Abstraction, Experience, Reduction

Time and Periodicity in the Work of Myron Stout and Postwar American Art History

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Abstract:

This dissertation is the first full-career study of the American painter Myron Stout (1908-1987). Stout is best known for a series of small black and white abstract paintings he made between 1955 and 1980. He is most often associated with American hard-edge painting of the early 1960s, the movement which set the stage for Minimalism. However, Stout's work predates hard-edge painting in an important way, namely that he developed it as an extension of Abstract Expressionism. Stout intended the reduced palette, simplified shapes, and absence of gestural marks in his paintings to be effective containers for an expression of lived experience.

Stout confounds typical art historical narratives in other ways. He was introduced to modernism in the 20s, but did not begin his life as a painter until the late 1940s. In an era of high production he made very few paintings—about fifteen over twenty-five years. His work "predicts" some of the issues that emerged in Minimalism, but by the mid-1960s Stout appeared very much a 50s artist. Whilst seemingly a die-hard, purist painter, his artistic milieu included artists innovating very different kinds of practices, from Happenings and Pop to realist painting. Finally, from today's perspective, Stout is a lesser-known artist, but he is and was nonetheless an insider in terms of his education and his artistic contacts.

By addressing the practice of a single artist, this dissertation demonstrates that even in the face of newer, more inclusive methodologies, recent histories Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism still have problems with inclusivity, indeed depend to a large degree on narrow views. The approach here is to illuminate moments where Stout's history collides with conventional period-histories. Using Stout's chronological age in addition to his interface with the art world, it takes a longer view of his career, addressing early and late parts of his life. Stout's continuity through these periods raises questions about how models of periodisation continue to drive the way art history is written.

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Introduction:

An Underknown Hero

Myron Stout is the secret hero of the new abstraction.

—Chris Martin[1]

It belongs to journalism—and to the millennial complex from which so many journalists and journalist intellectuals suffer in our day—that each new phase of Modernist art should be hailed as the start of a whole new epoch in art, marking a decisive break with all the customs and conventions of the past. Each time, a kind of art is expected so unlike all previous kinds of art, and so free from norms of practices or taste, that everybody, regardless of how informed or uninformed he happens to be, can have his say about it. And each time, this expectation has been disappointed, as the new phase of Modernist art in question finally takes its place in the intelligible continuity of taste and tradition.

—Clement Greenberg[2]

Art history continues to have trouble with its objects. Is it a science (responsive and diachronic) that makes order out of historical material such as art practices, artworks, and the discourse of ideas that contextualise them? Is it a form of social history that chronicles inclusively, and interprets an expanding definition of the visual object? Or is it a thematic "meta-narrative," that is, a series of paradigms driven by an agenda of relevance, which tell us where we are now and where we ought to go?

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[1] http://www.thebrooklynrail.org/arts/april03/abstractpainting.html (accessed 17 September 2004).
[2] Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), in John O'Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, 1993), 93. Hereafter cited as CG4.

The central questions of this dissertation are these: What do we do with an artist who worked in an art world centre and produced works of art that were engaged with the aesthetics and ideas of the day, but who—effectively—has been left out of the history of the period? If we assume he attained a certain level of success in his career, what could be the reason for this? Is there a way of gaining critical purchase on the judgments—social, aesthetic, ideological—that have led to his historical effacement? And, finally, what do we have to gain by such a reconsideration?

Myron Stout, the American painter who lived from 1908 to 1987, is an artist who produced, between 1950 and 1980, a body of mostly abstract work: paintings in oil, charcoal drawings, small graphite drawings, and landscape drawings in conté or pencil (see figs. 1-13). He is an insider to the New York art-world of the 1950s and 60s who is barely known outside that context. When his first retrospective took place, at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1980, he had to be "explained" with the term "underknown."[3] Stout has nonetheless an ardent following of not insignificant art-world figures, in some cases by artists whose work holds little formal or ideological relation to his. The conceptual artist Mel Bochner claimed Stout had the best edges in art history.[4] Postmodernist painter Philip Taaffe recalled Stout's importance to the beginnings of his own practice, helping him think about "infinite scale."[5] Lucas Samaras chose him as one of his favourite artists, as did Whitney Museum Director Adam Weinberg, who opted to have Stout's painting *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)* on his office wall.[6] Stout's name also appears with surprising regularity on the pages of American art

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[3] What began it was B.H. Friedman, "Too Little Attention: Art Chronicle," *New Boston Review* 2, no. 3 (Winter/January 1977): 17. See also Hilton Kramer, "Art: Myron Stout Ushered into Limelight," *The New York Times* (8 February 1980): C26; John Russell, "Stout Splashes Out of Obscurity at 71," *Provincetown Advocate,* Summer Guide (31 July 1980): 3; Barbara Rose, "Talking About...Art: Big 'Little Master,'" *Vogue* (February 1980): 68. See Appendix 2 for full details on exhibitions and reviews.
[4] Related to the author in conversation by Sanford Schwartz, 2 December 2000.
[5] Interview, "Martin Prinzhorn Gespräch mit Philip Taaffe," Vienna, 1996. www.mip.at/de/dokumente/1163-content.html (accessed 7 August 2004).
[6] Grace Glueck, "The Artists' Artists," *Art News* 81, no. 9 (November 1982): 98-99. Samaras said: "His work has an ascetic, restrained, Puritan sensibility that I've liked very much for 24 years—and still do." Weinberg said, "It's about how you can make a very large statement with a very small piece, the search for just the right balance of negative and positive space." Caitlin Kelly, "Their Favourite Things," *Art & Antiques* (January 1995): 71. See fig. 10.

magazines in reference to younger artists working abstractly, or artists working as mavericks of one type or another.[7] *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith appears to be waging a one-woman campaign to raise awareness on his work.[8] And in the most recent magazine feature, the writer recounted a long interest in Stout's work, and gave him a most appropriate sobriquet, "the tortoise who wins."[9]

Stout always had a certain level of institutional recognition. At the time, his shows were reviewed and his works collected. This was followed by his inclusion in themed exhibitions and a retrospective, in 1980, at the Whitney Museum. Most of his works are now in public collections. And yet, despite such indicators of his value as an artist, Stout's work comes up short against contemporary historical accounts of the period in which he worked. For those interested in Stout, it is generally a discouraging experience to look at a book on the subject of 1950s or 60s American art. He is nearly never there in an index or in a photograph, not to mention being the actual subject of a historical or theoretical argument. The literature that does include him is limited to reviews, exhibition catalogues, and a handful of survey texts, most notably Irving Sandler's *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (1978) and Sam Hunter's *American Art of the 20th Century* (1973). But after about 1970, his work rarely appeared in thematic or general exhibitions; it was shown on its own, or in small exhibitions based on a single collection, or artists who have a social connection. In this sense, Stout comes to only represent himself, while other, better-known artists stand for decades, movements, styles, or periods.

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[7] See Edward Leffingwell, "Carl Ostendarp at Xavier LaBoulbenne," *Art in America* 88, no. 2 (February 2000): 124; or Rafael Rubenstein, "In the Realm of the Superflat," *Art in America* 89, no. 6 (June 2001): 113, a feature on Japanese artist Takashi Murakami.

[8] In addition to reviewing proper Stout exhibitions—his 1990 Dia Art Foundation Bridgehampton show, as well as mentioning him in reviews of group shows like *Lead* (Hirschl & Adler Gallery, New York, 1987), *In a Classical Vein* (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1993) and *Abstraction Pure and Impure* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1995)—Smith cited Stout in reviews on Vija Celmins (6 March 1992), Tom Friedman (26 October 2001), Tom Nozkowski (21 February 2003), and Agnes Martin (14 May 2004). See Appendix 2 for full exhibition and review citations. Smith owns a Stout graphite drawing (*Untitled*, 1976-79) but that does not seem enough to motivate such regular attention.

[9] Trevor Winkfield, "The Tortoise Who Wins," *Modern Painters* 15, no. 3 (September 2003): 106-111.

Furthermore, his work sits rather uncomfortably against many of the ideas we hold as most urgent today. Too Modernist, too much about Idealism, too limited in style or diversity, and at the same time, somehow missing from the mainstream of cutting edge art. Poring back over the critical discourse that surrounds the type of work Stout made, it appears that a failure has occurred. Somewhere along the line, it stopped being bound up with the more durable period-ideas that are the currency of historical writing. This, of course, is a curious reversal: histories are advanced as "representative" of their concerns, but they need objects (works of art, concepts, artists) that themselves function as representations. If art history is a train, Stout's car got uncoupled from it when it took a long, hard turn sometime in the 1960s.

There are various personal reasons that might explain how he was sidelined. He took a long time to decide to be an artist. He produced few paintings when high production was valued. Having just established himself in New York, he left for the winter solitude of a summer resort. After his first show—critically though not commercially successful—he switched galleries, and then stayed with the second gallery long past its strongest years. He seems to have spent a lot of time reading and writing. These decisions certainly had their impact. His career must have suffered from his daily absence from the place where the opportunities were. He also had a difficult time finishing works; several have preposterous dates attached to them, like the painting *Demeter*, which he made during the years 1955-68, or *Aegis*, from 1955-79 (figs. 7 and 12). There are a few he never finished. There is also evidence of at least one cancelled show, which if it had taken place, might have given his work visibility at a particularly important critical juncture. Stout's paintings are small, their surfaces thin, and little effort is apparent, but between the years of 1954 and 1980 he made only fourteen paintings and perhaps a hundred drawings overall. He did not have a job, nor a family. What was he doing working on these paintings for so long? Such details come together to suggest he was an artist who presented *himself* at a disadvantage. He did not make it easy for his work to enter the market, and by extension, the apparatus of critical writing. But, art

history can and does overlook such problems all the time. And Stout exemplifies other things we value in twentieth-century art, like consistency, commitment, and a progressive stylistic development, values that seem importantly—although perhaps unfashionably—"modern." His small, perfectly-formed and individualised abstractions powerfully express deeply liberal ideas about social and scientific progress, about hopes for universal legibility and a belief that human potential can be realised concretely. At the same time, he was never grandiose. Certain eccentricities in the balance of forms along with his consistently small scale, equally reflect art's mid-century aspiration to be deeply idealistic but also grounded in history and specific practices. This dissertation addresses the disparities between his own concerns, and those that have the status of history.

There are, of course, other reclusive, late, singular artists that art historians have no trouble with. Piet Mondrian, whose work and ideas were crucial for Stout, was a late-bloomer, making his breakthrough works when he was well into his mid-thirties (many believe he made his best work in his sixties and seventies). Like Stout, Mondrian received little critical attention during his lifetime, but is now considered a key artist for the history of modernism. His work is a textbook example: his trials and rejections of other styles, evolutionary moves through observations of nature into pure abstraction, and almost scientific approach to ideas and forms. And then, a final style, worthy of many variations.[10] Mondrian, however, is indisputably central to twentieth-century art history. His work is aligned with the aims and aspirations—as well as the limitations—of his period and cultural identity. It may be more relevant to draw a parallel between Stout and certain "eccentrics" who are outside the mainstream rather than central to it. This is a fairly common strategy now; art historians are as interested in artists outside history's conventional boundaries as those central to it. But then Stout saw himself as historical and mainstream (within an avant-garde context) rather than eccentric.

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[10] See Yve-Alain Bois, "Piet Mondrian, New York City," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 157-59. He asserts there that repetition governs Mondrian's works.

Soon after Stout's death in 1987, around the time a series of gallery exhibitions were organised in New York to make a mini-retrospective, an apparent critical consensus emerged that he ought to be seen alongside other "singular" artists from history. Nonetheless the list was canonical, and included Morandi, Mondrian, Cézanne, even Vermeer.[11] James Elkins has recently pointed to two types of art historical enquiry, ones that are "extensive" and deal with less well-known artists, and ones that are "intensive" and address better-known ones.[12] (He observes that both types of study are growing in numbers.)

> The difference is interesting and crucial, since a discipline that writes extensively is expanding its purview and experimenting with new subjects, while a discipline that grows intensively is consolidating its interests and focusing on canonical figures.[13]

Stout however, even slips through this interpretive model. He is clearly not canonical, but neither can he be held up as an artist who will extend the discourse into new material or territory, as abstract or modernist painting has never fallen off the critical agenda.

Interpreting and contextualising Stout's work in fact relies on a set of methodologies already central to the discipline—formalist analysis, social history, a bit of poststructuralism. Herein lies the paradox of Stout as subject. Is it just—that is, merely—an exemplary body of work by a more or less interesting artist? Does a history rather need objects that are not so self-contained, that have influence, both negative and positive? Stout saw himself as a modernist. He appears to best fit into a mid-century critical discourse about abstraction as an expression of "pure" experience. And yet, it doesn't work. The old method of seeing his work in relation to his period reveals the way he does not fit—he was too "geometric" (read: instrumental) for Abstract Expressionism but too invested in "content" or "old values" for Minimalism. The new method—borne

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[11] See David Carrier, "Myron Stout," *Arts Magazine* 65, no. 5 (January 1991): 78; Lisa Liebman, "Myron Stout," *Artforum* 29, no. 9 (May 1991): 142; and Michael Brenson, "Works of Myron Stout, Standing on Their Own," *The New York Times* (2 November 1990): C32.
[12] James Elkins, *Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), 20-21.
[13] Ibid., 21.

out of the need for history to be more fully representational—is to create a more intricate relationship between biography and history. And yet, there is still a sense that Stout as object-of-study is endlessly deferred as successive methods of analysis are brought to bear on him. The work itself, and his life, become ever more elusive. Elkins is again helpful on this subject, suggesting art historians' need to interpret works of art in ever increasing numbers of words and ever more complex and diverse methodologies is—perversely—because pictures are in fact simple, and meaningless.[14]

Several important concepts are raised by this brief introduction to Stout and his problematic relationship to art history and art historical method. The first and perhaps largest is history and historical writing, and the ways in which different understandings of them play a role in the considerations (or lack of consideration) of Stout's work. Stout currently has two art-historical identities—a hard-edge abstract painter and an "outsider artist." Both are a product of historical misunderstandings, and neither is satisfactory. An associated concept is biography, or personal/social history, and whether and how it can be deployed to explain Stout's erasure. Canons are clearly an issue, as are ongoing debates about modernism's end and the failures of avant-gardism. Lastly there is a philosophical issue—what might be thought of in terms of a modern-postmodern opposition. Stout's work, moreover his own ideas about his work, are wholly unreconstructed. He believed that the artists of his generation were making "great works" out of universal aesthetic principles; he believed in "depth." He was a humanist. As an ideology, this modernist-humanist-idealist position has been roundly critiqued in the past forty or so years such that addressing him on his own terms is not easy. The remainder of the Introduction will address some of the larger philosophical and methodological issues for the dissertation, some of the key figures, and the way it is structured.

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[14] Ibid., 16.

History

Historiography is the study of the methods of historical inquiry. This in the main is the approach many art historians take today, and loosely speaking it describes my own method. Historiography contextualises sources, considers them to be "histories" and that they are thus necessarily ideologically formed. "History," then, is a text rather than a record of facts. Writing historiographically happens on another order. Appropriating or using historical "material" has to happen discursively. Historiography as a method is considered as an effort against *historicism*, which is the idea that laws of history can be understood, and used as models to interpret future events. Historicism as it was practiced in the nineteenth century saw history as a science and sought empirical rules that were above both the historian and the individuals living in that period. While this, in its best instances, meant that each period was seen on its own terms and not merely interpreted according to the historian's point of view, historicism is generally discredited as an approach. A turning point against it was the assertion Karl Popper made in his 1957 book, *The Poverty of Historicism,* that historicism was tantamount to totalitarian thinking.[15]

To my mind, the critique of history to be found in Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is relevant here. To Benjamin, historicism is the kind of thinking that holds up an "'eternal' image of the past." He continues:

> Historicism rightly culminates in universal history. Materialistic historiography differs from it as to method more clearly than from any other kind. Universal history has no theoretical armature. It's method is additive; it musters a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time. Materialistic historiography, on the other hand, is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock . . . In this

[15] Richard Vann points out that the historicist model was dominant until the late 1960s in historical writing and philosophies of history. See his essay "Turning Linguistic," in Frank Ankersmit and Hans Kellner, eds., *A New Philosophy of History* (London: Reaktion, 1995), 40-43.

> structure [the materialist historian] recognizes . . . a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.[16]

Benjamin's conception of materialistic historiography is an ideal approached by many art historians working now, especially those in the field of postwar American art. Seen this way, history is an entity with its own logic. It is not a stable and collectively-drawn account of the past, but, as Benjamin alerts us, an infinitely manipulated story that *will necessarily* be adapted to fit the needs of the present moment and those of the speaker or writer. There is a need to attend to the data of historical record, but to do so realising that not all of it is equal. Benjamin was writing in the context of an early, political Marxism, where history was seen as dialectical, but also leading towards revolution. Thinking about the past is in itself inherently thinking about the future. But this future is based in reality, not idealisations.

> The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty. . . We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jew the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.[17]

This concept of time and history—dubbed by Benjamin "Messianic time"—has had important effects on writers whose subject is avant-garde art. For writers who understand this, history is far from inevitable, even, or non-discriminatory. I argue that Clement Greenberg's early writings use a form of time very close to Benjamin's. Greenberg's writings dominated the critical discourse in New York about modernism, and had specific effects on Stout's work, which I'll discuss in Chapters 2 and 3.[18] Another writer whose use of history is important, although differently so from Greenberg, is Hal Foster.

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[16] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 262-3.
[17] Ibid., 264.
[18] Greenberg relies on a Hegelian construct of historical change. What interests me is the "hope" that he sees in change, and its relation to Benjamin's "Messianic time."

Foster adheres to the Benjaminian notion that history's "pregnant configurations" have a necessary "shock value" to its tendency towards stasis. In *The Return of the Real*, he claims to construct a new genealogy of the 1960s avant-garde that is a "coarticulation of artistic and political forms."[19] I'll argue in Chapter 4 that his reading of Minimalism through this lens has devastating effects on the present reception of an artist like Stout, whose proto-Minimalist painting nonetheless is rejected as "idealist." Foster claims to be interested in art that has a "critical consciousness of history," but all of the material that makes up his ground is canonical. For example, admitting that his "model of the avant-garde is too partial and canonical, but I offer it as a theoretical case study only, to be tested on other practices," he claims he left out "feminist" practices because they were predated by Minimalism.[20] The limits of his historical narrative is its very emphasis on moments of historical rupture. This forces him into generalisations about both works of art and artists—idealisations, in fact, on behalf of a history that parses a "radical politics" out of a complex set of aesthetic and ideological positions. His model moreover needs moments of *transition* which are based on partisan accounts. A brief example is when he explains via Donald Judd that in the early 1960s, geometric painting was "a present way of working felt to be outmoded, misguided, or otherwise oppressive."[21] Foster implies that Judd's rejection is *logical*, but looking back at this history from another perspective, we see rather that both Judd and Foster are being *ideological*. The problem is not with ideology itself—we are all ideological—but when it is reformed as self-evident and eternal.

Benjamin is important here, too: in his writings there is always a call for a corrective aimed at unmasking history as the narrative of the victors. Speaking, to be sure, of a very different time and place, Benjamin writes:

> A historical materialist views [cultural treasures] with cautious detachment. For without exception the cultural treasures he surveys have

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[19] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 5ff.
[20] Ibid., 3, 5, 8.
[21] Ibid., 3.

> an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another. A historical materialist therefore dissociates himself from it as far as possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.[22]

The idea that every object of history is an object of power, acting in an invisible dialectic with another object on the receiving end of that power, plays an important role in gaining purchase on the fact that there are always scores—if not hundreds—of artists in any era who are never noticed beyond their small social or critical milieu. But that they are essential for the ones who are famous. They are the "school," the followers, the community. They are the background that gives the foreground meaning. They are the weak, or late examples of a worn-out style that a younger artist fights against as "outmoded, misguided, or otherwise oppressive." The question is, in terms of discourse, to what degree can this issue be folded into the postmodernist notion of the other. For postmodern theorists, the other is a political or social outsider. In these general terms—class, gender, education, ethnicity—Stout is an insider. And yet, his personality, attitude, and the decisions he made about his life and work—which come together to form a social identity, I argue—makes him other to the artists whose work is now inscribed in art history. Stout was a white, Anglo-Saxon man, from a background of privilege, he was highly educated in respected schools, and his manner was genteel and articulate. He was physically small, and while he liked to talk he wasn't loud. He was also from "out West," and knew how to ride a horse. He was by no means a teetotaller. Reconsidering Stout's work needs the critical methodology of the other, a mode of discourse whose legacy includes studies like Ann Gibson's *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics,* which I use extensively in Chapter 2. Gibson does "brush history against the grain" in her

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[22] Benjamin, "Theses," 256-7. I was alerted to this quotation and realised its potential role here after reading it in Douglas Crimp, *On The Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1993), 238.

adoption of social identity as a way of interrogating the question of the "minor artist" in Abstract Expressionist painting.[23] For Gibson, history has players, but their accomplishments are recorded as if they were inevitable and without human intervention. Calling Stout an other allows for a critique of the history that excluded him. Nonetheless, there is an irony here. Postmodernist theorists would be likely to claim Stout (if they noticed him at all) as a product of modernist false consciousness.[24] I suggest, however, that positing Stout as an other complicates the picture, and in some regards suggests that the historical ground the first generation of postmodernist critics "radically re-read" may need to be updated.

It is also an irony that Stout would become a postmodern other when he made works that depend on formal values for the construction of their meaning. In recent art history, formalism is conventionally characterised as the height of historicism since it is based on stylistic laws. Formalism decontextualises works from the places where they were made or exhibited, and the original meanings that were intended for them. Formalism is problematic because it is synoptic—it presents a narrative flow taken from a single point of view, and it creates a situation where objects from very different contexts can be compared, ahistorically. This mode of history moreover serves the dominant class.

Stout was an artist who thought historically, but he did so in a specific ways, always with an eye to practice. A major theme running through his journals is *time*, and history, and the individual's need to think and act historically. It is like a worry: he wants to explain its impact on the way he is proceeding in his work. In one exemplary section

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[23] Art historians and critics are incredibly resistant to this book. There are some weaknesses in Gibson's analysis, and she makes a few category-mistakes, but on the whole it is revolutionary in method and subject matter.

[24] Hal Foster's earliest book, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983) is a key early anthology for postmodernist art criticism. The title suggests an orientation away from one modernist mode that was of key interest to Stout (this will emerge in Chapter 4). The conflation of the "anti-aesthetic" with issues of the other is confirmed in Foster's book by the inclusion of Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism," 57-82.

he invokes a model for historical time that is an important gloss, both culturally and philosophically, on a Western, Hegelian concept of time. He writes:

> I am reminded often of a story I was once told that some African tribe conceives of life on a basis such as this: you follow a selective visual path along one of the fan corals; you start at the stem. First you have only, say, three choices of direction, but, having chosen one, the other two fall away from practical consideration, but you are still presented by three—or four or five choices at the next stage of growth. And . . . at every stage of growth, with every selective action, you have not really reduced the possibilities of choice, which rather increase as you go along. You have simply come to a further stage of choosing. As, of course, you approach the outer edge of the fan, it is true that all the possibilities have an ending, but so, of course, does life. But the moral is that while you live, you are not in time asked for practical consideration, subject to a reduction of possibilities, but have constantly and at every moment a great range of possibilities and perhaps increasing possibilities. This conception is very important to me, and until I was convinced of it, I must admit that I tended to become more and more cynical and pessimistic.[25]

Periodisation

If chronological time is an aspect of history in general, art history in particular plays this out in a particular construction, the "period." The period is not a simple idea, rather a complex of ideas and aspirations. It favours visibility above all, and likes schools, major artists and other concentrated examples that help represent it. It also needs change. But the period in modernism and postmodernism is importantly different from the way it is used in reference to the art of previous centuries. There, it usually has a style name (the Baroque, for example) and charts a set of aesthetic issues in a variety of art forms, like architecture, painting and music, in this case, over a time period with indistinct borders. In the twentieth century, periods tend to be linked to decades, which suggests on one level that differing practices can be brought together productively (Cubism and Dada being two sides of the 'teens). On another, the shift from a style-term to a chronological one implies that certain meanings inhere in these ten-year sections of time, that there is

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[25] Tina Dickey, ed., *Selections from the Journals of Myron Stout* (draft manuscript, in publication, New York: Midmarch Press, 2005), 70-71 (24 November 1954). Hereafter cited as MS Journal-2.

an essential "twenties" mentality created by historical events that itself conditions cultural output. The first—at least in its inception—follows from categorising and interpreting cultural artefacts, and wanting insight into the remote past; the second is to interpret cultural objects *as motivated* by an identifiable world-view. The difference is based importantly on the accessibility of the period in relation to our present time, moreover, on the fact that modernism itself occurred after the notion of periodic time was in place. In the twentieth century, periods are used as shorthand for cultural constructions, like the "decadent" 20s or the "go-go" 80s; everybody already knows these types because they have first-hand experience with them. This is the point: a decade is related in some fundamental way to biological time. We talk about *our* twenties and eighties, and we think about our age in relation to the century's decade—in the 80s I was in my 'teens for the most part—and this seems to mean something. And we invest such time-constructions with meaning, giving special weight to markers (40th birthdays and turns of millenniums are big ones). At the same time, we know them to be abstractions, useful only as far as they go, as they are far from capable of representing detail or complexity.

One might be tempted to say that the different uses of period I have been detailing make for two different types of enquiry, the first in the realm of "history" and the second in "criticism."[26] Nevertheless, with its air of neutrality, periodisation appears in art historical arguments that otherwise reject the simplifications of labels. For example, in her recent book, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 60s*, Pamela Lee writes:

> . . . when historians and critics write about periodizing the sixties, they mean, first of all, to reject the crude historicizing that sees that time as beginning on January 1, 1960, and ending at midnight, December 31, ten years later. They mean to see something more expansive about that moment, irreducible to marks on a calendar or dates on a page, a "common objective situation" that is at once deeply historical but does

[26] See Richard Shiff, "On Criticism Handling History," *History of the Human Sciences* 2, no. 1 (February 1989): 63-87.

> not essentialise an "omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting."[27]

Lee observes rightly that "the 60s" is a convention that has little to do with actual chronological time. A certain event that took place in 1968 can come to signify "the 60s," as can also one that took place in 1973.[28] But she employs the notion that a period has an identity, and this is the subject of her book: to account for the resistance to or fear of time in the art of the 60s. There is both an obvious logic to her limiting her study to a decade—"the 60s" are still with us, as she argues—and an uncomfortable sense that once adopted, she proceeds apparently untroubled into reifying the practice of periodisation. My critique of Lee's approach is that not only does she use such an outworn historical form, but that the 60s themselves are such a correct subject to take up. We are in a moment of uncritical embrace of that decade; Lee's study in this way piggybacks on a whole range of fashionable issues and debates that a study on Stout (or any artist whose works complicates such a limitation) cannot. It is one of my key arguments that "the 60s" continue be a primary site in art history of the recent past because the decade signifies *rupture* rather than *continuity* in philosophical debates about modernism and humanism.

The source of Lee's quotations—the cultural critic Fredric Jameson—bears inquiry on this matter. Jameson in fact offers a different perspective on the subject than Lee does. The essay that she quotes, "Periodizing the 60s," is not a critique of periodisation itself but an account of the ideological positions formed during that decade. Outlining a shift from a world-view influenced by Sartre's existentialism to one dominated by the determining role Language plays in conditioning any experience, Jameson emphasises certain structural issues to do with cycles of ideas, like the fact that

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[27] Pamela Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), xxii.
[28] May 1968 may be the most significant date for my argument; she also cites 1973 as the year the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam and when the Watergate scandal happened. She borrows these dates from Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," in *The Ideologies of Theory,* Volume 2: Syntax of History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 204-5.

such "high structuralism" is becoming a "universal mathesis, under pain of vanishing as one more intellectual fad."

> The breakdown products of that moment of high structuralism can then be seen, on the one hand, as the reduction to a kind of scientism, to sheer method and analytical technique (in *semiotics*); and, on the other hand, as the transformation of structuralist approaches into active ideologies in which ethical, political, and historical consequences are drawn from the hitherto more epistemological "structuralist" positions; this last is of course of the moment of what is now understood as *poststructuralism*, associated with names like Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida and so forth.[29]

Jameson elaborates the radical ways in which the breakdown of high structuralism created the intellectual grounding for important cultural revolutions that have taken place since the 1950s, politically-speaking in former colonies and socially in terms of empowering groups of people based on gender, ethnicity, class, or region. This is a standard reading of the "ideological" consequences of the 60s. But Jameson points out that while there is an inevitability to these cycles of thought—from breakthrough to dry application—change also closes the lines of enquiry.[30] Furthermore, new ideas practice a kind of violence on the identity of the older ones. One example he notes in relation to postmodernism in its inherently "parasitic" relationship with "high modernism."

> In effect, with the canonization of a hitherto scandalous, ugly, disonant [sic.], amoral, antisocial, bohemian high modernism offensive to the middle classes, its promotion to the very figure of high culture generally, and perhaps most importantly, its enshrinement in an academic institution, postmodernism emerges as a way of making creative space for artists now oppressed by those henceforth hegemonic modernism categories of irony, complexity, ambiguity, dense temporality, and particularly, aesthetic and utopian monumentality.[31]

Postmodernism follows the same cycle of overthrow and creation of space for the other; but it has certain characteristics of its own, like the fact that, unlike modernism, according to Jameson, it never was "oppositional." While this is a key issue for the

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[29] Ibid., 186-87.
[30] Jameson writes of the importance of Sartre's work on Hegel's Master/Slave dialectic and his concept of the Look, but how these ideas failed to follow through: "the *Critique* fails to reach its appointed terminus, and to complete the projected highway that was to have led from the individual subject of existential experience all the way to fully constituted social classes." Ibid., 187.
[31] Ibid., 195.

essay—that in collapsing into the world culture "prodigious[ly] expan[ds]"—for my purposes it is equally important that Jameson goes on to show the situation continues to cycle through.[32]

Canons

It should be clear that in order to deal with Stout one has to think about his work in relation to two different art movements, Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. These movements, as they became canonical, also began to function as period-ideas, standing in or being used as a kind of shorthand for a set of concepts that signify an aesthetic and/or ideological shift. I treat Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism as test-cases for the limitations of periodisation, detailing Stout's relationship to each discourse in, respectively, Chapters 2 and 4. Foster is one example of a history that periodises, and will figure again in Chapter 4. Against Foster's narrow and exclusive account of Minimalism, a few more recent studies take a different attitude towards what constitutes its history. In his 1993 book, *Minimalism: Origins*, Edward Strickland considers Minimalism as a cultural signifier rather than a movement in art. Treating it as *culture* rather an historical-critical history, Strickland pushes the history back to Kasimir Malevich, draws out its influence in music, film, and fashion, as well as the fine arts. Of most importance for Stout's history, he discusses at length figures that are usually made peripheral to Minimalism as a movement: painters.[33] Where Foster has a handful of artists practicing an "authentic" Minimalism (authentically "radical"), Strickland's study suggests a more fluid picture of influence and originality, where no one person, work, or critical argument had hold over these ideas and practices.

