

From Parmigianino to Andy Warhol or
Conceptions of Mannerism in the 1960s as
Reflected in the Writings of Robert Smithson

by

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This thesis is an analysis of Robert Smithson's use of the term "Mannerism" in his essays and criticism from the 1960s. During that decade, the scholarship on Mannerist art constitutes a reinvention of the meaning of Mannerism, as an aesthetic attitude with positive attributes rather than a period of decline following the Renaissance. Adopting both the conclusions and tactics of scholars' conceptions of Mannerism, Smithson utilizes Mannerism in his writing to discuss trends in contemporary art and criticism. Mannerism becomes Smithson's critical tool to oppose the ideal of artistic and material purity advocated by formalist critics, particularly Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. Eventually Smithson formulates what he calls a "Mannerist esthetic," an artistic sensibility that embraces those elements considered "corrupt" by formalist critics.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: Neo-Mannerism and the Myth of the Renaissance

Robert Smithson's critical writing provides a rich verbal counterpart to his visual artworks. In his essays, which he began writing around 1965, he employs an abundance of references to various periods of art history and literature. In many instances his citations of specific styles or theories illuminate his thinking about different aspects of the contemporary art world. In a handful of essays written between 1965 and 1968, Smithson uses the term "Mannerism" in conjunction with his attempts to define a new aesthetic tendency in contemporary art. Initially, he mentions Mannerism only briefly: in a 1965 essay on Donald Judd, Smithson refers to Mannerism twice in relation to Judd's artworks¹; in "Entropy and the New Monuments" from 1966, Smithson notes "the Manneristic modernity of Philip Johnson,"² and he describes Robert Morris' "wall structures" [Figure 1] as "facsimiles of ready-mades within high Manneristic frames of reference."³ By 1966 and 1967, Smithson foregrounds Mannerism as the subject of two of his essays: he uses "Abstract Mannerism" as the title for an essay on a style of contemporary painting known as "Post Painterly Abstraction,"⁴ and in "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as

¹ Robert Smithson, "Donald Judd," in Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 4-6. Originally published in the exhibition catalogue *7 Sculptors*, etc. Although all of Smithson's essays discussed in this thesis appear in Flam's anthology, whenever possible I will use the original publications of Smithson's essays in my citations. Unless otherwise noted (as with this essay on Judd), those essays which cite Flam's anthology are writings that were published after Smithson's death.

² Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monuments," *Artforum* 4, no. 10 (June 1966), 27.

³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴ Robert Smithson, "Abstract Mannerism" (1966-67), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

Reflected in the Cinema” he discusses the films of Andy Warhol, Alfred Hitchcock, and Corman as examples of a contemporary “Mannerist esthetic.”⁵

Smithson’s specific references to Mannerism are the most explicit indications of a wider art historical vocabulary he adopts in the mid-1960s from contemporary literature on Mannerism. For example, in “Paradoxes of Conduct,” Smithson compares the painting of the 16th-century Italian Mannerist Parmigianino to works by Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, citing principles of “artificiality” and “surface”—both are attributes contemporary art historians associate with Mannerism—as common features of all three.⁶ In the interest of discrediting Clement Greenberg’s method of criticism, Smithson undertakes a lengthy defense of what he characterizes as the “grotesque sense of humor” in the sculpture of Michelangelo.⁷ Similar terminology appears repeatedly in his writing from this time, and his association of Mannerism with contemporary art criticism becomes increasingly important as he uses the term more frequently; however, without a fuller understanding of what exactly Smithson’s idea of Mannerism was when he made such statements, the specific significance of his connection between Mannerism and contemporary art and criticism remains unclear. Smithson’s library contained several books on Mannerism, and through an analysis of how Smithson uses the ideas from those texts in his writing, this thesis will begin to uncover Smithson’s particular conception of Mannerism, as well as his

⁵ Robert Smithson, “From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema” (1967), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 349–353 (hereafter referred to as “Paradoxes of Conduct” in the text). Smithson also mentions Mannerism briefly in “The Artist as Site-Seer; or a Dintorphic Essay” (1966–67), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 340–345; and “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art,” *Art International* 12, no. 3 (March 1968), 211–227.

⁶ Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351–353. Smithson also mentions Parmigianino in relation to Duchamp in “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 29.

⁷ Smithson, “What Really Spoils Michelangelo’s Sculpture” (1966–67), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 346–348.

motives for discussing Mannerism in conjunction with contemporary art and criticism.

From surveying the texts on Mannerism that Smithson owned, it becomes clear that the scholarship on Mannerism produced during the first half of the twentieth century initiated a shift away from the evaluations of Mannerism made in the seventeenth century, when historians describe Mannerism in terms of its inferiority to the Renaissance.⁸ Walter Friedlaender, whose essay “The Anti-Classical Style” contains one of the first attempts by an art historian to consider Mannerism on its own terms, argues that Mannerism represents a rejection of the classical ideals of the Renaissance, but does not constitute a return to “primitive” artistic production.⁹ For Friedlaender, Mannerism is the deliberate negation of the Renaissance canon of artistic beauty, which mandates specific proportions for the representation of figures, and the use of perspective to portray spatial depth. Friedlaender says of such Renaissance idealism, “Only what this artistic attitude set up as right and proper in proportions and the like counted

⁸ John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1967), 16. For another brief historiography of Mannerism, see Donald Posner, introduction to *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* by Walter Friedlaender (New York: Schocken, 1965), xi–xix. All of the texts discussed in this thesis are books that Smithson either cites specifically in his writing, or that were in his library. For a comprehensive list of Smithson’s library, see “Robert Smithson’s Library,” compiled and organized by Lori Cavagnaro, in Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 297–345. I also want to clarify that the scholarship on Mannerism produced in the early twentieth century represents only a minor divergence from the general opinion of Mannerism within the field of art history. A more widespread revision of Mannerism did not truly occur until the 1960s. I want to thank Linda Henderson for emphasizing this fact for me.

⁹ Walter Friedlaender, “The Anti-Classical Style,” in Wylie Sypher, ed., *Art History: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1963), 265. Smithson owned this anthology, but he did not own *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (see n. 8), which contains “The Anti-Classical Style” as well as “The Anti-Mannerist Style,” Friedlaender’s follow-up to the first essay. Both of these essays were first published in German in 1925. Posner, introduction to *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting*, xi. All subsequent citations of Friedlaender refer to Sypher’s anthology.

as beautiful and, even more than that, as the only thing truly natural.”¹⁰ In contrast to the Renaissance approach to art, Friedlaender presents Mannerism: “This art too is idealistic, but it does not rest on an idea of a canon, rather upon a *fantastica idea non appoggiata all’imitazione*, an imaginative idea unsupported by imitation of nature.”¹¹ Parmigianino, Jacopo de Pontormo, and Rosso Fiorentino—all of whom practiced in the 1520s and 1530s in Italy—embody for Friedlaender the ideological shift toward Mannerism; each artist’s tendency to elongate figures and their shared disregard for linear perspective and balanced, symmetrical compositions exemplify Friedlaender’s idea of Mannerism as a rejection of the “natural” in favor of the “unnatural.”¹²

The stylistic attributes of Mannerism that Friedlaender discusses in “The Anti-Classical Style,” as well as his sense of their significance as evidence of an alternative aesthetic perspective, remain the defining hallmarks of Mannerist art in much of the scholarly writing on Mannerism published after Friedlaender’s. Many of these later texts, especially those written in the late 1950s and 1960s, contain explanations of Mannerist art in terms of a certain shift in attitudes, theoretical or social or otherwise, away from Renaissance theories about art. For instance, Anthony Blunt’s *Artistic Theory in Italy: 1450–1600*, published in 1962, is a study of how factors such as Neoplatonism and the Protestant Reformation affected artistic theories in the Renaissance, and influenced theories of the art that came after.¹³ In his 1967 book *Mannerism*, John Shearman summarizes the characteristics of Mannerist art with the phrase “stylish style,”¹⁴ which for him connotes a

¹⁰Friedlaender, “The Anti-Classical Style,” in Sypher, *Art History*, 263.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 264.

¹³ Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁴ Shearman, *Mannerism*, 19.

conscious attempt by artists to adopt stylistic elements from the High Renaissance, and to subvert their expected function in order to create complex, artificial, and often bizarre images.¹⁵

Smithson's books on Mannerism also contain evidence of contemporary scholars' differing interpretations of the precise nature of the shift from the Renaissance to the Mannerist sensibility. Shearman states clearly in *Mannerism* that the Mannerist style was "ideally easy and attended by no crisis."¹⁶ This is most likely a response by Shearman to a specific trend among scholars of Mannerism at this time who claim that ideological crisis is a defining characteristic of the Mannerist attitude. Books in Smithson's library such as Andre Chastel's *The Crisis of the Renaissance* and Arnold Hauser's *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art* are two of the most obvious examples.¹⁷ Chastel argues that such factors as Martin Luther's initiation of the Reformation in 1517 and the Sack of Rome in 1527 initiated socio-political instability in Italy, and that the general rise of mercantilism and capitalism combined with the pretensions of aristocratic courtly life led to a period of excess and "useless expenditure" of energy and resources.¹⁸ Hauser also links social and economic crisis to Mannerism. For him, alienation is "the key to Mannerism,"¹⁹ and his conception of alienation derives directly from the Marxist theory that technical advances result in the alienation of a worker from his personal connection to the product of his labor, which in turn causes the worker to identify with the finished object of his work, not the process itself: "He puts his life into his work; his life, however, is no

¹⁵ Ibid., 19–22.

¹⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁷ Andre Chastel, *The Crisis of the Renaissance, 1520–1600* (Geneva: Skira, 1968); Arnold Hauser, *Mannerism: The Crisis of the Renaissance and the Origin of Modern Art*, 2 Vols (New York: Knopf, 1965).

¹⁸ Chastel, *The Crisis of the Renaissance*, 8–11. Quotation on p. 10.

¹⁹ The title of Chapter 7 of Hauser's book is "Alienation as the Key to Mannerism."

longer his own, but belongs to the object he produces.”²⁰ Hauser identifies the sixteenth century as “the beginning of the technical age,”²¹ and states that Mannerist art “is also itself a precious and fetishistic form of art that alienates itself from the creativity of the individual.”²² He then engages in an extensive analysis of the links between Mannerism and late 19th and early 20th century in terms of each epoch’s alienation. In the visual arts Hauser sees a distinct correlation between Mannerism and Surrealism, because he interprets both as intellectually tormented movements defined by a tendency to combine the “natural and anti-natural, rational and irrational.”²³

A book by Jacques Bousquet called *Mannerism: the Painting and Style of the Late Renaissance* also focuses on themes of alienation in Mannerist art, and consists of images and brief sections of text with titles such as “Distortion and Play of Perspective,” “Perversion,” “Melancholy,” “Monsters and Giants,” “Allegory and Symbol,” and “The Terrifying Image.”²⁴ Bousquet tends to employ anachronistic terms in his discussions of Mannerist art. In a section entitled “Cubism and the Expression of Volume,” Bousquet posits that Mannerist paintings like Rosso Fiorentino’s *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro* [Figure 2] depict the simplification of forms to geometric shapes, and that this tendency presages Cubism of the 1920s.²⁵ In his section on “Melancholy” Bousquet relates what he believes is Mannerism’s “melancholic

²⁰ Hauser, *Mannerism*, 98.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 111.

²³ *Ibid.*, 374. With the exception of his section on Surrealism, Hauser’s connections are mostly literary; after he explains his historical concept of Mannerism he discusses what he calls “Modern Mannerism” with little reference to traditional Mannerist works. His examples of Modern Mannerism include French Symbolist poetry, and the work of Marcel Proust.

²⁴ Jacques, Bousquet, *Mannerism: the Painting and Style of the Late Renaissance* (New York: Braziller, 1964).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

obsession” to the 19th-century Romantic concept of “spleen.”²⁶ His book is one of the few that Smithson cites specifically in his own essays on Mannerism.²⁷

Like Hauser and Bousquet, literary scholar Wylie Sypher considers Mannerism to be a somewhat ahistorical phenomenon, and he associates Mannerism with feelings of alienation and crisis within a given culture. Smithson owned four books by Sypher, all of which were published between 1955 and 1968 beginning with *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*.²⁸ In this book Sypher acknowledges a rise in contemporary interest in Mannerism, and he offers an explanation: “there is in the arts, the religion, the politics, the science, and the very conscience of [Mannerism] some disturbance interesting to us because we also have been living through a crisis of history and consciousness.”²⁹ In *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*, Sypher coins the term “Neo-Mannerism” to describe an attitude or “condition” that may occur at any period in time given the presence of a combination of social and psychic factors. He notices tendencies toward Neo Mannerism in French Impressionism, the Pre-Raphaelites, and Art Nouveau, and various other art historical epochs.³⁰ Of the books by Sypher that Smithson owned, Sypher discusses Mannerism extensively only in these two books.³¹ However, in the

²⁶ Ibid., 215.

²⁷ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

²⁸ The four books by Sypher in Smithson’s library are, in chronological order: *Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature 1400–1700* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955); *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature: Transformations in Style, in Art and Literature from the 18th to the 20th Century* (New York: Vintage, 1960); *Loss of the Self in modern literature and art* (New York: Random House, 1962); and *Literature and Technology: The Alien Vision* (New York: Random House, 1968). Sypher also edited the anthology of art historical writing containing Friedlaender’s essay on Mannerism (see n. 10).

²⁹ Sypher, *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*, 102.

³⁰ Sypher, *Rococo to Cubism*, 156–168. This section of the book is called “The Neo-Mannerist Condition.”

³¹ This generalization does not extend to brief mentions of Mannerism in Sypher’s books. For example, Sypher refers to a certain perspectival device of Degas as “mannerism” in *Literature*

other texts by Sypher in Smithson's library—*The Loss of Self in Art and Literature*, and *Literature and Technology: The Alien Vision*—Sypher approaches art and literature as vehicles for exploring common themes of crisis and alienation across history.

All of these books on Mannerism suggest that the reconsideration of Mannerism's art historical significance in the first half of the twentieth century amounted to a reinvention of the meaning of Mannerism.³² Smithson takes advantage of the opportunity to witness the refabrication of Mannerism as an art historical category, as well as its application to discussions of different time periods in art history. In his writing, Smithson also invents a new category or perspective by associating features of Mannerism with the work or ideas of certain contemporary artists and critics. In particular, Smithson uses Mannerism as a device in his writing to attack his ideological foil, alternately embodied by formalist critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried. For Smithson, both critics rely on a specific version of art history to make judgments about an artwork's value. In the mid-1960s Smithson was obsessed with Greenberg's criticism, and his essays "Abstract Mannerism" and "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture" are direct responses to particular essays from Greenberg's 1961 anthology *Art and Culture*.³³

and Technology: The Alien Vision, but this is a passing allusion without any further explanation. Sypher, *Literature and Technology*, 123.

