectural context. The subject of this work's critique is the projection apparatus of classical cinema and it is, therefore, no longer attached to the space of the gallery, except in its currently existing state as a scale model. There is no practical reason, however, why *Cinema* could not be executed. The design is not detrimental to the actual experience of film. When the house lights are down, the two-way mirror screen will function as a normal movie screen (although passers-by in the street will be able to see the projected image in reverse). In other words, *Cinema* belongs as much to the history of cinema and architecture as it does to art history.

Yet, there is another vector of escape that functions within the genealogy of post-minimal film. If I had entered the terms of "narrative" versus "non-narrative" in my semiotic diagram, this would quickly have become apparent. During our earlier look at the work of Lamelas, we have already seen examples of a "non-narrative" option, which is employed to exert pressure on the communicative concept of pure "information" (e.g. *Analysis of the Elements by which the Massive Consumption of Information Takes Place* and *A Study of the Relationships of Between Inner and Outer Space*). Next would be the principle of "anti-narrative" that can be observed in Lamelas' *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)* of 1972. This film installation consists of a silent loop that shows a series of events involving a female character. It

forms really no more than a film fragment, which lacks any clear, narrative development. In fact, the scenario of Lamelas' film is based on no more than a section of the story line of a commercial movie that had recently been released, although this source is not directly revealed by the artist. The film is projected together with three slide shows, each one re-assembling the film sequence according to a different pattern. The first slide projector replicates the original, narrative succession, the second one has completely scrambled the original order, and the third one shows only specific moments, while dropping one scene all together. The completion of the film loop is indicated by a sudden gesture of the woman, who turns around to directly confront the camera. At this point the gaze of the woman becomes briefly petrified in a freeze frame, before the loop returns to its beginning again. *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)* was clearly intended as a critique of the manipulative power of the media, yet it was still conceived in specific relation to the gallery context. The film was shot in Nigel Greenwood's gallery with Lynda Morris, his assistant, playing the chief role. The film also witnessed its premiere at the same gallery.

Lamelas was thus faced with a dilemma: he created gallery installations about the cinema as institution. But his way out of this dilemma would not be further based on the strategy of anti-narrative. If I now return to an earlier point in my text, the reader will be reminded of a fourth option in the series "narrative," "non-narrative," and "anti-narrative." This additional strategy was broached in the context of *Le corbeau et le renard* and I designated it as the option of "counter-narrative." If one wants to develop this fourth tactic in relation to the institution of classical cinema—as already had been the aim of the anti-narrative method of *Film Script (Manipulation of Meaning)*— it's within the space of this very institution that

one must do one's burrowing.

The feature-length movie *The Desert People* (1974) represents precisely such a decisive break between the gallery and the cinema in the career of Lamelas. Not only is the film intended to be shown in a cinema theater, and not a gallery space, it has also fully adopted the narrative language of cinema, or so it might seem at first to the spectator. At its outset, *The Desert People* closely follows the standard, narrative format of the documentary genre. The spectator is shown a series of interviews with a set of individuals. We learn that this group had visited a Native American reservation for on a previous occasion. The name of the Native American people and their geographical location remain undisclosed, but it appears to have been near the southern border of the United States. The interviewees represent a cross-section of American society, while their contradicting recollections of the desert people only succeed in shrouding the latter in further mystery. It becomes clear from these conversations that the people form a projective screen for the visitors' own complex feelings of disaffection. The last interview is conducted with the guide of the group who, although a member of the tribe, lives off the reservation. Filmed against a desert landscape, in contrast to the urban setting of the other interviews, he speaks of the imminent annihilation of his native culture and the need to rescue it. And, then, in a sudden lapse of character, he states: "This is one way of doing it, I think, performing." He switches into Spanish, and finally into his native tongue. There is no translation.

