

Readings for David Getsy Seminar: “Beyond Visibility: Transgender Methods, Queer Methods, and the Case of Abstraction in Art History”

Required Readings

1. EXCERPTS: [Preface and “Introduction: „New“ Genders and Sculpture in the 1960s,” in *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* \(Yale University Press, 2015\). PAGES xi-xvii, 1-5, 26-41.](#)
2. [“Queer Relations,” *ASAP/Journal* 2.2 \(May 2017\): 254-57](#)
3. [“Refusing Ambiguity,” in Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, and Carlos Maria Romero, eds., *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader* \(London: Frieze Projects, 2017\), 61-62.](#)
4. [“Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer’s Ethics of Discernment,” *Temporary Art Review* \(8 March 2016\), n.p.](#)
5. [“A Sight to Withhold: David J. Getsy on Cassils,” *Artforum* \(February 2018\), 57-60](#)

Further reference (not required):

- a. [“Abstract Bodies and Otherwise: Amelia Jones and David Getsy on Gender and Sexuality in the Writing of Art History,” *caa.reviews* \(posted 16 February 2018\)](#)
- b. [“Appearing Differently: Abstraction’s Transgender and Queer Capacities,” interview by W. Simmons, in C. Erharter, et al., *Pink Labour on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices* \(Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015\), 38-55.](#)
- c. [“Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art Journal* 72.4 \(Winter 2013\): 58-71.](#)
- d. [“Conclusion: Abstraction and the Unforeclosed,” in *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* \(Yale University Press, 2015\), 266-80.](#)

Scott Burton, *The Last Tableau*, 1989. Installed at the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1991.



ABSTRACT BODIES

SIXTIES SCULPTURE IN THE EXPANDED FIELD OF GENDER



DAVID J. GETSY



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JACKET ILLUSTRATIONS

FRONT: Dan Flavin, *pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)*, 1963. Pink fluorescent light, h. 244 cm (96 in.).

FRONT FLAP: John Chamberlain, *M. Junior Love*, 1962. Painted metal, 51 × 51 × 35.5 cm (20 × 20 × 14 in.).

ABOVE: Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965. Leather, metal, rubber, fabric, and paint assemblage on canvas mounted on plywood, 215.9 × 215.9 × 17.15 cm (85 × 85 × 6 7/8 in.).

PRINTED IN CHINA

“Abstract Bodies makes a remarkable intervention into art history, combining a rigorous attention to the history of sculpture with surprising and elaborate readings of the art of the 1960s. As a result of his disciplined attention to abstract forms rather than figural representations of the body, David Getsy has opened a new chapter in art history. This is a brilliant and original book and will change the way we think about the dynamics between art, embodiment, plasticity, and queer form.”

(Jack Halberstam, University of Southern California)

“David Getsy’s *Abstract Bodies* represents a welcome convergence of the long established academic discipline of art history with the more recent interdisciplinary field of transgender studies. This book is not a history of transgender artists or transgender themes in art, but rather a path-breaking application of transgender studies as a heuristic lens. His deft coupling of subject matter and critical framework enables readers to grasp the profound extent to which the plasticity of shape and transformation of substance in reference to human being is a central feature of recent Western history.”

(Susan Stryker, University of Arizona)

“Abstract Bodies more than bridges art history and gender studies – David Getsy demonstrates that these fields need each other. This book shows us how to see gender’s capacities in texture, light, and form – loosened from the discourse of sex, gender becomes a material possibility. This is essential reading for anyone who wants to know how to write about sculpture, or who wants to know how queer art history can be.”

(Jennifer Doyle, University of California at Riverside)

“The insights that emerge from David Getsy’s analyses of sculpture, reception, anecdote, historiography, and of the particular languages – and voices – of artists, are provocative and profound. In the process of locating transformational energies in these artists’ works, Getsy not only connects us more intimately to each artist but also redirects the field of postwar abstract sculpture.”

(Michael Brenson, Bard College)

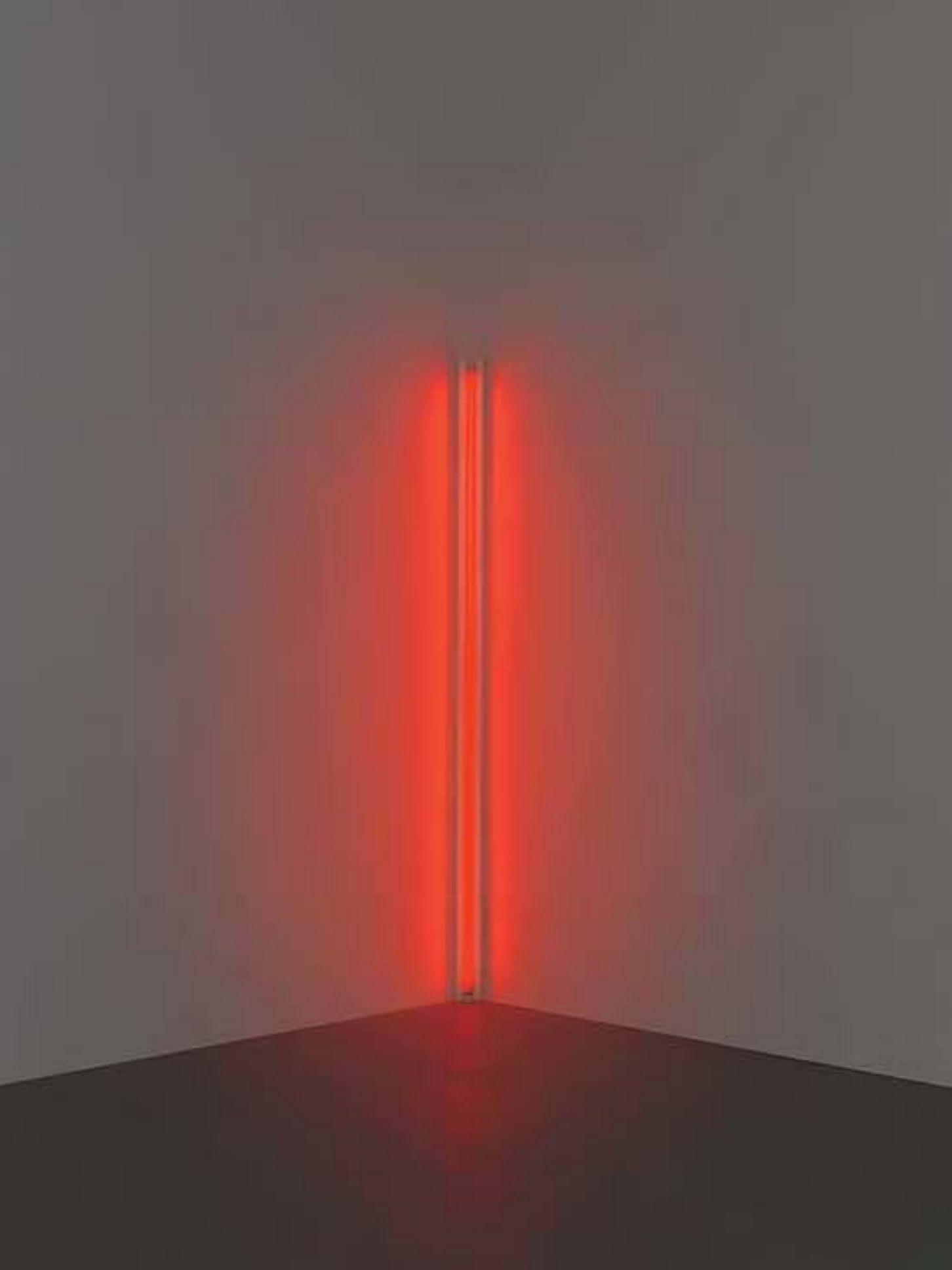
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PLEASE READ PAGES xi-xvii, 1-5, 26-41.

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CONTENTS

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Frontispiece: Dan Flavin, *red out of a corner (to Annina)*, 1963/70 (detail of fig. 116).
Page vi: Detail of Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965 (fig. 82).

Acknowledgments	VII
Preface	VII
Introduction:	I
“New” Genders and Sculpture in the 1960s	
1 On Not Making Boys: David Smith, Frank O’Hara, and Gender Assignment	43
2 Immoderate Couplings: Transformations and Genders in John Chamberlain’s Work	97
3 Second Skins: The Unbound Genders of Nancy Grossman’s Sculpture	147
4 Dan Flavin’s Dedications	209
Conclusion: Abstraction and the Unforeclosed	267
Notes	281
Bibliography	329
Index	356
Illustration Credits	372

P R E F A C E

In a sense, what is most important is what an artist *does*, rather than what he *is*, what the object *does* – in terms of response – rather than what it *is*.

Gregory Battcock, 1968¹

Transformation was the norm in American sculpture of the 1960s. The decade saw thoroughgoing attacks on sculptural representation and on the very idea of the statue. In the wake of sculpture's reconfiguration, modes such as assemblage, the reductive object, and earthworks proliferated. Rosalind Krauss famously dubbed the new conditions of sculpture that emerged in the 1960s as entering an "expanded field" and wrote of the medium's diffusion and dispersal.² Even though sculpture (as well as the format of the statue) did not end as widely foretold, in this contentious decade it was inexorably altered and multiplied.

The 1960s in America also saw a fundamental shift in the ways that persons were understood. This was the decade in which gender identities and their distinction from biological sex began to be more publically contested.³ A key development driving these debates was the realization that sex could be changed, and 1960s America witnessed the emergence of public and institutional acknowledgments of transsexuality. In popular culture, evidence had already been mounting since the 1950s about the lived diversity of transformable and multiple genders. The media discourse around transsexuality had begun in 1952 when Christine Jorgensen made international headlines for being the first publicly disclosed case of sex reassignment surgery.⁴ In 1954, the American magazine *People Today* would report, "Next to the recurrent hydrogen bomb headlines, reports of sex changes are becoming the most persistently startling world news."⁵ By the 1960s, gender research clinics began to be founded across the country, starting with the University of California Los Angeles in 1962 and growing to include such institutions as Johns Hopkins University, Northwestern Uni-

versity, the University of Washington, and Stanford University. In 1966, the groundbreaking book by Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, was published.⁶ That same year, the *New York Times* ran a front-page story about sex-change operations, soon followed by articles in *Esquire*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.⁷ In 1968, the Olympic Games held in Mexico City were the first formally to introduce gender confirmation testing, Jorgensen went on a twenty-city book tour to publicize her just-released autobiography, and Gore Vidal published his bestselling novel featuring its eponymous transsexual heroine, *Myra Breckinridge*. In 1969, the Stonewall Riots that launched Gay Liberation were sparked by the resistance of transwomen and drag queens to police harassment. In the 1960s, definitions of gender, sex, and the human body also moved into an expanded field.

This book questions what these two concurrent histories might have to say to each other. How, in other words, does the emerging public recognition of the presence of transformable genders and bodies in the 1960s correlate with sculpture's contentious relationship to figuration and the body in that decade? Questions of gender often accompanied sculpture's struggle to dispense with recognizable figures while maintaining abstract and non-referential objects' relationships to human bodies and human lives. Whether it was the metaphors of bodily couplings in the work of John Chamberlain, the transformed skins and garments of Nancy Grossman's assemblages, or Dan Flavin's affectionate dedications of literalist objects to friends and mentors, even the most abstract and non-representational sculpture nevertheless kept allusions to persons and bodies near. An attention to transformable genders, mutable morphologies, and successive states of personhood illuminates these positions in sculpture, showing how abstraction produced less determined and more open ways of accounting for bodies and persons.

Sculpture in the 1960s sought finally to free itself from the statue and its allusions to conventional human figures. The decade increasingly became characterized by abstract sculptures that repudiated the conventions and format of the freestanding statue but were nevertheless still discrete human-scale objects. Instead, new materials and new configurations emerged around the goal of making sculpture that neither fell back on conventional materials nor imaged the human figure or shared its proportions. David Smith was the key transitional figure in this, and his final years of sculpture were taken up with the battle to overcome the lingering statuary format that had characterized his major works of the 1950s. In his wake, sculptors moved more decisively into alternative materials, new formats, and higher

degrees of abstraction and non-reference. At the same time, this embrace of total abstraction fueled the long-running anxiety about the differences between sculptures, everyday objects, and furniture. Caught between their flight from the conventional statue and their fear of having abstract sculptures dissolve into the world of everyday functional things, sculptors in the 1960s developed a mode between these two options of the statue and the object. By the end of the decade, modes such as conceptual art, earthworks, and the like would overcome this issue by moving out of the gallery and away from the discrete object, but the first half of the 1960s was caught up with making what one could call non-statues on a human scale.

Artists as different as Smith, Chamberlain, Grossman, and Flavin all wrestled with how to make abstract works. They did so through relying on metaphors of the human body and of personhood. That is, even though their works did not image the human, they invoked it. Smith's welded steel constructions, Chamberlain's dense but delicate compositions made from crushed automobile parts, Grossman's de-constructed leather garments remade into writhing abstract reliefs, or Flavin's cool electrified light tubes all aimed to confront viewers with new entities, new bodies. In their work, the non-correlation between these objects and the metaphors the artists' applied to them produced questions – for viewers, for critics, and for the artists themselves – about how and where gender could be mapped onto the works and, more broadly, what gender's relationships to embodiment could be. What happens, in other words, when artists such as these refuse to present the human form but demand that their sculptures be seen as related to human bodies and persons?

This book begins to answer that question by drawing on the interdisciplinary field of transgender studies. Its methods and priorities inform the questions I ask of Sixties sculpture. I take as axiomatic that the ever-growing literature on the history of transgender experience in the twentieth century demands reconsiderations of larger accounts of the body, of normalcy, of personhood, of representation, and of the human. Accordingly, this book offers the first sustained, book-length use of transgender studies in the field of art history.⁸ I show how this perspective enhances clarity about the terms, history, and implications of sculpture's relationship to definitions of the human, to the figure, and to abstraction in this decade. I have not sought an iconography of transgender in this project, nor is this book about transgender artists or even artists who were in direct dialogue with the emerging popular discourse of transsexuality and gender nonconformity in the 1960s. Rather, I have used the methods and theories of transgender studies to approach anew and in depth a small group of artists in order to

show how their anxious, excited, and fearless invocations of the body in relation to abstract and non-referential objects can be understood to produce accounts of gender's plurality and mutability. In examining these artists and their archives, I pursued fundamental historical and conceptual questions that transgender studies poses: that is, how non-binary genders are articulated and acknowledged, how human morphologies could be valued for their mutability, and how to do justice to successive states of personhood or embodiment. The accounts of human experience and potential that underwrite transgender studies demand a broad critique and a fundamental remapping of the ways we understand societies and individuals. In keeping with this, the long history of figural representation (and its opponents) looks different when we attend to the reality of transformable genders and bodies.

Both the history of figuration and of abstraction's repudiation of it are inextricably bound up with sex and gender. Images of the human form generally incite a desire to categorize that form according to its sex and, in turn, to align it with assumptions about how gender should relate to that sex. In order for many to see a body (or an image of a body) as human, its relation to gender needs to be settled. Gender "figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity," as Judith Butler has maintained.⁹ From the first, the determination of gender operates as a predicate for integration into the social. For instance, the negotiation of pronoun usage becomes, for many, the obligatory first step in conversations and interactions, and any ambiguity or mobility of pronoun usage will quickly derail or arrest interactions. Or, more fundamentally, one could think of the primal nomination of personhood at birth. No matter if it is cliché or ritual, the performative assignment of sex and gender to a newborn ("It's a girl!") has immediate effects. This performative utterance (whether said out loud or inscribed on a birth certificate) alters how that child is understood by others, determines such things as what colors many will think are appropriate for its garments, and produces a set of expectations with regard to gender identity.¹⁰

Ambiguous or ambivalent images of the human form trouble these taxonomic impulses. Anything that does not simply and clearly reflect presumptions about the dimorphism of human bodies is ignored or rejected, and those figures that exceed binary categories are considered inadequate or incomplete renderings of the human. Attempts at simplifying representation to its basics as a means of offering the generic or the universal image have limited scope, for soon enough the question will be raised about "what kind" of person such a humanoid form actually implies. Even stick figures incite questions of gender assignment. This book goes even further than

such simplified figurative images to investigate how sculptures that refused to image the human form were nevertheless caught up with nominations of gender for non-representational objects. A transgender studies perspective provides a basis for examining the political and ethical implications of such arbitrations. It allows, on the one hand, for a wider recognition of gender's contestations and alternatives (which would otherwise be renounced or go unrecognized). On the other, it calls for a critical reassessment of normative accounts of the human that take dimorphism as absolute and binaries as immutable truths.¹¹

The term "transgender" has been used to bring into alliance a wide range of nonascribed genders, and I discuss its use in historical analysis further in the Introduction. Viviane K. Namaste described "transgender" as "an umbrella term used to refer to all individuals who live outside of normative sex/gender relations – that is, individuals whose gendered self-presentation (evidenced through dress, mannerisms, and even physiology) does not correspond to the behaviors habitually associated with members of their biological sex."¹² In this, the history of transsexuality was foundational to the later expansion and formulation of "transgender" as an inclusive category for a range of lived experiences of gender and embodiment.¹³ Transformation and temporality are central to definitions of transgender's conjugation of non-binary, unique, or recombined gender potentialities. Susan Stryker has nominated this idea of transformative movement as crucial to wider applications of "transgender," taking the term's defining trait as "the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place – rather than any particular destination or mode of transition."¹⁴

Neither the transformability of genders and bodies nor their variability and plurality are contemporary developments. There is extensive evidence for a broad and diverse history of gender nonconformity, successively adopted genders, and mutable bodily morphologies that decisively refutes the assumption that gender is binary and static.¹⁵ Similarly, there is an extensive (but silenced) history of intersex lives that discredits the misconception that the human species is absolutely dimorphic.¹⁶ The 1950s and 1960s saw long-running scientific debates about sex and gender cross over into popular culture. Gender's variability, complexity, and mutability began to be more publically discussed as part of the wide-ranging cultural upheavals of these years. As Paul B. Preciado has argued, "In the 1950s, which were confronted with the political rise of feminism and with homosexuality, as well as with the desire of 'transvestites,' 'deviants,' and 'transsexuals' to escape or transform birth sex assignment, the dimorphism epistemology of sexual difference was simply crumbling."¹⁷ By the 1960s, this process

had accelerated. New medical and social institutions were spawned, and evidence of nonascribed and transformed genders began to be featured regularly in the press, in popular culture, and in the work of artists and writers. As I discuss in the Introduction, Stryker nominated the 1960s as the era of “transgender liberation” because of the widespread cultural and institutional acknowledgment of gender mutability and multiplicity that emerged in those years.¹⁸

A transgender history attends not just to the evidence of gender non-conforming lives but also – as this study does – shows how accounts of transgender capacity are produced (sometimes inadvertently) through attempts to reconsider how bodies and persons can be imaged or evoked. It also asks its questions broadly with the understanding that all genders must be characterized differently once mutability and temporality are recognized among their defining traits.¹⁹ Once personhood is valued for its transformations and gender is understood as workable beyond conventional static and binary norms, any account of the human or of its representations looks different and more complex. Such is the case with the contentious role of the human form in the history of sculpture, and this book discusses the history of postwar sculpture for the ways it proposed “successive states” of personhood and unforeclosed accounts of genders’ inhabitations in works that evoked but did not image the human body. (I encountered this phrase “successive states” in Donald Judd’s writing on the formal character of Chamberlain’s reworked components, and it has stuck with me as a particularly apt way of characterizing the hard-won reworking of gender and personhood that transgender studies values.²⁰)

In bringing to light the ways in which abstract sculpture of the 1960s came to posit gender’s mutability and multiplicity, I see this book as taking up the challenge that Butler put to historical inquiry when she wrote of the need to provide new accounts of the long history of the complexity and diversity of genders:

I would say that it is not a question merely of producing a new future for genders that do not exist. The genders I have in mind have been in existence for a long time, but they have not been admitted into the terms that govern reality. So it is a question of developing within law, psychiatry, social, and literary theory a new legitimating lexicon for the gender complexity that we have been living with for a long time. Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will, of necessity, call them “new.”²¹

The present book pursues this call to action from the perspective of the history of art, which has a long tradition of debating the human form and attending to its vicissitudes. In this, I see art history as offering a particularly rich resource for transgender studies – for example, in its methods for interpreting the allegorical deployments of the human form or for critically engaging with visual abstractions. In turn, the perspective of transgender studies is energizing as a means to re-view art-historical episodes in which the human body and its metaphors were at issue. American abstract sculpture in the 1960s – with its paradoxical combination of a refusal to represent the human body and a reliance on it as analogue – offers an exemplary site at which to bring these modes of inquiry into productive dialogue. Accordingly, I have committed to gender’s historical plurality and mutability, and I have pursued the ways in which artists’ practices reward attention to transforming genders and successive personhood. The complexity of Sixties sculpture becomes more apparent and generative when one attends to the accounts of genders, of the body, and of persons that underwrote it.

During the decade characterized by the atomization of the statue into specific objects and expanded fields, abstract bodies emerged from the sculpture’s refusal of the figure. The human form could no longer be taken for granted or treated as universal. Gender became an open question, and it was mapped variably and successively onto abstraction. In these same years, genders and bodies came into question more widely, and nonascribed genders became visible as potentialities and actualities. Transgender lives presented a challenge to the authority given to the normative image of the human. Challenging this authority was also sculpture’s preoccupation in the 1960s.



INTRODUCTION

"NEW" GENDERS AND SCULPTURE IN THE 1960S

An epiphany for this project, which helped me envision its shape, occurred when I was leaving the David Smith retrospective at Tate Modern a number of years ago. One of the final rooms was the media room, and the 1964 televised interview between Smith and Frank O'Hara I discuss in Chapter 1 was being projected on a large wall. I had not intended to watch this didactic and was walking through the room when I was arrested by Smith's line, "I don't make boy sculptures." How bizarre, I thought, that such a negative designation was a necessary or useful term for Smith. This line continued to nag at me, and I began to realize how perniciously gender functioned as the predicate for nominating works of art in relation to the human. Further, I began to question how sculpture in the 1960s often returned to this scene of facing gender multiplicity created through pursuits of abstraction or literalism. I started conceiving of this project as a book once I investigated that casual comment and realized how much it crystalized a larger set of issues confronting sculpture during the decade when the statuary format dissolved into the expanded field. Other comments, such as John Chamberlain's that "everybody's both" genders or Nancy Grossman's that each individual was fundamentally bi-sexed, led me to see a wider complex of issues that these individual artists helped to clarify.

My central contention in this book is that sculpture of the 1960s gains greater historical resonance and wider interdisciplinary relevance through attention to how the human was mapped onto objects that patently refused to image even the most basic traits of the human figure. More so than in

OPPOSITE 1 David Smith, *Cubi VII*, 1963. Stainless steel, 281.9 × 175.3 × 58.4 cm (111 × 69 × 23 in.). Art Institute of Chicago, Grant J. Pick Purchase Fund, 1964.1141.

the long tradition of abstracted, simplified, and stylized figures from the preceding decades of modernism, sculpture in the 1960s shattered the expectations of the medium, expanded its material practices, left the format of the freestanding statue behind, and made decisive moves to achieve non-reference and objecthood. At the same time, these innovations increasingly sought to activate the viewer's bodily and affective relations with those abstract sculptural objects. As with the four artists on whom I focus in this volume, such propositions for abstract sculpture were often animated by references direct and indirect to sexuality and gender. To be clear: this book is not about the genders of the sculptors discussed in it. On the contrary, I have chosen my case studies deliberately to show how accounts of genders as multiple and mutable erupt in the work of artists for whom gender and sexuality were not necessarily stated or primary terms of investigation. Accordingly, I reveal no secrets about the artists' lives nor are their biographies used as the main tools for interpretation of their practices. My focus is on their artistic practices, repeated methods, and the rhetorics they employed to communicate their priorities. These provide the basis for an extrapolation of gender multiplicity and transformability fostered by their pursuit of abstract bodies and persons. I argue that transgender capacity was inadvertently realized out of abstract sculpture's coupling of objecthood and personhood as it negotiated what would come after the statuary tradition.

"Sculpture" is an open and contested category in this book. Any examination of the tumultuous transformations in three-dimensional art-making in the 1960s could have it no other way. I have intentionally chosen objects that vary in their definitions of the sculptural object, from the accumulated compositions of Chamberlain through Grossman's relief assemblages to Flavin's modular light tubes. Flavin's work, in particular, has been appropriated as sculpture in this book because of the ways in which it signals an expansion into spatial practices. Early on, Flavin rejected the singular category of sculpture for his work (as did many Minimalists), but his early fluorescent work nevertheless was taken to be sculpture and participated in the debates about the medium's future or ruin. In all of the case studies, I draw on the three-dimensionality of these artists' works and the ways that their attempts at abstraction, non-reference, or literalism activated bodily identifications in the viewer precisely because of their physicality.

Fluorescent tubes, welded steel planes and cubes, and discarded autobody parts or leather garments – these are the materials used by Flavin, Smith, Chamberlain, and Grossman in their pursuit of abstract sculptural objects. Despite their aim to refuse or befuddle reference and signification, they



2 John Chamberlain, *Flavin Flats*, 1977. Painted and chromium-plated steel, 195.5 × 95.5 × 94 cm (77 × 37½ × 37 in.). Installed at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, 1991, in foreground.

nevertheless couched these moves in allusions to bodies, in practices of naming, in evocations of orifices and skins, in desire, and in the intermingling of bodies in sexuality. I focus on these issues in order to explore the gaps created when bodies are evoked but not imaged and when their transformability becomes valued. My analyses follow the development of their perspectives in the 1960s and track them through larger trajectories and, when possible, into their work of the 1970s and beyond. I use these four artists as representative of that broader preoccupation in the 1960s with colliding two seemingly contradictory priorities: on the one hand, commitments to complete abstraction and non-reference and, on the other, metaphors of the body, of sexuality, and of personhood. These four artists were also chosen for their differences in the ways in which abstraction was embraced (and sometimes contested) in the long trajectories of their practices. Loosely, the selection speaks to some of the major positions in abstract sculpture of the first half of the 1960s, such as Abstract Expressionist (Smith), Chamberlain's almost Pop embrace of the auto industry's lurid colors as a

means to update the tradition of abstract steel sculpture, assemblage and found objects (Grossman's reliefs), and Minimalist (Flavin). None of these categories are adequate to the artists' work, obviously, and they bleed into each other. Naming them so bluntly, however, gives a sense of abstract options for sculpture in the first half of the 1960s. In addition, I have chosen to focus this book on artists conventionally associated with Sixties sculpture before Postminimalism – heralded by Lucy Lippard's 1966 exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction*. Within the study of that sculpture, it is Postminimalism that has received the most attention to date with regard to issues of gender, as I discuss shortly. I chose to redirect questions of gender to artists and movements that have, previously, been seen as less amenable to it than the more expected example of Postminimalism.

The questions pursued in my case studies expand on and explore the importance given to abstraction in Jack Halberstam's formative proposition of an aesthetics of the transgender body emerging in art after modernism.¹ As I shall be discussing, there are many more artists and art-historical periods (both before and after the 1960s) that abstracted the body and made gender ambiguous. My contention is not that the artists in this study are wholly unprecedented. To the contrary, they represent episodes in a much longer history of the ways in which abstracted bodies facilitate capacities for seeing the human otherwise. These four artists were chosen because I believe that the sophistication of their practices and the complexity of the issues they raise reward sustained investigation and, in turn, mark crucial tensions in the shift from the statuary tradition to sculpture's expanded field. In their negotiations of gender mutability, their cases offer more general models for how we articulate transgender capacities in other such artworks that – like theirs – were neither created by transgender artists nor made with the primary intention of envisioning mutable and multiple genders.

These chapters do not aim at a negative critique of these artists. In this study, I work primarily with these artists' artworks and the textual productions with which they buttressed them. I closely examine archives, objects, and statements in order to show how we can recognize new meanings and new accounts of the human in their struggle with the body in the abstract. I have been committed to explicating the driving concerns of their practices while, at the same time, arguing for the semantic and identificatory possibilities that expand out from those concerns. Such generative aims drive the book's analyses, and they respond to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's call for "reparative" interventions that multiply avenues of identification and cathexis, that offer tactics of survival, and that proliferate possibilities. As she urged about reparative readings, "What we can best learn from such

practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture – even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them."² Accordingly, the invested but self-consciously rogue readings I offer in this book demonstrate that a deep engagement with these artists' priorities and practices unfolds to reveal unforeseen reparative potential in their accounts of personhood and gender.

In the sections that follow, I outline some of the key contexts for this study. First, I focus on the parameters of sculpture, followed by a discussion of how questions of figuration were displaced into debates about anthropomorphism, one of the central questions for sculpture criticism of the 1960s. I then discuss the emergence of abstract eroticism and bodily evocations in the middle of the decade, followed by a brief summary of the role of ambiguity and androgyny in twentieth-century art. I then offer a comparison to the history of transgender issues in the 1960s and an examination of the conceptual framework of transgender capacity.

STATUES, SCULPTURE, AND PHYSICALITY

Sculpture has an activated relationship to the human body that differs significantly from pictorial and other two-dimensional modes of representation. Its physicality and three-dimensionality necessarily invoke bodily relations – even in the most patently abstract of sculptures. Of course, other media such as paintings, textiles, and photographs do this in their own ways, but sculpture has historically been patterned after and scaled in relation to the human body. When sculptures are representational, that "image" occurs in three dimensions rather than two and, consequently, shares space with the viewer who can circumambulate it and physically interact with its real volumes. A result of this is that there is not the same physical boundary as there is with a two-dimensional image. Pictorial representation involves a translation of the three-dimensional world to a new world untouchable behind the picture plane. By contrast, the condition of sculptural representation is that it is boundaryless in its physical proximity and real tactility.³ There is an immediacy and implied equivalency between the mass and volume of the sculptural object and the mass and volume of the viewer's encounter of it in shared space. Standing before a sculpture, the viewer is prompted to negotiate a series of bodily engagements, judgments of scale, incitements to tactility, and perceptions of shared environmental conditions between the sculptural body and their own. (This physical and spatial

engagement is another reason why I have considered Flavin's immersive light fields in the realm of sculpture, as he himself did initially.)

The potentials and limitations of sculpture's physicality have long confronted those who would make statues. Commonly, they have navigated these parameters by focusing on discrete bodies rather than on the representation of fully contextual scenes in which those bodies operate. Consequently, the history of sculptural production has tended to center on representations of persons, and in conventional freestanding sculpture there is no equivalent of such options for pictorial representation as landscape or still life in which figures might be absent. By contrast, sculptors focused on the human figure alone or in small groups, with the single figure dominating the sculptural genres of the ideal statue, the portrait, and the monument. For most of its history, that is, sculpture had been primarily an art of the human form in both its physical relationality and its content.⁴

Sculpture in the twentieth century explored new options, and the human figure's centrality was questioned and supplemented during the decades of modernism.⁵ Despite the fact that figuration increasingly became labeled as conservative and unmodern, versions of the human form persisted, and the formats of the statue and statuette retained their coherence after being overtaken by abstraction. Even during the highest periods of modernist abstraction there were relatively few modes of sculpture that did not somehow rely on the form and format of figuration (except for the most radical departures such as those of Vladimir Tatlin or Katarzyna Kobro and, debatably, the readymades of Marcel Duchamp). Animal bodies were adopted by artists such as Constantin Brancusi and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska as alternatives to the human form but, by and large, European and American traditions of sculpture continued to allude to or find equivalents for the human figure and its proportions. As Frances Colpitt noted, "Traditional sculpture depends on anthropomorphism to strike a bond between the spectator and the object, which accounts for the nonabstractness of most sculpture prior to the sixties."⁶

In the 1950s, the recognizable human figure was successively attacked and suppressed in sculpture. Nevertheless, the statue format continued to underwrite all but the most rigorously abstract sculpture. Even as mimetic representation was banished, sculptures continued to exhibit other defining parameters of statues: they were still predominantly freestanding, human-scale sculptural objects that shared the proportions, frontality, and structure of the human body. One can look to Rosalind Krauss's 1977 groundbreaking book, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, for a narrative of the struggle in the medium of sculpture to defeat the statue format and its figurative valences.⁷

The teleology of her account culminated in installation, earthworks, and the Minimal and Postminimal options best represented for her by Robert Morris. This triumphal narrative was built through her careful discussions of sculptors' attempts to move beyond the coherence of the statue and its reliance on an organizing core (both formally and semantically). In that story, Smith served as the crucial transitional figure to the 1960s (an opinion I share, demanding his inclusion in this book).⁸ Krauss's polemical and magisterial account of modern sculpture evidenced the ways in which conventions and meanings of the statue continued to shadow sculpture as it moved to embrace abstraction, objects, and new materials and formats.

While the summary history of sculpture provided in the preceding paragraphs is necessarily brief and over-simplifying, it nevertheless encapsulates what I see as the predominant patterns that led up to the beginnings of sculpture's more thoroughgoing revision that started in the 1950s and exploded in the 1960s. Despite the vicissitudes of style and degrees of representation and abstraction, however, across this history of modern sculpture it was the material object's physical co-presence and spatial relations with the viewer (as both object and, potentially, image) that were defining issues.⁹ A consequence of this is that sculpture – even at its most abstract – necessarily invokes the motile body of the viewer in a direct and immediate way. As Lucy Lippard said in 1967, "Sculpture, existing in real space and physically autonomous, is *realer* than painting."¹⁰ This invocation of real bodily relations meant that even as sculptors in the 1960s started to make non-statues, bodily metaphors and equivalencies were still operative. No matter how assiduous the pursuit of abstraction and non-reference, the body still haunted sculpture as its denominator. This study focuses on sculpture for the reason that such bodily resonances and invocations accompanied abstraction in a manner more pervasive and powerful than in two-dimensional media.

The nearness of bodies to even the most adventurous departures from traditional sculpture was remarked on by Krauss in her 1977 history of modern sculpture. Writing about Minimalism, often taken to be the apogee of abstraction, and other developments such as earthworks, Krauss reminded readers:

The abstractness of minimalism makes it less easy to recognize the human body in those works and therefore less easy to project ourselves into the space of that sculpture with all of our settled prejudices left intact. Yet our bodies and our experience of our bodies continue to be the subject of this sculpture – even when a work is made of several hundred tons of earth.¹¹

The image of the human body had been left behind, perhaps, but this move opened up a wider range of modes of address to multiple bodies across the 1960s. In this decade, the human body itself became an abstraction to be evoked and activated through sculptural objects.

LATENT ANTHROPOMORPHISMS, ECCENTRIC ABSTRACTIONS,
AND OTHER "VEHICLES OF THE UNFAMILIAR" IN THE 1960S

This book is not about ambiguous human figures or generic bodies so much as the ways in which artists and viewers mapped bodily or personifying metaphors onto patently un-figurative, non-representational sculptural objects. It was in the 1960s that abstraction and non-reference became central to sculpture, and artists sought to leave any traces of the human form behind.

At the beginning of the decade, many had increasingly become disdainful of sculpture's dependence on the human figure. For instance, in 1963, Lawrence Alloway decried the state of recent sculpture, seeing its conventions as "cliché." Explaining the long tradition of modern sculpture, he argued:

One reason that the 20th century sculptors rely so heavily, and so placidly, on the human image, is that if they don't, their work may look like furniture and hardware. Because sculpture has a more substantial and literal physical existence than paint on a canvas (which has an inveterate sign-making capacity and an unquenchable potential for illusion – and these are the medium's main carriers of meaning) it is prone to object-status.¹²

He quipped that the statues of the 1950s and early years of the 1960s were "commanding symbols of almost nothing" and called for a renewed engagement with the spatial characteristics of sculpture. In a statement that could be understood to presage Minimalism's spatial address (and Alloway's own burgeoning interest in systematic art), he argued: "One of the great problems (i.e., opportunity) in sculpture, which painting does not have in the same way, is the relation of the object to our physical space."¹³ At the beginning of the 1960s, abstract sculpture struggled to be neither objects nor statues. The representation of the body – or even any bipedal figure – increasingly became suspect even as sculpture's opportunity was seen to be its activation of spatial and bodily relations.

A contradiction emerged forcefully in the 1960s between the push toward ever more extreme abstraction and sculpture's continued reliance

on and evocation of the human body. As James Meyer has recently discussed, this manifested itself most strongly in the accusations of anthropomorphism that characterized critical discourse on sculpture in that decade. Anthropomorphism became a central term of derision from all sides.¹⁴ Underlying such charges, he argued, was an attempt to retain and enhance sculpture's association with the body even as its image was banished. Summarizing this situation, Meyer contended that "During the 1960s, then, critiques of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism typically went hand in hand. A third term was subsequently introduced into the discursive field, which I will call the *bodily*. The seminal critical debates of this period centered on the dialectic of the anthropomorphic and the bodily."¹⁵ As part of a broader antihumanist critique that informed debates on 1960s art (and Minimalism more specifically), both figuration and the attribution of human traits to objects were elided with the anthropocentric. Consequently, more extreme versions of abstraction and non-reference were pursued, and anthropomorphism became equivalent to a charge of outmoded and deluded conservatism. In the expanding field, there was little room for figures.

The hunt to eradicate the anthropomorphic among abstract artists was animated by the resurgence of representational modes among abstraction's competitors in the decade. Sculptural figuration was embraced by such artists as Paul Thek, George Segal, Edward Kienholz, and Bruce Conner. Pop Art, too, challenged the idea of abstraction and the avoidance of the figurative, most notably in the non-human anthropomorphisms resulting from Claes Oldenburg's soft gigantism.¹⁶ Faced with a burgeoning range of such representational sculptural practices, those artists who privileged abstraction or non-reference reacted by seeking to purge figural allusions and anthropomorphisms at all costs. This came to a head in debates centered on Minimalism, as Donald Judd and others attempted finally to transcend representation, convention, and allusion.

Michael Fried famously undercut Minimalism's claims that it had purged the anthropomorphic in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood."¹⁷ Despite the seriality and impassivity of the literalist object, Fried outlined how its human scale and obdurate presence before the viewer evoked another human: "[T]he beholder knows himself to stand in an indeterminate, open-ended – and unexacting – relation *as subject* to the impassive object on the wall or floor. In fact, being distanced by such objects is not, I suggest, entirely unlike being distanced, or crowded, by the silent presence of another *person*."¹⁸ Fried then proceeded to call out Minimalism for its anthropomorphism, using Tony Smith's human-scale, six-foot steel cube *Die* (1962) as his example (fig. 3). Fried concluded, "One way of describing what Smith



3 Tony Smith, *Die*, 1962 (fabricated 1968). Steel with oiled finish, 182.9 × 182.9 × 182.9 cm (72 × 72 × 72 in.). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; gift of the Collectors Committee 2003.77.1.

was making might be something like a surrogate person – that is, a kind of *statue*.”¹⁹ Recalling the ways in which Clement Greenberg elided the sculptural with the figurative, Fried cast the literalist object as a “statue” in order to show how its lack of resemblance to the human form nevertheless prompted the projection of the human onto it.²⁰ He quipped, “I am suggesting, then, that a kind of latent or hidden naturalism, indeed anthropomorphism, lies at the core of literalist theory and practice. The concept of presence all but says as much.”²¹

Such back-and-forth about anthropomorphism was a way of negotiating sculpture’s invocation of the bodily. As Colpitt characterized this situation, “The fact of the total abstractness of Minimal art resulted in a personification of its objects. The objects are not formally similar to human beings, yet their complete self-sufficiency encouraged the critic and spectator to treat them as other beings.”²² Writers from different positions in these debates claimed that the resemblance to the body and the statue had been finally eradicated, but they did so by arguing about how other bodily valences could be mapped onto abstract sculpture. As Meyer later remarked, “Mini-

malist sculpture alludes to and evokes the body in order to critique the anthropomorphic. A latent anthropomorphism would seem to inhabit *any* sculpture, including those works that we take to most strenuously undermine such associations.”²³

In an essay following “Art and Objecthood” by two years, Fried argued that the work of Anthony Caro achieved what Minimalism could not: an evocation of the bodily in works that bore no vestiges of the freestanding statue. Unlike literalist seriality, however, Caro captured the dynamic and lived experience of embodiment, according to Fried. He argued: “I am suggesting that it is *our* uprightness, frontality, axuality, groundedness and symmetry – as these determine our perceptions, our purposes, the very meanings we make – which, rendered wholly abstract, are the norms of Caro’s art.”²⁴ In these, the “bodily” itself became abstracted and open-ended, producing unforeclosed assignments of it to the sculptural encounter. Again, even as the format of the freestanding statue receded and new structures were proposed as alternatives, the bodily still found itself addressed and reflected in rigorously abstract sculpture.