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[32] Jameson links the "freedom" of the 1960s to a shift in forms of capitalism: "The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers." Ibid., 208. His economic language is meant in both literal and figurative senses.

[33] Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). The first half of the book is entitled "Paint."

For Stout and Abstract Expressionism, the issue is similar in structure but the relationship is different because of timing. Abstract Expressionism has a significant problem with canons. As recently as 1990, in his general study, *Abstract Expressionism*, David Anfam exploited the old, hierarchical model as a justification for continuing to work with the "prime members" rather than the "second rank" of artists.[34] He acknowledges the "fluctuating boundaries" of the group, and makes several changes in personnel (he adds Lee Krasner, arguing that it was only her gender that had kept her out, and excludes Ad Reinhardt on the basis of style). Anfam's revisions also take into account a widened notion of media (he argues that David Smith and Aaron Siskind have been wrongly excluded). In short, the canon should be reconsidered to correct minor omissions and adjusted to reflect certain expansions in method, but it remains a pragmatic limiting tool for focusing a history. Anfam's approach is no doubt reflective of the fact that his book is an introduction to the period, but it retains the canon nearly intact.

The interesting question perhaps, is it Abstract Expressionism's nature? Does its story depend on its exclusions? Stephen Foster's early study of abstract expressionist history, *The Critics of Abstract Expressionism*, published in 1980, develops an important, contextually-bound way of reading criticism. Aimed at representing an important moment of opposition between formalist criticism and "engaged criticism," history writing and advocacy, and radical and academic critical practices, the book is a systematic look at the establishment of a critical apparatus for Abstract Expressionist painting in the 40s, and the way it had become "historical" by the 60s. Foster's fundamental claim is that the early writing—that of Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg—was a radically new form of criticism created out of a need to justify and explain the artist in relation to his own historical position in the middle of the twentieth century. Foster suggests that as the painters themselves received more attention and became more

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[34] David Anfam, *Abstract Expressionism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 14-15.

established, criticism began to have a retrospective cast and its goal became to reevaluate what the artists, and the critics, had done. It drew the lines around the movement—a profoundly different aim from earlier critics. Foster argues that to rediscover Abstract Expressionism's power, the relationship between the criticism and its subject must be elucidated. In his concluding paragraph he writes:

> In all recent evaluations of abstract-expressionist criticism there is an unmistakable implication that there is one proper and necessary way for criticism to proceed. This naturally entails the belief that criticism submits, more or less, to definition. . . If, on the other hand, it is true that the so-called critic was trying to do something quite outside the role of traditional criticism, the recent counter-criticism . . . is irrelevant. . . With this shift in questions, the complexion of the problem changes from a primarily philosophical one to an historical one.[35]

Foster's bias is toward the "radical" criticism of Greenberg and Rosenberg; he sees less value in the "historical" criticism of writers like Rosalind Krauss, William Rubin, and Robert Goldwater, among a few who started writing in the 1960s. He is interested in Greenberg's idea that the point of view taken must be from the present.[36] He is also interested in Rosenberg's concern over artists' abandonment of the collective goals in favour of the individual; the artistic community was no longer "vanguard" in a political sense (direct political involvement having ebbed since the Moscow Trials in the late 1930s). Rosenberg was interested in what an artist would be in that situation.[37] Foster argues that both Greenberg and Rosenberg were motivated by a desire for this lost community.[38] Both were trying to resolve the relationship between artistic practice and radical political aspirations.

> It should be stressed, however, that in neither the case of Rosenberg nor Greenberg did the analysis of the specific works constitute the real value of their respective critical systems. The later belief that it should have

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[35] Stephen C. Foster, *The Critics of Abstract Expressionism* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 100.
[36] Ibid., 13.
[37] Foster states, "It is the dilemma of this political man, cast in nearly existential terms, that became useful for Rosenberg's art criticism of the forties." Ibid., 24.
[38] Ibid., 55.

> accounts for Greenberg's greater popularity in the late fifties and sixties."[39]

In the 1950s, he argues, Abstract Expressionist *criticism* came under suspicion, whereas the art was accepted.[40] Rosenberg's and Greenberg's political agenda was anathema to the new generation, whose main interest was in a full-blown, home-grown, and legitimately American art movement. The fact that their criticism was delivered in a non-traditional idiom—and that neither addressed specific works of art—was employed to discredit their work. Notably, Greenberg developed a following amongst academic writers, and his method was carried into the 1960s, not only for Abstract Expressionism, but for movements that followed it.[41] "It was precisely Greenberg's distrust of the avant-garde which fostered an establishment and a critical 'academy' in the sixties," Foster writes.[42]

While these ideas are helpful to a degree for thinking through how formalism and so-called "community goals" might meet in the early 1950s, Foster's book is a classic example of a history that does nearly nothing to aid a study of Stout. His major arguments and key players have little overlap with him. There is one section, however, where Foster treads on territory directly in the scope of my study. Citing the book *The New York School: Some Younger Artists*, he argues that "The result of ignoring the community function of criticism has permitted such hopelessly unhistorical appraisals of the critics of the forties as the following by B.H. Friedman." He goes on to quote Friedman as writing:

> I see no qualitative difference between an uninformed viewer saying "All modern art looks alike," and a critic lumping together (except geographically or chronologically) such very different artists as, say Pollock and de Kooning.[43]

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[39] Ibid., 31, 33.
[40] Ibid., 75.
[41] Especially in the work of Krauss, whose writing on art continues to hold sway over the art of the last forty years, in the form of her editorial position at the journal *October*, and in a steady flow of books beginning in the early 1970s.
[42] S. Foster, *The Critics*, 33.
[43] B.H. Friedman, in exh. cat., *The School of New York: Some Younger Artists* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 7. As quoted in S. Foster, *The Critics*, 50-51.

This is, importantly, the very moment when the "historicising" is taking place, and Foster sees Friedman as one of the culprits, misunderstanding Rosenberg's and Greenberg's need to develop a criticism that didn't depend on how a work of art looked, or on the intentions of artists.[44] While it seems plausible that Friedman is a less sensitive critic than the other two, and more "partisan," if one looks from the perspective of the artists Friedman was writing about, the comment makes a lot of sense. Friedman is questioning—along stylistic lines—the way in which Pollock and de Kooning are placed together in the "New York School," in other words, the ahistorical foundation of the "canon."

For his part, Friedman is a key commentator on Stout. While his writing is not "critical" in the way Foster found Greenberg's and Rosenberg's, he is nonetheless an important figure for the decade in general, and one who tried to give the "second generation" some credibility. In Chapter 2 he becomes an important touchstone for a reading of Abstract Expressionism that is more inclusive.

Biography

Against these period-histories, a monographic history of Stout has potential. This dissertation aims to show how an artistic and biographic trajectory produces questions in relation to canons, period-ideas and meta-narratives.[45] Taking Stout as a test-case, I address how artistic lives and artworks are either "transformed" into history or consigned

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[44] To explain the mistake, he quotes at length the avant-garde theorist Renato Poggioli, that "instead of tending toward a conscious reconstruction of the ambiance of the works or toward an intelligent interpretation thereof, [critical judgment] has preferred to develop the subordinate task of controversy and polemic, for propaganda for and against." Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 149-50. Quoted in S. Foster, *The Critics*, 51-52.

[45] I use this last term in reference to Hal Foster, as he used it himself to describe his practice as a critic and historian. Symposium, "Donald Judd's Writings," Tate Modern, May 2004. I find this puzzling, given his stated commitment to social and political engagement as well as his critique of historicism. And yet, reading *Return of the Real* afterwards, it became clear the degree to which "theory"—ranging voraciously from Freud and Lacan to Deleuze, Barthes, and Baudrillard—drives his argument. Artworks are analysed partially and out of their historical context. An example is his reading of Warhol in *Return of the Real* (Chapter 5). He gives us conventional (although avant-gardist) readings of Warhol, a Warhol based in *criticism*, not "radical" at all.

to a position of otherness. The argument for looking at Stout via biography hinges on the idea that he *stands out*, not because he stands *for* other things but because he stands *apart*. The conventional question an art historian might consider about an artist like Stout is: does his work ever exceed itself and become exemplary? I contend that this—itself a period-issue that needs reconsideration—is less interesting than whether we can reformulate the way we see the artist in relation to history, not from the past but now.

In art history, the biographical approach is most evident in exhibition practice: the single-artist show with its accompanying catalogue containing historical or biographical essays. The newest form of this is tellingly more "historical" than biographical. In recent long exhibition catalogues on Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, for example, the writing was by historians rather than the curator, and several texts considering different issues took the place of the more conventional single, biographically-driven essay.[46] Biography in this scenario has moved to the back matter, in the form of extensive chronologies which chart life events, artistic production and critical history all in one place. (I follow that form here, in Appendix 1.) However, this type of study remains bound to the institutional needs of the market and the sponsoring museum. These exhibitions and attendant publications are aimed at consolidating an artist's career, and maintaining their currency in various complexes of historical and institutional settings. And perhaps more than history or criticism, museums have an interest in maintaining rather than disrupting the canon; their strength relies heavily on what is available—and valuable—to them. Stout has done well in this context, with four monographic shows each with an accompanying catalogue, in 1980, 1990 (2) and 1997. The catalogues themselves represent the body of historical writing on his work, and each introduced new work, and new interpretations of it.

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[46] Kirk Varnedoe, *Jackson Pollock* (New York and London: Museum of Modern Art and Tate Gallery, 1998) and Ann Temkin, ed., *Barnett Newman* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002). See also Mark Rosenthal, "Telling Stories Museum-Style," in Charles W. Haxthausen, ed., *The Two Art Histories* (Williamstown, Mass.: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2002), 74-80.

The problem with biography, however, is that in its simplest sense it follows an inevitable cycle, the human life, and this can do little to clarify what is specific about that person, or the time and place where he or she lived.[47] There are also limits to what it can tell us about works of art. Does daily detail get you any closer to motivation? Moreover, Stout himself downplayed his extra-artistic biography, and kept his personal life private. He constructed the identity that he left behind, for one thing destroying almost every work he made before 1948, when he started studying with Hans Hofmann.[48] The only documents that remain other than his work, exhibition catalogues and critical writings on it are his journals (see Appendix 3 for an overview on them). In them he seldom strays from artistic concerns; little of it is personal or relating to his social life.[49] What Stout left behind directs us to his work, and not his life; much of the work this dissertation does in constructing his timeline and relationships come, not from his own documents, but from outside sources. Biography for Stout would likely have seemed secondary, even objectionable. The story he tells about himself is how he came to be an artist.[50]

But life-issues rather than artistic ones remain the point of confrontation with canonical histories. Out of postmodernism's discourse of the other there are compelling reasons for considering "lived history" as something quite different from History. Indexing the human as not co-equal with the historical. Gayatri Spivak proposed that "timing" is importantly different from "Time." In her interest in countering Hegel, she writes: "It is my contention that Time often emerges as an implicit graph only miscaught

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[47] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 13, on the "superhistorical man."

[48] In my research I have found one pre-1948 work, a lithograph made ca. 1938 in the collection of his niece by marriage, Betty Simpson (fig. 14). Stout never spoke or wrote about destroying works, they simply don't exist anywhere. Betty Simpson Papers, Denton, Texas.

[49] A comparison with his friend, painter Fritz Bultman's journals is helpful. Bultman's log the weather, how he slept, who he ate with, what his daily errands were. Stout's make no reference to such daily comings and goings. Fritz Bultman Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute.

[50] There are several sources for this story, all from the late 1970s: the taped interviews Kathryn Maartens made in 1977 (Maartens Collection, New York). See Appendix 3 for an overview of this interview; Sanford Schwartz's notes for the Whitney exhibition chronology (Sanford Schwartz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute—hereafter AAA-SS); the video interview, *Myron Stout Speaks* (The Cape Museum of Fine Arts, Dennis, Mass., n.d.). Stout tells a consistent story in all of them.

by those immersed in the process of timing."[51] For this study specifically, Ann Gibson and Anna Chave likewise form radical critiques of canonical versions of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, respectively, by revealing how biographical material—especially on minor artists or private relationships—shatters histories based in formal innovation or stereotypes of artistic identity.[52] Gibson in particular draws out important differences between Abstract Expressionist painters who claimed the mantle of marginality and those who actually were socially marginal. But again, this is far from a simple way to approach Stout's life and artistic practice. Socially, he was privileged. My contention is that on the grid of History, and only on the grid of History, was he made to be an other. His timing appears to be history's biggest problem with him: he was late in starting, late in delivering, late in his style. It does, therefore, seem compelling to compare him to other historical figures who started late, or produced few works, or who absented themselves from centres. Are there biographical-aesthetic issues that they share? Are certain approaches or decisions determined by these life-decisions?

In the final chapter of the dissertation I consider strategies for interpreting this issue. One is to look at "art historical time" as something different from "historical time." Stout made his work to exist in museums, that is, he made it in relation to other works of art. Next I consider him from a position of social history, such that differences between biological stages and socially constructed ones start to explain the origin of issues like "belatedness."[53] Finally I look closely at Stout's practice via an art historian who studies artistic innovation in relation to production rates.[54] I make an argument there for interpreting Stout's approach to working as "experimental," which separates it from style and historical period.

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[51] Gayatri Spivak, "Time and Timing: Law and History," in John Bender and David E. Wellbery, eds., *Chronotypes: The Construction of Time* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 99.
[52] Ann Gibson, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), xix. Anna C. Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *Art Bulletin* 82, no.1 (March 2000): 149-63.
[53] See Tamara Hareven, "Synchronising Individual Time, Family Time, and Historical Time," in Bender and Wellbery, *Chronotypes*, 171. She's dealing with social history.
[54] David W. Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001). He mainly considers the differences between Abstract Expressionism and Conceptual Art via statistical analysis.

Certain changes in the critical discourse since Stout was making and writing about his work frame the philosophical questions of this study. Ideas we hold now—associated with poststructuralism—that language and perception are culturally determined, have laid low the world-view that was central to Stout and his generation. Concepts he found compelling—like trying to fix basic, generalised ideas about visual perception and working through intuition rather than intellect—seem incorrigibly out of date viewed through the lens conditioned by poststructuralism. According to the new thinking, there can be no universal visual language; its pursuit is located in a particular place and era. Likewise, knowledge cannot be gained by observation, even when the practice is restricted to direct observations. Human understanding, as it were, appears to be in a more precarious, contextual situation than when Stout was alive. The very notion of believing in fundamental units of knowledge and being able to communicate them is now seen utterly bound to Western (male, educated) elite and capitalist aims. This "turn to language," and its close relation, the critique of Idealism, are the philosophical issues that frame practices of criticism, history, and art today. When art historians, critics and artists refer to Idealism since the 1960s, they mean it negatively, as a category of ideas associated with Romanticism. This would include seeing the human being as a self-determining subject who mixes "subjective" accounts with a kind of observational objectivity, rather than a "construct" of his or her social, political, ideological moment. Stout's own form of idealism (lower case "i") tended toward the pragmatic and historical—he saw idealism as a function of modernity, that is, the enormous progress of the machine age he witnessed in his own lifetime. Nonetheless it was something that had been put seriously in question by two world wars and other devastating historical events of the twentieth century.

Although philosophically inclined and interested in making art about "experience" and engaging with his *self* as subject, Stout was resolutely empirical about

his practice. For example, in a 1960 *Art in America* feature entitled "New Talent," Stout contributed this statement:

> The images I create are as simple, direct and clear as I can make them. I want them to possess objectivity. That's not to say I want to give them the illusion of being real objects, but that they have the quality of being convincing in and of themselves.

By comparison, the painter Frederick Franck wrote:

> I cannot live without drawing and the thin seismographic movement of the pen caressing the living forms. When I paint, the end of the struggle is to realize on a piece of canvas a truth felt dimly inside, relentlessly awaiting liberation.[55]

Stout's work sits between different historical and expressive modes. It is self-limiting in other ways, too. He has no real range of styles or subjects. He is an *auteur*, what Susan Sontag called in a different context a special case.[56] Like Morandi, Cézanne, Vermeer, and Mondrian, all artists who started late, worked slowly, and got stuck on one idea, we are endlessly brought back to the same place, the same set of issues, and the same problems.

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[55] John Canaday, "New Talent USA: Great Expectations," *Art in America* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1960): 58.
[56] Susan Sontag wrote that Diane Arbus is: "in the most limiting sense . . . a special case in the history of photography as is Giorgio Morandi, who spent half a century doing still life bottles, in the history of European painting. . . . All her subjects are equivalent." *On Photography* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977), 46-47.

Chapter 1:

The Artist-Teacher, The Artist-Student

Stout spent the first eighteen years of his adult life as a teacher, but perhaps typically, this fact is glossed over in the accounts of his life and work. They start with his experience of being "woken up" in his classes at the Hans Hofmann School of Art in the late 1940s, where he studied, on a sabbatical from teaching that turned into a resignation. Like many artists of his generation, Stout contributed to this picture by suppressing (if not destroying) his pre-Hofmann School work.[1] The elision is convenient also because it aligns him chronologically with Abstract Expressionist painting, and places him in the company of artists coming to New York after World War II ended—the "second generation" of Abstract Expressionists, many of whom studied with Hofmann. But beginning Stout's history there ignores half of his life, and treats his educational and working history as a mere prelude to his career as a *painter*. These early years matter for addressing questions about his "lateness," about his intellectual formation, and also about the curious case of his embrace, at the age of thirty-eight, of the life of a student. The first part of this chapter draws those earlier influences into

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[1] The mechanics of this are unclear. In the Maartens interviews Stout describes working hard while he lived in Hawaii, making landscape drawings and abstract paintings. None of these have turned up, but neither has information on their destruction. Hofmann had opened the Hofmann School of Fine Art in New York in 1934, first at 137 East 57th Street, but it subsequently moved downtown, to West 8th Street. Lowery Sims notes that Hofmann's notoriety began with the series of lectures he gave in New York in 1938 and 1939, Lowery Stokes Sims, "Hans Hofmann in Twentieth-Century Art," in exh. cat., *Hans Hofmann* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 8. Dore Ashton says that his teachings were not systematic, rather a "patchwork mélange of theory culled from many divergent European studios." Ashton, *Life and Times,* 79-80.

his history and proposes that Stout's pre-Hofmann education is in fact of real importance for understanding the philosophical preoccupations of his work. Set against major changes in the way art was taught in the first half of the twentieth century, this chapter introduces two figures that elucidate Stout's later work and philosophical preoccupations: the design principle, *Notan*, as taught in art classes at Columbia University, and the work of philosopher Susanne Langer, whose ideas, I argue, help form Stout's "humanism." The latter part of this chapter reviews the better-known milieu of the Hofmann School, and considers what Stout might really have learned there.

More radically, I propose the value in seeing Stout *as* a student and *as* a teacher, and would like to consider these roles not in opposition to his being an artist, but as key conditioners of his practice. He became a student again at the age of 38, and taught throughout his life, both formally and informally. Even in the second half of his life, when he had no other occupation than painting, Stout continued to act in the role of both teacher and student. Another way of addressing this material is to consider Stout's work itself as tool for teaching. While not literally a teaching aid (as are some of Josef Albers's works), the style Stout developed relates very closely to mid-century teaching models about visual perception. It is almost as if, in renouncing his role as a teacher, he embedded its ideals into his work, making his practice educative in its consummate clarity. While the conventions of the time required these roles to be separate (indeed all other activity outside art had to be made secondary) a fluid category of student-artist-teacher gives weight to his aspirations for continual learning and serves as an explanation of sorts for his resistance to the marketplace.[2] It also clarifies the "problem" of Stout's stylistic relationship to Hofmann, and expands the relevant timeframe of his artistic activity. Stout's own writings suggest this reading: in the final entry of his journal (curiously entitled "Reading Turner: 'Imagination

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[2] See Jay Bernstein, "Introduction," *Adorno: The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1-28.

and Reality'"), Stout reflects on the various points of contact he had with teachers, wondering why he did not become an expressionist painter.

> I'm reminded of my first experience (adult) with painting in 1929. Karl Gaslander's [sic.] water colors which first touched off desires for painting, to paint... They were expressively abstract, and in a vein that could have led to abstract expressionism, though not specifically so. I wanted to be able to do them, couldn't [sic.]. When I started painting then, it was landscapes that I attempted.... It was not until 1946 when I went to Hofmann's class that again I had a new vision that stirred me to real action.
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> [...] When I got to Hofmann, (considering how profoundly I'd been affected by Karl's Proto Abstract Expressionism) it's perhaps strange that I didn't fall into [it].... But I could no more truly work in such a manner then than I could in 1929-36, and it was Mondrian who "got" me.[3]

The passage (which ends with a paragraph on why Mondrian's "equivalence" was "too equivalent for me") suggests two compelling readings of Stout's work: that it was a deep compromise between "expression" and order, and that he thought continually about his own work in relation to his influences.

Stout's education was concentrated in four episodes spanning the years 1925 to 1952. Outside of the Hofmann School, accounts of Stout's education refer to the other institutions very briefly, only to stress his exposure in each place to modern art (Albers via his first painting teacher; European modernism via his teacher in Mexico City; Georgia O'Keeffe as another—though earlier—student at Columbia). In other words, more conventional accounts make Stout's schooling a matter of transmission and influence. At work are some familiar struggles: American regionalism versus European modernism, abstraction's purification from exterior reference, and the making of an artistic identity in an urban metropolis free from the idiosyncrasies of one's past or upbringing. It is as if Stout can

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[3] *Myron Stout Journal*, typescript manuscript, AAA-SS, Smithsonian Institute, 135-36 (25 December 1966). Hereafter cited as MS Journal-1. Stout also mentions Charles Martin here. See figs. 79 and 80 in Appendix 1: Chronology for examples of Gasslander's work.

only be taken seriously when he is finished being a student, moreover when he arrives in New York. The measure of his work's success is how it fits into an existing history of modernism. Adhering to these conventional lineages—all apparently second-hand and few exemplary in such terms, shows their limitations in Stout's case, even as he played into them. Stout effectively reinvented himself when he was in his early forties, leaving his teaching job and committing himself to being a painter. He gave up a steady job at the high school in Honolulu where he had taught for more than ten years, and he did so without prospect of another one. He left something he was good at which came with a community of friends and colleagues, and threw himself into something elusive and insecure.[4] On one level, it was a conflict between the allure of change and security of the *status quo*. It was an act that was risky, especially for someone who was deliberate about his finances and career choices. Taking the risk, however, is itself part of the foundation of artistic identity in this period, and it is characteristic that he thought he could only be one or the other. Although many artists taught for their living, *painting* was not a job, it was a calling. At least rhetorically, you had to choose. Being a painter was expansive, but it required radical reinvention. It was your whole life, but it also meant clarifying your activities, and shedding the aspects of it that didn't make sense.

The struggle between giving up teaching and committing himself to being an artist full-time is evident in the draft of a letter Stout wrote from New York to the head of Kamehameha School in January, 1950. He is asking for an extension to the year's leave he is halfway through, but effectively this is a letter of resignation, as he never returned to the school, and indeed never taught formally again. In the letter Stout tries to emphasise the seriousness of his work and how it will help him in the classroom. He writes, "I have pitched

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[4] Christopher Busa, "Editor's Introduction," *Journals of Myron Stout* (Provincetown, Mass.: Provincetown Arts Press, unpublished), 10. Busa wrote that Stout was very happy in Hawaii, but Stout told Maartens "it was at the end of the Earth." Maartens interview.

into the study and have been working very hard getting at the thing I want to accomplish through sustained and intensive work."[5] As for studying at the Hofmann School, "[it] is work that will improve me and, I ~~feel sure~~ am convinced, equip me ~~better~~ to carry on my teaching ~~on~~ in a ~~higher level~~ better way." Even as he argues that growing as an artist will help him as a teacher, the conflict between the two haunts the letter; the subtext is that they are pulling him in different directions. He cannot even convince himself, and writes near the end: "At this point you are probably wondering whether or not I really intend to return to Kamehameha at all, thinking that a Ph.D. (or its equivalent) is hardly a necessity in order to teach there." The letter is a remarkable exercise in projection. We hear through it the headmaster's scepticism, and Stout's over-reaching. Stout's lack of confidence centres on the idea—somehow inappropriate—that an art teacher should have artistic aspirations. At the same time, this letter is Stout's first effort to claim the life of an artist for himself. Timid and tentative as it is, it is a justification.[6]

Nearly thirty years later, Stout describes the same situation in opposite terms, as if he was an artist and had decided to become a teacher. He told Maartens in 1977:

> I had painted and worked hard during those first years in Hawaii. But then there was this very unsettling thing. I was going on towards forty years old by that time. I went through whole series in comparatively few years. It was too late for me to develop each of these as fully as I wanted to. I went on to other pictures rather than giving any one of them the fullest development. I was not happy with what I was doing, mostly representational painting. I drew a great deal and I did watercolors and some oils, but mostly, landscape drawings. The place was so beautiful; it was constant inspiration. I was not happy with my progress and I thought

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[5] Myron Stout Letter to Col. Kent, January 1950. Simpson Papers. The letter is handwritten and in draft form. The "strikethroughs" in my transcription represent text Stout crossed out. Most of his amendments are attempts to make the letter more authoritative, and less abstract. No other correspondence on the affair exists, but it accords with Schwartz's interview notes that he quit his job in 1950. AAA-SS.

[6] While it had a "positive" effect, it is clear that quitting this job was done "negatively": he did not face it early and head-on, but tried to defer his decision. He wrote: "I must in all truth say that ~~ultimately~~ I don't know what I want to do finally, but I know that right now ~~I'm not ready to~~ I don't want to say that I ~~don't~~ won't ~~to~~ return to Kam [sic.]." Stout to Col. Kent, Simpson Papers.

> maybe this isn't what I should do. So I thought, I'll go back to Columbia and start my doctorate [in Education].[7]

From this perspective, Stout had come to a dead end in his art practice, and sought a way out in the practical solution of a marketable career as an educator.

It may be most productive to consider Stout's educational and teaching experiences as sites of modernist identity-formation. A recent study by Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* is of particularly good use for contextualising the background of Stout's history. Singerman traces broad social and ideological changes that art education underwent since the late nineteenth century, from so-called "normal" colleges to modern-day universities. His goal is to account for the contemporary Master of Fine Arts programme, and to chart the way universities shifted from training and skills, to teaching the nature of *what it is to be an artist.* Significantly, Singerman addresses Hofmann's particular influence, and argues that the generation of abstract expressionist painters moving into universities as teachers initiated the model for the current M.F.A.[8] As the painter Ray Parker wrote:

> [In art schools] teachers demonstrate how they participate in the art-world, or discuss how others do it. . . [The] art-world can be understood and taught as a subject.[9]

As this suggests, the Hofmann School was an introduction to the "art-world." It represented an initiation into a community of artists and a way of life. For Stout, it provided structure and discipline, motivation and the direction he needed to develop his painting beyond the dead end he had reached in Hawaii. Further, Hofmann himself became a model, a mentor,

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[7] Kathryn Maartens, *Myron Stout*, Master's thesis (New York: Hunter College, 1979), 28.
[8] Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 130-33.
[9] Ray Parker, "Student, Teacher, Artist," *College Art Journal* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1953): 28-29. Cited in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 3.

and a friend—the first two years of Stout's journal, written while still attending classes with Hofmann, ruminates on his teaching and his advice.

All of this is very far from the situation when Stout began his education. When he matriculated at North Texas State Teachers College in 1925, no graduate program in the fine arts that focused on studio practice existed in an American university.[10] According to Singerman, arts training in American high schools, colleges and universities had only begun about a decade before the turn of the twentieth century. By 1937, when Stout began his Master's degree at Columbia Teachers College, there were only four university programs where one could earn a Master's degree as an artist.[11] "[T]he meaning of the M.F.A. had not yet been formalized," Singerman writes.[12] The concept of a professional artist trained in a university did not exist when Stout was an undergraduate, and it was just a notion—with minimal institutional credibility—when he was a master's student. In the first half of the twentieth century, the only art education one could get was either "industrial arts" (design, drafting, etc., for industry) or teacher-training, which trained you to teach industrial arts. "Normal" schools trained teachers (North Texas and Columbia Teacher's College were both normal schools).[13] Stout went to university to become a teacher.[14]

Singerman's study clarifies some of Stout's decisions as based in class, like the hierarchy implicit between the liberal arts education that teachers received and the vocational one that students of the industrial arts got. Stout's family was educated—his

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[10] Ibid., 6.
[11] The Universities of Washington and Oregon, Yale and Syracuse. Ibid., 6.
[12] Even by the beginning of the 1940s, there were only 60 candidates for M.F.A.'s enrolled in eleven institutions. As a point of comparison, there are now more than 180 universities and art schools offering M.F.A.'s. Ibid., 6.
[13] There was a rising need for art teachers in American high schools, which had only just begun to offer courses in art: Massachusetts was the first state to require the teaching of "manual arts," in 1870, but by 1920 all states did. Ibid., 13.
[14] Stout earned his B.S. in history from North Texas State College in 1930. *Commencement Exercise* (Denton, Tx.: North Texas State Teachers College, 1930), n.p. It is now called University of North Texas. It was founded in 1890 as Texas Normal College and Teachers' Training Institute, was called North Texas State Teachers College when Stout attended, and has had four other names since, which track its evolution from a normal school to a college to a university.

mother had a B.S. from North Texas and his sister, Mary got an M.A. from Columbia Teachers College.[15] The family was cultural and artistic—Stout took piano lessons, studied Greek and Latin, and read literature and poetry at home. North Texas was a land-grant college, one of hundreds of colleges and universities set up by the Morrill Act of 1862 in the late nineteenth century to educate and train students in the agricultural states in the mid-West and South. The programme there was broad-based and liberal, requiring Stout to split the bulk of his time between classes in education and his chosen major; he was also required to take English, social and laboratory sciences.[16]

Even so, Stout's first choice had been Carnegie Tech,[17] perhaps reflecting what Singerman calls an East-West split, as suggested in a 1927 survey conducted for the *Association of American Colleges Bulletin*:

> a schism between those who think art is learning and those who think art is doing. An arbitrary line drawn between these theories would leave the East on one side, the West and South on the other and Chicago cut by boundary, one-half for either side.[18]

Singerman calls the classical ideal of such Eastern universities "the object of philological and historical scholarship."[19] When Stout finally made the leap to Teachers College, as one of the most respected programmes for fine arts education, it would have held a similar ideology to that expressed in a contemporary essay by the President of Amherst College:

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[15] Berta's diploma is in the Simpson Papers. She graduated in 1892. Stout told Maartens that Mary had gone to Columbia ten years before him and had also studied with Charles Martin.
[16] *Bulletin* (Denton, Tx.: North Texas State Teachers College, 1929), n.p.
[17] Stout wanted to study architecture there, but the family was unable to afford it. Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 26
[18] Lura Beam, "The Place of Art in the Liberal College," *Association of American Colleges Bulletin* 13, no. 13 (May 1927): 272. Cited in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 16-17.
[19] Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 14.

