Between Black Box and White Cube (1994)
Peter Weibel

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It is in the authenticity of the cultural production of a human being connected to his or her historical moment concretely that the work is experienced as real ... It is not that the meaning of a work can transcend its time, but that a work of art describes the maker's relationship to her or his context through the struggle to make meaning, and in doing so, we get a glimpse of the life of the people who shared that meaning.

Joseph Kohuth, 1982

The 60s arts revolution and its anti-illusionism eliminated from the painting all vestiges of internal and external representation and brought it closer to the two-dimensional object. The monochrome white painting - painted or composed of different fabric materials - deleted the last surviving traces of 3-dimensionality and reduced the painting to what it is in reality - a flat object on the wall. While Ad Reinhardt's quasi monochrome black paintings still employed nuances of black which, although scarcely perceptible to the eye, created depth and momentum, which foregrounded and backgrounded and evoked, albeit highly abstract, figures, Manzoni's achrome and fur pictures derive from a purely materialistic pragmatism where the flatness of the image and the tactile nature of the material eliminate from the work any motive of representation or magic of colour. This potential which the flat image offered was further exploited by Kenneth Noland and other shaped-canvas painters who went even further and rid the painting of its traditional rectangular frame. After the figure and the background had been eliminated, and lines, dots and any other

elements used for representation (of depth), in short, the entire range of figurative and representational elements, had been discarded, there was only one element left which could still be modified and shaped - the frame. Instead of forming shapes on the canvas, Noland et al. shaped the canvas, the work itself, and so moved one step closer towards overcoming the tautology of the two-dimensional pictorial object. One further lesson still had to be learnt, however. Colour had to be applied anonymously, devoid of modulations and gestures, by a machine which spread the paint over the entire surface right to the edges of the canvas. The idea of the totality of the colour, of covering the canvas with a single colour, was born. Although the earlier works still submitted to the traditional constraints and limitations of the panel painting, artists no longer relied solely on oil as a carrier medium but began to employ coloured textile materials as well. Once the identity of colour and surface had been established, the traditional split between colour and the neutral surface (eg. canvas) onto which it is applied had become obsolete. If this is the line of argument we agree to adopt then Yves Klein's Eponge Bleu appears like a survivor from a romantic era when art was still figurative, and the pure blue pigment sprinkled on the floor is arguably the artist's most progressive achievement because the colour is itself material and carrier surface; it is no longer framed and hung on the wall but left unframed, scattered on the unlimited surface of the floor, in an attempt to realize the totality of colour. Other artists directed their attention to the

painting itself as a surface of colour and sought to integrate the concepts of monochrome painting with the ideals of the shaped-canvas painters. In their attempts to guarantee the totality of the colour, they enlarged the format of the picture. Yet with their renewed emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of paint, and representation of brush strokes and dripping paint, they revived earlier forms of expressive representation. The work of Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Frank Stella, characterized by efforts to escape the tautism (tautology + autism) of the monochrome, two-dimensional, shaped pictorial object, proved to have a more lasting effect. Flavin's use of light to establish the identity of colour and carrier medium, permitted him to create works that achieve the desired totality of colour by going beyond the canvas to take over the entire space they occupy. Coloured or white neon tubes mounted on the walls radiated (immaterial) colour and lit up the entire room, the colour thus covering the maximum surface possible. The two-dimensional painting had become a three-

dimensional space, the three-dimensional space a coloured, two-dimensional painting. Stella's and Judd's early works similarly visualize the oppostion between the two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional space. After the elimination of representational elements by anti-illusionistic artists, a painter who wanted to once more use background and figure, restore depth and modulation to the
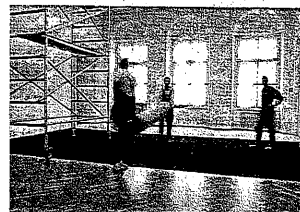

pictorial object - ie. revive the traditional effects of figurative and representational art - could only do so at the material and real level. Stella thus extended sections of his paintings and placed them in space. The canvases he shapes no longer modify merely the surface or the edges of the picture, but they are stretched and twisted into three-dimensional objects. Works by the Italians Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Agostino Bonalumi, Enrico Castellani and Paolo Scheggi are similarly attempts to confer three-dimensional depth to flat pictorial objects.