From a far different standpoint, Jack Burnham similarly attempted to articulate the bodily capacities of entirely un-figural forms. Reflecting on the debates about anthropomorphism, he wrote in 1969:

It is important to remember that most modern abstractionist movements have rejected their predecessors on the grounds of anthropomorphism. This has consistently undercut the humanistic intention of figurative work; and it has provided new abstraction with the appearance of greater detachment and objectivity. Yet the absurdity of who is less anthropomorphic soon ends in its own logical *cul-de-sac*. The *more* obvious truth is that all art is anthropomorphic – that is, if it is interpreted not solely through appearance but as one of many extensions of human need and thought. In reality, the argument over anthropomorphism is one concerned with the priorities of different sign and symbol systems, not over the limits of mimetic imagery.²⁵

Burnham was advocating interactive structures (his example was the work of Mowry Baden) that – unlike Caro’s – literalized the experience of sculpture as tactile and motile rather than just optical. In the end, he saw how even Baden’s structures facilitated an equation of sculpture’s physical potentiality with embodiment. “Comprehension of sculpture becomes the act of being sculpture,” he concluded. Like Fried’s account of Caro’s poised abstractions, Burnham too saw how the sculpture’s three-dimensionality

necessarily opened the door for such porous identifications between body and sculpture. As Briony Fer has remarked, such questions relied on “a notion of bodily empathy that, in the language of the 1960s, was called ‘anthropomorphism’.”²⁶

This position was extended by Robert Morris, whose “Notes on Sculpture” essays were definitive for the 1960s. Whereas his early essays had called for an embodied spectator,²⁷ the fourth of this series, published in April 1969, argued for an end to sculpture as a medium. Sculpture had, for Morris, been “terminally diseased with figurative allusion” and he sketched a narrative of how even the most abstract – but still discrete and specific – objects could not escape the analogies to human bodies:

There is no question that so far as an image goes, objects removed themselves from figurative allusions. But, in a more underlying way, in a perceptual way, they did not. Probably the main thing we constantly see all at once, or as a thing, is another human figure. Without the concentration of a figure, any given sector of the world is a field.²⁸

Morris was setting the stage for his anti-form installation works and, more broadly, for a conception of artistic practice that left discrete objects behind. In this and the other “Notes on Sculpture” essays, Morris adopted a rhetorical strategy in which he pushed a logic to hyperbolic levels and adopted the absurdity of the resulting extreme position as the next evolutionary step to be promoted. The reductive or Minimalist object was not abstract or non-referential enough from this perspective. The non-statue or the abstract body offered too many allusions, and Morris consequently called for a move “Beyond Objects” (his subtitle for the essay). He continued:

The specific art object of the '60s is not so much a metaphor for the figure as it is an existence parallel to it. It shares the perceptual response we have toward figures. This is undoubtedly why subliminal, generalized, kinesthetic responses are strong in confronting object art. Such responses are often denied or repressed since they seem so patently inappropriate in the face of non-anthropomorphic forms, yet they are there. Even in subtly morphological ways, object-type art is tied to the body.²⁹

In this and the other essays from the series, Morris offered deadpan analysis that is simultaneously perspicacious and coolly parodic. Although less confrontationally than Fried, Morris took aim at Judd’s sweeping claims for his own work and, in the end, agreed with Fried’s argument about the latent

anthropomorphism of Minimalist sculpture. Morris contended that discrete sculptures and objects should be abandoned in favor of a more formless and inclusive installation-based art. Ten years later, Krauss retrospectively characterized this as a generative move into sculpture’s expanded field. That move, however, was predicated on the debates about freestanding sculpture’s inability to avoid the figure, in all its forms.

For my purposes, however, the important point to draw from these debates is the way in which those artists and critics who were proponents of sculptural abstraction and non-representation continued to find themselves arguing for sculpture’s bodiliness. The level and breadth of this discourse on sculpture sets this decade apart from earlier moments in modernism when abstract sculptures presented ambiguous bodies, as I shall discuss later. Instead, the 1960s was committed to varieties of abstraction that sought to leave the imaging of the human form behind as it nevertheless activated the body as its analogue.

Gender and sexuality were a recurring part of these debates and nowhere is that clearer than in the influential role of Lucy Lippard in advocating a more affective account of object-based abstraction. In particular, two essays outlined the potentials for seeing the bodily in relationship to genders and sexualities. In the fall of 1966, Lippard curated a much-discussed exhibition titled *Eccentric Abstraction* at Fischbach Gallery, New York, and, in November, published an essay of the same title in *Art International*.³⁰ A few months later, in spring 1967, her article on the erotic potential of abstract art, “Eros Presumptive,” was released in *Hudson Review* and subsequently revised for Gregory Battcock’s 1968 anthology *Minimal Art*.³¹

It is surprising that Lippard’s “Eros Presumptive” is rarely discussed in the literature on the writer or the decade. This is perhaps because it makes direct claims for the capacity of abstract art to activate sexuality and sensuality (in a manner, Lippard suggests, more effective than representational art). Indeed, with its focus on eroticism and bodily activations, “Eros Presumptive” sits uncomfortably among the essays in Battcock’s anthology on Minimalism. As Anne Wagner noted in her account of Battcock’s compilation, the artists whom Lippard discussed – such as Claes Oldenburg, Yayoi Kusama, Lucas Samaras, Hannah Wilke, and Jean Linder – are largely unrelated to Minimalism. Instead, she contends, “[Lippard’s inclusion of these artists] point[s] to a moment when Minimalism could be defined differently, when fantasy – even erotic fantasy – was one word for the viewer’s share.”³² It is this emphasis on the viewer’s engagement with sensuous components of abstract art and its activated internal relations that Lippard explored in her text. She argued that, “from an esthetic point of view, abstraction is

capable of broader formal power, since the shapes are not bound to represent any particular thing or coincide in scale with other forms. The experience provoked may relate to, but is not dependent upon the realistic or symbolic origins of the form.”³³ The majority of Lippard’s positive examples of the eroticism made possible by abstraction are sculpture, and her essay registers the ways in which abstract sculpture at its most extreme invoked the body even as it refused to image it. She pursued this idea of abstraction widely, and argued that non-figurative eroticism could be incited by fully formal means. This, in turn, led her (via a too-casual and problematic reference to Hindu temple sculpture) to propose that some abstract work transcended or fused gender difference:

As in the classic Indian yoni and lingam sculptures, momentary excitement is omitted in favor of a double-edged experience; opposites are witnesses to the ultimate union or the neutralization of their own opposing characteristics. Hannah Wilke’s androgynous terra cotta at the Nycata [Gallery] show, though conceptually less advanced than other works mentioned here, might also serve to illustrate this principle.³⁴

Lippard’s text, while focused on the erotic potential of abstraction, nevertheless points to larger reconsiderations of gender, here signaled through her idea of the bi-sexed or the androgynous. One must understand Lippard’s formulations as part of a larger attempt to come to terms with the ways in which abstract sculpture provided an open-ended question about how bodies and bodiliness could be related to the non-representational object. Recasting Lippard’s observations through the lens of transgender studies, one can discern an awareness that the abstract yet erotic forms that she discussed also prompted a variable and mobile account of how (and how many) genders could be mapped onto those same objects. The emphasis on the “viewer’s share,” in other words, produced the capacity for a plurality of responses to the questions of the erotic and the gendered that these sculptures posed.

In the initial publication of “Eros Presumptive” in *Hudson Review*, Lippard included the 1966 exhibition she had curated for Fischbach Gallery as one its framing examples.³⁵ Both it and the eponymous essay “Eccentric Abstraction” focused on the ways in which artists used a high degree of abstraction to incite visceral and bodily reactions. As she defined it: “The makers of what I am calling, for semantic convenience, eccentric abstraction, refuse to eschew imagination and the extension of sensuous experience while they also refuse to sacrifice the solid formal basis demanded of the best in current non-objective art.”³⁶ Relating these practices to an earlier history

of Surrealism’s emphasis on eroticism, Lippard discussed a number of New York-based and West Coast artists who continued to explore abstract, regularized forms but who allowed those forms to be modified by variable repetitions, pliable materials, and appeals to irregularity and sensuousity. For Lippard, these artists aimed to produce bodily affect – a “mindless, near visceral identification with form,” as she called it – without alluding to the human form.³⁷

As has been much discussed in the literature on this essay, Lippard followed the critical protocols of Sixties abstraction by denying the presence of any allusive or figural imagery in this work. While she later came to reject this position (and these lines), she argued in 1966:

[A] more complete acceptance by the senses – visual, tactile, and “visceral” – the absence of emotional interference and literary pictorial association, is what the new artists seem to be after. They object to the isolation of biological implications and prefer their forms to be felt, or sensed, instead of read or interpreted. Ideally, a bag remains a bag and does not become a uterus, a tube is a tube and not a phallic symbol, a semi-sphere is just that and not a breast.³⁸

These lines are most often discussed in relation to Lippard’s nascent feminism and seen as a complicit moment of denial in which sexual difference was erased.³⁹ In a later revision of her thought, Lippard came to argue that it was precisely such figurative allusions that animated the visceral engagements with object-based abstraction. It was these allusions that must be accounted for differently, she argued, if they were made by artists identified as female or male: “[T]he image of the breast used by a woman artist can now be the subject as well as object.”⁴⁰ For Lippard, this later reconsideration emerged as part of her desire to value women artists’ difference and to support imagery and themes that spoke directly to women’s experience. Rooted in the feminism of the 1970s, such an aim made sense, but – as Briony Fer has argued – the higher degree of variability and potentiality of her initial position is lost in this move.⁴¹ It was, after all, not only allusions to reproductive organs on which abstract eroticism and Eccentric Abstraction turned. These were just one part of what Lippard praised as a more open set of erotic and bodily potentials that emerged when no such part-objects were imaged. As she wrote in 1966, “I doubt that more pictures of legs, thighs, genitalia, breasts and new positions, no matter how ‘modernistically’ portrayed, will be as valid to modern experience as this kind of sensuous abstraction. Abstraction is a far more potent vehicle of the unfamiliar than figuration.”⁴²

My contention in this book is that the particular context of Sixties sculpture allowed it to be precisely such a “vehicle of the unfamiliar” with regard to the questioning of conventional genders. It emerged from the recurring debates around anthropomorphism, figural allusions, and bodily empathies. The discourse of Sixties sculpture centered on the body in the abstract, and it produced proliferative and unruly accounts of gender in which static states and binary distinctions could not be assumed. Lippard’s texts from 1966 and 1967 register such an open-endedness with regard to gender assignments that might emerge from the viewer’s encounter with these objects. But Lippard’s texts took as their starting point the supersession of other modes of Sixties sculpture that form the basis of this book’s case studies, and she cited the drawing-in-space sculpture of David Smith, assemblage, and primary structures as the movements that Eccentric Abstraction was leaving behind. Lippard herself came to recognize how her essay marked a fundamental shift in expectations for sculpture. When she revised the essay in 1971, she retracted her statements about Eccentric Abstraction and its relation to the category of sculpture. Reflecting on the rapid reconfiguration of sculpture that had accompanied the new decade, she remarked: “I no longer think that either “non-sculptural” or “anti-sculptural” make sense as adjectives. At the time this was written, these terms seemed the only ones to imply the radicality of the moves being made away from traditional sculpture. Now, only four years later, this radical nature can be taken for granted.”⁴³ This retraction registered how pliable and open the category of sculpture had quickly become. Her initial nomination of it as “non-sculptural,” however, was meant to signal a rejection of the traditional equation of sculpture with the statue and the figure. It is for this reason that I have preferred the term “non-statue” in characterizing the discrete human-scale sculptural object in the wake of David Smith.

Eccentric Abstraction was, in many ways, one of the most significant of watersheds in the 1960s. (In 1972, Robert Pincus-Witten remarked that “*Eccentric Abstraction*...is one of the most influential group exhibitions in recent history.”⁴⁴) It heralded, as Lippard realized just a few years later, the explosion of Postminimalism and the more radical reconfiguration of sculpture that superseded Minimalism’s reductive objects.⁴⁵ This is the same shift that Morris later declared with “Beyond Objects” and that Krauss looked back on as the emergence of the expanded field. While Minimalism has often been seen as the pivotal break in the 1960s, at the time the developments of Postminimalism seemed, to many, to be the more fundamental move away from the traditions of sculpture.⁴⁶ Postminimalism’s attitude toward reactive materials, environmental conditions of the scene of viewing,

variability in the face of seriality, and more visceral addresses to the viewer combined to make it a highly generative development that reconfigures fundamentally the expectations of sculpture “beyond objects.”

Lippard’s texts also mark a break in relation to the issues of gender and sexuality. Beyond ushering in a reprieve from the regular and uninflected forms of Minimalism, they also presaged the eruption of feminism, gender, sexuality, and embodiment – all of which became major themes of art of the next decade.⁴⁷ In regard to this book’s case studies, I placed focus on artists whose initial works (and the art-historical positions they represent) could be understood to precede the developments of Eccentric Abstraction and Postminimalism. While it would be productive to follow Lippard’s examples, I chose to address artists who might not at first seem to be related to issues of gender and who have not undergone sustained critiques of gender and sexuality in their work.⁴⁸ This has also been the reason that I have left to one side those artists associated with Lippard’s essays who have extensive art-historical literatures that deal with gender – namely, Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse, both of whom have come to dominate accounts of genders and bodies in Sixties sculpture.

Undoubtedly, the work of Bourgeois, Hesse, and many other sculptors of the 1960s could productively be analysed in relation to the themes of this book. For instance, both Bourgeois and Hesse vexed gender assignments with their sculptural works that evoke bodies and corporeal processes.⁴⁹ In the 1940s and 1950s, Bourgeois had a practice of making minimally anthropomorphic sculptures in which the thin sculptural bodies were given almost no articulating traits. Like Smith (and earlier than him), she often referred to these as “personages.”⁵⁰ These gave way, throughout the 1960s, to works that brought representation and figuration back into her work in the form of “part-objects.”⁵¹ Hesse’s work, too, has been discussed by Halberstam as able to “stand in here for a long tradition of work on embodiment by women that, in a way, predicted the aesthetic and physical phenomenon of transgenderism.”⁵² For Halberstam, Hesse’s sculptures are “able to make the provisionality of identity, subjectivity, and gender a universal or at least generalizable condition.”⁵³ This relates to how Hesse, as James Meyer put it, “consistently despecified the body.”⁵⁴ With such histories and descriptions in mind, both Bourgeois and Hesse could undoubtedly be re-viewed productively with the analytic framework of transgender that I use in this book, since both evidence a kind of proliferative gender assignment and unforeclosed morphological potential that is my main topic.

I have chosen, however, to avoid these two most expected examples in Sixties sculpture. Bourgeois and Hesse have become restrictively synony-

mous with questions of gender in the study of art of this period.⁵⁵ Interrogations of the relationship between sculpture and gender from the perspective of these artists have been historiographically transformative and productive, but their prominence in this regard has narrowly concentrated into their literatures the majority of examinations of gender for the entire decade. In short, it has been only a select few women sculptors whose critical reception has carried the lion's share of the discussion of gender in the study of the 1960s. My decision not to include Bourgeois and Hesse as case studies was influenced by the often reflex invocation of their names when any topic of gender in Sixties art arises. They are without a doubt important, but a claim I make in this book is that there are other artists who might not at first appear to have anything to do with gender (let alone transgender) but who also reward sustained investigation from its perspective. That is, while gender has been mentioned in relation to artists such as Smith, Chamberlain, and Flavin, it is rarely a fundamental axis of interpretation and in-depth discussions of gender are largely absent in writing about their work. This is, in fact, the case with many men artists of the decade, whose literatures often go uncomplicated by such questions. (Such an imbalance was not rectified with the fad for masculinity studies that emerged in the 1990s and that tended to reify an essentialist account of masculinity by attending to its "crisis" rather than engage in a wider analysis of gender.⁵⁶) In addition to moving beyond binary and static accounts of gender, my intention in this book has been to pursue unexpected case studies as a means to challenge the too easy concentration of questions of gender (of any kind) in the literature on the decade.

This approach has also meant that I have chosen some artists for whom such issues seem extra-intentional or unexpected. That is, they are not artists who, as Halberstam said, "adapt the nonnarrative potential of abstract art into an oppositional practice" with regard to gender and embodiment.⁵⁷ Rather, my interest in artists such as Smith, Chamberlain, and Flavin lies in their inadvertent theorization of gender's mutability and multiplicity. While committed to explicating the artists' own priorities for their work, my readings go on to supplement discussions of their professed intentions and to demonstrate how their practices can be viewed otherwise. As I demonstrate in the chapters themselves, the histories of these artists benefit from an account of gender that moves beyond binary formulations and embraces the wider set of positions and potentials that we might now refer to as transgender.

As a counterpoint to these anti-intentionalist readings, I include the chapter on Grossman both to address the relative paucity of writing on the

artist and because of the particular complexity of her version of abstracting the body as material to be remade. If her abstract relief assemblages had been better known, they could well have contributed to the literature on part-objects and gender that takes Hesse, Bourgeois, and Kusama as its organizing figures. Paradoxically, however, she returned to figuration in the late 1960s, producing the work for which she is most known – leather-bound heads. These leave the body behind to focus on the head, obscured underneath its leather coverings. I included Grossman's work because of her contradictory place in feminist histories of the 1960s and 1970s. Late in the 1960s and early in the 1970s, she was upheld as one of few successful women artists and seen as an important example for a feminist art history. Within a decade, however, she had come to occupy a somewhat uncomfortable position in feminist art histories because of her turn to figuration and her engagement with physiognomies that were taken to be male – despite her own claims that they were self-portraits. In short, the cross-gender identification that characterized her practice conflicted with the dominant trends of 1970s feminism in a way paralleled by the anxious and often combative attitude that feminism had to transsexuality and transgender positions in that decade. So, much like the men artists that I read against the grain, I found that the extrapolation of the transgender affinities of Grossman's work bring to light issues from the archive that had previously gone unrecognized.

All four of the case studies have been written with the recognition that the Sixties was also a period of transformation with regard to the idea of gender. Each of the four made work and made statements that reflected an understanding of gender as potentially detachable from the body and able to be transformed. This drew not only on a long history of bodily ambiguity in the history of modern sculpture but also the popular understanding emerging in the 1960s that gender was workable.

FROM AMBIGUITY TO OPENNESS IN MODERN SCULPTURE

Ambiguous figures and simplified morphologies are recurring features of abstraction in the visual arts. Evident from the earliest explorations in modernism, they necessarily raise questions about how such abstract figures worked in relation to gender. Abstract portraits that befuddle or code gender (think Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, or Pablo Picasso), hybrid bodies or couplings (like Jacob Epstein's *Rock Drill* or Rudolf Belling's *Erotik*), and attempts at figuring non-human entities (such as in Marcel Duchamp's work or Mark Rothko's "organisms") were among the ways in

which gender had been complicated in earlier modes of abstraction. In fact, modernism's stylized bodies are just one episode in a longer history of the ambiguous figure that stretches from Cycladic art through the Borghese Hermaphrodite to Aestheticism and modernism. (It is worth noting that Harry Benjamin's 1966 book *The Transsexual Phenomenon* compared photographs of patients to ancient statues of hermaphrodites in order to discuss a history of representational confusion of intersex and transsexual.⁵⁸) Within modernism, examples such as Cubist portraiture, the streamlined forms of Arp, Noguchi, or Hepworth, or the emblematic portraits of the Stieglitz Circle all similarly vexed the correlation between the nomination of the figure and non-verisimilar art.

Another aspect of this longer history of nonconforming genders in modernism may be seen in the self-fashioning of the modern artist. It has been argued that androgyny and cross-gender identification were important aspects of modernism from Aestheticism and Symbolism onward.⁵⁹ One could look to Duchamp's or Apollinaire's artistic strategies of adopting other genders or the complex genders of figures in the work of Salvador Dalí or Francis Picabia. In fact, the range and sophistication of Duchamp's use of gender in his works is still being uncovered – in particular, in relation to Duchamp's complication of authorship through his alter ego Rose Sélavy.⁶⁰

For the present study, however, the most important precedent within modernist sculpture is Constantin Brancusi. His attempts to simplify form to its most basic organic shapes (such as the egg) often relied on allusions to gender and sexuality. With his simplified figures, gender assignment was a key concern for Brancusi, and he often chose to fix gender rather than let his human forms be read as ambiguous or generic bodies. For instance, while the form of his *Torso of a Young Man* (1917–22) could be read as either totemic phallic symbol or a human figure without external genitalia, he identified it as male (fig. 4). Similarly, the simpler form of *Torso of a Young Girl* (c. 1923; fig. 5) is made figural by virtue of the titular assignment of gender to this form (it too does not have depicted external genitalia). As Anna Chave has discussed, Brancusi also sometimes sought to combine male and female into one form, as in *Adam and Eve* (1921), *Leda* (1920), or the famously phallic form of his portrait of *Princess X* (1916). This was most successful when animal and avian subjects were chosen, and Chave saw his bird sculptures as exemplary of this (fig. 6). She concluded:

In doubling, confounding, and fusing the markers of sexual identity, Brancusi breached the imposed rigidity of the gender divide and conjured the vision of an inclusive, nonhierarchical sexuality. By destabilizing

4 Constantin Brancusi, *Torso of a Young Man [I]*, 1917–22.
Maple on limestone block,
48.3 × 31.5 × 18.5 cm
(19 × 12³/₈ × 7³/₈ in.) on
21.5 cm (8³/₈ in.) base.



the supposed fixities of sexual positioning, he left his viewers in a vertiginous position: peering at the terrifying or exhilarating symbolic possibility of a non- or a dual sexual identity.⁶¹

Chave's account is suggestive and points to the ways in which such ideas as bisexuality, hermaphroditism, and androgyny were operative in European modernism of the early decades of the twentieth century. With his idealism, Brancusi sought to transcend the mundane, and gender was associated with human bodies and their carnality. The blunt fusion of the sexes in *Adam and Eve* tells much about the ways in which Brancusi conceived of gender as a primary trait tied to bodies and sexuality. He successfully transcended this, however, only when his idealism led him to non-human bodies (such as birds) for whom gender, at least for their human viewers, was less consequential. Brancusi's example reminds us that, for many, the nomination of the "human" has long been predicated on gender assign-



5 Constantin Brancusi, *Torso of a Young Girl [II]*, c. 1923. White marble on limestone block, 34.9 × 24.8 × 15.2 cm (13³/₄ × 9³/₄ × 6 in.) on 15.6 × 22.9 × 22.5 cm (6¹/₈ × 9 × 8³/₄ in.) base.

ment. Thus, despite the availability of *Torso of a Young Man* to readings of it as female or phallic, Brancusi reminded us that it was a young man. *Princess X*'s conflation of female portrait and phallic shape operates as a joke (as the story goes, on the sitter) or, at best, as an oscillation between two opposed readings. Despite the volleying of gender in his works depicting humans, they ultimately relied on binary definitions and domesticated ambiguity. More complex and mobile forms of genders were left for the birds.

Keeping such examples from earlier in the twentieth century in mind, this book does not argue that the 1960s was the first time that sculpture had problematized gender assignment. Rather, I show that the particular pursuits of abstraction, non-reference, and objecthood that characterize this decade amplified that complication of gender. What makes these sculptors of the 1960s especially productive for such a study are the ways in which sexuality and gender are at play in some of these practices and the ways in which that play prompts multiple, successive, non-binary, and open-ended accounts of how genders could be defined and inhabited. By con-



6 Constantin Brancusi, *Golden Bird*, 1919/1920 (base c. 1922). Bronze, stone, and wood, 217.8 × 29.9 × 29.9 cm (86 × 11³/₄ × 11³/₄ in.). Art Institute of Chicago, partial gift of The Arts Club of Chicago, restricted gift of various donors; through prior bequest of Arthur Rubloff; through prior restricted gift of William E. Hartmann; through prior gifts of Mr. and Mrs. Carter H. Harrison, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold H. Maremont through the Kate Maremont Foundation, Woodruff J. Parker, Mrs. Clive Runnells, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson, and various donors, 1990.88.

trast, many (but not all) of the modernist precedents rested on figural ambiguity or proposed androgyny. Such earlier instances relied, in the end, on the representation of the figure, however stylized. And when a de-sexed androgyny was not the aim, many sought to fix ambiguity and establish a conventional gender for an unconventional (but still recognizably “human”) figure. At mid-century, the ambiguous sculptural figure fed directly into humanist discourses of the post-Second World War era and into sculptors’ attempts to refashion monumentality to account for a newly activated global international political frame. Sculptors such as Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore rose to ascendance owing to the potential of the generic figure as a vehicle for universalist aims. In their work, as well, the ambiguous body raised questions of gender assignment.⁶²

The issues of gender mutability that had previously been anchored in ambiguous or stylized human forms were joined, in the 1950s and 1960s, by other artistic investigations into nonconforming genders and bodies. Such work by artists contributed to the larger, but as yet inadequately acknowledged, history of gender’s mutability and multiplicity in the postwar

decades. One could look to the recent wave of interest in the remarkable work and life of Forrest Bess, whose abstract paintings visualized hybrid genders and hermaphroditism through ideographs. He started showing with Betty Parsons Gallery in 1950, and his work contributed to the story of Abstract Expressionism as well as to medical discourses of gender and sexuality in subsequent years.⁶³ He kept up extensive correspondences with the likes of Meyer Schapiro and John Money, and he had a retrospective at Parsons's gallery in 1962. By 1968, he was well known enough among medical professionals to be mentioned by Robert Stoller in his groundbreaking 1968 book *Sex and Gender*.⁶⁴

Other such nonconforming practices in the art world precipitated discussions of gender in larger public discourses. A particularly interesting example of this, which bears on the questions of sculpture that are the focus of this study, is offered by the American reception of the British-based sculptor Fiore de Henriquez, who had her New York debut exhibition at Sagittarius Gallery in 1957. Born intersex, de Henriquez acknowledged this in conversation with sitters and friends, and she thematized being "two sexes," as she called it, in her sculpture.⁶⁵ For her exhibition in New York, her appearance became a main topic of press discussion because of her short haircut and androgynous clothing. Perhaps because of this unconventional self-fashioning, she quickly became a media sensation, appearing on Jack Paar's *Tonight Show* a few times, first in 1957. She was taken on by the W. Colston Leigh Agency, which booked a U.S. lecture tour for her. Since her English was not fluent, the appearances entailed mostly the demonstration of clay modeling. She traveled the country with her tour manager, Jennifer Paterson, a motorcycle-riding former girls' school matron (who later became famous as a food writer and co-host of the 1990s cooking show *Two Fat Ladies* on British television). The two did a series of U.S. lecture tours in the 1950s and early in the 1960s, and de Henriquez lived part of the year in New York at this time. During these years, de Henriquez increasingly became known for her unconventional dress and attitude more than for her sculpture. This was regularly discussed in press coverage, and she was bold in her responses, as when she told a reporter (who had commented on her hands): "A sculptor is a man, not a woman. I've become the image of a man."⁶⁶

As with the artists in this study, these articulations of nonascribed and nonconforming genders were part of the discourse of Sixties art, and a few examples can give a sense of the ways in which this was manifested. Hesse remarked that her *Ringaround Arosie* was both "like breast and penis."⁶⁷ In 1967, Oldenburg said of his *Drum Set*:

The Drum Set is the image of the human body. It is a body of both sexes, a bisexual subject. Anyone who has traveled with a drum set knows that it must always be disassembled and assembled, packed in boxes. The organ of the pedal, for example, the masculine appendage, is detachable, and so are the "breasts" (cymbals), and the bass (womb) has its own box. The set is like a doll.⁶⁸

These, and other examples ranging from Frank O'Hara's 1955 poem "Hermaphrodite" to Diane Arbus's 1960s photographs of gender performers, run through these decades.⁶⁹

Similarly, in the 1970s, such possibilities proliferated. Lynda Benglis produced many works in the 1970s that addressed these questions, most notably the 1976 video *The Amazing Bow Wow*, with its depiction of an intersex anthropomorphized dog. As she later said, "The idea of combining the sexes, of a hermaphrodite was not new. I wasn't presenting myself as a hermaphrodite but presenting myself as an object of humanism, so that the sexes would be considered equal."⁷⁰ Just two years before, in 1974, Louise Bourgeois said: "We are all vulnerable in some way, and we are all male-female."⁷¹

Gender nonconformity, drag, and transsexuality all had been regularly discussed in both popular and art press throughout the 1960s and 1970s, as I discuss later. One need only recall Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theater Company and Andy Warhol's Factory as two of the more visible examples of this within the art world. Warhol's films, in particular, began regularly to feature transgender actresses, so that, by the early years of the 1970s, they had become equally famous for their involvement with Warhol and for their gender nonconformity. In 1971, for instance, Jackie Curtis was already replacing the terminology of transsexuality for something that might today be called transgender or genderqueer, saying: "I never claimed to be a man, a woman, an actor, an actress, a homosexual, a heterosexual, a transsexual, a drag queen, an Academy Award winner."⁷² Curtis and the other Warhol stars were of great interest to the press and their fame helped to provide further media exposure for transsexuality and gender nonconformity.⁷³ By the 1970s, questions of genders' mutability were frequent in contemporary art, and it is my hope that the present study will prompt reconsideration of such varied works as Vito Acconci's sex-change video performances, the work of Marisol, Adrian Piper's 1972–6 *Mythic Being*, Robert Morris's plays with gender (such as the 1963 *Cock/Cunt* or 1973–4 *Voice*), or Ana Mendieta's 1972 *Untitled (Facial Hair Transplants)*.⁷⁴ While many of these works have contributed to a feminist retelling of these decades, a transfeminist

approach could bring to light the ways in which they reconsider not just hegemonic gender difference but binary modes altogether.⁷⁵

Through its focus on deep readings of its artists' practices, this book tracks the ways in which their trajectories came to raise issues of transformable genders analogous to those that were increasingly debated in popular culture and the art world throughout the decade. Whether in the late work of Smith or the early work of Flavin, Grossman, and Chamberlain, all of these artists called on metaphors of gender and sexuality in the new practices they developed in the first half of the 1960s. With the last three artists, I examine the longer trajectory of their work into the 1970s, focusing on the ways in which they developed terms for their own practices that carried forward, mutated, and proliferated those early attachments to issues of gender and sex. That is, the book is not strictly about the early to mid-1960s alone. Rather, it grapples with the ways in which the intense period of experimentation in Sixties sculpture helped to forge these artists' particular long-term practices and their accounts of gender's plurality and mutability.

THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON OF THE 1960s

As the selection of artists' statements here indicates, questions about the unhinging of gender from the sexed body were circulating widely by the 1960s. This built on a longer history of these issues in American culture from the nineteenth century onward. An ever-growing literature has established that larger social, scientific, and political developments were influenced by the eruption of transgender and intersex politics and concerns over the course of the twentieth century. For instance, Halberstam has argued that female-bodied masculinities inflected and helped to define mainstream conceptions of masculinity throughout the modern era.⁷⁶ Elizabeth Reis has shown that the medical establishment's concern about how to locate gender in the body of intersex infants underwrote the advances in the science of gender and spurred larger cultural accounts of gender from the nineteenth century onward.⁷⁷ Similarly, Joanne Meyerowitz has established that transsexuality was fundamental in developing a popular discourse that distinguished sexuality from sex and gender.⁷⁸ Drawing on these studies, Paul B. Preciado has offered a damning account of the pharmaceutical and medical technologies of gender in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Leslie Feinberg has championed a long history of activists and "transgender warriors."⁸⁰ Stryker has proven, in her groundbreaking *Transgender History*, that

transgender issues have been at the core of many social movements in the postwar decades.⁸¹ These studies also contribute to a body of literature that is bringing to light transgender and intersex histories that had been subsumed into lesbian and gay histories or overlooked or obscured altogether.⁸² Indeed, a galvanizing issue for the academic discipline of transgender studies has been a resistance to the uncritical appropriation of transgender experience into queer studies and queer theory.⁸³

In American culture, as I have already suggested in the Preface, transsexuality became a part of popular discourse in the wake of the international headlines of the Christine Jorgensen story in 1952. As Stryker remarked, "In a year when hydrogen bombs were being tested in the Pacific, war was raging in Korea, England crowned a new queen, and Jonas Salk invented the polio vaccine, Jorgensen was the most written-about topic in the media."⁸⁴ Popular culture continued to feature transsexuality, culminating in such milestones as the *New York Times* front-page story in 1966 or the formal instatement of gender testing at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. These mainstream stories were fueled by pulp novels and tabloid papers, both of which kept transsexuality in their headlines throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. As Meyerowitz noted about these attempts to whip up sensationalism and scandal, "From the early 1960s on, tabloid newspapers and pulp publishers produced a stream of articles and cheap paperback books on mtf[s] [male-to-female transsexuals] who had worked as female impersonators, strippers, or prostitutes."⁸⁵ The transsexual performer Hedy Jo Star had published her memoirs in 1962 and wrote an advice column for the *National Insider*. Nancy Bernstein, who ran a "charm school for transsexuals" on the Upper East Side in New York, later told the *Village Voice* that she had been doing such work since 1959.⁸⁶ The cultural fascination with transgender potential did not just fuel interest in Warhol's stars but also centered on such bestselling novels as Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (1957, republished in 1961 and 1964) or Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* (1968).⁸⁷ What these events make clear is that a general, and continuing, concern emerged in the 1960s around the newly publicized ability to change sex and to unhinge gender from it.

Nevertheless, this history is still often suppressed or inadequately known in many accounts of the decade, and certainly within art history. For the benefit of readers, I have compiled a selective and partial list of events punctuating transgender history based on the required reading that is Stryker, Meyerowitz, and Reis's more extensive narratives. This abbreviated list demonstrates how popular, scientific, and political arenas registered a newly visible transgender presence in American culture. For convention's

sake, I start at the Jorgensen headlines, include just a few events of the 1950s, then focus on the 1960s, ending in 1970. This is just one slice of a longer and ongoing history (and historical revision).

- 1952 • 1 Dec: Christine Jorgensen makes international front-page news for having sex reassignment surgery. The *New York Daily News* headline is “Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty.” Her story was propagated by *American Weekly*, which paid Jorgensen \$20,000 for an exclusive interview that became a feature story. She becomes one of the most famous people of the 1950s.
- 1953 • Harry Benjamin publishes his groundbreaking article “Transvestism and Transsexuality” in the *International Journal of Sexology*.⁸⁸
- Ed Wood releases his exploitation film *Glen or Glenda?* (originally titled *I Changed My Sex!*), featuring Bela Lugosi.
- 1955 • John Money begins to develop the term “gender role.” This is taken up in subsequent articles by him and Joan and John Hampson.⁸⁹
- 1957 • Fiore de Henriquez makes appearances on Jack Paar’s *Tonight Show*.
- 1959 • May: in Los Angeles, the late-night coffeehouse Cooper’s Donuts is raided by police who start arresting the drag queens who frequented it. These and other patrons resist and the incident ends with a conflict between police and protesters in the street. The novelist John Rechy was among the patrons.
- 1962 • The Gender Identity Research Clinic is founded at University of California Los Angeles.
- *The National Insider* runs a series of autobiographical writings by transsexual nightclub entertainer Hedy Jo Star; published the following year as a book titled “*I Changed My Sex!*”; Star starts writing an advice column for the tabloid.⁹⁰
- 1964 • The novel *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, by Hubert Selby, Jr., is republished to critical acclaim and controversy for its depiction of lower-class life in the 1950s. It features a transgender character, Georgette. The novel had previously appeared in 1957 and 1961 but received a wider critical and popular reception on its 1964 release.
- Robert Stoller and Ralph Greenson of the University of California at Los Angeles coin the term “gender identity.”
- Reed Erickson, an industrial magnate and female-to-male transsexual, establishes Erickson Educational Foundation, which

becomes a major funding source for medical and social research into transsexuality.⁹¹

- 1965 • In April and May, protesters stage picket lines and sit-ins at Dewey’s coffeehouse in Philadelphia because of its refusal to serve the transgender and gay clientele that had been frequenting it since the 1940s.
- Doctors at Johns Hopkins University, long a center for the study of intersex conditions, form a committee on gender reassignment and agree to perform their first surgery, on Phyllis Avon Wilson. By November 1966, they had performed ten such surgeries (five transsexual men and five transsexual women).
- 1966 • Harry Benjamin publishes his book *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, which has an immediate impact on medical and social fields.⁹²
- The Compton’s Cafeteria Riot occurs in San Francisco in response to police harassment of drag queens and transwomen.
- Johns Hopkins Medical School Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) is founded.
- 4 Oct: Johns Hopkins GIC’s first patient, Phyllis Avon Wilson, is written about in *New York Daily News* gossip column: “Making the rounds of the Manhattan clubs these nights is a stunning girl who admits she was male less than a year ago...”
- 21 November: *The New York Times* runs front-page story: “A Changing of Sex by Surgery Begun at Johns Hopkins.” This story is followed by major articles in *Time* on 2 December and, on 5 December, in *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*.⁹³
- 1967 • Jorgensen’s long-anticipated memoir is published.⁹⁴ She begins to publicize it with a radio interview (conducted in 1966) with Richard Lamparski for New York’s radio station WBAL. The 1968 paperback edition sells more than 400,000 copies.⁹⁵
- *Esquire*’s April issue includes a nine-page article on “The Transsexual Operation.”⁹⁶
- Northwestern University begins a gender treatment and study program.
- 1968 • The International Olympic Committee formally adopts gender testing for Olympians at the Mexico City Games. It had used testing on a more experimental basis for the Winter Games in Grenoble.
- To publicize the paperback release of her autobiography, Jorgensen goes on a twenty-city book tour of the U.S., which

includes appearances on the Steve Allen Show and the Merv Griffin Show.

- Gore Vidal publishes his bestselling novel *Myra Breckinridge*.
- Candy Darling and Jackie Curtis make their film debuts in Andy Warhol's movie *Flesh*, directed by Paul Morrissey.
- Stanford University Gender Reorientation Program (later called the Gender Identity Clinic) is established.
- Robert Stoller's *Sex and Gender* is published. This book leads to the popularization of the notion of "gender identity."⁹⁷
- Esther Newton completes a dissertation at the University of Chicago on drag queens and gender performance, focusing on drag shows she studied in New York City, Chicago, and Kansas City from 1965. It was published in 1972 as the groundbreaking *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*.⁹⁸

1969 • Richard Green and John Money's field-establishing anthology, *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*, is published by Johns Hopkins University Press.⁹⁹

- Transgender patrons of the Stonewall Inn are the first to resist a police raid, sparking a riot in the streets of Greenwich Village, New York. The Stonewall Riots became the central catalysing event for the gay rights movement.

1970 • After a sit-in at New York University, Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson found Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) to organize transgender youth.¹⁰⁰

- Transsexual Action Organization (TAO) is founded in Los Angeles.
- Jointly with the Florida Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization and the New York Femmes Against Sexism, STAR issues a manifesto demanding such action as the abolition of laws prohibiting cross-dressing (some in place since the nineteenth century), free access to hormone treatment and surgery, and the legal right to live as a gender of one's choosing.

Stryker has called the Sixties the decade of "transgender liberation" because of the explosion of social movements, medical research, and political action that centered on transgender issues during these years. As she has remarked, "By the early 1970s, transgender political activism had progressed in ways scarcely imaginable when the 1960s had begun."¹⁰¹ She also argues that a widespread backlash occurred in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in its *Diagnostic*

and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). This event, combined with other cultural moves to retract the progressivism of the 1960s, resulted in the suppression of transgender visibility and politics. Mainstream forms of feminism became increasingly anxious about trans and queer forms of gender expression. In addition to the homophobia in the ranks, a transphobia extended to MTF transsexuals who were cast as enemies to cisgendered women's struggles.¹⁰² The seeds were sewn for decades of divisive debates in feminist communities about the participation of butches, transmen, and transwomen.¹⁰³ In addition, the gay liberation movement of the 1970s distanced itself from gender variance in its quest to argue that homosexuality was normal and deserving of legal protection. With this move, the transsexual and gender variant members of what was an ostensibly more inclusive "gay" community became ostracized precisely for their complication of normative gender roles (which gay and lesbian assimilationists supported in their attempts to prove the equality of recombined, but still binary, sexual orientations). In many ways, the widespread belief in the "newness" of transgender issues in the late twentieth century derives from the period of backlash and suppression in the 1970s when more varied accounts of the recent past were recast or edited. To recall Butler's words from the Preface, "Because the norms governing reality have not admitted these forms to be real, we will, of necessity, call them 'new.'"¹⁰⁴ It is for good reason that Stryker nominates the 1960s until 1973 as the period of transgender liberation and political flourishing. This study also follows that period in seeing the open questions about gender's relationship to figures and bodies as characterizing the 1960s.

My reason for going into such depth about this larger cultural context is to refute the misconceptions that transgender issues are new or that questions of mutable genders were unknown to Americans of the 1960s. Quite the contrary, popular stories of transsexuality eroded conventional beliefs in the immutability of sexual difference and contributed to the decade's cultural upheavals. In a decade when the idea of gender emerged and was transformed radically, why would one not see in art's history of negotiating the figure and of personhood a parallel openness or unfixity? I do not make the claim that there is a smoking gun or direct link between the popular or specialized discourses of transsexuality and the artists' practices under consideration (though I should mention that Grossman, in conversations with me, has brought up Christine Jorgensen and *Myra Breckinridge* independently and unprompted¹⁰⁵). My point is, I hope, a larger one: that the perspective of transgender history compels us to look widely to moments when genders and bodies were conceived of as mutable and

multiple. It is exactly this capaciousness that emerged from the particular history of abstraction's collisions with metaphors of the body and personhood in this tumultuous decade. The sculpture of the 1960s offers one of many episodes in a larger story of the ways in which genders, bodies, and persons were considered otherwise.

The one admitted anachronism is my usage of the term "transgender." As has been discussed by such scholars as Stryker and David Valentine, this term gained currency only in the 1990s.¹⁰⁶ It came into usage to refer more broadly to the range of gender variance, including but not limited to transsexuality. The term's popularity grew because it was argued to be more inclusive.¹⁰⁷ Also, it enabled (as with Stryker's formulation of it as "away from an unchosen" gender) an affirmation of those lives that did not accord with binary or dimorphic models.¹⁰⁸ Such an inclusivity, however, invariably leads to a leveling of individuality and difference, and the term continues to be debated for its adequacy to the range of options it is said to describe.¹⁰⁹ Given its limitations, it has nevertheless proven both politically and intellectually efficacious as a formation under which diverse modes of gender nonconformity can coalesce. In this, I again follow Stryker's justification for its use in American history before the 1990s. As she argued in the introduction to *Transgender History*:

I use the word "transgender" as a shorthand way of talking about a wide range of gender variance and gender atypicality in periods before the word was coined, and I sometimes apply it to people who might not apply it to themselves. Some butch women or queeny men will say that they are not transgender because they do not want to change sex. Some transsexuals will say that they are not transgender because they do. There is no way of using the word that doesn't offend some people by including them where they don't want to be included or excluding them from where they do not want to be included. And yet, I still think the term is useful as a simple word for indicating when some practice or identity crosses gender boundaries that are considered socially normative in the contemporary United States. Calling all of these things transgender is a device for telling a story about the political history of gender variance that is not limited to any one particular experience.¹¹⁰

Similarly, this study uses the term "transgender" to highlight and refine accounts of genders' mutabilities, pluralities, and temporalities as they were proposed in the practices of the artists under consideration here.