In the next shot, the car that had been carrying the group to the reservation for a second visit, careens off the road, plunging the travelers to their death. By killing off the film with this stock image from the Hollywood repertoire, the characters suddenly come to exhibit their fictional

David Lamelas, *Desert People*, 1974

status. The effect is that of installing a "derisory fetish" (Barthes) in the path of the spectator's gaze, and Lamelas has us apprehend our own desire to imagine a coherent world where there was none. Yet *Desert People* also represents a final exit from the gallery circuit and, therefore, from the purview of the present exhibition. Let it be known, however, that Lamelas was not alone in reaching these particular crossroads in the way of post-minimalism.

The strategy of counter-narrative suggests a possible discontinuity in the history I have traced; a break that occurred around the mid-1970s. What lies beyond remains a subject for another essay, although it is clear that any such account would need to retrace our steps in order to factor in the emergence of television and video. By 1975, cinema no longer functioned as the dominant model of publicity and its transgressive function within the gallery space seemed largely spent (only to be resurrected in the 1990s). Aside from the difficulty of assessing the meaning of such an "ending"—a task that is far from complete—what I have ascertained is that the discussion of the "two avant-gardes," which started up in the second half of the decade, was a belated one from the perspective of post-minimalism. The period 1965 to 1975 had seen a fruitful interaction between the avant-garde traditions of art and film which had not so much expanded as destabilized the genres, spaces, and frameworks of art production and reception. For many artists this highly productive period of post-minimal filmmaking would lead to an increased interest in questions of narrativity and to a difficult decision about the future course to take: avant-garde film, it seems, was once more heading to the exit signs of the museum.

Notes

1 Malcolm Le Grice, "The History We Need," in Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975, London, Hayward Gallery, 1979, p. 113.

2 Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910-1975 (May 3 – June 17, 1979) was curated for the Hayward Gallery in London by David Curtis and Richard Francis. The exhibition was originally conceived by Birgit Hein and Wulf Herzogenrath at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in 1978.

3 Le Grice, "The History We Need," p. 113.

4 Compare Hal Foster's hypothesis: "[R]ather than cancel the project of the historical avant-garde, might the neo-avant-garde comprehend it for the first time." (Hal Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?," The Return of the Real, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1996, p.15.)

5 "Expanded cinema" generally refers to a multimedia practice that uses several projection sources, props, and sometimes live performers, in order to create a sensorial environment of complete immersion. We might describe expanded cinema as an early variant of installation art that sought to confound the separation between the artistic disciplines of sculpture, film, theater and dance. Here is an early attempt at a coherent definition: "Expanded Cinema is not the name of a particular style of filmmaking... It is cinema expanded to include many different projectors in the showing of one work. It is cinema expanded to include computer-generated images and the electronic manipulation of images on television. It is cinema expanded to the point at which the effect of film may be produced without the use of film at all. Its work is more spectacular, more technological, and more diverse in form than

that of the avant-garde/experimental/underground film so far. But it is less personal." (Sheldon Renan, An Introduction to the American Underground Film New York, E.P. Dutton, 1967, p. 227.) The classic text on the topic remains Gene Youngblood, Expanded Cinema, New York, Dutton, 1970.

6 Elsewhere, Le Grice has composed an eight-point list of these preoccupations from which I draw the following four examples: "(1) Concerns which derive from the camera: its limitations and extensive capacities as a time-based photographic recording apparatus. Limitations: frame limits, lens limits (focus, field, aperture, zoom), shutter. Extensions: time lapse, ultra high speed, camera movements (panning, tracking, etc.)... (2) Concerns which derive from editing process and its abstraction into conceptual, concrete relationships of elements...(3) Concerns which derive from the mechanism of the eye and particularities of perception...(4) Concerns which derive from printing, processing, refilming, and recopying procedures; exploration of transformations possible in selective copying and modification of the material..." (Malcolm Le Grice, "Thoughts on Recent 'Underground' Film,'" in Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age, London, British Film Institute, 2001, pp. 14–15).

7 I am conscious of the fact that this definition of the word "formalism" is too reductive. I shall continue to use "formalist film," however, as an expedient name for a variety of self-reflective film practices during the sixties and seventies, among which structural film.