> The mission of the teacher is not the specialized knowledge which contributes to immediate practical aims, but the unified understanding that is Insight.[20]

Stout followed a course of study there close to what we now consider a liberal arts education, taking classes in painting, drawing, lithography, as well as philosophy of education.[21] Notably, there was a separate department called "Industrial Arts," with its own curriculum that focused on teaching in elementary schools and therapeutic situations, as indicated by a course entitled "Industrial Arts for Social and Religious Workers."[22] "Art," however, was both less and more important than it might first appear. Even though his family had some money, Stout had to work for a living so his decisions followed job security. Graduating from North Texas into the maw of the Great Depression, he took a job at a junior high school in San Antonio.[23] After Teacher's College he had an offer from a university in Virginia, but when they failed to send him a contract he took the job at Kamehameha.[24]

Stout's goal was not to "be an artist"—this idea would have seemed far-fetched, even in the context of living in New York in the late 30s (relatively little of what was taught at Columbia had any basis in the American art scene or living, practicing artists: "modern art" came from a distant present—Europe). At the same time, it was the thing that drove him. For example, at North Texas, he only discovered the art department in his final year, right

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[20] Alexander Meiklejohn, "What the Liberal College Is," in Richard Hofstadter and Wilson Smith, eds., *American Higher Education: A Documentary History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) vol. 2, 902. Cited in Singerman, *Art Subjects,* 15.

[21] According to his transcript, Stout arrived there in February 1937, and was awarded his Master of Arts degree in June 1938.

[22] *Bulletin*, North Texas State, n.p.

[23] North Texas State had an active placement service, especially for putting graduates into teaching positions. Stout remarked to Maartens he felt lucky to have any work at all. Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 26. This first job lasted for three years. Stout's claim that he spent these three summers making up the credits he would need for an art degree suggests he was teaching the subject of his degree, history.

[24] Maartens interview, tape 2. He doesn't name the university.

after it had been established.[25] The other key aspect of Stout's art education is that it was never "academic," and from his very first class—with the painter Karl Gasslander—he was introduced to abstraction.[26] As Stout described him, Gasslander was enthusiastic and brought to his class the newest ideas about painting and the work of major living European artists.[27] Gasslander's work seems equally influenced by Kandinsky, Picasso, and possibly Diego Rivera (Appendix 1, figs. 79-80). The same could be said for Stout's next teacher, the Guatemalan painter, Carlos Mérida, whose abstract paintings were a hybrid of Picassoid classicism and Mayan symbolism.[28] At Columbia, Stout's main teacher was the painter Charles J. Martin.[29] As with Gasslander, much of the available information is anecdotal, and in his case, no images are available. Compellingly, Stout described to Maartens a mural project Martin had his students do in their final term for one of Columbia's buildings. It was a scene representing New York, and each student chose part of the city; Stout describes to Maartens that his section was of the Bowery, and that he depicted it as gritty and impoverished.[30] In the only available work by Stout before 1947, a lithograph of a de-populated New York City street, we see him drawing in a style of mild social realism

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[25] Before 1929, North Texas State did not have an art department. Prior to that the school offered drawing classes; when the department was founded, painting and sculpture classes were added. His one class was: Art 420, 430, painting. "In these courses, students familiarize themselves with modern methods of painting through the study of the most important theories and through original compositions." *Bulletin*, North Texas State, n.p.

[26] Maartens interview. It is consistently cited that he studied with Gasslander, but the name is not listed as an instructor in the college catalogues in any of the years Stout was there. Email correspondence with archivist at University of North Texas library, 6 February 2001. Gasslander (1905-1997) studied at Columbia and Northwestern, and also spent time in Provincetown. He may have worked at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1931-37.

[27] Albers is mentioned as one of the artists Gasslander introduced Stout to.

[28] Mérida (1891-1985), had been in Paris in the 1910s studying with van Dongen. Even though influenced by Cubism, he deliberately stuck to flatter, hard-edge forms (Appendix 1, figs. 81 and 82). In 1914 he moved to post-Revolution Mexico City to the also revolutionary artistic and intellectual scene there, initiating a revival of interest in native (Mayan) culture. Stout studied with him there in the summer of 1930 at the Academia San Carlos. See exh. cat. *Carlos Mérida* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1966) and exh. cat. *Carlos Merida* (San Antonio: Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute, 1962).

[29] Stout took two Advanced Painting classes with him. The literature on Martin is non-existent. Stout literature states Martin studied in Paris with the early modern painter André Dunoyer de Segonzac (the latter's 1923 *Still Life with Eggs* is in the Courtauld). See Christopher Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies: Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-1928* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1987), 174.

[30] Maartens interview. He said, "I could have painted Central Park!" Stout also told her he was the project manager, which meant he didn't finish his classwork for Martin; this prompted his first summer in Provincetown, where he fulfilled the last credits for his degree in Martin's summer class there.

perhaps influenced by Martin (fig. 14). It was probably made in the lithography class Stout took with Arthur Young, another artist about whom there is little information. (It doesn't look like the Bowery, rather could be nearer to Columbia.)

The strongest influence on the programme at Teachers College was that of Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922), the artist and educator who arrived there in 1904. Dow had written the definitive manual for arts education, *Composition* (1899), a book which was described recently as "the bible of art students and teachers . . . the standard by which art was taught, at all levels, from grade school to college."[31] During his lifetime Dow had enormous influence as a teacher, travelling, exhibiting and lecturing internationally. Although nearly forgotten, he may have single-handedly modernised art in turn-of-the-century America by arguing for a set of general, formal principles for art, and a method of composition that could be applied to any subject. In his opposition to Beaux Arts training, he rejected hierarchies of art and craft, especially trying to diminish the distinction between fine and practical art. Most of his ideas follow from developments within avant-garde circles, like extolling the formal beauty of diverse objects from Japanese woodcuts to tribal objects to Arts & Crafts furniture. But he insisted on putting this into an art curriculum.[32] Dow's principles left their impression at Teachers College such that by the time Stout got there, his teachers were fully inculcated in a contemporary and liberal mode of teaching art (Martin for one had studied with him). The department's publication, *Art Education Today,* is particularly reflective of Dow's non-academic ethos. An issue from Stout's tenure suggests that anyone can be an artist even if they lack overt talent; that innovation ("individual creations") is the proper counterpoint to imitation; that using unorthodox materials, or

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[31] See Nancy E. Green, "Arthur Wesley Dow: His Art and His Influence" and Frederick C. Moffatt, "Composition," in *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922)* (New York, Spanierman Gallery, 1999), 9-36 and 39-45.
[32] Green observes (overstating?): "painting was de-emphasized in the classroom, and crafts such as batik, stenciling, textile design, and photography took its place." "Dow: His Art," 32-33. And yet, according to a late 1930s course catalogue, tie-dying was taught in fine arts classes.

traditional materials in an unorthodox way, was a means of achieving individual expression.[33]

Again, other than one print, none of Stout's work from his years at Columbia exists, but Dow's teaching in composition—for which he used the Japanese term *notan*, or the balance of dark and light—is in fact entirely compatible with Stout's mature, signature work. Amplifying Dow's influence on Stout helps explain in the first instance why his work looks so different from that of other Hofmann students— and the "vexing" question of why in the late 1940s Stout set his work against the prevailing aesthetic of expressionism. Stout himself makes a case for this in his writings: in one of the few references to Martin in his journals, he compares his teaching to Hofmann's: "I was getting something very similar from Charles Martin at Columbia at the same time; he was [like Hofmann] a very popular and rather successful teacher, also."[34] It is remarkable, in fact, how similar Dow's teaching is to Hofmann's.[35] Both were attempting to access a so-called pre-Renaissance pictorial space via invention on the canvas rather than imitation of nature. They used similar techniques to break with academic arts training. Dow's main target for criticism in *Composition* was *chiaroscuro*, which he saw as the technique that reproduced depth in art and kept Western art enslaved to "imitation." Hofmann attacked *chiaroscuro* without naming as such: he always denigrated "modelling." Dow embraced the non-academic term, "design," and, like Hofmann, emphasised invention on the canvas rather than reproduction of nature.

It is important here to see that Stout had already grasped ideas of pictorial space well before he met Hofmann. Further, there is a compelling comparison to be made between Stout's abstract work and that of Dow. As we see from Dow's prints (for which he was best

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[33] Elise E. Ruffini, "Art Keeps Pace," *Art Education Today: An Annual Devoted to the Problems of Art Education* (1936): 57.
[34] MS Journal-1, 605 (14 December 1962). The passage is part of an extended critique of Harold Rosenberg, "Hans Hofmann's 'Life' Class" *Art News Annual* 6 (Autumn 1962): 16-31, 110-115.
[35] Chronologically, in fact, Hofmann was only a decade behind Dow (although, of course, a continent away).

known), he used flat areas of contrasting colours to depict natural scenes. The print which was used for the cover of his book, *Dark and Light* (fig. 16), reads as remarkably prescient of Stout's hard contrasts of black and white as well as his use of curved and highly abstracted natural forms. Stout's 1948 painting, *Quartet* (fig. 24), painted after he was studying with Hofmann, is an abstraction of a view of boats in San Francisco Harbor. Even though there are important differences (Stout's is more "abstract") there are precedents in Dow's work that we see played out. Compare *Quartet* to Dow's print, *The Dory* (fig. 15), if only in the flattening of perspectival space to the pattern of shapes on the picture-plane. Dow's teaching about flat shapes—however indirect for Stout—seems a better explanation for Stout's eventual interest in simple, clear compositions than Hofmann's idea of "plasticity." Further, Dow's teaching—which intentionally did not extend to abstraction and models—also reaffirms that Stout's "geometry" is not mathematical in origin, but from observation of nature and "design." A remark made by Dow's most famous student, Georgia O'Keeffe, holds as a marker of his indirect influence over Stout: "This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way."[36]

* * *

Stout's second stint at Columbia—after the War, in the winter of 1946—raises another category of issues, not about composition or subject matter, but rather in the realm of philosophy. The intellectual climate there can be characterised as a type of humanism exemplified by thinkers like Alfred North Whitehead, John Dewey and Ernst Cassirer.[37] It was an attitude of bringing scientific logic and metaphysics to the problem of knowledge;

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[36] Quoted in Green, "Dow: His Art," 32.
[37] While Whitehead was at Harvard, Dewey taught at Columbia from 1904-1930, as did Cassirer. Dewey had a huge influence at Teacher's College in particular.

moreover, it was addressing philosophical categories to culture. Much of Stout's journal writings address such questions, and his answers are framed in deeply—although not always expertly—philosophical terms. For example, in one 1956 journal entry he writes:

> Expression is not communication. Having, for instance, learned the language, no man uses it simply to communicate with others. He also uses it to clarify and intensify his own conceptions—or, perhaps better, to convert his own feelings into conceptions. The ways meaning occur, bouncing back and forth between one's self and others' selves are too devious to permit the assigning of priority to communication.[38]

Compare this to Kant, from *The Critique of Judgment*:

> But nothing can be universally communicated except cognition and representation, so far as it belongs to cognition. For it is only thus that this latter can be objective, and only through this has it a universal point of reference, with which the representative power of everyone is compelled to harmonize.[39]

What is remarkable is not Stout's adherence to a Kantian view of aesthetics—this would have been commonplace for any intellectual—but how the reference orients us to the field (and depth) of his enquiry. Stout was not a philosopher, nor a professional intellectual. He was an auto-didact, and his writings were essentially for himself. Nevertheless, Stout saw philosophy as one of the ways to think about how to paint.[40]

It is likely that Stout's "Kant" came by way of Susanne Langer (1895-1985), the philosopher perhaps best known for translating Cassirer's *Language and Myth* into English. Her mentors were Whitehead and Cassirer, and she was interested generally in finding a

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[38] MS Journal-2, 85 (25 September 1956).
[39] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: Hafner, 1951), 51.
[40] One example of many of the connections he makes: "A key to an understanding of the possibility of abstract painting may lie in such a statement as Cassirer makes in An Essay on Man. . . ." MS Journal-1, 108 (7 August 1953).

philosophical explanation for aesthetic feeling and art objects.[41] Stout references her writings numerous times in his journals, and it is possible that he studied with her, or at the very least saw her lecture while he was at Columbia.[42] Langer's work functions as a good précis for Stout's interest in "experience." I'll argue that he meant it in the philosophical, Cartesian sense of subject-object relations, of a difference between inner and outer worlds. Stout thought both were important to painting, and his philosophical approach elucidates the way his painting—all painting, really—is both subjective and objective. It is evident in a diagram he drew into his journal, just after he'd had his fist big one-person show (fig. 17), which he devised to correct some misguided viewer. In it we see him insisting that aesthetic experiences are complexly interdependent relations between subjects (artists), the objective world and the painting.

Langer's aim in philosophy was to make sense out of experience, and to this end she argued that "all works of art are purely perceptible forms that seem to embody some sort of feeling."[43] First, she argues that art is different from science or everyday language. The former is "discursive" and the latter "non-discursive." She criticises typical, logical approaches to language for not making the distinction, and assuming that there is a continuum between everyday, expressive speech and symbolic language, like poetry or art.[44] She argues that art tries to investigate the realm of experience that is beyond language (she shared this basic idea of the "beyond" with Wittgenstein and Russell, and the recognition of

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[41] Langer's best-known book, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), was mainly a reading of Cassirer. She was educated at Radcliffe College and the University of Vienna.

[42] Langer was a lecturer at Columbia from 1945-50, which makes it unlikely that he had her while studying for his M.A. Stout took a class in the spring of 1946 in the philosophy department called "The Philosophy of Art and Criticism." (Stout transcript, Simpson Papers). She was sometimes published in popular magazines, like *Fortune*, as Michael Leja points out in his book, *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and Painting in the 1940s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 73.

[43] Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, 86

[44] Langer, "Discursive and Presentational Forms," *Philosophy in a New Key*, 86.

linguistics' limitations with Schopenhauer, Cassirer, Dewey and Whitehead). An example of this thought-model is:

> But if we consider how difficult it is to construct a meaningful language that shall meet neo-positivistic standards, it is quite incredible that people should ever say anything at all, or to understand each other's propositions. At best, human thought is but a tiny, grammar-bound island, in the midst of a sea of feeling expressed by "Oh-oh" [a cry of feeling] and sheer babble. The island has a periphery, perhaps, of mud—factual and hypothetical concepts broken down by the emotional tides into the "material mode," a mixture of meaning and nonsense. Most of us live our lives on this mud-flat; but in artistic moods we take to the deep, where we flounder about with symptomatic cries that sound like propositions about life and death, good and evil, substance, beauty, and other non-existent topics.[45]

In this conception, art is something more deeply linked to feeling (positive and negative) than everyday communication. The "cry of feeling" is what happens not in language, but through it: in its slips, exclamations and inadequacies. Stout writes: "The abstract space of the painter, in Langer's terms, is the virtual space. The virtual space of the painter is the felt space; actual space, as we respond to it in our feelings and that is an emotional truth—the truth of feeling, not of things, not of propositions and judgments."[46]

Langer's writings are concerned with the "symbolism" that takes place in mental processes, this is also a key preoccupation of Stout's. For example, in the passage cited above, Stout continues:

> The artist, like the mathematician, is operating symbolically. . . . He may choose what visible symbols he needs. The "truth" lies not in the symbols; they merely carry the expression, but in the expressive relationships, the way of ordering, in that the painting becomes, in a way, a kind of proposition. But it is not an actual proposition, of course, it is a proposition become fact—a proposition realized. But, of course, it cannot be confused with a mathematical or other intellectual propositions, for its basis is more immediately

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[45] Ibid., 87-8.
[46] MS Journal-1, 108 (7 August 1953).

> in the living experience of man. . . . And the truth in a painting lies not in the forms but more nearly in the direction of the process which brought them into being.[47]

As in Langer's "non-discursive" symbols, Stout is arguing that symbols in painting are linked to emotions, human experience, the "beyond." It depends, moreover, as I referred at the outset, on a Kantian notion of subject-object relations. This is where we see Stout's painting as importantly (and perhaps irreducibly) modern, despite the stylistic relationship to Minimalist art of the 1960s.[48] His adherence to art's "beyond" is incompatible with later philosophical positions, which treat them as humanist confections, or historically-determined (outdated) structures of belief.[49]

Seeing Stout's approach to painting as based in this philosophy is crucial for understanding his dissatisfaction with the painting he had been doing in Hawaii as well as what interested him in teaching. It was the justification for his pursuit of a Ph.D. Stout told Maartens:

> I'd been something of a musician my whole life, from the time I was very young, and I had been much into literature, and drama, and poetry, and painting—and when I got to New York, I was so absorbed with the dance—I saw Martha Graham and her company for the first time—and I got into thinking that nobody ever teaches the arts as a unified subject. I'd like to work out a dissertation on that basis—
>
> Early in my life, I felt the interrelationship of the arts. I was convinced of it. . . . It's being reminded of certain effects that come in music—or it is that each form is capable of expressing more or less the same thing, the same emotion—that art is bigger than any one of its forms.[50]

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[47] MS Journal-1, 108 (7 August 1953).

[48] James Meyer notes that Donald Judd also studied pragmatic philosophy at Columbia's School of General Studies (Dewey, William James, Ralph Barton Perry, George Santayana, and Henri Bergson). Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 35, expanded in note 23.

[49] Leja calls this "Modern Man discourse" and takes it up at length in *Reframing Abstract Expressionism*, 203-209. His method is to use Foucault for a critique of this inter-War "humanism."

[50] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 28-29. In the tapes he says that his advisor supported the idea but didn't know how he would do the thesis and wouldn't supervise him. Stout was planning to approach someone else at Columbia, but gave up on the idea.

For Stout, art was a general category not tied to style, or to medium. It was the means to make a person a full actor in the world. As a teacher, art was the means by which you gave a student independence and self-knowledge. This idea also informed his final, signature style, which is related to more to this notion of "experience" and "process" than they might at first appear. This issue comes to full fruit in the 1950s as an idea of an art-life continuum belied by questions of school, movement and canon.

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The final section of this chapter looks at Stout's time at the Hofmann School, and what he learned there. Hofmann occupies a curious role: both Stout and his early critics made him a central figure in Stout's artistic development, but play down any direct influence. Stout claimed: "I came to him as a more mature artist than the young ones who were there. I suppose I was ready for what he had to say. He was very inspiring, as a person, and as an artist."[51] The main accounts of Stout's history argue that he did not learn to paint from Hofmann, rather that encountering Hofmann was the episode that made him commit to being a painter: "In Hofmann, Stout found an artist-exemplar," postulates Mel Gooding; "Hofmann did not encourage his students to become intimate with his own work," defends Henry Geldzahler; and Friedman is "puzzled by Stout's admiration for his friend and teacher Hans Hofmann, whose style is so diametrically opposed to his own."[52] Sanford Schwartz expands:

> [Stout] was armed with his inconclusive experience of twenty-odd years of work . . . and an inner resource that he might not have been aware of, but which Hofmann would

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[51] Myron Stout, Oral History Interview by Robert F. Brown, tape recording, Provincetown Mass., 1984. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as MSOH-1984.

[52] Mel Gooding, "Experiencing the Paintings," in exh. cat., *Myron Stout* (Edinburgh: Inverleith House, 1997), n.p (hereafter cited as MS-IH); Henry Geldzahler, "Pathways and Epiphanies," in exh. cat., *Myron Stout* (New York: Kent Fine Art, Flynn and Oil & Steel Galleries, 1990), 8 (hereafter MS-KFOS); B.H. Friedman, "Introduction," in Sanford Schwartz, exh. cat., *Myron Stout* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980), 16 (hereafter MS-WMAA).

> activate overnight: a one-time serious piano student's belief that, at the base of things, there are immutable laws of harmony and melody, consonance and dissonance. Hofmann was a catalyst for many people . . . but he had a special, immediate potency for Stout because his formulations and analogies—about how colors and shapes must be made to wrestle with, and eventually find peace with, each other—have a musical logic to them.[53]

All of these accounts describe the relationship between a teacher and a "mature" student, suggesting that Stout only needed direction in becoming an artist. They seem keen to differentiate Stout from Hofmann, as if Stout's status as an individual is an issue. It bears remembering that the status given to the student here is a relatively new phenomena. Well into his sixties Cézanne still added to his name "pupil of Pissarro" in exhibition pamphlets.[54] Gauguin paid similar tribute to Pissarro, saying, "He was one of my masters and I do not disown him."[55] Generationally, Hofmann pivots between these old and new conceptions of the teacher-student relationship.

Another issue that may motivate Stout and his critic-advocates is the "problem" of Hofmann's students, a group that is numerous, various, adulating of their teacher, sometimes reactionary and of inconsistent quality as artists. At times Hofmann's students seem out of touch with the newer conventions of downplaying—rhetorically if not aesthetically—one's influences. Critic Karen Wilkin writes:

> I've heard Hans Hofmann spoken of with awe for almost as long as I can remember. A teacher at my high school had studied with him, a fact often repeated to account for her unorthodox methods—even in New York, in those days. It conferred status, although she ranked lower than a colleague who had actually been a student at the Bauhaus, but that's another matter. Today, almost twenty-five years after Hofmann's death, such connections still seem to count. A well-known and successful New York landscape painter,

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[53] Schwartz, "Chronology," MS-WMAA, 64.
[54] John Rewald, *History of Impressionism* (New York 1961, 1973), 578-579. Quoted in Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 160.
[55] Gauguin, *The Writings of a* Savage, ed. Daniel Guéran (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 218.

> who has been exhibiting for more than two decades, is often described as having been "Hofmann's monitor," as though that established his legitimacy.[56]

Hofmann's legacy as a painter is supported by this devotion—the information compiled about how he taught, in magazine articles and exhibitions of work by his students.[57] There is also some evidence of competition between Stout and his fellow students, and a quiet suggestion that he was not entirely original in his work.[58] There is also a suggestion that Hofmann favoured Stout.[59] Stout came to have a collegial relationship with him, and saw him and his first wife, Miz, socially, although infrequently. At the same time, Stout was reverent, and his own devotion to his teacher can be inferred by the relatively large portion of the journals that recount Hofmann's ideas, things Hofmann did, or that defend him against criticism. As late as December 1962, Stout poignantly argues in his journal that Hofmann "was way ahead of Pollock in being liberated from the unnecessarily logical . . ." suggesting Hofmann's predominance in Pollock's metier by getting to it first. Soon after, Stout makes the opposite argument again in support of Hofmann, writing that, "not satisfied with being

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[56] Karen Wilkin, "Memoria in aeternum: Hofmann at the Whitney," *The New Criterion* 9, no. 1 (September 1990): 10.

[57] This trend can be traced to Hofmann's own emphasis on pedagogy; see for example his essay, "The Search for the Real" (originally published in 1948). It also shaped the critical reception of his work. See Maude Riley, "Hans Hofmann: Teacher-Artist," *Art Digest* 18, no. 2 (15 March 1944): 13; Cynthia Goodman, "Hans Hofmann as Teacher," *Arts Magazine* 53 (April 1979): 22-28; as well as numerous exhibitions on Hofmann as teacher, Lillian Orlowsky, exh. cat., *The Provocative Years 1935-1945: The Hans Hofmann School and Its Students in Provincetown* (Provincetown, Mass.: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1990). More critical accounts are Rosenberg, "Hofmann's 'Life' Class"; Irving Sandler, "Hans Hofmann: The Pedagogical Master," *Art in America* 61 (May 1973): 49-57; and William C. Seitz, exh. cat., *Hans Hofmann* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1963), 54. Hofmann promoted his writings when he could—most of the announcements for his shows at Emmerich Gallery through the 1950s had extended statements printed on them.

[58] Paul Bowen mentioned that fellow students Toni La Selle and Haynes Ownby felt this—that there was cross-over between their work and Stout's, but he became the best known among them. Conversation with author, August 2001. There is a very interesting couple of pages in the journal where Stout discusses the issue of his own originality, which concurs with Bowen's recollection. Stout notes that after Hofmann's 1951 show at Kootz Gallery in New York, a number of artist-friends said, "he is doing your sort of thing." Stout explains: "I think that it was natural for Hofmann to participate in this communal swing towards Mondrian, so to speak, at the same time that he was in such large measure directing it, as it was for me too, and it certainly doesn't mean that he was 'copying' me any more than I was 'copying' Mondrian or Toni or [Alfred] Israel (in spite of what she felt, that I, and finally everybody was copying her!)" MS Journal-1, 92 (29 May 1953).

[59] Hofmann tended to not speak to artists when he liked the work they were doing—by all accounts he left Stout alone. When an *Art News* feature was written on Hofmann's teaching, of the two student works illustrated one was by Stout. The caption reads: "Geometric paintings like this one by Myron S. Stout are commended for their 'pure plastic values.'" See Dorothy Seckler, "Can Painting Be Taught?" *Art News* 50 (March 1951): 63.

just spontaneously and monumentally intuitive . . . his paintings continuingly reveal a higher and more complete and intense human expression therewith . . ."[60] It is important that Stout stopped writing the journals—which he had begun in 1950—at the end of 1966, the same year Hofmann died. In this sense, even when Stout was writing about himself, his ideas or observations, the subject of the journals was Hofmann.[61] Nevertheless, while Stout looked to Hofmann for guidance, he did not always listen to him. One passage in Stout's journal recounts an evening spent with Hofmann, during which he tried to tell him how he felt the writing helped his work, how it was "a process of clarification." Hofmann impatiently told Stout to stay focused on painting.

> He put it very clearly when he said: there are all these things coming at you from every direction, and there comes a time when you simply have to stop and find a direction, and he gestured forward with his straightened hand on the table so forcefully.[62]

(He continued to write, of course.)

Singerman's book is again important when considering what Stout learned from Hofmann. Stout's time at the Hofmann School was his first participation in the school-gallery-studio-art magazine complex. Hofmann's school was at the epicentre of the art world in the 1940s, and Stout had never quite been at the centre of anything before, and it helped him clarify his identity as an artist. In the late 1970s, he explained it this way, "all of a sudden I realised that, whether I was a scholar or not, I was a painter first."[63] Thus stated, Stout's account of his experience reflects one of Singerman's more interesting arguments: that the emergent version of art education post-War revolved around identity-construction.

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[60] MS Journal-1, 595 (2 December 1962). Hofmann's career had started to wane in 1962, his "formalism" out of step with changes in art practice and criticism. I address this in Chapter 2.
[61] Supporting this is a remarkable similarity between the early, and more philosophical part of the journal and the notes from Hofmann's classes that Emily Farnham compiled in her book, *Hofmann: Abstraction As Plastic Expression and Notes Made in Hofmann's Classes* (Provincetown, Mass.: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1999).
[62] MS Journal-2, 42 (29 May 1953).
[63] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 29

Less emphasis was placed on skills or mastering specific styles of art; the "subject" was how to be an artist, and how as an artist one valued liberal ideas, had a consciousness of history, and pursued original forms of expression. What happened at the Hofmann School—that had not happened in previous educative contexts—is that the teaching informed the practice: Hofmann had the ability to turn his students into artists. Singerman suggests that a result of the artist-run school is that teacher and student are more equal. At the Subjects of the Artist School, run by William Baziotes, David Hare, Motherwell, and Rothko, the literature advertised that:

> The artists who have formed this school believe that receiving instruction in regularly scheduled courses from a single teacher is not necessarily the best spirit in which to advance creative work. Those who are in a learning stage benefit most by associating with working artists and developing with them variations on the artistic process (through actually drawing, painting, and sculpting) . . . Those attending classes will not be treated as "students" in the conventional manner, but as collaborators with the artists in the investigation of the artistic process, its modern conditions, possibilities, and extreme nature, through discussions and practice.[64]

"Teaching" often took the form of lectures by working artists. The object was not to impart a set of artistic principles, techniques or ideas, but rather to offer the student models; the successful student, of course, could project.

Because of the G.I. Bill, many students at the Hofmann School were "mature." Classes also got larger, more masculine, and by implication, more serious.[65] Singerman

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[64] Stephanie Terenzio, ed., *Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 294. The school only ran for one year, 1948. In an important text painter Robert Goodnough wrote, rather grandiosely, "The Friday evenings [when artists came to talk] quickly became a physical place for everyone interested in advanced art in the United States to meet; the audiences averaged about 150 persons . . ." in Robert Motherwell and Ad Reinhardt, eds., *Modern Artists in America* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1951) 9. By contrast, Dore Ashton notes that nowhere else in New York was there the broad, consistent and inclusive conversation than what took place at the Hofmann School. Dore Ashton, *The Life and Times of the New York School* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1972), 79-80.

[65] Although there were women veterans (350,000 to the 16 million men who served), and 35% of them who served took advantage of the GI Bill, Singerman notes that 90% of student veterans were men. Chapter 2 of his

points out that the timing of the G.I. Bill and Abstract Expressionism was more than felicitous:

> Accompanied by artists' statements, new critical writing [in art magazines], and, often, the presence of visiting artists, abstract expressionism was more than just one of an eclectic set of possible choices of style and subject for those who would be artists. Rather it presented a national image of what art looked like and what artists did.[66]

Abstract Expressionism was the picture that fit the new, older, more serious and ambitious artist.

Stout had probably known of Hofmann for some time, at least since the summer he spent in Provincetown in 1938.[67] Arriving in New York in January 1946, G.I. Bill funding in hand, he was following the trajectory of teaching.[68] The story goes that an old friend from Denton, the painter and teacher Toni La Selle, encouraged him to come down to one of Hofmann's classes.[69] Stout was living on West 90th Street; they had met and he had shown her some of the work he had been doing in Hawaii. Stout took his time; he didn't go straight down—perhaps downtown seemed far from the deliberate way that he pursued art, and the company of artists quite different from the academic context he was used to. There is some

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book is devoted to gender issues in art education—see 58-59 on the effect of the G.I. Bill on women in universities. The veterans spent much more time at the Hofmann School—typically 1-3 years—than a self-funded student, who attended 1-2 sessions. My research in the Lillian Kiesler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, confirms Singerman's reading (they contain the card files for the School, which note every inquiry into the school, and every student who attended): most inquiries before 1945 were made by women and most of the post-War students ended their study on May 23rd, 1952, which is when the G.I. Bill funding ran out. My count of veterans listed in the cards is 59 (five were women), but this cannot be contextualised in terms of overall numbers. Hereafter AAA-LK.

[66] Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 130.

[67] Lillian Orlowsky suggests that from 1935—when he opened his summer school—until around 1945, Hofmann was under attack in Provincetown by artists associated with social realist, figurative, academic and modernist schools; they spoke out against him and his school at various symposia at the Art Association. *Provocative Years*, 4.