The necessary (and enabling) anachronism of mobilizing "transgender" to bring to light a long-running history of gender variance has been widely

discussed in transgender studies. In one of the founding texts of the field, Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, the idea of "perverse presentism" was proposed as a willing embrace of anachronism in the service of bringing lived diversity and complexity in history to light. Halberstam's groundbreaking book sought to tell the history of masculinities adopted by female-bodied individuals. This history was distinguished from that of a history of sexuality, and Halberstam examined such roles as the tribade and the female husband – among others present in both literature and history – as recognizable and repeated historical phenomena that demanded to be understood primarily in terms of gender rather than sexuality. Halberstam argued for a model "that avoids the trap of simply projecting contemporary understandings back in time, but one that can apply insights from the present to conundrums of the past."¹¹¹ This study is inspired by the historical approach offered by Halberstam in this formulation, and I use the term "transgender" to register moments of gender's plurality and temporality as they are manifested in the historical record. As Halberstam has written elsewhere in *Female Masculinity*, "Transgender discourse in no ways argues that people should just pick up new genders and eliminate old ones or proliferate at will because gendering is available as a self-determining practice; rather, transgender discourse asks only that we recognize the nonmale and nonfemale genders already in circulation and presently under construction."¹¹²

Transgender lives are already present and already historical, and it should be remembered that the recognition of the mutability and multiplicity of genders in academic discourse is a response to and an activation of that history. Similarly, Gayle Salamon has argued in support of the lived plurality of genders in history and at the present moment, writing that "Genders beyond the binary of male and female are neither fictive nor futural, but are presently embodied and lived."¹¹³ This book does not presume to write a history of transgender art, but I do claim that the history of art is fundamentally enriched and clarified when we put into action the recognition that gender has a complex, temporal, and exponential relationship to individual human bodies.

Transgender, in these new developments and in the present book, signals a commitment to do justice to narratives of variance and specificity in the lived experience of gender and in its deployments as an axis of meaning around which norms are debated. Energized by the wider community and more capacious critique that this term afforded, the discipline of transgender studies has grown rapidly in recent decades to offer a dynamic and broad recasting of biopolitics.¹¹⁴ Similarly, the emergence of a distinctly intersex history and politics has paralleled transgender history in its critique

of the historical record's blindness to and willful erasure of non-dimorphic bodies and atypical sexual development. In keeping with these historical revisions, this book sees in the particularities of abstract sculpture accounts of gendered embodiment that exceed binary and dimorphic models. It is both methodologically and historiographically urgent to allow such capacities present in the historical record to be identified and cultivated.

TRANSGENDER CAPACITY

A central aim of this book is to argue for the transgender capacity of abstract sculpture through detailed engagements with the archive of artists' works and statements.¹¹⁵ Through an analysis of their art-theoretical priorities and their stated engagements with gender and sexuality, I show how artists arrived at positions where their work offered accounts of multiplying genders, mutable morphologies, and successive states of personhood – even if these accounts might be alien or anathema to them in their own lives. Because I believe that transgender studies demands a widespread revision of the ways in which genders, bodies, and figures must be viewed historically, I have concerned myself not with artists' expressed intentions with regard to these issues but rather with the capaciousness that their practices affords.

A capacity is both an “active power or force” and an “ability to receive or maintain; holding power” (*OED*). A capacity manifests its power as potentiality, incipience, and imminence. Only when exercised do capacities become fully apparent, and they may lie in wait to be activated.

Transgender capacity is the ability or the potential for making visible, bringing into experience, or knowing genders as mutable, successive, and multiple. It can be located or discerned in texts, objects, cultural forms, situations, systems, and images that support an interpretation or recognition of proliferative modes of gender nonconformity, multiplicity, and temporality. In other words, transgender capacity is the trait of those many things that support or demand accounts of gender's dynamism, plurality, and expansiveness.

The dimorphic model of sex and the binary account of gender – not to mention the assertion of their static natures – are never adequate ways of knowing the sophisticated and divergent modes of existence that people enact. Such strictures always encode their own possibilities for collapse and deconstruction, and transgender capacity erupts at those moments when such reductive norms do not hold.

The most important feature of transgender capacity is that it can be an unintended effect of many divergent decisions and conditions. That is, a transgender critique can be demanded of a wide range of texts, sites, systems, and objects – including those that, at first, seem unrelated to transgender concerns and potentialities. A capacity need not be purposefully planted or embedded (though of course it may be), and it does not just result from the intentions of sympathetic or self-identified transgender subjects. It may emerge at any site where dimorphic and static understandings of gender are revealed as arbitrary and inadequate. Transgender phenomena can be generated from a wide range of positions and competing (even antagonistic) subjects, and it is important to recognize that a transgender hermeneutic can and should be pursued at all such capacitating sites.

This concept's usefulness is primarily methodological and is meant as a tool for resisting the persistent erasure of the evidence of transgender lives, gender diversity, non-dimorphism, and successive identities. Its questions are valid to many areas of scholarly inquiry, including such different fields as biology, sociology, and economics. It is a retort to charges of anachronism and a reminder to search widely for the nascence of transgender critique. With regard to historical analysis, transgender capacity poses particularly urgent questions, since it is clear that there is a wealth of gender variance and nonconformity that has simply not been registered in the historical record. Without projecting present-day understandings of transgender identities into the past, one must recognize and make space for all of the ways in which self-determined and successive genders, identities, and bodily morphologies have always been present throughout history as possibilities and actualities.¹¹⁶ Dimorphic and static definitions of gender and sexual difference obscure such diversity and facilitate the obliteration of the complex and infinitely varied history of gender nonconformity and strategies for survival. To recognize transgender capacity is not to equate all episodes of potential but rather to allow the recognition of their particularity and to resist the normative presumptions that have enforced their invisibility.

Transgender epistemologies and theoretical models fundamentally remap the study of human cultures. Their recognition of the mutable and multiple conditions of the apparatus we know as gender has wide-ranging consequences. That is, once gender is understood to be temporal, successive, or transformable, all accounts of human lives look different and more complex. It would be a mistake to limit this powerful epistemological shift to clearly identifiable transgender topics and histories. While transgender subjects and experience must remain central and defining, the lessons of transgender critique demand to be applied expansively.

Across the disciplines, there is much evidence of the limitations of static and dimorphic models of genders, identities, and relations. One must search for and be attentive to transgender capacities in both expected and unexpected places. Tracking them is a hermeneutic rather than an iconographic task, and the conceptual space of gender transformability erupts anywhere that dimorphism is questioned, mutability becomes a value, or self-creation becomes a possibility. While they are most readily located in the study of the representation of human bodies and experiences, transgender capacities can be located in such topics as abstract art, rhetorical forms, digital cultures, technologies of complex systems, economic ecologies, and histories of scientific discovery. In these areas and beyond, there are innumerable forms and modes of transgender capacity still to be found, imagined, or realized.

The concept of transgender capacity provides a supple and adaptive model through which to re-interrogate archives and artworks, and it is particularly helpful when accounting for abstract art's potentiality and openness. It is in accord with Butler's position that "critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation."¹¹⁷ Excavating transgender capacity is a means of cultivating such expanded semantic spaces and proliferative identificatory sites in the historical record and in current methodological debates.

SEXUALITY AND GENDERS' MULTIPLICATION

While the central aim of this book is focused on gender and on demonstrating how abstract sculpture can support and call for accounts of it as successive and multiple, this is also a book about sexuality. These two categories through which we make sense of lived experience and habitual embodiments are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, as David Valentine has noted, their distinction as separate and discrete categories is a historical development of the twentieth century that "results in a substitution of an analytic distinction for actual lived experience."¹¹⁸ A critique of queer politics and queer theory has been that both largely seek to trouble sexuality while leaving binary and deterministic models for gender largely intact. By contrast, transgender, as Stryker has argued, disrupts this homonormativity just as much as it does heteronormativity, and sexualities become widened and remapped when genders are understood as mutable and multiple.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, it is also important to resist the view that transgender is merely equivalent to non-normative sexualities, since gender's transformations and the particularity of transgender experience both have a history of being co-opted (and made invisible) by queer politics.¹²⁰

Keeping these historical and historiographic issues in mind, I nevertheless came to realize how much my historical cases demanded attention to sexuality. As I investigated the history of these artists' practices and statements about gender, I realized that all of them had been catalysed by a recognition of sexuality. That is, the narratives about these artists' production of accounts of gender's mutability and plurality began with a confrontation with sexual themes and metaphors. For this reason, this book also deals extensively with questions of sexuality and sexual identities (of many kinds), and its methodological and theoretical touchstones come from both transgender studies and queer studies. I found that non-normative sexualities were themselves figured (in the rhetorical sense) as a means of grappling with gender's multiplicity and mutability. Further, while transgender studies was galvanized by a rejection of the appropriation of trans lives in queer theory of the 1990s, subsequent positions in both transgender studies and queer studies have sought to attend to the shared issues and overlapping communities without equating them or, for that matter, sexuality and gender more broadly. As Salamon has argued,

Insisting on the radical separability and separateness of sexual orientation and gender identity overlooks the ways in which these two categories are mutually implicated, even when they are not mutually constituting. That is, even when the trajectory of one's desire cannot be predicted by one's gender, it surely is the case that my desire is experienced through my gender and that a strict parsing runs the risk of impoverishing both categories.¹²¹

Owing to this mutual constitution, sexuality often (though not exclusively) invokes the image and the idea of the relations of genders and bodies. As Stryker has argued, "Gendering practices are inextricably enmeshed with sexuality. The identity of the desiring subject and that of the object of desire are characterized by gender. Gender difference undergirds the homo/hetero distinction. Gender conventions code permissible and disallowed forms of erotic expression, and gender stereotyping is strongly linked with practices of bodily normativization."¹²² Many invocations of sexuality imply the possibility of multiplicity or, at least, coupling. Queer and divergent sexualities usher in a disruption by asking the question of how and why same genders could couple. Especially when attached to works of sculpture that evoked

but refused to image human bodies, the injection of sexuality set in play a hypothesizing of genders and their relations.

The narratives in the case studies were often sparked by the recognition or invocation of sexuality or sexual relations: Flavin's allegorization of the homosexual as the figure of illusionism, Chamberlain's reliance on an orgiastic and polymorphous sexuality as a metaphor for his artistic practice, Grossman's autopenetrating *Ali Stoker*, or Smith differentiating himself from O'Hara's personification of his own works. While, ultimately, the trajectories of these artists' practice center on gender as the key element for personhood and propose its multiplications, it was the initial confrontation with sexuality – often, a non-normative sexuality – that set in motion a calculus of where and how conventional genders fit.

The effects of the negotiation of sexuality in relation to the abstract body, in other words, produced multiple, competing, and possibly infinite propositions for the ways in which genders could be imagined in that relation. Transgender capacity does not derive from sexuality. Rather, the categorical disruption caused by queer or polyamorous sexualities produces a need to account for gender's already existing multiplicity and potentiality. Especially in the formative decade of the 1960s when the discourse of transgender politics was differentiating itself from the politics of sexuality, the axes of gender and sexuality often allowed each other to be seen as complex and varied rather than simple or singular. For me, this is one reason why I believe that the cisgendered artists on whom I focus in this book found themselves making works that spoke of genders' non-binary multiplicity and transformability. Non-normative sexualities demanded a new conjugation of relations and recombinations of genders, none of which could be secured to an image of the human form with the abstract bodies offered by non-representational sculpture. It was this catalysing potential of the erotic that Lippard, in "Eros Presumptive," first attempted to articulate for Sixties abstraction and its activation of bodily empathies.

As I show in the case studies, it is the departure from a focus on sexuality, however, that affords the potential to make bigger claims about personhood's successive states and gender's exponential multiplication. For instance, despite Flavin's concern with the figure of the homosexual in 1962 and 1963, his subsequent practice arrived at an account of transformable personhood by engaging more broadly with how literalist objects could be personalized and made adaptive. Chamberlain came to admit that "everybody's both" genders, in part, because he had proposed a thoroughgoing mash-up and multiplication of genders as the best way to describe his patently abstract "fit." These examples point to a more general issue for the study of nonascribed and

transformable genders: namely, that sexuality (and, in particular, disagreements or distinctions between individuals' sexualities) can serve as a catalyst for proposing or recognizing the possibility of other, multiple, or successive genders. A focus solely on sexuality (even queer sexuality) cannot adequately describe those genders, those lives, or those transformations, but it does illuminate the need for new accounts of personhood that can.

AN EXPANDED FIELD

Rather than attempt to survey the divergent paths of sculpture in this decade, this book charts one trajectory through in-depth case studies of individual artists. Smith, as the widely accepted leader of American sculpture at the end of the 1950s, begins the book, and it is his continued negotiation of the statuary tradition in the face of his increasingly abstract and unmonolithic constructions that set the tone for the 1960s. Focusing on a 1964 interview with the poet and curator O'Hara, I discuss how Smith found himself viewing his own sculptures through O'Hara's eyes, forcing him to face (and reject) their gender ambiguity. I examine how a seemingly minor joke from this televised interview was recast as a recurring (and erroneous) explanatory statement in subsequent accounts of his work. I then turn to Chamberlain, the abstract sculptor who is often understood to have taken up Smith's mantle as the sculptor of metal. His brash accumulated sculptures signaled a further leap from the artisanal sculptural materials into the found and the mass-produced, and I expand on the gendered and sexualized metaphors he provided as an explanation of his process of fitting parts together to make new forms. From there, I move to another artist, Grossman, who used everyday materials, old leather garments, to produce abstract assemblages that ultimately led her to turn to figuration. I discuss Grossman's many statements about cross-gender identification and use them to assess her process of reworking parts – that is, making sculptures from old garments made from the skins of animals. I then analyse her turn to "figuration" late in the 1960s as another means of abstracting the body. Giving an account of her contentious reputation in the 1970s, I discuss how Grossman's work was characterized by an open account of genders' multiplicity that went misrecognized as male-identified. And, finally, I examine the logics of interchangeability and naming in Dan Flavin's work. While not conventionally "sculpture" (like most Minimalism), Flavin's works nevertheless continue with the adoption of the mass-produced objects (fluorescent lights) redeployed as art objects. More importantly, however, I look at the development

of installation practices in Flavin's work, signaling one of the major examples of the new practices that ultimately produced the richness of example on which Krauss drew for her essay in the late 1970s. My focus in that chapter is on Flavin's use of titling and its effects on his modular interchangeable medium. Naming calls up a question of personhood and its nominations, and Flavin's work developed its systemic interchangeability out of a performative usage of the dedication as title.

As for the title of this book, I adopt Krauss's term "expanded field" both for its specificity and its allusiveness. While the term is often applied to other areas, I use it to invoke the particular conditions for which Krauss's essay sought to account – namely, the dissolution of the statuary tradition into a moment where sculpture could no longer be defined by recourse to a tradition but rather through a coordination of its contemporary negations and counter-terms.¹²³ While the intention of her essay was to derail historicist attempts to explain new formations as effects of a lineage of the medium of sculpture, it has come, as well, to characterize a particular historical moment at which such transformations were retrospectively described.¹²⁴ My deployment of this term in the title points to this as the condition of sculpture throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. The abstract body, the non-statue, the dedicated literalist object, and other contenders for sculpture's successor all contributed to the movement into the field that Krauss described.

In her compelling analysis of the text and the receptions of it, Eve Meltzer has argued that the appeal of Krauss's "expanded field" exceeds the terms of its argument and that its users often ignore its methodological aims.¹²⁵ I agree with her reservations about the vulgar overuse of the term. Nevertheless, I could think of no more succinct way to describe what happened to gender in the 1960s. After years of erosion of their boundaries, the binary categories of male and female became, in this decade, newly visible as porous, mutually defining, and productive of unforeseen positions through their selective combinations or negations. Gender, like sculpture in Krauss's analysis, was definitively revealed to be not an essential category or transhistorical constant. Rather, it was shown to be contingent, workable, and defined in relation to an open topography of mutually defining and interdependent positions. As Krauss said about sculpture, "What is important here is that we are not dealing with an either/or...but with both/and."¹²⁶ The value of Krauss's structuralist description is that it demands that we see, in other historical moments, the particular set of synchronic exclusions, negations, and affinities through which categories were understood, defined, and performed. The historical phenomenon of a more open-ended, avail-

able, and expansive field of options that happened to both sculpture and gender in the 1960s, in other words, was made visible by – and, in turn, was accelerated by – an approach that attended to hybrids, double negations, synergies, and other non-binary proliferations.

This book offers deep readings of its artists' practices, statements, works, and archives in order to draw out both their historical complexity in relation to genders and sexualities and, perhaps more importantly, to cultivate from them a set of potentialities about how art can view gender and personhood otherwise. These two aims are not at cross-purposes, and I show how these artists' engagements with abstraction prompted them to offer their works as more capacious (and capacitating) accounts of the human and of art. Rooted in the archive and reparative in attitude, these case studies argue for these artists' practices as well as for their contemporary relevance as theoretical objects that posit openness and possibility for conceiving of genders. With regards to such a goal of expanding accounts of potential, Butler once remarked: "Some people have asked me what is the use of increasing possibilities for gender. I tend to answer: Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread. I think we should not underestimate what the thought of the possible does for those for whom the very issue of survival is most urgent."¹²⁷

The cultivation of possibility is an ethical and political, not just a theoretical, aim. The artists I discuss offered abstract bodies and, with them, open accounts of personhood's variability and possibility. Their sculptures do this by moving away from the human form and the rendering of the body. Rather, they figure it in the abstract. That is, these works evoke the concept of the body without mimesis, producing a gap between that calling forth of the human and the presentation of artworks that resolutely refuse to provide an anchoring *image* of a body. In that gap, there grew new versions of genders, new bodily morphologies, and a new attention to the shifting and successive potentials of these categories. Activated by the conventions of sculpture's attachment to the human body, these abstractions posited unforclosed sites for identifying and cultivating polyvalence. As the predicate for nominating the human, gender was the operative question that these artists arrived at in their attempts to make sense of these abstractions of the body and of personhood. Each of these artists pursued this spaciousness as part of the development of their practices, and their individual trajectories mirror and contribute to the widening awareness in popular culture of gender's mutability and multiplicity. Both sculpture and gender moved into fields that were, by the end of the decade, expanded.

NOTES

PREFACE

1 From the preface to Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 36. Emphases original.

2 Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44. See the Introduction for further discussion of this text.

3 While the previous decades had seen an increasing disentanglement of gender from a deterministic equation with the sexed body, developments in the 1950s and 1960s propelled it forward. Theories of researchers into intersex conditions such as those of John Money or Robert Stoller filtered from specialist to wider cultural discourses in that period, popularizing the idea of gender identity's multiple determinants. See Elisabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

4 The report that broke the news first was B. White, "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth," *New York Daily News*, 1 December 1952, 1.

5 "New Sex Switches," *People Today*, 5 May 1954. Clipping reproduced in Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, pl. 8.

6 Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966).

7 Thomas Buckley, "A Changing of Sex by Surgery Begun at Johns Hopkins," *New York Times*, 21 November 1966, 1ff; "A Change of Gender," *Newsweek*, 5 December 1966, 73; "Surgery: A Body to Match the Mind," *Time*, 2 December 1966, 52; "Sex-change Operations at a U.S. Hospital," *U.S. News & World Report*, 5 December 1966, 13; Thomas Buckley, "The Transsexual Operation," *Esquire* 67, no. 4 (April 1967): 111–15, 205–8.

8 While this is the first book-length study to draw extensively on transgender studies as a method for the discipline of art history, there is a growing number of essay-length interventions that have dealt with visual art from a transgender studies perspective, beginning with the formative arguments that can be found in individual chapters in Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005). In addition to these and other texts referenced throughout the endnotes to this book, some recent contributions to art-critical writing from a transgender studies perspective include Lucas Crawford, "Breaking Ground on a Theory of Transgender Architecture," *Seattle Journal for Social Justice* 8, no. 2 (May 2010): 515–39; Eva Hayward, "Spider City Sex," *Women & Performance* 20, no. 3 (November 2010): 225–51; Jeanne Vaccaro, "Felt Matters," *Women & Performance* 20, no. 3 (November 2010): 253–66; Gordon Hall, "Object Lessons:

Thinking Gender Variance Through Minimalist Sculpture,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 47–57; Lucas Crawford, “A Transgender Poetics of the High Line Park,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (November 2014): 482–500; Eliza Steinbock, “Generative Negatives: Del LaGrace Volcano’s Herm Body Photographs,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (November 2014): 539–51.

9 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 11.

10 Susan Stryker discussed this non-consensual gendering that occurs to the infant, arguing that “A gendering violence is the founding condition of human subjectivity; having a gender is the tribal tattoo that makes one’s personhood cognizable.” Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ* 1, no. 3 (1994): 250. The assignment of sex at birth has also been perhaps the central issue for intersex activism. See Reis, *Bodies in Doubt* for the American historical context and, further, Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 189–211; Cheryl Chase, “Hermaphrodites with Attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism,” *GLQ* 4, no. 2 (1998): 189–211; Suzanne J. Kessler, *Lessons from the Intersexed* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Katrina Alicia Karkazis, *Fixing Sex: Intersex, Medical Authority, and Lived Experience* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008); Sharon E. Preves, *Intersex and Identity: The Contested Self* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

11 For a concise picture of the range of the interdisciplinary critique afforded by transgender studies, see Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006) and Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

12 Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

13 One of the foundational (and widely influential) texts for this usage was a groundbreaking pamphlet by Leslie Feinberg, reprinted as “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” (1992), in Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies Reader*, 205–20. For further discussion of the term “transgender” and its parameters and development, see the Introduction. Useful histories of the term can be found in David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2007) and Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif.: Seal Press, 2008). See also T. Benjamin Singer, “Umbrella,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 259–61.

14 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1.

15 In this, the history of science has played a crucial role. For a recent overview of the relationship among biology, psychology, and social context in the diversity of lived genders, see Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (New York: Routledge, 2012). See also the groundbreaking Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow: Diversity, Gender, and Sexuality in Nature and People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Rebecca M. Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010). For a wide-ranging argument about the biopolitical history of gender as a product of the “pharmacopornographic sex-gender regime,” see [Paul] B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013), esp. pp. 99–129. An important theorization of both gender and sex in relation to norms can be found in Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

16 As the authors of a survey of incidents of intersex traits noted, “Biologists and medical scientists recognize, of course, that absolute dimorphism is a Platonic ideal not actually achieved in the natural world....If one relinquishes an a priori belief in complete genital dimorphism, one can examine sexual development with an eye toward variability rather than bimodality.” They concluded that there were one to two intersex infants in every 1000 births. Melanie Blackless et al., “How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis,” *American Journal of Human Biology* 12 (2000): 151. See also Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow*; Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm*; Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender*.

17 Preciado, *Testo Junkie*, 103–4.

18 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 59–89.

19 Michel Foucault once challenged his readers to take seriously the disruptions that non-ascribed genders presented for conventional understandings, criticizing those who tolerated but did not feel implicated by nonconforming genders and bodies. Decrying their underlying faith in the idea of a “true sex,” a natural order, and the politics of mere toleration, he argued: “It is also agreed, though with much difficulty, that it is possible for an individual to adopt a sex that is not biologically his own. Nevertheless, the idea that one must indeed finally have a true sex is far from being completely dispelled....We are certainly more tolerant in regard to practices that break the law. But we continue to think that some of these are insulting to ‘the truth’: we may be prepared to admit that a ‘passive’ man, a ‘virile’ woman, people of the same sex who love one another, do not seriously impair the established order; but we are ready enough to believe that there is something like an ‘error’ involved in what they do. An ‘error’ as understood in the most traditionally philosophical sense: a manner of acting that is not adequate to reality. Sexual irregularity is seen as belonging more or less to the realm of chimeras. That is why we rid ourselves

easily enough of the idea that these are crimes, but less easily of the suspicion that they are fictions which, whether involuntary or self-indulgent, are useless, and which it would be better to dispel.” Gender nonconformity is part of what Foucault terms “sexual irregularity” in his text and it is still often received as a useless “fiction,” grudgingly tolerated but not seen to be of general or broad importance. By contrast, I see these issues as central and defining. They allow for new evidentiary accounts of gender’s mutability and plurality to be recognized, and they engender reinvigorated accounts of the continued relevance of artistic practices that take bodies or persons as analogues. See Michel Foucault, “Introduction,” in *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), x.

20 Donald Judd, “Local History” (1964), in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 152–3.

21 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 51.

INTRODUCTION: “NEW” GENDERS AND SCULPTURE IN THE 1960S

1 J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 97–124.

2 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 150–1.

3 Relief sculpture presents a special case and is best understood as intermedial in its hybridity of three- and two-dimensional systems of representation. It partakes of both actual volume and pictorial depictions of depth. I discuss this further in David Getsy, “Playing in the Sand with Picasso: Relief Sculpture as Game in the Summer of 1930,” in *From Diversion to Subversion: Games, Play,*

and *Twentieth-century Art*, ed. David Getsy (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 80–93. With regard to the present analysis, assemblage reliefs (such as Grossman's) share many of the same general conditions of freestanding sculpture due to their appropriation of found objects, all of which invoke questions of their past functionality and bodily scale.

4 While there are of course exceptions to this general tendency (such as with the distinct medium of relief sculpture in which architectural and landscape spaces are more readily able to be depicted), the generalization holds true that sculpture has had a primary association with the (often singular) figure. This carries through to *animalier* sculpture, which, though providing an alternative to the representation of the human form, nevertheless often shares the parameters of the discrete freestanding figure. For a useful overview of the predominance of the human form in European and American sculpture, see Ruth Butler, *Western Sculpture: Definitions of Man* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975). Also of interest in this regard is Rudolf Wittkower, *Sculpture: Processes and Principles* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

5 A detailed history of the modern sculpture that attends to the effects of the spatial and temporal encounter between viewers and sculptural objects can be found in Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000). See also Penelope Curtis, *Sculpture 1900–1945: After Rodin* (Oxford University Press, 1999); Penelope Curtis, “After Rodin: The Problem of the Statue in Twentieth-century Sculpture,” in *Rodin: The Zola of Sculpture*, ed. Claudine Mitchell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004).

6 Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research Press, 1990), 66.

7 Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977).

8 Or, as Henry Geldzahler declared, “But another way of the thinking of the sixties is that perhaps the best work that was done in that decade in America was done by David Smith in the last five years of his life and by Hans Hofmann in the last five years of his life.” Henry Geldzahler, “The Sixties: As They Were” (1991), in *Making It New: Essays, Interviews, and Talks* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1994), 339.

9 A central concern in my own work on the origins and history of modern sculpture has been negotiations of sculpture as both image and object. This relationship between materiality and either representational or abstract modes of sculpture underwrote competing formulations and genealogies of modern sculpture. I offer two different versions of this dynamic – one invested in verisimilitude and the other in its abandonment or subordination – in my two books on the origins of modern sculpture in Britain and in France: David Getsy, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877–1905* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004); *Rodin: Sex and the Making of Modern Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

10 Lucy Lippard, “As Painting is to Sculpture: A Changing Ratio,” in *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, ed. Maurice Tuchman (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1967), 32. Emphasis original.

11 Krauss, *Passages*, 279.

12 Lawrence Alloway, “Sculpture as Cliché,” *Artforum* 2, no. 4 (October 1963): 26.

13 Ibid.

14 Colpitt provides a useful overview of the debates around anthropomorphism in Minimalist criticism in Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, 67–73. For her, anthropomorphism is strictly defined as mimetic of the human form, and she distinguishes this from “presence” and bodily evocations made through scale. She does, however, chronicle other understandings of the anthropomorphic in her overview.

15 James Meyer, “Anthropomorphism,” *Art Bulletin* 94, no. 1 (March 2012): 24.

16 In Oldenburg's case, his avoidance of figural representation permitted viewers to explore their bodily associations with his soft sculpture. Judd, in 1964, devoted a third of his review of Oldenburg's exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, to sorting out how it was that a giant soft light switch made him think of female breasts. He concluded that “Real anthropomorphism is subverted by the grossly anthropomorphic shapes, man-made, not shapes of natural things or people.” Donald Judd, “In the Galleries: Claes Oldenburg” (1964), in *Donald Judd: Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax and New York: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and New York University Press, 1975), 133. For discussion, see the chapter “Gross Anthropomorphism: Claes Oldenburg” in Jo Applin, *Eccentric Objects: Rethinking Sculpture in 1960s America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 43–62 as well as Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 276–9.

17 Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23. For essential commentary on this much discussed text, see James Meyer, “The Writing of ‘Art and Objecthood,’” in *Refraction: Essays on the Writings of Michael Fried*, ed. Jill Beaulieu, Mary Roberts, and Toni Ross (Sydney: Power Institute, 2000), 61–96; Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*, 178–206.

18 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 16. Emphases original.

19 Ibid., 19.

20 In his pivotal 1960 essay “Modernist Painting,” Greenberg set up the “sculptural” as the metaphor for all that painting should expunge: pictorial illusionism, figuration, and three-dimensionality. Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1960), in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O'Brian, 4 vols (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 4: 88.

21 Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 19.

22 Colpitt, *Minimal Art*, 72.

23 Meyer, “Anthropomorphism,” 25.

24 Michael Fried, “Introduction,” in *Anthony Caro* (London: Arts Council and the Hayward Gallery, 1969), 9. I am grateful to James Meyer for alerting me to this underappreciated text.

25 Jack Burnham, “On Being Sculpture,” *Artforum* 7, no. 9 (May 1969): 44–5. Emphasis original.

26 Briony Fer, *The Infinite Line: Re-making Art After Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 106.

27 Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part 1,” *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966): 42–4; “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966): 20–3; “Notes on Sculpture, Part III: Notes and Nonsequiturs,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 24–9.

28 Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture, Part IV: Beyond Objects,” *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969): 51.

29 Ibid.

30 Lucy Lippard, “Eccentric Abstraction,” *Art International* 10, no. 9 (20 November 1966): 28, 34–40.

31 Lucy Lippard, “Eros Presumptive,” *Hudson Review* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 91–9; “Eros Presumptive,” rev. in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 209–21.

32 Anne Middleton Wagner, “Reading *Minimal Art*,” in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13.

33 Lippard, “Eros Presumptive,” (1967), 94.

34 Ibid., 96. For commentary (and for one of the few extended discussions of “Eros Presumptive”), see Margo Hobbs Thompson, “Agreeable Objects and Angry Paintings: ‘Female Imagery’ in Art by Hannah Wilke and Louise Fishman, 1970–1973,” *Genders* 43 (2006): n.p. See also Rachel Middleman, “Rethinking Vaginal Iconology with

Hannah Wilke's Sculpture," *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (2013): 34–45.

35 Lippard, "Eros Presumptive," (1967), 91.

36 Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," 28.

37 Ibid., 34.

38 Ibid., 39.

39 Of the many discussions of Lippard's text, the primary ones that have informed my thinking are Fer, *Infinite Line*, 101–15; Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 109–30; James Meyer, "Non, Nothing, Everything: Eva Hesse's 'Abstraction,'" in *Eva Hesse*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 57–77; and Applin, *Eccentric Objects*, 7–12. Although it does not discuss the 1960s essays in detail, the insightful essay by Laura Cottingham, "Shifting Ground: On the Critical Practice of Lucy Lippard," in *Seeing through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art* (Amsterdam: G and B Arts, 2000), 1–46, has proven especially helpful. See also Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 127–71; Judy K. Collischan Van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art: Profiles of Power* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1984), 99–114.

40 Lucy Lippard, "The Women's Art Movement—What's Next" (1975), in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 83.

41 Fer, *Infinite Line*, 104–5.

42 Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," 40.

43 Lucy Lippard, "Eccentric Abstraction," rev. in *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971), 99.

44 Robert Pincus-Witten, "Eva Hesse: More Light on the Transition from Post-minimalism to the Sublime," in *Eva Hesse: A Memorial Exhibition*, ed. Linda Shearer (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1972), n.p.

45 "Postminimalism" was a retrospective term dubbed by Robert Pincus-Witten in his writings as a good enough catch-all that registered the proliferation of practices and attitudes toward the sculptural object's permanence that began in the late 1960s. See Robert Pincus-Witten, *Postminimalism* (New York: Out of London Press, 1977).

46 The now classic argument about Minimalism's pivotal importance is that of Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" (1986), in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1996), 35–68. See also Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," *October* 54 (Fall 1990): 3–17; Hal Foster, "Dan Flavin and the Catastrophe of Minimalism," in *Dan Flavin: New Light*, ed. Jeffrey Weiss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 133–51. These historical views of Minimalism compellingly account for the paradigm shift it signaled, but it was the moves in "Beyond Objects" that seemed, finally, to alter fundamentally the medium of sculpture. This impact of Postminimalism was chronicled in detail in Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall, eds., *The New Sculpture 1965–1975: Between Geometry and Gesture* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990) and is the "after" in Richard J. Williams, *After Modern Sculpture: Art in the United States and Europe, 1965–70* (Manchester University Press, 2000). This marking of a shift is also registered in Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

47 See discussion in e.g. Whitney Chadwick, "Balancing Acts: Reflections on Postminimalism and Gender in the 1970s," in *More Than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the '70s*, ed. Susan L. Stoops (Waltham, Mass: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1996), 14–25.

48 Recently, Jo Applin's engaging book on Sixties sculpture, *Eccentric Objects*, has taken on some of Lippard's central examples as a means of reconsidering the centrality of Minimalism in the literature on the decade.

49 Of particular use from the extensive literature on these artists have been Anne Middleton Wagner, "Bourgeois Fantasy," in *A House Divided: American Art since 1955* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 158–82; Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005); Potts, *Sculptural Imagination*; Wagner, *Three Artists*.

50 See Josef Helfenstein, *Louise Bourgeois: The Early Work* (Champaign, Ill: Krannert Art Museum, 2002); Ann Gibson, "Louise Bourgeois's Retroactive Politics of Gender," *Art Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 44–7; Mignon Nixon, "'Fantastic Reality': A Note on Louise Bourgeois's *Portrait of C.Y.*," *Sculpture Journal* 5 (2001): 83–9; Nixon, *Fantastic Reality*, 119–63.

51 The implications of this period have been well studied by Mignon Nixon; see e.g. "Bad Enough Mother," *October* 102 (1995): 71–92; "Posing the Phallus," *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 96–127; *Fantastic Reality*, 209–65; "o+x," *October* 119 (2007): 6–20. More broadly, see Helen Molesworth, ed., *Part Object Part Sculpture* (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts and Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005).

52 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, 117.

53 Ibid., 119.

54 Meyer, "Non, Nothing, Everything," 66.

55 For instance, a useful analysis of the organizing example of Bourgeois for feminist art history was offered by Katy Deepwell, "Feminist Readings of Louise Bourgeois or Why Louise Bourgeois is a Feminist Icon," *n.paradoxa* 3 (May 1997): 28–38.

56 Some of that decade's analyses of masculinity in art history produced valuable critiques, e.g. Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (1990): 44–63; Michael Leja, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 546–84; Amelia Jones, "Dis/playing the Phallus:

Male Artists Perform Their Masculinities," *Art History* 17, no. 4 (December 1994): 546–84; Michael Leja, "Barnet Newman's Solo Tango," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 556–80; Andrew Perchuk, "Pollock and Postwar Masculinity," in *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, ed. Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner (Cambridge, Mass: MIT List Visual Arts Center, 1995), 31–42; Caroline Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Ann Eden Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); Terry Smith, ed., *In Visible Touch: Modernism and Masculinity* (University of Chicago Press, 1997); and, for a reprise of these questions in the next decade, Marcia Brennan, *Modernism's Masculine Subjects: Matisse, the New York School, and Post-painterly Abstraction* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004).

57 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, 121.

58 Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966), plates. On the hermaphrodite in ancient art, see the useful survey in Aileen Ajootian, "The Only Happy Couple: Hermaphrodites and Gender," in *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality, and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, ed. Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 220–42.

59 This case about Symbolism is made in the important book by Patricia Mathews, *Passionate Discontent: Creativity, Gender, and French Symbolist Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1999). Other useful discussions of androgyny can be found in Anna Chave, *Constantin Brancusi: Shifting the Bases of Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993); Susan Fillin-Yeh, "Dandies, Marginality, and Modernism: Georgia O'Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp, and Other Cross-dressers," *Oxford Art*

Journal 18, no. 2 (1995): 33–44; Caroline Jones, “The Sex of the Machine: Mechanomorphic Art, New Women, and Francis Picabia’s Neurasthenic Cure,” in *Picturing Science, Producing Art*, ed. Caroline Jones and Peter Galison (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 145–80; Lanier Graham, “Duchamp & Androgyny: The Concept and its Context,” *Tout-fait* 2, no. 4 (January 2002): n.p. For a longer view, see also Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

60 See e.g. Amelia Jones, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); Paul B. Franklin, “Object Choice: Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* and the Art of Queer Art History,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 23–50; Helen Molesworth, “Rrose Sélavy Goes Shopping,” in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman and Matthew Witkovsky (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, 2005), 173–89; David Hopkins, *Dada’s Boys: Masculinity after Duchamp* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007); Deborah Johnson, “Marcel Duchamp, Rrose Sélavy, and Gender Performativity,” *International Journal of the Arts in Society* 1, no. 7 (2007): 191–200; Deborah Johnson, “R(r)ose Sélavy as Man Ray: Reconsidering the Alter Ego of Marcel Duchamp,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 1 (September 2013): 80–94. A related argument about Duchamp’s play with the constructed nature of gender can be found in the useful article by Edward Powers, “Fasten Your Seatbelts as We Prepare for Our *Nude Descending*,” *Tout-fait* 2, no. 5 (April 2003): n.p.

61 Chave, *Constantin Brancusi*, 123.

62 The following anecdote from the photographer David Finn about Henry Moore is telling: “The only time Henry acknowledged to me any sexual aspect of one of his sculptures was when I asked him about *Draped Reclining Figure*. It had a skirt around its lower part which showed that it was a female, but coming out of the groin there

was what seemed to be an erect phallus. He wasn’t happy about the question, but after a moment’s pause he did admit rather softly that the figure was ‘androgynous.’” David Finn, *One Man’s Henry Moore* (Redding Ridge, Conn: Black Swan Books, 1993), 43. For further on gender in Moore and Hepworth, see Anne Middleton Wagner, *Mother Stone: The Vitality of Modern British Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005). On the context of public sculpture and postwar internationalism, see Margaret Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Christopher Pearson, “Hepworth, Moore and the United Nations: Modern Art and the Ideology of Post-war Internationalism,” *Sculpture Journal* 6 (2001): 89–99.

63 See Clare Elliott and Robert Gober, *Forrest Bess: Seeing Things Invisible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and the Menil Collection, 2013); Chuck Smith, *Forrest Bess: Key to the Riddle* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: powerHouse Books, 2013). For further discussion of the artistic contexts for Bess’s work and its reception, see Gregory Tentler, “Painting in a Different Kind of Void,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 14, no. 3 (2013): 230–4.

64 Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968), 129. Bess had corresponded with Money from 1962 to 1974. Money detailed Bess’s case a few years later in John Money and Michael De Priest, “Three Cases of Genital Self-surgery and their Relationship to Transsexualism,” *Journal of Sex Research* 12, no. 4 (November 1976): 283–94. Robert Gober has discussed Bess’s relationship to Money in Elliott and Gober, *Forrest Bess*, 91, 98.

65 This was a main theme of de Henriquez’s work, as discussed in Jan Marsh, *Art & Androgyny: The Life of Sculptor, Fiore de Henriquez* (London: Elliott & Thompson, 2004); for just one of many occurrences of this quotation, see p. 97.

66 Ibid., 151. Here, de Henriquez is also registering the gendered discourse that had sprung from Auguste Rodin’s titanic influence as the reputed “father” of modern sculpture. This attitude about modern sculpture as a solely masculine endeavor was common among European and American sculptors in the early part of the twentieth century. For those artists who worked in the traditional sculptural materials of clay and bronze, especially, such limiting characterizations lasted well into the 1960s. I discuss the roots of this formulation of the gendered and sexualized role for the modern sculptor in the conclusion to Getsy, *Rodin*, 173–93.

67 Eva Hesse, from a diary entry of 18 March 1965, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), 34.

68 Oldenburg quoted in Achim Hochdörfer, Maartje Oldenburg, and Barbara Schröder, eds., *Claes Oldenburg: Writing on the Side 1956–1969* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 317.

69 Frank O’Hara, “Hermaphrodite,” 1st pub. in *Folder 3* (1955), repr. in Donald Allen, ed. *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 218.

70 Lynda Benglis quoted in Franck Gautherot, Caroline Hancock, and Seungduk Kim, eds., *Lynda Benglis* (Dijon, France: Presses du Réel and the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2009), 171.

71 Louise Bourgeois quoted in *New York Magazine*, 11 February 1974.

72 Jackie Curtis quoted in Raymond Macrino, “Jackie Curtis: The Victory Isn’t Vain,” *Herald: The Manhattan News and Entertainment Weekly*, 6 June 1971, s.2, 5. I am thankful to Joseph Madura for sharing this reference with me.

73 See e.g. Stuart Byron, “Reactionaries in Radical Drag,” *Village Voice*, 16 March 1972, 69.

74 More broadly, see the survey of gender nonconformity in late twentieth-century art provided in Frank Wagner, Kasper König, and Julia Friedrich, eds., *Das achte Feld: Geschlechter, Leben*

und Begehren in der Kunst seit 1960 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, 2006).

75 On transfeminism, see e.g. Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 95–128.

76 J. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1998). On this point, see also Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries” (1992), in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011), 241–53.

77 Elisabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

78 Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

79 [Paul] B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).

80 This point was made in his manifesto; Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” (1992), in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 205–20 and then expanded in Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Dennis Rodman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

81 Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif: Seal Press, 2008); Susan Stryker, “Why the T in LGBT is Here to Stay,” *Salon.com* (11 October 2007), online at www.salon.com/2007/10/11/transgender_2/ (accessed 26 February 2014).