³² Other texts that were not in Smithson's library support this conclusion. See for example Craig Hugh Smyth, *Mannerism and Maniera* (Vienna: IRSA, 1963), as well as Sidney Freedberg, "Observations on the Painting of the Maniera," *The Art Bulletin* 47 (June 1965), 187–197 and John Shearman, "In Search of a Definition: Three books on Mannerism," *Apollo* 81 (January 1965), 73–77, both of which contain discussions of the status of art historical scholarship on Mannerism in the 1960s.

³³ Although Greenberg is known to have revised and edited his original essays heavily for their publication in *Art and Culture*, for this thesis I will concentrate only on those versions of Greenberg's essays that appear in *Art and Culture*. As Ann Reynolds has pointed out, this is due to the fact that, before 1967, Smithson refers almost exclusively to *Art and Culture* when discussing Greenberg in his own writing. The only exception to this is a brief reference by Smithson to Greenberg's essay "Post Painterly Abstraction," in the exhibition catalogue *Post*

In the mid-1960s, Fried gained prominence as a formalist critic of contemporary art. In a 1965 essay entitled “Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Frank Stella,” Fried offers his account of the history of stylistic criticism, beginning with a discussion the art of the High Renaissance in relation to Heinrich Wölfflin’s book *Renaissance and Baroque*, written in 1888.³⁴ Fried argues that Wölfflin’s book institutes a widespread trend in art criticism based on “a fundamentally Hegelian conception of art history, in which styles are described as succeeding one another in accord with an internal dynamic or dialectic.”³⁵ According to Fried, critics who perceive art history in this way disregard an artwork’s social or political context, and instead interpret artworks solely in terms of stylistic progression—as one period’s style determining the next, and so forth.

Fried identifies the Hegelian approach to art history with formalist criticism, and he concludes that it is inadequate for evaluating the art of the High Renaissance, since for him the meaning of Renaissance art is inseparable from its social context.³⁶ However, Fried proposes that 20th-century modernist art stands to benefit from formalist criticism, because modernist artists do not consider social factors to be important for their work:

In a sense, modernist art in this century finished what society in the nineteenth began: the alienation of the artist from the general preoccupations of the culture in which he is embedded, and the prizing loose of art itself from the concerns, aims, and ideals of that culture. With the achievements of Cubism in the first and second decades of

Painterly Abstraction (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1964), which did not appear in *Art and Culture*. Reynolds, *Robert Smithson*, 254, n. 121. For more on Smithson’s obsession with Greenberg, see Reynolds, *Robert Smithson*, 64–66; 253, n. 120.

³⁴ Heinrich Wölfflin, *Renaissance and Baroque* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966). Incidentally, Smithson owned a copy of this edition.

³⁵ Michael Fried, “Three American Painters,” in the exhibition catalogue *Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella* (Boston: Fogg Art Museum, 1965), 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7–8. For consistency, I will continue to use the term “formalist criticism” to discuss this concept.

this century, if not before, painting and sculpture became free to pursue concerns intrinsic to themselves.³⁷

Here the idea of “alienation” recurs, but Fried attaches a different significance to alienation as it affects artistic production.³⁸ Because Fried believes that modernist art does not take into account the so-called “non-artistic factors” that hamper other critics’ success in evaluating Renaissance art, formalist criticism is for him an appropriate method for evaluating modernist art.

Fried’s conclusion that modernist art is autonomous from its culture demonstrates his indifference to interpretations linking Modernism to a Mannerist sensibility or condition; such art historical accounts rely on the very factors that Fried finds insignificant to discussions of contemporary art. Instead, Fried insists that contemporary art should look only to earlier modernist art for inspiration. As he explains, this constitutes a process of formal self-criticism whereby an artist must evaluate the physical attributes of a particular medium (painting, sculpture, or architecture) and determine which of those elements is absolutely essential to it. For Fried, this process of “self-renewal” through self-criticism is a means of achieving the highest level of artistic purity for each medium.³⁹ Fried acknowledges that the responsibility of the artist to achieve self-renewal includes a struggle, which he characterizes as dialectical: “the actual dialectic by which [modernist painting] is made has taken on more and more of the denseness, structure, and complexity of moral experience—that is, of life itself, but life lived as few are inclined to live it: in a state of continuous intellectual and moral alertness.”⁴⁰ Fried also believes that the formalist critic, as the chronicler of the modernist art’s process of self-

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

³⁸ Fried mentions Marx as well, but as a source for his later formulation of a “dialectic of modernism.” Fried, “The American Painters,” 8.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 9–10.

renewal, has a similar moral obligation to modernism.⁴¹ As a formalist critic Fried's duty is to provide the means for modernist art to look to the past in order to continue its process of self-renewal, and to do this he adheres to a strict screening process for evaluating modernist art, which is based on time-tested formal qualities: shape, color, surface—in short, on what he considers pure materiality.

Smithson objects to formalist criticism's equation of art with life,⁴² and to Fried's interpretation of formalist criticism as a moral endeavor to preserve the purity of modernist art. He notices that formalist criticism's reliance on certain physical characteristics depends on a specific comprehension of art history, which in turn leads to an unwillingness to admit into the modernist canon alternative histories that might make better sense of developments in contemporary art. Smithson likens formalist criticism's particular brand of art history to what he calls "the myth of the Renaissance."⁴³ As such, he models his attack on formalist criticism on those art historical accounts that depict Mannerism as a departure from the artistic concepts of the Renaissance. For Smithson, the Renaissance is also, like Mannerism, a category invented by art historians, and characterized by the primary goal of rendering an image that is indistinguishable from reality. Smithson believes that connoisseurs such as Bernard Berenson used the ideal of naturalism in Renaissance art as

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See Robert Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism" (1966–67), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336.

⁴³ For specific references to the "myth of the Renaissance," see Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 349; and "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," Ibid., 336. Wylie Sypher, in *Literature and Technology: The Alien Vision*, discusses John Ruskin's term "the myth of the Renaissance." Sypher, *Literature and Technology*, 83. Also, André Chastel's companion book to *The Crisis of the Renaissance* is *The Myth of the Renaissance, 1420–1520* (Geneva: Skira, 1969). However, because both of these books were published after the attributed dates of the two Smithson essays, it is unclear from where Smithson derived the term. None of Ruskin's writings appear in his library.

a scale of value for evaluating all art, and that this same hierarchy of value persists in formalist critics' quest for artistic purity.⁴⁴

For Smithson, formalist critics determine artistic value according to personal taste, and submit their opinions as truth by claiming that the opinions of scholars like Berenson provide sound art historical precedence. To demonstrate how art historians' subjective tastes led to the idea that art strives toward an ideal of naturalism, Smithson traces the origin of the myth of the Renaissance in "Paradoxes of Conduct":

The 19th-century myth of the Renaissance is based on the sensibility of naturalism, and is opposed to manners and conventions. Naturalism in a sense became an unprincipled defense against the problem of corruption in both esthetics and society. Natural expressiveness replaced the rules of the game, and so confused inanimate objects with personal feelings. The art object became in the naturalist's mind the direct expression of his own feeling and not the result of a convention or manner, thus began the belief in expressiveness in art.⁴⁵

For Smithson, formalist criticism is a prime example of such "naturalism," because like the myth of the Renaissance, formalist criticism claims to fight corruption and aspires toward an ideal of artistic purity—although for the Renaissance purity denotes naturalistic artistic representation, while in formalist criticism purity is one of medium and personal expression.⁴⁶ Smithson, in this and other essays, sets out to restore "the rules of the game" by opposing the myth of the Renaissance with what he calls a "Mannerist

⁴⁴ Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336.

⁴⁵ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 349.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 351. See also Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism." in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336-337; and Robert Smithson, "The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics," Ibid., 337-338. The first essay contains an extended explanation of the myth of the Renaissance. The second essay, although it does not use the term "myth of the Renaissance," reiterates the concepts discussed in "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," especially regarding "self-expression," and then ties them to Greenberg and Fried specifically.

sensibility.”⁴⁷ His use of Mannerism to “corrupt” the purity of Renaissance naturalism effectively subverts the authority of formalist critics’ interpretations of art history, which provide them with a hierarchy of artistic value by which they judge contemporary art. Mannerism becomes Smithson’s critical tool in this endeavor to spare contemporary art from the standards of formalist criticism, and to restore to art and criticism what has been lost through formalist critics’ quest for purity.

My first chapter provides a discussion of Smithson’s Mannerist sensibility as it relates to a major tenet of the formalist criticism of Greenberg and Fried: the concept of the framing edge in modernist painting. Smithson uses Mannerism to mock formalist discussions of the framing edge as a benchmark of quality. Smithson sees formalist critics’ concept of “quality” as an arbitrary designation intended to instill art’s physical characteristics with the ability to elicit a transcendent aesthetic “experience.” Smithson’s essays also display his animosity toward the idea that the framing edge is a measure of illusionistic space in abstract painting, which leads him to object to the very definition of abstraction as it is used in formalist criticism. Ultimately Smithson wishes to expose formalist critics’ promotion of the framing edge as the perpetuation of the myth of the Renaissance, and his conception of Mannerism plays an important role in this process.

My second chapter addresses Smithson’s ideas about surface, or artifice, as they relate to certain contemporary artworks. Greenberg and Fried use the term surface in their evaluations of modernist sculpture, and their use of surface in their writings works to uphold formalist criticism’s standards of purity. Surface for Smithson signals a decidedly corrupt, complex and intellectual role for an artwork, and he uses Mannerism to underscore his

⁴⁷ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

thinking about surface in this way. Thus the differences between how formalist critics view surfaces in relation to Smithson's idea of surfaces provides a clear contrast between Smithson's ideas about the myth of the Renaissance and a Mannerist sensibility for contemporary art.

Smithson eventually incorporates his view of Mannerism into his formulation of an alternative critical approach to contemporary art. His explanation of a "Mannerist esthetic," which appears in "Paradoxes of Conduct," is a conception of contemporary art devoid of all moralistic judgments of quality and claims of purity or truth. Smithson states, "Manneristic art is often called pseudo, sick, perverse, false, phony and decadent by the naturalists or truth tellers, yet it seems to me that what the Mannerist esthetic does disclose or recover is a sense of primal evil."⁴⁸ Smithson's use of Mannerism in his writing is his attempt to make a similar recovery for contemporary art and criticism.

⁴⁸ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 350.

Chapter 2. Shape as Farce: The Framing Edge and the Formalist Culture-Hero

Ever since Clement Greenberg took over T.S. Eliot's role as the formalist culture-hero, he has been the keeper of abstract "quality." The word "quality" has many propaganda purposes. It is used in the art world the same way it is used in the advertising world. "The canvas standard stands for quality," Marcel Duchamp might say. Nevertheless, it was Greenberg, who in his flight from hard-core Cubism to soft-core Cubism, i.e., from Picasso to Morris Louis, stumbled upon that great Mannerism, ultra-consciousness of the "framing edge." Before we go on, let us look back into awful art history. Jacques Bousquet in his book *Mannerism* says, "By a typically Mannerist paradox, the frame became the picture. In France, the feigned frame enjoyed great vogue." Meanwhile, back at the Avant-Garde, which is beyond history, Greenberg tells us in his essay, "*American type*" *Painting* [sic], "What is destroyed is the Cubist and immemorial notion and feeling of the picture edge as a confine; with (Barnett) Newman, the picture edge is repeated inside, and *makes* the picture, instead of merely being *echoed*." History repeats itself, but in the Abstract.⁴⁹

The above statement appears in an essay by Robert Smithson from 1966–67 called "Abstract Mannerism." Here Smithson makes a connection between an art historical interpretation of the frame in Mannerist painting and Clement Greenberg's emphasis on the framing edge in Barnett Newman's thin, vertical paintings [Figure 3].⁵⁰ For Smithson, Mannerism implies artificiality, affectation, and the use of visual or theoretical devices to deny or confound any specific meaning in an artwork,⁵¹ and in the above passage Mannerism is essentially synonymous with "propaganda." His comparison of Greenberg's preoccupation with the framing edge to Bousquet's comments on

⁴⁹ Smithson, "Abstract Mannerism," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

⁵⁰ Clement Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," *Art and Culture*, 226.

⁵¹ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351. Here Smithson says that two Mannerist paintings "reflect nothing but ungraspable meanings." For further explanation of this idea, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

the Mannerist frame thus conveys Smithson's position that Greenberg's interpretation of Newman is essentially an empty gesture to promote the authority of "quality" for formalist criticism.

According to Smithson, Greenberg's "ultra-consciousness of the 'framing edge'" is an example of how formalist critics uphold the concept of formal quality by adhering to a specific and exclusive version of art history. In "American-Type Painting," the essay to which Smithson reacts in "Abstract Mannerism," Greenberg offers an account of the history of modernist painting in which all compositional techniques after Cézanne are essentially the products of painters' increasing awareness of the frame and their efforts to acknowledge the frame as "the all-controlling coordinate of design and drawing," which Greenberg declares is "a rule that the Old Masters had faithfully observed but never spelled out."⁵² Greenberg argues that Cézanne's increased consciousness of the framing edge in his paintings results in the artist's depiction of geometric shapes with edges that "would echo the shape of the frame more insistently,"⁵³ and that the Cubists follow Cézanne with compositions orienting every depicted shape to the vertical and horizontal axes of the framing edge.⁵⁴ Greenberg traces the demise of this system, "which Late Cubism converted into an inhibiting habit."⁵⁵ This version of the history of modernist painting is the context in which Greenberg places Newman. According to Greenberg, "Newman's picture becomes all frame in

⁵² Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," *Art and Culture*, 219. Greenberg credits the increasing reduction of pictorial space—the flattening of the picture plane that according to formalist criticism is the chief characteristic of modernist painting—as the reason for artists becoming increasingly aware of the role of the framing edge in painting. Regarding his use of the term "Old Masters," Greenberg consistently offers Rembrandt as a prime example—see for instance Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Art and Culture*, 3–21; and "Abstraction, Representational, and so forth," *Ibid.*, 133–138.