Stella created three-dimensional shaped canvases, Judd lifted the flat pictorial object off the wall and placed it on the floor where, with the change from two-dimensional to three-dimensional object, the rectangular picture changed into a monochrome, mono-material, open or closed cube. Placed in space, the flat pictorial object is inflated, becomes a 'specific object'. The next logical step for Judd therefore was to put this object, which really is nothing but an exaggerated three-dimensional picture, back on the wall, and, mounting several of them horizontally rather than vertically, to create his famous 'stacks'.

These endeavours, Judd's stacks, Stella's 3 D shaped canvases, Noland's surface of colour and shaped canvas, Klein's and Manzoni's monochromes, and Flavin's light spaces, clearly define a sphere where painting can no longer preserve its historic innocence and autonomy or avoid the conflict and dialectic of the space and the painting, of the floor and the wall, of two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality. New generations of artists were needed, and a new era had to come, in order to reveal the subliminal parameter changes of this transformed concept of the picture. Autonomy of the painting meant for example that every painting was independent from its surroundings, from the space it occupied and the wall on which it hung. As it could potentially hang on any wall it was only logical that the idea should be taken further and the painting reduced to an exchangeable object, to an object offered for barter. In order to support its claim to ubiquity and universal exchangeability, it was typically placed in a neutral, white space. The myth of the white cube was created.

A very different approach was adopted by artists like Michael Asher and Daniel Buren whose work relies on the location for its interpretation, makes such specific references to the site that it can only be understood in the context of its surroundings and thus inevitably bears the date of the time of its creation. Michael Asher's legendary exhibition in the Clair Copley Gallery in 1974, where he removed a gallery wall and so eliminated the division between representational spaces
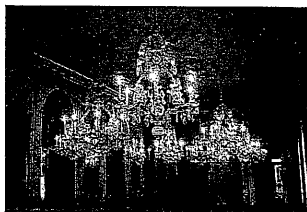
and work rooms, contextualized the aesthetic problems posed by the conflict between background and figure, and consequently politicized them. The annulment of the difference between background and figure underwent further radicalization and led to the annulment of the difference between representation and production. The devaluation of figurative art was thus reduced to its core problem.

Paintings no longer represented anything except the social mechanisms of representation themselves. When the wall was removed, not only the painting disappeared with it, but also the sculpture, even the wall as sculpture. By avoiding the opposition between painting on the wall and sculpture on the floor, which had reached its first paroxystic climax with Stella and Judd, the lost and enforced
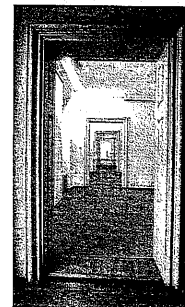
parameters of the history of painting and sculpture were revealed. The tabula rasa which remained when the painting, the wall, the sculpted object had been removed, finally focussed attention on the context, on the conditions in which paintings and objects had been produced and represented. The reduction of the monochrome was taken to its logical conclusion and produced the zero-chrome.

The real, visible space became the painting, and the painting the space, which finally eliminated the last traces of illusionistic or representational art. No object was put on show, but the realization of a specific function in a specific formal or social context.

It was this tabula rasa which served Buren as his point of departure. Once pictorial surface and pictorial space had been freed from traditional constraints Buren was free to apply paint directly in the space, using the walls of the places where his art was situated as the stretched frames and supports of his paintings. Drawing on the insights provided by monochromes, surfaces of colour and pictorial surfaces he evolved an advanced brand of anti-illusionism which allowed him to create pure material works, colour in space. Working in situ with alternating bands of colour, either black and white or multi-coloured, which always match the nature of the places where they are situated, his work is highly place-specific, colour which lacks materiality, but also immateriality, eg. his Une pièce/peinture (1970). This "painting", this "non-painting" was inextricably related to the place where it was situated. The site itself, however, was interchangeable, it could be the external wall of a snackbar, the internal wall of a museum, the outside of a bus, or a sail. Only the "painting" was unseverably linked to the site, the forms became the painting, the colours, a sculpture. Buren had thus solved the problem of the frame. The surface determines the frame, and defines the limits of the totality of the colour and of the image. Buren's work topicalizes the "surface", the "frame", the "outline", and challenges the tenet of the neutrality of the background in the white cube of the museum.