[68] Veterans Administration letter to Myron Stout, 27 April 1946, Simpson Papers. It notes he received $65 a month for his education.

[69] La Selle was a professor in the Art Department, Texas State College for Women in Denton, but took Hofmann's classes in the summers (1946, 1949 and 1952). She was enrolled in winter session of 1946 in New York. AAA-LK. For an introduction to her work see Michael Ennis, "Toni La Selle: Thoroughly Modern," *Texas Monthly* (August 2001) and Ann Wilson Lloyd, "Toni La Selle at Berta Walker's," *Art in America* 82, no. 3 (March 1994): 105.

evidence that it took him a few visits before he was let in the door.[70] But he persisted, and at the few classes he attended that spring, he got a taste of this new world. Abandoning his Ph.D. and beginning at the Hofmann School was a corner turned.[71] In a later interview, Stout said:

> I did go down to Hofmann's and started drawing. As soon as I went back to work, drawing and working in his class, I knew that I was never going to get a doctorate, and this is what I should be doing.[72]

The complicating factor is that it took four more years for Stout to extricate himself from his teaching job.[73] For the next two years he spent the academic year teaching in Hawaii and the summers in Provincetown studying with Hofmann. He obtained a sabbatical for the 1949-50 academic year during which he attended the School full time. In the end, Stout attended Hofmann's classes in Provincetown and New York continually from the summer of 1949 through the summer of 1952—nine sessions running.[74]

As I have established, Stout was already well trained in composition and had a philosophical grounding by the time he reached Hofmann's classes. In a late interview, Stout recalled that the main things he learned from Hofmann were first, the problem in painting and drawing of going from three to two dimensions; and second, Hofmann's insistence on drawing from nature. This confirmed the work he had been doing in Hawaii but pushed him

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[70] There are several letters from La Selle to Stout in the Simpson Papers. On February 19 she mentions that he came to the school but missed Hofmann; on March 14 she suggests several ways of getting in, including "badgering" Tony Smith and going to the preview of Hofmann's "big show"; on March 28 she describes Hofmann's monitor blocking Stout's entrance to the criticism, because it was too full.

[71] He also moved: Stout's first card lists him living at 104 West 90th Street, and later at the Chelsea Hotel. AAA-LK, box 3.

[72] MSOH-1984.

[73] Ever deliberate, he completed the semester's coursework at Teachers College, then enrolled in the School's summer session in Provincetown. That fall, he returned to teaching at Kamehameha. It must have been the case that they put pressure on him to return; clearly he could not have gotten a doctorate in a semester.

[74] Hofmann held three sessions a year, spring, summer and winter. There is some discrepancy in Stout's records and his recollections: Stout's card in the Kiesler Papers suggests he attended in the summer of 1946, and not again until the summer of 1949. Schwartz writes he was going in the summers of 1947 and '48; Stout himself stated he only worked with Hofmann "off and on, for two years." Busa, "Editor's Introduction," 11. It is, of course, possible that he was signed up but didn't go the classes.

to fix it in an abstract style.[75] The major issue in Hofmann's classes was for the student to understand the picture as a space with certain governing rules. The object was to use shape, colour, and mass to make the work dynamic. In Hofmann's lexicon, this was *plasticity;* its opposite was "design," which was just moving shapes around, formulaic and illustrative of a principle. Plasticity indexed reality: lived, emotional experience. Stout embraced this as a method for keeping his painting vital, writing in his journal some years later:

> No matter how abstract you're going to be—even if you're going to be as abstract as Mondrian—it has to have its source in real experience—in your own visual experience of the world. By drawing constantly from nature, you're not tempted to go where you've lost the foundation.[76]

In a sense, the relationship between these ideas and Stout's later work is unproblematic. Even as one might appear "geometric," Stout's works are never measured out in a mathematical sense, rather gleaned and simplified from an observed situation. A clear example is the untitled drawing from 1977-79, which appears to be a study in rectilinear mass and weight (fig. 21). It is, rather, a view from his balcony, looking out as Cape Cod curves around to its very tip into an expanse of the sea. Stout used "nature" (that is, observation) as a way of grounding abstraction, so that even as they became more and more simplified he stayed shy of making them into "models" of abstract work. At their best, his works carry with them some sense of a grand, physical experience: wind (a term he used to describe a painting he liked), light, expansive landscape, repetitive natural effects, like tides.

Emily Farnham notes that: "Not all of [Hofmann's] students learned how to see plastic form or how to create it."[77] As far back as his school in Munich, Hofmann's insisted

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[75] Busa notes that, awed by the landscape there, he sketched in the open air and made watercolours in his studio, "a medium that taught him to work rapidly, very much against his natural inclination." "Editor's Introduction," 10.

[76] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 33.

[77] Farnham, *Hofmann*, 27. One of his students from the Munich school in the 1920s said, "Easy understanding of it [Hofmann's teaching] for most of us was impeded by some previous Beaux Arts training. . . . We had to learn to substitute the horizontal and vertical axes of the picture plane for the optical axis against which we had

upon students working abstractly.[78] Stout willingly leapt over it—until he began to make landscape drawings again around 1952. Even so, Hofmann's classes were set up around drawing from still life or nude model.[79] Assistants and monitors like Kiesler and Lenita Manry took care of the day-to-day details, and Hofmann came in a few times a week and critiqued the students' work. Notably, several still lives would be set up at the beginning of term and left unchanged for its duration.[80] Farnham explains this helped students better understand the process of making abstract work:

> by the end of the summer the students who worked long hours in the garage had acquired an unusually profound knowledge of the general form of each still life and the relationships between a given still life's objects.[81]

Hofmann's use of studio drawing should not be seen as academic, although it may seem so now. If it were academic, he would have taught a set of repeatable, fixed techniques.[82] For Hofmann, drawing from observation was a means to an end, mainly for the student to understand the "relation between things" along with ideas of pictorial composition. Using a phrase belonging to Braque, Hofmann often insisted: "the four sides of the paper are the first lines of the composition."[83] This of course signals the modernist idea that art is to be found in its own materiality, but that such an approach was connected to larger issues of expression. Robert Hobbs explained recently:

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previously seen the subject. Those who didn't cross that threshold left either confused or bitter, or both." Cynthia Goodman, exh. cat., *Hans Hofmann* (New York and Munich: Whitney Museum of American Art and Prestel Verlag, 1990), 106. Cited in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 29.

[78] Farnham writes, "I recall that he once denounced a naturalistic, figurative work which had been brought to the critique by a woman from Philadelphia, as a piece that belonged to the Expressionist school, not Abstraction." Farnham, *Hofmann*, 28. Even though he emphasised composition and flatness, Dow's work was still representational.

[79] In the summer, several still lives were set up in a garage next to Hofmann's house, and upstairs there was a painting studio where there was a model stand on one side of the room. Students who wanted to paint landscapes worked outside, bringing their work to the Friday critiques. Ibid., 22-23.

[80] Ibid., *Hofmann*, 22; see also Seckler, "Can Painting?" 63.

[81] Farnham, *Hofmann*, 22

[82] Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 27-29. Curiously, he writes: "Academic painting is characterised by waste, torpor, and uselessness, and the isolation of the student is signified by the isolation of a figure drawn on the page."

[83] Goodman, *Hofmann*, 76. Cited in Singerman, *Art Subjects*, 29. He sources this to Braque who said that he did not paint things but the relation between things.

> To emphasize the strategic role played by the in-between spaces that help build tensions in a work even as they provide a scaffolding for abstract forms, [Hofmann] would use crumpled sheets of cellophane and construction paper. . . . The use of these elaborate schemes, which would often take Hofmann an entire afternoon to assemble, was buttressed by his own theory that in art one represents first a medium and then oneself. And that self can be defined only in so far as it can be channelled into a particular medium.[84]

Allan Kaprow, who was a student from 1947-48, proponent of Happenings, and himself an educator, adds a further gloss on the role of the still lives, suggesting that the real work went on elsewhere (and this, if not everything else, would have appealed to Stout):

> He said once that you couldn't teach art at all, but you could certainly teach the right direction to it, namely methods and exercises. It was understood that one made one's art at home, "sacredly," while at the school one did basically formal exercises from a model.[85]

We are lucky to have a description of Stout working in one of Hofmann's classes, observed by his fellow student and friend, Haynes Ownby:

> During the first pose of the model, Stout sat on his stool, motionless but for his head moving back and forth between the sheet of paper and the model on the platform. When the model rested, Stout buried his face in the *New York Times*. When the model resumed the pose, he went through another period observing alertly without touching charcoal to paper. The model took the same pose for a week.
>
> Finally Stout began drawing a line, delineating a simple black shape along the bottom, making one lateral stroke at a time. Each stroke, deliberately a little out of true, filed away some charcoal dust, which fell to the floor, away from the central white area. When the black became black enough, Stout turned the paper and began blackening along the bottom, careful to keep most of the dust from touching the white. . . . When the drawing was completed, Stout took

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[84] Robert Hobbs, exh. cat., *Lee Krasner* (New York: Independent Curators International, 1999), 49-50.
[85] Allan Kaprow, "Formalism: Flogging a Dead Horse," in *Essays on the Blurring Between Art and Life*, edited by Jeff Kelley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 154.

> an eraser and went over the white to make sure it was clean.[86]

From this we can glean a few things: by taking his time to understand the "nature" of the pose rather than its initial appearance, Stout demonstrated that the model was not to be reproduced, rather used as the "scaffolding." Supporting this is the fact that Ownby doesn't describe the resulting image, focusing instead on Stout's application of the medium. What is most compelling about the description however, is the spectre of Stout making one of his signature ovoid black-and-white charcoals, and making it from a *model*.[87] (See fig. 44)

There were several aesthetic decisions Stout made during the time he was studying with Hofmann that bear note. From the summer of 1947 he concentrated on small-scale paintings. At first he worked on small stretched canvasses measuring between 20 and 30 inches in either dimension, and sometimes on cheap canvasboard that came pre-made in several sizes (he used ones measuring 18 x 14 inches and 20 x 16 inches).[88] He also began to make finished charcoal drawings on 25 x 19 inch sheets of paper, the size used by most of Hofmann's students. The typical paintings—which he made at home—were geometric and in colour, with the paint applied thickly by palette knife. Geldzahler later called them "pathways," both because they led to the later work, and because—spatially—they appear as if the picture plane was tipping back (figs. 30-34).[89] Stout explained in his journal:

> A central point within the implied depth of picture space and high in it (or even high above it) can act as a kind of single magnetic pole around which the elements of the composition play. This is the "source-impetus" I played

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[86] Busa, "Editor's Introduction," 12. The description is written by Busa, most likely from a conversation with Ownby. Ownby was also from Texas.

[87] Ownby's description does not accord with new evidence, that Stout was long gone from Hofmann classes when he made his first ovoid *charcoal* in 1957. Prior to that they were rectilinear. See figs. 42 and 43.

[88] Schwartz is deterministic about Stout's making small-scale ("easel-size") works, "Chronology," MS-WMAA, 67. While I agree it is remarkable that Stout never made large paintings when it was happening all around him, it is wrong to say Stout made only "small" works. There is a world of difference between an 18 x 14 inch painting and a 40 x 32 inch one (his biggest, *Apollo*, 1955-79 (fig. 13)).

[89] Geldzahler, MS-DIA. This catalogue appears in Henry Geldzahler, *Making It New: Essays, Interviews, Talks* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 1994).

> with constantly from 1949 to the summer of 1952. It was for me a very powerful mode of force. The effect was of a spiral, or of a cone within which the action was set. Its danger, of course, lay in the lack of balance on the surface. It was in constant danger of becoming an illustrated space like academic perspective.[90]

In these paintings Stout develops a structure within pictorial space, a kind of architecture that determines but does not entirely limit the work.[91] These works are also about capturing something about sense-experience. Referring to the painting, *Untitled*, 1951 (fig. 32), Stout explained:

> I know that they invariably start with a *sensation*, a sensation of color, a sensation of movement, and they are usually . . . touched off by a certain situation . . . In the "red" painting, for instance, the color sensation was one that had been building up for several summers in Provincetown—the colors of the little flower beds, the crimson of the large poppies, the oranges and yellow-oranges of the little ones, the high hollyhocks, the roses, all so vivid in the luminous Provincetown atmosphere that they burn themselves into one's vision. . . .
>
> When I actually started what became the red painting, though, two years later, I started drawing on the canvas, still wanting and feeling the flower colors, but now more set in green. The drawing that I began with, on the canvas, came not from any remembered form of flowers or flower beds, but from a tree outside the door; a tree that the thin foliage of the lower reaches allowed the rising branches to be seen, rising, yet moving sideways, toward each other, coming in contact, reversing the movement, yet still rising.[92]

Thus "architecture" as something revealed rather than hidden is not the extent of the painting but the means to which an experience can be developed in painting. The problem with the form appears to have been the risk of its becoming a trick, and thus overwhelming the experience. He turned to working entirely flatly, and with more apparent "balance," as in

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[90] MS Journal-2, 35 (24 May 1953).

[91] Another passage describes Hofmann's teaching about how structure is "overcome" in a work of art: "1) to let its skeleton be not only its inner support but also its outer expression, 2) to let the outer garment or surface reflect the skeleton, but clothe and mostly conceal it." MS Journal-2, 31-32 (18 May 1953).

[92] MS Journal-2, 22-23 (17 October 1952).

a series of paintings that seek their dynamism through pattern, weight and colour contrast, (figs. 25-28). One could say that here in context of studying with Hofmann, Stout made his first moves toward creating plastic space without employing an already established form, the "breakthrough" that he made to the curved line in the first black and white painting, in 1954 (fig. 1).

There is a way in which Stout's work from this period seems driven by a need to prove he had grasped the point of Hofmann's teaching, but to make the object of that understanding unique to him. In other words, Stout was keen to differentiate his work from that of other students. His earliest-known drawing (fig. 18) is very similar to one made by John Grillo in 1948 (fig. 19). But the untitled drawing from 1950-51 (fig. 42) is quite different from any of the ones illustrated in Farnham's book, even Ownby's which is the closest (fig. 20).[93] Stout himself suggests that it was important to do so, when he emphasised that Hofmann's teaching inspired a range of practices; to Maartens and others he always spoke of the artists that eventually moved on: "Rivers, Harry Jackson, Jan Muller, Bob Goodnough, Marisol, John Grillo, Mike Goldberg, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, Al Leslie, Kaprow, you couldn't have found more diversity."[94] Such a suggestion—that Hofmann's legacy was not Abstract Expressionism or Mondrian-style geometric painting *per se*—but the diverse art-life practices of the 1950s is a good introduction to the next chapter where I attempt to disrupt that decade from movement-based, periodised histories. To this end, it's worth a comparison between Stout's drawing of Provincetown's landscape (fig. 21) with Hofmann's (fig. 22). They share little other than medium, scale, and basic subject. The residual, and perhaps more tricky question is what either artist—and for that matter any artist

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[93] This argument is made on the very limited evidence offered in Farnham's book, but one gets a sense from it nevertheless of "types" of work occurring in clusters, like cubist still lifes in the late 30s (by Peter Busa and Fritz Bultman); softer geometric abstractions with lots of erasures in the mid 50s (by Robert Henry and Betty Smith Bishop); Hofmann-esque linear expressions in the mid 1940s (by William Freed, Orlowsky, and Krasner). Stout's 1948 drawing (fig. 18) is very characteristic of a school style.
[94] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 31. Her underline.

at the time—meant by "nature." For Stout, armed as he was with a certain philosophical position based in Langer, it had something to do with forming a "symbolic language" that expresses "living experience." The important point was for the artist to establish some connection with the viewer. For some this was achieved by gesture and a level of irresolution in the finished work.[95] For an artist like Kaprow, it was to make an art-life gesture in an overwhelming environment. For Stout, it was to make apparently ordered and simplified forms as irrational and unbalanced as actual natural phenomena.

* * *

The model of the artist-teacher-student suggests a kind of interaction that is different from that of the artist-in-the-studio. In addition to the artist himself, and the "audience" (which could be totally invented or a real one), the artist-teacher has another responsibility: the student. It is crucial to remember that half the time Stout was studying with Hofmann, he was *also teaching*, going back and forth between Provincetown and Honolulu. This vacillation between learning/painting and teaching, I argue, contributed to certain characteristics of his work, namely its clarity, its consistency, and, in the end, its differentiation. It could be compared to the work of other artist-teachers, like Albers, whose work is not an illustration of, but demonstrates the aesthetic principles he pursued.[96] This may sound far-fetched as an interpretive tool, but then again, Stout's painting *Untitled (Number 3),* 1954 turned up in a 1966 textbook entitled *Art and Education in Contemporary Culture* (fig. 23). In this context, Stout's painting becomes an exemplar of sorts—but for

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[95] Anna Chave is illuminating on this issue in New York School painting, that it had less to do with solipsism than with a desire to become Ego-less. Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects on Abstraction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 142-145.
[96] Albers considered his students his "first collaborators." Josef Albers, *The Interaction of Color* (New Haven: Yale, 1975), 75.

what? Although his painting is deeply subjective in impetus, even as he argued—philosophically—that art is not about communication, Stout was equally compelled to do so. He sought out and found a means for expressing experiences in a particularly "objective" and complete form.

Around the same time as he resigned from Kamehameha, Stout wrote a letter to a young artist, from which the following passage is taken:

> Don't be chained to what has been done and to what others (teachers etc.) tell you you can do. They don't know any more than you do what you can do; and what has been done before is certainly not evidently all that can be done. You are something that never was before. It's only by going wherever you can go that you begin to find what-all you can do.
>
> [. . .] When you've expanded the canvas as far as it will go, it's still not enough. You have to reach out into the space beyond the canvas and gather in more space (and sometimes more and more) in order to go on with the painting—to bring to it all that will bring it into complete being—all that will fill it.[97]

Far more authoritative and assured than his resignation letter, this text functions as both artistic credo and teaching primer. In it technical matters become justifications for experience as art's subject matter. Painting has the potential to fulfil a person's individuality and destiny. Compelling, too, is a biographical reading: overcoming the limitations of the past notionally turns around the pivot of 1950, the year that, indeed, Stout did decide to "go on with painting" and "bring it into complete being."[98]

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[97] MS Journal-1, 727-28 (undated, c. 1950). The passage is embedded in the journal text, which is an issue of transcription, as many of Stout's early notes that were on scraps of drawing paper and the backs of envelopes were typed up along with the dated material. The recipient is unnamed.

[98] Even though he quit teaching as a profession, Stout continued to teach informally. In the late 1960s he helped organise the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, a residence programme for emerging artists, writers, and poets. During the 1970s it occupied most of his time. Author's conversation with Harry Philbrick, 1 October 2003. Now Director of the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Philbrick was 18 and wanted to be an artist, and visited Stout several times. It seems Stout loved talking to aspiring artists, and had a way of encouraging them into their strengths.

Stout's education tracks the changes in how art was taught in universities and schools; his decision to stop being a teacher and become a full-time artist signals another major cultural shift, which is the growing art market that would allow many artists to stop relying on teaching as their means to a career as an artist. The artists with whom Stout first studied would have taught by necessity.[99] The generation that followed were not as categorical, and while some of them taught, by the early 1950s some were selling enough paintings to suggest that teaching was not the only option. By the late 50s, everything had changed. Young artists could rely on the art market for their main means of support. In 1958 Jasper Johns had his first one-man show at Castelli, and every painting was sold.[100] Stout, of course, never sold many works. As in other ways, he doesn't fit squarely into one generation or another. He did manage to support himself independent of teaching, but he would never sacrifice this hard-won freedom to the vagaries of the art market.

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[99] For example, John Sloan (1871-1951) told his students: "you can't make a living at art. The idea of taking up art as a calling, a trade, a profession, is a mirage. John Sloan, *Gist of Art*, 26.
[100] The works from this show are the most valuable in Johns' oeuvre. Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines*, 133-34.

Chapter 2:

Abstract Expressionism—"The Dream" and The Canon

According to Umberto Eco, naming a movement begins as nothing more than a "semiotic enclave."

—Donald Kuspit[1]

Abstract Expressionism remains today the guiding paradigm for any discussion of 1950s American art. It is a great rags-to-riches story of American chutzpa, of a small group of people coming to believe in an idea and overcoming adversity to make it a reality. Cogent critiques have been lodged against the mythologies that surround this period, but both the mythologies and the critiques operate on the level of ideology; neither elucidates biographical or art-world stories which are more complicated versions of it. Abstract Expressionism is, in fact, deeply bound up with issues of canons and periodisation, and the simplifications that go along with their formations. And, remarkably, despite changes in the discourse, the "canon"—the progenitors and originators—has remained essentially the same.

This chapter charts Stout's relationship to Abstract Expressionism—the degrees to which he adopted and diverged from it—and the legacy of the canon on subsequent interpretations of his work. It tracks the development of his work over the course of the 50s and the way it was critically received in his three main exhibitions of the decade. The chapter is bracketed by the years 1949, when Stout quit his teaching job and moved to New

[1] Kuspit, "Foreword," in S. Foster, *The Critics*, ix.

York, and 1958, when the critical climate changed and started to shift away from the dominant interest in "expressionism." The two crucial and paradigmatic events for Stout in these nine years were his permanent move to Provincetown in the autumn of 1952 and his decision to switch galleries in 1955. Another important date is 1950, when he began to formalise his thoughts into written form in his journals. Coming on the scene in New York, Stout saw abstract art as both a new frontier and an already established tradition. At points in the early 50s he expresses in his journals the idea it is embattled, at others he emphasises its popularity.[2] These equivocations denote the degree to which cultural battles were being waged in real time during the years he was developing his mature style of work.

Frank O'Hara recounted that when he was first introduced to de Kooning he "nearly got sick." For O'Hara, a young poet meeting one of his heroes—a genius, he felt—it was almost too much. De Kooning was part of "the dream:" O'Hara had touched it and it was overwhelming.[3] The story tells a lot about being an artist in New York around 1950. It was a heady time. Art was huge, but it was also right there for you to be a part of. When Stout finally extricated himself from his teaching job and arrived in New York to stay, this new American painting called Abstract Expressionism was just breaking. *Life Magazine's* 1949 article about Jackson Pollock heralded his recent successes:

> His paintings hang in five U.S. museums and 40 private collections. Exhibiting in New York last winter, he sold 12 out of 18 pictures. Moreover, his work has stirred up a fuss in Italy, and this autumn he is slated for a one-man show in

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[2] There are many examples of the former, like a rant against the USAID or against *New York Times* critic Stuart Preston, MS Journal-1, 217 (25 January 1954); latter: "[people who are concerned with the new painting] make up a large, intelligent, well-educated and concerned public" MS Journal-1, 213 (5 May 1954).

[3] Irving Sandler used this story to open his book, *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 1. "The dream" was Franz Kline's phrase. O'Hara went on to be a curator at MoMA. Getting sick appears to be a theme: Geldzahler claimed to have taken ill after seeing his first Abstract Expressionist show—Gottlieb at the Whitney in 1944 (he was 15). Maartens told a similar story to Stout about seeing the Louvre for the first time, that she came down with a flu for two days after but always associated it with the experience. Maartens Interview, Tape 2.

> *avant-garde* Paris, where he is fast becoming the most talked-of and controversial U.S. painter.[4]

That autumn's *Whitney Annual* was full of paintings by Baziotes, Hofmann, Motherwell, Pollock, Rothko, and Tomlin.[5] Museums were starting to buy and display the work.[6] For his part, Stout immersed himself in looking.[7] You could be part of this powerful group of artists leading art forward, but the deal was you had to *do it*, and you had to do it on your own.

The argument of this chapter—that Stout's work benefits from interpreting it in terms of the philosophy of Abstract Expressionism—is in direct conflict with his main commentators who have consistently downplayed Stout's relationship to Abstract Expressionist painting. For example, in the catalogue for Stout's 1980 retrospective at the Whitney, Friedman suggested:

> It is difficult, though not impossible, to relate Stout's work to recent American art. Unlike the dominant artists of his own generation, he is involved with scale but not size, with image but not "gesture," with expressiveness but not expressionism, with light but not conventional color. There are none of the violent storms or pyrotechnics displayed sometimes in the work of the Action Painters who best personify that label. With Stout heavy weather doesn't exist. It is always seemingly calm and "atmospheric."[8]

A decade later, reviewing a trio of New York gallery exhibitions, the critic from the *New York Times* insisted:

> In the early 1950's, when the Abstract Expressionists were changing the scale and character of American art with their

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[4] Dorothy Seiberling "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" *Life Magazine* (8 August 1949): 42 (italics original).
[5] Pollock's painting, *Number 14*, 1949 was shown there.
[6] MoMA bought its first Pollock, *Number 1A*, 1948, in January 1950. "Chronology," in Varnedoe, *Pollock*, 324.
[7] Stout did not use his journal to record specific shows he saw, but he wrote in a way that suggests he was going regularly. He was in New York when major exhibitions took place of artists such as Pollock, Rothko, Newman, Still and of course Hofmann. He was also in the city for shows that had an institutional impact, like the MoMA's *Abstract Painting & Sculpture in America* (January 1951), the *Ninth Street Show* (May-June 1951) and *15 Americans* (April-July 1952). He mentions one show in particular several times as having a strong impact: a Still-de Kooning show in San Francisco. I've identified it as *Fourth Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, 25 November 1950-January 1951.
[8] Friedman, "Introduction," MS-WMAA, 9-10.

> big, expansive, "all-over" paintings, Myron Stout was moving toward small, highly concentrated black-and-white abstractions in which all signs of spontaneity, heroism and personality seemed to have vanished.[9]

Sensitive as each reading might be to the particulars of Stout's paintings, these statements say more about the limits of period- and style-categories than shed light on his practice. Both in fact have him disappearing: in the first account the art history provides no viable context for Stout's placid surfaces, and in the second the paintings themselves are so small as to have vanished. It seems these are deep problems with Stout's work: its very smallness marks failures of courage to embrace what was new and modern, big, American, bombastic, chaotic, and brash. Stout's work in these terms is historically recursive. He references, and is therefore (negatively) bound to earlier—and perhaps worse—"European" styles of abstraction. The critics' metaphors are, of course at the same time, conceits—descriptive of a situation that has performed Stout's erasure, and expressive of a desire for his renewed visibility. Both writers want us to overlook the deficiencies implied by the comparison. Both overplay stylistic and physical differences not only in Stout's work, but in Abstract Expressionist painting, to demonstrate to anyone knowledgeable about Abstract Expressionism's legacy—that Stout's "authentic" relationship to the cultural, political, and aesthetic changes of that moment ought not be in question.

My argument is based primarily on Stout writings, and on a close study of the literature on Abstract Expressionism. Like any other artist, the problem Stout faced was how to work critically and productively with a given situation; specifically it was how to address head-on the high stakes of making purely abstract works. This mindset is evident in a journal passage from 1954, around the time of his first show, where he emphatically defended abstraction:

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[9] Michael Brenson, "Works of Myron Stout, Standing on Their Own," *The New York Times* (2 November 1990): C32. Brenson has written frequently on Stout, including his *New York Times* obituary. See also Appendix 2.

> It does not do simply to dismiss the abstract painting by saying that its forms do not mean anything, are cold and sterile, or are too fanciful and private in their meaning to reach the public. For the fact is that there are abstract paintings, that both their painters and an ever growing public find meaning and value in them, and that no significant movement using traditional purely representational forms has appeared or is operating which is having any impact or importance on either painters or the public. In short, the vitality of painting today lies overwhelmingly with the abstract painter.
>
> That vitality, I'm convinced, lies not in the fact that the forms are new, but in the fact that the artists are searching for meaning both deeply and earnestly, and that the forms which they come to use are expressive of the meaning that they find.[10]

The passage summarises a fairly typical position on painting for the time: that abstraction was the vanguard and the future, as yet not fully appreciated, and that it had more potential than figurative painting to reach a large audience.[11] Within a discussion of abstract painting, however, Stout had differences with the prevailing critical opinion; some sections of his journal are devoted to debunking the idea that the "subject" of painting is paint; others take issue with the assertion (Greenberg's) that "flatness" was painting's aspiration.[12] These were technical, and moreover instrumentalist matters that had little to do with the more important task of "finding" the answer to expression in painting itself. In another journal passage, less formal and polemical, he asks:

> What is the substance of what we see? We reach for it with every stroke of the brush. When the dunes were so beautiful last month, . . . a massive yet so light drift of white, color without apparent substance. . . when the sky was gray, the

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[10] MS Journal-1, 205 (26 April 1954). This appears to be a commentary on his recent show at the Stable Gallery (there is a three-week gap in the journal coinciding with the show's run; Schwartz places Stout in New York from February until May that spring. Schwartz, draft chronology, Sanford Schwartz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, 3. Hereafter cited as AAA-SS. It stands as a rebuttal to the kind of critique of Abstract Expressionism made by Geoffrey Wagner, "The New American Painting," in *The Antioch Review* 14, no. 1 (March 1954): 3-13.

[11] Stout's "triumphant" tone echoes Greenberg's, I read it as a sort of "ideational" passage—Stout trying on a public position. The only difference he strikes here is that he de-emphasises its novelty, where critics like Rosenberg insists on it.

[12] MS Journal-2, 88-89 (12 May 1956).

> blossoms seemed white. So light in weight, so unsubstantial a mist, but a mist of filmy light.
>
> In painting, when we invest [symbols] with official meanings, we rob the painting of its vitality, for the life of a symbol is in its refusal to become fixed. . . . The totality of the painting finally becomes a supreme metaphor. All together giving that fleeting delight of a monument realized—for the merest fraction of a second you have had a vision, so clear, so lucid, so real, yet far beyond the bounds of daily reality.[13]

This passage represents an idea closely associated with Abstract Expressionist painting: that painting could be a "representation of inner reality" while avoiding the pitfalls of a kind of formalism that becomes its own subject.[14] Clearly, for Stout, scale and "gesture" were not criteria that defined the possibilities of expression, nor limited authentic, individual aesthetic experiences. One had to develop a painting style—that is, an approach to the "problem"—that was one's *own* rather than already claimed by someone else; Stout also wanted to heed Hofmann's lessons about plastic form and remaining close to nature.[15] To this end he cycled through a narrow range of formats in painting and drawing before settling in, in the fall of 1954, with the black and white work he is now known for. The work he did in these six years was entirely abstract, much of it loosely geometric.[16] On the surface, Stout explored flatness and pictorial depth, pattern, balance, shape and proportion, as well as colour issues like saturation and hue.[17] More deeply, Stout was searching for a way to fully represent *himself.* "It must never be forgotten that the artist doesn't have, never had, and never will have ready-made symbols, nor does he just incidentally pick them up on his way . . . *He must find out on*

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[13] MS Journal-2, 45-6 (4 June 1953).
[14] This is Stout's phrase, MS Journal-1, 655 (1950). This subject appears right from their inception.
[15] MS Journal, as quoted in MS-KFOS, 8 (17 October 195? [sic.]).
[16] The contradictions of Stout's closeness to the rules of geometric painting will be addressed in Chapter 3.
[17] The work was not restricted to painting, as he produced as many drawings in charcoal as oils, and always considered them to be stand-alone works on the same level as his painting.

his own, his purpose firm, his patience infinite, his faith boundless, his vision open to the ends of all the universes conceivable."[18]

* * *

In the summer of 1949, Stout made a work that is both predictive of what would come later and utterly uncharacteristic of him. It is a painting depicting a triangle-like shape, pointed down, balanced centrally in a dark, purplish background (fig. 25). Not only is the shape more angular and ragged than his normally deliberate application of paint, the central white shape is unpainted, in fact raw canvas. The painting is thus a kind of reversal, where the central figure is created by the background colour, a departure for Stout who normally worked as if the painting was a continuous surface.[19] Another surprise is that he painted it quickly.[20] While the painting has little of the density of paint or resolution of other work he was doing at the time, it introduced the single figure in integral relationship to its background. Three years later, in the fall of 1952, Stout painted two more single-image pictures, this time fully painted canvases, but still relatively quickly.[21] Importantly, they were in black and white, but unlike later work they were pendant, a pair of opposites: a black shape on a white canvas and a white on black, both rounded, rock-like shapes. Again, it was a false start of sorts, or only predictive in hindsight. It was two more years before Stout stayed with the single form as the format of his work.