82 This is a component of all the narratives just cited. Other significant discussions of this co-option of transgender by gay and lesbian histories can be found in Michel Foucault, “Intro-

duction,” in *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-century French Hermaphrodite* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), vii–xvii; Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Julian Carter, “On Mother-love: History, Queer Theory, and Nonlesbian Identity,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 1/2 (January 2005): 107–38; Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors*; David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

83 A guiding historiographic and theoretical intervention for me has been Viviane K. Namaste, “The Use and Abuse of Queer Tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in Queer Theory and Politics,” *Social Semiotics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 213–34. An influential founding statement of the rejection of queer theory’s appropriation was offered in Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). See also Viviane K. Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity,” in *Queer Studies: A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 183–203; Namaste, *Invisible Lives*; Susan Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212–15; Viviane K. Namaste, *Sex Change, Social Change: Reflections on Identity, Institutions, and Imperialism* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 2005); Susan Stryker, “(De)Subjugated Knowledges: An Introduction to Transgender Studies,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 1–17. A key point in the early discussions was Judith Butler’s work (or, more accurately, the misapplications of Butler’s work by her followers). Butler responded to these criticisms in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) and,

most productively, in *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004). See further the discussion in Cressida Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity After Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender,” *Signs* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 1093–120; Viviane K. Namaste, “Undoing Theory: The ‘Transgender Question’ and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory,” *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 11–32; Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 95–128; J. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), 301–43.

84 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 47.

85 Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 197.

86 Lynda Crawford, “Men Become Women: A Charm School for Transsexuals,” *Soho Weekly News*, 16 October 1975, 11.

87 Hubert Selby Jr., *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Gore Vidal, *Myra Breckinridge* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1968).

88 Harry Benjamin, “Transvestism and Transsexualism,” *International Journal of Sexology* 7, no. 1 (August 1953): 12–14.

89 Most notably, John Money, Joan Hampson, and John Hampson, “Imprinting and the Establishment of Gender Role,” *Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry* 77 (1957): 333–6.

90 Hedy Jo Star, “I Changed My Sex” (Chicago: Novel Books, 1963).

91 On Erickson, see Aaron H. Devor and Nicholas Matte, “One Inc. and Reed Erickson: The Uneasy Collaboration of Gay and Trans Activism, 1964–2003,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 179–209.

92 Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966).

93 Thomas Buckley, “A Changing of Sex by Surgery Begun at Johns Hopkins,” *New York Times*, 21 November 1966, 1ff; “Surgery: A Body to Match the Mind,” *Time*, 2 December 1966, 52;

“A Change of Gender,” *Newsweek*, 5 December 1966, 73; “Sex-change Operations at a U.S. Hospital,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 5 December 1966, 13.

94 Christine Jorgensen, *A Personal Autobiography* (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1967).

95 Susan Stryker, “Introduction,” in *Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2000), ix.

96 Thomas Buckley, “The Transsexual Operation,” *Esquire* 67, no. 4 (April 1967): 111–15, 205–8.

97 Stoller, *Sex and Gender* (1968). That same year, the term was also the focus of an article by Harry Gersham, “The Evolution of Gender Identity,” *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 28 (1968): 80–90.

98 Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Phoenix ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1979).

99 Richard Green and John Money, eds., *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

100 See Leslie Feinberg, “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries,” *Workers World*, 24 September 2006. See also the recent collection of archival documents by the collective Untorelli Press, *Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries: Survival, Revolt, and Queer Antagonist Struggle* (Bloomington, Ind. Untorelli Press, 2013). Some of these documents had previously been collected by Reina Gossett; see <http://thespiritwas.tumblr.com/post/45275076521/on-untorellis-new-book> (accessed 20 April 2014).

101 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 89.

102 This was famously enacted in the castration of the transsexual lesbian singer Beth Elliott by a keynote speaker, Robin Morgan, at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Feminist Conference; *ibid.*, 103–5. A critique of transphobia in feminism became central to the foundational texts for transgender studies, most notably by Sandy Stone in her 1987 “Posttranssexual Manifesto,” which was a direct refutation of Janice

Raymond’s polemic against transsexuals in her *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979). Stone’s text went through a series of revisions and republications, but see Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” rev. in Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies Reader*, 221–35. It remains one of the most important texts within transgender studies, and its message continues to be relevant as a retort to the transphobia that is still evident in some recent feminist writing (e.g. Sheila Jeffreys). A critique of transphobia in feminism is also important in the highly influential article by Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ* 1, no. 3 (1994): 237–54. For further discussion, see also Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation,” 205–20; Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity After Queer Theory,” 1093–120. Overviews of the recent debates in this area can be found in Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review* 100 (Winter 2008): 145–57; Namaste, “Undoing Theory,” 11–32; Patricia Elliot, *Debates in Transgender, Queer, and Feminist Theory: Contested Sites* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 95–128; Raewyn Connell, “Transsexual Women and Feminist Thought: Toward New Understanding and New Politics,” *Signs* 37, no. 4 (Summer 2012): 857–81.

103 In addition to the sources cited on feminism’s resistance to transgender, see further on “border” disputes among female masculinities in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 141–73; Jacob Hale, “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/Ftm Borderlands,” *GLQ* 4, no. 2 (1998): 311–48; Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings,” 241–53; Henry Rubin, *Self-made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men* (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003).

104 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 51.

105 Grossman also listed *Myra Breckinridge* as

one of a short list of decade-defining events to an interviewer in Alessandra Codinha, “Working Deep Beneath the Think,” *Intermission* 8 (2013): 67.

106 Valentine’s account of this is particularly useful; Valentine, *Imagining Transgender*. While not widespread, variations on the term “transgender” did circulate in the 1960s and 1970s. As Valentine notes (261 n. 1), in 1969, *Transvestia* magazine (no. 60) used the term “transgenderal.” Cristan Williams has also noted a 1965 usage of the term in John Oliven, *Sexual Hygiene and Pathology: A Manual for the Physician and the Professions*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), 514; www.cristanwilliams.com/b/2012/03/27/tracking-transgender-the-historical-truth/#34 (accessed 22 April 2014).

107 See Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation,” 205–20 and discussion in Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” 146.

108 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 1.

109 See e.g. the early critique of transgender for its effects on the category of transsexual in Prosser, *Second Skins*, 171–205. A recent discussion of the usefulness and limitations of such inclusive categories can be found in T. Benjamin Singer, “Umbrella,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 259–61.

110 Stryker, *Transgender History*, 24.

111 Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 52–3.

112 *Ibid.*, 162.

113 Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 95.

114 See the discussion in e.g. Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah, and Lisa Jean Moore, “Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender?” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3–4 (Fall/Winter 2008): 11–22; Trystan Cotten, ed., *Transgender Migrations: The Bodies, Borders, and Politics of Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Susan Stryker, “Biopolitics,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 38–42; special issue of *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (2014) on “Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary.” A revision of biopolitical analysis from a transgender perspective can be found in Preciado, *Têsto Junkie*.

115 The core of this section was initially published as David Getsy, “Capacity,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 47–9.

116 Again, the concept of “perverse presentism” proposed in Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 50–9, offers a defining methodological position on addressing this issue for historical writing.

117 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 4.

118 While arguing against uncritical and unhistorical acceptance of this distinction as empirical fact, he nevertheless notes that this model has facilitated both politics and cultural theory; David Valentine, “The Categories Themselves,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2003): 215–20.

119 Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” esp. 147–9.

120 As Stryker warned, “all too often *queer* remains a code word for ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian,’ and all too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity”; Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” 214. Namaste had earlier asked, “How could we develop a queer politics which presupposes transsexual bodies, but which benevolently accommodates lesbian and gay subject positions?” Namaste, “Use and Abuse of Queer Tropes,” 217. Her subsequent book performs a damning critique of queer theory as it was practiced in the 1990s, rightly arguing that its formations did not attend to economic and social conditions in which transgender lives are embedded; Namaste, *Invisible Lives*, 22: “Despite their insistence on the productive nature of power, they do not demonstrate how drag queens or transgendered people of color are produced in different institutional, social, economic, and historical settings. And because they do not offer this type of analysis, they ignore the role their own theories play in creating transgendered people as an object of academic discourse.” Namaste’s argument was that the specificity and

complexity of transgender lives were erased in these theories, turning them solely into figures for transgression and into theoretical (not political or actual) subjects. Much of the most important subsequent queer theory has been at pains to address this injustice (as with Butler’s *Undoing Gender*). See also the history of political activism in Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” 145–57.

121 Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 127.

122 Stryker, “Biopolitics,” 39; see also Preciado, *Têsto Junkie*, esp. pp. 23–54.

123 See Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44.

124 Krauss’s proposition for an expanded field was set in opposition to what she saw as the debased form of historicism that had determined art criticism and history at the time. In particular, it was the teleological explanation of phenomena (new or old) through recourse to a continuous genealogy that the structuralist notion of the expanded field was to supplant as a hermeneutic device. Lurking behind historicism, for Krauss, was Greenberg’s Hegelian account of medium specificity. In an essay published concurrently with the expanded field essay, Krauss was even more unforgiving about the limitations of historicism: “Historicism is our intellectual milieu. It affects the way we think and how we act – morally, politically, esthetically. And it must also be seen as a strategic operation, one that works on the strange to make it familiar. Given, say, an ancient civilization, one whose social structures and cultural artifacts are different from our own, historicism acts to construct a developmental model by which the early forms can be seen as the embryonic versions of later ones, which inevitably achieve ‘maturity’ in the forms of our own time....This drive to historicize, which amounts to a loathing of the different, is what defines us as an audience for art. And it is that very thing which separates us most profoundly now, in the present, from its makers. For artists, whether they

wish it or not, have become the residents of the land of the strange”; Rosalind Krauss, “John Mason and Post-modernist Sculpture: New Experiences, New Words,” *Art in America* 67, no. 3 (May–June 1979): 120–1. Krauss developed the model of the expanded field both to recast the medium through a set of its structural coordinates (rather than a lineage) and to offer a more adequate way of accounting for artists for whom medium was no longer a relevant or useful mode of characterizing their practice. Ironically, it is for these two reasons that Krauss’s essay has subsequently been seen as the one of the most appropriate and useful of historical descriptions of the previous decade and a half. As she says in the conclusion to the Mason essay (127), “I have been insisting that the expanded field of post-modernism occurs at a specific moment in the recent history of art.” Further accounts of Krauss’s text, its intentions, and its legacies are discussed in the recently published *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters between Art and Architecture*, ed. Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2014). Surprisingly, none of the contributors mention the Mason essay despite its informative relation to the *October* article of the same year with which it shares concerns and terms.

125 Eve Meltzer, *Systems We Have Loved: Conceptual Art, Affect, and the Antihumanist Turn* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 119–36.

126 Krauss, “John Mason and Post-modernist Sculpture,” 125.

127 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 29.

1 ON NOT MAKING BOYS: DAVID SMITH, FRANK O’HARA, AND GENDER ASSIGNMENT

1 David Smith, interview with Frank O’Hara, *The Sculpting Master of Bolton Landing*, aired on WNDT New York, 11 November and repeated 13

INDEX

NOTE: Page numbers in italics refer to illustrations. Page numbers followed by *n* and a number refer to information in the Notes. Artists' works appear at the end of their index entries.

abstract eroticism 5, 13–15
see also Eccentric Abstraction
 Abstract Expressionism 24
 and Chamberlain 138–9, 142
 and Grossman 154, 162, 189–90
 and O'Hara, 72
 and Smith 3, 68
 abstraction's rejection of human form
 and invocation in sculpture xii–xiii,
 xvi, xvii, 1–2, 6–41, 278–9
 anthropomorphism 9–13
 and Minimalism 9–11, 12–13
 Bourgeois's work 17
 Flavin's dedications and personhood
 249–53, 256, 257–65
 Flavin's icons and figurations of the
 homosexual 212–27, 233–5, 237,
 241–3, 261
 and genders xiv–xv, 1, 2, 13–19, 44,

279–80
 complication and ambiguity of
 gender 19–26
 Gonzalez-Torres's dedications and
 personhood 254, 256, 265
 and Smith's non-figurative art 2–3,
 44–5, 54–5, 57–9, 62–8, 70, 80,
 81–95
 transgender capacity 2, 4, 34, 38–9,
 276–7, 278–80
 and body in Cassils's sculpture
 269–74, 278
 Burton's sculpture as furniture
 274–6, 278
 Grossman's work 160
 openness of Chamberlain's work
 129–42, 145
 Acconci, Vito 25
 activism and transgender issues xii, 26–7,
 28, 29, 30
 Adrian, Dennis 326*n*.123
 Aestheticism: artists and self-representa-
 tion 20
 Alloway, Lawrence 8
 Altieri, Charles 71
 ambiguity of gender in art 4, 5, 19

ambiguity and simplified morpholo-
 gies in modern sculpture 19–26
 and Brancusi's sculpture 20–2
 Chamberlain's work 131–3, 135
 Smith's non-figurative works 83,
 87–95
 and Lippard's discourse 14
 sculpture of Bourgeois and Hesse 17
 and Smith's work 83
see also androgyny
 American Psychiatric Association 30–1
 Andre, Carl 247, 249, 259
 “A Word for John Chamberlain”
 (poem) 305*n*.22
 androgyny
 in art 5, 14, 21
 interpretations of Smith's work 83
 artists' self-representation 20, 24
see also ambiguity of gender in art
 anecdotal theory 44
 Anger, Kenneth 142
 Scorpio Rising (film) 139, 172
 animalier sculpture 283–4*nn*.4
 anthropocentrism critique 9
 anthropomorphism 5
 and sculpture 6, 9–13, 145
 Smith's non-figurative work 54–5,
 57–9, 61, 62–8, 70, 80, 81–95
see also sculpture: relationship with
 human figure
 Antin, Eleanor 269
 Apollinaire, Guillaume 20
 Arbus, Diane 25, 198
 art history *see* transgender studies: and
 art history
Artforum: Flavin's autobiography 217–18,
 219
 artists and self-representation: noncon-
 forming genders 20, 24, 25, 149, 205
 assemblage: Grossman's sculpture 4,
 18–19, 147–8, 149–79, 203
 Auder, Viva: *The Secret Life of William*
 Shakespeare (film with Chamberlain)

114, 116
 Auping, Michael 100
 Avedon, Richard: Grossman's studio and
 work 182, 184, 189, 190, 191, 194
 Ayden, Erje 61

 Baden, Mowry 11
 Baker, Elizabeth (Betsy) 97, 102, 117,
 308*n*.77
 Bannard, Darby 106
 Bass, Math 327*n*.13
 Battcock, Gregory 324*n*.93
 Minimal Art (anthology) 13
 Bell, Larry 119
 Bellamy, Richard 220
 Benglis, Lynda: *The Amazing Bow Wow*
 (video) 25
 Benjamin, Harry xii, 20, 28, 29
 Benning, Sadie 327*n*.13
 Berkson, Bill 61–2, 150, 177
 Bernstein, Nancy 27
 Besember, Linda 327*n*.13
 Bess, Forrest 24
 binary approach to gender and human
 form xiv–xv, 21–2
 fallacy and acknowledgement of
 multiple genders xv–xvi, 14, 23–4,
 31–2, 33, 34, 280
 limitations on human experience 129
 and Grossman 176–7, 179
see also dimorphism
 bi-sexed and inclusive genders in art
 20–1, 24–5
 Grossman on bi-sexed process of art
 178–9, 205
 black leather and Grossman's work
 association with S/M 172, 173, 180,
 191–201, 204
 connotations of black leather jacket
 172–4, 176
 Black Mountain College and Chamber-
 lain 117, 143, 304*n*.6
 Blake, Nayland 179, 189, 193, 194

Blow Job (Warhol film) 172, 201
 “bodily”
 and anthropomorphism in sculpture 9, 11, 13
 and gender and sexuality 13
 body
 aesthetics of transgender body 4
 in sculptural work of artists 2–3
 Cassils’s use of body in making of work 267–74, 278
 see also human figure and shift to abstraction; viewer’s bodily relation with art
 bondage *see* S/M community
 Bontecou, Lee 142
 Bosworth, Patricia 198
 Bourgeois, Louise 17–18, 19, 25, 160, 301*n*.93
 Brainard, Joe 48
 Brancusi, Constantin 6, 20–2
 Flavin’s dedication of work to 210
 Adam and Eve 20, 21
 Golden Bird 23
 The Kiss 135, 140
 Leda 20
 Princess X 20, 22
 Torso of a Young Girl [III] 20, 22
 Torso of a Young Man [I] 20, 21, 22
 Broadway in Flavin’s *icon V* (Coran’s *Broadway Flesh*) 212–13, 215, 222–4
 Burgher, Elijah 327*n*.13
 Burden, Chris 316*n*.126
 Burnham, Jack 11–12, 244, 325*n*.96
 Burr, Tom 327*n*.13
 Burton, Scott 274–6, 278
 Five Themes of Solitary Behavior 198
 Two-part Chair 276
 Butler, Judith xiv, 31, 94, 127, 278, 307*n*.59
 on acknowledgement of gender complexity xvi, 36, 41, 89–91, 267
 Butt, Gavin 47
 Calder, Alexander (“Sandy”) 259

Calley, Lieutenant William 185, 187–8
 capacity *see* transgender capacity
 Carney, William: *The Real Thing* 173, 315*n*.116
 Caro, Anthony 11–12
 Carroll, Paul 71
 Cassils, Heather
 Becoming an Image performance work 268–71, 268, 271–2, 273, 278
 Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture 269
 The Resilience of the 20% 266, 267–9, 273–4
 Chadwick, Whitney 316*n*.134
 Chamberlain, John xii, xiii, xvi, 2–4, 39, 97–145, 121, 274, 276, 279
 Black Mountain College 143, 304*n*.6
 and poet’s approach to work 117, 143
 bodies in non-figurative art 2–3, 114
 challenges of describing work 100–2, 138–9, 142
 interviews and evasive attitude to work 117–18, 122–3, 130, 279
 Judd’s writing and interpretation 110–11, 118–19
 and “successive states” 110–11, 114, 130
 color and work 105–8, 305*n*.26
 “fitting” process and coupling in
 words and work 97–8
 conflicted readings of concrete and abstract 97, 108, 110–12, 143
 coupling and tactics of 100, 102–16, 143
 masculine and feminine in work 137
 sculpture and painting 104–5, 116
 and sexual in work 98, 100, 120–5, 127, 130–1
 volume and mass 103–4, 112, 116
 and gender multiplicity and indeter-

mination 1, 122–42
 Guggenheim retrospective (2012) 305*n*.27
John Chamberlain / F_____g Couches
 exhibition 120–1
 paper sculptures 110, 117
 sexuality
 and personal interactions and interviews 119–20
 and work 38, 98, 100, 120–5, 127, 129–31, 143, 145
 titles and meaning of work 110, 114, 117, 249
 and gender assignment 113–4, 131, 132
 transformative nature of art 112–13, 114, 122, 125, 127, 145
 recycling aesthetic 127
 and transgender perspective 18, 26, 129–42
 open-endedness and transgender capacity 129–42, 145
Bouquet 99
Chili Terlingua 124
Crowded Hearts 132
Dolores James 112
Endless Gossip 110
Endzoneboogie 110, 111
Essex 123–4
*F*****g Asterisks* 129
Fantail 103
Flavin Flats 3
Folded Nude 96, 133–4, 134
Four Polished Nails 126
Huzzy 113–14, 115, 131
Kiss series 135
Kiss #11 138–9
Kiss #12 140, 141
Kiss #26 141
Kiss #28 136
M. Junior Love 101
Miss Lucy Pink 108, 131
Mustang Sally McBright 107

One Twin 133–4
Panna-Normanna 123, 142
Penthouse series 110
Penthouse #46 118
The Secret Life of William Shakespeare (film with Auder) 114, 116
Socket series 98, 114, 132
Son of Dudes 109, 131, 132
Three Cornered Desire 132, 133
Tongue Pictures 113
Toy 104
Ultrafull Private 144
 Chave, Anna 20–1
 Chicago, Judy: *Dinner Party* 163
 Clum, John M. 320*n*.46
 Cohen, Mark Daniel 175–6
 color and sculpture
 Chamberlain 105–8, 305*n*.26
 critical reservations 105–6
 Smith 48, 54, 105
 Colpitt, Frances 6, 10, 284*n*.14
 Cone, Jane Harrison 299*n*.58
 Conner, Bruce 9
 Coran, Stanley 215, 218–19, 220, 222–5, 234, 237, 242, 247
 Creeley, Robert 110
 Crow, Thomas 129
 Curtis, Jackie 25, 30

 Dalí, Salvador 20
 Darling, Candy 30
 Davis, Whitney 327–8*n*.16
 Dawson, Fielding 305*n*.22
 de Henriquez, Fiore 24, 28
 de Kooning, Willem 46, 48
 de Villiers, Nicholas 219
 dedications *see* Flavin: titles of works and dedications
 Dehner, Dorothy 79
 Dienes, Sari 142
 difference and Flavin’s work
 naming of homosexuals and visible difference 210–12, 218–19, 220–7,

- 233–5, 237, 239, 241–3, 259, 261
 systematic interchangeability and
 difference and sameness 243–53,
 257, 261, 264–5
 dimorphism
 fallacy of absolute dimorphism
 xiv–xvi, 129, 280
 and feminist attitudes 204
 gender assignment and human form
 in art xiv–xv
 and Brancusi's sculptures 20–2
 and Chamberlain's sculptures
 131–2
 and Smith's non-figurative work
 44–5, 62–4, 73–86, 89–91, 93
 social insistence on assignment of
 gender 176–7
 nomination of human gender xiv,
 21–2
see also binary approach to gender
 and human form
 Disney clay (WED clay) and Cassils's
 work 273
 drag/drag queens
 academic study in 1960s 30
 conflict with police 28, 29
 Rosenblum's drag queen names for
 friends 259, 262–3
 visibility in Warhol's films 25, 30
 Duchamp, Marcel 6, 20
*The Bride Stripped Bare by her
 Bachelors, Even* 157
 earthworks as art 7
Eccentric Abstraction exhibition (New
 York, 1966) 4, 13, 14, 16–17
 Ellison, Ralph: *Invisible Man* (novel)
 219–20
 Erickson, Reed and Erickson Educa-
 tional Foundation 28–9
 erotic in art
 abstract eroticism 5, 13–15
see also sexuality
 Factory (Warhol) films 25, 30
 Fake, Edie 327*n*.13
 Farren, Mick 172
 fashion and black leather jacket 172–3,
 176
 Feinberg, Leslie 26, 282*n*.13, 289*n*.80
 feminism
 binary attitudes to gender 204
 division over transgender participa-
 tion 31, 291*n*.22
 Grossman and conflicted relationship
 with 19, 149, 203–5
 Grossman and use of vaginal imagery
 162–3
 Lippard on abstraction and sexual
 difference 15
 and S/M community and practices
 204
 transfeminism and gender noncon-
 formism in art 25–6, 149, 205
 Fer, Briony 12, 15
 figuration *see* human figure and shift to
 abstraction
 film and transsexuality 25, 27, 28, 30
 Flavin, Dan xii, xiii, 2–4, 39–40, 209–65,
 274, 276
 bodies in non-figurative art 2–3, 213,
 215
 and categorization of work 209–10
 as sculpture 2, 6, 210, 317–8*n*.5
 change of direction and use of
 fluorescent tubes 230–43
 systematic interchangeability and
 difference and sameness
 243–53, 257, 261, 264–5
 homosexuality and attitudes and
 work 38
 and autobiography in *Artforum*
 217–18, 219
 “flesh tint” and carnal nature of
icon V 213, 215, 225, 227, 234
 homosexual mentors 232–43
icons and figurations of the

- homosexual 212–27, 228,
 233–5, 237, 241–3, 261
 public offensives and naming of
 homosexuals 216–17, 218–19,
 220, 227, 233–4, 259, 261
 invisibility and art of 228–9
 fluorescent tubes and “approx-
 imate invisibility” 232–43, 261, 264
 light and the visible in art 219–20,
 239
 titles of works and dedications 40,
 209–10, 280
 fluorescent tubes and performative
 dedications 247–53, 257, 261,
 264
 influence on Gonzalez-Torres's
 naming of works 254–7, 265
 naming of homosexuals and
 visible difference 210–12,
 218–19, 220–7, 233–4, 239,
 241–3, 259, 261
 shifting dedication for *diagonal of
 May 25, 1963* 239, 243
 transformable personhood and
 naming 254–65
 and transgender perspective 18, 26,
 257–65
*alternate diagonals of March 2, 1964 (to
 Don Judd)* 242
*Dan Flavin: alternating pink and “gold”
 installation* 248
Dan Flavin: fluorescent light installation
 242–3, 242
Dan Flavin: some light installation 213,
 229–30, 230
*the diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to
 Constantin Brancusi / to Robert
 Rosenblum)* 230–1, 231, 232, 239,
 240, 241, 242, 243
East New York Shrines 220, 222, 259
European Couples installation 265
icon series 212–27, 228–30
*icon IV (the pure land) (to David John
 Flavin [1933–1962])* 225, 226, 227,
 228, 230, 241
icon V (Coran's Broadway Flesh)
 212–16, 214, 218–27, 221, 228, 230,
 233–5, 237, 239, 247, 261
 final study 216
 formation of title 250–1
 plan for revised work 224–5, 224
*icon VI (Ireland dying) (to Louis
 Sullivan)* 228, 229
icon VII (via crucis) 228, 229
*icon VIII (the dead nigger's icon) (to
 Blind Lemon Jefferson)* 228–9, 229
*one of May 27th, 1963 (Construction
 with Red Fluorescent and Incandes-
 cent Bulbs)* 237, 238
pink out of a corner (to Jasper Johns)
 232, 234, 236, 237, 239, 242–3, 242
red and green alternatives (to Sonja) 211
red out of a corner (to Annina) 237, 238,
 257
*untitled (for you, Leo, in long respect and
 affection)* 208, 257
untitled (in memory of “Sandy” Calder)
V 257, 260
untitled (to Ellen Johnson, fondly) 252
untitled (to Janie Lee) one 246
untitled (to the real Dan Hill) 244
 Flavin, David John 217, 225, 227, 242
Flesh (Warhol film) 30
 Foucault, Michel 283*n*.19
 Frankenthaler, Helen 62
 Freas, Jean 48
 Fried, Michael 12–13
 “Art and Objecthood” essay 9–10,
 278
 on Caro 11–12
 Fritscher, Jack 196–7
 furniture as art in Burton's work 274–6
 Gallop, Jane 44
 Gaudier-Brzeska, Henri 6
 gay liberation movement xii

- distancing from transgender community and issues 31
see also homosexuality
 Geldzahler, Henry 137, 279, 284*n*.8
 gender
 as “expanded field” 40–1
 fallacy of absolute dimorphism xiv–xvi, 129, 280
 feminist attitudes to gender roles 204
 and Flavin’s naming of works 257–65
 gender identity
 ascription at birth xiv
 invention of term 28, 30
 shift in understanding in 1960s xi–xii
 historical attitudes and understandings 26–34
 and human figure in art xvi, xvii
 abstraction and genders xiv–xv, 1, 2, 13–19, 279–80
 ambiguity of gender 4, 5, 14, 17, 19–26, 83, 94–5
 assignment of gender xiv–xv, 20–3, 44, 131–2
 assignment of gender and Smith’s work 44–5, 62–4, 73–86, 89–91, 93
 Chamberlain’s work 114, 122–42
 Grossman’s open and disruptive approach to gender 147–8, 149–50, 160–79
 inclusive genders 20–1, 24–5
 nonconforming genders 20, 23–6, 38, 149, 205
 and literature on artists 17–18
 masculine in Grossman’s work 150, 188
 connotations of black leather jacket 172–4, 176
 multiplicity xv–xvi, 1, 2, 14, 23–4, 33, 40–1, 279–80
 Chamberlain’s work and unspecified gender 1, 122–42
 historical context 31–2
 see also transgender capacity
 mutability xvi, 2, 19, 20, 23–4, 40–1, 127
 and Chamberlain’s works 131–3, 135
 and Grossman’s work 1, 147–8, 149–50, 160–79, 201–7
 historical context 31–2
 temporal nature of gender 127, 129
 see also transgender capacity
 and sexuality 36–9
 complexity of Grossman’s explicit sculptures 160–76, 179, 203
 see also ambiguity of gender in art; binary approach to gender and human form; dimorphism; nonconforming genders; transformation: and gender; transgender
 gender research clinics xi–xii, 28–9, 30
 Genette, Gérard 251–3
 Gernreich, Rudi 217
 Gibson, John: *Tinted Venus* 105, 106
 Goldsmith, Bill 194–5
 Glass, Charles 327*n*.2
 Gonzalez-Torres, Felix 254–7, 265
 “Untitled” (*Perfect Lovers*) 256
 “Untitled” (*Petit Palais*) 254, 255
 “Untitled” (*Portrait of Ross in L.A.*) 254, 255
 Goosen, E. C. 105
 Govan, Michael 225
 Graham, Dan 225, 245
 Gray, Cleve 82, 86, 301*n*.94
 Green, Richard 30
 Greenberg, Clement 10, 54, 55, 311*n*.28
 Greenson, Ralph 28
 Groeneboer, Jonah 327*n*.13
 Grossman, Nancy xii, xiii, 2–4, 31, 39, 147–207, 274, 276, 279
 bodies in non-figurative art 2–3
 abstract assemblages 4, 18–19, 147–8, 149–79, 203
 Civil Rights and anti-racism sympathies 199, 313*n*.69
 critical reception and reputation 148–9, 163
 misrepresentations of work 149, 205, 206
 popularity and misreading of “heads” 192–201
 drawings
 commercial illustration work 167–8
 and sculpture 151, 152, 155, 156–7, 181
 and feminism
 gender nonconformity and uneasy relationship with 19, 149, 203–5
 transgender affinities 19, 26
 and use of vaginal imagery 162–3
 figurative art and heads 19, 148, 172, 178–207, 180, 183–4, 186–7, 189, 194–6, 200, 202, 207
 bodilessness and transgender capacity 201–7
 containment and disclosure theme 181–2, 184, 187–8, 191, 201
 earlier abstract assemblages as precursor to 149–50, 167–8
 labor and craft of making 181–3, 182
 redirection of heads in 1980s 199–201
 S/M association 180, 191–201, 204, 205
 as self-portraits 147, 150, 179–81, 184–91, 202–3, 206
 sources of inspiration and research for 189, 191
 friendship with Smith and influence on work 151–60
 and gender multiplicity and mutability 1
 bi-sexed process of art 178–9, 205
 bodilessness of heads and transgender perspective 201–7
 disruptive and open approach to gender 147–8, 149–50, 160–79
 German shepherd dog 175
 leather in work
 black leather and cultural connotations 172–4, 176, 180, 191–201
 as repurposed material 151, 152–4, 158, 165, 171–2, 177
 “machine-animal hybrids” series 159, 177–8
 sexuality and complexity of explicit sculptures 38, 148, 151, 160–76, 179, 203
 studio and work in progress 182, 184, 189, 190, 191, 194
 and transgender perspective 19, 159–60
 A.F.F. 146
 Ali of Nostrand 158, 175
 Ali Stoker 38, 150–1, 162, 167, 169–76, 170–1, 173, 175
 Andro sculptures 194–5
 Arbus 198
 Black Landscape 151, 152, 161, 166
 Blunt 183
 Bride 150–1, 154, 160–7, 161, 164, 176
 Brown and Black 158
 B.Y.K. 202
 Car Horn 158
 Caracas 193
 Chiron 166–7, 166
 Cob II 199
 Eden 151
 The Edge of Always 151, 152, 161
 For David Smith 150–1, 151–60, 153, 155
 Hitchcock 158
 Mary 185, 186–7, 187–8

M.L. Sweeney 181, 196
M.U.S. 189
No Name 180, 207
Potawatami 162, 167, 168–9
Slaves series 167, 169, 172
Totem series 311*n.*29
Walrus 166
 Guggenheim, Peggy 241
Gypsy (Broadway musical) 222–3, 223, 258–9

 Halberstam, Jack 4, 17, 18, 26, 33, 159–60, 177
 Hall, Gordon 327*n.*13
 Hammond, Harmony 327*n.*13
 Hampson, Joan and John 28
 Harwood, Michael 324*n.*92, 326*n.*124
 Henriquez, Fiore de *see* de Henriquez, Fiore
 Hepworth, Barbara 23
 hermaphrodite statues and ambiguous figures 20
 Hess, Thomas 79, 80
 Hesse, Eva 17–18, 19, 160, 177
 Ringaround Arosie 24
 Höch, Hannah 160
 homosexuality
 black leather and clothing 172–3, 176, 195–6
 Flavin's attitudes and work
 homosexual mentors 232–43
 icons and figurations of the homosexual 212–27, 233–5, 237, 241–3, 261
 naming of homosexuals and visible difference 210–12, 215–16, 218–19, 220–7, 233–5, 237, 239, 241–3, 259, 261
 public offensives against homosexuals 216–17, 227
 gay collectors
 Flavin's work 323*n.*82
 Grossman's work 194–5

 and *Gypsy* musical and New York 222–3
 and New York art world 46–8, 241
 see also gay liberation movement; S/M community
 Horosko, Marian 79–80
 Howard, Richard 73
 human figure and shift to abstraction
 xii–xiii, xvi, xvii, 277
 and genders xiv–xv, 1, 2, 13–19, 279–80
 abstraction and nonconforming genders 20, 23–6, 38, 149, 205
 assignment of gender xiv–xv, 20–3, 44
 assignment of gender and Smith's non-figurative work 44–5, 62–4, 73–86, 89–91, 93
 Brancusi's assigned and inclusive genders 20–2
 Chamberlain's sculptures 131–2
 see also abstraction's rejection of human form and invocation in sculpture; ambiguity of gender in art; body; sculpture: relationship with human figure
 Hunter, Sam 49–50

 Indiana, Gary 102, 123–4, 125
 International Olympic Committee (IOC) 29
 intersex
 artists' self-representation 24, 25
 development of history and politics of xv, 26–7, 33–4, 282*n.*10

 Jefferson, Blind Lemon 229
 Johns, Jasper 48, 72, 142, 228, 232–5, 237, 249, 259
 and Flavin's *pink out of a corner* (to Jasper Johns) 232, 234, 236, 237, 239, 242–3, 242
 Tennyson 215, 233–5, 235, 237, 239

 Johns Hopkins University xi, 29, 30
 Johnson, Marsha P. 30
 Johnson, Philip 323*n.*82
 Johnston, Jill 213, 234–5
 Jones, Caroline 215, 323*n.*78
 Jorgensen, Christine xi, 27, 28, 29–30, 31, 259
 Joyce, James 217
 Judd, Donald xvi, 9, 12–13, 142, 216, 219, 285*n.*16
 on Chamberlain 101, 105, 107–8, 110–11, 118–19, 120, 130
 and Flavin 210, 212, 220, 228
 titles of works 249, 250

 Kaplowitz, Jane 324
 Katz, Jonathan D. 47
 Kauffman, Craig 244–5, 324*n.*94
 Kertess, Klaus 102, 105, 120, 307*n.*51
 Kienholz, Edward 9
 Kobro, Katarzyna 6
 Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve 4–5, 201, 307*n.*59
 Krauss, Rosalind xi, 13, 16
 on attempts to overcome figuration in sculpture 6–7
 on body in abstract sculpture 7
 “expanded field” term 40–1
 on Smith and work 72, 80, 83–4, 88
 dissertation and catalogue raisonné 299*n.*58
 Kusama, Yayoi 13, 19

 language
 nomination of gender at birth xiv
 words and artists' work 279
 leather *see* Grossman: leather in work
 Leider, Philip 319*n.*29
 Leigh, Michael: *Velvet Underground* 192, 193
 lesbian community and feminism 204
 Leslie, Alfred: *The Last Clean Shirt* (film with O'Hara) 52

LeWitt, Sol 210, 228
 Licht, Fred 241
 Linder, Jean 13
 Lippard, Lucy
 “Eccentric Abstraction” (essay) 13, 14–15, 16, 17
 Eccentric Abstraction exhibition (New York, 1966) 4, 13, 14, 16–17
 “Eros Presumptive” (essay) 13–15, 16, 17, 38
 on Flavin's *icon V* 213
 on reality of sculpture 7
 literalism
 and Flavin's work 209–10
 icons and figurations of the homosexual 212–27, 233–5, 237, 241–3, 261
 turn to fluorescent tubes 230–2, 241–3, 261, 264
 and human form xii, 2, 9, 10, 11, 38
 and Burton's sculpture as furniture 274–5, 278
 Flavin's dedications and personhood 249–53, 257–65
 Lonesome Cowboys (Warhol film) 138–9
 Lord, Catherine 176
 Lowndes, Joan 251
 Ludlam, Charles: Ridiculous Theater Company 25

 McGinnes, Mac 324*n.*92, 326*n.*123
 “Meet Ms. Western Artiste!” (with Rosenblum) 262–3
 Malevich, Kasimir 323*n.*78
 Mapplethorpe, Robert 195, 197–8
 Untitled (Nancy Grossman sculptures) 200
 Marisol 25
 masculine in Grossman's work 150, 188
 associations of black leather 172–4, 176
 Masheck, Joe 216
 Massumi, Brian 75–6

Matisse, Henri 210
media
 and misrepresentation of Grossman’s
 “heads” 193–5, 198, 199–201
 visibility and understanding of
 transsexuality xi, xii, 24, 25, 27,
 28, 29–30
medicine
 gender reassignment surgery 29
 medical discourse of sex and gender
 24
 see also gender research clinics
McCracken, John 324*n*.94
Medina, Ernest 185, 187
Meltzer, Eve 40
Mendietta, Ana: *Untitled (Facial Hair
 Transplants)* 25
Merman, Ethel 222, 223
Meyer, James 9, 10–11, 17, 212, 220
Meyer, Richard 47
Meyerowitz, Joanne 26, 27
Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig 247
Miller, D. A. 222
Minimalism 8, 16
 abstraction and human figure 7, 9–13
 anthropomorphism critiques 9–11,
 12–13
 and body in Cassils’s work 273
 Burton’s sculpture as furniture 274–6,
 278
 and Flavin 4, 209–10
 and Gonzalez-Torres 254, 256
 see also Postminimalism
Money, John 24, 28, 30
“monokini” and Flavin on Barbara
 Rose 217
Moore, Henry 23
Morris, Robert 7, 12–13, 16, 25
Motherwell, Robert 301*n*.93
Moyer, Carrie 327*n*.13
Müller, Grégoire 256
Müller, Ulrike 327*n*.13
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New

York
 Flavin on Wilfred’s work at 217
 O’Hara and Smith’s work 45–6,
 48–50, 59, 61, 62
My Lai Massacre and Grossman’s work
 185, 187–8

Namaste, Viviane K. xv, 292–3*n*.120
names
 Rosenblum’s drag queen names for
 friends 259, 262–3
 and self-determination 258–9
 see also titles
Nashat, Shahryar 327*n*.13
Nelson, Maggie 47
Nemser, Cindy 149, 155–6, 157, 160, 162,
 163, 169, 171, 311–2*n*.40
Neuner, Stefan 217
New York art world and homosexual
 networks 46–8, 241
New York School of poets 46, 47
Newman, Barnett 228, 245
Newton, Esther 30
Nine at Leo Castelli warehouse show
 216–17, 218
nonconforming genders xvi, xvii
 and abstraction 20, 23–6, 38
 Grossman’s work 149–50, 205
 actors and artists 20, 24, 25
 see also transgender; transsexuality
Northwestern University xi–xii, 29
Nosei, Annina 237

Ockham, William of 210
O’Doherty, Brian 149
O’Hara, Frank 47
 homosexuality and New York art
 world 46–8
as poet 70–3
 “Having a Coke with You” 70
 “Hermaphrodite” 25
 “In Memory of My Feelings” 72
 Love Poems (Tentative Title) 47

Lunch Poems 46
Smith’s appearance in “Mozart
 Chemisier” 50–2
and social and sexual relationships
 46–7, 62
and visual art and artists 46
and Smith
 Art New York interview 1, 39,
 43–4, 61–8, 63–4, 66, 72, 80,
 81–2, 93–5, 279
 ARTnews article 53–4, 57–8, 59
as curator and role in Smith’s
 career 43, 44–61, 72–3
response to Smith’s sculptures
 57–9, 61, 64–8, 70, 72–3,
 73–86
and sexuality 75–7
visits to Bolton Landing 48–9,
 50–3, 57–9, 62, 64–5
Oldenburg, Claes 9, 13
 Drum Set 24–5
Olson, James 185, 187
Olympic Games in Mexico City (1968)
 xii, 27, 29
ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives,
 Los Angeles: “Trans Activation” series
 270

Paar, Jack 24, 28
paratextuality *see* peritextuality
Parsons, Betty and gallery 24
part-objects and gender 15, 17, 19, 177
Paterson, Jennifer 24
performativity
 Flavin’s titles and dedications 209,
 220
 and fluorescent tube works
 247–53, 257, 261, 264
 Grossman’s heads as self-portraits 203,
 206
 nomination of gender at birth xiv
Pepe, Sheila 327*n*.13
peritextuality and Flavin’s dedications