⁵³ Greenberg, "American-Type Painting," *Art and Culture*, 227.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

itself” by parodying the geometry of Late Cubism, and therefore, “What is destroyed is the Cubist, and immemorial, notion and feeling of the picture edge as a confine.”⁵⁶

By juxtaposing Greenberg’s comments on Newman with a text on Mannerist art, Smithson foregrounds the fact that Greenberg omits certain art historical categories to devise his own personal account of art history. Smithson’s insertion of Mannerism into Greenberg’s art history nullifies the inevitability of Greenberg’s conclusions about Newman’s painting, and effectively deflates Greenberg’s intention to convince his reader that Newman is a revolutionary artist whose paintings “constitute perhaps the most direct attack yet on the easel convention.”⁵⁷ From Smithson’s perspective, Greenberg’s motivation for lionizing Newman is to secure his own position as an arbiter of formal quality. Using Greenberg’s modernist manifesto “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” as his point of reference, Smithson declares in “Abstract Mannerism” that Greenberg’s reputation as a “formalist culture-hero” has, by the mid-1960s, become insubstantial and artificial: “The pretentious wall that Modernism had set up to protect its lost generations and beat generations is no longer convincing. Greenberg’s “superior consciousness of history,” together with his idea of a cultural elite has dissolved like all forms of critical representationalisms into a vast...network of non-objectivity.”⁵⁸ The idea of modernism as an impenetrable bastion of culture, Smithson suggests, is a fabrication, a “pretentious wall” that has shattered into multiple perspectives—

⁵⁶ Ibid., 226.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 225.

⁵⁸ This quotation is from an alternate draft of “Abstract Mannerism,” from The Robert Irving Smithson Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., Roll 3834, no. 248. Copies of this draft were lent to me by Ann Reynolds. Smithson in this passage quotes Greenberg: “In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore:—avant-garde culture. A superior consciousness of history—more precisely, the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism—made this possible.” Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” *Art and Culture*, 4.

—any authority that Greenberg’s system of differentiating between high and low culture may have had disappears. Consequently, Greenberg’s persona, which at one time possessed the power to translate the mysteries of history and guide the avant-garde to safety, becomes a costume, a veiled marketing campaign to promote Greenberg’s own personal taste.

To demonstrate how Greenberg’s propagandistic agenda has affected contemporary art, Smithson addresses the style of painting Greenberg refers to as “Post Painterly Abstraction.” Greenberg curated a show called *Post Painterly Abstraction*, which opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964. In his catalogue essay, Greenberg cites Heinrich Wölfflin’s formal categories as his source for the terms “painterly” and “abstract.”⁵⁹ For Greenberg, Post Painterly Abstraction denotes a response to “Painterly Abstraction,” or Abstract Expressionism. In particular, Greenberg explains that the style of Abstract Expressionism follows a trajectory that is common to all major artistic styles: “Having produced an art of major importance, it turned into a school, then into a manner, and finally into a set of mannerisms.”⁶⁰ Here “mannerism” alludes to the degeneration of a style, and the term has a negative connotation; for Greenberg, the difference between the Abstract Expressionism of Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock and its mannered counterparts is one of quality.⁶¹ Greenberg contends that Abstract Expressionism has become trite, and “its

⁵⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Post Painterly Abstraction,” n.p.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. “The most conspicuous of the mannerism into which Painterly Abstraction has degenerated is what I call the ‘Tenth Street touch’ (after East Tenth Street New York), which spread through abstract painting like a blight during the 1950’s” (Ibid.). The negative connotation of “mannerism” that Greenberg employs is a common meaning for the word, as opposed to “Mannerism” as an art historical category. John Shearman notes that even in the 16th century the term “manierato” was used to indicate stylization, the trite use of artistic styles; whereas the term “maniera” denoted what we now refer to as “Mannerism.” Shearman, *Mannerism*, 18–19.

standardization, its reduction to a set of mannerisms” by artists who imitate its stylistic features has pushed Abstract Expressionism toward being “bad as art.”⁶² According to this logic, the paintings Greenberg has selected to represent Post Painterly Abstraction constitute a reaction “largely against the mannered drawing and the mannered design of Painterly Abstraction.”⁶³

In “Abstract Mannerism” Smithson adopts the term “Mannerism,” the meaning of which comes from the scholarly writing that characterizes Mannerism as an art historical category,⁶⁴ and he argues that Post Painterly Abstraction signals “the rebirth of the Mannerist sensibility”: “If it can be said that Abstract Expressionism originated in the ‘unconscious’ within a ‘natural’ frame of reference, then it can be said that the New Abstraction or Post Painterly Abstraction originated in an ultra-consciousness and far from anything called nature, even ideal nature.”⁶⁵ Here Smithson employs the opposition of “natural” and “unnatural” that art historians of Mannerism use to contrast Renaissance and Mannerist art. He also notices that some Post Painterly Abstract paintings exhibit a lingering self-expressive tendency, which he refers to as “false expressionism.”⁶⁶ For example, in some

⁶² Greenberg, “Post Painterly Abstraction,” n.p.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ In his writing Smithson alternates between using “Mannerism” and “mannerism.” Sometimes his use of the latter carries the conventional derogatory connotation, while at other times, such as his use of the term “mannerist *picture*” in “Paradoxes of Conduct,” he seems to mean “Mannerism” in the more historical sense. Smithson also uses “mannerist esthetic” once in “Paradoxes of Conduct” although he uses “Mannerist esthetic” throughout the rest of the essay. The reasons for this are unclear. I will continue to use Smithson’s capitalization as it appears in Flam for all of my quotations of Smithson’s writing.

⁶⁵ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339. In “Abstract Mannerism” Smithson also exchanges the term “New Abstraction” with Post Painterly Abstraction. These two terms, which originated in the exhibitions *Post Painterly Abstraction* (1964) and *Toward a New Abstraction* (New York, The Jewish Museum, 1963), were sometimes used synonymously in the mid-1960s; see Reynolds, *Robert Smithson*, 46.

⁶⁶ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339. Smithson refers specifically to the work of Kenneth Noland, Larry Poons Frank Stella, and Neil Williams. Of

paintings by Noland the “little references to the ‘drip’ or the ‘splash’” that remain on the canvas [Figure 4] are incongruous with his otherwise “cool” and controlled brushwork. and thus indicate “self-consciousness” not “ultra-consciousness.”⁶⁷

Smithson is indifferent to whether or not the “Abstract Mannerism” of Post Painterly Abstraction is deliberate on the part of the artists. He focuses instead on whether or not there is a significant difference between the work of Post Painterly Abstract artists who make false claims of ultra-consciousness, and an artist whom Smithson regards as being fully conscious of his actions both in his work and with regard to his public persona.⁶⁸ Using Andy Warhol as an example of the latter, Smithson comes to no definite conclusion in this matter: “It’s hard to tell whether Noland’s ‘mistakes’ are more or less interesting than Andy Warhol’s fake ‘corrections.’”⁶⁹ Unable to find any difference—at least in terms of interest—between Noland and Warhol, Smithson contends that Post Painterly Abstraction’s “false expressionism” is a nostalgic homage to Abstract Expressionism’s “hot blooded” approach to painting: “When the ‘tough guy’ artist plays it cool little bits of expressionism boil up here and there. The ‘noble savage’ gambit dies hard in the formalist vice. Ultra-conscious yearns for the good old 50s when art came from the ‘unconscious.’”⁷⁰ Ultimately, this statement underscores Smithson’s opinion that the idea of modernist painting as a natural expression of the creative

these four artists, only Noland and Stella showed paintings in *Post Painterly Abstraction*. Likewise, Noland and Stella both participated in *Toward a New Abstraction*.

⁶⁷ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

⁶⁸ Smithson often refers to Warhol as an artist who refuses to disclose, through his comments and external appearance, any meaningful or creative purpose for his work. See for example “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 352–353; “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 27; and “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art,” 211–227.

⁶⁹ Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

process⁷¹ is the invention of formalist critics. For Smithson, Greenberg in particular intends to use the “formalist vice” to perpetuate his own criteria for artistic quality according to his personal version of art history. According to Smithson’s logic, formalist critics base their assessments of contemporary art on outmoded aesthetic standards at the expense of exploring alternative interpretations that may contradict their ideas of value, but which could reveal aspects of contemporary art that are “more interesting” than whether or not a certain stylistic tendency is “deliberate or non-deliberate.”⁷²

By interpreting Post Painterly Abstraction as “Abstract Mannerism,” Smithson suggests that Greenberg’s insistence on “quality” has caused artists to mistake Greenberg’s opinions for facts, and Smithson uses Mannerism to invalidate the high value Greenberg places on the framing edge in his statement on Newman in “American-Type Painting.” In another essay by Smithson entitled “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics” written around the same time as “Abstract Mannerism,” Smithson offers a brief summary of his understanding of why and how the framing edge has become such a prominent issue for formalist evaluations of painting:

All “formal” criticism and art is based on representational space and its reduction. The latest “formal advance” to come out of this “reductive tendency” has to do with the “framing support.” “The picture-support,’ as it is also called, is interesting as a critical mutation of Greenberg’s space speculations, but should not be considered abstract by any stretch of the imagination.⁷³

With this statement, Smithson identifies the importance placed upon the framing edge in formalist criticism as being a result of formalist critics’—

⁷¹ Ibid. Smithson opens this essay by stating, “Some artists never question the ‘creative process’; they consider it to be quite natural” (Ibid).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Robert Smithson, “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 337–338.

specifically Greenberg's—preoccupation with pictorialism, or the suggestion of the illusion of space in painting.

The formalist assumption that the history of modernist painting constitutes a progression toward increasingly “abstract” pictorial space is a major source of contention for Smithson, because he defines abstraction as the eradication of spatial representation of any kind. Therefore, for Smithson the formalist suggestion that pictorial space can be abstract is a contradiction in terms.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Smithson believes formalist criticism has arrived at this particular characterization of painting through logic that qualifies as the polar opposite of abstraction. He explains that from the formalist perspective, abstraction in modernist painting is the result of its evolution from the representation of three-dimensional space, or as Greenberg says, “an illusion of the same kind of space in which our bodies move,”⁷⁵ to, says Smithson quoting Greenberg, “a reduction of three-dimensional illusionistic space to ‘the same order of space as our bodies.’”⁷⁶ In other words, Greenberg sees modernist painting in terms of the increasing shallowness of illusionistic depth depicted on the painting's surface. This reduction of three-dimensional space, Greenberg concludes, pushes the picture plane into the viewer's

⁷⁴ Ibid. This definition of abstraction is Wilhelm Worringer's, whose book *Abstraction and Empathy* posits that abstraction in art necessarily entails the absence of spatial representation. This is because, Worringer argues, cultures deliberately wanted to create forms that were alienated from nature in order to achieve an ultimate regularity, free from the earthly obligations of three-dimensional space. Worringer opposes this “psychic impulse” of abstraction to “empathy,” or the need to relate to an object as a representation of a form in natural, three-dimensional space. Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), 3-25.

⁷⁵ Greenberg, “Abstract, Representational, and so forth,” *Art and Culture*, 136.

⁷⁶ Smithson, “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 338. Smithson is quoting Greenberg, “Abstract, Representational, and so forth,” *Art and Culture*, 136. In “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics” this comment appears in a paragraph contrasting Greenberg's statement with Worringer's idea of abstraction. This opposition appears as two separate footnotes in Smithson's essay “Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space,” *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 1 (November 1966), 28–31.

space, which changes how pictorial space functions for the viewer: “Pictorial space has lost its ‘inside’ and become all ‘outside.’ The spectator can no longer escape into it from the space in which he himself stands. If it deceives the eye at all, it is by optical rather than pictorial means.”⁷⁷ Greenberg interprets this shift in painting from “pictorial” to “optical” as a transition from representation to abstraction.

Smithson reacts to “Greenberg’s space speculations” by arguing that not only does formalism advocate false abstraction, it also anthropomorphizes pictorial space by confusing pictorial space with the three-dimensional space “in which our bodies move,” which Smithson translates as Greenberg’s use of “man as the measure of space.”⁷⁸ For Smithson this is blatant evidence of formalist criticism’s “empathic” attitude,⁷⁹ the tendency to consider art in terms of its self-expression and the viewer’s corresponding emotional response. Citing Bernard Berenson’s evaluations of Renaissance art as the precedent for the empathic attitude, Smithson implies that the “pathetic fallacy”—the “reductive tendency” of pictorial space in modernist painting—is another example of how formalist critics use a biased version of art history to justify subjective value judgments.⁸⁰

Smithson then addresses the criticism of Michael Fried within the context of the empathic attitude: “the dubious seriousness and pretended rigor of Fried’s criticism tends to keep the ‘space’ myth going. All of Fried’s remarks about ‘color’ and ‘structure’ are empathic with vague references to

⁷⁷ Greenberg, “Abstract, Representational, and so forth,” *Art and Culture*, 136–137.

⁷⁸ Smithson, “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 338.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* The term “empathic” is derived from Worringer.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 337. For an explicit link between Smithson’s idea of empathy or self-expression and formal quality, see, “A Refutation of Historical Humanism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336–337.

Wittgensteinian humanism.”⁸¹ For Smithson, then, Fried has taken over Greenberg’s role as “the formalist culture-hero”⁸²; Fried merely participates in the “critical mutation” of ideas that are already unfounded and essentially self-serving, and Smithson’s derision of Fried’s “pretended rigor” alludes to what may qualify as a Mannerist tendency. Eventually, due in large part to Fried’s discussions of the framing edge in his criticism, Smithson will come to this conclusion.

Smithson makes one other comment about Fried’s criticism in “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics”: “Fried believes Kenneth Noland’s paintings to be ‘at the bottom expressive in intent.’”⁸³ This further implicates Fried in formalist criticism’s alleged empathic attitude, and like all of Smithson’s remarks on Fried’s criticism in “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” it refers specifically to Fried’s 1965 essay “Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella.”⁸⁴ In this essay, which also contains his historical account of formalist criticism,⁸⁵ Fried extrapolates from this history the basic premise for his subsequent arguments on the primacy of the framing edge in contemporary painting—a premise which reiterates Greenberg’s evaluation of Newman’s paintings:

the spatial relation of the bands [of color in Newman’s paintings] to the colored field is anything but precisely definable...the illusive optical space that seems to lie beyond the vertical bands also, in some way or other, effectively subsumes them...the bands provide a crucial element of pictorial structure, by means of what I want to term their “deductive” relation to the framing edge. That is, the bands amount to echoes

⁸¹ Smithson, “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 337.