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[18] MS Journal, as quoted in MS-KFOS, 8-9 (26 April 1954).
[19] This is a technique that Newman would make a signature—the multivalence of "zips," some painted some "absent" in the above fashion. Newman had only just begun to use it and it's doubtful that Stout knew about it.
[20] Schwartz recorded that Stout considered it "sport" or an exercise, and that it took him only twenty minutes to make. "Draft Chronology," AAA-SS. I examined this painting in June 2000, and gave it little attention at the time because of its oddness. It didn't "feel" like a Stout at all. Stout wrote to his dealer, Richard Bellamy: "It's really a sketch, not a painting (in my style!) done quickly + spontaneously." Myron Stout letter to Richard Bellamy, 1 March 1961, Richard Bellamy Papers, Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Hereafter cited as MoMA-RB. In this letter Stout describes the shape as a "white straight line shape" where it more resembles a distorted pentagram. Is this further suggestion of a Newman connection in Stout's mind?
[21] I believe these no longer exist. Schwartz refers to them in "Chronology," MS-WMAA, 67, noting they had never been shown.

Other than this painting, Stout's work in these few years before his "breakthrough" can be described in formal terms as "all-over," or as presenting a surface that implies an extension beyond the bounds of the canvas (for example, *Untitled,* 1950 (fig. 27)). Rather than being related to Pollock's all-over canvases, Stout's interest in this formal conceit should be connected to Mondrian.[22] This, and another untitled painting from 1950 (fig. 28), depict linear shapes on dark backgrounds—vertical and horizontal lines in one colour are set against a background of another. Kaprow, in his 1963 article that addresses Mondrian, Pollock, Newman and Stout, analyses Mondrian's work in terms of its "fragmentation" and compares it productively in these terms to both Pollock and Stout.[23] Perhaps more "circuit" than grid, the impulse of the paintings appears to be about achieving balance despite an eccentric composition. Both paintings could be read as fragments of a larger grid, although they read slightly differently. In *Untitled* (July 5), several blue lines "run off" the sides of the painting, and several align exactly with the edges, which suggests equally the fact of this canvas itself and a world beyond.[24] In *Untitled* (fig. 27), similar things happen, but the "scale" of the circuit lines suggest perhaps a more "fragmentary" or close-up view. These conceits are evident in Mondrian's work: see for example, *Composition No. 1*, 1938-39 (fig. 29), where black lines run off as well as line up with the sides of the canvas. Stout has changed his vocabulary by varying the scale of lines, connecting them into a more idiosyncratic system, and shifting out of the Neo-plasticist colour palette.[25]

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[22] This argument is made on the basis of two things: first, Stout's own repeated assertion that "Mondrian got me." MS Journal-1, 133 (25 December 1966) and other passages in the early 1950s; second, evidence of one explicitly Mondrian-esque painting that Stout did in 1947 (it was in his studio in 1978-9 when Schwartz was visiting him—a sketch in AAA-SS confirms it was conventionally Neo-plasticist).

[23] Quite a few of the paintings were done on canvasboard, which was a cheap, readymade material that came in standard sizes. Stout used two sizes, 20 x 16 and 18 x 14 inches the majority oriented vertically. Most of the paintings on canvasboard are the geometric ones, and have a flat feeling to them, as if painting against the hard surface instead of a springy one prevented the illusion of depth. It may be, however, that Stout painted more thinly in them, or that they do not play with the third dimension.

[24] Reproduced images of this painting are cropped too close making it appear that the blue line along the left edge is only half as wide as the others. My photograph of the painting suggests that it is of equal thickness but with no black visible on the far side of it.

[25] Kaprow, "Impurity" (1963), in *Essays*, 30-33, 38-40.

One could speak in similar terms of inside and outside about another group of paintings Stout made between 1950 and '52, about seven paintings referred to as "pathways" (see my earlier discussion of these in Chapter 1, 54-56). They are thick, painterly grid-works like *Untitled*, ca. 1950 (fig. 30).[26] In these Stout employs a simple but effective formal device that extends the idea of all-overness, making an important "break" with Mondrian's frontal picture plane: he "tips" or "folds" the plane of the picture space by using "perspective," as in two untitled paintings from 1951 (figs. 31 and 32). In these paintings, one is confronted by a slab of colour, apparently a grid, but in fact individual areas of paint generally converging toward a point beyond the canvas.[27] Stout seems determined to show that pictorial (flat) and dimensional (representational without being figurative) can exist in the same work, as in *Untitled*, ca. 1950 (fig. 33).[28] In this painting Stout "connected" the tipped slab to the bottom edge of the painting via two rectangles of colour (one horizontal lying to the left and the other a square filling the lower right corner) which effectively lock the grid into the vertical plane of the painting. Several years later, in a journal passage that explicitly critiques Greenberg's notion of "flatness," Stout argues rather that the number of planes is infinite:

> Active Wonder
> The plane of your canvas is never—"the one plane" to which all the planes of your conceptions have to be reduced. It is as many planes at once as you have conceptions. They, or rather the full picture space (the combination of spaces) that each such plane implies—all those spaces must, like Gamow's two spheres occupying the same space fourth

[26] There is an important relation in these thicker paintings to the "mosaic" paintings of Jan Müller, another student of Hofmann's and a close friend of Stout. Müller's wife, Dody, also a painter, suggested that a few artist-friends (she didn't mention Stout in the text but it could have included him) tried to organise a show around the idea in the early 1950s. Dody Müller, "Jan Müller's Life" in exh. cat. *Jan Müller* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1962) n.p. I looked into Müller's work closely for my paper, "An American in Paris and a German in New York: A Case-Study for Internationalism in the New York School," Association of Art Historian's Annual Conference, Liverpool, 2002. The ideas for "mosaic" paintings come out of Hofmann's teachings on colour "intervals" and "complexes." See Seitz, *Hofmann*, 46-50.
[27] Geldzahler emphasises that these works depend on the space of classical perspective. MS-DIA, n.p.
[28] I've seen this painting twice, at Joan Washburn Gallery, New York in June 2000 and at Miles Bellamy's loft in Brooklyn December 2000. Stout described it in his 1961 letter to Dick Bellamy (Miles' father), writing: "I have a great weakness—i.e., fondness, for it and may hang it here in my own place." MoMA-RB.

> dimensionally occupy—or possess the "space" of the canvas at once.
>
> [. . .] It is the imaginative grasp of this idea, paralleled by the equal idea of psychology that we, each in ourselves, are not just one or a person. In this sense it is almost a euphemism to speak of yourself as one person—an individual, and a painting as a unique, single object.[29]

Another work from 1950, *Untitled* (fig. 26) shows Stout experimenting with space again, taking the classical image of a checkerboard in perspective and giving it one more effect, that of a sweeping curve upwards.

In another group of paintings spanning 1950-53, Stout explored an "expressionist" style more explicitly (see Appendix 1, fig. 92, which shows Stout in the studio with one of these works—unfinished—on the wall behind him).[30] They were made quickly, by laying paint on thickly with a palette knife, and sometimes scraping it back. In one of them, *Untitled*, 1953 (March 14) (fig. 38) the colours are mixed and scraped. In another, *Untitled* (November 18), 1952 (fig. 36), the paint is almost straight from the tube. (Stout thought this one suggested a bird in flight.) Some were angular, others more rounded; some were quite freely gestural and in others a rough figure-ground relationship was represented (see fig. 35). It does not seem coincidental that he pursued this style during the first winter he spent in Provincetown; leaving New York perhaps let him experiment more than he had before (this was also the first post-G.I. Bill funding, post-Hofmann School work). He also starts making landscape drawings in conté pencil, of the dunes he could see from the window of his studio. His first landscapes since before the War, he feels he can do them now at the same time as his abstract work. His pencil strokes are feathery, and although the landscapes seem general,

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[29] MS Journal-2, 88-89 (12 May 1956). His underlines. George Gamow was a physicist who popularised the "big bang" theory. This could be a reference to Gamow, *One, Two, Three . . . Infinity* (1947).

[30] There are roughly twenty of these recorded in Polaroids taken after Stout's death. MoMA-RB, file: "Stout Estate." According to Schwartz, the majority of them came after Stout's first black and whites which came in October 1952. A few were in black and white, but others in colour. Schwartz, "Draft Chronology," AAA-SS. They are designated by the Estate as "B"-grade paintings (Stout wrote in 1961 that the series "never came to any resolution at all." Stout letter to Bellamy, MoMA-RB), although a select few were exhibited in 1990; three were shown in the Kent, Flynn and Oil & Steel shows and a number at Dia.

they are of specific places drawn over and over again—a dead willow tree, a laurel, a view with a telephone pole, a landscape with a house in it.

In the later works of the series, Schwartz tells us, "the restless movement becomes contained . . . the stroke is feathery; colors strong, though heading toward pastel-land; recalls Hofmann, etc."[31] In these paintings, it seems, Stout de-emphasises "space" and takes up painting's "material." They are his most overtly tactile and indexical works in terms of showing "touch" and using free forms. Another one in the group, *Untitled* (ca. 1950) (fig. 37), which both Stout and Bellamy referred to as "Cathedral," in fact bears something of a formal relationship to Pollock's 1947 painting of the same name (fig. 39). In terms of strategy, both are about the painting's surface, both also explore a deeper pictorial space, though through different means.

In pictorial terms, Stout is exploring different possibilities: of format, paint handling and application, use of colour, depiction of deep space versus surface, and to some degree, of scale. Even as he admires Mondrian's example, he adopts a more experimental attitude, adhering to no pre-existing rules of composition, rather treating each painting as developing its own internal roles. Each painting is a separate exploration. Of equal importance is the fact that these paintings have their origins in specific, visual, experiences. As I previously recounted, *Untitled*, 1950 (fig. 32) was an attempt on Stout's part to capture a "colour-sensation"—of flowers seen in the summers in Provincetown. What is compelling is that Stout often tried to locate a "source-impetus" as a key experience to which he must return to make a painting work. The object—the desire—is to capture something ephemeral in paint. In the passage I quoted above he recounts various mediations: time, the mechanics of

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[31] Schwartz, "Draft Chronology," AAA-SS.

drawing and painting, and the overlapping of other more recent experiences. These do not, however, contravene his effort; in fact they appear to make it more full.[32]

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When it came time for Stout's first individual exhibition—which took place at the Stable Gallery in New York in April 1954—a highly edited version of his production was presented. In all twelve paintings and fifteen charcoals were shown.[33] Archival photographs show that the work was hung somewhat densely, sometimes in two rows, and not divided in terms of media (figs. 40 and 41).[34] Bellamy recalled that Stout's work was in the second-floor gallery space; one of the installation photographs shows them flanked by a chair, bench, and low circular table.[35] All the work was "geometric." Absent were the "expressionist" paintings and the two ovoid black and white paintings that he had made in

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[32] A note on his interest in colour: generally painters in 1950s New York were thinking less about established symbolisms of colour and more about the expressive capabilities of paint and paint handling, both their capability as reference and their qualities on the canvas. Colour and form come together to represent these experiences; and the painting proffers them to the viewer. I pursued this subject in a conference paper, "Black and White and Red in New York Painting, Myron Stout in Particular," Colloquium on Colour, Kingston University, November 2002. I argued in it that Mondrian's approach to colour helped Stout change to black and white by allowing him to think about them as colours in themselves rather than representing something else. This paper clarified the philosophical and aesthetic background for Stout's claim that his black and white paintings were not about the absence of colour, but about making black and white articulate themselves, or "speak."

[33] These numbers are cited in Sanford Schwartz, "Myron Stout," *Artforum* 13, no. 7 (March 1975): 38; this is the best source for information on this show. Later he specifies that the paintings in the Stable show were of two types, "very faceted (though not terribly cubist) color fields" and "bolder, more clear-cut geometric designs, often using black and 1 other color." He remarked also here that Stout "paints all 12 pictures that are eventually shown in Stable show" and that the charcoals dated from 1947 and the paintings were from 1949-52."Draft Chronology," AAA-SS. These details does not appear in the MS-WMAA chronology.

[34] They show four charcoal drawings and four paintings hung together, and six small geometric paintings, hung two on top of four on the gallery's painted brick wall. It is somewhat ambiguous which works are in what media, but Schwartz identifies them as charcoals in his 1979 visit notes, AAA-SS, file 4. It appears some drawings were framed in clip-frames and have a medium-toned border around them, perhaps Upson board (Stout refers to this in his 1961 letter to Bellamy). The works were in bad condition by 1961 when Stout mentioned it in his letter to Bellamy; Schwartz noted in 1978 that many of these charcoals had been mounted poorly. At least one of the paintings had a frame around it. The painting half-visible next to the window is possibly *Untitled* (May 20, 1950). Others on canvasboard appear unframed (like *Untitled*, 1950, top right in fig. 40) which leaves a mystery about the mechanics of their hanging.

[35] Richard Bellamy, Oral History Interview by Richard Brown Baker, tape recording, 1963. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute. Hereafter cited as RBOH-1963.

1952.[36] Also absent were his landscape drawings, which he had begun to make (again) in 1952-53.

Perhaps because of the exhibition's emphasis on geometry, the two reviews it got positioned Stout's work in terms of non-objective art; however, both proceed in cataloguing his deviations from it. Fairfield Porter found that the surfaces of the charcoals' "purity" made them transcend their materiality. Oddly, he felt that this—combined with the "illusion of depth caused by lines at an angle"—made them not appear to be drawings at all, but confusable with photographs.[37]

In his longer review, Sam Feinstein saw Stout's work as overcoming the limitations of non-objective painting, remarking that "Stout has been neither emptied nor awed by Mondrian's ruthless purity."[38] For Feinstein, the positive value of Stout's work was that it presented a clear authorial voice that made its claims simply, concretely, and with consistency. "There are no flaccid areas; no accidents." The work did not "resort to novelty or tricks." This was serious, committed art, neither decorative nor sterile.[39] Of utmost importance to Feinstein was that Stout's work transcended its forms and materials and communicated on an emotional level. He found this most convincingly in the thick grid paintings: "It is the oils, with their fugue-like orchestrating of color-forms, which illuminate

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[36] Stout later claimed he was not able to make a successful painting in black and white until the winter of 1954-55. MSOH-1984.

[37] Fairfield Porter, "Reviews and Previews: Myron Stout." *Art News* 53, no. 2 (April 1954): 58. It's difficult to contextualise this suggestion, although from the way it is worded and the fact that Porter (1907-1975) was a painter himself and a seasoned critic, it's clear he did not *mistake* them for photographs. The comment may reflect a certain quality of thickness of charcoal that emulates the emulsion of a black and white photographic print. Perhaps he was also thinking of Siskind's photographs, and the idea that an abstract "gesture" was not limited to painting or drawing. Notably, Schwartz picks this idea up, calling Stout's paintings "metaphysical photographs, taken somehow simultaneously at the dazzling speed of light and at the slow, grinding pace of eternity." "Introduction," MS-WMAA, 13.

[38] Sam Feinstein, "Fortnight in Review: The Unified Image," *Art Digest* 28, no. 1 (1 April 1954): 16. Little information on Feinstein is available, although one undated photograph of Stout suggests they may have been acquaintances Simpson Papers.

[39] I expect Gibson (see this chapter, pages 84ff) might find Feinstein's metaphors indicators of masculine value.

the artist's deeper impulses and reveal the emotional intensity implicit in all his work."[40] According to the critic, this work was the key to Stout's intent; it allowed the viewer to return to the charcoals and geometric paintings and perceive the depth of emotion there, too.

Feinstein's praise for Stout was elaborate. Even if it reflects a bias towards "expressionism," it should serve as an indicator of how effective Stout was in articulating—through his work—a position somewhere between expressionism and non-objectivity. Feinstein "got" Stout's attempt to represent emotions and fleeting experiences in such a reduced form of abstraction. But Stout may have received other, less supportive, responses to his work, and he wrote extensively in his journals after the show in largely negative terms—as in the first long quotation of this chapter where he describes abstract painting as embattled.[41] Critically speaking, Stout's 1954 exhibition provides us with the strongest opportunity to consider him in relation to Abstract Expressionist painting. It has historical proximity to the movement's incipient institutional moment. The statements Stout made around it show him identifying with key abstract expressionist philosophical concepts. For example, in another journal passage after the show, Stout wrote:

> The problem of meaning in painting has never been more clouded over by confusion and misconception than it is at present. Both among the painters and among the laymen there is evidence of this confusion. At forums, in artists' statements, in articles, in reviews, there constantly occurs the question whether a painting has meaning, in what sense it has meaning, and how the meaning can be apprehended by its viewer or "appreciator" . . . I firmly believe that the problem is not, however, the way an abstract painting has meaning but the way any painting has meaning. . . .
> . . . how is meaning in painting carried without reference to a recognizable subject? . . . Can painting have a subject

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[40] Feinstein, "Unified Image," 16. He also called the show "one of the season's more significant events" and claimed that despite its being his first one man show [sic.], "one can hardly question the quality of the achievements here."

[41] It may be that Stout attended some of The Club panels during the month of April, which were entitled "Has the Situation Changed?" See Irving Sandler, "The Club," *Artforum* 4, no. 1 (September 1965): 30. He was a member, according to William Littlefield Papers, Archives of American Art.

> other than one stateable, or presentable in terms of the conventionalized image of man, nature, etc.? . . .
> The so-called "subject" of the painting is then little more than the device by which the painter leads us to the ultimate or real meaning of the painting.[42]

Stout had no illusions about painting being free from meaning or totally abstract—this was a superficial reading between abstract and figurative painting. The point was a deeper, more emotional meaning that was not related to a painting's narrative or representational function.

The critical reception of Stout's work in 1954 moreover suggests a surprising lack of conflict between his geometric and reduced paintings and his ideas about representing experience. What appears later to be a "lack" in Stout's work—his non-use of automatic painting techniques—is replayed here (especially in Feinstein's review) as his strength, the "clarity" of his "vision," in other words, his differentiation. Feinstein does not suggest that an expressive surface is co-equal with expressive content; neither he nor Porter make any reference to the fact Stout that was not an "action painter" or that his paintings were small in scale.[43] This openness to different morphologies suggests several things. First, it might simply be that the range of formal innovation was already broad (well-known painters like Rothko, Still and Newman had already used colour flatly, or introduced a more mechanical or uninflected gesture in abstract painting). It could also suggest a visual literacy on the part of the critics, where works were not judged along stylistic lines but against their own internal rules. In either case, against later historical views of the 1950s that use the canon of Abstract

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[42] MS Journal-1, 200-204 (22 and 26 May 1954). Some of the ideas Stout expressed are of classic concern to the formation of Abstract Expressionism. In a 1943 letter to *The New York Times*, Adolf Gottlieb and Mark Rothko wrote: "There is no such thing as a good painting about nothing." As quoted in Alicia Legg, "Introduction," *American Art Since 1945* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1975), 9 (this was a show that included Stout). Seitz's 1955 Ph.D. dissertation on Abstract Expressionism was entitled "Simultaneity of Abstraction and Subject."

[43] Rosenberg's hugely influential article, "The American Action Painters" had been published in *Art News* in December 1952. Edited and anthologised in Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965).

Expressionism as the measure of everything else, Feinstein's review, especially, reflects a different credo—that anything was possible, *if you could make it work.*

Feinstein's terminology is also telling, as its appears to predict the next body of work Stout pursued, what later commentators refer to as his breakthrough works.[44] He observed, for example, that "Each picture presents itself as a totality—like a suddenly illuminated object." And the title of his column—although it refers to other artists as well as Stout—is prescient about Stout's preoccupation that painting was something you needed to apprehend "all at once." (This was a matter of perception, not representation: Stout's pre-1954 work suggests that our apprehension of a painting does not depend upon whether it is an *actual* whole, or a seeming "fragment" of a larger work.) As we will see, this issue becomes important in the discourse around Minimalism in the 1960s.

After the Stable Gallery show, in the autumn of 1954, Stout began to make paintings in black and white, of flat, single shapes on uninflected backgrounds, fully conceived and executed to a level that pleased him. In terms of Stout's later rate of production, he was prolific in these three-odd years. He began thirteen paintings in the new black and white format and finished five before his next show in 1957 (see figs. 1-5).[45] This is the time period in which Stout makes what we consider his "mature" work. He develops, as it were, a signature style, shrugging off Neo-plasticism and Abstract Expressionism to make work that seems at once—in terms of the conventions of the time—surprising and sensical. Internally, the works satisfy his high ideas about abstraction and expression, elevating his forms from the geometry and the thick paint that had made them seem subject to existing conventions, or

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[44] I use this term only in reference to conventional readings of Stout's work. Stout worked much more complexly than it implies. For example, at more or less the same time he made this "refinement" or simplification in his work, he was also pursuing the new graphite drawings as well as "representational" landscape drawings, which he would show together with the (stark) abstract paintings in his next exhibition.

[45] This is the way Schwartz characterised it, in "Chronology," MS-WMAA, 68. He writes: "No new paintings were commenced after this time." There is evidence elsewhere that Stout began *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)* in 1962.

too specific in their materiality. In a thumbnail sketch of Stout, these are his icons: they are concentrated, serious, distilled, and small works that explore and embody shape, surface, balance, density. They are undeniably formalist, "classical" in feel and sensibility, "purist" in execution.

In all of these post-1954 works, Stout handled the paint (relatively) thinly. Brushstrokes are visible, but they are not "expressive." It could more aptly be described as applied, the paint is put on with vertical or horizontal strokes.[46] The majority of the paintings depict white shapes on black backgrounds; the two that don't are *Demeter* and *Untitled (Number 1),* 1956 (figs. 7 and 3). Some of the shapes seem "full" (in a pneumatic sense) as well as fully abstract (*Demeter* again, *Wind Borne Egg* and *Aegis* (figs. 10 and 12)), while others appear more like signs, or abstract symbols (*Untitled (Number 3),* 1954 and *Untitled* (1955-68) stand for this type (figs. 2 and 6)). Two that follow each other chronologically seem to work as a pair: *Untitled (Number 2),* 1956 and *Untitled (Number 3),* 1956, although they are not the same size (figs. 4 and 5). They are "full," but they also work a bit like letters, hovering somewhere between a symbol and an ideogram. These two also seem close to referencing human bodies, as they look like legs. (Indeed, seen this way, the first "walks," and the second "stands" mostly straight, toes turned outwards.) Another three have something in common, appearing somehow more complicated, less idiosyncratic, and at the same time more resolved; these are *Leto II*, *Hierophant,* and *Apollo* (figs. 9, 11 and 13). In them the edges seem harder, and the white shapes more like a *figure* than in others were figure and ground reverse more easily, (*Leto II*, is an exception: its bottom half reverses

[46] If one were to compare them to Stout's earlier bodies of work, the paint application is like that he used with the geometric paintings on canvasboard.

quite easily). They also represent a jump in scale from previous paintings, and notably are among the paintings Stout never finished.[47]

This accounts for all thirteen and in effect divides the group visually; another way to analyse them would be to divide them by title: seven are untitled and five have Greek names; this follows chronologically with later paintings being named.[48] The exception is *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg).* This painting's title is an anomaly since it is the closest to having a linguistic accordance with the depicted shape, and further, it hedges between two types of naming.[49] One might also point out that ten of the paintings are single shapes, and with these, the energy emerges from the balance Stout created between the ensuing relationship between interior and exterior, object and background. Very explicit in this regard is *Leto I,* where the interior white shape (a boot? Stout called it "Big Hook") presses hard against the bottom and harder against the top edge of the painting (this language is metaphorical—Stout creates a sense of weight, pressure, and growth with the simplest of visual means). Of the three paintings that have more than one shape, one stands apart: *Untitled (Number 1),* 1956 is of two round shapes, stacked more or less vertically, somewhat like the profiles of slightly squashed balls of clay.[50] The other two—*Apollo* and *Leto II,* both from the larger-scaled "Greek" paintings—are similar to each other, where a dominating white figure "holds" a round disc or ball. These latter paintings are complicated by their increase in figures (technically one could say that *Leto II* has three shapes in it, and this seems like a cascade of complexity). They are also manifestly anthropomorphic, very much like bodies with arms and heads.

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[47] It is an interesting question why. Schwartz posits that it was their symmetry that befuddled Stout. Sanford Schwartz, exh. pamphlet, *Myron Stout: The Unfinished Paintings* (Joan T. Washburn, 1997), n.p. See Chapter 5, 186-87.

[48] There are also three drawings titled *Tereisias*, two called *Delphi*, a pair entitled *Adam* and *Eve*, one called *Moon Lady*, and one called *Memento*; otherwise they are untitled. Titles referring to Greek mythology were common among Abstract Expressionist painters. Rothko titled a painting *Tiresias*

[49] There is evidence that "Wind Borne Egg" was suggested to him. It was a nickname at first, as many of his untitleds have, a distinguisher.

[50] Somewhat of an anomaly amongst Stout's paintings, there are several charcoals that are similar.

One could also discuss the group in terms of when each painting was finished, and when sold (if ever). Not all of them took a long time; the quickest were *Untitled*, 1954 and *Untitled (Number 3)*, 1954 followed closely by the three untitleds from 1956. Three more were finished in 1968 (*Leto I, Untitled* and *Demeter*) and three more in 1979-80 (*Aegis, Hierophant* and *Wind Borne Egg*). *Leto II* and *Apollo* were never "finished." As I'll discuss in Chapter 5, Stout had difficulty finishing paintings. The ones completed in 1968 and 1980 were prompted by exhibitions, respectively, the Corcoran Biennial and Whitney retrospective (see Appendix 2 for full details). But the paintings finished for the Whitney are a special case. As Stout was too blind to work on them they were "re-painted" by an assistant under his supervision. Stout felt the paintings had been too built up, and so the shape was transferred to a new canvas of the same size and repainted. In the 1997 *Unfinished Paintings* exhibition, unfinished and finished paintings were hung side-by-side (see fig. 76).

This brief account suggests that despite the apparent regularity of scale, technique, and format in Stout's own "canon" of works, there is diversity—even complexity. Looking further at his production after 1954 shows an even greater range. At the same time that he made these paintings he completed dozens of charcoals (generally at the Hofmann School size of 25 x 19 inches). Some took their cue from paintings, but many were geometric in format, similar to the pre-1954 paintings (see figs. 42-44). As previously mentioned, he began to make landscape drawings, in pencil or conté, a type of work—non-abstract—that he had not pursued since before the War (figs. 45 and 46). Lastly, Stout started in on a new medium and scale: small finished drawings in graphite, of forms similar to those he was exploring in the painting; nearly a hundred of these were in his studio when he died, many of

them very small (figs. 47-48 and in Appendix 1).[51] (Schwartz notes that pencil "gave him grey," allowing him, as it were, to introduce a third element into a binary system.)[52]

Stout wanted to emphasise the range of his practice in his next one-person show, which took place in March of 1957 at the Hansa Gallery. It included charcoal drawings, his new black and white paintings, and a selection of landscape drawings.[53] As with his show at the Stable, this one was reviewed twice, although more briefly and with a little less fanfare. Both reviewers noted Stout's "breakthrough" away from geometry (one commented: "His geometric abstractions are less interesting; here precision seems caution.")[54] Neither reviewer found it odd nor incompatible that the exhibition mixed abstract and representational work. In fact, Parker Tyler saw it as a clarifier: the landscapes were the "organic source for modulating his previous geometric manner into his current free-line abstractness."[55] As in the last set of reviews, we see here a critical reception of Stout's work that would not have been predicted by typical historical accounts of the 1950s.

The final exhibition Stout had in this decade was in fact the last occasion where he would let a group of works go for another ten years. This show, although not significant in

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[51] The mythology about Stout's small output appears to have originated with Schwartz, who emphasised Stout's "spectacular" slowness in his 1975 *Artforum* article. He reported there that Stout had only produced between ten and fifteen graphite drawings. This is belied by the studio inventory taken after his death. MoMA-RB, file: "Estate."

[52] Schwartz, notes for gallery talk, AAA-SS, 3. He dates the small-size graphite drawings as beginning in 1955-57.

[53] No records are available of what was shown, nor any images. It could have included five paintings. *Untitled (Number 3)* 1954 has a Hansa Gallery label on the back, according to Schwartz's inspection notes, AAA-SS, but this could be from any show. Landscapes could have included: *Untitled (Dunes with Peaked Brush)* (1953) and *Untitled* (1953). There were no small-scale graphite drawings in the show. One reviewer describes one of the charcoals as "two ovoid forms, horizontally spaced, black on white" but I cannot identify it. Elizabeth Pollet, "In the Galleries: Myron Stout." *Arts Magazine* 31, no. 6 (March 1957: 58-59). Pollet was a novelist (*A Family Romance*, 1951) and married to the poet, Delmore Schwartz; at the time she wrote this review their marriage was deteriorating.

[54] Pollet, "Stout," 59.