251–3
Perreault, John
 and Flavin’s titles and dedications
 209, 210
 on Grossman 192, 194
personhood in sculpture 3, 276
 and “expanded field” 41
 and Flavin’s naming system
 performative naming of works
 249–53, 257
 transformable personhood 254–65
 “successive states” of personhood and
 gender xvi, xvii, 34, 279–80
 and Chamberlain’s work 110–11,
 114, 130
Picabia, Francis 20
Picasso, Pablo 105
Pincus-Witten, Robert 16
Piper, Adrian: *Mythic Being* 25
Plunkett, Edward M. 220, 259, 320*n*.41
Poetter, Jochen 125–7
Pollock, Jackson 46, 48
Pop Art 3–4, 9
Postminimalism 4
 and *Eccentric Abstraction* exhibition
 16–17
Potts, Alex 44, 215, 309*n*.2
Preciado, Paul B. xv, 26
public art: Burton’s furniture 274–6

queer studies and queer theory 27, 37

Rasmussen, Waldo 59, 61
Rauschenberg, Robert 48, 142
 Bed 235
Raven, Arlene 147, 150, 151, 156, 158,
 166, 185, 187
Rechy, John 28
 City of Night 48
Reis, Elizabeth 26, 27
relief assemblages of Grossman 18–19,
 147–8, 149–79, 203
relief sculpture 283–4*nn*.3&4

reparative readings 4–5
 Richardson, Brenda 249
 Ridiculous Theater Company 25
 Ritchie, Andrew 49–50
 Rivera, Sylvia 30
 Rivers, Larry 47, 48, 139
 Roberts, Randy 185, 187
 Rodin, Auguste 135, 273, 289*n*.66
 Rondeau, James 235
 Rose, Barbara 101–2, 105, 213, 217
 Rosen, Andrea 254, 256
 Rosenblum, Robert 220, 232–3, 239, 241, 243
 drag queen names for friends 259
 “Meet Ms. Western Artistel!” (with McGinnes) 262–3
 sexual identity 241, 324*n*.93
 Rubin, Gayle 204

 S/M community
 association with Grossman’s work 172, 173, 205
 and head figures 180, 191–201, 204
 Sahib, Prem 327*n*.13
 Salamon, Gayle 33, 37, 165, 206
 Samaras, Lucas 13
 Schapiro, Meyer 24
 Schapiro, Miriam 163
 Schiff, Gert 193
 Schor, Mira 205
 Scull, Robert and Ethel 220
 sculpture
 and color 48, 54, 105–8
 physical relationship with viewer 5–6, 7, 9, 11–12, 14–15, 277–8
 O’Hara’s response to Smith’s work 57–9, 61, 64–8, 70, 72–3, 73–86
 relationship with human figure 1–41
 abstract sculpture and genders xv, 1, 2, 9–13
 ambiguity and simplified forms

19–26, 83, 87–95, 133–4
 anthropomorphism critiques 6, 9–13
 and distinction as art not object 8
 Smith’s non-figurative art 2–3, 44–5, 54–5, 57–9, 62–8, 70, 80, 81–95
 “successive states” of personhood and gender xvi, xvii, 34, 279–80
 and Chamberlain’s work 110–11, 114, 130
 transformation in 1960s xi, 2, 6
 see also abstraction’s rejection of human form and invocation in sculpture; human figure and shift to abstraction
 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky *see* Kosofsky Sedgwick
 Segal, George 9
 Selby, Hubert, Jr.: *Last Exit to Brooklyn* (novel) 27, 28
 sex change *see* transsexuality
 sexuality
 and Chamberlain’s personal interactions and interviews 119–20
 and gender 36–9
 and O’Hara 46–8, 75–7
 in sculpture 3, 37
 abstract eroticism 5, 13–15
 and Chamberlain’s work 98, 100, 120–5, 127, 129–31, 143, 145
 complexity of Grossman’s explicit art 38, 148, 151, 160–76, 179, 203
 Grossman’s association with S/M community 180, 191–201, 204, 205
 and Smith’s work 38, 75–7
 see also erotic in art; homosexuality; transsexuality
 Shaw, Lytle 72–3
 Siegel, Anita 198
 Sillman, Amy 327*n*.13

Sims, Lowery Stokes 174, 176
 Smith, David xii, xiii, 2–4, 7, 16, 43–95, 74–5, 89, 274, 280
 bodies in non-figurative art 2–3, 54–5, 57–9, 62–8, 70, 80, 81–95
 and assignment of gender 44–5, 62–4, 73–86, 89–91, 93
 Bolton Landing and sculptures in situ 42, 45, 48–9, 49–53, 50–3, 55–8, 57–9, 61, 62, 64–5, 67, 71, 74–8, 85–6, 88–92, 95
 catalogue raisonné 299*n*.58
 color and work 48, 54, 105
 composition of work and “drawing in space” 68, 157–8
 daughters and home life and work 48, 51–2, 78–9, 298*n*.54
 death 59, 61
 friendship with Grossman and *For David Smith* 150–1, 151–60, 153, 155
 and O’Hara
 Art New York interview 1, 39, 43–4, 61–8, 63–4, 66, 72, 80, 81–2, 93–5, 279
 connotations of “I don’t make boy sculptures” comment 43–4, 64, 73–84, 86
 and European retrospective (1966) 59, 61
 misrepresentation of Smith’s comments and works 81–6, 93
 “Mozart’s Chemisier” poem 50–2
 O’Hara at Bolton Landing 48–9, 50–3, 57–9, 62, 64–5
 O’Hara’s *ARTnews* article 53–4, 57–8, 59
 O’Hara’s response to Smith’s sculptures 57–9, 61, 64–8, 70, 72–3, 73–86
 O’Hara’s support as curator and role in career 43, 44–61, 72–3
 response to O’Hara’s sexuality

75–7
 rejection of words to interpret art 81
 sexuality and work 38, 75–7
 attitudes to women and use of term “girls” 78–80
 female nudes 79
 Tate Modern retrospective 1
 and transgender perspective 18, 26, 87–95
Agricola I 51
Black White Forward 77
Circle and Box (Circle and Ray) 65
Cube Totem 7 and 6 51, 84, 85
Cubi series 53, 55, 68, 95, 158, 159
Cubi VI 65
Cubi VII xviii
Cubi VIII 67
Cubi XI 71
XI Books III Apples 78
Fifteen Planes 69–70
The Five Spring 57
The Hero (Eyehead of a Hero) 83, 84, 86–7
Lectern Sentinel 67
Lonesome Man 76, 78
March Sentinel (Stainless Steel Planes) 53, 53
Ninety Father 42, 53, 60, 77, 78
Ninety Son 42, 53, 60, 77, 78, 91
Noland’s Blues 60
Personage of August 57, 58
Pilgrim 57
Rebecca Circle 60
Running Daughter 57
Sentinel series 68, 83
Sentinel I 56, 57
Sentinel II 57, 58
Tahstvaat 51
Tanktotem series 68, 83
Tanktotem I 83, 84
Tanktotem IV 83, 88
Tanktotem VI 57
Tanktotem VIII 60

Tanktotem IX 83, 90
Two Box Structure 50, 53
Two Circle Sentinel 50, 53, 53
Zig series 53, 68
Zig II 49, 50, 53, 55
Zig III 49, 50, 53, 77
Smith, Jack 195
Smith, Tony: *Die* 9–10, 10, 278
Smithson, Robert 139, 234
speech act theory *see* performativity
Stanford University xii, 30
Star, Hedy Jo 27, 28
statue
 assignment of gender in Smith’s
 non-figurative work 44–5, 62–4,
 73–86, 89–91, 93
 hermaphrodite statues and ambiguous
 figures 20
 rejection and transformation in art of
 1960s xi, xii, xiii, xvii, 2, 6–7, 8,
 10–11, 40
Stella, Frank 142, 220, 228, 259
 titles of “Black Paintings” 249–50
Stoller, Robert 24, 28, 30
Stonewall Riots (New York, 1969) xii,
 30
Street Transvestite Action Revolutionar-
ies (STAR) 30
Stryker, Susan xv, 26–7, 32, 36, 127,
 282*n*.10, 292*n*.120
 on gender and sexuality 37
 on inevitability of gender attribution
 176–7
 on “transgender liberation” in 1960s
 xvi, 30–1
 on use of “transgender” as term 32
“successive states” of personhood and
gender in sculpture xvi, xvii, 34,
279–80
 and Chamberlain’s work 110–11,
 114, 130
Sullivan, Louis 228
Sylvester, Julie 117–18

Symbolism: artists and self-representation
 20
Tatlin, Vladimir 6, 210, 323*n*.78
Tennyson, Alfred, Lord: “In Memoriam
 A.H.H.” (poem) 235, 237
theater and illusionism and Flavin’s
 work 222
Thek, Paul 9
Tillim, Sidney 212
titles *see* Chamberlain: titles and
 meaning of work; Flavin: titles of
 works and dedications
Tonight Show (US TV show) 24, 28
transfeminism and gender nonconform-
ism in art 25–6, 149, 205
transformation
 and Chamberlain’s work 112–13, 114,
 122, 125, 127, 145
 and gender 279–80
 and body in Cassils’s work
 269–74, 278
 and Flavin’s naming practices
 257–65
transformed gender categories xvi,
 xvii
transgender experience xv, 35,
 273–4
 see also gender: mutability
sculpture and rejection of statue in
 1960s xi, xii, xiii, xvii, 2, 6, 6–7, 8,
 10, 40
transgender
 activism and issues xii, 26–7, 28, 29,
 30
 aesthetics of transgender body 4
 artists and self-representation 20, 24,
 25
 bi-sexed and inclusive genders in art
 20–1, 24–5, 178–9, 205
 Cassils’s performance and work
 269–74, 278
 and Grossman’s work 19

historical understanding and
 acknowledgement xv–xvi, 25,
 26–34
 chronology of 28–30
 in context of gay and lesbian
 culture 31, 270
naming and personhood 258, 259,
 264
and temporal nature of gender 127,
 129
use of term 32–3
 as inclusive category xv
 see also transgender capacity; trans-
 gender studies; transsexuality
transgender capacity xvi, 5, 34–6
 and abstract sculpture 2, 4, 34–6,
 38–9, 276–7, 278–80
 and body in Cassils’s work
 269–74, 278
 Grossman’s work 160
 openness of Chamberlain’s work
 129–42, 145
 usefulness as critical tool 34–6
transgender studies
 and art history xiii–xv, xvi, xvii, 33
 application to unexpected artists
 18
 and Lippard’s “Eros Presumptive”
 views 14
development as discipline 27, 33
and temporal construction of gender
 129
Transsexual Action Organization (TAO)
 30
transsexuality
 historical understanding and
 acknowledgement xi–xii, xv–xvi,
 25, 27, 28, 29–30
 transgender as umbrella term xv
Tucker, Paul 79

Tucker, William 54, 84
Twombly, Cy 142

Ultra Violet (Warhol actress) 116, 121
universities: gender research clinics xi–
 xii, 28, 29, 30
University of California Los Angeles xi,
 28

Valentine, David 32, 36
van der Marck, Jan 220
Vidal, Gore: *Myra Breckinridge* (novel) xii,
 27, 30, 31
Vietnam War: Grossman’s response 185,
 187–8
viewer’s bodily relation with art 2
 abstraction and bodily scale 9–10,
 277–8
sculpture 5–6, 7, 11–12, 278
 Lippard on “Eccentric Abstrac-
 tion” 14–15
 O’Hara’s response to Smith’s
 work 57–9, 61, 64–8, 70, 72–3,
 73–86
 Postminimalism and sculpture
 “beyond objects” 16–17

Wagner, Anne 13
Warhol, Andy 25, 27, 30, 142, 195
 Blow Job (film) 172, 201
 Lonesome Cowboys (film) 138–9
Warren, Vincent 47, 59
Welchman, John 249
Wilfred, Thomas 217
Wilke, Hannah 13, 14
Wilkin, Karen 83
Williams, Cristan 292*n*.106
Wilson, Phyllis Avon 29
Wood, Ed 28

QUEER RELATIONS

DAVID J. GETSY

. . . wavering line
between two solids
themselves immersed

— Stephen Jonas, “Exercises for the Ear” (1968)¹

There is nothing intrinsically queer about a form. Rather, queer capacities are engendered by activating relations—between forms, against an opposition or context, or (in the case of complex forms) among the internal dynamics of their components. Queer counternarratives and sites of otherwise identification can be located in the associations, frictions, and bonds between and among forms.

After all, one cannot be queer alone. Whether in the embrace of another or against the ground of a hostile society that seeks to enforce normativity, a life is thrown into relief as queer through its commitment to unauthorized or unorthodox relations and the transformative potential they represent. (Of course, the organizing synecdoche for this commitment is a set of sexual relations that refuse “natural” rites of procreation and, by extension, propose new modes of desire, pleasure, family, and kinship.) Even those theoretical models that assert negativity and the antisocial thrust of queer existence come to emphasize relationality as a locus of refusal and redefinition. Whether lone sexual outlaw or utopian

collective, forms of living as queer are caught up with fundamental questions about what we do with each other. In all its many and varied forms, that is, queer existence takes relationality as the matrix in which difference and defiance become manifest.

I’m being somewhat stark in my characterization of both form and relation in order to draw out what I see as the most promising potential of a queer attention to their dynamics. Rather than expecting that we might find some form, formality, or format that is queer anywhere or everywhere, we need to engender a queer formalism that can pursue the *intercourse of forms*. There is both subversive and utopian potential in attending to the ways in which forms and their components get on. This is not an iconographic task. Rather, there is potential in striving to see the uses of formal relations beneath, beyond, in consort with, or against ostensible “content.” Historically, we should remember, there have been many times when

“

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”

“

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”

formal manipulation has been the only vehicle through which queer insubordination could be conveyed. Its proponents escaped censure by means of this dissemblance and coding through forms, and they mobilized formal traits and relations as metonymies of unauthorized desires and positions of queer resistance. In effect, they relied on *how* something was said or imaged rather than the purported *what*.

With its invested attention to the relations between and within forms, a queer formalism can offer a heuristic counterpart to such coding through its cultivation of ways to read against the grain, beyond intentionality, and in pursuit of inadvertent potential. It can be a means for mobilizing formal relations in order to call forth counternarratives, to challenge given taxonomies, to attend to unorthodox intimacies and exchanges, and to subvert “natural” and ascribed meanings. Such subversions can come from examining how forms interact with each other, the patterns such relations adopt, the differential effects of context, or the ways in which form contradicts

“straight” readings. There is queer potential in insurrections of form, shape, and pattern, as well as in their uses.

An attention to the queer dynamics of forms does not mean that we should abjure or ignore ostensible “content.” Rather, it allows us to investigate how form can be mobilized in relation to content as a way of fostering such queer tactics as subversion, infiltration, refusal, or the declaration of unauthorized allegiances. We shouldn’t think of formalism as turning away from content or context but rather as the focused pursuit of queer potential through the questioning of how content is shaped, transmitted, coded, patterned, undermined, and invested by means of form.² In the capacious and un-technical sense in which I am proposing it here, formalism is less a method than a belief in the politics of form and the unruly potential of form’s relations.³ Any queer formal reading must itself be relational, particular, and contingent on its situation and context. This is a strength, not a weakness. It echoes the tactical mobility of queer refusals of normativity.

This brief essay is my first attempt at owning a sentence I wrote in the conclusion to my book on gender assignment and abstract sculpture in the 1960s: “Relations are meaningful, ethical, and political, and it is in its syntactical staging of relations that abstract art produces its engagements.”⁴ In the book, I took it as axiomatic that genders are multiple, that bodies are transformable, and that personhood is successive. I tracked moments where binary

and dimorphic assumptions about genders and their forms broke down. This was facilitated by focusing on a historical period in which formal dynamics and abstraction became priorities, and I reinvestigated canonical art histories of the 1960s where divergent accounts of gender were debated through abstract sculpture. The mapping of gender onto abstract forms often resulted in contention, reprisal, or discovery. Alternative or inadvertent accounts of gender's multiplicity emerged out of these debates. In this way, I made a case for the methodological urgency and broad implications of transgender studies and its refusal of binary and dimorphic presumptions. In support of this, allied queer methods and, in particular, a queer attention to forms and their dynamics became crucial to the aim of denaturalizing and derailing the binary and normative taxonomies for personhood. This approach also allowed me to examine the unintended effects of intentionality and to move beyond a reliance on one-to-one equations of artists' own identities with their work (an *ad hominem* fallacy that many critics continue to propagate). Sculptural abstraction—with its avoidance of representation and its opposition to anthropomorphism—served as an enabling matrix for the eruption of inadvertent counter-narratives of successive genders, non-dimorphic bodies, and acts of transformation. Abstraction does this by distilling formal relations, thus allowing one to track how form itself prompts divergent attempts at recognition. What became clear through the writing of the book was how much rebellious potential there was in the identification with form's dynamics.

However, I want to emphasize here that this ethical and political capacity of form does not require abstraction. That is, while my own guiding examples have been shapes, patterns, conjunctions, and other visual forms and formalities, my intention has been to use these simplifications to call for a greater attention to formal relations in more complex representational systems, socialities, performances, and texts. We need to hold close the recognition that formal dynamics themselves can offer the basis for cultivating such positions of resistance and counter-narratives—the counter-narratives that must be sought as models of survival for trans and queer lives facing daily their attempted erasure.

Queer existence is always wrapped up in an attention to form, whether in the survival tactic of shaping oneself to the camouflage of the normal, the defiant assembling of new patterns of lineage and succession, or the picturing of new configurations of desire, bodies, sex, and sodality. A queer formalism can track issues of shape and relation such as the erotics of sameness, refusals of conformity, non-monogamous couplings, defiant non-reproducibility, the encouragement of misuse, the vexing of taxonomies, achronological temporalities, and the creation of self-made kinships. It might examine the ways in which forms exceed boundaries; how they behave differently in different contexts; how they are being deployed against their intended use; or how they disrupt the ostensible meaning of a text or an image's claims to naturalism (in style or content). In short, a queer formalism

attends to the ways in which insubordinate relations can be proposed through form's dynamics, and it strives to identify those configurations from which queer defiance can be cultivated. After all, it is relations themselves that queer politics seek to open and remap.

/ **Notes** /

I am grateful to Ramzi Fawaz, Gordon Hall, and the journal and issue editors for their helpful responses to a draft of this text.

¹ From Stephen Jonas, "Exercises for the Ear, LVI," in *Stephen Jonas: Selected Poems*, ed. Joseph Torra (Hoboken, New Jersey: Talisman House Publishers, 1994), 47.

² A text I have found particularly helpful in thinking through these questions is by the painter Amy Sillman, "AbEx and Disco Balls: In Defense of Abstract Expressionism, II," *Artforum* 49, no. 10 (Summer 2011): 321–25. Indeed, it is often the writings by artists that address most directly the queer or trans potentials of formal dynamics and formal decisions. Here, I am thinking of contributions like the important recent text by Gordon Hall, "Reading Things: Gordon Hall on Gender, Sculpture, and Relearning How to See," *Walker Art Gallery Magazine*, August 8, 2016, <http://www.walkerart.org/magazine/2016/gordon-hall-transgender-hb2-bathroom-bill/>.

³ For further on this, see "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 58–71. I am indebted to many conversations with Jennifer Doyle before and after this published exchange that have informed my thinking about these issues.

⁴ David J. Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 277. For related arguments about abstraction and for a

differentiation of transgender and queer histories and issues, see also "Appearing Differently: Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities; David J. Getsy in Conversation with William J. Simmons," in *Pink Labor on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices*, ed. C. Erharder, D. Schwärzler, R. Sicar, and H. Scheirl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 38–55; and David J. Getsy, "Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer's Ethics of Discernment," *Temporary Art Review*, March 8, 2016, <http://temporaryartreview.com/seeing-commitments-jonah-groeneboers-ethics-of-discernment/>.

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Nominations of ambiguity are nothing more than declarations of resignation. We call something ambiguous when we give up on it and when we avoid committing to learning about all that does not fit into our categories. Objects, people, texts, events, and acts are not themselves ambiguous. They are particular, unassimilable, unorthodox, unprecedented, or recalcitrant. To invoke 'ambiguity' is to flee from the confrontation with something that does not easily fall into one's patterns of knowing. This act of exhausted reading disrespects the particularity of that which is before us and instead writes it off as being at fault — as being unknowable, indiscernible, and incompletely categorisable. 'Ambiguity' is safe to invoke, because it places blame for our own limitations elsewhere. It is a method of deflection and scapegoating. It enables us to throw up our hands and lead a hasty retreat from confronting how limited our categories and systems are. After all, what do we really mean when we say something or someone is ambiguous? We mean that *we* cannot read, cannot identify, and cannot classify. Instead, I want to uphold the particularity and inscrutability that the backhanded slur 'ambiguous' attempts to manage. I want to see that particularity as a challenge to systems of knowing.

I've recently been writing about abstraction and ways in which gender nominations are vexed by abstract, non-figurative, and non-objective forms. My aim has been to show the limitations of binary accounts of gender by using art's rich history of debating what counts as an adequate figure (or a feasible departure) against compulsions to assign (binary) gender. When the body is invoked but not imaged, gender

nominations become open for debate and contestation, and it is in the dialogic situations of discord or successive nominations that gender's openness, mutability, and multiplicity can be manifested. This is *not* due to the ambiguity of the abstract form. Rather, it is because of the ways in which the same intransigent form means differently for different viewers. To call this situation 'ambiguous' is to fall back into hopeless subjectivity and avoidance. Instead, let's call this situation 'competing' to show how much it is in the viewer's incomplete attempt to classify that differences emerge and supposedly stable taxonomies unravel amidst contestations and divergences of reception. The difficulties of reading abstract art resulted from its withstanding attempts to categorise based on resemblance or the exterior. Instead, the limitations of a binary system of gender erupted repeatedly as viewers negotiated their divergent identifications with forms that resisted easy legibility. For me, such debates were deeply informed by the politics of transgender history and its demand that we look for suppressed evidence of non-binary genders and accounts of self-determination and successive personhood. This history again and again demands recognition that people are not ambiguous. People are themselves, for themselves. Mischaracterising any particularity for 'ambiguity' is a means of making their endurance of your scrutiny into a form of subservience to your desire for comfortable intelligibility.

'Ambiguous' as an invocation or description merely signals the limitations of the one who would deploy that term. This does not mean I want everything clear and in its place. Quite the opposite: I want to embrace the radical particularity that always exceeds and undermines taxonomies. This is a queer stance, for it denies the applicability or the neutrality of those taxonomies as adequate representations of the world's complexity. Rather, they are artificial impositions of normativity more concerned with policing boundaries than with engagement. To take this term to task is to demand that we see the greater structural limitations that its invocations hope to mask. 'Ambiguity' as a description is not just lazy. It's chauvinistic. More to the point, its deployment keeps us from recognising and embracing the chance to see beyond the categories that are nothing more than blinders forcing us to stay on a narrow path.

Especially today, we cannot afford ambiguity. We must attempt to embrace inscrutability and particularity, and we can defiantly exceed or jam the taxonomic protocols that seek to delimit and define us. The undertow of ambiguity is complacency and surrender, and it is misapplied to acts of refusal and self-definition.

THE SPIT!

MANIFESTO READER

A SELECTION OF HISTORICAL AND
CONTEMPORARY QUEER MANIFESTOS

Frieze Projects 2017

SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!)

Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, Carlos Maria Romero

The *SPIT! Manifesto Reader*, a reader of historical and contemporary queer manifestos is the second component of the Frieze Project by SPIT! (Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, Carlos Maria Romero) and was published on the occasion of Frieze Projects 2017 at Frieze London, 5–8 October 2017. The first component is a series of performative interventions by a group of performers (Daniel Brathwaite-Shirley, Joshua Hubbard, Claudia Palazzo, Malik Nashad Sharpe, Carlos Mauricio Rojas, Despina Zacharopoulou) that take five original manifestos written by SPIT! as a point of departure and that were performed daily at Frieze London.

Raphael Gy  ax
Curator, Frieze Projects

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PART I INTRODUCTION

THE SPIT! MANIFESTO READER INTRODUCTION

Author: SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!)
Carlos Motta, John Arthur Peetz, Carlos Maria Romero
Year: 2017

The SPIT! Manifesto Reader brings together a selection of historical and contemporary queer manifestos¹ to create a dialogue between radical queer histories, past and present. Arguably, queer histories can be narrated through these declarative statements of discontent with political systems that are inherently patriarchal, discriminatory, biased, racialised, class-based, or gendered. We consider these excerpted texts manifestos insofar as they are statements of intent, demands for visibility, or calls for autonomy in reaction to oppressive political environments. Ranging from the late 1960s to the 2010s, these texts express a progression of intersectional concerns and practices in the sexual and gender rights movements: from the sexual and gender liberation of the 1970s, to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, to the activism around identity politics during the 1990s, and the rejection of the international LGBTQI movement’s assimilationist agenda and its capitalist incorporation in the 21st century. We hope that this reader can be used as a linear timeline upon which to reflect or understand the progressions that have taken place in the queer and human rights struggles that have lead us to the present. We also hope that this reader can serve as ideological evidence that underscores the urgency and importance of action, voice, and visibility in our social inheritance as queer people, asserting ourselves and the place of our desires in the world.

In addition to the historical manifestos published in this reader, the SPIT! (Sodomites, Perverts, Inverts Together!) Collective has produced five original queer manifestos to be performed and distributed on the occasion of the 2017 Frieze Projects in London. SPIT! consists of three cultural producers hailing from different disciplines – Carlos Motta from the visual arts, John Arthur Peetz from art writing, and Carlos Maria Romero from dance and live art – who share a long-standing interest in histories of queer activism and sexual and gender politics. SPIT! wants to consider what has been deemed ‘progress’ (social, legal, and cultural) and think

about the shifts in strategy and urgency that have taken place over the last four decades in search of social equality for queer people. Our collective is interested in thinking about *critical difference* as a productive way of challenging entrenched systemic discrimination on the basis of sex and gender. While the framework of ‘equality’ has succeeded in finding ways to be included and assimilated in society (marriage equality, inclusion in the military, etc.), it has failed to transform an inherently oppressive and violent system.

In a time of unprecedented visibility and advancement of legal rights for LGBTQI people in the West, SPIT! is concerned with the ways in which the strategies of tolerance and inclusion have only carved inroads into existing societal norms and institutions, and have left many of our most vulnerable behind (namely those who are not rich, white, gay, and male). While these moderate social trophies may represent ideas of political progress, we aren’t satisfied with the ways in which historical patterns of discrimination and exclusion have been cyclically reproduced. The radical raging ethos of sexual and gender liberation, and our demands for a truly just and emancipated society seem to have been mollified with crumbs from a table at which we don’t even want to sit. The acknowledgement of our struggle as a human rights battle, the recognition of our sexual practices, and the vindication from our social status as vectors of disease are milestones that have taken place only within the past decade in the Western world. We queers have been societal, moral, political, and religious scapegoats for centuries and, make no mistake, we still are. Being able to marry or serve in the military doesn’t necessarily improve the lives of impoverished queer people of colour who don’t have access to basic health services; or of queer incarcerated people who are unjustly detained without due process; or of trans sex workers who are battered on the streets and elsewhere; or of undocumented queer immigrants who are prosecuted on the basis of their ethnicity – these individual’s lives are still regarded as disposable. We have compiled these manifestos to remind our communities that our social protections are precarious and not guaranteed. SPIT! urges our communities to WAKE UP! and to fight for and produce systemic changes that will benefit those beyond our immediate social circles.

¹ *The SPIT! Manifesto Reader* largely focuses on American and European struggles and histories and we acknowledge that there are a number of other voices and manifestos from around the world that deserve equal recognition but unfortunately remain out of our purview.

[“Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer’s Ethics of Discernment,” *Temporary Art Review* \(8 March 2016\), n.p.](#)

Seeing Commitments: Jonah Groeneboer’s Ethics of Discernment

[DAVID J. GETSY](#)

on March 8, 2016 at 5:56 AM

What does it mean for an artist to make works that are hard to see? As viewers, we cannot help but feel that decision’s effects. One questions if one is looking at or for the right thing. Incriminations emerge. Some viewers ask why the work cannot just reveal itself better, while others search themselves for ways to look more intently, scrutinizing every detail for incident, event, and evidence. Such frustrations and compensations arise because of our faith in seeing. It is hard to realize that your ability to see cannot fathom all that appears. But that does not mean one should not work to see. Rather, such visual art and its refusals ask us to consider the ethics of sight—sight that we are reminded is limited rather than imperious.

[Jonah Groeneboer](#)’s work takes as a central theme the ethical contours and political ramifications of attempting to see as a way of attempting to know. His works are hard to see. They are impossible to photograph. They make demands on the viewer. At first appearing straightforward in their geometric simplicity, they reveal their formal complexity slowly, partially, and successively.

Groeneboer adopted the look of 1960s American Minimalism, extending its activation of perception as a means to address the body.¹ Minimalism, to offer a hopelessly brief formula, emphasized formal reduction to geometric units as a means of creating more unified, direct objects that—in their simplicity and regularity—compelled the viewer to attend to their processes of perceiving. Minimalism’s long-lasting impact can be understood to derive from the ways in which it activates the space of the gallery and the viewer’s place in it, and artists have subsequently expanded on its terms and tactics to similarly engage the viewer’s relational co-presence with the object in space. Groeneboer’s work draws on but does not replay Minimalism, even though his sculptures and paintings might at first look like those of Fred Sandback, Ad Reinhart, Jo Baer, Brice Marden, or James Bishop. His work departs from these precedents, however, through its flirtation with invisibility, through its requirements for the viewer to see, and through its quiet insistence that vision’s highest stakes are revealed when one attempts to regard another person.

In its particular activation of the struggle to see, the other key comparison to Groeneboer’s practice is that of the Swiss sculptor Alberto Giacometti, whose post-World War II works took the impossibility of fully seeing a person (even one as close to him as his own brother) as their recurring theme. Giacometti’s attenuated statues and portraits teach us about the difficulty of encountering the opacity of another person, and they remind how external features allow only a partial view of another’s subjectivity.



The Step, 2012. Green thread, blue thread, and four brass

bars, 72 x 24 x 48 in.

I like to think of Groeneboer's work as inhabiting the formal terms of Minimalism but animating them through questions related to those that drove Giacometti's struggle with facing persons. Groeneboer's work, I want to argue, uses formal reduction as a means to address the complexity and variability of the visual ethics that are active in encounters between people. His high degree of abstraction creates a situation that avoids the representation of the figure but that nevertheless calls for an unforeclosed account of personhood and the terms of its relations.²

A central mode of practice for Groeneboer has been his use of thread to create complex transparent geometries in three dimensions. These subtle sculptures evoke bodies and persons despite their extreme abstraction. With delicate threads suspended from the ceiling and made taut by hanging rectangular brass rods, Groeneboer's sculptures exhibit an animated stillness as they almost imperceptibly vibrate in response to microclimatic changes of the room. The rods lend width to the shape made by the threads that pass through them. Some of these rectangular brass tubes hover just above the ground, while others are planted on it. Like Robert Barry's similarly suspended works, the existence of the nonvisible but bodily pressing force of gravity is distilled as a reminder to the viewer. While the hovering rods of Groeneboer's works produce their regular geometries through responding to gravity, their complex and non-regular planes are made possible when the rods resting on the ground are placed at angles to that plumb.

With titles that evoke bodies and actions such as *bent hip* and *The Step*, the works invoke but do not image the human form and its capacities. Some of these works take on the proportions of humans when their hanging rectangular planes approach the dimensions of full-length mirrors. In this way, they face us with a verticality

historically associated with statue. They are astonishingly complex, however, in their refusal to let their contours define mass or solidity. The works appear distinct and different from every angle of approach as their faintly outlined geometries multiply and interpenetrate. It takes time to visually disentangle the taut lines from each other. Forms that had at first been seen as simply rectangular transform into complex, torqued planes. This multiplicity demands circumambulation rather than visual circumscription, and Groeneboer's works stage visual transitions at every turn.

It is hopeless to try to capture this experience in a photograph. This is the intentional effect of Groeneboer's activation of visual discernment. Unlike, say, Sandback's thicker, colored string that often creates the illusion of architectural elements or blockades, there is an intimacy to Groeneboer's thinner thread as it escapes being seen from a comfortable distance. It requires work for the viewer to view, and the act of seeing becomes muscular in its intensity and resistance. Because of the almost immaterial and invisible presence of the thread-lines, one simply cannot focus on the work as a whole. The thinness of the thread suspended in our space dissolves into its environment. The background of the room competes with the taut lines for our vision's attention. The threads oscillate in and out of focus, and the viewer must constantly strain to recapture these slight lines that subtly vibrate in space. This is even the case when Groeneboer uses colored thread, as in his site-specific work *Sun Column* that was made to respond to the strong raking Texas sunlight streaming across at different angles throughout the day. Here, the combination of intense light (a condition of that space and that geography) was used to play with successive appearance and disappearance. Even in the moments of brightness in relation to the colored thread, however, the extreme thinness of the thread vexed viewers' ability to focus (and remain focused) on it before the sun's activation of the color changed or passed.



Curve, 2013 (detail). Black thread and three brass bars, 96 x 24 x 24 in.

Groeneboer uses the slightness of thread to slip away from easy visual consumption and stability. Like Giacometti's receding faces and attenuated statues, the outlined form's expected wholeness sweeps away with the intense focus demanded in order for us to see what is directly in front of us. The experience is durational, with these lines in space requiring the viewer's proximity and ongoing effort in order to be seen. Even though their verticality reflects the viewer's, the thread works can disappear before the viewer's eyes as soon as focus shifts away to another point. We must continue to work to see because of the thread's almost complete lack of mass and the ways in which it visually enmeshes into all that surrounds it.

Ultimately, Groeneboer offers the viewer a proposition: walk away with nothing or do the ongoing work to see that which is in front of you on its own terms and in its full complexity. That complexity frustrates the presumption that recognition is simple, immediate, and in the viewer's control. Instead,

the work's material form requires vigilance in order to be seen. There is sophistication in its refusal to be easily legible while nevertheless being, in its form and concept, open and transparent. Remember, unlike many of Sandback's barriers and walls, these are human scale, and the geometries and twists of the outlined forms in space evoke bodies and actions.³ Like the mirrors with which they share proportions and verticality, Groeneboer's thread works face us when we look at and through them. They confront us, however, with a form that is not easily apprehended visually and that takes ongoing commitment in order to see.

* * *

In a new group of two-dimensional works, Groeneboer has extended the engagement with discernment and the ethics of seeing that he had pursued in the thread sculptures. He recently exhibited the *Blue Shift* series at the [Platform Centre for Photographic and Digital Arts](#) in Winnipeg.⁴ In these new works, the inability to see has been shifted from the real-time space of the encounter with thread to the conceptual articulation of a time and place elsewhere than the immediacy of the gallery. Groeneboer made paintings that appear, first, as portrait-oriented rectangles that have been divided into two distinct colors. When viewed under the specific conditions of moonlight, however, these works appear unified as monochromes or near-monochromes. That is, while the paintings contain two different hues, the particular low-light of moonlight reduces that chromatic range so that the comparable values of the two hues appear indistinguishable from each other. In moonlight, most of us see predominantly in shades of grey, and the *Blue Shift* paintings were made to transform in such moments of greyscale seeing.⁵

Most viewers will never see these works under those moonlit conditions, however. Instead, they are confronted with the initial paintings' divided hues while being reminded that these works appear differently elsewhere and at different times. The ability to have a direct visual experience in the moonlight is off-site and out-of-sight. In this, the works draw on legacies of conceptual art in which the idea, rather than a visual encounter, predominates over the visual experience. While it was not a reference for Groeneboer, I think of other impossible-to-see works like Sandback's 1969 *Eight-Part Sculpture for Dwan Gallery (Conceptual Construction)*, in which the artist declared that there were volumes of gasses such as helium and xenon just above the gallery's floor or, more directly, like Barry's inert gas sculptures in the desert. Groeneboer's *Blue Shift* paintings similarly remind us of what we are not able to see here.



Blue / Green, from Blue Shift, 2015. Oil on linen painting and fiber-based silver gelatin prints, 14 x 24 in.

Importantly, however, Groeneboer does not leave the moonlight conditions of viewing completely apart. Instead, he has organized the works as diptychs of two portrait-oriented rectangles. The diptych format has powerful consequences. It is used by artists to establish parallels and comparisons, compelling the viewer to stitch together both similarities and differences across the central divide. For Groeneboer, this meant pairing the initial painting with a photographic print of the works under the conditions of moonlight. At first appearing as simple or approximate monochromes, these photographic prints also show a subtle shadow along the far edge. This is the shadow cast by the moonlight on the painted object at the moment it was photographed. Groeneboer's decision to place the initial painting on the left or the right side of the panel is determined by the direction of the shadow cast on the night when each photograph was taken. The experience of seeing under the moonlight is thus partially recreated, but Groeneboer also includes this as a reminder of each photograph's mediation and temporal distance. The shadow, that is, points to the fact that the photograph was taken in a different place, at a different time, and under different visual conditions.

Each diptych does not result in the same monochrome from one to the next. This is due to the differences between the human eye and the camera. In the moonlight, these color combinations will appear as monochrome to the naked eye, but the camera has different abilities in those lighting conditions. So, works like *Pale Pink Yellow / Pale Magenta Blue* retain their bisected form in the photograph because the camera could not capture the in-person visual experience. Cumulatively, such variations in the works in the *Blue Shift* series point not to a singular conceptual operation but rather to the tenuous and limited ability of the photographic print as a means of conveying the actual experiences of seeing in moonlight.

Like the thread works and their resistance to focus, the *Blue Shift* works problematize seeing as a way of knowing what's in front of us. The mode of compare-and-contrast that results from the diptych format compels us to reflect on our vision's limitations and partiality in this situation. We must grapple with the actual visual encounter with the object being paired with a representation of how it could otherwise be. Merely looking is not enough, and we are told we would need to work to see

more adequately and more completely. We would need to commit the time to the work to go to another place and see it at another time. Each bisected panel could appear differently under the right conditions, and we could see that if only we committed to seeing the paintings in another light.

* * *

On the eve of first drafting this essay, I was having dinner with a painter I respect who had some years ago turned away from abstraction. One question that was raised in our conversation was about the problems faced by reductive abstraction in particular. He saw it as questionable when abstract works began to look similar and when their politics relied on external explanations or information provided by the artist. Shouldn't it, he asked, be made immediately visible in the work? I understood his point (which was sympathetic rather than antagonistic), and he was expressing concern that politics became illegible in abstraction. He worried how very divergent works started to look alike to the point where message or conviction would be hopelessly bracketed and subjective.

One might at first assume that one could make this claim about Groeneboer's practice, and it would not be hard to list works by other artists with which we might confuse his at first glance. This pseudomorphism (as the art historian Erwin Panofsky called resemblances produced from divergent priorities and contexts) could lead one to believe that Groeneboer's sculptures or paintings are interchangeable with those of such different artists as the Minimalists mentioned above (or other, more contemporary, artists using reductive abstraction).⁶ Nevertheless, Groeneboer's work is not the same as these other examples that it might at first look like. He arrived at geometric abstraction because it allowed him to address bodies and persons without imaging them, and he does not aim for the pragmatically verifiable geometric object, as many Minimalists did. Rather, he uses the ostensibly simple form to complicate the presumed equation of seeing and knowing. The difference of Groeneboer's practice becomes apparent only slowly after one spends time with his works and gets to know the particularity that their simplicity belies. This is also the case with the political and ethical underpinnings of Groeneboer's work, which are, like his objects, hard to see easily or immediately. This refusal to instantly self-disclose is intentional and strategic. In this regard, we might understand some viewers' fears about resemblance or pseudomorphism differently. Rather than the dilution of difference or particularity, resemblance can also be the result of deliberate choices to complicate similarity and to demand that seemingly identical or typical appearances be committed to and considered on their own terms.

An important resource for Groeneboer's work has been the politics and history of transgender experience, and it is from this perspective that one can see how such supposedly formal and descriptive terms as resemblance and identity can be understood to be politically urgent. For Groeneboer, the questions of the viewer's share and the process of perceiving are not simply neutral arenas for the artist to activate. They are also the terms of interpersonal negotiation and sociality, and from these Groeneboer distills visual discernment into formal relations. In his work, there is an account of personhood and its ethics proposed by simple forms that nevertheless escape being apprehended comprehensively through sight. Whereas the Minimalists often used formal reduction to achieve clarity, specificity, or universality, Groeneboer leans on those same formal traits to resist and to question the presumption that things (and persons) are only as they first appear.

A central theme in transgender history has been the question of appearance in the visual field—that is, how quickly appearance is used to ascribe assumptions about gender onto persons. Groeneboer's work is aligned with other artists working today who are pursuing abstraction as a means to address transgender experience and to resist the taxonomies through which bodies are read and personhood is assumed.⁷ Abstraction becomes a way to discuss social relations and bodily

politics without producing an image of a body. In this way, there is a refusal of the voyeurism and scrutiny that so often hounds the representation of the transgender body.

As a mode of resistance, Groeneboer's work offers an account of intersubjectivity that, like Giacometti's, upholds the inscrutability of another person. The concision of Groeneboer's work is poetic and political, for it addresses sight as the matrix in which arbitrations of personhood are performed. For instance, his thread works stand up to the viewer's vision and remind how limited and inconclusive it can be. This performance of resistance to immediate visual comprehension draws its urgency and energy from the experience of daily confrontation with others' sight and with their compulsion to read and to decipher gender.⁸ A person's lived experience of gender does not always match others' visual categorization of that person's appearance. As well, those who have transformed their bodies and appearances to visually convey the gender they know themselves to be must constantly negotiate others' sight and scrutiny. Visual taxonomies of gender weigh on us all, but their oppressive force is particularly felt by transgender subjects who exceed or who complicate those regimes of visual interpellation. Groeneboer engages with these issues in artworks that perform modes of visual resistance and that demand commitment as a way of knowing particularity. As with his thread works' vexation of vision, for instance, the seeming simplicity of the *Blue Shift* panels quickly dissolves as we realize that we are not seeing under the right conditions. What is in front of us can only be seen incompletely. That is, the *Blue Shift* works stage their own nonvisibility, despite the ostensibly straightforward geometric form. The two halves of the diptych always push us off-stage and off-site to the elsewhere moonlight place where this painting appears differently. Again, merely seeing (or seeing quickly) is inadequate and incomplete.



Red / Fuchsia, from Blue Shift, 2015. Oil on linen painting and fiber-based silver gelatin print, 14 x 24 in.