⁸² Smithson, “Abstract Mannerism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 339.

⁸³ Smithson, “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 337.

⁸⁴ Fried describes in this essay Noland’s “drive toward a deductive mode of pictorial organization—a drive that was, and still is, at bottom expressive in intent...” Michael Fried, “Three American Painters,” 28. Smithson obviously tailored this comment to apply specifically to Noland’s paintings.

⁸⁵ See Ch. 1 of this thesis.

within the painting of the two side framing-edges; they relate primarily to those edges, and in so doing make explicit acknowledgment of the shape of the canvas. They demand to be seen as deriving from the framing-edge—as having been deduced from it...⁸⁶

Fried's conclusions about Newman and the "deductive structure" of the framing edge resonate throughout the second section of "Three American Painters," in which Fried discusses the advances made by Noland, Olitski, and Stella. For Fried, all three painters' achievements are the result of Newman's legacy for modernist painting, which Fried identifies as a leap of progress in the exploration of "a new kind of pictorial structure based on the shape and size, rather than the flatness, of the picture support."⁸⁷

Fried's repeated references to "structure" in "Three American Painters" indicate his particular stance, which is especially relevant to Smithson's comments on Fried in "The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics." Fried approaches contemporary painting in "Three American Painters" by tailoring his comments according to the two formal categories of "color" and "structure."⁸⁸ He sees the history of modernist painting as having been reduced to these two essential principles, and as a result, the choices made by Noland, Olitski, and Stella of how to handle color and structure become emblematic to Fried of each artist's "aspirations...not toward purity, but toward quality and eloquence."⁸⁹ Fried thus departs from a more Greenbergian interpretation of

⁸⁶ Fried, "Three American Painters," 22–23. During his discussion of Newman, Fried cites Greenberg's essay "After Abstract Expressionism," *Art International* (October 25, 1962), 29; in reference to Newman's ability to suggest "indeterminate space" with color. Fried, "Three American Painters," 21.

⁸⁷ Fried, "Three American Painters," 23.

⁸⁸ I understand Fried's idea of structure to be synonymous with his remarks about the shape and size of the picture support in terms of pictorialism. As for color, Fried says, "color tends to be much harder than structure to characterize precisely." Fried, "Three American Painters," 24.

⁸⁹ Fried, "Three American Painters," 48.

modernist painting as a quest for purity, and focuses on the quality of color and structure in the work of Noland, Olitski, and Stella.

Both color and structure are capable of achieving pictorial illusion according to Fried, and he acknowledges a high degree of success in Noland's "ellipsoid motif"⁹⁰ paintings [Figure 5], which consist of an elliptical shape—sometimes one concentric ellipse painted inside another—placed in a field of color, though not in the center of the field. Fried believes that these paintings represent an instance in which color becomes fully integrated into the overall structure of the works. Apparently, Noland achieves this by ensuring that "the colored field plays an active, structural role by helping the motif remain poised either at or above the center of the canvas, and by seeming to bring intense coloristic pressure to bear on it that might account for its deformation."⁹¹ In other words, Fried interprets the expanse of color, which spreads all the way to the edge of the surface of the canvas, as representing a shallow pictorial space actually pushing on and in effect causing the ellipsoid motif to appear as it is, and where it is, within the overall composition. Thus each element proves essential to the paintings' overall "structural logic" and to its success as pictorial illusion.⁹²

For Fried, contemporary painters must ensure that the framing edge is instrumental to creating and sustaining pictorial illusion. The role of the frame in modernist painting is crucial due to what he believes is the exclusively optical nature of illusionism, and he evaluates the paintings of Noland, Olitski, and Stella according to their achievements in this respect. In Stella's paintings especially, Fried sees a highly advanced form of deductive structure. Fried explains in "Three American Painters" that Stella, in his

⁹⁰ Ibid., 29.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

paintings of concentric stripes that repeat the outline of an irregularly shaped canvas [Figure 6], reinforces the literalness of the picture support more fully than any other contemporary painter.⁹³ In fact, because Stella's paintings so completely express the power of the framing edge over other pictorial elements, Fried feels the need to defend Stella against an "antipictorial interpretation of modernism."⁹⁴ Fried posits, "The values in Stella's case are pictorial values; they are to be found, or found wanting, *only* in one's first-hand experience of the paintings in question."⁹⁵

In his analyses of Noland and Stella's paintings, Fried's emphasis on quality combined with his opinion that the viewer's experience is the only means for truly understanding quality provides the basis for his arguments about color and structure, and in turn influences his conclusions about the paintings' pictorial space. Therefore, it is possible to gather a sense of what Smithson means when he says that Fried's conception of the framing edge "should not be considered abstract by any stretch of the imagination."⁹⁶ Fried declares that the framing edge is the key formal element in contemporary painting's struggle to convey optical pictorial space, and this type of illusionism constitutes for Fried modernist painting's tendency toward abstraction. Fried's recourse to the viewer's personal experience as a defense against the so-called "antipictorial interpretation of modernism" in Stella's paintings also offends Smithson's sensibility, because Fried's idea of abstraction entails his own emotional response; for this, Smithson qualifies Fried as a practitioner of the "empathic attitude" of art criticism.⁹⁷

⁹³ Ibid., 43–44.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 44. Fried's summary of this attitude forms the basis of his attack on "literalism" in his essay "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), 12-23.

⁹⁵ Fried, "Three American Painters," 44.

⁹⁶ Robert Smithson, "The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 337–338.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 337.

The frame continues to be Fried's primary concern in his criticism on modernist painting throughout the mid-1960s.⁹⁸ Two years after writing "Three American Painters," Fried engages in another defense of modernist art against an "antipictorial interpretation of modernism," which he terms "objecthood" in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."⁹⁹ Smithson writes a letter to the editor of *Artforum* responding to "Art and Objecthood," which amounts to an accusation that Fried's criticism has reached absolutely histrionic proportions, and represents new heights in formalist criticism's Manneristic artificiality:

In a manner worthy of the most fanatical puritan, [Fried] provides the art world with a long-overdue spectacle—a kind of ready-made parody of the war between Renaissance classicism (modernity) versus Manneristic anti-classicism (theater). Fried, without knowing it, has brought into being a schism complete with all the "mimic fury" (Thomas Carew) of a fictive inquisition. He becomes, I want to say, in effect the first truly manneristic critic of "modernity." Fried has set the critical stage for *manneristic modernism*, although he is trying hard not to fall from the "grip" of grace.¹⁰⁰

Again, Smithson pits the Renaissance against Mannerism to make a connection between the conventions of modernism and its antithesis, in this case Fried's idea of theater. The "grip" Smithson mentions is a term Fried uses in connection with the formalist idea of "experience," the intimate and

⁹⁸ The most well known of Fried's essays on the primacy of the framing edge is "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings," *Artforum* 5, no. 3 (November 1966), 18–27.

⁹⁹ Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 12–23.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," *Artforum* 6, no. 2 (October 1967), 4. In reference to this "grip," which Fried mentions often in his criticism from the mid-1960s, Smithson cites Fried's article "Anthony Caro and Kenneth Noland: Some Notes on Not Composing," *The Lugano Review* (Summer 1965), 198–206. This issue of *The Lugano Review* also contains an essay by Wylie Sypher entitled "Mannerism as Metatheatre," which includes a passage from Thomas Carew's elegy for John Donne (*The Lugano Review*, Summer 1965, 184); this is the source of Smithson's above reference to Carew.

emotional connection between the viewer and the artwork.¹⁰¹ According to Fried, only an artwork possessing exceptional formal quality is capable of eliciting such an experience.¹⁰² For Smithson, Fried's empathic reliance on feeling (which Fried repeatedly admits is the cornerstone of his critical practice) is a defense mechanism: "What Fried fears most is the consciousness of what he is doing—namely being himself theatrical. He dreads 'distance' because that would force him to become aware of the role he is playing."¹⁰³ This implies that Fried has claimed that his role is not a role, but rather a "sacred duty to modernism"¹⁰⁴ that, in spite of appearances, is nevertheless merely a trumped up version of formalism's reliance on false value systems.

In his letter to the editor, Smithson identifies Tony Smith as Fried's nemesis in "Art and Objecthood," because Smith rejects the formalist division of art into individual media, thereby disregarding formalist criticism's criteria for quality. Indeed, Fried uses Smith's description of a ride on the unfinished

¹⁰¹ Fried's use of the term "grip" in this specific way is most explicit in "Anthony Caro and Kenneth Noland," *The Lugano Review*, 206. Fried refers to a "grip" in "Art and Objecthood," but in reference to theatricality: "It was the need to break the fingers of this grip that made objecthood an issue for modernist painting" ("Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, 20). Smithson parodies this statement in his letter: "Yet, little known 'specific demons' are 'breaking the fingers' of Fried's grip on [Jules Olitski's] *Bunga*" ("Letter to the Editor," *Artforum*, 4).

¹⁰² The idea of experience as being a direct result of formal quality is a dominant theme of Fried's criticism. One example occurs in "Three American Painters" during a discussion of Stella's paintings, in which Fried argues that what matters more than any interpretation of modernist painting is "the actual quality of work produced by its adherents...only one's actual experience of works of art ought to be regarded as bearing *directly* on the question of which [formal] conventions are still viable and which may be discarded as having outlived their capacity to make us accept them...as essential and even natural." Fried, "Three American Painters," 44.

¹⁰³ Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 4. Smithson remarks in another essay, "Artists should be conscious of the roles they are playing." Smithson, "A Refutation of Historical Humanism," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336. For Smithson this self-awareness is an antidote to the Renaissance myth of self-expression practiced by formalism.

¹⁰⁴ Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 4.

New Jersey turnpike as an example of the threat that “literalism” poses for the preservation of modernist values:

The drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done...its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art...The experience on the road was something mapped out but not socially recognized. I thought to myself, it ought to be clear that's the end of art. Most painting looks pretty pictorial after that. There is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it.¹⁰⁵

Smith does not allow the frame to circumscribe his experience on the turnpike, yet he declares that it belongs within the parameters of art, possibly even painting. Fried responds to these conclusions by implying that Smith is essentially persecuting the sanctity of formalist doctrine. Smith's flippant comment that painting is “pretty pictorial” is for Fried a sign of literalist snobbery: “*this* Smith seems to have understood, not as laying bare the essence of art, but as announcing its end...art appears to have struck Smith as absurdly small.”¹⁰⁶

Smithson responds to Fried's statement in his letter by broadening the scope of temporality that Fried uses to gauge his conclusions; rather than use Fried's humanistic scale, Smithson introduces infinity.¹⁰⁷ From the point of view of endlessness or atemporality, Fried's remarks about the sanctity of the frame become “absurdly small” themselves; on an infinite scale all matter

¹⁰⁵ Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 79. This quotation originally appeared in Samuel Wagstaff, Jr. “Talking With Tony Smith,” *Artforum* v. 5 no. 4 (December 1966), 19.

¹⁰⁶ Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 79.

¹⁰⁷ Smithson's ideas about formalist criticism's use of “humanism” or measuring time and space on a self-centered scale, see his essays “A Refutation of Historical Humanism,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 336–337; “The Pathetic Fallacy in Esthetics,” *Ibid.*, 337–338; “Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space,” 28–31; and “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 26–31. For a broader discussion of Smithson's use of infinity and temporality to combat Fried, see Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

becomes meaningless. Therefore to Smithson, the importance of the framing edge in Fried's criticism is a last vestige of formalism's desperate efforts to turn a blind eye to the impending danger facing the sanctity of modernism:

The terrors of infinity are taking over the mind of Michael Fried. Corrupt appearances of endlessness worse than any known evil. A radical skepticism, known only to the dreadful 'literalists' is making inroads into intimate 'shapehood.' Non-durational labyrinths of time are infecting his brain with eternity.¹⁰⁸

The threat that literalism poses of prizing art loose from formalism's values and casting doubt on the authority of its ultimately subjective experiences—the immanence of which Smithson has already pointed out in his attack on Greenberg in "Abstract Mannerism"—seems finally to materialize, however inadvertently, in Michael Fried.

Smithson mentions the framing edge only once in his 1967 essay "From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema": "we must avoid the 'formalist' trap of discussing 'the painting' in terms of 'framing supports' or shaped canvases.' I shall concern myself with the difference between expressive *paintings* and mannerist pictures."¹⁰⁹ This essay represents the culmination of Smithson's thinking about Mannerism; he has rejected formalism, even in his formulation of a Mannerist sensibility. In "Abstract Mannerism" and his letter to *Artforum*, Greenberg and Fried are Mannerists because of the artificiality apparent in their promotion of an aesthetic program that Smithson believes is based on meaningless values and misconceptions. With "Paradoxes of Conduct," Smithson demonstrates that he is aware of the artificiality of the role he is playing, and he adopts Mannerism as a defining characteristic of his own

¹⁰⁸ Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 4.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351.

attitude toward contemporary art and criticism, thus reversing the meaning of his own designation of Mannerism as an indicator of formalist pretension.

In “Paradoxes of Conduct,” the Mannerism of formalist criticism becomes “naturalism,” which remains a pose, but one that “always affects what he terms *honesty*.”¹¹⁰ Smithson explains that naturalism, or the “naturalist ethic,” also applies to artworks. His differentiation between “expressive *paintings* and mannerist pictures” in effect topples formalism’s hierarchy of values, and Smithson levels his attack on Rembrandt, whose paintings Greenberg often mentions in his criticism as being absolutely beyond reproach in terms of quality.¹¹¹ For Smithson, Rembrandt’s *The Artist Laughing* [Figure 7] is an example of an expressive painting. Smithson interprets the painting by translating its sensual, material aspects into emotional responses: the “rough and lumpy” paint suggests for Smithson (who subtly parodies the role of the naturalist) “a kind of good-natured air” in the portrait’s facial expression.¹¹² The overall effect of this self-portrait is unthreatening, and Smithson finds it basically uninteresting in its simplicity: “The type of humor it displays is rustic and down to earth...the laughter of Rembrandt’s is warm and friendly, its expressive character leads directly to the artist’s inner sense of individualism.”¹¹³

Smithson locates the appeal of naturalism in its safety; because its expressiveness does not stimulate the mind but the emotions, naturalism is conducive to innocuous interpretations like the one above, which place arbitrary value on material aspects like “paint quality,” or the “framing support.” For Smithson, the sacrifice naturalists make for security is pathetic,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 349.

¹¹¹ See n. 4.

¹¹² Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 352.