[55] Parker Tyler, "Reviews and Previews: Myron Stout." *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 1 (March 1957): 12. Tyler (1904-1974) was a poet and important early film critic, writing nine books on the subject. He edited, founded or was closely associated with journals like *Blues*, *View*, *Partisan Review* and *Film Culture*, and wrote for *Art News* throughout the 1950s. He was a proponent of and commentator on Greenwich Village's underground gay scene, most explicitly in his banned 1931 novel *The Young and the Evil*, co-written with Charles Henri Ford. For Tyler's participation in the New York art scene of the 1950s, see Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* London: Pimlico, 1998.

scale or scope, nevertheless is instructive—again—of Stout's approach to making and showing his work. It was a three-person show of drawings at the Hansa Gallery in May of 1958 (although the critic who reviewed it, Barbara Butler, said it read more like three separate shows in the same space).[56] The organising principle appears to be that all the work was in black and white. To Butler, Stout's work looked consistent across the different mediums he used. She, more than the reviewers of Stout's previous shows, argued for one interpretation of all of it, writing: "Stout's work is totally dependent on the clarity and exactitude of the initial image. One, two or three forms are placed in completely flat space with a maximum contrast of black and white."[57] Further, she insisted on the most doctrinaire reading of them, writing:

> Although these Arp-like shapes contain certain extra-pictorial suggestions, the entire validity depends on the spatial divisions—everything here happens in the picture—and on the arresting perfection of their relationships.[58]

As I'll argue in the next chapter, Butler's review represents a new view of Stout's work, one that would focus on the "purism" of his means rather than its "meaning" or "emotional intensity." This show marks another shift in Stout's career and a rise in his profile as an artist. At the end of 1958, he was included in two large museum "annuals," at the Whitney and the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. In early 1959, the Museum of Modern Art bought *Untitled (Number 3),* 1954, which had been shown at the Whitney. In his personal life there was an important event as well. His older sister Mary, who wrote him semi-weekly letters and was his most direct connection to his family, died on Christmas Day, 1958.

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[56] Barbara Butler, "In the Galleries: Brody, Follett, Stout," *Arts Magazine* 32, no. 9 (June 1958): 53.
[57] Ibid., 53. This must be a simplification, as no charcoal drawings completed before 1958 fit this description. One (fig. 45) was begun in 1957 but finished in 1962; it is possible that it was exhibited and returned to the studio for more work.
[58] Ibid., 53. Butler's review in this way signals a consolidation of critical opinion about "geometric" art that would only increase in the next few years, which I address in the next chapter.

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Via a close reading of Stout's work and critical reception in the 1950s, this chapter has argued that one needs the discourse of Abstract Expressionist painting to understand his fundamental approach to painting. But the attendant problem with situating him in this way is that *not one* of its current histories include him. The exceptions are a pair of studies that focus on the *decade* instead of the movement, but neither is helpful in terms of newer information or recent critical methods. One is Henry Geldzahler's broad, exhaustive quasi-social history, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970*, where Stout's name appears once, on a list of artists who were showing at the Stable Gallery in the mid-50s.[59] The other is Irving Sandler's *The New York School: The Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*. Both have been criticised roundly for their focus on social milieu over "criticality,"[60] but Sandler's book is—in comparison to the paucity of other literature on Stout—downright generous to him, giving him, as it were, a semiotic enclave along with a handful of other painters working in the 50s in non-expressionist styles. Sandler however overplays Stout's geographical distance from New York, suggesting (as a convenient shorthand) that he came "from outside the New York School."[61] In fact few of the New York School painters

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[59] Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1969), 31. The book accompanied a large exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 1969, where he was the curator of contemporary art. It aimed to extend the Museum's purview into that field. Geldzahler (1935-1994) was the first such curator there, a post he took in 1960 at the age of 25. He later became a curator at Dia Bridgehampton, and mounted a Stout exhibition there in 1990.

[60] See Max Kozloff, "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum* 11, no. 9 (May 1973): 43. In the opening gambit of the article, he mentions Geldzahler's *Painting and Sculpture* as well as Sandler's earlier book, *Abstract Expressionism: The Triumph of American Painting* (New York and London: Praeger, 1970). Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock write: "In Sandler's history the avant-garde becomes commonplace, matter of fact, eternal rather than something specific or disputable." "Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed," in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 168-9.

[61] Sandler, "Hard-Edge and Stained Color-Field Abstraction, and other Non-Gestural Styles: Kelly, Smith, Louis, Noland, Parker, Held and Others," in *New York School*, 214.

themselves lived in New York, as Chave corrects in her study on Rothko.[62] Continuing along this line of argument, Sandler writes: "The early hard-edge painters were aware of but relatively unconcerned with Abstract Expressionism, intent neither on extending it nor rejecting it." As I have shown, Stout's painting and writing is nothing but an extension of core ideas of Abstract Expressionism; it is the context that surrounded him, and what he made his work in dialogue with.[63]

The problem with Stout and Abstract Expressionism has to do with his "lateness." Even though Stout was the same age as the main Abstract Expressionists (older than Pollock, Baziotes and Motherwell, younger than Newman, Rothko and Gottlieb, he falls chronologically squarely in the middle) he was not in New York, working, early enough to be considered—even at this late date—for the canon.[64] Crucially, it appears, for the historical literature Stout came after all the "firsts" had taken place: first shows, first articles, first purchases. According to this logic, Stout arrived late for the party, therefore is in the "second generation." However, his "formative" period is the same.[65] One can argue that a nuanced reading of the *style* of his work suggests, while he may have sacrificed square footage, painterliness and gestural activity, he intended, as other Abstract Expressionists did, to present an intense, emotionally-based experience to the viewer. Stout had the same wish as his generation to produce a transhistorical painting that could—perhaps—communicate in aesthetic terms to anyone who could see. He also developed a "signature technique" that remained differentiated from the styles of other artists no matter how many variations he

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[62] Chave, *Rothko: Subjects*, 5.
[63] As I will argue in Chapter 3 Sandler's interpretation of Stout's work is conditioned, rather, by a late-50s set of concerns about opposing "gestural" and "geometric" painting.
[64] For example, the year and a half at Columbia in 1937-8 was not incidental, rather gave him access to people and ideas at the forefront of these changes. Furthermore, it appears that although Hawaii was isolated (and isolating), Stout spent his summer holidays elsewhere, in New York, Chicago and other places. He tells Maartens that he saw both 1939 World's Fairs, in San Francisco and New York.
[65] Sandler seems to have internalised this mode: arguing that Milton Resnick should be considered "second generation," he cited the fact that he was away from New York from 1940-48: "He therefore missed the germinal period of Abstract Expressionism. Furthermore, he did not have his first show in New York until 1955, later than most second-generation artists." In "Introduction," *New York School*, xi, note 2.

produced.[66] Moreover, his "politics" were no more conservative (as is implied by the generational model) than other artists of his age. The only real divergence, other than chronology, is Stout's enduring respect for Hofmann, whose own place in the canon of Abstract Expressionist painting remains insecure.

Many scholars have commented upon the intransigence of "canonical-thinking" in Abstract Expressionism and the so-called New York School. In the early 1970s, historians and critics began to challenge the received ideas ("mythologies") that continued to form the basis of its history.[67] This decade and the one that followed it saw a range of new methods (Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist, post structuralist) used to construct a more "historical history" for the period, as Stephen Polcari put it.[68] But as I pointed out in the Introduction, while the boundaries of the group may fluctuate they are still firmly in place. Despite new scholarship and new methods, the term "Abstract Expressionism" is still linked to a handful of painters who were working in New York in the early 1940s, and histories of the period aim only at extending or shifting interpretations of the group. Abstract Expressionism's histories appear to need their small numbers. Writing a historical account of Stout in the 1950s, then, is necessarily bound up with the erasure of him and a hundred other artists; it is also one of the main sources of doubt about his value as an object of study.

Back in 1984, T.J. Clark expressed a strategy to address the problem:

> the critique of modernism will not proceed by demotion of heroes, but by having heroism come to be less and less the heart of the matter. We should not be trying to puncture holes in the modernist canon (we shall anyway usually fail at that) but rather to have that canon replaced by other, more intricate, more particular orders and relations. Naturally, new kinds of value judgment will result from this: certain works of art will come to seem more important, others less

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[66] Chave used this term for Rothko, *Rothko: Subjects*, 11 ff.
[67] The critical break came in the early 1970s with Kozloff's "American Painting During the Cold War" followed by Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism, Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum* 15, no. 10 (June 1974): 39-41, here cited in Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris, eds., *Art in Modern Culture* (London: Phaidon, 1992), 82-90.
[68] Stephen Polcari, "Abstract Expressionism: 'New and Improved,'" *Art Journal* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 176. He lists recent scholarship by Serge Guilbault, T.J. Clark, Orton, Pollock and Frascina.

> interesting than before; but above all the ground of valuation will shift.[69]

It may be that the more intricate orders are being written in the forms of monographs, like this one, and others.[70] Clark's major work, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism,* however, takes issue with postmodernism's reading of Modernism, which is compelling because of Stout's own desire to extend Abstract Expressionism rather than subvert or debunk it, as was the wish of artists and critics of the generation that followed. The important intellectual position, for Clark, is to move "from representation to agency," which in this reader supports the present study.[71]

In my estimation, however, the only scholar who has radically and genuinely shifted "the ground of valuation" is Ann Gibson in her book, *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics*. She is the *only* scholar to have reoriented the field of study away from its conventional proponents and address the problem of the "minor artist" in the history of Abstract Expressionism. Marshalling theoretical support, Gibson begins the book with a quotation from the literary critic Hans-Georg Gadamer:

> The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us.[72]

Gadamer's quotation is in fact a good counter-point to Eco's, which Kuspit referred to in his introduction to Foster's earlier study of Abstract Expressionism. The Gadamer quote

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[69] T.J. Clark, "Arguments about Modernism: A Reply to Michael Fried," in Frascina, *Pollock and After,* 84.
[70] Chave's, *Rothko: Subjects* is perhaps the first monograph to challenge canonical ideas in this way, as it differentiated Rothko from his peers. Pollock continues to be a subject of continual revision; the recent exhibition catalogue (Varnedoe, *Pollock* 1998) followed Chave's lead (as did Temkin in *Newman*). Expansions have been made with important studies on formerly peripheral figures like Bob Thompson (Thelma Golden, exh. cat., *Bob Thompson* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1998) and Hobbs, *Krasner*. A large study of Hofmann written by Tina Dickey is currently in publication.
[71] T.J. Clark, "Introduction," *Farewell To An Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 3.
[72] Hans-Georg Gadamer, as quoted in Gibson, *Other Politics*, xix.

suggests that framing historical study around "human life" results in a reordering of history, as it cannot be bound eternally to one particular moment or historical perspective. Eco makes history a language with its own internal rules, an idea arising from the poststructuralist "linguistic turn." Gibson's approach—impossible without the changes in theory wrought by poststructuralism—suggests that its own historical "abstraction" are still at the expense of human beings and their individual identities.

Gibson's main argument is that the suppression of social and political identity in the 1940s and 50s in the name of aesthetics and values of expressiveness homogenised and simplified the wide range of concerns artists were working with. In effect, the most successful artists were the ones who participated in a powerful set of ideologies that established their authenticity and creative originality. These included: appropriating the role of the outsider, calling oneself a transgressor, and claiming to be independent.[73] By concentrating almost entirely on artists never included in the Abstract Expressionist canon, she reveals how much the history depends on a very narrow field. Instead of using style or chronology to organise it, she uses biography and social milieu. If an artist was there and considered themselves to be engaged with current ideas, they are an appropriate object of consideration. Along these lines, information previously considered anecdotal becomes integrated into the critical model. For example, she cites the fact that the painter Leon Polk Smith was part Native American. Gibson quotes him in discussing his interest Native American weaving, and suggests that it might play as important a role in the development of his style as his interest in Mondrian (see fig. 54).

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[73] Gibson's argument is very similar to that made by James Clifford in his critique if the MoMA exhibition, *'Primitivism' in Twentieth-Century Art*. He points out that Western notions of innovation and originality depends upon suppressing the actualities of colonialisation and oppression on the past of same said powers. Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 195. Gibson suggests that interest in African art was waning in 1940s New York; as Abstract Expressionism emerged, Native American art was the "'primitivism' of choice," as evidenced in MoMA's show, *Indian Art of the United States* (1941). Ibid., 65.

In Gibson's hands, biography becomes a powerful tool for thinking through issues about style as it relates to artistic identity. Polk Smith's actual identity as outsider (a living "primitive") motivated him to make work that suppressed it. He used geometric abstraction as a "style-less style:"

> For Smith, geometric abstraction, not the biomorphic abstraction more commonly associated with Abstract Expressionism, meant freedom. "I was a much freer person than anyone else I had met," he recalls. . . .[but] "Style has nothing to do with it."[74]

In effect, working within the conventions of European abstraction did two things: it proved he could work successfully in the mode of the dominant culture, and it resisted these false ideas of the primitive.[75] For Polk Smith it was clear: "the future of modern art lay in the direction indicated by European abstraction."[76]

It is not a contradiction to Gibson's method that other artists criticised purist art for being sterile—among them Krasner and painter Ann Ryan. Neither is it ultimately surprising that Gibson finds complexity in the work of Charmion von Wiegand, a painter usually noted for her strict adherence to Neo-plasticism.[77] The point is to pry apart social identity from style, and to see them as fluid and changeable. It is, of course, also to show how value is attached to style in name only. Von Wiegand, she points out, was passed over for being too rigid, but Perle Fine was criticised for changing styles too often. Gibson suggests that the exclusion these artists experienced on aesthetic grounds was covertly social. Alphonso Ossorio—who was of Chinese, Philippine and Spanish heritage, and was gay—is perhaps Gibson's strongest example, as he articulated the pressure of producing work in one style as

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[74] Ibid., 63. The chapter is titled "The Anonymity of Abstraction."
[75] Polk Smith: "I said 'there is no such thing as primitive art—Africa, Precolumbia—these were highly developed aesthetics, not intuitive superstitions.'" As quoted by Gibson, Ibid., 63.
[76] Ibid., 65. Polk Smith and Stout are shown together as "purists" in the early 1960s; their differences are important, as I'll suggest in Chapter 3.
[77] Ibid., 87-88. She illustrates a von Wiegand collage I've never seen and remarks that; it is "neo-plasticist" in its formal arrangement but some of the paper cut-outs depict fragments of medieval religious paintings. Ibid., 90.

a form of deracination.[78] Aesthetics, it appears, were in conflict with the idea that "expression" was an authentic development of the self. How can you express yourself in an official style? Citing theories of poststructuralism and post-colonialism, Gibson makes a strong argument for stylistic inconsistency to be read as a form of resistance to dominant cultural modes: "even cloaked refusals to perform 'correctly' (that is, to abandon one's social specificity) form the structural foundation for later, more visible political action."[79] Along these lines, we can contextualise a few of the ways Stout is excluded from Abstract Expressionism: his rejection of the expressionist gesture and his withdrawal from one of it sites of competition—the Stable Gallery, which he quit after his one 1954 show there.[80]

If we take Pollock to be the principal figure who haunts these discussions of value, the flip side is—of course—that anything goes: the construct of the macho, hard guy from out West, or his inarticulateness and dysfunctionality, among other social stereotypes, do not change whether or not he is first or second generation, major or minor. His work is a model of progressive moves toward abstraction for Greenberg in the 1940s, and, when the critical discourse turns to figuration, Pollock's paintings are there to confirm the paradigm shift. After the canon's consolidation, changes in the discourse have had no effect on his central position in it. To a large degree, Gibson argues, the justification for continuing to use the same artists is pitched in terms of formalism:

> The greatest understanding of the style, these critics [Greenberg, and later Krauss, Judd and Fried] evidently felt, would come from formal analysis of the works of the "masters." Critic Sam Hunter's attitude was typical. In response to the work of "minor" Abstract Expressionists like Sonia Sekula, Mark Tobey, and Ralph Rosenborg, Hunter observed that they "never achieved much resonance in their time or later." For this reason, he said, "Their work

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[78] Ibid., 90-94.
[79] Ibid., 113. She cites James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990).
[80] He always cited "temperament" to explain his style. Being an expressionist didn't accord with his conception of himself.

> simply distracts me from the continuing drama of appraisal and reappraisal of the principal avant-garde figures, and the evolving trajectory and complexity of contemporary interpretations of their work."[81]

We don't need to name the principal figures Hunter has in mind. This is the way canons work: Pollock defines Abstract Expressionism, Abstract Expressionist discourse defines Pollock. Why make it more complicated and introduce another artist, less well known? This would require explanation and qualification. In the recent anthology of new texts on Pollock following the 1998 show organized by MoMA, for example, this claim was made for him:

> In the forty-odd years since Jackson Pollock's death, in 1956, several generations of critics, historians, and artists have confirmed his importance in twentieth-century art. All the while, though, these analysts and creators have been changing our sense of why Pollock is such a crucial figure. The ongoing life of that process, and the often passionate debates that today surround Pollock and his legacy, are vividly evident in the nine essays that make up this book.[82]

Pollock in effect is shorthand for Abstract Expressionism; it is something we can all agree upon. This argument implies something else, as well: that *only* the work of "crucial" artists can sustain the changes in critical discourse. "Resonance" for Hunter is the same as "importance" for Varnedoe and Karmel: it evokes historical complexity; it also suggests that artistic influence is a criteria for canonical inclusion. As Gibson points out, all of this was being expressed as "disinterested" formalist criticism, purely on the basis of the work's success or failure. This goes to the heart of the canonical hierarchies that divide artists into

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[81] Gibson, *Other Politics*, 59. The Hunter quotation is from an interview with Jeffrey Weschler, in Weschler and Jenni L. Schlossman, exh. cat., *Abstract Expressionism: Other Dimensions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, 1989), 71.

[82] Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel, "Introduction: Pollock and the Museum of Modern Art," *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 8.

major and minor figures—and the order is neither "natural" nor neutral.[83] Using a documentary (and democratic) history, Gibson chooses to include anyone who was there:

> Artists like Louise Bourgeois, Lee Krasner, Norman Lewis, and Louise Nevelson had shown their work and had been reviewed, as had Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, but they just weren't in "the literature" about Abstract Expressionism.
>
> This does not mean that their work was unknown, with the implication that if it had been known it would have been appreciated. Their work *was* available.[84]

The "erasure" she describes here was exactly the same for Stout. He reached a certain level of success that by all accounts should have given him a place, but instead he hovers on a threshold, held back by some mechanism that finds him lacking. But what is it? Is it institutional discrimination, or the "critical establishment" patrolling the canon's borders? Or is it, as she also suggests, the way an individual interfaces with that establishment? In one instance she suggests something on the level of the individual: that artists who did not flourish tended to be true others, and this "hardly prepared them for the 'heroic' attitudes required for participation in the Abstract Expressionist movement."[85]

This is, of course, where Stout cannot be included in Gibson's model. He is not an other in the political sense that postmodernism constructed it. He was of dominant class in terms of class background, ethnic makeup, education, and gender. And yet, he is other, or has become other, as I have suggested, to Abstract Expressionism. He was not canonical, in other words. Griselda Pollock explains in her book, *Differencing the Canon*:

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[83] Greenberg is the grey eminence of the period, and Gibson's main antagonist. Hunter's statement is reminiscent of a similar kind of move made by Greenberg where he dismisses the influence Mark Tobey's "all-over" paintings had on Pollock by shifting attention from the show Pollock saw of Tobey's work to two "primitive" paintings he saw at Peggy Guggenheim's house. Greenberg "American-Type Painting" (1955) in John O'Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism,* Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals, 1950-1956 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 217-235. Hereafter cited as CG3.
[84] Gibson, *Other Politics*, xi.
[85] Ibid., 59.

> The canon ... not only determines what we read, look at, listen to, see at the art gallery and study in school or university. It is formed retrospectively by what artists themselves select as their legitimising or enabling predecessors.[86]

Pollock argues more pointedly that art history itself has relied upon "a category of negated femininity in order to secure the supremacy of masculinity within the sphere of creativity."[87] Art history is still seen as a series of "triumphs" in a competitive field of players, a model which has not lost its grip on modes of describing artistic developments. The first screening, as it were, of an artist's work occurs in the marketplace, which *is* competitive in very real ways.

Pollock's category of "femininity" is oddly useful for determining where Stout fell short. His practice fails according to the model of art-world-cum-avant-garde success which values rupture and supersession. His withdrawal from the New York art world to the protected sphere of Provincetown, his sporadic attempts to limit his involvement with institutions of art to the ones he felt most secure with. It is significant that when he left the Stable Gallery, which was "commercial" (that is, for the profit of its owner) he joined the Hansa Gallery, which was an artist-run cooperative. Moreover, where the Stable Gallery was competitive and distant from his milieu, he knew many of the artists who had founded the Hansa—they were friends from the Hofmann School (see Appendix 1, 276 for a description of it). Even Stout's pursuit of *small,* moreover technically conservative paintings, all could be read as "feminine" in its social construction.[88] It should be clear that the term "minor" artist, which has been used to describe Stout and countless others who are not canonical, is a

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[86] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writings of Art Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.
[87] Ibid., 5.
[88] This is an extremely tricky argument. For example, many artists who left New York remained commercially successful; Kaprow showed at Hansa but this didn't hold his career back. But the combination of all these things in Stout's work and attitude suggests a certain refusal to play the game as it was laid out. This may not make him "feminine" so much as non-competitive.

key marker in the formation of the modernist discourse around the American avant-garde in the post-War period, a negative position that is integral to upholding the positive stories of the artists who succeeded there.

Stout himself pushes us back to thinking of painting as something rhetorically disconnected from the person, along the lines of what Rosenberg meant when he wrote: "art as action rests on the enormous assumption that the artist accepts as real only that which he is in the process of creating."[89] A compelling insight into these issues as they stood for Stout is that as the criticism of the movement was shifting to writing its histories, Stout noticed that Rosenberg was writing Hofmann *out.* In his 1962 article, "Hofmann's 'Life' Classes," Rosenberg argued that the best "new American painting" was made by immigrants, but left Hofmann out in any case.[90] Writing in his journal, Stout pointed to two things wrong with Rosenberg's approach. First, "he is writing so much from the position of an 'in group' that he's just writing for that in-group. That quality and its lack of breadth and scope, is a grave weakness in practically all American critical writing."[91] Rosenberg, in other words, was acting as a flawed agent of history, offering opinion rather than analysis. Stout countered: "it becomes a little glib to make such a generalized statement. . . . the great problem, and challenge of every individual is to make, create or find himself."[92] Stout's recourse was to art, not biography. For him, failure or success was not social; it was one's work. Moreover, Stout's version of history was in favour of inclusiveness.

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[89] Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in Shapiro and Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism*, 80.
[90] Rosenberg, "Hofmann's 'Life' Class," *Art News Annual* 6 (Autumn 1962): 16-31, 110-115.
[91] MS Journal-1, 610 (14 December 1962).
[92] MS Journal-1, 609-10 (14 December 1962).

A number of studies have returned to the 1950s in New York as a site—not of Abstract Expressionist painting, first or second generation—but of a diversity of practices and styles opening up in different directions. They argue that Abstract Expressionism was an anomaly of sorts, an imposition of critical coherence over a situation where there was none. The first of this type addressed the issue of figurative painting. In their 1988 exhibition and book, *The Figurative Fifties*, Paul Schimmel and Judith Stein aimed "to rectify the lingering impression that New York avant-garde painters eschewed the figure in the fifties and to refute the implication that artists who used the body as form and subject produced work that was the less for doing so."[93] Working entirely with artists who associated themselves with Abstract Expressionism, they argued that the heavy stakes set in the 1940s for "pure abstraction" set a critical agenda that did not in fact represent practice.[94]

Schimmel and Stein's study is important for Stout because it represents more closely the social and aesthetic context in which he was working than would an exclusive focus on abstract painting. The milieu of their study in fact nearly represents Stout's peer group at the Hansa Gallery and in Provincetown: Alex Katz, Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Lester Johnson, and Jan Müller. Müller in particular was a close friend of Stout's from the Hofmann School days as well as in Provincetown; he was also part of the Hansa Gallery (see fig. 50 and Appendix 1, fig. 96). Müller's figurative painting moreover grew out of a type of abstract work that shared certain characteristics with Stout's "pathway" paintings.[95] Judith Wilson recently wrote about:

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[93] Paul Schimmel and Judith E. Stein, "Introduction," in exh. cat., *The Figurative Fifties: New York Figurative Expressionism* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988), 15. The strength of the prejudice can be seen in the way Rose, in 1965, refers to figuration as degenerating into "facile illustration."

[94] De Kooning's woman series (first seen in his 1953 Janis Gallery exhibition) was the impetus that gave younger artists the idea it was possible. Klaus Kertess writes: "It was assumed that he, like his peers Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still, would have completely and willingly surrendered the figure to the inexorable flow of the new American abstraction." Kertess, "The Other Tradition," in Schimmel and Stein, *Figurative Fifties*, 17.

[95] Jeffrey Hoffeld argues that Müller's work grew out of an idiosyncratic reading of Mondrian. Hoffeld, "Jan Müller," in *Figurative Fifties*, 118-120. See note 26 above.

> Müller's mutinous return to a figurative mode and literary content that Hofmann's pedagogy had repressed. Müller's profound indebtedness to Hofmann and an equally intense need to rebel against his mentor's abstract creed epitomized the relationship between an emergent school of figurative painters and their Abstract Expressionist predecessors.[96]

The example of Müller's work suggests that abstraction had more significance than the mere flattening of interior space or resistance to figuration; it was rather full of expressive possibilities, mystical content, and equally a place for color to stand on its own. "Figurative" painting was moreover only one of a number of modes being pursued by ex-Hofmann students. Kaprow—who was another friend of Stout, a Hansa Gallery member, and sometime commentator—extended Hofmann's teachings into the entirely new format of the Happening.[97] Set against the context of these artists, Stout's decision to continue making "purely" abstract painting becomes even more notable, since it functions again as a differentiation, this time of a "return" to figuration. At the same time, Stout himself was using the figure as the basis of his major black and whites, but sublimating it into something apparently "purely" abstract. Ultimately, what Stout shares with these two artists is a desire to make art something vital, connected to experience, and authentically one's own.

As we have seen, art criticism and art history often occlude these philosophical positions. Much of the discourse of the 1950s focused on chronology and teleology, that is, on identifying Abstract Expressionism's legacy. It could be said that the art of the 1950s does not have a "semiotic enclave" because of the legacy of a periodic model tied inexorably, and ultimately negatively, to the better-known and slightly older artists of the 40s. On morphological grounds this wave of critical commentary never included Stout, but it

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[96] Judith Wilson, "The 'Ecstasy of Influence': Provincetown, 1958," in Golden, *Bob Thompson*, 41. Given the discussion on canons, Müller is another "erased" artist. Reviewing the posthumous Guggenheim show, Sidney Tillim wrote: "Müller's painting is wholly German Expressionist in character and feeling, but not wholly German in style. And this division, disrupting his mature sensibility, deprived Müller of a unified expression that might have made him an artist of the first rank." Tillim, "New York Exhibitions: Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 6 (March 1962): 38.

[97] Kelley argues that Dewey's *Art as Experience* was an intellectual touchstone for Happenings, which of course puts him even closer to Stout. Jeff Kelley, "Introduction" *Essays*, xi.

nonetheless had its impact on the reception of his work. For example, in the late 50s and early 1960s, there was a powerful backlash against all discussions of "authentic expression" and "art as experience" wrapped up in the New York School's "second generation." In a 1965 article for an issue of *Artforum* devoted to the New York School, Barbara Rose refers to "the method-acting atmosphere of hysterical posturing and pretentious engagement which characterised the twilight of Abstract Expressionism as it was practiced by the epigoni of Tenth Street."[98] Rosenberg comes under special attack:

> That Rosenberg's essay ["The American Action Painters"] was influential in providing an esthetic rationale for young painters is an understatement. The worst excesses of self-indulgence and inept art that resulted from the elevation of mindless "action" over self-consciousness and critical deliberation were encouraged by such an approach.[99]

For Rose an artist could no longer be seriously engaged with Abstract Expressionism; the only results would be imitation, "simulated emotional content," or "academicism."[100] While earlier, these issues were raised—but not as roundly criticised—in the first institutional recordings of second-generation painting. The first was the 1957 exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York entitled *Artists of the New York School, Second Generation.* Chosen by Meyer Schapiro, it included twenty-three painters.[101] This was followed in 1959 by B.H. Friedman's book, *School of New York: Some Younger Artists*, which (tellingly) included as a

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[98] Barbara Rose, "The Second Generation: Academy and Breakthrough," *Artforum* 4, no. 1 (September 1965): 53-63. 54.

[99] Ibid., 55. This quotation supports Foster's observation of the fact that Rosenberg's ideas suffered in the 60s where Greenberg's (implicit in Rose's call for self-consciousness) succeeded.

[100] She herself uses terminology that could be characterised as suppressing the "feminine"; she argues that second generation artists often have *too much talent*: "We find lacking that sense of struggle, which, if there ever was a 'crisis content,' is at the heart of de Kooning's work" Ibid., 62.

[101] The show included: Gandy Brody, Elaine de Kooning, Robert De Niro, Follet, Miles Forst, Frankenthaler, Goodnough, Hartigan, L. Jocylin, Jasper Johns, Johnson, Kahn, Kaprow, Leslie, Mitchell, Müller, Felix Pasilis, Rauschenberg, Resnick, David Sawin, Segal, Liza Shapiro, Hyde Solomon. (It is remarkable in itself for its large number of women.)

frontispiece a photograph of Pollock's grave.[102] (Neither included Stout.) The third was Sandler's, *The New York School: Painters and Sculptors of the Fifties*—already mentioned for including Stout at greater length than anywhere else—which was a follow up to his earlier book, *The Triumph of American Painting*. The underlying "problem" of all of these accounts is twofold: first, that the range of responses by the second generation is too diverse to be made sense of in the terms of Abstract Expressionism; second, that there is an inherent problem with their "authenticity." To a degree the issue can be traced back to the first generation itself. Sandler cites several instances of exclusion at the very moment of Abstract Expressionism's institutionalisation (he mentions the Studio 35 discussions, the "Irascibles" portrait, and Motherwell's 1951 show, *The School of New York*).[103] He noted more recently that the "crisis developed *within* Abstract Expressionism. . . . Key figures who had previously supported action painting had turned away."[104] Indeed, timing mattered to the first generation. Their hard-won, individual expression was being lifted from them as a style; a younger artist trying to make work in this vein could not avoid the knowledge of what had come before, and therefore no matter how good or individual, their work would always "follow." Stout's seemingly perverse aesthetics find here a motivation: to avoid the trap of the follower. By not using an expressionist style, he cuts the connection and can pursue the "subject" of painting more freely. That Stout was not included in the two second generation exhibitions suggests that he wasn't thought of in this way. Sandler's book, *The New York School,* is retrospective (it was published in 1978), and puts Stout in a category that, as we saw in Butler's review of Stout's 1958 show at the Hansa Gallery, gained currency as the

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[102] Friedman, *Younger Artists*, cited in Introduction as object of Stephen Foster's critique. The show included: Frankenthaler, Goodnough, Hartigan, Johns, Leslie, Mitchell, Ray Parker, Rauschenberg, Rivers, Jon Scheuler, and Richard Stankiewicz.
[103] Sandler: "the first-generation Abstract Expressionists were not as catholic, for they had begun to exclude from their activities artists of lesser reputation and those who had realized their individual styles, no matter what distinction, at a later date and so could be considered followers." *Triumph of American Painting*, 269.
[104] Quoted in Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974* (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 2000), 26. Her italics.

50s turned into the 60s with "hard-edge" abstraction and "non-gestural" styles, emerging (incorrectly) from outside the New York School.