To further pursue how these issues are enacted in the formal and conceptual dynamics of the *Blue Shift* works, it should be emphasized that the diptychs are not made up of two equal halves, but rather two states of the same work. The “original” (just because initial) bisected painting is obdurately present on the wall next to a successive image of it. We are confronted with an image of transformation, with one side of the diptych being the ground from which the other's image was subsequently made. The representation of the painting—in the monochrome side—thus encodes distance and duration. Remember, we see what the divided painting can be under different

conditions and at a different time, but we only see it in the form of a photographic approximation of what that experience would be like. Were we able to see the painting under the moonlight, our view would again be partial (since we would lose the variability within the painted panel). There is no comprehensive or total viewing experience; there is only a work that appears differently in its possible conditions of being seen. The diptych format emphasizes this potentiality and partiality in its staging of the relationship between the daylight and the moonlight, between the here and the there, and between the now and the when. That is the odd nature of the approximate monochromes in these works. They represent another state and remind the viewer of how their vision is inadequate and partial under these (and, indeed, all) conditions. They point to how we might and must try to see otherwise.

All of this is to say that viewing the *Blue Shift* works in a white box gallery is intentionally an experience of incompleteness as well as an encounter with multiple resemblances. We are reminded how everyday looking fails to show us what lies within. Groeneboer could have just told us that the moonlight would work, but he generously went further by pairing the paintings with these monochrome or near-monochrome prints, showing us the mere representation of the ways in which we could actually see if we were to make the effort to see his paintings in their proper light. Moonlight is, after all, associated with transformation, as we are told from Shakespeare to popular culture. We see just an image of what this transformation might be like (in the photograph of the painting in the moonlight), but even this is incomplete since the camera's eye captures more than our own can. Because of this, these are not the complete monochromes we would see if we were in the moonlight, but rather something just close to that experience. The photographic panels, that is, do not offer finality but rather, like the diptych as a whole, perform the distance between our looking at the works and the conditions in which they could be seen otherwise. The variety among the monochrome representations is, in this light, important. The *Blue Shift* works, at first, all look alike but reveal their particularity slowly the more one sees and differentiates them. Their variations from one to the next can also be understood to evoke the slow visual transformations that would occur if we were in the moonlight with them and watched the shifts in light's intensity from moonrise to moonfall. In this way, the relationship between the diptychs comes to evoke the optical shift possible in the works' constitutions as well as it reminds that these visually similar works also slowly reveal their particularity in response to committed looking. Like the thread works, the onus is on the viewer to do the work in order to see properly. No way of looking is comprehensive or immediate—even for such a simple thing as rectangles on a wall.

With Groeneboer's works in mind, I would now respond to my friend's challenge to reductive abstraction that there can be a politics—a specific politics—in resemblance and in the refusal to make difference easily legible and, consequently, open to surveillance and scrutiny. The belief that artworks should immediately play out their politics as visibility must be interrogated for the ways in which that belief relies on a compulsory self-disclosure. This is different from saying that the experience or politics on which an artist draws should be camouflaged, hidden, or suppressed. It is saying that there are political, personal, and ethical bases for art (and life) that choose not to offer themselves up easily to the viewer for visual consumption and instant categorization. Groeneboer's works remind us that there is an ethical and political basis for the refusal both to self-disclose and to be made simply and readily visible. Disclosure and particularity come with the viewer's on-going commitment. The visual terms of his work show us that the recognition of the unique qualities of the individual are earned through the establishment of intimate, durational relationships.

Being hard to see or looking alike can be politically powerful and necessary, and Groeneboer makes this claim with artworks that vex visual comprehension and that demand time and dedication. The ethical aspects of vision's role in interpersonal relations are thematized in Groeneboer's objects themselves, which complicate our belief that merely seeing is fully knowing. Instead, his artworks ask us to commit to the effort required to regard persons on their own terms.

I would like to thank Jonah Groeneboer for the many conversations and correspondences over the past few years that have informed my writing about his work. This essay was initially occasioned by the 2015 exhibition of Groeneboer's Blue Shift works at the Platform Centre for the Photographic and Digital Arts, Winnipeg, and I am very grateful to the staff of Platform for their assistance and encouragement.

All images © Jonah Groeneboer, 2016 and courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

1. A brief discussion of Groeneboer's relation to modernism, more broadly, can be found in Craig Willse, "Craig Willse talks to Jonah Groeneboer," *NY Arts Magazine* 13, no. 1/2 (January/February 2008): 46-37.
2. For more on the abstraction's capacity to propose unforecasted accounts of personhood, see the conclusion to my *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), esp. 276–80.
3. Such capacities, however, may be nascent (even if inadvertent) in the terms that Sandback proposed for his own work — capacities which Groeneboer's work makes retrospectively clearer. For a compelling discussion of the ways in which Sandback's process and ideas can be understood to relate to material openness, bodies, and gender, see Gordon Hall, "Object Lessons: Thinking Gender Variance Through Minimalist Sculpture," *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 47-57.
4. "Jonah Groeneboer: Blue Shift," Platform Centre for Photographic and Digital Arts, Winnipeg, 27 November 2015 to 16 January 2016.
5. Groeneboer discussed his research into optics and his process in a November 2015 interview with Derek Dunlop published as a brochure for his exhibition at the Platform Centre.
6. On pseudomorphism, see Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Egypt to Bernini* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964), 26–27, 52–54.
7. I discuss this in more detail (with reference to Groeneboer) in an interview published as David J. Getsy, "Appearing Differently: Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities," interview by William J. Simmons, in Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar, and Hans Scheirl, eds., *Pink Labour on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015), 38–55; and in Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy, "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (2013): 58–71.
8. For a discussion of resistance in and the potential of such negotiations for transgender subjects, see C. Riley Snorton, "A New Hope: The Psychic Life of Passing," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 77-92.

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its alternatives. His recent books include *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (Yale University Press, 2015); *Scott Burton: Complete Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975* (Sobercove Press, 2012); and the anthology of artists' writings, *Queer*, for the Whitechapel Gallery's —Documents of Contemporary Art” book series published by MIT Press (2016).

A SIGHT TO WITHHOLD

David J. Getsy on Cassils



Cassils, *Fountain*, 2017. Performance view, September 16, 2017, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.
Background: Cassils, *PISSED*, 2017. Photo: Vince Ruvolo.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: Cassils's work comes from rage. *PISSED*, the centerpiece of their exhibition "Monumental" at Ronald Feldman Gallery in New York this past autumn, testifies to that anger. Exhibited as a massive glass cube containing two hundred gallons of the artist's urine surrounded by the containers used to collect and carry it, *PISSED* addressed a transgender political struggle via a formal language at once confrontational and uncompromisingly austere. The work was sparked by the Trump administration's spiteful, reactionary decision to rescind an Obama-era executive order that endorsed the rights of transgender students to use the bathroom of the gender they know themselves to be. In response, Cassils began collecting all the urine they passed since that date. Refusing to keep out of sight, the artist undertook this months-long lifework as a confrontational transgression of the conventional lines between public and private, and the resulting installation offered a defiant material presence that resists the ways in which "privacy" has been weaponized against transgender lives.

The fearmongering about bathrooms hinges on compelling trans people to make themselves visible as a means of surveilling and targeting them. This motive is masked as a defense of privacy, the terms of which are defined, narrowly, through the presumption that gender is merely (and strictly) binary, and through the belief that those binary genders need to be segregated because of the dangers of heterosexual lust. Any "right to privacy," however, excludes anyone who does not fit binary preconceptions, and this exclusion is enforced by institutions that defend the myth that there are only two static genders. Bathrooms have become one of the most visible symbols and sites of the structural disenfranchisement of transgender people. *PISSED* makes the case that bodily processes are already public and political.

With *PISSED*, Cassils wryly appropriated the formal vocabulary of Minimalist abstraction, the rule-based structures of Conceptual performance, and the tropes of institutional critique. The work was a daily disruption for the public spaces through which Cassils moved during nearly seven months of urine collection, carrying

a conspicuous container with them at all times. The material needs of their body were consequently made both public and social throughout the months leading up to the work's display. This performance work manifested its protest as quotidian visibility, a literal refusal to allow this issue to recede from view—not for a single day. When Cassils was traveling by air or out of the country, friends took on the responsibility of storing their own urine in the artist's stead. What was on view in the gallery is an evidentiary residue of these daily acts of defiance and solidarity, and its final form is built on the thousands of conversations Cassils had with friends, strangers, authorities, and acquaintances about the work and its political significance. Cassils's artistic labor included shouldering the burden of having these conversations (which ranged from the supportive to the skeptical to the antagonistic), as well as enduring the increased scrutiny this performance of resistance brought to them, their body, and its processes.

For over fifteen years, Cassils's work in performance, installation, and video has tackled the complicated politics of transgender visibility and its intertwinement with the politics of form. They use their own body as material, transforming it through training, nutrition, and the acquisition of athletic skills, while also exploring the

Cassils speaks to the politics affecting transgender lives while striving to convey those politics without exposing the trans body to voyeuristic examination.



Left: Cassils, *Alchemic No. 1*, 2017, ink-jet print, 30 x 30". From the series "Alchemized," 2017. Photo: Cassils with Robin Black. Above: Cassils, *Becoming an Image Performance Still, No. 3* (Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Historic Casting Hall), 2016, ink-jet print, 20 x 30". Photo: Cassils with Zachary Hartzell.

body's mediation via photography, video, sound, and sculpture. In some performances and photographs, Cassils has defiantly exposed their body, knowing this will solicit viewers' intrusive gazes and suffering the voyeuristic objectification that many viewers unquestionably perform. The artist does this to short-circuit the lurid, diagnostic fascination that has historically shadowed the visibility of the transgender body. Cassils's work incites voyeurism to subvert it.

"Monumental" situated *PISSED* within the broader context of this practice of resistance, juxtaposing the work with objects related to *Becoming an Image*, 2012–. This ongoing performance centers on Cassils's combat with a two-thousand-pound clay monolith whose originally clean-lined, geometric form has been transformed into a record of the many punches and kicks that have impacted its surface. The audience views it in the dark, surrounded by the sounds of Cassils's exertions. Flashes of light from a photographer's camera allow brief glimpses of Cassils during their attack on this form, leaving viewers with retinal burn rather than the ability to stare at the performer's nude body. The exhibition at Ronald Feldman included some of the photographs taken during these performances, as well as the monument *Resilience of the 20%*, 2016, a bronze cast of the battered clay remnant that obliquely attests to the survival and strength of transgender people in a climate of violence against them. Also on view was documentation of the important performance *Monument Push*, 2017, organized with the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

in Omaha. Here, a group pushed the bronze sculpture through town to sites of resistance and to places where violence against marginalized peoples had occurred. In addition to establishing a platform for public conversations about the suppressed violence of the city's past, *Monument Push* created an indexical record of the effort of those who moved it through the streets of Omaha, the bronze accumulating marks of patination and wear. The work recalls Francis Alÿs's well-known *Paradox of Praxis I*, 1997, for which he pushed a block of ice through the streets of Mexico City as it gradually melted away, but *Monument Push* is less reflexive, more overtly embedded not only in the history of art (Alÿs's work having been widely construed as both a parody of and an elegy for Minimalism) but also in the history of politics, of gender, of the specific place in which the work was situated. And Cassils's performance gets more difficult as it proceeds. The weight does not lessen. If anything, it seems to get heavier. If Alÿs stages the deliquescence of history, Cassils emphasizes its obdurate refusal to go away, or to transform itself into elegant abstraction. Abstraction in *Monument Push* is not elegant, and it is not an escape from anything.

In all of their multistage works, which move from performance to sculpture and installation, Cassils never allows the viewer merely to aestheticize the experience. Visitors did not contemplate *PISSED* in silence; emanating from the speakers in the room was the recorded testimony of the Virginia school board and the Fourth US Circuit Court of Appeals regarding Gavin Grimm, the

high school student who sued his school for his right to use the appropriate bathroom. Much of the testimony is negative, and this looping two-hour audio component immersed viewers in the hateful opinions aired in Grimm's presence during the legal proceedings. These disembodied voices of ignorance made it impossible to see Cassils's cube, or the seriality of the containers, in merely formal terms, ensuring that the bodily and political urgency of the work was present and visceral. Sound plays a similar role in Cassils's video installation *Inextinguishable Fire*, 2007–15, in which viewers hear the labored breath of the artist as they are engulfed in flames (while wearing a fire-retardant suit), and in *Becoming an Image*, where the artist's breathing can be heard for the duration of the piece, while their body is only fitfully seen in the camera's flashes.

Across their works, Cassils uses such fragmented or distilled evocations of bodies both to activate physical empathy and to circumvent the visual scrutiny that trans people endure. This is also the case with their use of abstraction (be it in the Minimalist cube or the mottled form of *Resilience of the 20%*). Cassils's work results from a sustained attempt to speak to the larger politics affecting transgender lives while, at the same time, striving to convey those politics without exposing the trans body to voyeuristic examination. In conjunction, these tactics derive from Cassils's understanding that no one body can represent the diversity and complexity of all trans lives. While Cassils uses their own body in their performances, they strategically employ abstraction to



From left: Cassils, *Monument Push*, 2017. Performance view, April 29, 2017, Omaha. Photo: Cassils and Alison Kelly. Cassils, *Fountain*, 2017. Performance view, September 16, 2017, Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York. Background: Cassils, *PISSED*, 2017. Photo: Vince Ruvalo. View of "Cassils: Monumental," Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York. Background: *Inextinguishable Fire*, 2007–15. Hanging: *Encapsulated Breaths*, 2017. Photo: Vince Ruvalo.



avoid the presumption of speaking (or standing) for all. Instead, they offer works that—like the traces of touch on the abstract monument or the disembodied voices of the Grimm trials—attempt to open up the complexity of trans experience while calling for visceral identification and political reflection from all viewers.

At the same time, there are moments when Cassils does use their own body in their performance, to visually confront the viewer. Rarely, however, do they offer unfettered visual access to their body. This relates to their long-standing engagement with histories of feminist art, and Cassils builds on and cites the precedents of such artists as Eleanor Antin and Lynda Benglis, both of whom made works that also bravely displayed their bodies to critique the history of representation and its gendered politics. Pivoting between such feminist body art and the capacities of abstraction and fragmentation, Cassils challenges us with the defiant presence of their body. Exposing the artist to the viewer's gaze, such work nevertheless both makes manifest and resists the violence that such visibility can incite. We see this, for example, in "Alchemized," 2017, a series of photographs of Cassils in which their body is covered in gold. These pictures push the body toward abstraction through tight cropping and the monochrome gilt. They invite the gaze but also mock it by turning the spectacularized body into a precious metal—a fragment of a gold statue that, like the famous Oscar statuette, is streamlined to a form

that is not easily gendered. While indexing Cassils's body, the photographs, like *Becoming an Image*, also prevent full visual access to it.

Such recourses to abstraction, bodily evocation through sound, or fragmentation are necessary for Cassils's project and politics. No, abstraction is not an escape—but it can be a method of protection or evasion when easy legibility is dangerous or intrusive. There needs to be space both for confrontational politics and for the equally political tactics of nondisclosure and intended unrecognizability. Cassils stages these dual necessities by making overtly political work that does not merely offer itself up to the viewer's wish to see—that is, to identify and to categorize. Their deployment of Minimalist and abstract forms (as well as their vexing of the easy view of the transgender body) is a challenge to the demand that transgender people make themselves visible for everyone else.

At the opening of "Monumental," in the performance *Fountain*, 2017, Cassils critically enacted these ideas. Surrounded by the containers and facing the glass cube, they stood (clothed) on a tall pedestal. They drank water constantly and would, on occasion, urinate into another container, to be added to the cube. Attendees waited curiously for this event over the two hours the performance went on. It was a sympathetic crowd, but there was still an anxious buzz in the room when it appeared that the urination was about to happen. This

was, in the end, another of Cassils's tactical contradictions. Cassils capitalized on the fascination with the vulnerable act of urinating (and, by extension, with the transgender body) to compel the audience to stare at the artist. For this limited time, Cassils was the monument, high above the crowd. All looked up and waited, vigilant. Cassils understood the audience's gaze (both intrusive and sympathetic) and solicited it as a means of entraining them in a group performance of witnessing and, ultimately, of solidarity.

Cassils's works are protests. They are based in anger and defiance, and they struggle with the realities of the ways in which transgender people are surveilled and controlled. Cassils insists on recognition but refuses to be objectified. The seeming divergences of the works' visual strategies—from spectacular body performance to cerebral abstraction—are required to address today's political realities, when transgender lives are commodified, instrumentalized, and policed for others' comfort. The double bind in political attacks on transgender visibility hinges on the paradoxical demands of being both out of sight and readily identifiable, and Cassils's monuments attest to the many ways in which that visual contradiction is endured and resisted. □

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Jointly-authored statement regarding *Artforum*, posted on social media and cassils.net, 9 Feb 2018

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CASSILS IN ARTFORUM

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"As an artist, it has long been a goal to be featured in a respected art magazine. I wanted to increase the level and sophistication about trans politics by contributing to the conversation. I was thrilled when *Artforum* agreed last summer to publish an article on my new work. I crafted the work with everything I had, and it was so eloquently articulated by David Getsy, a writer I greatly admire. I expected to feel pride and jubilation, but instead I felt deep sadness when I learned my milestone rested on a history of women being harassed, objectified, and belittled. Neither David or I knew about the disturbing pattern of sexual harassment at the magazine. Now we do, and we could not let this go unaddressed. Our anger about these revelations remains, but we are encouraged that the magazine is under new direction. We look forward to this change. We learned that the article is not accessible for people who do not subscribe to *Artforum*. For this reason we have uploaded it here so that you may read it for free." <http://tinyurl.com/ycnuwn8n>

-Cassils and David Getsy

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Abstract Bodies and Otherwise: A Conversation with Amelia Jones and David Getsy on Gender and Sexuality in the Writing of Art History

Amelia Jones and David J. Getsy

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On the heels of the recent publication of their books Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories and Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender, Amelia Jones and David Getsy initiated a conversation about these books and the current state of and future directions for art history's engagements with gender and sexuality. [i] The following dialogue was conducted by email over the course of the summer and fall of 2017, and it is presented by caa.reviews as part of its commitment to engage with new ideas in art-historical and art-critical writing.

Amelia Jones: Perhaps we could start with asking ourselves: What are the different versions of "gender" as a concept and experience being deployed in art-historical and art-critical writing today?

David Getsy: Our present moment is indebted to a sustained attention to gender—first and foremost from feminist criticism beginning in the 1970s and extending through allied perspectives in queer theory and transgender studies. These ways of understanding the politics of how one writes art history are still urgent. It's a mistake to think we're past the need for the feminist critique of structural sexism, for queer theory's resistance to the propagation of heteronormativity, or for the defense of gender self-determination put forth by transgender studies. Indeed, there are ongoing and complex debates about how to understand gender's relation to societal power among these perspectives—and, most crucially, of the ways in which all gender normativities are tied up with race. Those debates can (and should) challenge the aversion to talking about inequalities of gender and sexuality that is still evident in some writing about art's histories and current practices.

AJ: I would add an extension based on my own experience in the field. I have spent almost thirty years (!) pursuing a feminist art history and have been continually marginalized from certain powerful institutions (departments, journals, conferences, etc.) for putting gender—or, crucially (as you point out), structures of power relating to gender/sex identification—in the foreground of my analysis, as well as strategically and extensively focusing on the work of otherwise neglected woman-identified and queer artists.

Watching moments at which such emphases are momentarily fashionable emerge and then quickly pass by (say, the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, or the brief heyday of feminist shows in the US and Europe around 2005–10), I am struck by the continued failure to integrate an understanding of how gender/sex identifications *function* in art-historical scholarship, as well as in curating. Gender/sex plays a role either relating to self-identification or, often unspoken and hidden, identifications positioning artists' works in a hierarchy of value based on their presumed gender/sex.

This also relates to the larger problem of assuming questions of identification to be peripheral to the "real" work of art history. I would argue, in contrast, that there is no point in doing art history without starting from the point of awareness that all making and interpretation takes place in ways that are deeply and inevitably informed by beliefs about the perceived identity of the artist, as well as by our own matrices of identification. Sex/gender identifications are not in this framework peripheral or secondary concerns. Nor are they prioritized as somehow more important or more foundational than other modes of identification such as class or race/ethnicity (these are all co-constitutive). And no art making, viewing, interpretation, historicization, collecting, marketing, or exhibition of art occurs outside these matrices of power. This is the overarching point in my book *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. [ii] Art is all about gender/sexuality—there is nothing about it that escapes such identifications!

DG: But this is what is encouraging about all of the work that is emerging out of feminist, queer, and transgender thought today. That's the more hopeful answer to your question about what's happening in current writing about art. Those perspectives that take gender as a critical site at which to expose larger structures of oppression have developed an increasingly sophisticated accounting of the operations of structural heteronormativity, sexism, and transphobia. As well, the understanding of gender's intertwining with race, sexuality, and class is a central priority today, and the terminology and methods for intersectional critique are expanding. [iii]

AJ: I think your insistence in your recent book, *Abstract Bodies*, on addressing the work of David Smith, Dan Flavin, and John Chamberlain through the lens of gender/sexuality (itself a kind of willfully perverse critical gesture) is one of its most interesting methodological contributions. Those are compelling chapters. Finding the evidence of views and beliefs about sexuality in discursive traces (statements, interviews, archival bits) is such a powerful strategy, and one that parallels what I am doing in my current book project (tentatively entitled *In Between Subjects: A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance*). Here, I'm looking at the historically coextensive rise of discourses around "queer" cultures and subjects and "performativity" and performance in the art world; I explore the co-elaboration of gay or queer culture, theatricality, relationality, performance, and performativity in the 1950s and following.

DG: What became clear to me in writing my book was how much these canonical artists were always already talking about instabilities of gender and sexuality. The texts that they produced about their work—through interviews and writing—returned again and again to questions about gender assignment and abstraction (Smith), sex as a metaphor for artistic practice (Chamberlain), the body as a limit (Nancy Grossman), or the visual evidence of sexual differences and the effects of naming (Flavin). That is, the art-theoretical debates about abstraction, anthropomorphism, figuration, and objecthood all grappled with issues of gender's multiplicity and transformability. Nevertheless, these topics had been ignored or sidelined in dominant art-historical discussions. For me, it became urgent to show that gender's multiplicity, in particular, had always been at issue. Nonbinary and non-dimorphic definitions of gender greatly clarified the terms of such historical debates.

We have to attend to the silences and omissions in history. All historical debates about gender and sexuality are always *also* potential registrations of the capacity for non-ascribed and volitional genders and for queer resistances to emerge. I think your work on theatricality's anxious relation to queer performativity will also help bring out such possibilities for resistance and an understanding of recognizing the importance of gender and sexuality to our received art-historical narratives.

AJ: My aim with the book is to historicize the terms "queer" and "performativity": they have been elided in performance studies and cultural studies in particular into a concept that few question, but there is a history to their connectedness. This connectedness, this history, allows me to highlight the way in which binary concepts of gender and sexuality haunt the making and theorizing of contemporary art all the way through to the present—certainly quite directly since the 1940s.

DG: This, I think, is the reason we're having this conversation—to discuss how important it is to recognize that gender and sexuality are not peripheral, subordinate, or distracting issues for art history but, rather, necessary and foundational to that history. As I mentioned above, however, to do this it seems necessary to expand the terms and scope of accounts of gender by arguing for the pertinence (no—the urgency) of recovering histories of gender's already existing (and historical) multiplicity and mutability. Most accounts of historical (or current) individuals are based on a false axiom that there are only two genders and that the human species is simply, clearly, and consistently divided in two. It's like saying the world is flat because that's how it looks outside my window.

I tried to address this by thinking about one possible transgender studies *method*—one that took as axiomatic a recognition of gender as multiple, bodies as non-dimorphic, and both personhood and embodiment as transformable and successive. How do we *start* from such an axiom, and how do we find evidence that pursuing it produces more nuanced and complex interpretations — and narratives of potential identification and resistance? I don't mean "alternative" interpretations. I mean head-on accounts of how gender's potential and complexity inform artistic practice and its receptions. There is great value in the methodological choice to take as foundational an understanding that genders are volitional and multiple and that bodies are not limited by absolute dimorphism. For instance, there are some readers of my book who got angry that I would do such a thing to an artist like Dan Flavin or David Smith—artists who seemed unconnected to nonbinary genders. But my point was in alliance with yours: that all artists and all art need to be approached with the understanding that gender/sexuality *and* unenclosed multiplicities are *already* inextricable. It's myopic to assume that it's only women artists who need (or benefit from) feminist critique, only non-heterosexual artists who require queer critique, or only transgender artists who are the topics of transgender studies. That assumption (an insidious inversion of identity politics) is a way of keeping people in their places and preventing wide-scale, structural critique and re-envisioning. Feminist, queer, and transgender critical approaches must be pursued expansively.

AJ: Beautifully stated, David, and a powerful nutshell summary of your complex arguments in the book. How do these theoretical points square with the need to give more time and space to the work of artists previously and consistently marginalized, though? I know you've gotten some flak for focusing on artists who already are fully canonized (Smith, Flavin, Chamberlain), while your chapter on Nancy Grossman fits more awkwardly into this story, since her work is largely *not* abstract and in fact *does* explicitly deal with gender and sexuality on a continuum that is quite radically unusual for feminist artists at the time.

DG: The shock of Grossman's heads as figurative but abstract was necessary to the methodological convictions of the book. Thank you for asking about it. The inclusion of her work in the book troubles the very category of abstraction (as you note) and points to the ways in which the ideas that are distilled by formal abstraction are not limited to abstract art. But, more importantly, it allowed me a different way of tracking the unintended effects of intentionality (a key theme of the book). I discussed how Grossman's committed engagement with gender's multiplicity and bodily transformation in her work was caricatured and misrecognized by critics as spectacular queer performativity—that of leather

and S&M, which in the 1960s became a topic of popular discussion and anxiety. For me, it felt both appropriate and important to track the development of her work beyond the abstraction of the 1960s through her turn to figuration at the end of the decade. In both, she attempted to evoke the body as transformable and gender as volitional without representing a body. Frankly, I don't care about a locked-down definition of abstraction as pure, and I was happy to talk about different degrees of abstraction (as in my chapter on Smith) or the more propositional and analogical "abstraction" of Grossman's sculptures of heads—representational sculptures that refused the body and, in so doing, refused the assumptions about gender that viewers invariably bring to its images.

Again, my main point in the book was to explore the possibilities of *starting* with the assumption that transgender capacity is pervasive and is already historical. In all four case studies, I attempted to offer a new account of the complexity contained in each artist's work that was rooted in their artistic practices and their statements about them. The close attention to these ways of making, these statements, and these histories also, however, afforded the opportunity to demonstrate how binary or static assumptions about gender or personhood were inadequate to that complexity. Each chapter sought to provide an example of how transgender capacities can be located—in different ways and degrees—in negotiations of abstraction's relationships to bodies and persons. I think some people read my book looking for a simple formula, but I deliberately refused such aspirations to a master theory. Instead, I believe transgender capacity is a foundational question that we must bring to *all* art histories. The directions of the answer to that question will be—like gender multiplicity—specific, particular, and variable.

I want to make sure we don't just talk about the politics of art-historical writing but also about artistic practice. After all, both our books address the terms through which artists thought about their practices. But with regard to current art, it seems to me that, sometimes, there is an uptake in artists' practices of debates in gender/sexuality that is faster, more unruly, and more direct than either in the art history or the art criticism that tries to catch up to them. Artists do history, too, and they mine art history for capacitating sites in unruly and productive ways. Are there any artists' practices that offer *methodologies* for the history of gender/sexuality? That is, ones that don't just represent or critically engage with gender/sexuality but that actually offer different ways to think about interpretation, history, or criticism (of their and of others' work)?

AJ: I agree—the most interesting artists theorize and address history and gender and sexuality in their work; that's what makes the practice powerful. For example, Carolee Schneemann (in pieces such as *Eye Body* of 1963 and *Fuses* of 1967), Yoko Ono (in the epic 1964-65 *Cut Piece*) and VALIE EXPORT (in her radical performances confronting the male gaze in late 1960s Vienna) pioneered embodied feminist models of critique before the rise of feminist visual theory. Jack Smith's performative mode of living creatively and queerly pioneered queer performance long before Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick theorized it around 1990. Adrian Piper's *My Calling Card* (1986) enacted as it theorized the relationality of identification, which scholars and writers took up in 1990s theories of intersectionality and relational aesthetics. These would be some historic examples. Other obvious examples that come to mind include artists whose work addresses questions of history and theory directly, and in turn inspires researchers looking for ways of understanding how gender/sex identifications resonate in, inform, and are informed by visibility and visual practices (as well as performance). Within feminism, that would be someone like Mary Kelly (whose psychoanalytic, Marxian feminist visual theory is enacted across her writing as well as her artwork), or obviously Piper, who is a philosopher as well as an artist (her 1988 *Cornered* may not explicitly address sexuality and gender, but folds these elements into our inevitably racialized encounter with Piper in the work), or Tee Corinne (who used photography to create images evoking and celebrating lesbian eroticism, which could be said to theorize visually a way of imagining nonbinary modes of sexual embodiment). These artists are all extremely learned and think as well as make in theoretically rigorous ways that in turn can inform how we understand (and historicize) gender/sex relations and meanings.

I have also developed my own thoughts about gender/sex theory and visibility/performance through the life works of Vaginal Davis and Ron Athey, who enact in their work a lived intersectional performativity that, as you say, pushes boundaries through the playing out of unruly desires and erotic actions, and those of Sandy Stone (whose performative lectures in the 1990s and early 2000s enacted as they theorized gender fluidity). William Pope.L's maverick performances, Renate Lorenz and Pauline Boudry's work as well as the performances of Cassils, Zackary Drucker, Nao Bustamante, Keijaun Thomas, and Rafa Esparza—all theorize as they enact the interrelations among visibility, embodiment, and gender/sexuality. I could go on, but these are some of the practices that have informed my thinking the most.

DG: That's a great list. I think it's very important to be attuned to artists who model or produce methodologies through their work. That is, works that impact how we view other artworks and the world. Here, I'm thinking of artists like Adam Pendleton, Gordon Hall, Xandra Ibarra, Carlos Motta, Andrea Geyer, Henrik Olesen, Shahryar Nashat, or My Barbarian—just to give a sense of the range of different practices.

AJ: Yes—I'm including Ibarra in my book on queer performativity (probably to disrupt the chapter called "Trans," where I address the radical new forms of queer practice and being that have come to the fore in recent years). Our examples have been from artists who have more or less directly sought to produce such oppositional perspectives, but what are strategies for differentiating gender/sexuality theory from our assumptions or beliefs about how artists themselves are identified?

DG: Perhaps another way to phrase this is: What is the distinction between, on the one hand, the

artist's self-identified gender or sexuality and the ways in which gender or sexuality are prompted by their work? Or, how do we correlate intention and reception without reducing the artwork to the artist's identity? The history of queer culture has been built on productive and speculative ways of carving out queer potentialities from a culture that refuses to acknowledge difference equanimously. Sometimes the only avenues of survival are to imagine communities and to find in unlikely places evidence that one is not alone. Historically, such ways of reading against the grain and beyond intentionality have proven emotionally and politically edifying. How can we value those rogue readings, queer interventions, trans capacities, and all those other means of finding cracks in the attempts to police difference and to enforce normativity? If we insist that cultural production is ultimately delimited by the identity of its creator, do we lose this practice of critical appropriation and of *making counterculture*? How can we grapple with the issues of structural oppression and privilege that validate certain kinds of cultural production without foreclosing the possibility that subversive or reparative uses of that same cultural production can be resources for the survival and flourishing of those marked as different?[iv]

AJ: Great questions, David—although I've always avoided the concept of "intentionality," because (through the theorizing of Jacques Derrida and others) I believe it is an impossible conceit that can, in conservative forms of art history, veil projections of meaning onto works of art (i.e., the interpreter presuming to "know" the galvanizing intention of the artist, when in fact we never have access even to our own "intentions" in any full or simple sense). I'd only add to this (from the arguments in my book *Seeing Differently*) that the key point is often to insist on complicating the discussions around identity, art, and art's institutions and discourses.

The tendency is to oversimplify the question into "we should or shouldn't reduce the work to the identity of the artist"—and I think the answer to this simplistic question is "of course we should not." Art is not reducible to some concept of identity (whatever that even means). So this question of whether or not we should connect the work directly to "identity" is completely not the point, in my opinion, not least in that it glosses over what we mean by identity and how we determine it. The point, rather, is that when we think about, make, or look at something we call art we are necessarily connecting it to a making subject, who is inevitably (if not fully consciously) "identified" in our minds. We interpret a work differently, for example, depending on whether we imagine the maker to be a white man versus a Chicana—or David Smith versus Nancy Grossman, to take your examples—and of course our own experiences and biases figure into how this distinction plays out in our relational engagement with the work.

This is, of course, a variation on the understanding in sociology since Erving Goffman in the late 1950s, and the attribution theory of social psychologists such as Edward E. Jones in the 1960s, that all meaning is relational—we engage people in a related way, although of course in the case of human interactions there is more volatility.[v] (This is where live performance can have a particular place in discussions about how we connect art to beliefs about the maker's identity.)

DG: We have to acknowledge and understand the positionality of the artist (and, as well, of patrons, curators, etc.). But I also think that we must attend to the *unintentional effects of intentionality* and see artworks as embodying logics that were not planned but nevertheless operative in a work's reception.

AJ: Yes. That's a powerful way to nuance intentionality.

DG: Here's an example (that may date me): the other day (thanks to Pandora radio), I randomly heard for the first time Freddie Mercury's version of "The Great Pretender." That version operates queerly and means differently than when that song was first sung by The Platters. A listener's knowledge of the open secret of Mercury's queer tactics in his music informs how that song can be interpreted and identified with. (This open secret, I learned upon some investigation, was reinforced by the 1987 video for Mercury's version, which cycled through his looks from his Queen years and included members of the band in drag.) That is, one does the calculus of difference to ask who the proposed "you" is in its lyrics and what "pretending" means to someone who pushed the boundaries of heteronormativity's demand that queers camouflage themselves into the supposed "normal." This is what shifts from the R&B version sung by Tony Williams (lead singer of The Platters) to Mercury's adoption of the song three decades later. But what's most important about this is that—in between Williams's and Mercury's versions—one can come to see how a shift in context can, in this case, reveal a queer capacity in the song. (We also need to ask what is assumed and what is lost when the performer adopts this song made popular by black artists—a song that was, in turn, written by The Platters' white, straight manager.) Paying attention to identity in this case means understanding that the writing of the song (i.e., the initial artist's plan for it) did not necessarily intend a queer capacity, but one was nevertheless located in it by a different artist (with a different set of intentions).

A simplistic notion that all artworks are entirely dependent on (and equivalent to) the positionality of their makers is an ad hominem fallacy. However, none of this means we ignore identity. Rather, it means we understand how different identity positions inform not just intention but also reception. My (perhaps odd) example of Freddie Mercury's re-performance of The Platters' song is meant to highlight that any piece of cultural production must be *informed* by the identity and context of its maker but it is not *limited* by them. Indeed, an account of structural sexism, homophobia, or transphobia must, by necessity, map outward from cultural production to the network of reception in which different identity positions compete in and through that cultural production.

Rogue identifications and interpretations can be transformative. There are queer logics in texts and art objects that enable (and encourage) their misuse, their camp adoration, or their unintended embrace.

Queer and transgender methods are ways to combat the reality of historical erasure and caricature, since they allow us to find capacitating sites in places beyond those with which we might more easily identify (or be told with which to identify). “Capacity” is my term for thinking about the ways in which transgender or queer potential can be located in texts and artworks (above and beyond the positionality of their authors and makers). This is derived from queer methods of reading against the grain, and it helped me to envision what one (among many) transgender studies methodology might look like with its more complex accounting of nonbinarism’s evidence in history.

AJ: We definitely have shared goals and ultimately mostly compatible frameworks, but I would eschew such dependence on the idea of an artist’s “intentions,” the concept of potential located “in” objects or texts—and this concept of “identity” that relates to both: I have argued (again, in *Seeing Differently*) that *identification* is a much more useful term. Identifications are always fluid and changing, particularly in relation to situations and others engaged; identity tends to imply a kind of determined set of characteristics that “stick” with a particular individual, that can be determined (your understanding of gender fluidity clearly would make this impossible in terms of gender/sex identifications). As for intention, I don’t find it useful to imagine (for example) that there was a moment at which the initial author of the lyrics of “The Great Pretender” had a fixed idea that was then transferred in an unmediated way to the words of the song. My creative expression certainly doesn’t work that way (I have no idea what my “intentions” are in a fully determinable way, although I try to articulate certain directions or goals). Words are just as complex in their meaning as are multimedia performances.

DG: I understand that qualification (and would agree there is no “unmediated” transfer of intent to artwork), but I also want to hold on to the idea that artists do, in fact, often plan their works in order to produce certain effects or recognitions by viewers or listeners. Such plans (intentions) are never wholly realized in the recalcitrant materiality of the artwork or the connotative excess of the text. Nevertheless, repeated formations or statements (in a series of artworks, a series of statements about those works, or within the layered process of making an individual artwork) do provide for a methodologically grounded way of locating and analyzing the intentionality—with the understanding that it is only one contributing factor to the artwork or text. The tracking of patterns allows for a way of discussing *both* the question of planned effects and the accounting of the ways in which they are always exceeded (or productive of new directions). In order to overcome historical erasure, a queer or transgender history of art must look to patterns of replication to help locate sites at which resistance or capacity can be cultivated—in both intentions for and receptions of works of art. This means having an account that is attuned to repeated patterns as a means of attending to intent but also giving weight to cultures of rogue reception (for instance, camp).

Right now, my two big projects are about recoveries of queer and genderqueer performance practices in the 1970s that were very visible at the time but have been written out of history—a book about Scott Burton’s queer performances and infiltrations in high-profile 1970s art institutions, on the one hand, and, on the other, a retrospective of Stephen Varble’s outrageous genderqueer guerilla actions in SoHo galleries and city streets.^[vi] For both, I needed a way of talking about intent and about the ways in which these artists cultivated queer or genderqueer logics based in rogue interpretations of others’ works. Understanding the complexities of intent (and its excess) is crucial to historical work and to making a case for the importance of such queer practices to current conversations.

AJ: I’m glad you brought up this deep level of how we understand the relationship between the subject making or interpreting and the meaning of the work—in terms of sexuality. These are not arcane questions, or marginal to the politics and histories we are concerned with. They are absolutely central questions to debate.

But these are methodological and terminological nuances. We both clearly agree that gender and sexuality, however these might be theorized, understood, or experienced, are structurally implicated in any art making or interpretive/contextualizing gestures. In the end, we come to complementary endpoints with our different modes of articulating and theorizing how best to address these structures. Your turn to the performative—your new work on Scott Burton and Stephen Varble—is a thrilling new move, and I can’t wait to see what you come up with. Their interventions were deeply processual and embodied, and I think will allow you fully to explore the elements you sketch above through the playful, hilarious, and radically queer performative reworkings of earlier pop classics by Freddie Mercury. Sometimes pop culture is the most innovative place to go in order to understand how such strategies can function.

DG: Yes, the point is that issues of gender and sexuality are pervasive, and we cannot forget how central they are to cultural production and the ways we write its histories. Recognizing this means attuning our methods to questions of societal power, of intersectionality with race, of erasures in history, and of suppressed capacities. Feminist, queer, and transgender methods work on many levels not just to make visible the power dynamics of privilege and prejudice but also—we have to remember—to inspire and to incite rogue identifications, reparative positions, unforclosed narratives, and unanticipated modes of resistance.

^[i] Amelia Jones and Erin Silver, eds., *Otherwise: Imagining Queer Feminist Art Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); and David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

^[ii] Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[iii] One fantastic example of this is the recent issue of the journal of the Association of the Study of the Arts of the Present, *ASAP/Journal*, that focused on “queer form.” This collection of essays and statements stages a remarkably wide debate about the politics of form from scholars working in art history, American studies, literature, performance studies, critical race studies, and more—as well as artists, who should always be part of these conversations. “Queer Form,” special issue, ed. Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 2017).

[iv] While there have been many formulations of such a question, perhaps the most widely influential of them both for scholarship and for artistic practice has been José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[v] See, for example, Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1959); and Edward E. Jones and Victor A. Harris, “The Attribution of Attitudes,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 3, no. 1 (January 1967): 1–24; as well as Jones, “Interpreting Interpersonal Behavior: The Effects of Expectancies,” *Science* 234 (1986): 41–46. The fact that Edward E. Jones is my father says something interesting about my own “relational” experience and how it conditions my interests.

[vi] *Rubbish and Dreams: The Genderqueer Performance Art of Stephen Varble* will be on view September 29, 2018–January 27, 2019, at the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New York.

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Appearing Differently Abstraction's Transgender and Queer Capacities

David J. Getsy in Conversation
with William J. Simmons

in *Pink Labour on Golden Streets: Queer Art Practices*,
eds. Christiane Erharter, Dietmar Schwärzler, Ruby Sircar,
and Hans Scheirl (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2015)

William J. Simmons: Queer art has often been predicated on the literal nature of LGBTQ themes and bodies, following the idea that representation is a form of liberation. How does the representation of politics differ from the politics of representation?

David Getsy: The history of queer practices in art has been wrapped up with a desire to testify to the existence of those who love and live differently. This means that both art and its histories have tended to be preoccupied with the production of evidence.