¹¹³ Ibid.

because they forfeit the opportunity to understand or even imagine a more complex, conceptual interpretation. Smithson avoids a naturalist approach in his analysis of a Mannerist picture, in this case Parmigianino's *The Virgin of the Long Neck* [Figure 8]: "Consider the Virgin's eyes—she has none, but there is a gaze, a terrible snake-glance that seems to turn her child to ice, or perhaps it has even killed her 'immaculate conception'...an alienated saint turns away from the 'monster'...The distance between Parmigianino's humor and Rembrandt's humor is immense."¹¹⁴ Smithson adopts a deliberately sinister interpretation to make a point about the range of intellectual interpretations that formalist critics forsake in the name of aesthetic quality. According to the principles of formalist criticism, the possibility of art to suggest alienation, monsters, humor, and terror does not exist; such concepts would qualify as highly unnatural and corrupt, and therefore entirely outside the bounds of art. Smithson's Mannerist sensibility constitutes a recovery of these rather grotesque conceptions and represents an important step in his thinking about contemporary art—toward eradicating the plausibility of even considering art in terms of diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive categories such as "pure" vs. "corrupt," or "natural" vs. "unnatural."

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 3. Artifice and Objecthood, or Surfaces and the Mannerist Mask

The 1967 essay “From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema” marks a turning point in how Mannerism functions in Smithson’s writing. Rather than employ Mannerism to parody the misdirection and propaganda he sees in formalist criticism, Smithson subsequently uses Mannerism as a guiding principle in his own attitude toward contemporary art and criticism. In addition to his stylistic comparison of Parmigianino’s Mannerist pictures with Rembrandt’s expressive paintings, Smithson offers Andy Warhol as an example of an artist whose behavior contrasts with Rembrandt’s: “If Rembrandt subverted upper class value and roles to shabbiness, then Warhol has elevated lower class value and roles to the level of grandeur. Rembrandt posed as a ‘prince,’ Warhol poses as an ‘idiot,’—both roles are false.”¹¹⁵ Here Smithson underscores the artificiality inherent in each artist’s projected image, and the initial difference between Rembrandt’s naturalism and Warhol’s supposed Mannerism as either “honest” or “dishonest” disappears; if both roles are false, then the remaining difference between the two becomes whether or not each role acknowledges its falseness.

Like the sections on artists’ poses in “Paradoxes of Conduct,” Smithson’s discussions of artworks hinge on his conception of artificiality. His idea of the Mannerist esthetic derives in part from his interpretation of the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder. Smithson explains that Bertolt Brecht refers to Brueghel’s *The Tower of Babel* [Figure 9] in relation to a particular style of acting, known as “alienation-effect,” or “a-effect”:

¹¹⁵ Robert Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 352.

Far from being non-illusionistic, Brecht calls attention to the physical elements of illusion; thus illusion exists on an equal level with reality. Says Brecht in a description of Brueghel's Tower of Babel [sic], "The tower has been put up askew. It includes portions of the cliff, between which one can see the artificiality of the stonework." The "cliff" is thus *alienated* from the "artificiality of the stonework." This is true of many Mannerist pictures, where for instance everything turns away from the center of interest. This *turning away* from what is thought to be "important" is at the bottom of the a-effect.¹¹⁶

Smithson, who adopts Brecht's conclusions as his own, understands the illusionism in *The Tower of Babel* to be so obviously artificial that the subject matter of the painting crosses over into the realm of independent material reality. Brueghel has handled the composition and perspective—two features that, according to the naturalist tradition of painting, are techniques for achieving meaning through realistic representation—in such a way that the tower does not seem to occupy the pictorial space of the painting. Therefore *The Tower of Babel* is not technically successful by naturalist standards because the tower itself, the "center of interest" in the painting, actually destroys the illusionism of the entire composition. The "physical elements of illusion" no longer function as pictorial characteristics. Instead, these elements announce their artificiality, their status as visual devices that suggest the *idea* of the tower. Thus, the painting does not correspond to an actual Tower of Babel in the naturalist sense, and yet the painting represents the Tower of Babel.

For Smithson this paradox of alienation as a form of illusion—achieving illusion by denying verisimilitude—is a defining characteristic of Mannerism, and one result of its use in artworks is that the material elements of a given medium, such as the framing edge or "paint quality," become

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 350. For more on Smithson's discussion of the alienation-effect in "Paradoxes of Conduct," see Ann Reynolds. *Robert Smithson*, 219–221.

important in terms of their physicality, but meaningless as signifiers of expressive characteristics.¹¹⁷ In other words, whereas the physical features of naturalist art represent expressiveness, the physical features of Mannerist art have been emptied of meaning, because by refusing naturalistic representation, Mannerist art also escapes the confines of all associations of expression that accompany naturalism. Smithson imparts this idea in “Paradoxes of Conduct” through his use of the term “surface.”¹¹⁸ For him, surfaces in Mannerist art are merely incidental; any attempt to determine their meaning for the artwork through attributions of expressive content or discussions of formal quality would be superfluous. Prior to his discussion of Rembrandt in “Paradoxes of Conduct,” Smithson points out a connection between a Mannerist painting *Allegory of Europe* and Sergei Eisenstein’s film *Ivan the Terrible*: “The world of both the *Allegory* and *Ivan* is one that rejects Renaissance naturalism and the image of the self-sufficient man acting in a rational environment. One could almost say the environment is lost under a network of tiny surfaces, that reflect nothing but ungraspable meanings.”¹¹⁹ Like his idea that *The Tower of Babel* subverts naturalistic techniques of representation in order to avoid corresponding to the actual, three-dimensional world, Smithson uses surface here to indicate the artists’ construction of a world that denies the possibility of having a counterpart in reality—it is actual unto itself. Because Smithson contends that any attempt

¹¹⁷ In the case of Renaissance art, Smithson locates an expressive tendency in the realistic representation of pictorial space, and he identifies expressiveness as a goal of modernist art’s supposed reduction of pictorial space. For more discussion of Smithson’s ideas about the role pictorial space and its reduction for formalist criticism, see Chapter 2 of this thesis.

¹¹⁸ Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351. Smithson’s introduction of surfaces in this essay follows a comment that “allegory” is a trope associated with Mannerist artificiality. *Ibid.*, 350–351. However, I will refrain from discussing Smithson’s thoughts on allegory at length, because even as it is pertinent to Smithson’s conception of Mannerism, any discussion including both allegory and surfaces would be in some ways redundant.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

at naturalism in an artwork is in effect an attempt to achieve expressiveness, to him the abstract surfaces in the *Allegory of Europe* and *Ivan the Terrible* elude any specific expressive meaning. He continues: “Here is a world of countless plots and counterplots, all combining to make up a delicate structure, that evades simplism.”¹²⁰ The surfaces, by refusing any particular meaning, are for Smithson the very image of complexity that he believes has been passed over in many “naturalist” readings of art.

Smithson’s interpretation of surfaces (and in some ways his very use of the word) relates directly to the art historical interpretations of Mannerism that appear in the 1960s. For certain art historians from this time, Mannerist surfaces indicate the material surface of an artwork, but they can also take on a meaning that is more conceptual, synonymous with the idea of artifice, devices of stylization, or allegory.¹²¹ Often in the art historical writing on Mannerism these two ideas, the material and the conceptual, are inseparable. The 1964 book *Mannerism—Style and Mood* by Daniel B. Rowland offers this interpretation of Jacopo de Pontormo’s *Deposition* [Figure 10]:

All we can see, then, of Pontormo’s figures is their surface, for there is no indication of the body underneath the skin. Sydney Freedberg observed the same tendency in the work of Parmigianino, a Mannerist artist contemporary to Pontormo, and came to the following conclusion, which applies in my opinion to Pontormo as well:

Parmigianino’s figures are an assembly of surfaces; nothing is contained within these surfaces, and their modeling is the affirmation not of a solid, but only of a hollow form.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

¹²² Daniel B. Rowland, *Mannerism—Style and Mood: An Anatomy of Four Works in Three Art Forms* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 17–18. Smithson uses this quotation by Freedberg in “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 29. In the article he cites Freedberg, and makes no mention of Rowland.

Rowland posits that the surfaces in Pontormo's *Deposition* give the figures in the painting the illusion of weightlessness. Such illusionism is by no means naturalistic; rather, Pontormo's figures "seem to float in a kind of neutral world unaffected by the ordinary law of gravity."¹²³ Rowland therefore concludes that Pontormo has not represented a realistic scene, but an abstract one:

Pontormo's figures are, then, expressive abstractions. He has rejected the Renaissance image of the *self-sufficient man acting in a rational environment* which he can understand. The environment has almost ceased to exist, and all that is visible is a few fragments which fail to fit together in any coherent pattern. In this world the Renaissance belief in the beauty and vigor of the human body is destroyed...Rather [Pontormo's figures] seem controlled by unknown forces, forces unaccounted for by the Renaissance world view, and not fully understandable by anyone.¹²⁴

Smithson adopts Rowland's argument in order to apply it to his own interpretation of *Ivan the Terrible*.¹²⁵ He also uses this concept of surface in "Paradoxes of Conduct" to introduce his opposition between the "mannerist picture" and the "expressionist painting."¹²⁶ Because Rowland's interpretation of Pontormo's surfaces involves a different conception of abstraction than the abstraction of formalist criticism,¹²⁷ Smithson's citation of Rowland's text

¹²³ Rowland, *Mannerism—Style and Mood*, 18.

¹²⁴ Ibid. (my emphasis).

¹²⁵ Smithson does reference Rowland's book in "Paradoxes of Conduct" (p. 353), but this occurs after Smithson Rowland's term "visual nausea" during a comparison of Alfred Hitchcock's films and Pontormo's painting style. Rowland, *Mannerism—Style and Mood*, 15. This is Smithson's only citation of Rowland in that essay, or any other essay of which I am aware.

¹²⁶ See Chapter 2 for an explanation of this opposition. I also want to reiterate that the "expression" to which Rowland refers should not be considered "self-expression" or expression in any emotive sense, since Rowland concludes that his idea of expression is ultimately indefinite by definition: "Thus [Rosso di Fiorentino and Pontormo] broke almost every formal system they could find, leaving only a complex and finally incomprehensible pattern." Rowland, *Mannerism—Style and Mood*, 19.

¹²⁷ See Chapter 2 for an explanation of abstraction as conceived by formalist critics—especially Greenberg—and how it differed from Smithson's approach to abstraction. This difference serves to separate Smithson's use of Rowland, who refers to Pontormo's figures

serves to separate the Mannerist surface from the modernist idea of surface, specifically formalist critics' discussions of the "pictorial surface" of painting. Instead, Smithson says of the faces portrayed in Mannerist pictures, "The mannerist face is a mask detached from the material fact of the pictorial surface."¹²⁸ Here Smithson points out that because the Mannerist picture is not dependent on naturalism or "natural expressiveness,"¹²⁹ its meaning remains somehow "detached" or abstracted from its materiality, even though it exists concretely as an object.

The Mannerist mask is a dominant trope for the second half of "Paradoxes of Conduct." Using Rowland's conceptions of Mannerism and surface as points of departure, Smithson offers examples from contemporary films as evidence that Mannerist works of art are capable of conveying abstract concepts regardless of their materiality. Comparing Paul America's performance in Warhol's *My Hustler* to Parmigianino's *Virgin*,¹³⁰ Smithson surmises, "both have their sex alienated from their person or self. The question of *love* in such a context is transformed into a fearful duality. The cold mask-like faces of the hustlers and virgins hide a humorous pessimism."¹³¹ In a paragraph on the films of Alfred Hitchcock, Smithson refers to Julie Andrews' face in *Torn Curtain* as "a mask of exhaustion not unlike the swooning face of the Virgin in Pontormo's *Deposition*."¹³² Smithson

as "expressive abstractions," from the modernist painting style of "Abstract Expressionism" as discussed by formalist critics.

¹²⁸ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351.

¹²⁹ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 349.

¹³⁰ Smithson does not specify which *Virgin* he means. Ann Reynolds has told me in conversation that Smithson owned an 8x10" reproduction of *The Virgin of the Rose*, and that this suggests that he may have intended to use that image with "Paradoxes of Conduct." In the case of this particular comparison, however, the specification is negligible.

¹³¹ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 353. Smithson also likens America's sex to a commodity; in this respect, his reading of Warhol's film resembles Hauser's Marxist summary of Mannerist alienation.

¹³² *Ibid.*

likens the artificiality of Hitchcock's films to those of Roger Corman, in which the acting is so "derealized" and amateurish that the movies themselves seem inevitably artificial. "Paradoxes of Conduct" ends with another mask-like image: the final frame of Corman's film *The Trip* shows, Smithson writes, "a shattered 'still' of the face of Peter Fonda."¹³³ These examples of the Mannerist mask underscore an important difference between Smithson's thinking about contemporary art as compared to that of formalist critics in the 1960s. The appearance of the Mannerist mask in the work of Warhol, Hitchcock, and Corman is incompatible with the standards of the so-called "naturalist ethic,"¹³⁴ and for Smithson these films provide an antidote to the insistence in formalist criticism that expression in an artwork is the result of its material quality, specifically its "pictorial surface." In this respect, the Mannerist mask is an important example of how Smithson uses the Mannerist esthetic outlined in "Paradoxes of Conduct." His interpretation of the function of the "pictorial surface" in painting represents a shift away from the ideas behind the formalist criticism of Greenberg and Fried.

Greenberg's discussions of surface in sculpture confirm the difference between Smithson's Mannerist mask and the formalist critic's conception of pictorial surface. For instance, Greenberg betrays his opinion of the function of pictorial surface for modernist art in his essay "Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past." Here Greenberg decries Michelangelo's sculpture as a milestone of depravity in the history of art:

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ That all of Smithson takes all of his contemporary examples of the Mannerist mask from films is a topic worthy of attention. Incidentally, Fried in "Art and Objecthood" was wary to discuss film under the rubric of formalist criticism. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 21.