Nevertheless it is clear that the second generation issue is the biggest problem for Stout and the history of 1950s art in New York. Until very recently, any discussion of artists who were younger than the Abstract Expressionists, and who arrived later, was couched in terms of their success or failure along the lines of their elders.[105] Moreover, the implication was that as followers, they lacked originality. Sandler titled one of the book's chapters "The Colonization of Gesture Painting." This introduces the tidy notion of Abstract Expressionism as a land, occupied by waves of different people; the colonials are, of course, always the most intransigent in their ideology. The term was also used by Friedman in his rangy and chatty essay, which dove straight into the thorny issue of influence, and characterised the younger artists as "colonizers" rather than "explorers." But there is no self-consciousness about the irony of his terminology—he liked their work and saw this as legitimate. Observing that the younger artists have adopted the "technical innovations" of Pollock and "dazzling effects" of de Kooning, he writes:

> The artists in this book are original because each has been able to present his own image, the history of his or her own experience, including the impact of the previous generation. In any other sense, originality becomes an end in itself, a part of the fashion world.[106]

The light tone of Friedman's essay belies the intense discussions going on elsewhere. By this time being called "second generation" was derisive, and implied a loss of credibility. Sandler

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[105] An excellent study that counters this is Lisa Phillips, *Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1995). She addresses many of Stout's friends and cohorts, like Alfred Leslie, Jan and Dody Müller, Larry Rivers, Kaprow, Robert and Mary Frank, and Richard Bellamy, but the context is not whether they were making authentic, Abstract Expressionist paintings.
[106] Friedman, "Introduction," *Younger Artists*, 11.

himself organised a session at The Club in 1959 to consider the "new academy" and compiled statements by artists for publication in *Art News*.[107]

The legacy of this collapse, the implosion of the "dream," is that there is are "right" and "wrong" ways to follow. Interpreting is okay, copying is wrong. Copying *was* wrong because it called into question the originality of the originals. It is currently wrong because the dream that there was *ever* a means to produce and unmediated experience was a form of false consciousness. As I've suggested previously, in the case of Abstract Expressionism, the artists who are considered to have *extended* its discourse—in discourse, that is—are not the second generation painters at all (who copied), but artists who took an aspect of it, and transformed it into something else. This is the major preoccupation of Krauss's writings on Pollock: how putting the painting on the floor made it part of the "expanded field" and lead to Happenings, Minimalism, and process art.[108] However, her approach then occludes an artist like Stout who "failed" to make such a move evident in his work.

For his part, Stout wanted to extend Abstract Expressionism, but the artist he adhered to was not Pollock, nor was it de Kooning (as others "used" him to legitimate their "return" to the figure), but Hofmann. This is a problem—Stout's extension, in terms like Krauss's was not "radical" enough. Moreover, he was interested in the "wrong" artist. Hofmann, as I've suggested earlier, was himself being written out of the Abstract Expressionist canon. Stout, therefore, is doubly effaced on this count.

Why is Hofmann another artist who has been effaced? As is well known, he played an important role in Greenberg's thinking on pictorial space in the early 1940s.[109] Greenberg

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[107] Irving Sandler, "Is There a New Academy?" parts I & II, *Art News* 58, nos. 5 and 6 (Summer and September 1959): 34-37, 58-59 and 36-39, 58-60.
[108] Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in H. Foster, ed., *Anti Aesthetic*, 31-42 and *Passages*.
[109] Greenberg acknowledged that the public lectures Hofmann gave at his school in 1938-39 were crucial to him. See Barbara Reise, "Greenberg and the Group: A Retrospective View," *Studio International*, 2 parts, 175, nos. 901 and 902 (May and June 1968): 254-57 and 314-16, in Frascina and Harris, *Art in Modern Culture*, 252-263. She cites Greenberg's article, "The Late Thirties in New York," collected in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).

would later make this a fundamental aspect of modernist painting; "advanced" artists grasped this concept, and a work was not *really* abstract if the artist had not shifted from a represented subject to elements within the painting. In an early review of Hofmann he wrote:

> He has, at least in my opinion, grasped the issues at stake better than did Roger Fry and better than Mondrian, Kandinsky, Lhote, Ozenfant, and all those others who have tried to "explicate" the recent revolution in painting.[110]

Despite the praise, this already qualifies Hofmann first as *European*, and second as an ideologue rather than a painter. In his important 1947 essay, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," Greenberg reiterated the idea that Hofmann would be remembered for what he taught rather than for his own work. His 1961 monograph on Hofmann is full of praise and insight side by side with a rearguard defense of an artist apparently left behind by the art world—Hofmann had been carved out of the group by now, not included in MoMA's 1959 *New American Painting* show. Of the many explanations for Hofmann's "failure," Greenberg writes:

> Hofmann's over-riding weakness has nothing to do essentially with drawing, but his tendency to push a picture too far in every direction. There is the endeavor to achieve, as it would seem, an old-fashioned synthesis of "drawing" and "color"—a grand-manner synthesis. This is an ambition that identifies Hofmann with his own chronological generation of artists and separates him from the generation he actually paints with.[111]

This "synthesis," linked to earlier (European) movements in modern art, indicates reaching beyond painting's own area of expertise. In Greenberg's positivist approach, drawing and colour belong to different material spheres and a confusion—even a decoration—rather than a clarifier.

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[110] Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann and a Reconsideration of Mondrian's Theories" (1945) in John O'Brian, ed., *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Volume 2: Arrogant Purpose, 1945-1949 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 18. Hereafter cited as CG2.
[111] Clement Greenberg, *Hofmann* (Paris: Éditions Georges Fall, 1961), 22.

Equally devastating to Hofmann's status was his very emphasis on "internal relations," which pitched him on the wrong side of a growing discourse whose poles were "formalism" and "politics," and saw aesthetics as ahistorical. In the 1960s Hofmann was dismissed by many as a formalist, an "expressionist," a Cubist, a humanist, and an idealist.[112] Krasner, for example, described a change in her own work as "a move from Hofmann's exterior cubist nature to Pollock's 'I am nature'."[113] Marxist critics critiqued him for taking a position that art is a "natural" and "individual" activity, pointing out that he failed to see art as historically-determined.[114] Indeed, Yve-Alain Bois has argued that the embrace of Ad Reinhardt's work in the 1960s hinged on his *difference* from Hofmann:

> That such a thing as a gift for design or placing should be considered a necessity for the realization of any painting [what Greenberg saw in Reinhardt as lacking] is precisely what Reinhardt's entire enterprise from 1940 on was made to fight. . . . one of the things Reinhardt's "black" paintings achieved, for a whole generation of artists, was to render Hofmann's art, for example, absolutely unbearable and (to use Greenberg's rhetoric), to "clear the way . . . for things to come."[115]

Hofmann's work came to stand in for much of what later critics have rejected about so-called high formalist painting.[116]

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[112] For his part, Greenberg always rejected Hofmann's "private and irrelevant preoccupation with the 'spiritual.'" See "Present Prospects" (1947), CG2, 160.
[113] Robert Hobbs and Gail Levin, exh. cat., *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 12. The quotation is from a 1977 conversation between Hobbs and Krasner.
[114] The earliest example of this is Rosenberg, "Hofmann's 'Life' Class"; more recent is Jonathan Harris, "Ideologies of the Aesthetic: Hans Hofmann and The New York School," in David Thistlewood, ed., exh. cat., *American Abstract Expressionism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery, 1993), 77-96.
[115] Yve-Alain Bois, "The Limit of Almost," in exh. cat. *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), 18. The comment appears to belong to the author and not the painter: Bois remarks that Reinhardt "did not deal with Hofmann per se, his teaching, or the push and the pull (he just made fun of it, but no more than of everyone else—certainly no more than of the rhetoric of de Kooning or Motherwell). He had much bigger fish to fry . . ." 18.
[116] For insight into the complexities of Hofmann's position on "formalism" see his participation in "Artists' Session at Studio 35," in Motherwell and Reinhardt, *Modern Artists in America*, 8-22.

To his students and supporters, however, Hofmann was something quite different, and this identity in particular is important to keep in mind when considering the ideological battles in question. Dore Ashton explained:

> Hofmann's approach was consistently esthetic—he maintained the professional European's confidence in the autonomous character of his art. The existence of his studio on 8th Street helped to sustain the spirits of many young artists bewildered by the excessive rhetoric of the various politically oriented groups. . . Hofmann, the very model of a maestro, never for a moment doubted the power of art to survive all temporary digressions, and it was this conviction that buoyed up so many serious young artists.[117]

Kaprow praised the Hofmann School for "its historicity, its systematic discipline, its awareness of and insistence on modern art, its professionalism."[118] As Stout recalled it, "working from nature" was not an academic exercise or merely in issue of painting. It meant keeping a work relevant to the world, getting something "real" onto the canvas without it being illusionistic or merely illustrative of an idea or experience. Indeed, where others characterise Hofmann negatively as the "end of a tradition,"[119] Stout thought his connection to the past made the other artists more interesting:

> The really great person in painting here is Hofmann, leading all of them [de Kooning, Pollock, Motherwell, Rothko] (even when they resist it, or don't know it) because of his clear certainty in his own (and in others—as a teacher) ever-increasing potentialities. In his painting, I doubt if any of them fully understand him; in his teaching they know only that he can lead people into something that is of themselves and their best expressions. In action (particularly in groups) they are almost afraid to act without him, for he has that security of full self-knowledge and realization that they so lack.

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[117] Ashton, *Life and Times*, 79.
[118] Kaprow, "The Effect of Recent Art in the Teaching of Art," *Art Journal* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1963-64): 138. Kaprow was then a professor at Rutgers. Hofmann himself was a living source of modernist art history, and thus, tautologically, himself historical. He knew Braque, Picasso, Matisse and Léger, and with his wife, was close friends with the Delaunays; he also saved Kandinsky's paintings from certain ruin when the artist was forced to return to Russia on the eve of World War I.
[119] Harris, "Ideologies of the Aesthetic," 97.

> Here is the link with the past that they wouldn't otherwise have.[120]

Once again, emphasising tradition, Stout appears to be on the wrong side of the argument. But it is important here to see Hofmann's support of "diversity" over his successful adaptation to canons.

* * *

If scale and gesture are the two major points of difference between Stout and Abstract Expressionism, can we rethink them as more than strategies of differentiation? Could we say that Stout's use of small scale and minimal gesture is acknowledgement and resistance of problems in these formats that were already emerging on the heels of their early successes? In most instances the large scale of Abstract Expressionist painting is celebrated, but Thomas Crow gives it a reading that is less celebratory and more contextual. For Crow, the first large-scale Abstract Expressionist painting was Pollock's *Mural*, 1948, commissioned by Peggy Guggenheim. Situating it and other large Abstract Expressionist paintings in their diffusion in popular magazines such as *Vogue* and *Life*, he suggests that it suffered the fate of an audience that would stand in front of it facing outwards rather than to it; in other words, the paintings became backdrops. Crow elaborates:

> The pathos of the situation for the artists who adopted the format was that they could not afford to acknowledge such originary meanings in their own practice. That implicit conflict lead to resolute forms of denial and perhaps certain acts of protest.[121]

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[120] MS Journal-2, 7-9 (1 December 1950).
[121] Thomas Crow, "Fashioning Modernism," *Modern Art in the Common Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), 48. Taking his cue from Guilbault, Crow addresses this work in relation to American capitalism, but breaks with him in his conclusion.

He cites as examples Rothko's insistence on controlling the conditions of his work's exhibition and Pollock's *Cut Out*, 1948, in which he cut a figure out of one canvas and attached it to another, making evident this condition, as it were. One could also mention Still's resistance to potential buyers and Newman's refusal to show at all in the mid-1950s. In these terms, Stout's insistence on a small scale could be seen as an attempt to maintain a credible, one-on-one relationship between the viewer and the painting. Further, his various "withdrawals" (from New York, from the Stable Gallery), are means of controlling that audience, moreover, knowing who they are.

In the end, Stout had no illusions about what he was doing as a painter. Aesthetic decisions were life decisions. In 1960, possibly sensing the sea change underway, he articulated in his journal how he saw his work in relation to Abstract Expressionism. This represents a big change from even a few years earlier, where he saw it as integrated and overlapping.

> 11/23/60:
> The contrast between abstract expressionism and my type of painting is marked strongly by:
>
> Abstract Expressionism
> 1/ The excitement of constantly new exploration and discovery of creatively expressive impulses or "motifs".
>
> My Painting
> 1/ The simplicity and directness of a single expressive "motif", the sustained development of it which, by comparison with A. Ex. is explanatory.[122]

[122] MS Journal-1, 493 (19 November 1960).

Chapter 3:

An Idea for the Early 1960s—"Radical Simplification"

On the way [to the opening] Dick Bellamy defined Stout as "the best Neo-plastic painter since Mondrian."

"The only trouble with that compliment," commented Stout, "is that my painting isn't Neo-plastic."

—Richard Brown Baker, diary entry about the evening of Jasper Johns's first show[1]

In typical surveys of postwar art, the 1960s signals big changes—on social, philosophical and political levels. Abstract Expressionism's hegemony gave way to a multiplicity of new forms: Pop, Happenings, Op Art, Minimalism, Fluxus, and Conceptual Art among them. The concept of periodisation runs strongly through accounts of these years, such that "the sixties" functions as a shorthand for embracing the final closure of a set of values associated with Idealism and Humanism. This chapter focuses on the years 1959-64, and the critical dialogue surrounding "geometric painting" which included a consideration of Stout's work. In most histories this particular episode is eclipsed by discussions of Minimalism (indeed functions as the Laius to Minimalism's Oedipus: geometric painting was the thing Minimalism had to get over). I'll argue for a reading of these years as a transitional moment where ideas from both Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism are active. Not strictly a "bridge," nor a movement in its own right (although claims for it in this regard were made), it was rather a

[1] Richard Brown Baker, Diary, typescript papers, Richard Brown Baker Papers, Yale University, 1112. The Johns show was at the Castelli Gallery, then on East 77th Street, 20 January-8 February, 1958.

continuum of ideas about abstract art as a general category for artistic expression. I will also address how, in the years when Stout's work is first being considered in public exhibitions of contemporary art, he is simultaneously being written out of its critical discourse.

The early 60s were a time of profound transition. It was the beginning of the end of aesthetics being the main subject of—or mode of analysing—art. For example, style, which had been a central way to categorise art since art history's beginnings, was seen as something that limited understanding.[2] In a related sense, "medium" started to lose its relevance as well, on both practical and philosophical levels—how could you, for example, speak productively of a Happening in terms of sculpture or painting? The whole point was that such new practices exceeded these categories. Modernism, and by extension, abstract art—the possibility they offered of progress and collectivity, and of a universal, intuitive, visual language—appeared to come to a point of closure, too. This is a moment when the "aesthetic" came into conflict with the "historical." This crux is taken up and reflected upon by Arthur Danto in his book, *After the End of Art*. Danto makes the claim that "artistic perception is through and through historical" at the same time as calling the 1960s "the end of art." This brackets the complexity—and irresolution—of the changes that took place here.[3] Against Douglas Crimp, in *On The Museum's Ruins*, as a critic who claimed that painting as a medium and historical category had been exhausted by the 1960s, Danto argues that it is the linear, progressive model of artistic production that lost its explanatory power, *not* a particular medium or style, which can be continued in full knowledge of the

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[2] It seems important to remark that Stout used style in a way more common to anthropology or the study of past cultures than the way it is used in art history. For Stout, style meant *personal style*. No mere issue of "choice," this was inherently linked to the artist's historical and cultural moment. For this reason, minute stylistic differences attended to in the art criticism of the 1960s (aimed at a teleological explanation of art's correct trajectory) missed the point. Style was not in the *eye*, that is, nor was it a *law*.

[3] Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 154 and 165, in Chapter 9: "The Historical Museum of Monochrome Art." He means, of course, not the end of art but the end of a "historical narrative" for art.

implications of the former.[4] Danto's approach is productive here because it allows a discussion of both heterogeneity in artistic practice and aesthetic/formal issues, whereas other, more "periodising" accounts reject the latter as a holdover from the 50s. Specifically, Minimalism signifies for many scholars a form of abstract art grounded historically, as opposed to the geometric art it replaced which was claiming universality or transhistorical values.[5] Danto's explanation leaves room for an interpretation of Stout's paintings, as it were, the particular problematic of the aesthetic at the moment of its profound critique. Danto's approach moreover is both "critical" and "social." That is, it appears to consider both theories of history (meta-narrative) and practice (milieu, diversity, etc.). It is close, I argue, to Stout's understanding of the relationship that his own practice had with his historical moment.

For Stout, these years were active and important. The body of work he had begun in the mid 50s was being exhibited, purchased, and addressed critically. Institutionally, it is the moment when he gets defined by his black and white paintings.[6] His successes were significant: the Museum of Modern Art bought *Untitled (Number 3),* 1954 and the Carnegie Institute *Untitled (Number 3),* 1956.[7] In addition to small shows at the Hansa and other

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[4] He cites Crimp, *Museum's Ruins*, op. cit. Danto suggests rather that *all art* made after the 1960s is disjunctive, including painting. His example here is Robert Ryman, and he argues that he should not be seen—according to medium, that is, or a loose use of style—exclusively as a continuation of Abstract Expressionism, but in the context in which he actually was making work—Warhol, Nauman, Informel, Minimalism. Ryman's *choice* to continue with paint on canvas is what is significant.

[5] Thierry de Duve is a good example: "Though it may be an overstatement to say that minimal art sprang from this show [*Sixteen Americans*, 1959, specifically featuring Stella's black stripe paintings], it is clear that the show crystallized a new sensibility which hitherto expressed itself only negatively, as a sheer lassitude with Abstract expressionism." "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," in *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 201. De Duve sees a particular clarity of direction in these years that I find questionable. His "facts" are often, rather, situations that could be interpreted otherwise.

[6] In a letter promoting the Whitney's 1980 retrospective exhibition, Schwartz writes: "These [three of four paintings completed in the mid-50s] are the works he is most known [f]or. These are the ones that appear in the histories of American art as his contribution to the 'hard edge' moment or 'biomorphic' image or that never neverland of the 'classical spirit.'" Sanford Schwartz Letter to John Neff, 17 April 1979, AAA-SS.

[7] *Untitled (Number 3),* 1954 was acquired by MoMA in 1959 with funds from the Philip Johnson Fund. Alfred H. Barr, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*, 1929-1967 (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 591. It isn't clear if Johnson chose the work; he had been involved with the museum since its earliest days and founded the department of modern architecture in 1932. In 1957 he joined to Board of Trustees and, according to Barr, "became a lively and generous member of the Committee on Museum Collections." Barr, *Museum of Modern Art,* 645.

galleries, his work was included in the *Whitney Annual* and *Carnegie International* of 1958; in a large show of works on paper at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston and a show of recent acquisitions at MoMA in 1959; and a big travelling show in 1960, *New Talent in the USA*. Other shows followed at museums and galleries, and his work was written up several times in feature articles that focused on contemporary trends.[8]

The institutional embrace of Stout's work, however, was hardly straightforward. Mainly it took two forms, either defining his practice as "new" and placing him alongside artists working in diverse forms; or, it grouped him with other painters and sculptors working geometrically. The former represents a synchronic explanation of his work. In this Saussurean sense, the synchronic view "reports a state of affairs."[9] It put him in the context of his community (Hansa, the Green Gallery, Provincetown) or contemporary practice (as in an annual or other type of survey). This type of show posits a cross-section of his particular historical and cultural moment. The exhibitions and critical writings that addressed Stout's work as representative of historical change—to extend the analogy to Saussure's theory of language—function diachronically. By defining his work as "geometric," they ground it in a historical and stylistic discourse. This latter discourse bears some analysis, as it proceeded in several ways: one approach was to oppose "geometric" to "gestural" art.[10] In this scenario,

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[8] For example, Canaday, "New Talent." Stout was among seven painters chosen by Dorothy Miller, curator at MoMA. (She had organized shows like *The New American Painting* (1958-59), and *Sixteen Americans*. Stout's painting, *Untitled (Number 1)*, 1956, was the lead illustration of the article (fig. 3).

[9] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 92. A synchronic view, for example, might see correspondences between Pop art and abstraction. Lawrence Alloway compared their clarity, for example—bold, flat colours and clear edges, and also the direct application of paint (the sense that the image was pre-formed and hits you all at once). Alloway, exh. cat., *Systemic Painting* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1966), cited here in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: An Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968), 37-60. In a March 1964 journal entry, Stout wrote that Pop used "veritable pieces of reality" and argued for a connection between it and "Greek" art (interest in whole v. Western elaboration of detail). He also drew a connection there between his own work and Pop. MS Journal-1, 623 (27 March 1964).

[10] This opposition is deeply inscribed in an historical explanation of modernist abstraction, if not art history in general. Barr articulated it as the basis for his 1936 exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, asserting that "Apollo, Pythagoras and Descartes watch over the Cézanne-Cubist-geometrical tradition; Dionysus . . ., Plotinus and Rousseau over the Gauguin-Expressionist-non-geometrical line." *Cubism and Abstract Art* (MoMA, 1936); quoted in Michael Auping, "Fields, Planes, Systems," in exh. cat., *Abstraction, Geometry, Painting: Selected*

the two terms function dialectically as two sides of the human personality, where artistic style is a reflection of temperament. For example, Hans Jaffé argued that geometric art was "a way of regarding, ordering and understanding the world and so controlling it."[11]

Geometry's reduction, as in that found in Stout's work by reductive critics, was hereby a cyclical response to gestural or narrative complexity, a tool within art-making that emerges at certain historical junctures for specific and local reasons.[12] Barr's well-known "flow chart," made for the exhibition, *Cubism and Abstract Art,* organises art's history into a series of stylistic developments, effectively making style a subject in itself.[13] Greenberg's early 1960s criticism is another influential example of a style-based discourse that saw the re-emergence of geometric art as a swing of the pendulum away from gestural abstraction. As I'll argue in Chapter 4, this early 60s discussion of geometric and abstract art would be narrowed and reframed as the groundwork for an abstraction with a very different impulse. But here I'll address it as something more open, although not uncontested. Abstract art was considered—still—to be a new category embodying a set of issues relating to modern art's de-acquisition of its narrative or illusionistic function; in this scenario, abstraction is the unique innovation of the twentieth century.[14]

Geometric Abstract Painting in America Since 1945 (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1989), 14. Auping notes that Barr's argument follows Worringer's in *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908).

[11] Hans Jaffé, "Geometric Abstraction: It's Origin, Principles and Evolution," in Jean Leymarie, ed., *Abstract Art Since 1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 190. Lucy Lippard, who contributed a chapter to the same book—that includes Stout—positions geometric painting in terms of Minimalism, and argues that geometry in this context is something new. Lippard, "Diversity in Unity: Recent Geometrizing Styles in America" in Leymarie, op cit, 231-255.

[12] Heinrich Wölfflin's famous division between the *linear* and the *painterly*—in his classic opposition between Renaissance and Baroque art—was used at this time to explain the situation in New York. *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950), 13-16. He was concerned with explaining historical style, and saw it as reflecting not only the artist's but the period's temperament. "[Linear and painterly style] are two conceptions of the world, differently oriented in taste and in their interest in the world, and yet each capable of giving a perfect picture of visible things." Wölfflin, 18.

[13] Ann Reynolds argues that MoMA created this situation through their education programme in her "Resemblance and Desire," *Center: A Journal for Architecture in America* 9 (1995): 93.

[14] Exhibitions that included Stout, like Auping, *Abstraction, Geometry, Painting* and Magdalena Dabrowski, *Contrasts of Form: Geometric Abstract Art 1910-1980* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979) resisted the tendency to see Minimalism as different from abstract art. Several recent studies, like Frances Colpitt, ed., *Abstract Art in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Lynn Zelevansky, exh. cat., *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s-1970s* (Cambridge, London and Los

My argument here is that a stylistically homogenous situation existed side-by-side with a "diverse" or heterogeneous one (the latter case being where style and social context signify each other in complex ways). As a reading via Saussure suggests, synchronic and diachronic explanations are not exclusive of each other. And in terms of Stout's work, neither is wholly adequate. For example, in 1961 one would have been able to see Stout's *Untitled (Number 2)*, 1956, amongst works by Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras and Mark di Suvero (in other words, his small black and white painting in a room with Pop Art, a neo-Dada book-object and a pre-Minimalist, abstract wooden sculpture) (fig. 51). This was an untitled group show at the Green Gallery, most likely curated with some informality by its owner, Richard Bellamy. The same year Stout's painting *Untitled,* 1952 was included in the exhibition, *Purism* at the David Herbert Gallery, where it hung with paintings and sculptures by fourteen other artists, all abstract, all in a reduced, planar, or geometric style.[15] The former show was based in the first instance on artists working with the Green Gallery, and it represents to some extent Stout's social milieu. It suggests that Stout's highly reduced work could be interpreted productively in a heterogeneous context, in relation to a broad range of early 1960s concerns. And this, in fact, would reflect Stout's interests in art-as-experience, and de-emphasise the *form* the work took. Alternately, *Purism* was a show based on formal similarity, but Stout had had little if any contact with any of the other artists in it. It categorised his work stylistically, and connected it to an argument about the history of abstraction.[16]

At work here, too, are cross-overs and incompatibilities between "history" and career decisions. Stout was undoubtedly pleased he had gotten the opportunity to have his paintings

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Angeles: MIT Press and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2004) posit the subject of abstraction in the 1950s-1960s as internally heterogeneous.

[15] There is no illustration in the catalogue and I cannot identify Stout's painting from the checklist. *Purism* was a follow-up to the show *Modern Classicism* (1960), also at the Herbert Gallery, which eight of the same artists, including Stout. See Appendix 2 for full details.

[16] The essay was written by Georgine Oeri, about whom there is little information. She does not make an argument for the history of abstraction, but it is implied (Mondrian is her touchstone).

in contexts with other abstract paintings, pleased to have his work be recognised as contributing to that dialogue.[17] His response to the shows (specifically their organising principles and the other artists' work), however, was mainly negative.[18] Alternately, neither Pop nor Minimalism provoked a "crisis" in Stout, as it did for other artists; perhaps his long-term relationship with Bellamy provided a deep source of continuity over and through these styles and movements.

Driving this discussion forward is a sense that the early 1960s represents a moment when Stout's work was aligned with a going concern in the art world. Abstract painting and sculpture was the subject of numerous exhibitions and articles during this decade. Stout's work was included in several shows about geometry or aesthetic simplification, like *Purism* and *Modern Classicism*, the Whitney Museum's *Geometric Abstraction in America* (1962) (see fig. 52), *Black and White* at the Jewish Museum, *Formalists* at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art (both 1963), and *The Classic Spirit in Twentieth-Century Art* at Sidney Janis Gallery (1964).[19] Many terms were invoked to articulate a future for an abstract art that was reduced in colour and form, like "purism" and "classicism" (or coined: "hard-edge").[20] Stout's paintings, their uninflected surfaces and reduced forms, seemed to dovetail perfectly with the general desire to describe a new direction for painting and sculpture to go.[21] It was

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[17] By contrast, Newman infamously tried to control the contexts for his work, refusing to be in shows like *Formalists* (Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1961) and *Geometric Abstraction in America* (Whitney Museum of American Art, 1962), both of which included Stout.

[18] It is one of the few sections of Stout's journals that he comments so extensively on other artists' works.

[19] There were no one-person shows of Stout's work between 1958 and 1977; the criticism of his work during this crucial time is in the form of reviews of group exhibitions, with three exceptions: Canaday, "New Talent" and Kaprow, "Impurity," op. cit., and Sidney Tillim, "What Happened to Geometry?" *Arts Magazine* 33, no. 9 (June 1959): 38-44.

[20] As is often noted, the term "hard-edge" was coined by Jules Langsner in his essay for the exhibition, *Four Abstract Classicists* (Los Angeles County Museum and San Francisco Museum of Art, 1959). Langsner (1911-1967) was a Los Angeles-based critic and art historian who wrote for *Art International* in the early 1960s.

[21] Dabrowski, for example, mentions Stout as one of the maverick artists working in a geometric idiom in the 1950s, and then a page later as one of a few artists working in a "fresh manner" (hard-edge abstraction) in the 1960s. "Recent Non-Figurative Tendencies," *Contrasts of Form*, 205-6.

the first time Stout's work was brought into a public dialogue, but it was also—for him and for other artists as well—a moment that would be short lived.[22]

For my argument, it matters that American art was linked in the early 60s to abstract art being made in Europe and the rest of the world. In 1961, Lawrence Alloway arrived in New York from London to work as a curator at the Guggenheim, and brought with him knowledge of Constructivism in the British context.[23] Less often noted is that Michel Seuphor, the critic and curator active in Paris, organised several shows in New York in the early 1960s.[24] Seuphor saw the situation as a battle between novelty and seriousness: artists working geometrically had to apply "patience, discretion, and calm perseverance" against the more easily understood styles of Pop and expressionism.[25] Greenberg made his contribution to the subject in his 1964 article, "Post-Painterly Abstraction," which was retrospective and notably ignored artists like Stout in favour of younger painters like Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis, who made larger-scale work. Seuphor, perhaps, was the most dogged of all in pursuing the idea that abstraction was a truly universal, modern form, with proponents in every corner of the world (his five-volume 1974 study, *L'Art Abstrait*, was the culmination of a life's work, and stands now as a high or low point in the discourse, depending on your point of view). Seuphor's approach is untheoretical; it is, rather, (within the category of abstract art) *inclusive*; he judges each artist on the criteria put forward by

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[22] Auping for one leaves Stout out of the 1960s, putting him instead in a "lost generation" (with Polk Smith and John McLaughlin). "Fields, Planes, Systems," 52-53.
[23] Alloway had written a book while still in London, *Nine Abstract Artists* (1954); he became curator at the Guggenheim in 1961; his essay "Systemic Painting" was an important contribution to the New York dialogue.
[24] Active since the 1940s, Seuphor curated the exhibition, *Construction and Geometry in Painting: From Malevitch to 'Tomorrow'* (New York: Gallery Chalette, 1960). It traveled to Cincinnati, Chicago and Minneapolis. Hilton Kramer wrote: "The virtue of this exhibition is that . . . it presents us with the fact of an entire modern tradition we have tended to lose sight of." "Constructing the Absolute: Reflections on the Exhibition 'Construction and Geometry in Painting,'" *Arts Magazine* 34, no. 8 (May 1960): 39. Seuphor's often-collaborator, the Parisian dealer Denise René, also had an influence on New York. She advised Seitz on the planning of his international survey of abstraction, *The Responsive Eye* (Museum of Modern Art, 1965).
[25] Seuphor, "États-Unis," in Michel Ragon and Michel Seuphor, eds., *L'Art Abstrait* vol. 4 (Paris: Maeght Éditeur, 1974), 17.

their practice. One of the subtleties of this discussion is that Seuphor's criticism is anti-idealist in this way, while "idealist" in its support for a universal style.