In America, similar motives prompted

Robert Ryman to extend the frame of his paintings until they encompassed the wall and used the wall as the surface. Sol Lewitt's work also derives from a desire to find a solution to the conflict between spatial image and pictorial space, surface of colour and pictorial surface, which for years he believed he would find in the colour in space, before he finally returned to the traditional concepts of illusionistic art, and relied once more on the illusion of perspective, on background and figurative elements and the two-dimensional representation of figures. The work of Günter Förg and Ernst Caramelle is half-way between illusion and anti-illusion, between the essentially baroque problem of the figurative form, and minimalist flatness and the totality of the colour. All these works have at least preserved their total commitment to the space in which they are situated, their unseverable links with the place where they are presented.
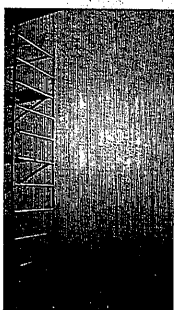
Robert Morris similarly incorporated the real space into the work of art. This permitted him to eliminate from his works any motive of representation and at the same time to create 'objects' whose specificity undermined the minimalist dogma. With his four wooden cubes, each face covered by a mirror, he achieved the totality of the form, the unity of the figure, the continuity of the space, which is, however, simultaneously disrupted by reflections in the mirrors. The floor, the surroundings, the formal context, they are all reflected in the textual objects and create illusionary spaces. Morris called this technique 'Blank Form' in a text he wrote in 1961. For him, the form is a blank to which meaning is assigned by the surrounding context, by the viewer. Form and object are reduced to a 'situation' constituted of free variables: "So long as the form (in the broadest possible sense: situation) is not reduced beyond perception ... Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one's awareness as art." The real objects and their physical presence, the real space (the walls and the floor) are perforated. Illusionistic pictures have been affixed to real objects, yet these pictures portray the floor and the walls, that is, the surroundings in which the object is located. The continuous form/figure has been rendered discontinuous, the unity disrupted, fragmented, broken up into equivalent elements of real and imaginary presence. Morris had thus cleared the ground for the 'anti-form' and the 'scatter-technique'. He began to randomly scatter a multitude of individual parts on the floor. This technique has been revived and partly retextualized by some of our contemporary artists, amongst them Cady Noland and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. As they are reflected in the mirrors, the floor and

the walls become part of the sculpture, the are rendered scupturable, portrayable. As the unity of the objects is disrupted by the reflected floor, and the unity of the floor by the mirrors of the objects, a new relationship is created between 2-D and 3-D, between illusion and reality, between representation and non-representation. The two-dimensional representation of the floor in the mirrors of the cubes was almost impossible to distinguish from the real floor, indeed, the only difference noticed were some formal discontinuities. These were further emphasized by the employment of the 'scatter technique', resulting in the total break-down of the form, the abolition of unity and uniformity, in the final collapse of the minimialist dogma.

These developments were paralleled by the evolution of a new dialectic of the visible and the invisible. When the floor is reflected in the mirrors of the cube, the cube becomes almost invisible. The surrounding context is reflected in the blank form, ensuring that the form remains visible despite its blankness. The

visible form of the floor is obliterated, fragmented by the reflections of the floor and the real cube. The manifestation of the real object is covered up, modified, and camouflaged by the reflection of the context, which creates object-less objects and so renders the space perceptible. The object is replaced by the situation, the relationship between object, viewer and context. Non-vision thus becomes a theme which can be addressed by vision. For the first time, Minimal Art's specific brand of perceptualism was thus no longer uncritically accepted. Even harsher criticism was raised by the conceptualists. In 1968 Marcel Broodthaers wrote: "The language of forms must be reunited with that of words. There are no "Primary Structures". Broodthaers criticism is echoed in Felix Gonzales-Torres' statement of December 1993: "Minimalist sculptures were never really primary structures, they were structures that were unbedded with a multiplicity of meanings. Every time a viewer came into the room the objects became something else. Aesthetic choices are politics". In order to conceal that a multiplicity of meanings was possible so as to be able to create as unambiguous relations, meanings and situations as possible, and make sure that aesthetic choices were never political choices in order to make purely formal vision possible, it was necessary to idealize the neutral 'white space', the 'white cube' (Brian O'Doherty). Minimalist sculptures, Judd's 'specific objects', need context-free spaces if they are to develop their full potential. This criticism of Minimalist Art restored to museum spaces their specifically ideological moments, the meanings which people of different gender, race or nationality assign to them. The 'white cube' is ultimately a repressive space, an orthodox room, which admits no

multiple meanings. The situation between object, viewer and context is open, and permits every new viewer to assign new meanings. After Minimalist Art had suppressed the context, the context is now once more restored to the 'white cube'.