This compulsion to make evident has its roots in the late nineteenth-century construction of sexuality as a means to categorize people based on their erotic or romantic gravitations. In this history, regulations of sexual acts gave way to a wider monitoring of individuals' ways of living. The agents both of oppression and of resistance positioned what we have come to call "sexuality" as being more than carnal. Rather, it came to delimit an interrelated set of nonnormative attitudes toward desire, family, and one's relation to the social. One way this played out historically was in the emergence of medical and legal formulations of homosexual (and later LGB) identity that could be posited, defined, and identified—whether that be to attack or to defend them. No less than those who would be prejudiced against them, pro-LGB activists and cultural workers, that is, tended to pursue a model of identity that privileged shared experience, coherence, and visibility. It was this model that they came to argue was equivalent (but still different) to the norm to which they aspired. In this they demanded evidence of existence as a foundation for arguing for sympathy and compassion. This is the "equal" rights strategy in which restrictive identity categories are constructed and, consequently, defended in order to talk back to the unequal distribution of power. Ultimately, however, this strategy demands that difference be made visible, countable, and open to surveillance as a precondition for arguing that such identifiable divergence be treated like the norm. Not only does this strategy insidiously reinforce a hierarchical relationship between normalcy and difference, it also serves to engender attitudes of assimilationism and of subordination to normativity among those who are fighting prejudice. Difference (and oppression) is still experienced, but it is denied as a foundation for opposition. Michel Foucault was right to warn of all that was lost when sexuality became a taxonomic category of identity and, consequently, became an axis of regulation.¹

¹ Beyond the analysis in Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: Volume 1, an Introduction*, trans. Robert J. Hurley (1976; New York: Vintage Books, 1990); see also

the 1978 interview published as "The Gay Science," *Critical Inquiry* 37 (Spring 2011): 385–403; the 1982 interview published as "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,"



Fig. 3
Gordon Hall,
SET (V), 2014

In the 1980s in the United States, a recognizably queer politics (and art) emerged publically out of the fight against the genocidal effects of governmental inaction to the AIDS crisis, and activists and cultural workers demanded visibility and accountability. (Foucault was a key source for many as they thought about the redistribution of cultural power).² Such political movements targeted assimilationist politics for their compulsory self-abnegation and argued that their self-erasure from discourse had facilitated the ability of the government to passively overlook the mounting deaths caused by AIDS.

Paradoxically, clear evidence of the existence of nonnormative desires was (again) demanded. Anti-assimilationism—the refusal to erase the difference of nonnormative sexual lives—became a cardinal principle, and it manifested itself as highly visible incursions of nonnormative sexualities into politics and culture. In activism and its attendant cultural manifestations like visual art and theater, evidence of existence was confrontationally produced. The United States is not the only place this happened during this era, of course, and we can see different kinds of AIDS-related artist activism in Europe and in Latin America (as with, for example, Roberto Jacoby in Argentina or *Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis* in Chile). I'm calling forth this history here because it's important to remember how queer practices were formulated boldly and bravely in public discourse for the first time on a large scale. Across this history, however, it has been evidence of visibility and the ability to identify that have been given the most currency. That is, from the invention of the modern category of sexuality to the eruption of antiassimilationist queer practices that departed from it, an organizing question has been how to bring into representation visible positions of difference.

WS: So, are there alternatives to the politics of representational visibility?

DG: Running within and against this history has been the ongoing desire to evade the protocols of identification and surveillance that come with the figuration of queer positions. This arises from a skepticism about the limitations of overarching taxonomies of identity and, more specifically, about the ways in which sexuality has been made available to representation—that is, about how visualizations of sexuality have tended to focus

in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–84, Vol. 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998), 163–73; and the 1983 interview published as “Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality,” *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews*

and *Other Writings of Michel Foucault, 1977–1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 286–303.

² See David Halperin, *Saint Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).



Fig. 4
Jonah Groeneboer,
bent hip, 2014

almost exclusively on bodies and their couplings as recognizable signs of queer sensibilities. Such a privileging of images of erotic objects has the effect of caricaturing sexuality as sexual activity (even as something to be defended and celebrated) while replaying the regulatory compulsion to produce evidence of existence—to *appear* as lesbian, gay, bisexual, homosexual, or queer. That is, even though the history of modern sexuality has been caught up with arguing for a category of identity, the allowable and verifiable representations of nonheterosexual sexual identities have tended to privilege bodies and acts. In turn, this has prompted some artists to pursue ways to resist the reproduction of the regulatory power that makes the queer subject identifiable and distinguishable.

What I'm trying to say is that while the history of LGB activism and art have tended to focus on the politics of representation and visibility, there has also been, from the start, a recognition of how easy legibility comes with a cost. After all, how does one make sexuality visible to others? More to the point, how does one make it visible in a sophisticated way that speaks to the complexities of desire, of self-created familial bonds, and of the accumulated experience of living outside tacit norms? Queer experience can incorporate attitudes toward the world, family, sociality, and futurity—attitudes of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality that depart from its normative and procreative logics. How, today, do artists address this richer understanding of what sexual perspectives of difference can produce? Think about the problems faced, for example, by an artist who identifies as lesbian or gay or queer and asserts the centrality of that part of their existence to their work but who *refuses* to paint, sculpt, or write about erotic objects, same-sex couplings, or naked bodies—or, we shouldn't forget, who might be *barred* from doing so. How do they prove to skeptical viewers or readers that their sexual sensibility matters? Possibilities for speaking from experiences of difference are limited when one can only testify to existence through a recourse to the depiction of sexual acts, same-sex couplings, or erotically available bodies. This becomes a political as well as a formal question.

These concerns are not new, and they can be discerned throughout the history of art and, especially, twentieth-century art.³ But what I've been fascinated to see is that many twenty-first-century artists have been finding one answer to these questions—and by no means the only one—in abstraction. This is, for them, not a turning away from politics but rather a mode in which to enact politics. Abstraction has been embraced for its oppositional, utopian, and critical possibilities, for it is in abstraction that the dynamic potential of queer stances can be manifested without recourse to the representation of bodies. The human figure in representation is inescapably culturally marked. Abstraction is one tactic for

refusing the power of this marking and for resisting the visual taxonomies through which people are recognized and regulated.

WS: So, what is the relationship between this history of the representation of sexuality and renewed interest in the term “queer”?

DG: In my view, abstraction makes sense as a vehicle for queer stances and politics because it is unforecasted in its visualizations and open in the ways in which it posits relations. On a conceptual level, queer is an adjective and not a noun. The usage of the term always implies at least two other things—a noun to which it is applied (a queer *what?*) and a norm or convention against which the term queer is posed. So, the term is always historically and contextually contingent. It infects and overtakes the nouns and things to which it is attached. One way of saying this is to say that it is performative in the strict sense, and its effects are to highlight and bracket the operations of implicit normativity. The connotations of queer in English center on a suspicion about unnaturalness, and it is the assumptions about what is and is not “natural” that queer practices critique.

I’m setting all this up to remind us that queer is no one thing—nor is it easily recognized. It is an operation in which norms are called into question, “common” sense is challenged, unnaturalness is upheld, and castigation is rebuffed through its embrace. It is frustrating for some to deal with the fact that queer has no one simple definition nor a readily available iconography, but it’s important to keep it mobile, tactical, and immoderate. This is why it continues to be urgent today—and why its mobility cannot be limited to the politics of representation. For this reason, abstraction has proved to be a useful mode for many artists in thinking through queer perspectives and their tactical richness.

WS: I noticed that in all you just said, you didn’t include transgender. You even left the “T” of the acronym. But much of your recent work has foregrounded the perspective of transgender studies. How have the important challenges brought about by recent interventions from transgender theory complicated our understanding of the word queer?

DG: This is crucial for both historical and conceptual reasons. While they are interwoven, transgender and queer histories should not be simply equated. Historically, gay and lesbian politics (as well as its outgrowth in academia as queer theory and queer studies) have tended to subsume, ignore, or misrepresent the role of gender nonconforming people.⁴ More broadly, the distinctions between what we in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries define as gender and sexuality are historically contingent and not clear cut.⁵ Gender variance was often seen—by both medical

Tex



Fig. 5
Prem Sahib, *You & Me Both II*, 2013

establishments and by otherwise well-meaning gay and lesbian activists—as merely a manifestation of nonnormative sexual desire and identity. Such appropriations effectively made the contributions of trans and gender-variant people invisible. Even more problematically, transfolk were also subject to prejudice not just from the general public but also from gay and lesbian politics and culture. They were seen to be distracting from the message and problematic to gay and lesbian assimilationism.

3 See also “Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 58–71.

4 See, for instance, the critiques in Susan Stryker, “Transgender Studies: Queer Theory’s Evil Twin,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2004): 212–15; *Transgender History* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2007); and see notes 6 and 7 below; Viviane K. Namaste, “Tragic Misreadings: Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity,” in *Queer Studies; A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 183–203; Viviane K.

Namaste, “The Use and Abuse of Queer Tropes: Metaphor and Catachresis in Queer Theory and Politics,” *Social Semiotics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 213–34; and Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

5 See the discussion in David Valentine, “The Categories Themselves,” *GLQ* 10, no. 2 (2003): 215–20; and David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Susan Stryker has talked about how the uncontextualized addition of the T to LGBT in mainstream activism had the pernicious effect of *normalizing gender* for the L, the G, and the B in that acronym, thus desexualizing the T and keeping all visibly nonconforming genders into that last letter.⁶ This doesn't mean that there should not be coalitional politics among queer and transfolk, and Stryker has also argued how much queer politics and LGB rights movements *have always been* tied up with gender non-conformity and the fight against gender oppression.⁷ The relation of queer to transgender should always be interrogated for the many ways in which they differ and interweave. I slipped the T out of the above because I was specifically talking about queer history. The politics of representation and the problems of visibility are different in trans history—as are the demands that one *appear* in order to be a political subject.

All in all, it's important to remember that there are allegiances and overlaps between queer and transgender priorities and experience, but they are not equivalent. Many individuals adopt both terms as ways in which they affiliate and understand themselves, but one needs to be careful not to equate gender nonconformity with sexual nonconformity. Further, one must understand how queer practices are always also fundamentally about gender. Because of this, the critique of gender regulation must be prioritized and the history of appropriation of trans experience by queer politics and theory must be attended to and revised.

WS: In another piece, you argued: “While transgender subjects and experience must remain central and defining, the lessons of transgender critique demand to be applied expansively.”⁸ How can transgender theory be best incorporated into art historical scholarship?

DG: Transgender studies, as an intellectual formation and as an academic manifestation of real world politics, demands a substantial reconfiguration of our conceptions of personhood, relationality, and the social. Quite simply, the world looks different once we attend to the historical reality that gender is multiple, bodies are mutable, personhood is successive, and variability rather than (binary or dimorphic) consistency is ubiquitous. Our accounts of the human, of sexuality, and of the interpersonal must all be rethought through a valuation of mutability and of particularity. For instance, recognition of gender's pluralities fundamentally undermines the ways in which mainstream definitions of sexuality are predicated on binaries, however aligned or shuffled. What is needed is a broad recasting of politics, biopolitics, and necropolitics to understand the ways in which persons have been taxonomically regulated through the assumption of dimorphism and through the repeated positing of gender as static and unworkable.

With regard to artistic practice and its histories, I think art history can offer a major resource in this endeavor in its long-standing critique of representational strategies and of the use of the human figure as privileged image and allegorical device. In other words, art history has been concerned, for a long time, with the adequate rendering of the human form and the debates that have surrounded it. These arbitrations are ethical and not just aesthetic.

To take on the indisputable reality of transgender history and its complexity demands that additional work be done. Beyond its foundational focus on trans subjects speaking to and from trans experience and history, transgender studies is also a position from which to launch expansive critiques of gender regulation, of binarisms and dimorphisms, and of the ways in which persons are recognized. For me, this meant that I had to look differently at the ways in which art's histories have tended to reinforce models of the human that disallowed particularity and transformation. So I track episodes in which gender mutability or plurality incited reactions of anxiety and repression, or I examine ways in which artistic practices formulated non-dimorphic or nonbinary accounts of genders and bodies. In my new book *Abstract Bodies*, it is sculpture's struggle with extreme abstraction or objecthood in the 1960s that proved to be a particularly rich site for asking questions demanded by transgender studies.⁹ It allowed me to see differently the work of non-trans artists such as David Smith or Dan Flavin. They are artists who would never themselves espouse a critical attitude toward a binary model of gender—let alone a more open understanding of gender's complexity. So, I use the questions from transgender studies to re-view their work itself, showing how the artists' desires to refuse the human figure inadvertently produced unforeclosed possibilities for thinking differently about how the human could be nominated. This is what I mean when I talk about “transgender capacity,” and I think it's essential for scholars and artists to take on board the wider critique of gender and biopolitics on which transgender studies insists. Such work supplements the important research being done by trans scholars on history, theory, and politics as well as contributes to a wider revision of the ways in which we analyze the “human” as a category of analysis and politics. My historical re-

6 Susan Stryker, “Transgender History, Homonormativity, and Disciplinarity,” *Radical History Review* 100 (Winter 2008): 145–57.

7 Susan Stryker, “Why the T in LGBT Is Here to Stay,” *Salon*, October 11, 2007. http://www.salon.com/2007/10/11/transgender_2/.

8 David Getsy, “Capacity,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2014): 48.

9 David Getsy, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

search on 1960s abstraction seeks to understand how nonrepresentational art objects problematized binary gender assignments, how accounts of gender were reformulated in this decade, and, more broadly, how this history can inform current engagements with abstraction by trans and queer artists.

WS: Following this line and thinking about this new book on nonrepresentational sculpture, how do these critiques relate to abstraction as a practice that gives voice to nonnormative sexualities or atypical or transformable genders?

DG: Abstraction has afforded many artists a way of thinking about the varieties of identification that operate for individuals. With regard to gender, abstraction's avoidance of the figure offers the possibility to at least partially circumvent the tendency to read bodies as if they signify simply the gender of the person with that body. In other words, one shouldn't assume that one can discern gender from a quick glance at a person or a body. Figural representation brings with it the cultural marking of bodies in relation to ideologies and power, so one means of resistance is to refuse to render the human form and to demand an open range of potential identifications.

Abstraction is not a panacea for the cultural oppression of otherwise genders and sexualities, but it is a generative and increasingly attractive mode in which to prompt new visualizations. Because it refuses representation and figuration, abstraction relies on relations, be they between internal forms or externally with the viewer or with the space. One can examine those relations for what they propose and how they foster variability and particularity.

WS: Can the lessons we derive from the queer and transgender advancements be applied to different veins of artistic practice beyond abstraction?

DG: There is no denying that abstraction is a rarefied mode, but it is nevertheless a capacious one that engenders openness and potential. It's not, however, the only way to think about temporalized personhoods and plural genders. Any rendering of the human form (and any evocation of it as a standard) necessarily engages with the arbitration of persons and bodies, and transgender studies argues that we misrecognize the world by assuming that bodies and genders are simply and easily divided into two static camps. Instead, it demands that we attend to the temporal nature of bodies and persons and that we not assume that gender is readable as an expression of bodily configurations. Similarly, queer studies problematizes how we think about how bodies relate to one another,

how desire operates, and how the social is formulated. These questions are both bracing and enabling for the study of image making, and they offer ways to show how artistic practice is an arena in which accounts of personhood have, for centuries, been at issue. Abstraction distills these concerns and provides an exemplary theoretical object for them, but the questions are mobile and infectious.

WS: Is there, then, a transgender iconography? A queer iconography? Surely this runs the risk of some kind of essentialism, though it sounds as promising as it does problematic. These issues have been on the mind of straight artists for some time as well. Lisa Phillips said of David Salle in 1986: "Salle has largely displaced the eroticism of his subject matter into the act of painting itself, demanding an erotics of art as a way of encountering the world."¹⁰

DG: Well, the big difference is that Salle's subject position is in line with compulsory heterosexuality and normative accounts of gender as binary, so there is not the same political weight given to (or expected of) his *appearing as* heterosexual or male. Displacement or eroticism can be apolitical for an artist like Salle in a way it isn't for an artist working from a trans or queer perspective. For trans and queer artists, to choose to be visible is a political act. But from those same positions, to argue that one's difference still matters while refusing to become an object of surveillance or voyeurism is no less political. This is the difficulty. How does one do justice to the complexity and daily political content of trans or queer existence without simply requiring self-disclosure and self-representation as avatar of an identity category?

Back to your first question. Yes, there are iconographic signs that have been used by queer and trans artists—everything from Oscar Wilde's green carnation to the omnipresent rainbow to the proud display of the chest scar. These are reductive and by no means universally accepted. But I think the bigger question is how to refuse the requirement of an iconography. That's where we started this conversation, after all. It is often assumed that in order to be recognized as such, queer work has to *figure* queerness in the form of the iconography of sex and desire and that trans work has to make *visible* a process of transition. Such iconographic presumptions fall prey to the same evidentiary protocols that characterize the politics of visibility. We have to leave room to be able to speak from experiences that deny being so figured, and we have to reject the presumption that one needs to self-disclose and make oneself *easily recognizable* in order to have one's differences matter.

¹⁰ Lisa Phillips, "His Equivocal Touch in the Vicinity of History," in *David Salle*,

J. Kardon, ed. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1986), 31.



Fig. 6
Heather Cassils,
*The Resilience
of the 20%*, 2013

It's precisely because of its own refusals of representation that abstraction seems newly political to many artists. Abstraction has become a position from which to prompt new visualizations and to propose new relations. Again, it resists the cultural marking of the body by refusing the figure. Some might see this as utopian and apolitical, but there are many artists who put forth abstraction as a way to make space for a critique of relationality and for *worlding* differently. Again, it's not the only strategy, but it is one that has been increasingly important in recent years as a means to think beyond the limitations of an exclusive focus on the politics of representation.

WS: So, what about other practices? My own work has thus far focused on the Pictures Generation, especially the late Jimmy DeSana, whose lush, abstracted bodies of the early 1980s became complex photomontages after he was diagnosed with AIDS. How might photography factor into these discussions?

DG: Because photography often starts with image capture, it differs from the ways in which images in painting and sculpture are largely built up through their material mediums. It's a cliché—but not all that wrong—to say that photography has a more intimate relationship with the world. It captures it, receptively, and relies on it. Montage and digital tools, however, afford many possibilities for the captured image(s) to be manipulated, allowing for new combinatory forms and previously unvisualized potentials. Because of this, degrees of abstraction are surely possible in photography (in addition to DeSana, one obvious example is Wolfgang Tillmans), but it's still relatively rare. I guess my question for abstract photography would be medium specific: What were the events during which the form of the photograph occurred?

For DeSana, however, could you say a bit more? Are those works actually abstract? I think collage and montage have some specific meanings (and are related to a long history of visualizing hybridity and the ways in which the given or the found can be used as raw material for transformation and recombination).

WS: It is precisely this oscillation between raw material (or the body) and the capacity for its manipulation that allows DeSana to enter this discussion. Before being diagnosed with AIDS, DeSana used his camera to dissolve bodies, to create a world wherein corporeality is both present and diffused—a combination of queer politics and the medium—something that could equally be said of the work of Amy Sillman or Nicole Eisenman as well. His works of the early 1980s are indeed representational, but through complex staging, lighting, and precise darkroom production, they speak to the possibility of a photography that is able to approximate the abstract possibilities of raw canvas or sculptural material.

His collage work, done in the darkroom, often uses materials we can recognize, like mustard, ravioli, flour, and letters of the alphabet. In many cases, DeSana would layer these materials atop photographs using glass, a method also used by his friend Marilyn Minter. This distancing effect refuses easy assimilation or consumption, causing us to pause and consider the layers of representation inherent in the photograph—the essence, perhaps, of abstraction. In this way, DeSana peels back the “laminated” image, to use Barthes’s terminology, and the crevices in between these sediments take on their own life. This suggests possibilities for new forms of queer erotics.

Getting back to the present moment, what artists do you see as working within the queer and trans frameworks that we have been discussing?

DG: My historical work on the 1960s has really been developed in dialogue with current practices. This comes, in part, from the fact that I teach in an art school and am deeply engaged with thinking about how art’s histories inform contemporary art and its making. It was seeing more and more trans and queer artists working with abstraction in the studios and in the galleries that made me realize the need for a historical assessment of a moment when abstraction became a place from which new accounts of gender could be articulated. This is what drove the writing of *Abstract Bodies*. That said, I am beginning to write much more often about artists working today, since I think all of the questions we’ve been discussing about abstraction have become increasingly widespread.

I’ve been approaching this in some writings about artists like Heather Cassils, who works between performance, sculpture, installation, and sound. Cassils’s performances often have a sculptural element as well as being aimed at the political history of figuration in art, and I am interested in the ways in which they critique that history and deploy abstraction.

There are also a number of artists who have used more or less reductive and geometric abstraction to address trans experience and queer perspectives. I’m thinking here of artists like Gordon Hall, Jonah Groeneboer, and Math Bass. Hall, like Cassils, also activates abstract objects through performance, and they create site-responsive sculptures that speak to issues of transformation, remaking, care of the self, and the refusal of visual taxonomies of personhood. For instance, their *Set* sculptures appear simple at first. However, the sculptures reveal themselves slowly as intricately worked objects that repay attention to particularities. Only by committing to spend time with one of these objects will one begin to see the ways in which it occupies the space and the ways in which it is



Fig. 7
Jimmy DeSana, *Instant Camera*, 1980

unique. All of the *Set* sculptures also produce color effects (through reflection) on the wall that they are placed in intimate relation to. However striking this reflected color, the viewer sees only the effects of the vibrancy of the side that it refuses to show us directly—that is, visibly unavailable to us. The visual disclosures made by the sculptures in response to the viewer’s commitment to get to know them are, in this way, nevertheless restrained and intentionally partial. Not all is available to looking. Similarly, Groeneboer’s practice uses both sculpture and painting to create works that frustrate visual discernment. He makes art that is deliberately hard to see, singly. For instance, his sculptures made from barely visible strings in tension are visually inextricable from the space in which we encounter them. They activate an engaged process of looking in which viewers struggle to see the drawing made by the slight, taut strings in three dimensions. As they attempt to engage with these barely visible lines in space, they become just as much aware of what they have had to choose to not see in order to focus on one aspect of the complex polygons and quadrilateral outlines hovering in their proximity. I also think of Bass’s sculptures that appear, only from some angles, as if they are bodies underneath brightly striped tarps but from other angles appear illegible as such.

All three artists have explored the ways in which transformation can be visualized in works that evoke problems of figuration but that refuse to offer a representation of the body. Such work can be understood as standing in opposition to the long history of the voyeurism and exploitation to which trans and queer people have been subjected. At the same time, it's much more than that, and the work uses abstraction to address larger questions of the politics and poetics of how we view each other, what demands we make on recognition, and how transformation and particularity can be valued.

There are many more artists who similarly work from trans, queer, or both perspectives in making abstractions of varying degrees. One could look to Sadie Benning's paintings of video-editing transitions, Prem Sahib's abstract wall works, or Ulrike Müller's carefully composed and tightly cropped forms made from vitreous enamel on steel. For instance, Müller's coupled geometric forms have boundaries and interfaces that blur slightly due to the material. Visual differences of color and line are all made inextricable from (and intimately related to) each other once the powdered glass becomes fused through heat into one solid matrix. Divisions become continuities. Such work reminds us how materials and processes can also be used to evoke the complexities of personhood and its accruals, transformations, and exchanges.

Ultimately, there is no one way to recognize queer or trans content in abstraction. That's the point. Trans and queer stances appear differently each time. I think it's crucial to cultivate those acts of appearance and the openness they propose.

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Front cover: Heather Cassils, *After*, 2014, 2,000-pound clay bash, remnant sculpture from the performance *Becoming an Image*, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto, 2014; **back cover:** Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image Performance Still* No. 1, Edgy Women Festival, Montreal 2013 (artworks © Heather Cassils; photographs by the artist and Alejandro Santiago). See p. 70.

Table of Contents

5	Artist’s Project Jeanne Dunning Tom Thumb, the New Oedipus
	Forum Sexing Sculpture: New Approaches to Theorizing the Object
27	Jillian Hernandez and Susan Richmond Introduction
30	Rachel Lachowicz Portfolio: Material Specificity and the Index of the Feminine
34	Rachel Middleman Rethinking Vaginal Iconology with Hannah Wilke’s Sculpture
46	Gordon Hall Object Lessons: Thinking Gender Variance through Minimalist Sculpture
58	Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation
72	Lily Cox-Richard Portfolio: <i>The Stand</i> (Possessing Powers)
78	Nicholas Hartigan and Joan Kee Lily Cox-Richard: On the Powers of Taking a Stand
	Reviews
84	Joanne Heath on Myrel Chernick and Jennie Klein, eds., <i>The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art</i> , and Rachel Epp Buller, ed., <i>Reconciling Art and Mothering</i> ; Tina Rivers on Ken Johnson, <i>Are You Experienced: How Psychedelic Consciousness Transformed Modern Art</i> , and David S. Rubin, <i>Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art since the 1960s</i>



Math Bass, *Body No Body Body*, 2012, latex paint on canvas and wood, installation view, Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles, 2012 (artwork © Math Bass; photograph provided by Overduin and Kite)

Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation

David Getsy: The context of a group of essays on sculpture, sexuality, and abstraction prompts me to start this conversation by talking about how we both write about the valence of sexuality in artworks and performances that would not, at first, seem to encourage it. While we’ve both written about explicit material too, I think a concern we share is how desire, the sexual, and the gendered operate beyond their straightforward depictions. We also both have a background

in the study of the nineteenth century, in which discussions of and evidence for desire and the sexual were heavily coded.

Too often, the study of sexuality in art is dismissed if it departs from the iconographic depiction of sexual acts or bodies that are deemed to be erotically appealing. It’s one of the ways that those suspicious of or uncomfortable with queer theory, for instance, attempt to domesticate its critique—by claiming that anything other than the obvious is “reading into” or hopeful projective fantasy.

Jennifer Doyle: That complaint about “reading into” usually displaces a conversation about desire with a complaint about identity—it mistakes the effort to expand on how pleasure works for a taxonomical project, turning the queer reading into the abject shadow of art history’s most conservative projects. That worry about “reading into” invokes the inside as that which we should not access.

Getsy: With regard to our interests in sculpture and in performance, for instance, I think it’s crucial to remember that bodily relations immediately and inescapably activate questions about gender and sexuality. Historically, sculpture and performance art have shared this as a fundamental issue. Both rely on the viewer’s proprioceptive assessment of their copresence with the sculpture or performer. Such a staging of relations between bodies establishes sexuality’s potential to emerge within those relations. This can even be seen in the evidence of a past gesture or act, where the viewer must reconstruct the scene that left its trace, inhabiting the place of the agent that made it. The big question is how to characterize the capacity of the nonfigurative to manifest queer performativity in these mediums—whether that performativity is deployed by the artist, the historian, or the viewer.

Doyle: That problem is itself addressed by some queer formal practices. An example: My sister worked as a nanny to a woman who spent her summers with the designer Halston, who rented Andy Warhol’s estate on Long Island. I went to visit my sister there in 1987. There were built-in bookcases throughout the houses on the property. All of the books lining those shelves, however, were turned so that the spines faced the wall.

Walking into a room to see a wall of books that had been treated that way was bracing. It was a slap in the face. For, of course, those walls were beautiful—you instantly got it, the seriality of books as objects. It was a redeployment of books as home decoration, against their use as cultural capital. The gesture is a brutal thing, a total rejection of a certain kind of discourse on culture and value.

Someone said Warhol did that because when he bought the house it came fully furnished: he had no relationship to those books so he flipped them

This conversation took place via e-mail over the course of autumn 2013.



Halston in Andy Warhol's Montauk home, 1980s (photograph by Kosugi Sangyo Co.)

because they looked nice that way. I don't know if that is true, or even if Warhol was the person who flipped the books around (it is also very Halston). But I've always thought of that gesture as a queer sort of formalism. It literalized the ambivalent place of narrative within contemporary art: to insist on the book as an object—not an art object, but as a block shaped by one formal logic and deployed in another.

Getsy: It's a great anecdote, hinging on a move of turning around and back-facing. It is also the kind of queer gesture that might easily be overlooked as inconsequential or quizzical for some viewers presuming such things as proper use and common sense. But for those viewers searching for sites of resistance to the enforcement of the normal and the supposed "natural," the mutual recognition ushered in by identifying with this move could offer the embrace of solidar-

ity. This gesture's reversal is a refusal of common use, demanding an "unnatural" (just because unconventional) relation to the book as object. What's fascinating for me in this is that the rear of the book still establishes a physical relation that makes it a sensuous object. Which is more tactile: the spine or the tips of the leaves? Indeed, the back-facing authorizes a kind of touching that one might never have imagined or privileged before. It also produces a kind of anonymous cruising in that the relation with the object occurs in willful ignorance of the book's title, author, and cultural positioning. I wonder, however, if there isn't a critical mass that needs to be made visible to prompt such reordered relations. One book back-faced wouldn't do it, but a room full of them reminds us that it's not a chance or a mistake—but a tactic and a signal.

Doyle: Absolutely. That turn to form, which can sometimes change what you think form is or can be, and the "poetic" can be that tactic, that signal. Take Walt Whitman's relationship to *Leaves of Grass*, for example. The first edition (1855) is a gorgeously crafted thing. Its embossed green leather surface is meant to be fondled. He worked on revisions of this book as long as he was alive, and across all of the book's editions you will find an awareness of the book as a material object embedded into his writing ("Whoever you are, holding me now in hand"), just as leaves were molded from the surface of that first edition. Queer readings of Whitman have taken us, interestingly, to considering his relationship to publication itself as part of his poetic practice: each edition of *Leaves of Grass* is a living thing, a manifestation of the poet's desire and an occasion for intimacy. The multiple editions of this work express an intention opposite to that represented by Warhol's library. There is, across his work, an expressed desire to make each book feel like a unique body—each reading, a unique encounter—but in the end, all books are the same. In the end, we all end up in the same body, which meets the same end (that awareness is also all over Whitman's writing). Am I "reading into" Whitman by talking about his material practice?

Sexuality is one kind of relation among other kinds of relation. As a critic, I am drawn to how one mode of relation inhabits others (e.g., the sexual within the economic; or the economic within the sexual). Warhol's library revealed how such a move might work through already existing objects. It manifested the turn to form as an attack—and as playful. If I saw that, it was because I was called out in my pretension (each book, somehow a sign of cultural accomplishment). That library taught me to think of literature as a material practice. And it taught me that a block is never just a block, especially when it appears as "just."

Getsy: For me, my recognition of the queer potential of formal tactics came from early interests in practices that established meaning through use. Primary among these were camp and appropriation. Both are ways to use images and objects that derail original intention, and my enthusiasms for them were driven by my involvement in queer activism when I was just starting out as an undergraduate. I went to Oberlin College, which has a tradition of activism and progressivism, so it was a very receptive place for this. However, it was geographically removed from the urban centers where such groups as Queer Nation and ACT/UP were concentrated. There was still plenty to be done, and our local efforts were energized and informed by the visual practices of these groups—most

notably the work of Gran Fury. It was primarily through such agitprop that I came to know the nonassimilationist politics of queer visibility, and camp and critique were key parts of it. At the same time, this visual bent also had drawn me to art history, and my introduction to it was through the politically engaged teaching of the feminist art historian Patricia Mathews. Out of this mix of influences, I found myself engaged with what, at first, might seem like camp’s antithesis—Minimalism. What could gray polyhedrons and steel and plexi boxes say to queer politics? For me, it was in the tactics they shared: the outright refusal of the rules of convention and medium (“neither painting nor sculpture”), the hyperbolic performance of those rules as a means of critique or parody, and—most of all—the shift of emphasis from maker to user. Even though there seemed to be little queer politics in Minimalism, I realized I could draw queer politics out of Minimalism, according to its own logic.

Doyle: I was talking to Ron Athey the other week, and he described that Minimalist aesthetic as “bitchy”—he said this with a real appreciation for it. I think that might be one of the meeting points you are naming.

Getsy: I never thought about it that way, but it is. This also prompts me to make a further perverse connection back to camp’s origins in another famously bitchy movement—the nineteenth-century Aestheticism of Wilde, Whistler, and the like. From certain perspectives, the attitude of Minimalism shares quite a lot with Aestheticism’s self-righteous refusals of necessity, of the quotidian, and of content. At the time, many pitched “art for art’s sake” as urgent, political, and enlightened. Oscar Wilde could write both “The Soul of Man under Socialism” and “The Decay of Lying,” much as Minimalist artists such as Carl Andre and Donald Judd understood their production of nonfunctional, nonreferential objects as informed by politics. (To follow the comparison, this would make Robert Morris the Whistler of the 1960s—think of the mockery of “Specific Objects” he undertakes in the original layout of his parodic text “Notes on Sculpture III.”)¹ Seriously, though, there is something powerful in Minimalism’s move of denying the artist’s hand and the concomitant refusal of the artwork as an autographic expression of the artist’s psychology or, indeed, as referential in any way. Instead, Judd, Andre, Morris, et al., opened the meaning of the sculptural encounter to viewers and their real-time spatial and bodily relations. That relinquishing of control becomes unruly because it places value on the audience as a source of meaning. Camp is similarly an emphasis on use over original intention, and its politics are rooted in that rebellious capacity.

Doyle: I came to the shift from maker to user through feminist interventions in Marxist critical paradigms—like the intense formalism of feminist artists taking on questions of labor and reproduction (such as Laura Mulvey’s writing on film, the Berwick Street Collective film *Night Cleaners*, or Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document*). Ideologies of sex/gender are written into that separation, production/consumption; and they are written into the fantasy of absolute autonomy that is one of sexism’s foundational moves—the fantasy of that autonomy depends on the disavowal of reproductive labor of all sorts. Ideologies of race have a similar but not identical shape: the vision which demands that a person’s being is reduc-

ible to what they are (as if the latter could be known)—the grammar of the object, the radicalization of that grammar.

A queer/feminist critical take will track that; queer/feminist art practices will hover over the thingness of the body as a way of exploring the weight and history of that body, as a way of exploring the politics of making bodies into things, and things into bodies. It’s a joy to teach the work of artists who do this—Warhol, but also, say, Senga Nengudi (who uses material, like pantyhose, to make a sculptural object act like skin without being skin), or Linda Bessemer (who makes a painting act like a towel or a belt, by lifting paint from the canvas). We do not encounter those works in isolation: we bring a history of sensation to them. Our familiarity with the poetics and politics of objectification (especially as something that we do, as something that happens to us) is a part of the story of how we engage with, respond to the object. We can experience those things as living and having agency. Sometimes they push back. But to speak to that as a critic, you have to let go of the demand that every story you tell about the object be about Art— or at least, you have to let go of that as the point, the argument. To say a work of art is about Art as a category is not an argument, it is an observation—just as is the declaration that a work is about “race” or “sex.” A lot of the resistance to antiracist or queer critical theory in art history and criticism is a dispute about what kind of argument one is allowed to make within art history. The critic is accused of misusing art-historical tools, and artists face more foundational complaints in the declaration that they, in essence, aren’t artists at all.

Getsy: Underlying these anxieties about “reading into” is a defensive and pernicious desire to uphold the normative. Immediately suspect are any interpretations that make use of artworks or ideas to carve out semantic space for differently identified individuals to adopt those artworks. To prompt us to see a material or an object in a different way—against or to the side of its intended use—is a queer tactic. That “disavowal of reproductive labor,” as you said, is a refusal to accept (or to *only accept*) the prescribed functions of objects or materials. Knowingly, willfully using something wrong has been deployed by many as a tactic for allegorizing normativity’s disavowal of its own partiality. In this vein, it’s important to remember that camp is never just about fun. It values the devalued, and its energy comes from its rejection of “commonly accepted” worth. For this reason, the object or image appropriated as camp becomes a site for the interrogation of the ways in which cultural and economic values are assigned. This comes from the brazen and intentional misuse and misreading that camp perpetrates. Camp’s valorization of culturally derided objects and images upholds the weak as the strong, the bad as the good, and the useless as essential. Its love of obsolescence is a form of resistance to normative values. Camp tactics emerged out of Aestheticism’s refusal to instrumentalize art as productive or illustrative, preferring instead to emphasize experience and form (Walter Pater) or to flout commonly held values by playing up the contingency of meaning (Wilde). To invoke again a perverse analogy to Minimalism: for everything else it does, Minimalism also produced intentionally useless things that refused to be anything other than themselves. As Fried famously narrated, these things merely waited for the viewer (like a person in “a somewhat darkened room”), locating their meaning, differently, in each new phenomenal encounter.²

1. Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture III: Notes and Nonsequitors,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 24–29.

2. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 12–23.

Doyle: That’s the best part of that essay—the cruising scenario he invokes to describe the encounter with that kind of object. Math Bass plays with this. Bass’s sculptural objects may appear as covers—overturned flower pots and strange duvet-like things (made of canvas and sometimes painted to look like animal skins). In the encounter with Bass’s work, it feels like you are discovering an object hiding something from you (an object containing a thing). These sculptures feel both familiar and strange—uncanny in the way one is haunted by the ordinary. Bass’s work is queer like those books which have turned their backs on us, teasing us.

Getsy: In order to critique a similar coyness of Minimalism, Fried drew out its solicitation of the viewer—its “need” for the viewer. What continues to be so useful about that essay is the way that it outlines the affective intensities possible when a viewer engages with even the most reductive geometric form. Minimalist objects trade on bodily confrontations and relations, and they do not foreclose possibilities the way a rendering of a particular body would. In many ways, it’s a more concentrated form of what happens with abstraction’s openness more generally. This is what I am really interested in these days—how abstraction is being used as a resource by young trans and queer artists because it allows for a less prescribed capacity for artists and viewers to see themselves in it. Such a dynamic has a historical source in the art-theoretical debates of the 1960s from which literalist abstraction emerged. This is what I’ve been working on recently with the history of sculpture—how the decade that saw the dissolution of the statuary tradition into the expanded field of sculpture nevertheless held fast to bodily evocations and solicitations that buttressed its embrace of abstraction and objecthood.

Another early experience I keep coming back to when I’ve been thinking through these ideas: During those same years, I worked at the Allen Memorial Art Museum, which has a great collection of Minimal and Postminimal artworks. Dealing with these sculptures as material presences and not just as illustrations of ideas alerted me to the very real relations I could have with these sculptures even though they weren’t figurative or even representational. The stubborn recalcitrance of Richard Serra’s *Two Cuts* was physically real as was the frailty of Eva Hesse’s *Connection*. Here materials were being used for their qualities but without instrumentalizing them as “productive” or “useful.” Steel, fiberglass, felt, fluorescent lights all became particular and odd when they were severed from the obligation to work for something—to be useful. This made them strange and bodily present in a different way. For me, this is one of the great lessons of Postminimalism—the bodily evocations of materials allowed to be themselves. But most of all, I remember that for a few months I was tasked with monitoring a Morris felt work that I had included in an exhibition I curated. Every few days, I had to plunge my gloved hands into it in order to rerandomize its slackening tendrils. During those moments, the sculpture was intimate and incontrovertibly just material at the same time. Despite its stubborn literalism, it became bodily. That was a great lesson in sculpture’s physicality and the corporeality it could incite. I began to see sculptural presence as a site where unauthorized or disallowed relations could erupt.



Robert Morris, *Untitled*, 1967, felt, approx. 12 x 6 ft. (365.8 x 182.9 cm). Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ellen H. Johnson Collection, 1975.45 (artwork © 2014 Robert Morris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

3. See for example Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

Doyle: Yes. The way things act on and organize us—there is so much for art criticism in recent scholarship on the agentic dimensions of things, on vitalism.³ That representation of queer scholarship as “only” about identity (as if what that meant were somehow simple or obvious) erases this feminist and queer attention to certain kinds of labor and attention, ways of working with things—that physicality, that kind of maintenance, sculptural housework. It disavows the erotic, as a language or a set of affects animating and inhabiting this kind of work, but also as a mode of knowing (or even being known by) the object.

Hearing you speak to the poetics of domination in Scott Burton’s work, for example—and connect that to a way of being in the world, to the history of a creative community—without reducing the work to a sign or symptom, as if you



Scott Burton, *Two-Part Chair*, 1986, Lake Superior Green granite, 40 x 23 x 36 in. (101.6 x 58.4 x 91.4 cm), installation view, Art Institute of Chicago (artwork © 2014 Estate of Scott Burton/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York)

4. The authors’ conversations began when both were on a panel at the National Portrait Gallery for the 2010 exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*, organized by Jonathan D. Katz and David Ward. The lecture on Scott Burton can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPAzZVy9TT4, as of December 30, 2013. This research will be part of a forthcoming monograph on Burton’s work in the 1970s, but it also informs *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975*, ed. David Getsy (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2012). Doyle’s lecture on David Wojnarowicz from the same event, www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMluukkZJ10, as of December 30, 2013, was incorporated into

could just decode it.⁴ Your writing has really helped me to imagine that I can bring objects into my own writing. I didn’t think I would ever enjoy Postminimalist work like Burton’s benches—but now the erotics of economy, of restraint and rigor is the first thing I find myself seeing. Or perhaps it’s better to say that your work has helped me to grasp the poetic dimension of our encounters with objects. It has helped me to enjoy them.

Getsy: Burton’s largely forgotten work of the 1970s has been a long-term research interest, and I’m working on a book about his performance art from that decade. He is a great example of an artist who infused a seemingly formalist and innocuous practice with sexuality, and there is a lot to be said about his furniture-as-sculpture meant to be used. But what is interesting about an artist like Burton is that he draws out the erotics that are present in the logic of Minimalism and its bodily address to (and reliance on) the viewer.

I’ve been emboldened in my historical work on the 1960s and 1970s by what I keep seeing in studios today. As I said earlier, one of the developments that has

been exciting me most has been recent work by trans and queer artists who appropriate Minimalism and abstraction as resources for envisioning new ways to inhabit the body or to give an account of the self. For instance, the sculptor Jonah Groeneboer’s use of techniques we associate with Fred Sandback to create works that address the body directly through absence, verticality, and suggestion. Unlike Sandback’s more spatially dominating ersatz walls and architectural elements, Groeneboer’s works more often approach a human scale but refuse to settle into a single profile or faciality (let alone a barricade). Instead, they use the transparency of the outline to complicate the idea of a proper or a comprehensive view. They take on the proportions of full-length mirrors, and they stage figurative multiplicity through the interpenetrating layering of possible (and competing) contours and forms that appear to be different from every perspective in which we try to settle. They end up visualizing transformation and successive states in a way no figurative representation could.