However, what really spoils Michelangelo's sculpture is not so much its naturalism as, on the contrary, its unnaturalistic exaggerations and distortions, which place themselves more in the context of pictorial illusion than in that of sculptural self-evidence. And even Michelangelo's carved surfaces partake of the pictorial, to the extent that their hard, shiny patina, on top of the voluble modeling, tends to deny the resistant weight of stone. This may help explain why his unfinished carvings are generally his best.¹³⁵

According to Greenberg, that sculpture and painting influence one another is acceptable and even profitable, as long as each discipline accepts the other's contributions on its own terms—he mentions the modeling of Michelangelo's figures on the Sistine ceiling as an instance where transposing sculptural principles onto a painting has produced positive results.¹³⁶ However, Greenberg goes on to say of Michelangelo, "The most sculptural of painters, he was also, in the deepest but also most morbid way, the most pictorial of sculptors."¹³⁷

Like his assessment of modernist painting, Greenberg's evaluation of Michelangelo's sculpture is based on whether or not the artist fulfills his obligation to maintain the "purity" of his medium. Greenberg finds it unfortunate that in the case of sculpture, Michelangelo allows painting to "limit and adulterate"¹³⁸ the integrity of his materials. For Greenberg the function of painting is "to transpose stereometric reality" into a "planimetric" medium—to convey illusory depth on a two-dimensional surface.¹³⁹ Sculpture, on the other

¹³⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past," *Art and Culture*, 161.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 160. Throughout this essay Greenberg implies that "pictorial art" indicates all arts that depict space on a two-dimensional surface for illustrative, rather than ornamental, purposes. However, I will continue to discuss pictorial art in terms of painting, as Greenberg refers most often to painting when discussing pictorialism.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

hand, “put[s] less strain on one’s powers of abstraction”¹⁴⁰ because it already exists in three dimensions. By following this assumption Greenberg concludes that Michelangelo subverts his sculptures’ inherent three-dimensionality by distorting his figures. In other words, although they are three-dimensional, the sculptures do not conform to any natural three-dimensional form, and for this reason Greenberg considers them to be pictorial. Moreover, Greenberg argues that Michelangelo further contradicts the integrity of his materials¹⁴¹ with his highly polished surfaces, which cause the heavy stone or marble sculptures to appear weightless. Greenberg also interprets this apparent defiance of gravity as “pictorial,” and he argues that this “Michelangeloesque notion of finish” instituted a dark period in the history of art, during which sculpture “languished for the next three centuries.”¹⁴²

Smithson responds directly to Greenberg’s position on the degeneracy of Michelangelo’s sculpture with an essay entitled “What Really Spoils Michelangelo’s Sculpture,” in which he declares, “Stylistic criticism, with its overused categories of ‘painting, sculpture, and architecture,’ fails to see beyond realism and naturalism. If one considers Michelangelo’s grotesque sense of humor ‘pictorial illusion,’ then one sees art in terms of realistic and natural content.”¹⁴³ Here Smithson disposes of the modernist division of the arts, and with it Greenberg’s opposition of pictorial illusion and “sculptural self-evidence.” To combat Greenberg’s evaluation in “Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past,” he cites two art-historians’ interpretations of Michelangelo:

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ For this essay Greenberg limits his discussion of Michelangelo’s sculpture to the artist’s work in stone and marble.

¹⁴² Ibid., 161.

¹⁴³ Robert Smithson, “What Really Spoils Michelangelo’s Sculpture,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 348. One of the epigrams preceding this essay contains the sentence by Greenberg, quoted above, which provides the title for Smithson’s response.

A figure by Michelangelo is not a person, but rather, in the words of Erwin Panofsky, "...a volumetric system of almost Egyptian rigidity." Wilhelm Worringer has made a similar observation and speaks of "...the invisible pressure of the cubic compactness." His art is a babel of contorted bodies paralyzed into hard surfaces...the *figura serpentinata* is shackled into the oppressive matter of literal stone. Says Professor Panofsky, "Thus Michelangelo's figures are not conceived in relation to an organic axis but in relation to the surface of a rectangular block."¹⁴⁴

With this statement, Smithson embraces a notion of surface in art that is analogous to his own idea of the Mannerist mask. Whereas Greenberg dismisses Michelangelo's sculpture as pictorial because his figures fail to achieve a realistic likeness of a person, Smithson argues that Michelangelo never intended his figures to look like humans—they represent the artist's attempt to preserve the original shape of the stone. Therefore Smithson's essay, somewhat ironically in relation to Greenberg's conclusions, entails a reading of Michelangelo's sculpture that affords Michelangelo a high level of awareness as to the nature of his material, his ultimate goal being to preserve its "integrity" even at the expense of naturalism. In this respect, Smithson's interpretation of Michelangelo's sculpture is similar to his analysis of Brueghel's *The Tower of Babel*; both artworks are detached from pictorial representation and alienated from their presumed subject.

According to Greenberg, Michelangelo belongs to the "monolithic" tradition of sculpture, whereby an artist must achieve the "monumentality" that is the obligation of sculpture made from stone.¹⁴⁵ By "monumentality," Greenberg means to indicate sculpture's ability to "respect the original

¹⁴⁴ Smithson, "What Really Spoils Michelangelo's Sculpture," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 346.

¹⁴⁵ Greenberg does not explicitly come to this conclusion; my summation is based on his essays "Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past," *Art and Culture*, 158–163; and "The New Sculpture," *Ibid.*, 139–145.

monolith,”¹⁴⁶ to stand alone in the round as an autonomous artwork, free from a dependence on architecture, by which it would not qualify as sculpture so much as “ornament.” Again, Greenberg’s conclusions are due to his conviction that an artist must emphasize the purity of his or her medium. True to this principle, Greenberg’s ideas about sculpture shift with the introduction of new sculptural materials which, according to his account in *Art and Culture*, occurs in a nascent form with Constantin Brancusi and finally flourishes in Constructivism and the work of other early 20th century European sculptors, including Pablo Picasso and Alberto Giacometti.¹⁴⁷

For Greenberg, this new “construction-sculpture” is “‘liberated’ from the monolithic,”¹⁴⁸ and as a result, it is no longer subject to the conditions imposed by that monumental tradition. In his essay “The New Sculpture,” Greenberg emphasizes the advantages of “construction-sculpture” over the monolith. Repeatedly, Greenberg insists that the advantages of the new sculpture result from its closeness to modernist painting:

The new construction-sculpture points back, almost insistently, to its origins in Cubist painting: by its linearism and linear intricacies, by its openness and transparency and weightlessness, and by its preoccupation with skin alone, which it expresses in blade or sheet-like forms. Space is there to be shaped, divided, and enclosed, but not to be filled.¹⁴⁹

For Greenberg, the common emphasis on surface between the new sculpture and modernist painting extends to a similar interest in opticality. While the increasing flatness of pictorial space in modernist painting transforms it into

¹⁴⁶ Greenberg, “Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past,” *Art and Culture*, 162.

¹⁴⁷ Clement Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” *Art and Culture*, 142. Greenberg makes similar comments in “Modernist Sculpture, Its Pictorial Past.”

¹⁴⁸ Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” *Art and Culture*, 142.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

“an entity belonging to the same order of space as our bodies,”¹⁵⁰ Greenberg notes:

It is significant, moreover, that modernist sensibility, though it rejects sculptural painting of any kind, allows sculpture to be as pictorial as it pleases. Here the prohibition against one art’s entering the domain of another is suspended, thanks to the unique concreteness and literalness of sculpture’s medium. Sculpture can confine itself to virtually two dimensions (as some of David Smith’s pieces do) without being felt to violate the limitations of its medium, because the eye recognizes that what offers itself in two dimensions is actually (not palpably) fashioned in three.¹⁵¹

Apparently, three-dimensionality is a feature of sculpture that for Greenberg is so stable and essential that it ensures the identity of the medium, even as other elements of sculpture—such as weight and density, which Greenberg considers essential to a definition of sculpture as monolithic—assume characteristics that traditionally have been exclusive to pictorial art. Due to the use of new, “industrial materials,” the monolithic dictum regarding the “resistant weight of stone” no longer applies:

Uniformity of material and color is no longer required, and applied color is sanctioned. The distinction between carving and modeling becomes irrelevant: a work or its parts can be cast, wrought, cut or simply put together; it is not so much sculpted as constructed, built, assembled, arranged. From all this the medium has acquired a new flexibility in which I now see sculpture’s chance to attain an even wider range of expression than painting.

Essentially, Greenberg makes his conclusions about the new “construction-sculpture” by taking advantage of a material loophole; the new materials of modernist sculpture have no intrinsic formal significance until Greenberg endows them with specific qualities for achieving “an even wider range of expression.” When taken into account from the perspective of

¹⁵⁰ Greenberg, “Abstraction, Representation, and so forth,” *Art and Culture*, 136.

¹⁵¹ Greenberg, “The New Sculpture,” *Art and Culture*, 143.

Smithson's thoughts on the Mannerist mask, Greenberg's characterization of construction-sculpture bears a similarity to Smithson's descriptions of Michelangelo's sculpture. That is, if the Mannerist mask discards the expressive significance of an artwork's materiality, this is essentially tantamount to Greenberg's attribution of value to materials heretofore unaccounted for in his version of modernism. Therefore, the one factor separating Greenberg's new sculpture and Michelangelo's monolithic sculpture from being considered on the same terms disappears. This is, ultimately, Smithson's goal behind his use of Mannerism as an alternative attitude to formalist criticism—to establish the possibility of considering artworks in terms of their capability of abstraction, rather than as expressions of their material self-evidence.

This objective carries over into Smithson's reactions to Michael Fried, who takes advantage of Greenberg's comments in "The New Sculpture" to advance his own ideas about modernist sculpture. In "Shape as Form" Fried cites "opticality" as the ultimate goal of modernist sculpture, although he concludes that sculpture has yet to achieve it, the reason being that the eye may only come into contact with a sculpture's surface and no more than that.¹⁵² In accordance with Greenberg's ideas, Fried uses color as a synonym for the surface of modernist sculpture. In "Art and Objecthood" Fried declares that color is an element of modernist sculpture that, if not handled carefully, may jeopardize an artwork's overall ability to stave off the literalist threat: "the color of a given sculpture, whether applied or in the natural state of the material, is identical with its surface; and inasmuch as all objects have surface, awareness of the sculpture's surface implies its objecthood."¹⁵³

¹⁵² Fried, "Shape as Form," 25.

¹⁵³ Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 20.

Of course, objecthood is the target of Fried's polemic in this essay, and he offers a solution to this problem of color as an indicator of objecthood in his discussion of a sculpture by Jules Olitski. *Bunga 45* [Figure 11] consists of over a dozen metal pipes of varying widths that are riveted together vertically, so the resulting structure reaches a height of approximately ten feet. Olitski, whose paintings Fried discusses often in the mid-1960s, has applied color to the tubes using his characteristic spray technique,¹⁵⁴ and he has placed *Bunga 45* next to a wall. Fried refers to the section of the sculpture facing the wall as the "back," and the opposite side as the "front."¹⁵⁵ He notes the contrast between the color applied to the front, which is mainly "yellow to yellow-orange," and the back, which is a "deep rose" with "flecks and even thin trickles of green and red."¹⁵⁶ Olitski has also used two different shades of blue in the band around the bottom of the piece, "one at the 'front' and another at the 'rear.'"¹⁵⁷

Just as Greenberg connects the properties of construction-sculpture to those of modernist painting, Fried uses the physical characteristics of *Bunga 45* to compare the sculpture to Olitski's recent paintings, although he is careful to qualify the nature of their similarities:

¹⁵⁴ See Michael Fried, "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella," "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings," as well as those essays on Olitski in Fried's anthologized collection of art criticism *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998). Olitski's paintings of the mid-1960s were usually rectangular and vertical, with layers of sprayed pigment applied to the surface of the canvas. Fried in his essays discusses Olitski's use of color as it relates to the issue of shape in modernist painting. For instance, Fried posits (with regard to certain paintings from 1965-66) that the artist's application of bands or color along two or three edges of the surface acknowledges the framing edge and, in some of his most successful attempts, ensures that the literalness of the support actually participates in the painting's "sheerly visual" illusionism. Fried, "Shape as Form," *Artforum*, 21-22.

¹⁵⁵ Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 20.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

[*Bunga 45*] amounts to something far more than an attempt simply to make or “translate” [Olitski’s] paintings into sculptures, namely, an attempt to establish surface—the surface, so to speak, of *painting*—as a medium of sculpture. The use of tubes, each of which one sees, incredibly, as *flat*—that is, flat but *rolled*—makes *Bunga*’s surface more like that of painting than like that of an object: like painting, and unlike both ordinary objects and other sculpture, *Bunga* is *all* surface. And of course what declares or establishes that surface is color, Olitski’s sprayed color.¹⁵⁸

In Fried’s mind *Bunga 45* does not occupy the territory of modernist painting; *Bunga 45* is “like painting,” but it is decidedly *not* painting. For Fried, *Bunga 45* suggests a degree of flatness, and this allows him to link the color Olitski applies to the sculpture—and hence the sculpture itself—with modernist painting. Therefore by Fried’s account, Olitski’s allusion to the surface of painting establishes a new, entirely sculptural surface, and *Bunga 45* successfully evades any potential implications of objecthood. In this respect, Fried nevertheless transposes the *function* of the surface of modernist painting, which according to formalist criticism is essentially pictorial, onto Olitski’s sculpture.

To Smithson, the interpretation of *Bunga 45* in “Art and Objecthood” betrays Fried’s desperation as he attempts to make sense of contemporary art based solely on the logic of formalist criticism. The opticality that Fried champions for modernist sculpture is analogous to the emphasis placed on pictorialism in modernist painting, and both for Smithson are direct contradictions of the abstraction that he believes is so important for understanding contemporary art. In his written response to “Art and Objecthood,” Smithson declares that rather than succumb to the “radical skepticism” of literalism, Fried “will cling for dear life to the ‘surfaces’ of Jules

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Olitski's *Bunga*. Better one million *Bungas* than one 'specific object.' Yet, little known 'specific demons' are at this moment, I want to say, 'breaking the fingers' of Fried's grip on *Bunga*."¹⁵⁹ Here Smithson refers sarcastically to Fried's conception of surfaces in art and to Fried's application of surface to *Bunga 45*, which underscores the fact that each critic attributes a contrasting significance to the role played by surfaces in works of art. As Smithson makes clear in this letter to the editor of *Artforum*, he believes Fried to be a truly "manneristic critic of 'modernity,'"¹⁶⁰ in that his evaluations in "Art and Objecthood" betray a fear of corruption. According to Smithson, rather than accept the obsolescence of the modernist principles of purity, Fried has panicked, choosing to adhere to the principles of modernism at whatever cost.