II

End

End of painting as an art?

Working in form nearing end of its time
Shot its bolt from the blue
Become pure by detaching itself from everything
Withdraw from sense objects, multiplicity
Intentness upon confrontation
Pattern of presentation
Nor forms, figures parts, adornments, body,
quality, quantity, mass
not in space, not visible, not to be felt, not lightless
Neither non-being or being, not dark, not light
Not affirmable, not deniable
Free of all
Nonsensuous, formless, shapeless, colorless,
soundless, odorless
No sounds, sights, sensing, sensation No intensity

No images, mental copies of sensations, imagings, imaginings
No concepts, thinking, ideas, meaning, content
Reception of formula over over again until loses all meaning
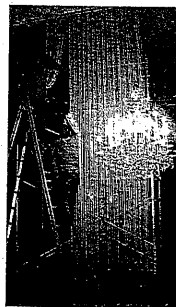*Nothing left except monotonous disappearing image*
Focus of required one-pointed direction
Everywhere, time, the same thing, one exercise
Ultimate, variations of, confrontations with ultimate
An invasion of the ultimate
Logical last step in rigid processes, straight, narrow

Luminous center in light of which all controversies are understood
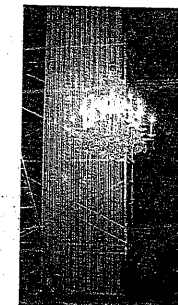*Trans-subjective*
A thing that is not

Ad Reinhardt
Unpublished, undated notes

Rudolf Stingel's pictorial installations which use monochrome carpets on the wall and on the floor, exemplifies and summarizes several of these problems. His work signals a return to the radical anti-illusionism of the 60s. At first, the

exhibition halls and art galleries seem like real rooms, and we find it almost impossible to detect the work of art, the artistic intrusion of the monochrome carpet. Several re-visits are necessary before we are able to perceive the artistic character of these rooms. Yet all these rooms essentially originate in the realm of illusion, the previous home of the arts. What we are confronted with here are very specific strategies of dislocation. However, what we find in the different real rooms are not parts of a work of art or sections of networks of art, scattered like after an

explosion, the result of telematic dislocation, not objects and elements which have been dislodged from their real context and re-assembled in the museum, like after an implosion (Cady Noland), but the rooms and the constituent elements of these rooms, their walls, floors, carpets and curtains, themselves desert the place in which they are situated. They desert the realm of illusion, the sphere of art, to return, transformed, to their original place. Starting out as interchangeable exhibition rooms, the rooms became functional spaces and return, transformed, as art spaces. Aristotle coined the term

'diaphaneity' to denote this imperceptible transformation from visible to invisible, the transparency where the invisible element shines through the visible element. And it precisely this kind of diaphonous operation which allows Stingel to transform ordinary rooms into museum spaces and turn normal conditions into exceptional conditions. Although the rooms are blatantly banal and trivial, there is a major abstractive element which transforms them into cabinets of abstraction and transcendence. Drawing inspiration from a direction in painting which for the first time tried to define the picture as an interface between two- and three-dimensionality, and its utopian transcendentality, Stingel develops the idea further, yet by preserving anti-illusionistic rationality he prevents transcendentality from declining into obscure spirituality. While his materialistic pragmatism allows him to retain the physicality of the material and the flatness of the picture, it also permits him to restore to the colour and to the representation qua diapheneity (representation as presence of the absent) much of their magic. As the visitor enters the picture on the floor, quasi touches the

paintings on the wall as he views them, he returns modulation to the monochrome colour and restores the impression of depth and motion, foreground and background, of gesture and pastosity, streaks and structure.