One of the reasons I thought to have this conversation with you is because of your new work on athletics.⁵ As in what I’m doing with sculptural abstraction, you’re taking on a topic that doesn’t directly figure gender or the sexual or in the iconographic sense. Nevertheless, the tactics of queer and feminist interpretation allow you to analyze the economies of sport in a different way. How does this new work relate to your other books on sexuality and on emotion?

Doyle: I’m using “the athletic turn” as a working title to signal affect and form as part of this project’s story. The book begins with the observation that artists are a part of the sports world; many work from an athletic practice and engage the sports world, often critically. My writing on this subject moves in two directions. One pays attention to those artists working with sports who are not collaborating with its worst institutions—Heather Cassils’s citation of combat sports in the performance *Becoming an Image* (in which the artist punches a large plinth-shaped slab of wet clay), for example, in contrast with Douglas Gordon’s collaboration with Spain’s biggest commercial soccer league and with one of the world’s biggest celebrities (Zinedine Zidane), or Harun Farocki’s collaboration with FIFA [Fédération Internationale de Football Association], one of the world’s most corrupt and vile organizations. Many artists make work that has something to say about physical practice, sport, and play—work that is feminist, anticolonial and queer. Which is, of course, why they won’t end up on the payroll for Nike, the IOC [International Olympic Committee], or FIFA.

But there’s another side to this project. I keep returning to Caster Semenya, the South African runner whose sex became the object of international attention when she won the 2009 world championship in her event (the 800-meter dash). It is the question of her speed rather than her gender that interests me. Her speed makes her extraordinary (she is not the fastest ever, but she is among the three fastest competing today). In response to that speed—to what that speed looks like—a whole world organizes itself into a conversation about sexual difference, whole new protocols are developed for establishing what makes an athlete female. (Now that’s reading into!) All women who mark the limit of women’s capabilities will also mark the edge and the end of the category “woman.”

Here a black woman seems to become flight itself, and seems to become not-a-woman in that performance. This is not a transcendence of the body—it is

her recent book *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

5. See *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 4, special issue “The Athletic Issue,” ed. Jennifer Doyle (Fall 2013); and Doyle’s blogs at <http://fromaleftwing.blogspot.com> and thesportspectacle.com, as of December 30, 2013.



Jonah Groeneboer, installation view and two details of ***Curve*, 2013**, black thread and brass bars, approx. 96 x 24 x 24 in. (243.8 x 61 x 61 cm) (artwork © Jonah Groeneboer; photographs provided by the artist)

perhaps a glimpse of what the body is, when loosened from discourse—that loosening is both an ungendering, and very “gendery” (a word Eve Sedgwick used once to describe places where there is a lot of gender). The black body has a specific relation to that ungendering—at the heart of enslavement is an abstraction, abstraction sits at the core of capital. (Keith Piper took up the question of the politics of speed in relation to liberation and national fantasy in a recent project exploring Jamaica’s great sprinting tradition.) The athletic turn can engage that site of violence and undoing, and artists are helping me to get there in my writing.

Getsy: I’m attempting something similar in my work on abstraction and sculpture in the 1960s by exploring how artists of very different sorts collided abstraction with bodily metaphors to produce work that called for an account of genders as successive and mutable. For me, this is an archival project just as much as an interpretative one, and I’ve been looking at texts and archives anew through the lens of transgender studies and queer studies to find evidence for moments of recognition of gender multiplicity, mutable morphologies, and successive states of personhood.



Heather Cassils, *Before*, 2014, 2,000 pounds of modeling clay, 51 x 36 x 36 in. (129.5 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm), and ***After*, 2014**, 2,000-pound clay bash, approx 40¾ x 36 x 36 in. (103.6 x 91.4 x 91.4 cm), sculpture and remnant sculpture from the performance *Becoming an Image*, Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto, 2014 (artworks © Heather Cassils; photographs by the artist and Alejandro Santiago)

My new book *Abstract Bodies* will investigate how genders and sexualities manifest in patently abstract, nonreferential, and nonfigurative sculptures. I do this through a cluster of in-depth case studies of artists such as David Smith and Dan Flavin to chart some ways that nonnormative accounts of genders can be inadvertently generated by artists for whom such queer positions would be anathema. Sometimes, this occurs through their works’ subsequent uses by queer viewers and sometimes from their own paradoxical commitments to abstraction and to bodily metaphors for their practice. For me, it’s an argument about the larger relevance and urgency of queer and transgender theory by focusing on their inadvertent visualizations by abstract sculptures that vex the nomination of the “human.” This is how I reread an artist like John Chamberlain, for instance, whose work would never be expected to say anything engaging or constructive to transgender or queer theory. Nevertheless, his insistence on a sexualized metaphor for his particular sculptural practice (“fitting” of parts) compels an account of genders and sexualities in relation to the nonfigurative. At one point, he even



conceded this when he was asked (by Henry Geldzahler) about how his works seemed simultaneously masculine and feminine to viewers. Chamberlain’s response was as simple as it was unexpected for him: “Everybody’s both.”⁶ This wasn’t an offhand comment. Rather, it registered a long-standing logic he had put into his material and artistic practice. It’s not about his own identity at all, but it is about the patterns he committed to put into his practice and the ways he talked about it. An account that draws out this capacity of his work ultimately allows for a deeper discussion of his practice and offers a wider set of ways that viewers and later artists can invest in it. (This was brought home to me when I learned in 2012 that an early essay version of the Chamberlain chapter of my book became a guiding text for the first exhibition of the Brooklyn-based feminist and queer curatorial collective Garden Party/Arts.)⁷

One can argue for different politics than those intended by the artist while still being grounded in the direct history of the art object, its form, and its reception. While sexuality is a central issue in my book, the larger aim is to identify accounts of genders’ mutabilities and transformations arising from the collision of abstraction and metaphors of personhood or the body. The perspective of transgender studies allows one to better recognize and analyze those historical moments when questions of gender’s multiplicity erupted. That history is there, but has been occluded or obscured. Rather than the derisory “reading into,” such a critical or historical practice aims to make semantic space and to establish divergent sites of identification for subsequent viewers. Such rogue interpretations are urgent and ultimately end up telling us a lot about the artwork itself.

Doyle: This is some of the most exciting work in transgender theory for those writing about art and performance—what sex becomes when practiced or expressed or manifested through things like speed, gesture, plasticity, or texture. It’s great to feel queer theory push our critical practice in new directions.

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David J. Getsy is the Goldabelle McComb Finn Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also chairs the editorial board of the College Art Association’s journal *The Art Bulletin*. His books include *Rodin: Sex and the Making of Modern Sculpture* (2010), *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877–1905* (2004), and *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975* (2012). A new book, *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*, will be published by Yale University Press in 2015.

6. Chamberlain quoted in Henry Geldzahler, “Interview with John Chamberlain,” in *John Chamberlain: Recent Work*, exh. cat. (New York: Pace Gallery, 1992), n.p.

7. Garden Party/Arts was launched by E. E. Ikeler and Ariel Roman in 2012. See Kara L. Rooney, “Fresh For(u)ms: Garden Party/Arts,” *Brooklyn Rail* online, August 1, 2012, at <http://brooklynrail.org/2012/08/artseen/fresh-forums-garden-partyarts>, as of December 30, 2013.



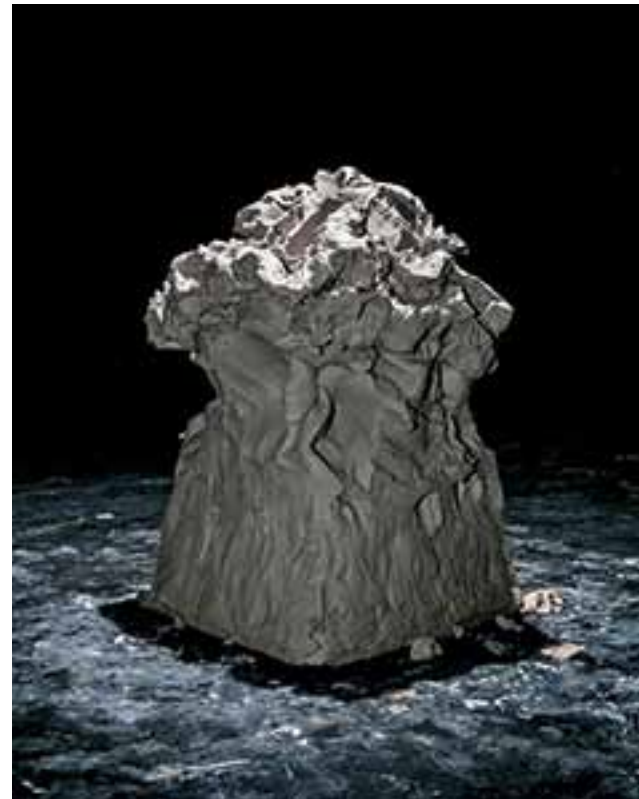
CONCLUSION

ABSTRACTION AND THE UNFORECLOSED

While my aim has been to examine the historical complexity of the practices of the artists in this study, my work has also been motivated by current concerns about gender and art (that themselves find the 1960s as a formative and generative precedent). Ultimately, this book's arguments are directed both at the historical record and at the current artists, critics, viewers, and historians who are grappling with questions of abstraction's usefulness, the politics of transformable personhood, and the recognition of the plurality of gendered inhabitations of the world. To recall Judith Butler's exhortation used in the Preface, my aim has been to offer one "new legitimating lexicon for the gender complexity that we have been living with for a long time."¹ I see abstraction as an especially rich mode through which particularity and difference can be made available, and the four main artists I discuss in this book present historical precedents to those who, more directly, seek to make semantic, cultural, and political space today. In the way of conclusion, I offer two examples of artists who drew on these issues and who speak to the possibilities that Sixties abstraction offered – one near to the time of writing and one immediately following the 1960s. These represent but two of the many and divergent ways in which tactics from abstraction were adapted and used to address more manifestly transgender politics and to call for the need for more pluralistic accounts of persons.

The first comes from the present decade and takes the form of an abstract, seemingly expressionist, sculpture. It appears as a rising mass, about four feet high, covered in indentations, gouges, and extrusions (fig. 139). The dark color of this mottled monolith, a graphite black, flows into the deep shadows created by a surface that is both volcanic and mountainous. Its footprint is regular and rectilinear, three feet wide (90 cm). Along its

OPPOSITE 139 Heather Cassils, *The Resilience of the 20%*, 2013. Poured black concrete cast of clay bash, 122 × 91.5 × 61 cm (48 × 36 × 24 in.).



140 Heather Cassils, *Before* from the performance *Becoming an Image*, 2012–present. (This version: 35th Rhubarb Festival, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Toronto, 2014.) EM-217 (WED) modeling clay, 907 kg (2000 lbs), 129.5 × 91.4 × 91.4 cm (51 × 36 × 36 in.).

141 Heather Cassils, *After* from the performance *Becoming an Image*, 2012–present. (This version: 35th Rhubarb Festival, Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, Toronto, 2014.) EM-217 (WED) modeling clay, 907 kg (2000 lbs), 103.6 × 91.4 × 91.4 cm (40¾ × 36 × 36 in.).

height, one can see the increasing retreat from this base as the form tapers upward and inward. That retreat (or is it progress?) has been hard-won, and the gouges come into focus as deep impressions of knees, elbows, legs, fingers, and fists that pummeled the material into its present form.

This abstract sculpture by Heather Cassils*, titled *The Resilience of the 20%*, is the result of an intensely physical process involving the transformation of the body and its confrontation with materiality. It is a concrete cast of an object created in relation to Cassils's performance *Becoming an Image* (2011 – present), a multi-stage work involving performance, photography, sound, and sculpture. The starting point for this sculpture and the performance was a particular body – Cassils's body – and its athletic exchanges

with a rectilinear monolith made of 2000 pounds (some 909 kilos) of modeling clay. Cassils developed this performance in order to speak directly to issues of transgender politics, history, and experience. With this larger project in view, it becomes apparent that *The Resilience of the 20%* uses its final abstraction as a means to evoke the body but leave its visualization open and unforecasted. It makes explicit the ways in which a non-representational sculptural object in all its physicality can offer a vehicle to realize transgender capacity.

Cassils, who has also competed as a semi-pro boxer, undergoes intense physical training and education for each performance. Much of Cassils's work involves the transformation of their body through athletics and body-building, and they have previously made this a central component of their practice. This is clearest in the work *Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture* (2011). *Cuts* involved photographic documentation of a 23-week performance in which Cassils, through nutrition and training, added 23 pounds (10.4 kilos) of muscle.² This performance reinterpreted the canonical feminist work by Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972), aiming instead at the transformation of the female-assigned body into a conventionally masculine form and ideal.

The somatic work to which Cassils commits is extended, highly considered, and in collaboration with expert trainers. The body serves as the raw material in these life performances, and it is the medium through which Cassils enacts transformation and transition. For *Becoming an Image*, a new kind of advanced training was necessary to ready their body for maximum effect. The modeling clay offered a great deal of resistance to the hits and kicks, and Cassils underwent combat conditioning in order most effectively and safely to prepare their body for the impact. Training with a Muay Thai master at the world-class Glendale Fight Club in Glendale, California, Cassils spent the months leading up to each performance of *Becoming an Image* involved in extensive planning and exercise in order to avoid injury. As they explained,

I had to shed mass, as mass slows you down. I had to train towards explosive movement, precise form, aligning the skeleton in such a way that it prepares the bones and tendons for impact. I also had to train my heart and lungs to operate at over 170 beats per minute – serious cardiovascular training where I expand the size of both my heart and lungs to work at that capacity for the extended period of 20 to 25 minutes.³

Such hard-won reshaping and enhancement are directed at the specific needs for each new live performance, relying solely on intense physical

* Note to the reader: At the request of the artist at the time of writing, this book incorporated a previously-used name that had, to that point, served as the artist's public name and trademark. This name is no longer in use, and the 2018 eBook edition has been changed to reflect this. Any future citations or discussions should refer to the artist only as "Cassils."

training and nutrition to reorient the body. In this way, the act of sculpting begins with Cassils's own body, which must be remodeled and readied.

Cassils's training and transformation was more than bodily; it was also visual and perceptual. Performances of *Becoming an Image* happen in the dark (figs. 142 and 143). The scene of creation of the final form occurs during a performance in which both Cassils and the audience are together in complete darkness. Light only occurs with the photographer's flash as it documents Cassils's blind combat with the clay form. Visually disorienting for Cassils, the audience, and the photographer, the experience of the performance of 25 minutes is one of retinal burn and glimpses of Cassils's athleticism in an environment of darkness filled with the sounds of exertion. To achieve this performance, Cassils had to incorporate combat training with vertigo, spinning, and extrasensory combat. In addition to being as strong as possible, Cassils also had to establish new ways to deal with the environment.

Such visual disorientation produced by the collective experience of darkness and the flashes of illumination caused by attempts to document the struggle were both ways in which *Becoming an Image* thematized issues from transgender politics and history. The impetus for this work was a commission for a performance work by the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles. To augment the 2011–12 exhibition series *Cruising the Archive: Queer Art and Culture in Los Angeles, 1945–1980*, the ONE Archives created the series "Trans Activation." Rather than draw on the contents of the archives, as others did, Cassils chose to address the omissions of transgender people and the difficulties faced with regard to documentation and archiving. Gay and lesbian communities have a conflicted history of subsuming or ignoring the differences of transgender experience. Consequently, any archive based in gay and lesbian community history will contain partial evidence of transgender history while at the same time appropriating it into narratives of sexual orientation. Cassils recognized that one could speak more strongly by producing a work that complicated the idea of documentation and that embodied transition.

In the *Becoming an Image* performances, the photographer is also blind and unable to frame (and consequently control) the documentary image. While Cassils's photographers have captured some striking pictures of Cassils's process, these were achieved through a struggle between photographer and subject that mirrored the exertion of Cassils's confrontation with the clay. The mastery and objectivity that underwrite the idea of documentation was made more reciprocal and unruly. In this way, the exemplary images that emerged from Cassils's performance remind viewers of their partiality



142 Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image, Performance Still No. 5*, 2013, from the SPILL Festival, National Theatre Studio, London. C-print, 55.9 × 76.2 cm (22 × 30 in.).

and all that they did not capture. The experience of the audience was primarily one of darkness and sound, and their memories, too, were flashes that fade. In fact, because they were just looking and straining to perceive, their experience of the performance was fuller than that of the photographer who wrestled with the environment to make an image. Allegorizing the problem of trans archival presence, this performance both demanded attention to real-time presence (the communal experience of witnessing in the dark an extreme physical encounter) and recognition of the impossibility of adequately remembering that experience (only recorded in retinal burn and images that explicitly render a single moment of that extended encounter).

The resulting objects from the performance include the photographs, a sound installation made from a recording of the impacts between Cassils and the clay, and the hard-won final form of the sculptures. *Becoming an Image* has been performed a few times, and I illustrate documentation and sculptures from some of the different instances. The resulting sculptures are, by definition, unique though they all started from the same geometric



143 Heather Cassils, *Becoming an Image, Performance Still No. 2*, 2013, from *Edgy Woman* Festival, Montreal. C-print, 91.5 × 61 cm (36 × 24 in.).

form – which Cassils referred to once in conversation as “Juddian,” thus signaling its citation of Minimalism’s activation of bodily relations.⁴

The clay chosen by Cassils was EM-217 or WED Clay, which is used in the film industry for stop-motion animation and for making elaborate facial sculptures from which latex masks are cast. Named after the most famous of its adopters, Walter Edward Disney, it is now a favorite among special-effects artists who make unorthodox physiognomies, monsters, and new kinds of figures. Disney clay is dense and workable but it cannot be fired. Because of this, it will erode and vanish, and Cassils’s resulting sculpture will transform itself as gravity works on its weight. The sculpture itself is thus ephemeral and always in process. This, too, evokes the body as a site of transformation, growth, and age. Not only does this form bear the evidence of work and effort. It also embeds transition into its material substance and into the process whereby the generic and geometric form was made unique, the history of change embedded in its surface.

Cassils’s subsequent cast sculpture, *The Resilience of the 20%*, is a monument to this transformational and ephemeral clay sculpture, and it freezes it in a durable form. This secondary casting is a key part of traditional sculptural practice, and through it statues were made into a material that could stand outside as public monument and enduring figure. Auguste Rodin had, in the nineteenth century, made the capture (in bronze) of the fleeting marks of process a key sign for the presence of the artist as maker in works that were made through casting.⁵ Cassils’s decision to cast the sculpture in a durable form draws on these traditions of the statue, the monument, and Rodin’s assertion of the sculptor’s acts of making as central to modern sculpture. Furthermore, this object, cast in concrete, has had its surface worked over by Cassils in order to add more variation and transformation into the final form. Areas have been polished smooth and others made rougher.⁶ Like the other stages of the work, it has been transformed as it moves into a new state.

The title of the concrete sculpture, *The Resilience of the 20%*, refers to the violence encountered by transgender communities. In 2012, the murders of transgender individuals increased worldwide by twenty percent, and Cassils offered this sculpture as a monument to those lost and as a testament to the hard-won process of becoming. While the title of the work as a whole is *Becoming an Image*, the final monument to the performance is resolutely abstract and offers no image. It refuses to image any one human form, instead allowing the transformations across its surface to call forth bodies no longer present. They are evoked by the partial evidence left. The refusal to image a single body is important, as it opens this monument up

to larger accounts of transformation and resilience. This allows it to speak to the openness, determination, and mutability that are central to transgender experience without anchoring (and consequently limiting) that narrative in a single body. No one morphology could be offered as exemplary for all transgender lives. Cassils wrestled with the need to document and the problems of evidence, arriving at a work that refused to image the human form but evoked it as an object of work, transformation, and purpose. As an abstract monument, *The Resilience of the 20%* draws on transgender experience and politics while also standing as an allegory of self-determination and resolve.

Coming some five decades after the earliest sculptures discussed in this book, Cassils's work manifests aspects of the potential which I have been arguing that abstraction carries: its capacity to evoke bodily transformation, mutable genders, and successive states of personhood. Rooted in transgender politics and experience, this work expands on the capacities of abstraction and makes its openness with regard to genders and bodies manifest. While the contexts and issues are vastly different, nevertheless I see such work as Cassils's as being presaged by abstract sculpture's struggle with the bodily in the 1960s. What I have argued for David Smith, John Chamberlain, Nancy Grossman, and Dan Flavin is an account that draws from their own art-theoretical priorities but that nevertheless opens up possibilities that they could not have foreseen. During the decade in which the statuary tradition finally dissolved into the expanded field, these artists grappled with how the body must still be invoked by sculpture even if human morphologies could no longer be taken for granted.

Cassils offers a twenty-first century engagement with the transgender capacity of abstraction – one that is explicit in its politics. At a closer historical time to this book, another artist also developed the issues and tactics that made the 1960s so formative with regard to open accounts of gender. The performance artist, critic, and sculptor Scott Burton also absorbed and rejected ideas from 1960s sculpture to make a case for difference, particularity, and openness.⁷ As with Cassils, his work helps to illuminate the stakes of the transgender capacity that Sixties abstraction exhibited. Whereas Cassils attacked a "Juddian" sculpture to transform it, Burton's critical engagement with Minimalism compelled him to develop a more demotic and accessible mode of practice. Consequently, he became one of the progenitors of public art, and it was in this drive towards accessibility and openness that Burton registered the potential of abstract sculpture.

Burton's sculptural practice involved making useful sculpture as furniture. Self-effacing and functional, this work appropriated Minimalist literalism

and made it serve the viewer. At the same time, his sculptures are realist. They both are chairs and represent chairs – despite their obdurate "it is what it is" objecthood. For Burton, this work was created both in relation to the human body (in order to be functional) and in allusion to the human form. He once explained, "The human body is central to my work. A piece of furniture, even without the presence of a body, refers to human presence."⁸ In this way, Burton created works that overcame the opposition between literalism and figuration.

Many of the furniture works made by Burton in the 1980s embrace their anthropomorphic valences as a means of catering to the bodies of their users. This offering, however, will have different coordinates and meanings based on the particularity of the person or persons who take a seat. Genders vary with each new coupling produced when a participant occupies the seat. Indeed, Burton later remarked about his works, "They take different poses and suggest different genders."⁹ As his practice developed, he increasingly made more diverse and ambitious chair sculptures to be used. For his public works, he often relied on a highly geometric style so that the works could operate more anonymously in social spaces (fig. 144). In this way, they were more accessible and useful to the passerby – who may or may not have known that Burton's work was art (a possibility he embraced). Nevertheless, he explored much invention and variation in his seemingly simple chair sculptures. He explained this by saying: "Any chair is useful but a very striking looking chair, something that isn't like a usual chair, can make people perhaps more flexible in their attitudes to accept more things, to become more democratic about what a chair is. *They may even become more democratic about what a person is.* Art can be a moral example."¹⁰ Burton's aim to make art as a moral example – to be *more democratic about what a person is* – derived from his engagement with abstraction's potential to visualize successive openness. His works are also abstract bodies. Indeed, their functionality relies on their successfully being open enough to relate to each subsequent sitter in a different and unique way. Even though most users of his works might have a preconceived notion of what a chair looks like, nevertheless they find themselves seated on something that equally finds a place for them. If participants can be prompted to ask more broadly what a chair is, what art could be, and how they can relate to it, then they might be, as Burton hoped, more open about how they defined persons.

Burton was an astute critic of the debates of 1960s art, and his work sought to draw from it just such an engaged and social version of abstract sculpture that manifested its capacity for more open accounts of personhood. That is, when he turned from a critic of 1960s abstraction to become



144 Scott Burton, *Two-part Chair*, 1986. Lake Superior Green Granite, 101.6 × 58.4 × 91.4 cm (40 × 23 × 36 in.). Installation view, Art Institute of Chicago.

ing a sculptor in the 1970s, he boldly sought to make work that demanded plural accounts of personhood. This same increasing embrace of expansiveness can be seen in such artists as Grossman, Chamberlain, and Flavin as they developed their work in the 1970s to afford more mobile and multiple ways in which bodily metaphors, names, and genders could be located in their practices. Their work, that is, proposed unforclosed accounts of “what a person is.”

THE UNFORECLOSED

As Cassils, Burton, and the artists discussed in this book suggest, abstraction has capacity. It is productive and proliferative. Rather than an avoidance of representation, it must be considered an embrace of potentiality and a positing of the unforclosed.¹¹ Abstraction makes room. Because of this

capaciousness, abstraction has emerged as urgent for a growing number of transgender and queer artists in recent years. It offers a position from which to imagine, recognize, or realize new possibilities.

In its earlier moments, abstraction was sometimes characterized as flight – a flight from representation, from narrative, from figuration, from the world, from the mundane, and from the recognizable. In these accounts, abstraction was cast as either distillation or enervation, ghosting the observable world of the everyday that it refuses. Abstraction’s early defenders buttressed its flight by declaring its superiority over that which it rejects and purges, be that “literary” content, recognizable representation, or the decorative. That is, whether the argument was spiritual or conceptual, abstraction’s “purification” was often defined negatively and oppositionally. Erasure and negation underwrote its rhetorics. Today, about a century beyond when abstraction became an option, such defenses of abstraction’s negation ring increasingly hollow. Abstraction and figuration rub shoulders in contemporary art, and many younger artists simply do not understand (or care to understand) the antagonistic rhetoric of the twentieth century that cast them as mutually exclusive opponents. Rather than seeing abstraction as erasure, it appears to many as plenitude. Increasingly, what is called for are more accounts of abstraction that are positively defined, not negatively cast – accounts that ask how abstraction can perform and what it produces.

This is not to say that abstraction is not needful. Abstract art must be motivated by concerns outside of itself, and viewers and artists identify with and engage with abstraction because of the ways in which it spirals out to other associations and allusions. A primary way this happens is with the syntax created by the abstract work of art or practice. What, in other words, are the relations and patterns put forth by an abstract work? These can be internal, spatial, experiential, or otherwise, but the key question is how units establish relationality and organize themselves into iteration. While abstraction does sometimes have an iconography (x form stands for y idea/thing), most abstract artists would never rely on such easy routes as one-to-one symbolizations, decoder rings, map legends, or keys. Instead, investment is put into the relations, where priorities can be played out among forms and materials. Relations are meaningful, ethical, and political, and it is in its syntactical staging of relations that abstract art produces its engagements.

One of the most important of these relations is extrinsic: the embodied presence of the viewer who looks (or the artist who makes and also looks). Abstraction is produced in relation to the bodies of its beholders and creators. Everything has a scale, and we gauge scale through the proprioceptive

knowledge of our own bodies and their particularity. Abstraction often accesses bodily scale and suggests memories of corporeal relations through its marshaling of non-depicting form and materials. This is especially the case with abstract sculpture, which even in its most rigorously minimal and unitary versions incites bodily response. In Michael Fried's infamous 1967 critique of Minimalism, he put forth an idea that has proven enduring and infectious when he criticized Tony Smith's *Die* (1962): "One way of describing what Smith was making might be something like a surrogate person – that is, a kind of *statue*."¹² This observation is newly relevant today as artists pursue geometric and reductive abstraction but direct it at bodily evocations and ethical relations. In particular, artists who identify their practice as transgender or queer use this capacity of abstraction to invoke the body without imaging it, offering the abstract form as a receptor to the viewer's own identifications and empathies.¹³ Such a practice is generous, as it allows for each viewer to find their own analogies differently and anew. This is one of the lessons that the history of transgender experience teaches: to value mutability, to embrace successive states, and to cultivate both particularity and plurality.

Mobilized by transgender and queer priorities, abstraction has appeared to many today as newly compelling and capacious. It has come to be an important position from which to visualize the unforeclosed. It is for this reason that, in their shift from performance art to sculpture, abstraction became Cassils's mode for evoking the complexity, mutability, and variability of bodies and genders. It is also why Burton, in adapting and superseding Minimalism, played with objecthood to increase the ways in which viewers engaged with his work, in hopes that they would be "more democratic about what a person is."

Abstraction is not the only way to enact or to visualize transgender capacity, but I have attempted to show how it provides a historically rich enabling ground from which to rethink gender's multiplicity and mutability. In its retreat from resemblance and the conventional figure, abstraction offers a position from which to reconsider or to visualize anew the body and personhood. Art-historical debates about the status of the figure or explorations of the evocations of non-figuration both contribute to a history of human morphology's arbitrations and to transgender critique. Again, I have been emboldened by Butler's thinking in my recasting of abstraction in this way. As she has argued, "There is a certain departure from the human that takes place in order to start the process of remaking the human."¹⁴ Abstraction is one such departure, and the artists discussed in this book used non-representational objects to evoke people and

bodies in such a way that accounts of remaking and openness were produced.¹⁵

For the artists in the present study, this often involved the translation of non-representational artworks into words, and I have given weight to the words that were used by the artists themselves, by their critics, and by their viewers. In many ways, the capacity of these works to offer new accounts of the human becomes most immediately evident through the frictions and synergies created when language (especially a language based on a binary gendering) is applied to non-representational artworks. The correlation between abstract objects and the metaphors of the body, implications of sexual coupling, or personifying titles given by the artists all served to produce unruly and expansive capacities. A recurring pattern in the book has been the scene in which artists re-view their work in dialogic situations with others. Seeing the work through others' eyes prompts a reconsideration of the abstract sculpture's openness to multiple identifications. Most evident in the Smith–O'Hara interview, it was also key to Grossman's exchange with the art students and Chamberlain's with Henry Geldzahler. In none of these situations was there a correct way of seeing the works. Far more interesting are the ways in which the works facilitated plurality, prompting even the artists themselves to consider their own productions anew when they saw their abstractions as bodies or persons.¹⁶ As Chamberlain once remarked, "art is the only place left where a person can go discover something and not have to be told by somebody else whether they discovered it or not."¹⁷

One of the central questions of this book has been how to visualize transformation and its potential. In other words, when we question the limitations of dimorphism or of binaries and when we recognize that personhood is not static, how do we look? The abstract, three-dimensional art object offers an arena in which to work out visualizations and imaginations of new morphologies and successive states. The particular mix of sculpture's physicality, the viewer's three-dimensional engagements, and the refusal to depict simply the human form combine to produce a field in which nominations of the human are dynamic, generative, ongoing, and plural. The collision of abstraction with metaphors of the body or personhood is proliferative, and the four artists discussed in this book each staged such an imbrication between non-reference or non-depiction and allusions to bodies and persons. From their own art-theoretical priorities and concerns, they created works that called for open and unlimited accounts of the body and of personhood. Gender, as the recurring predicate for nominating the human, played a central role in these accounts, and it is in tracking the

successive states and plurality of genders that one can begin to grasp the expansiveness of their practices. The perspective of transgender politics and theory not only allows for a more precise articulation of the terms and implications of these artists' output. It also provides a key to understanding how these accounts and these artworks speak directly to broader concerns. From David Smith's anxious realization of his own success in pursuing abstraction's capaciousness to Dan Flavin's fidelity to personalization and naming, an analysis of these four artists also emphatically points to the ways in which we must revise the binary and dimorphic assumptions with which we have heretofore understood the history of figuration and abstraction, the Sixties emphasis on the bodily, and the ways in which the human is nominated.

he was then old and arthritic, and I couldn't do it"; Flavin in Tuchman, "Flavin Interviewed," 194. On the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, see Alexandra Whitney, "An Illuminating Paradox: Dan Flavin's *alternating pink and 'gold,'* 1967," in Bell, Bell, and Whitney, *Dan Flavin: Series and Progressions*, 17–23.

107 Tuchman, "Flavin Interviewed," 194.

108 John C. Welchman, *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 43.

109 Ibid., 1.

110 Brenda Richardson, *Frank Stella: The Black Paintings* (Baltimore Museum of Art, 1976), 3.

111 I am grateful to Lisa Lee for prompting me to think deeply about the effects of the "to" when she acted as respondent to my presentation of this material in the 30 October 2013 Weissbourd Seminar of the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts at the University of Chicago.

112 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987), trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11–12. Both my usage of "performative" and Genette's refer to speech act theory and its foundational definition in J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962).

113 Genette, *Paratexts*, 134.

114 Joan Lowndes, "Flavin's 'Mystical' Aura" (1969), in *It Is What It Is: Writings on Dan Flavin since 1964*, ed. Paula Feldman and Karsten Schubert (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 65.

115 Genette, *Paratexts*, 134.

116 Ibid., 136.

117 Andrea Rosen, "'Untitled' (The Never-ending Portrait)," in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*, ed. Dietmar Elger (Hannover and Ostfildern-Ruit: Sprengel Museum Hannover and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1997), 57.

118 Grégoire Müller, *The New Avant-garde: Issues for the Art of the Seventies* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1972), 10.

119 Rosen, "'Untitled' (The Never-ending Portrait)," 55.

120 Tuchman, "Flavin Interviewed," 194.

121 *Gypsy* is, in fact, all about acts of naming and renaming, from the repeated "My name's June! What's yours?" to the "gimmick" stage names to Gypsy's declaration: "I am Gypsy Rose Lee! I love her – and if you don't you can clear out now!" Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim, and Jule Styne, *Gypsy: A Musical* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 1960), 101. Furthermore, D. A. Miller has examined the mobility of gender in the book, as when Rose says about her daughter, "Louise can be a boy" (9); Miller, *Place for Us*.

122 Such naming is rife in the personal correspondence of the 1960s into the early 1970s in the Robert Rosenblum Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

123 Mac McGinnes said of Rosenblum's list: "A lot of it was compiled on a trip he made to Chicago on an afternoon with me and Dennis Adrian. What you may not know is that its genesis was a list of drag names for American presidents. Bobby went through his copy of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and scratched out all the real names. It was a long time ago, but some that I remember are: Cherry Washington, Babe Lincoln, Dawn Adams and Dawn Quincy Adams, Anne of Cleveland, Dot Polk, Liz Tyler, and Tokyo Roosevelt. Name magic was important in those days"; email from Mac McGinnes to the author, 15 August 2012. He expanded on this history in my interview with him on 2 November 2012.

124 The copy of the typewritten transcription of the list with Rosenblum's handwritten annotations (including the addition of Flavin) was sent to Michael Harwood, who generously

provided it to me; email from Harwood, 12 August 2012.

125 Flavin, "Some Remarks," 27.

CONCLUSION: ABSTRACTION AND THE UNFORECLOSED

1 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 51.

2 For *Cuts*, Cassils trained with the fitness legend Charles Glass at the famous Venice Muscle Beach in California. As with all of Cassils's preparatory work, a precise regimen of advanced training was developed in consultation with experts such as Glass in order to achieve the transformation required for each performance.

3 Heather Cassils, email to the author, 26 September 2014.

4 Heather Cassils, interview with the author, 1 August 2014.

5 I have discussed at length the implications of Rodin's performative mark-making and its relationship to the multistage process of casting in *Rodin: Sex and the Making of Modern Sculpture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

6 At the time of writing, Cassils has plans to cast the work in bronze with the aim that, when displayed in public, the cumulative caresses of its viewers will bring shine to certain areas, allowing for a work that is like a durable monument but also bears evidence of repeated bodily engagements.

7 Burton will be the subject of a future book. For an overview of his relationship to the 1960s, however, see the introduction to my volume of his art criticism and writings, David Getsy, ed., *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975* (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2012), 1–32.

8 Scott Burton, interview of 10 October 1979, in Michael Auping, *30 Years: Interviews and Outtakes* (Fort Worth, Tex: Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, 2007), 79.

9 Ibid., 81.

10 Audio recording of interview between Scott Burton and Edward Brooks de Celle, March 1980; Edward Brooks de Celle Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Emphases mine.

11 Much of this section first appeared in the folio published to accompany the exhibition *FLEX* curated by Orlando Tirando at Kent Fine Art, New York, in 2014.

12 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 19.

13 There are many artists both established and emerging who are, today, exploring abstraction as a resource for engaging with transgender and queer experience. Artists such as Jonah Groeneboer, Math Bass, Gordon Hall, Linda Besemer, Amy Sillman, Ulrike Müller, Sadie Benning, Carrie Moyer, Harmony Hammond, Sheila Pepe, Elijah Burgher, Edie Fake, Prem Sahib, Tom Burr, and Shahryar Nashat have all (very differently) incorporated abstraction of varying degrees into their practices for its capacities and openness.

14 Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 3–4.

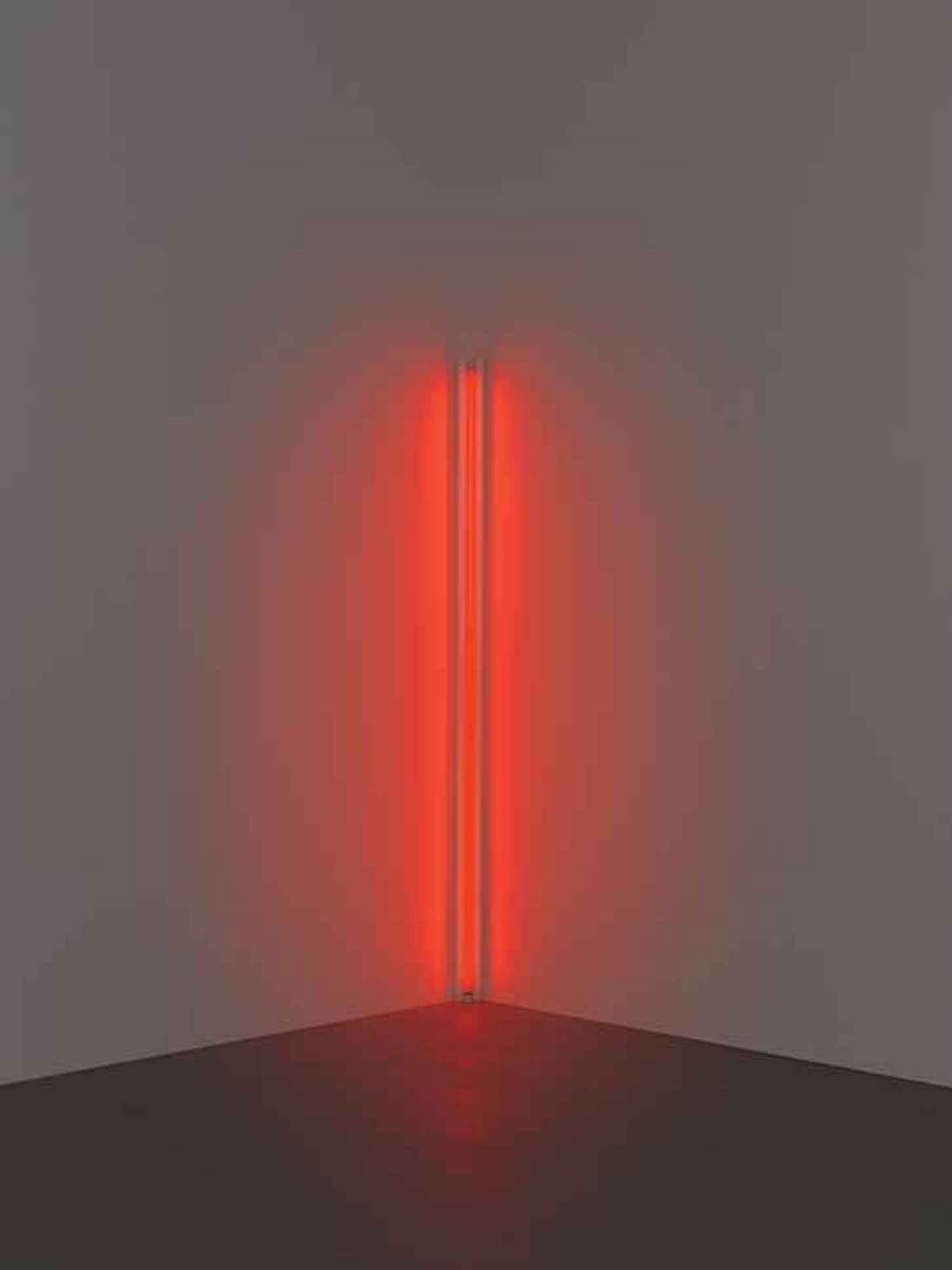
15 For a survey of other practices in art since 1960 that have taken gender's mutability and multiplicity as a theme, see Frank Wagner, Kasper König, and Julia Friedrich, eds., *Das achte Feld: Geschlechter, Leben und Begehren in der Kunst seit 1960* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz and Museum Ludwig, 2006).

16 In this regard, such scenes turned on the attempt to establish gender agreements, in the sense proposed in Whitney Davis, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 220–33. While Davis's analysis primarily

deals with representation, the method of tracking agreement classes with regard to gender is also suggestive when dealing with abstraction and other forms of non-representational art. The sculptors I have chosen for analysis, from this perspective, are particularly interesting for the ways in which they confound or defer agree-

ments and invite non-agreements and contestations, as in the dialogic situations discussed in the chapters.

17 Bonnie Clearwater, "John Chamberlain interview, 1991 Jan. 29–30," Oral History Archives, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 16.



ABSTRACT BODIES

SIXTIES SCULPTURE IN THE
EXPANDED FIELD OF GENDER

DAVID J. GETSY

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CONTENTS

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Frontispiece: Dan Flavin, *red out of a corner (to Annina)*, 1963/70 (detail of fig. 116).
Page vi: Detail of Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965 (fig. 82).

Acknowledgments	VII
Preface	VII
Introduction:	I
“New” Genders and Sculpture in the 1960s	
1 On Not Making Boys: David Smith, Frank O’Hara, and Gender Assignment	43
2 Immoderate Couplings: Transformations and Genders in John Chamberlain’s Work	97
3 Second Skins: The Unbound Genders of Nancy Grossman’s Sculpture	147
4 Dan Flavin’s Dedications	209
Conclusion: Abstraction and the Unforeclosed	267
Notes	281
Bibliography	329
Index	356
Illustration Credits	372