It is this difference in how Smithson conceives of surfaces as compared to Greenberg and Fried that underscores the important slippage between Smithson's Mannerist esthetic and formalist criticism. Ultimately, the Mannerist idea of "corruption" provides an antithesis to the modernist idea of "purity" for Smithson. Two statements in "Paradoxes of Conduct" make this clear. First, in reference to Mannerist works of art Smithson alludes to corruption by invoking the idea of "evil": "Mannerist art is often called pseudo, sick, perverse, false, phony and decadent by the naturalists or truth tellers, yet it seems to me that what the Mannerist esthetic does disclose or recover is a sense of primal evil."¹⁶¹ And as a more general comment on the Mannerist sensibility, Smithson remarks, "The Mannerist is not innocent of corruption. He casts a cold eye, and what he sees he treats with humor and

¹⁵⁹ Robert Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," *Artforum*, 4. Smithson in this last sentence refers to a specific passage in "Art and Objecthood," in which Fried states that the "grip" of theatricality "corrupted literalist sensibility" and therefore modernist painting was forced to "break the fingers of this grip." Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 20.

¹⁶⁰ Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 4.

¹⁶¹ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 350. I have already used this quotation in the Introduction to this thesis, p. 17.

terror.”¹⁶² With this, Smithson begins his discussion of surfaces based on Rowland’s *Mannerism—Style and Mood*, which leads to his formulation of the Mannerist mask. All of these comments, as is the case with “Paradoxes of Conduct” as a whole, represent a decisive break with the idea put forth in the formalist criticism of both Greenberg and Fried that art must conform to an ideal of quality or purity by maintaining the integrity of the materials of an individual discipline. Instead, Smithson proposes an idea of art and a way of dealing with art that is hardly intelligible when considered from the standpoint of the essays of Greenberg or Fried. Smithson’s arguments that an artwork’s illusionism actually results in its existing “on an equal level with reality,”¹⁶³ and that an artwork is first and foremost an abstract idea disconnected from its materiality—two ideas that are in many ways incompatible in terms of modernism, and otherwise simply paradoxical—represent a radical departure from the tenets of formalist criticism.

In addition to its significance as a rejection of modernism and formalist criticism, Smithson’s use of Mannerism to support his ideas about surfaces and the Mannerist mask is also a rejection of a particular reading of art history. Greenberg’s establishment of the lineage of modernist sculpture, in which he condemns Michelangelo and refers to modernist *painting* frequently to characterize sculptural tradition, is the product of Greenberg’s exclusive notion of the purpose of art and the role of art history in his critical agenda. His ideas about the capabilities of the medium of sculpture omit any knowledge of or respect for alternative readings of Michelangelo’s sculpture, which for many art historians represents a stylistic breakthrough,¹⁶⁴ not the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ See Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450–1600*, 58–71; John Shearman, *Mannerism*; and Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, 84–85.

low point in a history of sculptural purity or monolithic monumentality. Moreover, Fried's comments in "Shape as Form" and especially in "Art and Objecthood" are for Smithson symptomatic of the art historical blindness of formalist criticism, and Smithson's revival of Mannerism and Mannerist readings of contemporary artworks, in addition to recovering the corruption and evil that had been lost in the modernist preoccupation with purity and self-expression, also restore important aspects of art history and criticism. For Smithson, this recovery of an alternative point of view provides new paths for artists and critics working in the mid-1960s, especially those artists whom Greenberg and Fried condemn as outside the bounds of their criteria for artistic quality.

Chapter 4. Conclusion: Restoring the Rules of the Game

Although the two essays in which his explanations of Mannerism are most extensive, “Abstract Mannerism” and “From Ivan the Terrible to Roger Corman or Paradoxes of Conduct in Mannerism as Reflected in the Cinema,” were never published in Smithson’s lifetime, close readings of these essays uncover his process for formulating a contemporary “Mannerist esthetic,” and serve as a point of entry for understanding how his conception of Mannerism functions in his other critical writings. Smithson’s uses of Mannerism in his published essays are brief and may initially seem insignificant compared to his comments on, for instance, entropy or architecture, both of which have been the subjects of recent scholarship on Smithson.¹⁶⁵ However, when inserted into the context of his unpublished essays on Mannerism, passing references in his published writings—such as his comment in “Entropy and the New Monuments,” “The ‘purist’ surfaces of certain artists have a ‘contamination’ in them that relates to Duchamp and Parmigianino,”¹⁶⁶ or his accusation in his response to “Art and Objecthood” that Fried is a “manneristic critic of modernity”¹⁶⁷—become more meaningful indicators of Smithson’s larger conception of a Mannerist esthetic.

Furthermore, the appearance of Mannerism in Smithson’s discussions of contemporary art and criticism in the mid-1960s is not an isolated incident in the critical discourse of that period. Smithson’s ideas about Mannerism connect his writing to a critical dialogue that occurred in 1966 and 1967. In 1966, *Art and Artists* published an essay by the artist Peter Hutchinson

¹⁶⁵ See for instance Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s*; and Mark Linder, *Nothing Less than Literal: Architecture After Minimalism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

¹⁶⁶ Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” 29.

¹⁶⁷ Smithson, “Letter to the Editor,” 4.

entitled “Mannerism in the Abstract.” Like Smithson, Hutchinson adopts contemporary scholarly interpretations of Mannerism to formulate a contemporary Mannerist sensibility. Adopting Wylie Sypher’s idea of “Neo-Mannerism,”¹⁶⁸ Hutchinson associates contemporary “Abstract Mannerism” with a sense of alienation, and identifies it as a subversion of a “purist” sensibility:

The new sensibility looks at first sight remarkably like the purist painting and sculpture from which it departs. It appears to the casual viewer as a second wind to Hard-edge. It is disguised as referential, shrugged off as plagiaristic. But is this not exactly how a mannerism, in this case Abstract Mannerism, works, from within? According to Sypher, it is. Behind the charming but “impure” mask are great disquiet, turmoil, cynicism, and self-doubt.¹⁶⁹

Hutchinson refers to Smithson’s “krylon-sprayed metal frames” [Figure 12] as an example of the Mannerist tendency to exaggerate the framing edge, and he also claims that certain paintings by Charles Hinman are Mannerist because their protruding surfaces subvert any suggestion of pictorial depth.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, like Smithson’s conception of Mannerism as representative of a world that is abstract, essentially meaningless, and which rejects “the image of the self-sufficient man acting in a rational environment,”¹⁷¹ Hutchinson associates Mannerist artists with an alternative worldview that differs from a scientific perspective, or what he calls “scientism,” which he associates with “Purist abstraction”¹⁷²:

¹⁶⁸ Peter Hutchinson, “Mannerism in the Abstract,” *Art and Artists* Vol. 1, No. 6 (September 1966), 19. Hutchinson notes that according to Sypher, stylistic features of “neo-Mannerism” include “Elegance, high technique, acid colour, drama, use of the cliché.” *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 19–20.

¹⁷¹ Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351.

¹⁷² Hutchinson, “Mannerism in the Abstract,” 19.

The scientist offers a hopeful world, a world where inevitable progress discovers more and more, a world that gets better and better. This world is sane, stable, and knows where it is going. The Mannerist counters with a world in intellectual hysteria, punctuated by frozen inactivity, a world where space-time cease to have meaning, a world of soundless gestures, where humans do not live.¹⁷³

Hutchinson's formulation of science as "hopeful" and "stable" in relation to the meaningless gestures of Mannerism parallels Smithson's view that the false "*honesty*" of naturalism opposes the deliberate affectations of a "Mannerist esthetic."¹⁷⁴

The similarity between some of Hutchinson's descriptions in "Mannerism in the Abstract" and many of Smithson's references to Mannerism in his own writing suggests that the two artists may have communicated further regarding a contemporary Mannerist sensibility.¹⁷⁵

Smithson was certainly aware of Hutchinson's essay; he refers to "Mannerism in the Abstract" in his 1968 essay "The Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art":

Hutchinson lets us know about "probabilities, contingencies, chances and cosmic breakdown". "Scientism" is shown to be actually a kind of Mannerist science full of obvious disguises and false bottoms. "Topology surely mocks plane geometry", says Hutchinson. But actually his language usage deliberately mocks his own meaning, so that nothing is left but a gratuitous syntactical *device*. His writing is

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷⁴ Smithson, "Paradoxes of Conduct," 349–350.

¹⁷⁵ Hutchinson and Smithson were both in the show *New Dimensions* at A.M. Sachs Gallery, New York, May 10-28, 1966. This show also included work by Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt. Also, Linda Henderson has confirmed through her own conversations with artist Dean Fleming that Hutchinson and Smithson both frequented the Park Place Gallery in the mid-1960s, and that they were probably communicating fairly regularly. Linda Henderson, e-mail correspondence, July 21, 2005. Hutchinson in his collected writings discusses briefly his friendship with Smithson in an essay called "Science Fiction and Art." Peter Hutchinson, *Dissolving Clouds: Writings of Peter Hutchinson*, edited by Christopher Busa (Provincetown, MA: Provincetown Arts Press, 1994), 34–35. In the same volume there is also a vignette written about Smithson entitled "The Art Dictator." *Ibid.*, 19.

marvelously “inauthentic”. Hutchinson’s method starts with science fiction clichés, and scientific conventions and ends in an extraordinary esthetic structure. To paraphrase Nathalie Surraute on Flaubert, “Here Hutchinson’s defects become virtues.”¹⁷⁶

Smithson construes Hutchinson’s use of Mannerism as a process of extracting and discarding the possible meanings attached to concepts like math and science by placing them within the same context as his discussions of science-fiction, treating them as equally legitimate artistic tools, and using them to construct an aesthetic that is ultimately useless for interpreting art as a manifestation of actual mathematical or scientific practices. Smithson’s explanation thus reflects his own idea that Mannerism connotes affectation, or is a “collection of devices” that refuse to signify,¹⁷⁷ and he interprets Hutchinson’s essay itself as being Mannerist in this way.

For both Smithson and Hutchinson, ideas in contemporary scholarly texts on Mannerist art parallel their own thinking about contemporary artistic issues, and offer an escape from the accepted modes of apprehending and discussing art and art history in the mid-1960s. The two artists’ implementation of Mannerist principles in their writings on contemporary art, especially Smithson’s essays, ultimately suggests that the dominant concepts of modernism and formalist criticism have become outmoded, and this is the larger issue at stake for Smithson, Hutchinson, and those artists dismissed by

¹⁷⁶ Robert Smithson, “A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art,” 21.

¹⁷⁷ Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 350. There is a deeper connection between Hutchinson and science-fiction. See for instance Hutchinson’s essay “Science-Fiction: An Aesthetic for Science,” *Art International* 12, no. 8 (October 1968), 32–34. Hutchinson mentions Smithson’s art and writing repeatedly in this article. Smithson refers to science-fiction often in his own writing, and the connections between Smithson and Hutchinson’s interpretations and use of science-fiction is worth exploring further. For a more extensive analysis of Smithson and Hutchinson’s interest in science-fiction, see Linda Henderson, “The Fourth Dimension 1950-2000: From Relativity’s Dominance to the Digital Era and New Cosmologies,” new Introduction to *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, forthcoming 2006).

formalist critics of the mid-1960s as irrelevant, or “mannered” in the pejorative sense. By proposing a “Mannerist esthetic” as an alternative artistic and critical sensibility, Smithson intends neither to destroy the institution of art criticism as an exchange of ideas, nor to eliminate “art” in favor of “objecthood,” as Michael Fried argues. On the contrary, Smithson wants to abolish the authority of formalist criticism, and to restore “the rules of the game”—the dialectic or dialogue necessary to maintain multiple points of view in art and criticism.

A final comparison of Hutchinson’s “Mannerism in the Abstract” to Smithson’s writing on Mannerism reveals an important difference in how each artist interprets contemporary art’s relationship to Mannerism. In his essay, Hutchinson draws concrete stylistic connections between 16th-century Mannerist art and art being produced in the mid-1960s. One shared Mannerist feature Hutchinson mentions is “the diagonal,” which he recognizes in Dan Flavin’s light installations. He also compares the paintings of Larry Poons with an architectural façade designed by Giacomo della Porta, because in both “the eye jumps from detail to detail.”¹⁷⁸ Hutchinson makes these and other stylistic connections in order to relate contemporary artworks with a psychic impulse that he also considers Mannerist; however, his emphasis on physical characteristics in contrasts with Smithson’s approach to Mannerism. Smithson’s identification of Mannerist stylistic traits in contemporary artworks, such as his comments on the frame and his discussions of surfaces, tend to be more general than Hutchinson’s. Furthermore, because Smithson employs Mannerism primarily to draw

¹⁷⁸ Hutchinson, “Mannerism in the Abstract,” 19.

conclusions about contemporary artistic attitudes,¹⁷⁹ his discussions of Mannerism in relation to contemporary art are decidedly theoretical. While expressing interest in Hutchinson's use of Mannerism, Smithson's response in "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art" exemplifies how Smithson manages to discuss Mannerism without attributing undue authority to Mannerism as a model for classifying a stylistic tendency contemporary art.

Smithson's clever nullification of Hutchinson's writing by identifying "Mannerism in the Abstract" as Mannerist alludes to Smithson's emphasis in "Paradoxes of Conduct" that Mannerism is an affectation, and that a Mannerist makes no claims for independent, irrefutable value in his or her art or criticism. In this respect, Smithson's written response to Hutchinson's essay may be interpreted as a more playful and much less scathing version of Smithson's letter to *Artforum* in response to Fried's "Art and Objecthood."¹⁸⁰ Therefore, in terms of Smithson's own critical practice, his explanations of Mannerism and his "Mannerist esthetic" contain a sly warning against reading too much into any of his references as a key to interpreting his larger body of artworks and writings. Smithson's published and unpublished essays contain references to disparate and obscure sources and, because of this, his writing style often seems cryptic and incomprehensible. It is tempting, after discovering the roots of his conception of Mannerism, to investigate Smithson's references to subjects such as landscape gardens or science-fiction and horror films—all of which are subjects that Smithson mentions in his writing as much if not more than Mannerism—in order to decipher their precise significance for his work. While this is certainly worthwhile for

¹⁷⁹ The only exception I can think of in this respect is Smithson's discussion of film, although this is not necessarily a direct, material connection between Mannerist and contemporary art, which is impossible.

¹⁸⁰ Smithson, "Letter to the Editor," 4.

understanding certain aspects of Smithson's artistic practice,¹⁸¹ there is a point at which the glut of references in his essays begin to function for him as Mannerism—they contribute to his construction of “network of tiny surfaces, that reflect nothing but ungraspable meanings,”¹⁸² which is an integral feature of his most complex critical writing.