The totality of the picture (the pictorial surface as carpet on the wall or the floor) has become an installation and thus solved the problem of the frame. Once the frame has been eliminated the situation of the picture is different. The flat coloured object on the wall turns into a wall as a flat coloured object. The panel painting turns into an autonomous pictorial wall. As implied by the term 'panel painting', the painting covers a large surface, an entire wall, and thus intimates the potential, two possible realizations: forms on the canvas and shaped canvases, results of an activity performed by the painter, which are to be transformed into forms on the wall and forms on the floor as results of an activity the viewer engages in. It leads us out of the tautology of the flat pictorial object and rescues us from its resultant paradoxes and boredom. Stingel radicalised the division between colour and materiality by eliminating the division between the wall and the picture. The material becomes the colour and the picture in a twofold manner. No paint is applied onto the canvas but the coloured carpet is the (unpainted) canvas. No picture is hung on the wall but the wall is the (imageless) picture and the picture is the wall.

In this respect, Stingel is a nominalist painter, following in the footsteps of Marcel Duchamp. This permits him to take the idea of the ready-made and transfer it from the sphere of the world of consumer items to the world of images. The situation of the picture is turned into a ready-made context. The painted picture is converted into a standard instruction manual, the picture into a standard consumer item, the exhibition space into standard living quarters. In one of his works dating from 1989, Stingel listed all the constitutive elements of painting in his "List of Parts" (9 in total: paint pot, paint thinner, spray gun, natural bristle brush, silver paint, electric mixer, oil paints, spatula, tulle, plastic tub) and gave a "Step-by-step introduction to painting", listing eight steps, A to H, to teach viewers how to create a painting. The written instructions were accompanied by illustrations which exemplified the different steps and the instructions translated into the standard languages used in instruction manuals, English, Italian, German, French, Spanish and Japanese. Painting was thus reduced to a consumer item, an international commodity, a banal hobby, an industrial process. Using orange as his key colour - a colour which is not very popular with painters - Stingel published a little brochure entitled "Instructions, Istruzioni, Anleitung ..." which may be compared to earlier manifestos on the art of painting (eg. Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci, Karel van Mander), as a step-by-step guide on how paintings are created. Painting is portrayed as a skill which everyone can learn. The "romanticism" of illusionistic painting with the painter as the maverick genius is finally turned into a democratic cultural activity.

Stingel eliminates from the painting all vestiges of internal or representation, any illusion of three-dimensionality and reduces it to what it really is, a flat wall. In his work, the picture is the canvas, the canvas the picture. The textile painting is the carpet, the carpet forms the wall or the floor. He has rid the painting not only of its rectangular frame, but of any kind of frame. He covers the surface with colour, anonymously, using a machine, spreading the paint over the entire surface right to the edges of the surface (see eg. 1989), then glues tulle fabric onto it and sprays it. In his pictorial situations and installations on the floor he similarly goes to extremes. These works are marked by anonymity, by a machine-like, industrial character. And indeed, the carpet was manufactured in a factory. Whereas early avantgarde art had sought to achieve the unity of surface and colour (textile pictures), Stingel's endeavours aim to achieve the unity of multi-coloured material and support constructions, surroundings and walls. We have no longer a monochrome square on the wall, but the wall or the floor is itself this monochrome square, a coloured textile painting, the pictorial surface of the totality of colour. The wall is transformed into a flat, coloured object.

What Flavin achieved with his neon tubes, Stingel achieves with his carpet. Colour covers the maximum surface possible. The two-dimensional painting becomes a three-dimensional space, the three-dimensional space a two-dimensional painting. The totality of colour extends to the entire room. Stingel's installation in Graz with its black carpet and complete darkness is particularly successful at allowing us to experience the unity of image and space. Ad Reinhardt chose black because of its 'negative presence' which allowed him to achieve the desired fusion of image and space. His orations on the colour black as the "absence of colour" accurately describe the aesthetic objectives Stingel pursues with his black box in the Neue Galerie in Graz.
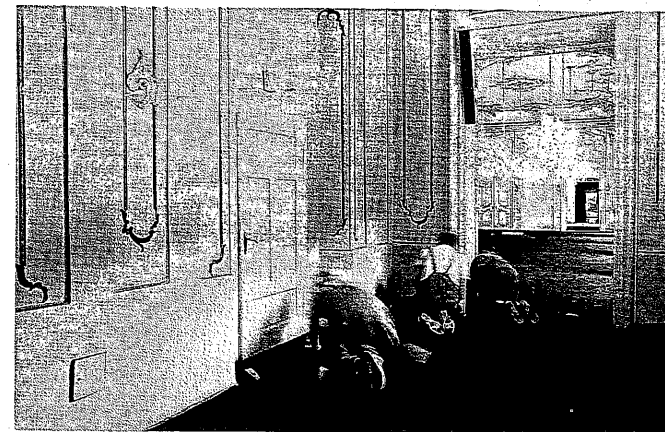
'Black'