8 This does not mean that this "rescue" was recognized as such by formalist critics of painting like Clement Greenberg. This task fell to Adams Sitney, among others, in his monumental Visionary Film, which became a lodestone for a generation of formalist filmmakers. See Visionary Film:

The American Avant-Garde 1943–1978, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974.

9 Le Grice, "The History We Need," p. 116.

10 Ibid., p. 115.

11 My source is Bruce Jenkins, "Fluxfilms in Three False Starts," In the Spirit of Fluxus, Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1993, pp. 122–138.

12 My title makes an allusion to another of Nauman's performative films from his so-called "studio films" series of 1967–68.

13 Malcolm Le Grice, "Thoughts on Recent 'Underground' Film," p. 25. In this text, Le Grice discusses the question of "function and context," but his description of different institutional site remains abstract as it is primarily interested in questions of accommodation and distribution, not criticism.

14 Le Grice, "The History We Need," p. 117.

15 In Theory of the Avant-Garde, Peter Bürger defined the avant-garde project in political, rather than formalist terms by elaborating an abstract theory of institutional critique. It is well known, though, that Bürger considered the critical project of the avant-garde to have come to an unhappy end. Failing to realize the Romantic goal of sublating the autonomy of bourgeois art within a new, post-revolutionary society, the neo-avant-garde of the fifties, he argued, reversed tracks and succeeded only to institutionalize the oppositional strategies of the historical avant-garde. See Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, trans. Michael Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985. On the avant-garde project as specific rather than abstract, and an interminable rather than finite mode of institutional critique, see Hal Foster, "Who's Afraid of the Neo-Avant-Garde?"

16 Peter Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies*, London, Verso, 1982. The extent of its subsequent influence can be gleaned from Philip Drummond's contribution to *Film as Film*, "Notions of Avant-Garde Cinema," which makes extensive reference to Wollen's essay.

17 Obviously, Wollen did not achieve this on his own. I have already mentioned the important work of Peter Bürger, but I could also draw attention to the work of other contemporary critics, such as Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, and Benjamin Buchloh, who explored the nexus between the political avant-garde in film and art within the context of art journals such as *Interfunktionen* or *Artforum*.

18 *Homes for America* has already been the topic of much discussion. Among the more pertinent contributions are Benjamin Buchloh, "Moments of History in the Work of Dan Graham," *Dan Graham: Articles*, Eindhoven, van Abbe Museum, 1978; Jeff Wall, *Dan Graham's Kammerspiel*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1991; and Alex Alberro, "Reductivism in Reverse," *Tracing Cultures: Art History, Criticism, Critical Fiction*, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994. I take the liberty of referring the reader to my own text on Bochner's magazine piece: "*Alfaville*, or the Utopics of Mel Bochner," *Grey Room* 10 (Winter 2003).

19 This should not be confused with the "typophoto," a term used by Moholy-Nagy to describe his typographic layout of the film scenario for the unrealized *Dynamic of the Metropolis*. See *Painting Photography Film*, trans. Janet Seligman, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1973.

20 The film was only projected after being disqualified within the competition and then only after the artist agreed to have it shown on a regular screen instead of on his own printed screen. "The Richard Mutt Case" is, of course, an allusion to Marcel Duchamp's submission of the ready-made *Fountain* to the 1917 Independents exhibition.

21 Broodthaers, "Le D est plus grand que le T", *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma*, p. 58.

22 Ibid.

23 At the time Broodthaers was working on *Le corbeau et le renard*, he participated in a performance at the Palais des Beaux-Arts during La Semaine anglaise: Modern English Theater and Poetic Show. During this event, the artist wrote out sections of La Fontaine's fable (from memory?) on a sheet of white paper. (A photograph of this performance is included in a second edition of *Le corbeau et le renard*.)

24 It is interesting to note that La Fontaine's fable is also the product of a complex process of re-writing and re-editing. The French author legitimated his work in reference to Aesop, while his writings, like that of fellow moralists, appeared in many different editions and variants during his lifetime. See Georges Van Den Abbeele, "Moralists and the Legacy of Cartesianism," *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1989.