In this sense, Smithson's Mannerist esthetic does continue to play a part in his critical practice, even after 1968 when explicit references to Mannerism disappear from his essays. Especially significant are those instances when meaninglessness is his subject. For example, in his essay “A Cinematic Atopia” from 1971, Smithson articulates what he sees as the unfathomable experience of viewing film:

The simple rectangle of the movie screen contains the flux, no matter how many different orders one presents. But no sooner have we fixed the order in our mind than it dissolves into limbo. Tangled jungles, blind paths, secret passages, lost cities invade our perception. The sites in films are not to be located or trusted. All is out of proportion. Scale inflates or deflates into uneasy dimensions. We wander between the towering and the bottomless...Any film wraps us in uncertainty.¹⁸³

Here Smithson characterizes cinema according to those “corrupt” features that he associates with Mannerism in earlier essays—themes such as artificiality, irreconcilable complexity, and the rejection of naturalism in favor of distortion. Similar references to Mannerist elements appear in much of Smithson's writings throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁸⁴ Of course

¹⁸¹ For instance, see Henderson, “The Fourth Dimension 1950–2000: From Relativity's Dominance to the Digital Era and New Cosmologies.”

¹⁸² Smithson, “Paradoxes of Conduct,” in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 351.

¹⁸³ Robert Smithson, “A Cinematic Atopia,” *Artforum* 10, no. 1 (September 1971), 53.

¹⁸⁴ See especially Robert Smithson, “Aerial Art,” *Studio International* (February–April 1969), “Can Man Survive?” (1969) in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 367–368; and “Art Through the Camera's Eye” (1971), in Flam, *Robert Smithson*, 371–375. In both of these essays

according to Smithson's conception of Mannerism, although certain aspects of his later writings may indicate a Mannerist sensibility, to label them as such would be pointless. Ultimately, it is this fundamental paradox of Mannerism which lies at the heart of Smithson's Mannerist sensibility, and which—rather ironically—makes an understanding of Smithson's conception of Mannerism *valuable* as a component of his larger artistic and critical practice.

Smithson discusses the rejection of naturalism in favor of the artificial , the abstract, or the grotesque.

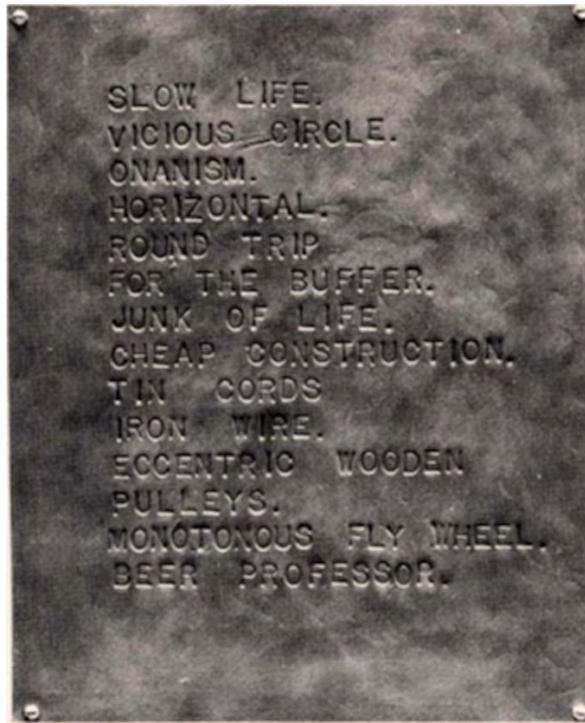


Figure 1. Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1963
Lead, 10" x 8"

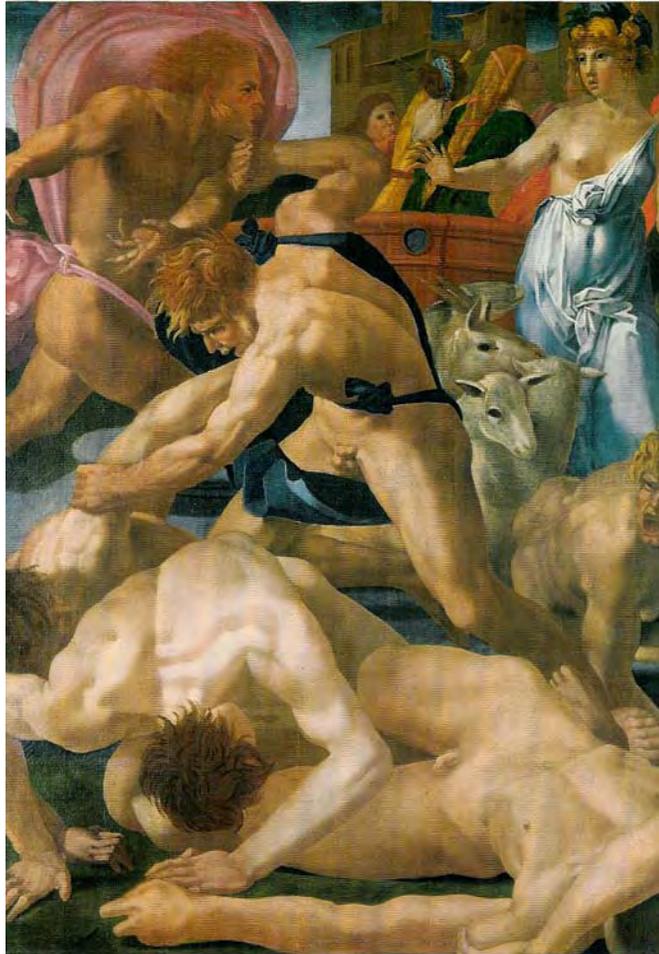


Figure 2. Rosso Fiorentino, *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*,
c. 1523–1524
Oil on canvas, 63” x 46.1”



Figure 3. Barnett Newman, Untitled 4, 1950
Oil on canvas, 74" x 6"



Figure 4. Kenneth Noland, *Hover*, 1963
Acrylic on canvas, 69" x 69"



Figure 5. Kenneth Noland, *Magic Box*, 1959
Acrylic on canvas, 93" x 93"



Figure 6. Frank Stella, *Tampa*, 1963
Red lead on canvas, 8.28' x 8.28'

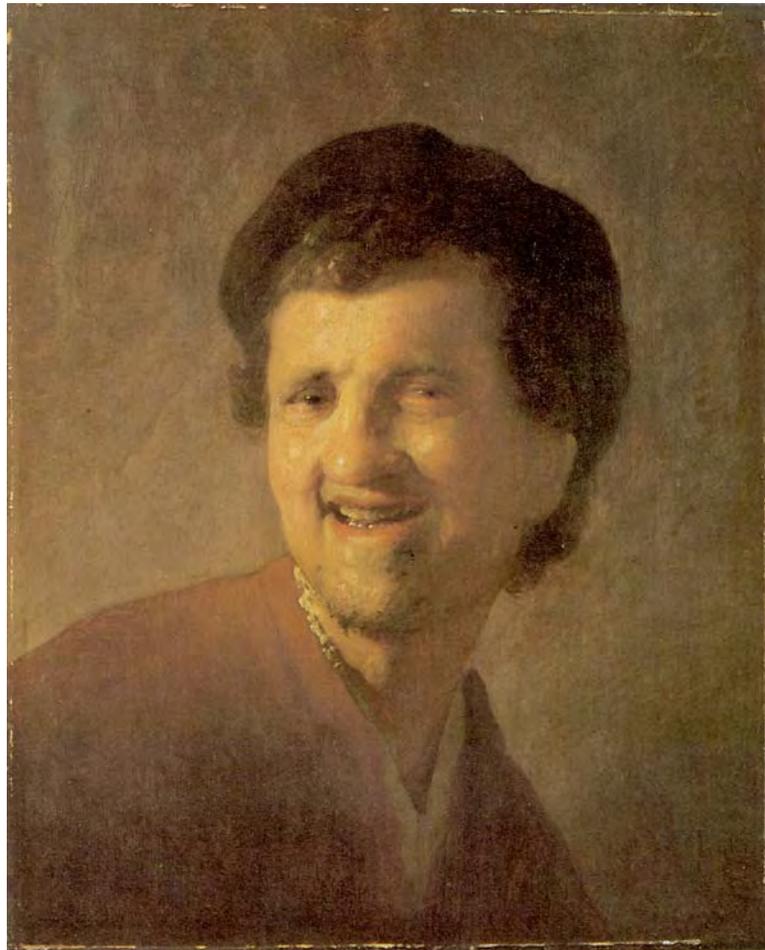


Figure 7. Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, c. 1629–31
Oil on panel, 16.2" x 13.3"



Figure 8. Parmigianino, *Madonna della Collo Lungo* (*Madonna of the Long Neck*), c. 1534–1539
Oil on panel, 85” x 52”

Also known as *Virgin of the Long Neck*



Figure 9. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1563
Oil on panel, 44" x 45"



Figure 10. Jacopo da Pontormo, *Deposition*, c. 1525–28
Oil on panel, 123.2" x 75.6"

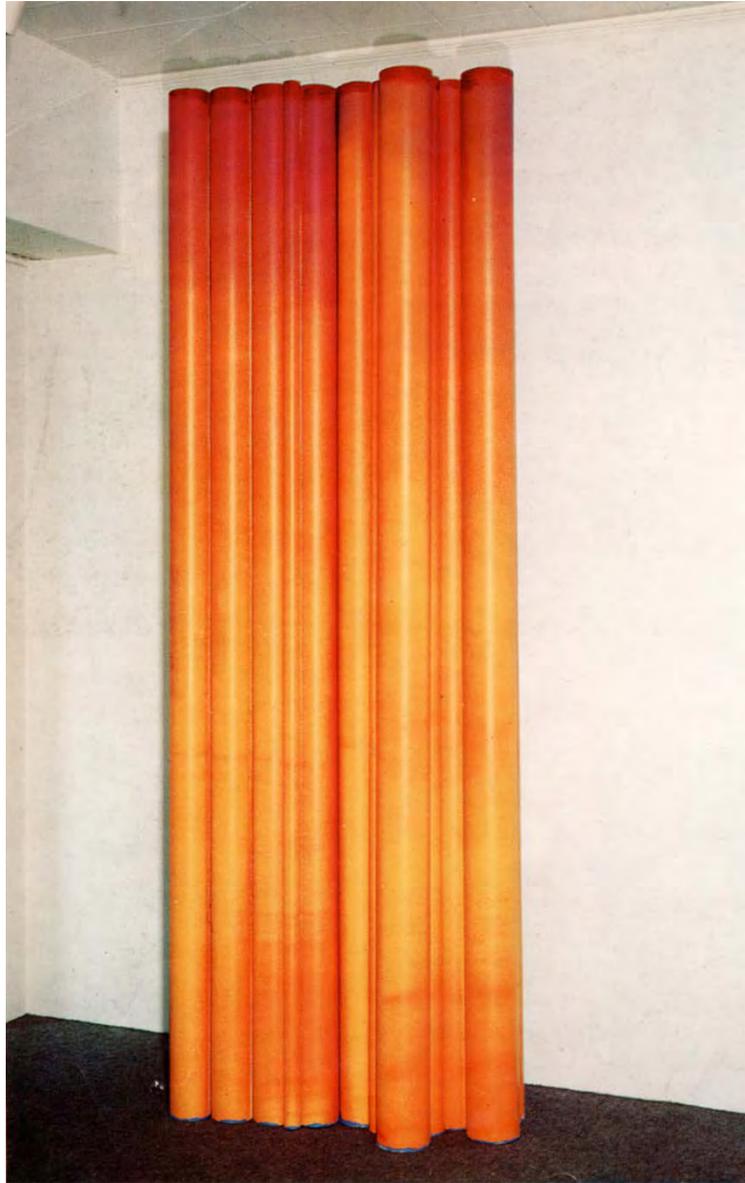


Figure 11. Jules Olitski, *Bunga 45*, 1967
Painted Aluminum, 10' high

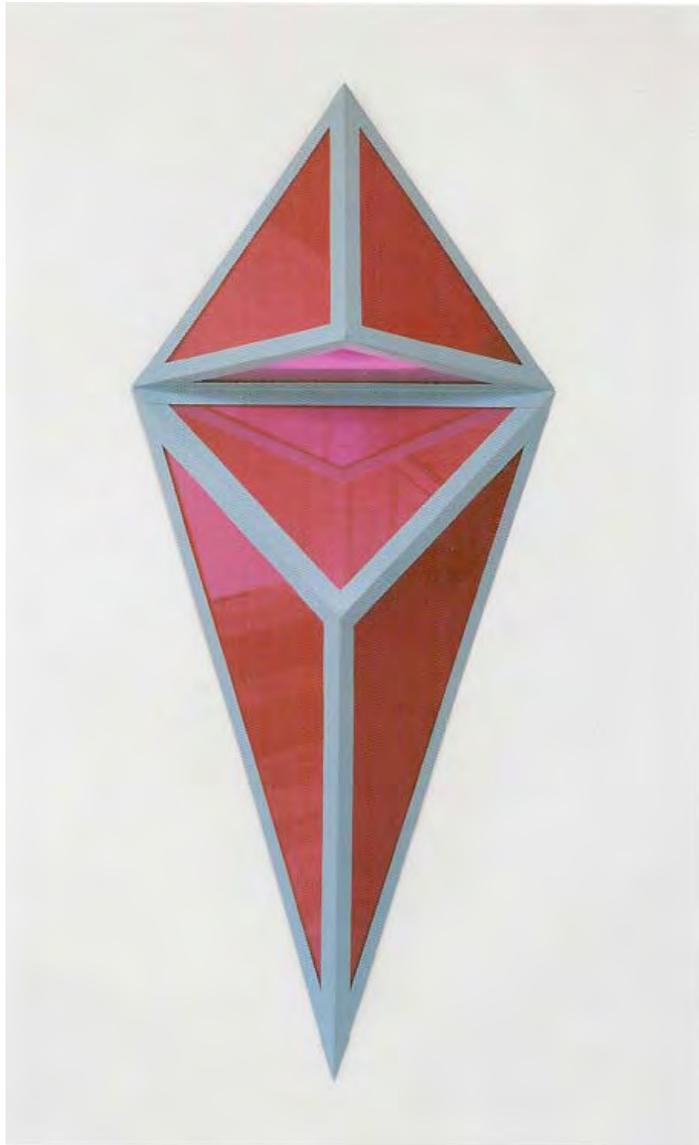


Figure 12. Robert Smithson, Untitled, 1964–1965
Metal and plastic, 81" x 35" x 10"

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