'Black', absence of 'color', colorlessness, darkness, lightlessness
Art of painting vs. art of color (color-engineering, psychologist)
'Painting is black, sculp. is white, arch. is color'
Black as color, shiny black on matte black, texture, scumble, contrast
'Color blinds'
'Color sticks in one's eyes like something caught in one's throat'
'Colors are an aspect of appearance and so only of the surface'
'Manifest an indiscreet personality with shameful insistence'
Colors are barbaric, unstable, primitive, 'woven into the fabric of life', 'cannot be completely controlled', 'and should be concealed'
'Blacked-out', non-color, beyond color, shape, line monochrome, monotone, Chinese, Guernica
Negative presence, 'darkness', 'a getting rid of', 'blowing out',
Diminishing beyond shapes, colors, 'melting away'
Dematerialization, non-being
'The dark of absolute freedom'
Going from 'darkness to darkness deeper yet', ultimate
Black, 'medium of the mind', no distractions, no intrusions

Ad Reinhardt
Unpublished, undated notes

The autonomy of the picture is renounced in exchange for an inextricable link with the place where it is located. In this respect, Stingel is even more radical than Buren. When the exhibition finishes, Stingel's installations are discarded, partly because they are consumer items, and partly because their existence is so strongly dependent on the site, on the wall or the floor, that they could not exist without them. In other words, his pictorial situations cannot exist independently of their surroundings, of the space they occupy or the wall on which they are mounted; on the contrary, these are their very raison d'être. An alternative myth is thus created to the 'white cube' which preserved its independence by claiming its universal interchangeability. In Stingel's Black Box in the Neue Galerie, the main motives are dependence, and paradoxically, the revocation of the idea of the work of art as a consumer item, as an object offered for barter, the annulment of its interchangeability. The on-site installation is reduced to total site-dependence. The site, the place where the work of art is exhibited, is itself the work of art. The work depends on its location, is so site-specific, that it terminates the universal exchangeability which was one of the tenets uphelp by the international modern movement. An ordinary consumer article (a carpet) is installed and its primary function (as carpet on the floor) preserved. Any motive of representation is annulled by the social context. As the context replaces the work, the text, the work becomes even more anti-illusionistic. Walls and floor become themselves works of art; not simply neutral aesthetic objects, however, but places and moments of very specific historic experiences. The neutral white background normally offered by the museum is inverted and replaced by a black background. Zero-painting and zero-sculpture do not merely devalue the traditional figurative strategies, but they upgrade new situational parameters, like the user and the context, as well as new possible uses. As the viewers walk across the floor, touch the wall, they perceive pictorial effects, modulations of colour, the illusion of depth, of foreground and background, they experience the "frame", the "surroundings", the "three-dimensional picture", as social and aesthetic events. Because the room is dark they cannot see the floor, only feel it. Although the space itself is invisible, they can still experience it. Invisible picture and invisible space become object-less objects, yet they can still perceived by the viewers as abstractions when they move around. The sensory deprivation obliterates all "primary structures" and transcends perception. As the "white cube" is extinguished, the multiplicity of meanings is re-established. Every viewer becomes a "shifter", in the grammatical sense of the word. The sensory deprivation permits the viewer to experience sculptural, visual and spatial qualities, beyond the restrictions of conventional definitions of the art of sculpture or painting. As the immaterial and material aspects of aesthetic objects
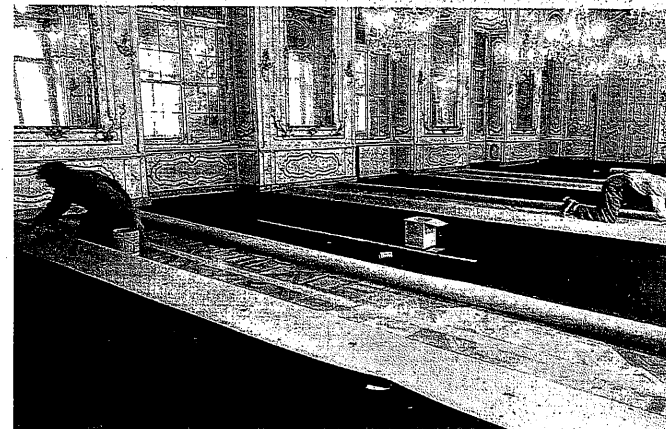
are eliminated, the viewers gain an even greater degree of autonomy. The sensory deprivation undermines the Minimalist axioms which rely on perception. An even bigger challenge to the conventional modes of the perception of art and historic forms of representations is Stingel's decision to place the work firmly within the realm of functional reality (walking on the carpet), and to use ready-made elements. Sensory deprivation, the perception of every-day events, and real functionality - in combination, they finally implode the auratic "white cube".