25 I quote the opening lines of Broodthaers' text for *Le corbeau et le renard*.

26 Broodthaers cited in *Marcel Broodthaers: Cinéma*, p. 52

27 Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Noonday Press, 1988. Barthes' text, to be sure, comes at a later date and should not be taken as a direct influence *Le corbeau et le renard*.

28 Ibid., p. 67.

29 Press release for *L'Angélus de Daumier*, Paris, Centre National d'Art et Culture, 1975.

30 The theme of doubling runs throughout the film and the décor. The installation, for instance, existed of two period rooms — one documenting the nineteenth century and the other the twentieth century — whereas the film continuously plays off the opposition between moving and still images, and the (dis)synchrony of sound and picture. For my discussion of these two projects by Broodthaers, see "Das Museum der Attraktionen: Marcel Broodthaers und die 'Section Cinéma,'" *Kunst/ Kino, Jahresring 48: Jahrbuch für Moderne Kunst*, ed. Gregor Stemmrich, Cologne, Oktagon, 2001; and "On the Museum as Film Décor: Marcel Broodthaers and *La Bataille de Waterloo*," *Trans 8* (Fall 2000).

31 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983.

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Not that this concerns an oversight on her part. Film, and most notably the work of Jean-Luc Godard, is a frequent reference point in Krauss' writings of the seventies.

34 "The expansion to which I am referring is called a Klein group when employed mathematically and has various other designations, among them the Piaget group, when used by structuralists involved in mapping operations within the human sciences. By means of this logical expansion a set of binaries is transformed into a quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it. It becomes a logically expanded field" (Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 37).

35 Krauss criticizes this structural closure of the Klein diagram in her later *Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993.

36 Stan VanDerBeek, ""Culture: Inter-com" and Expanded Cinema: A Pro-posal and a Manifesto," in *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York, E.P Dutton, 1967, pp. 175-176.

37 Ibid.

38 Peter Kubelka, "The Invisible Cinema," *Design Quarterly* 93 (1974), p. 32.

39 Ibid., p. 34.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Hollis Frampton, "Lecture," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney, New York, Anthology Film Archive, 1987, p. 276.

44 Anthony McCall, "Two Statements," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, p. 250.

45 Scott MacDonald, "Anthony McCall," in *A Critical Cinema 2: Inter-views with Independent Filmmakers*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992, p. 161.

46 McCall, "Two Statements," p. 250.

47 Gordon Matta-Clark has inverted this premise of autonomy in *Line Describing a Cone* by using it as a kind of template for his structural interven-tion in the cityscape of Paris called *Conical Intersect*. See *Gordon Matta-Clark*, Marseille, Musées de Marseille, 1993, p. 245.

48 The *Second Investigation* (1968-69) of Joseph Kosuth, for instance, moved into the space of publicity defined by the media of billboards, handbills, and newspapers by anonymously publish-ing sections from Roget's Thesaurus. He sought in this manner to under-score the fact that the work of art forms a kind of tautological proposi-tion—"art as idea as idea"—which can only be understood as art within the context of art itself. These linguistic works were not to be received as objects of perception but were to function as an articulation of context. Yet, ultimately it is the meaning system that the artist constructs which is the only significant context—not the actual ideological workings of the media—and as a result the audi-ence that Kosuth projected for his work becomes as abstract and gener-alized as the linguistic message that he conveys. See also Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-69: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990).

49 See Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Transformations of the Public Sphere," *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1995.

50 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London, Verso, 1989, p. 66

51 Annette Michelson, "Film and The Radical Aspiration" [1966], in *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, p. 101.

52 See "Dan Graham Interviewed by Eric de Bruyn," *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art*, ed. Alexander Alberro, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999, p. 114.

53 Ibid., p. 115.

54 Virilio, p. 46.

55 Graham, "*Cinema*," *Two-Way Mirror Power*, p. 94.

56 Ibid., p. 95.