Stingel's Black Box not only takes us into the realm of contextuality, of the unrepressive space, but it also restores specificity to spaces and experiences. The Black Box not only rejects the repressive "white cube", it also makes reference to scientific models of systems and organisms. The structure of a system is reconstructed by observing input signals and output signals, its internal structure inferred. Stingel's Black Box is thus also a model which shows how knowledge of an unobservable, invisible interior can be deduced by observing its exterior. One might even say that Stingel's Black Box formulates a kybernetic response to Aristotle's diaphaneity, is a correction of Modernism.

IV

Felix Gonzalez-Torres continues the inversion of modernism which had been initiated by Robert Morris's scatter technique. His specific "stacks" form a perceptual unity, a unified figure, which is, however, made up of discontinuous elements. So this unity is an illusion; physically discrete and discontinuous, the continuum is visual only. Form and anti-

form, totality and fragementation are dialectically opposed. Other social and ideological oppositions, such as private vs public sphere, are added. The curtain which forms the boundary of the black space, represents a visual unity, although it is made up of a multitude of fragments (white, transparent and silver beads), which produce slight modulations of colour and light effects and so enhance the impression that the strings of bead are of different length and magnitude. The monochrome, the unity of colour, the visual figure is disrupted. The curtain represents itself an architectural and spatial element - like Stingel's carpet - and is used as a curtain. Being used as a curtain violates its status as an aesthetically autonomous work of glittering fragments and suppresses the visual noise, the pictorial effects which normally dominate our perception (see Stella). The curtain is white, in reference to the white cube - which, however, exists only synecdochically. Our experience of the white cube is once more diaphanous, through the curtain. The curtain redefines sculpture and picture, just as the carpet does. A portable wall forms the pictorial situation where the visual effects are ready-made products, manufactured from ready-made materials. The totality of the colour and of the picture encompasses the entire wall. Felix Gonzalez-Torres's curtain creates - like Stingel's Black Box - a new interface between the picture and the wall where the wall is the picture, between picture and sculpture, where the picture is the sculpture, between figure and background, between two- and three-dimensionality, between pictorial surface and pictorial space.

The white curtain through which the black cave is entered inverts our traditional notions of exhibition spaces in a gallery or museum. Here, the interior (the white wall) is externalized, and the outside folded inside (which is the reason for the disappearance of visibility inside). The exhibition space is turned into an inivisible zone which is inaccessible to vision and impenetrable. The exterior space becomes the agent of visibility. The interface between inside and outside becomes the sentry of visibility. The few things which remain visible, the other empty rooms of the museum are reduced to spheres of banality. The visible, at least the visible object, is thus pronounced banal. With their contextualization of museum spaces, Stingel and Gonzalez-Torres not only politicize the spaces themselves, the rooms which replace the exhibits, but having transformed the spaces into exhibits - not the neutral white spaces of the spaces of outlandish experiences, but the spaces that have been annulled and obliterated - they politicize the concept or art itself. Their two- and three- dimensional spatial interventions make redundant and replace the installation, the object, the sculpture, the picture, the exhibition, and perhaps even art istself, at least our traditional conception of art. In this, the perforated homogeneity of the curtains and the chromatic homogeneity of the spaces, pursue a common objective: the Black Box as their response to the white cube, the inversion of modernism, the evolution of an understanding of art which rejects Kant's apriorism in favour of an concept of perception which is constituted by social and historical parameters.