As we saw in Barbara Butler's review of Stout's work at the Hansa Gallery in 1958, there was a growing discussion in New York about the inadequacy of the expressive brushstroke in Abstract Expressionist painting. Some critics started to highlight work that was geometric or non-expressive. One of these was the painter and critic Sidney Tillim, who issued a major and early salvo in his 1959 *Arts Magazine* article entitled "What Happened to Geometry?" Stout is one of the four painters he names in the new generation of artists moving geometric art forward in a successful way, along with Ellsworth Kelly, Nassos Daphnis and Leon Polk Smith. Tillim writes that in Stout's painting:

> . . . the single biomorphic shapes . . . show, in their retreat from angularity, a desire to allow impulse to inform the image. Stout is not underrated, but his work is still certainly too little known.[26]

Tillim wants to draw a firm line under the American Abstract Artists group and artists extending Neo-plasticism. In the past geometric art had two main problems. First, it had failed in its goal to be fully political (Tillim notes, for example, that Albers "is himself aware [that] his work is now accepted . . . for its version of form rather than as a symbol of social and artistic integration.")[27] The second issue is more subtle, but driven by a desire to synthesise geometric art and Abstract Expressionism. Tillim remarks that geometric art could deny the individual artist his or her expressive potential because it was such a rigid

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[26] Tillim, "Geometry?" 44. Stout's *Untitled*,1955-56 is reproduced on the same page. Tillim himself was turning at this moment from hard-edge abstraction to figurative painting; as a critic, he was notably interested in diverse practices (he was an early supporter of Oldenburg) but always critical of the orthodoxies and hypocrisies of the avant-garde. See Katy Siegel, "Sidney Tillim: Critical Realist," *Artforum* 42, no. 1 (September 2003): 208-11.
[27] Tillim, "Geometry?" 43. His characterisation of the AAA is standard for the time. See Auping about its founding, influence, and eclipse in "Planes, Fields, Systems," 27-36. Tillim ends the essay ruefully, with the remark that: "Respectability has long since claimed the abstract tradition, but it only emphasizes the irony of an historical reversal which casts the revolutionary in the role of a conservative." "Geometry?" 44.

style. But following intuition and trying to express lived experience rather than style, systems or political idealism meant one's work would be vital and individual. Geometric style was not a historical category but a personal decision.[28] This is a crucial point for understanding geometric art in the late 50s: its stylistic resemblance to previous generations of geometric painting was less important than its connection to its immediate forbear. Tillim writes: "If today the 'geometric' is classic, it differs from the romantic only in technique, for at the root both share a common goal—art . . . as its own subject, art as attitude."[29]

Tillim's argument is important in several other ways. He sees a reduction of form as making an aesthetic experience all the more likely: "any construction less elementary or fundamental than geometry would interfere with the clear perception of its [in this context of a discussion of Albers' work: light and colour] reality."[30] His emphasis on the continuity between core Abstract Expressionist ideas and the new geometric work resonated and would be invoked in a lot of critical writing in the next three or four years: an individual use of geometric form was an investment of each work as an act of creation rather than a mere example of historical form.[31] It also reflected a turn within discussions of 50s painting to less gestural work, like Newman's, Still's and Reinhardt's.[32] At the same time, Tillim's emphasis on self-expression would be the very thing that Minimalists like Stella would reject.

Stout articulated his own position on aesthetic simplification in his 1984 interview with Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art. He said:

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[28] This is a theme running through the essay. With Burgoyne Diller, for example, Tillim suggests that the "endless possibilities [of re-doing Neo-plasticism were] too complex and demanding for so restless a temperament." "Geometry?" 41. Mondrian's style was a product of the person, and cannot be transferred so easily to another.

[29] Tillim, "Geometry?" 42-3.

[30] Tillim, "Geometry?" 43. Fried misses this even though he makes the same point, in his review of *The Classic Spirit*. See note 89 in this chapter.

[31] See Canaday "New Talent;" the two Herbert Gallery essays; John Gordon, "Geometric Abstraction in America," exh. cat., *Geometric Abstraction in America* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1962); as well as Sidney Janis, exh. cat., *The Classic Spirit in 20th Century Art, from Brancusi & Mondrian to Art Today* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1964), n.p.

[32] H.H. Arnason argued that Abstract Expressionism should be seen within a larger category of art using "isolated and highly simplified elements." See Lawrence Alloway, "Easel Painting at the Guggenheim," *Art International* 5, no. 10 (Christmas, 1961): 27, which is a review of Arnason's show *The Abstract Imagists* (1961).

> By reduction there is a kind of purism—a term bandied about much more in the '50s than you hear it now. A reducing of your means to as little as possible so you can say as much as possible. . . . Color is very beguiling, sensuous. With black and white, also sensuous, you have to find out how to use them so they are sensuous and organic, rather than, say, intellectual or mental. A lot of people working with reduced means, many of the good American painters, end up making more intellectual exercises rather than felt expression, I think. I knew I had to find a way to make a feeling experience, not just to me but to whoever looked at it as well.[33]

In his elliptical way, Stout explains a number of motivations beyond an investment in geometric form. The apparent conflict between simplifying, and making the work a vehicle for feeling and expression was the primary goal: jettisoning colour in favour of black and white, Stout realises, makes the work more difficult, but also more rewarding. Another was reducing your means, but preventing the work from being formulaic (in Stout's words, "intellectual or mental"). For him, it seems, reduction *was* the means "to say as much as possible," as if anything extra got in the way of communicating the artist's experience.

Stout's version of events suggests that the extension of ideas we associate with Abstract Expressionism into a reduced form of painting and sculpture presents several problems that are not easily resolved. In a context where the mark on the canvas had referred to the artist in body, how can an art that contains no "expression" still communicate?[34] Reduction would seem to put that authentic individual in crisis. Isn't one geometric painting just like another? Moreover, how can the viewer have access to the unique artist if he or she uses forms that already exist (whether geometric or Neo-plastic)?[35] On the other side of the

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[33] MSOH-1984.

[34] Relevant texts that address this question from the perspective of Abstract Expressionist work include Richard Shiff, "Performing an Appearance: On the Surface of Abstract Expressionism," in Michael Auping et al., eds., *Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments* (New York and London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 94-123; Kate Linker, "Abstraction: Form and Meaning," in Howard Singerman, ed., *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945-1986* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 30-59.

[35] This became a popular criticism of Minimalism. Barbara Rose wrote about the exhibition, *Primary Structures*: "Nobody really likes this new art. . . . It is uningratiating, unsentimental, unbiographical and not open to

equation, doesn't a geometric art that is individualised subvert the goal of collectivism implied by using such an "objective" language?

These were not issues for Greenberg, whose ideas of medium-specificity—which he had been writing about since the late 30s—had a large influence over such discussions of purity or reduction. Greenberg developed his idea of "radical simplification" in his 1960 essay "Modernist Painting." Again, he argued, that Modernism's core activity is "self-definition" and "self-criticism."[36] In this account he writes:

> Each art had to determine, through its own operations and works, the effects exclusive to itself. By doing so it would, to be sure, narrow its area of competence, but at the same time it would make its possession of that areas all the more certain.[37]

This echoes Stout's insistence that reduction of form does not mean a reduction of expressive possibilities. Greenberg, however, was not interested in expression *per se*, rather in art that was historically authentic. By coming to a clear definition of what is essential to itself, art could remain relevant, and not become something else (Greenberg used terms like "kitsch" and "novelty"; today we would call it "popular culture"). He wrote:

> The arts could save themselves from this leveling down only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provide was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.[38]

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interpretation. If you don't like it at first glance, chances are you never will, because there is no more to it than what you have already seen." "Sculpture: Engineer's Esthetic," *Time* (3 June 1966). Quoted here from Reynolds, "Resemblance and Desire," note 22. It's interesting that it was Rose who called so loudly, just the year before, for the end to the gestural mark.

[36] This was a theme in Greenberg's "'American-Type' Painting," (1955); it got refined in "Modernist Painting" (1960), in CG4, 85-93. One needs to be clear about the reception history of the latter essay. In 1978 Greenberg felt compelled to write a defense of it, and noted it did not get widely read until Battcock's 1966 anthology *The New Art*. His defense is about his use of the terms "pure" and "purity." He argues that he was *explaining* and not *prescribing* Modernist painting by his use of quotation marks around the words. See footnote in CG4, 93-94.

[37] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," CG4, 86.

[38] Ibid., 86. This is indicative of Greenberg's problem with Pop art.

Greenberg's attempt to control art's borders in this essay has been commented upon frequently. His argument here depends on the idea that the thing painting had all to its own was flatness. According to him, flat, planar art emerged in the early 1960s as a clarification of means.[39] (Notably, he did not see "abstractness" as necessary for modernist painting; in principle a painting could be representational and still assert its flatness.)[40] No matter what is in the picture, it tells you first and foremost that it is a picture.

As I suggested in Chapter 2, Stout's thinking is not co-equal with Greenberg's, but was certainly influenced by it.[41] It is important to clarify here that the impetus behind Stout's "reduction" was more in keeping with Tillim's idea of a personal style than with Greenberg's historical explanation. And yet there are significant cross-overs. Greenberg's belief in art as something that needs to be separate, and historical to be relevant, accords with Stout's own ideas. Stout also shared with Greenberg the belief that one cannot follow old ideas but must invent. Indeed, the related issue that too much theory in painting is a detriment to expression—was behind much of Stout's criticism of his peers. In a series of journal entries in 1960, Stout wrote about a number of other painters working in a "geometric" style.[42] For example, he claimed to greatly admire Albers' work but wrote that: "the scientifically 'measured' quality always stops me (at least momentarily and sometimes blocks me) on the way 'through' his work to what he has to say or present."[43] He called Polk Smith's work "earnest but shallow." The problem was the impetus behind Polk Smith's use of geometry:

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[39] First noted in a 1960 review of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, Greenberg would come to refer frequently to "the long stock market decline in the winter and spring of 1962" as precipitating (but not causing) a "crisis" in art that lead to Pop's explosion on the scene that same year. Greenberg, "Louis and Noland" (1960), CG4, 94-100; "The Crisis in Abstract Art" (1964), CG4, 179. See also "America Takes the Lead, 1945-1965" (1965), CG4, 215 and "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties" (1968), CG4, 297.
[40] "Modernist Painting," 87.
[41] As in the mid 1950s, there is evidence of Stout reading Greenberg. In his journal in the early 60s he alights on the term "simplification" as better than the others being used (classicism, geometry, purism).
[42] It seems extremely likely that what prompted his writing on the subject was the Tillim article and the January 1960 exhibition, *Modern Classicism*. Most of the artists he considers here were in one or the other.
[43] MS Journal-1, 477 (28 April 1960).

> He conceives geometrical art basically as one of the ways to paint a picture, and he finds it congenial to his nature and intriguing but he doesn't much know what painting and art are for.[44]

For Stout, a geometric style—in other words the form a work takes—cannot be a received concept, nor an issue of "taste." It had to matter on a deeper level; "style" had to be "found" through a process, not adopted.

The problem with Polk Smith crossed over with the issue that Tillim addressed about the American Abstract Artists group and Mondrian's legacy. For Stout, many of the geometric painters failed to develop Mondrian's work in a substantial way:

> So many of the others never had much impulse to do anything except what they saw already done. Mondrian's work to them became not a spring-board, but an end to which they, also, sought to attain to.[45]

Stout, of course, acknowledges fully that Mondrian was an influence on his work. You can see it in the scale of his paintings, and their reduced brushwork and colour-pallet. These visual signifiers are important: Stout worked "thinly," that is, with thin paint and few evident brushstrokes. His use of black and white accords with Mondrian's reduction, although is less "scientific," and not "Neo-plastic" in its impulse. Stout is somewhere between Mondrian and Ellsworth Kelly, who kept to no prescribed colour pallet, basing his paintings on simplifications of observed colours. It bears note, also, that some of the geometrical painters had abandoned the brush all together by this time (Daphnis used a paint roller, we know that Louis poured paint), indicating that "touch" was being reduced in a variety of ways (see figs. 52-55).

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[44] MS Journal-1, 479 (28 April 1960).
[45] MS Journal-1, 478 (28 April 1960). He doesn't say who he means, but he has just written about Albers, Glarner and Diller.

It is crucial that Stout came to geometry idiosyncratically. He never gravitated to the American Abstract Artists, not liking their rules or group mentality. He came to Mondrian's work via Hofmann. What he took from Mondrian was the problem of creating a unified picture while retaining separate elements on a ground. But like Hofmann and the Abstract Expressionists, he wanted his own signature work, so he could not re-do Mondrian.[46] This was the dynamic of artistic originality: one had to look to the past but make a break from it.

This, however, does not clarify the trickier historical issue of how geometry in 1960 related to previous uses of geometry. For Greenberg, "radical simplification" necessarily came after gestural abstraction, the flattening a historical drive about painting separating itself from sculpture over a hundred years of modernist art.[47] By contrast, most of the other critics commenting on geometric art in the early 1960s (including Tillim) saw a connection between the newer painting and sculpture and previous episodes. In his essay for the Whitney's *Geometric Abstraction in America*, John Gordon identified the AAA as the main organ for transmitting ideas about European abstraction. There is a distinct sense in this essay that it was time to give the AAA its due—Gordon describes it as a group rejected first by philistinism, and then by a public open to modern art but attuned to Abstract Expressionism.[48] Nevertheless, he insists on a historical break between the youngest artists and the AAA:

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[46] Coming from a post-1960s position, Bois describes this as a "problem" for Reinhardt. "The Limit of Almost," 24-25. He suggests that "composition" was the issue (pitfall) for later artists looking into Mondrian's post-cubist work (and Malevich's supremacist work). As I understand Bois, the issue is keeping an abstract painting from becoming (merely) decorative. Bois argues that Reinhardt adopted strategies of *not composing* in his work, that is, eradicating subjective or intuitive composing. Stout, of course, continued to work "intuitively." He continued to "find" his forms rather than execute something pre-conceived.

[47] This is made explicit in "Modernist Painting" where Greenberg finds painting's new remit of "pure opticality" in Impressionism: "With Manet and the Impressionists the question stopped being defined as one of color versus drawing, and became one of purely optical experience against optical experience as revised or modified by tactile associations." CG4, 89. See section below where Stout insists on the tactility of visual experience.

[48] Gordon, "Geometric Abstraction," 9. He suggested that the history originated with Alexander Calder's visit to Mondrian's studio in 1930, and that: "For about three decades, geometric abstraction in America has been a strong and dedicated movement in American art, though somewhat obscured by other movements more in the public eye." 9.

> At the start of the 1960s there is an indication of a narrowing of the boundaries that separate the geometric from the expressionist point of view. Lessons have been learned by both sides. Surely whatever direction painting may take in the future, it cannot advance without utilizing the earnest and thoughtful searchings of both. Although geometric abstraction had its beginnings in European sources, none of these influences entirely accounts for its growth and characteristics here. In the course of its development it has become a distinct expression of one aspect of the American mind.[49]

In a sense Gordon elevates the position of the AAA in order to make it an equal partner with Abstract Expressionism to come together in a synthesis of current geometric art. This is a different kind of history from that practiced by Greenberg, more social history than aesthetic.

As I've suggested, Stout saw the issue of his work as germane to practice rather than history or theory. Art was something you worked from. Moreover, he thought Mondrian's importance was that his paintings resonated with certain irreducible human experiences. This formed the basis of his critique of Neo-plasticist painting that was being practiced in New York in the 50s. About Fritz Glarner, Stout wrote in his journal, "there is no growing and expanding germ in his work."[50] Glarner's work was more like a mechanical reproduction of a Neo-plasticist painting than something brought into existence by an artist. In the same journal entry, Stout generalised:

> The earlier purists were so much more the poets and the mystics in their work than any now practicing, and these are the very qualities which gave their work more validity . . . than that of the ones now practicing.[51]

Mondrian's interest in the occult and theosophy is well documented, but this aspect of it was received skeptically in America. In effect, Mondrian's work was stripped of its

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[49] Ibid., 14.
[50] MS Journal-1, 478 (28 April 1960).
[51] MS Journal-1, 477 (28 April 1960).

mystical content.[52] Stout would have shared this attitude; he was not otherwise interested—as far as I can find—in the occult, or numerology, or spiritualism, in any part of his life except for in this specific interpretation of Mondrian's work (unlike Reinhardt, for example, who had a long correspondence with the Trappist monk and expert on Eastern religions, Thomas Merton). Stout did, however, insist that what interested him in abstract painting was not form or colour or historical critique in and of themselves, but in painting's mystical dimension. Again, in the same journal passage, he explains *post facto* why he restricted his colours to black and white five years earlier:

> The use of black and white seems a particularly good source for developing this idea; the reduction of the pallett [sic.] to two symbolical and polar colors. This in itself is mystical. The use of "Pure" colors of the style: the reduction of (or transformation) in the expression of a "lived" experience as into an expression of an ideal image of experience; a "transcendentalization"[53]

This passage is important because, as in the 1984 interview, Stout relates *reduction* to *transformation*. In reference to Mondrian, using pure colours is part of the process of going from the particulars of lived experience to the general, ideal image. Black and white as a choice of colours is a simplification, but this is an "intensification." In this conception Stout's forms are not geometric in the sense of following a mathematical formula. They are an analogue to the way geometry is a language that generalises about things we see and experience in the world.

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[52] Most Americans approached the mystical content of European abstraction pragmatically. Auping notes that von Wiegand was the only American painter who took up the theosophical aspect of Mondrian's work. "Fields, Planes, Systems," 30-31. Hilla Rebay, who was central to the founding of the Museum of Non-Objective Painting (later became the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), considered herself a spiritualist and emphasised this aspect of Kandisnky's and Mondrian's work. Robert Knott, "Defenders of Abstraction," *American Abstract Art of the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988), 16-17. He notes the painters of the AAA generally dismissed Rebay's interpretations, but does outline the pro-theosophy group of artists working in New Mexico in the late 1930s, the Transcendental Painting Group. 17-20.

[53] MS Journal-1, 477 (28 April 1960). Same entry as his critique of *Modern Classicism*. Typical of the style in which he writes, Stout refers to painting in black and white without identifying it as *his* practice per se, but it is clear he is trying to articulate the gap between art's "symbolism" and so-called "lived experience"; this leads to a longish discussion of Mondrian in the context of other "geometrical" painters (Albers is his negative example).

It is most likely that Stout's interest in "transcendentalization" is a version of Kant akin to American transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau. Kant held that a certain reality exists beyond the sensible, which is only accessible through intuition and judgment. A particularly American interpretation of these ideas stressed individualism, anti-authoritarianism (in government and religion), naturalism and self-reliance. These issues combine to explain Stout's belief in individualism as well as idealism, how he was suspicious of industrial progress and had a deep connection with nature. Not surprisingly, Stout's commentators have passed over the issue of transcendence in his work. In the critical literature of the 1960s especially, "mysticism" is actively rejected—along with humanism, transcendentalism, and all remnants of humanism. Greenberg, for one, disavowed the "metaphysical" content in Abstract Expressionism, rejecting Hofmann's "private and irrelevant preoccupation with the 'spiritual'" as well as Rosenberg's emphasis on self-expression.[54]

Greenberg's rejection of metaphysics went hand in hand with his emphasis on art's materialism, and it had its effect on later interpretations of other abstract, geometric painting being made in the 50s and 60s. In his 1963 *Artforum* article, "Three American Painters," Michael Fried paraphrased Greenberg's explanation that "the history of painting from Manet through Synthetic Cubism and Matisse may be characterized in terms of the gradual withdrawal of painting from the task of representing reality . . . in favor of an increasing preoccupation with problems intrinsic to painting itself."[55] This "formalism"—aimed at explaining the work of Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella—suggests there is nothing included that does not need to be there, no illusion of depth, no reference to objects

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[54] Greenberg, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture" (1947), CG2, 170. In this essay he cites Hofmann as helping others distinguish "between what is pertinent and permanent in the art of our times and what is merely interesting, curious or sensational." 169.
[55] Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (New York: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 214.

or things, certainly no metaphysical content. Similar in approach to Fried, Bois rejects a "mystical" interpretation of Reinhardt's work.[56]

It may be that the "spiritual" or "metaphysical" dimension of art—which clearly means different things to different people—is one of the strongest divisions between artists from the "fifties" (traditional, old school, humanist) and artists from the "sixties" (new, secular, iconoclastic). It has been noted by Briony Fer as a point of divergence between European and American artists; she adopts the terms "transcendental" and "structural" to explain their different aspirations.[57] Bois's bias is important for the legacy of how the 60s are divided from the 50s; to him the spiritual dimension works against the "political," and he actively refuses it as an aspect of both Reinhardt's and Kelly's work. (Kelly has recently refuted the idea that his work has nothing to do with issues of spirituality, importantly revising his own history to suggest it was there from the beginning.)[58] Nevertheless, the idea that politics and metaphysics are inimical to each other is itself a period issue that emerged well after the 1960s were over; it reflects the position of critics emerging in the 1970s and 80s.[59]

For Stout, the idea that the metaphysical dimension of art prevented it from "engaging" with the world would have been non-sensical. On the one hand, art was a closed system; it necessarily referred only to itself.[60] On the other hand, art had everything to do with the world. Politics ("external truth") was important but not a question for aesthetics.

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[56] Bois, "The Limit of Almost", 13. Ironically, Bois put Greenberg and Hofmann together in the service of recuperating Reinhardt. He argued that Greenberg had a kind of crisis in 1957-58, when he "realized that he had been a 'Hofmannian' all along, but not a consistent enough one." Bois, 15. The text he cites is the "Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann and a Reconsideration of Mondrian's Theories" (1945), CG2, 18.
[57] Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 8-9, 170, n. 3.
[58] "For me, [Brancusi's] art was an affirmation; it strengthened my intention to make an art that is spiritual in content." Ellsworth Kelly, "Fragmentation and the Single Form," in exh. pamphlet, *Artist's Choice* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), n.p. Recently, Kelly was included in a room entitled, "Spirituality and Matter" in the exhibition, *Paris: Capital of the Arts: 1900-1968* (London: Royal Academy of Art, 2002).
[59] Bois and de Duve are only two critic/historians who identify themselves as "children of '68".
[60] Bois, "The Limit of Almost," 14. Reinhardt was attracted to Kubler's idea, in *The Shape of Time*, "that the field of art was closed, that the possibilities of art were finite, far from yielding to an apocalyptic doom, represented for Reinhardt the most powerful confirmation of his own theory."

This very specific "aesthetic" discussion needs—to my mind—to be elaborated outside the issue of "politics" in its post-60s meaning. In the catalogue for the *Purism* show, Georgine Oeri argued that "the artists included here like to use the discipline of an objective vocabulary of strict forms in order to capture the irrational."[61] We can see Oeri's argument being made in a similar way to that of other critics: current geometric art was about felt emotion and human changeability, even though it appeared different from Abstract Expressionist painting.[62] Nevertheless, her invocation of irrationality carries with it references to the more occult aspects of geometry.[63] Curiously, Oeri claimed to have rejected terms like classicist, hard-edge and geometric; purism was "the least confining or doctrinaire characterization, allowing for flexibility and variety in selecting the artists as well as the pictures."[64] This sentiment—for a term unencumbered by associations—would be expected, but her choice of "purism" is surprising. Currently "purism" would signify a misguided, even Idealist belief in separation, read politically as embracing totalitarianism, eugenics or racial segregation. But for Oeri, purism meant clarity, specialisation, and the expertise one gains from repeating and honing one area of expression. Importantly, she connects the formal to "realism," arguing that:

> The work in this show represents one contemporary possibility of visualizing the experiences of our world—"the true vision of reality," as Mondrian once called it—in symbolic language.[65]

This particular connection between aesthetic simplification and a "vision of reality" is a characteristic of the discourse here—the "connection" that can be made in art to observed

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[61] Oeri, in exh. cat., *Purism*, n.p. Like Barbara Butler in the previous year's show, she cited Mondrian as the historical touchstone.
[62] Tillim suggests another explanation in a comment he made about Neo-plasticism being "less of a synthesis than a protest against indecision and disillusionment." "Geometry?" 41.
[63] Some references to add. Sacred geometry, etc.
[64] Oeri, *Purism*, n.p. Le Corbusier is one source of "purism." It's original meaning was tied to the machine age and belief in science as the engine of social progress.
[65] Ibid.

and essential truths. Newman's important 1945 essay, "The Plasmic Image," was in fact a critique of the term purism. He argued that purist art was "objective, cold, impersonal, and consequently incapable of giving complete satisfaction to the intensity generated by man's spiritual need."[66] Newman distinguished between "purist art and an art form used purely" to explain that art had to be clear about expressing thought and feeling, but not to the degree that the art object becomes a model for the world.[67] It is a subtle but crucial point that I believe was central to Stout's conception of his own work. However, Newman's writing was explicitly against Mondrian, whose work, he argued, was "founded on bad philosophy and on faulty logic."[68] Michael Auping argues that Newman should not be seen as an antagonist of Mondrian's work but that the artist functioned for him as something he had to overcome.[69] I think Stout's relationship to Mondrian is similar: he never wanted to imitate him and always knew he had to go past him, but not as explicitly antagonistic as Newman's. For Newman, the crucial difference was between abstraction that made itself separate from life (a pattern within the four sides of the canvas) and abstraction that was trying to express "deeply felt emotion."[70] Purism signalled the separation that was the problem for abstraction to overcome.

Nonetheless, Oeri's conception accords with Newman's to a large degree: she tells us the artists have come to this set of forms independently—and therefore do not constitute a school—and work therefore with a "pictorial language." She saw geometric art as a step *towards* developing a public dialogue about the problems of self-expression.

This issue is also raised in the criticism of Reinhardt's work, although it should be noted that he differed greatly from Newman in his embrace of "perfection." Separation was

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[66] Barnett Newman, "The Plasmic Image," in Richard Shiff, ed., *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 140-1.
[67] Ibid., 140-1.
[68] Newman, "The Plasmic Image," 141.
[69] Auping, "Fields, Planes, Systems," 42.
[70] Ibid., 155.

the key to art's meaning; Reinhardt claimed his work was "about nothing." Even so, critics tried to distance him from ideas about purism. In a 1953 review, Thomas Hess emphasised the difference between Reinhardt's work and "traditional Classicism, or Purism" (by which he meant Neo-plasticism and some Bauhaus painting) but still saw his purity as problematic.[71] For Hess, Reinhardt was the exception rather than the rule; he accepted Reinhardt *for Reinhardt*, but rejected the artist's historical argument that his style of painting was inevitable. For Reinhardt, this was crucial, as the jettisoning of all association and connection to exterior meaning was what made the work radically connected to his own historical moment. Purity was not a failed idea—purist art did not go far enough. Purity was what could be achieved in art but not in life. Lippard would evoke this situation in a 1966 catalogue essay:

> The picture leaves the studio as a purist, abstract, non-objective work of art . . . [and] returns as a record of everyday (surrealist, expressionist) experience ("chance" spots, defacements, hard-markings, accidents, "happenings," scratches, and it is repainted, restored to a new painting painted in the same old way (negating the negation of art), again and again, over and over again, until it is just "right" again.[72]

This description of an aspiration for a painting to be ideal, to be perfectly representative of what is not the experience of everyday life, bears a relationship to Stout's desire to find a form that could likewise hold up against the world. The story, too, resonates with Stout's long working process, and his hesitation in letting works go. Stout's problem was less a question of material, but rather getting the painting to the point of perfection in the first place.

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[71] Thomas B. Hess, "Reinhardt: The Position and Perils of Purity," *Art News* 52, no. 8 (December 1953): 26-27, 59. This is the article that Kelly read in a Paris bookshop and felt gave him the confidence to go forward with his experiments in abstract painting, and, eventually, move to New York.
[72] Lucy R. Lippard, "Ad Reinhardt by Lucy R. Lippard," in exh. cat., *Ad Reinhardt: Paintings* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1967), 22.

Stout rejected "purism" as a term and as an idea, right at the time of the *Purism* exhibition. What prompted his thinking was likely the article, "Impurity," written by Kaprow and published in *Art News* in January 1963.[73] Stout wrote:

> . . . it would be best to abandon the word Purity entirely. (I can-not consider myself a Purist . . . and am not sympathetic to the esthetic generally pronounced under that name.)[74]

His rejection was based in part on his general suspicion of terminologies like schools, styles or movements. He saw them as rhetorical place-markers that actually impede understanding and appreciation of painting. As I suggested earlier, the problem was often how other artists embraced these ideas. "One feels they go for an abstract ideal of Purity without ever determining what Purity is, in the human experience, expressive *of*."[75] As before, the issue is style over substance: "they recognize that purity and simplicity are expressive of modern culture, and that a 'pure' and 'simplified' painting can look handsome indeed in a 'modern' interior setting."[76] Even if art had lost its utopian purpose, it was not merely decoration. Stout wrote:

> . . . the idea of progress or "onward and upward" is démodé. The this is the moment. And the action that the moment brings, and to savor the feeling, to have it, to know it. Then, one believes now, and only then, can one paint.[77]

In other words, art that claims to be "purist" is a repetition of a style rather than the product of connection; it is a mere demonstration of an idea rather than a full expression of an individually-held vision.

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[73] Kaprow, "Impurity" (1963), in *Essays*, 27-45.
[74] MS Journal-1, 516 (14 April 1961). The terminology is a concern for Stout from 1961-1963. Stout explicitly refers to Kaprow's article in April 1961, which suggests he had seen a draft.
[75] MS Journal-1, 520 (15 April 1961).
[76] Ibid.
[77] MS Journal-1, 476 (20 April 1960).

Kaprow's article featured Stout to a greater extent than any other to date, and addresses the polarity between chaos and order, purity and impurity, in both a cogent and complex way (in particular, his analysis of Mondrian's work dispels Newman's complaint about "theory"). It goes beyond the terminology to a discussion of how paintings signify. The article is a comparison of Mondrian and Stout as purists and Pollock and Newman as impurists. Kaprow uses scale as one strong difference between the two, as well as the way Newman and Pollock *depart from* purity. It is really an analysis of pictorial space. For example, moving beyond the normal opposition between the "classical" and the "romantic," Kaprow writes that classical space is defined by the balance of opposed, though not necessarily equal, elements.[78] In Newman's work, he suggests, scale makes the work non-classical: the stripes in the painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* have nothing in opposition to them (they are too far apart and there is no horizontal stripe, as in Mondrian's work, against which to define their vertical-ness) and they are as empty as they are substantial. Further, the stripes are not symmetrical, nor equal in weight or width; their symmetry resides in relation to the expanses of colour between them.[79] For Kaprow, this suggests that Newman starts out with the idea of the classical, but subverts it. What matters is the experience of the painting. Taken as a whole, one can't think of it as a detached representation of relations of objects in the world, but engaging the person viewing the work as an object in the field of the painting.[80]

Kaprow describes Stout's work as adhering to classical properties. His deviations from symmetry make one mindful of symmetry (or "centrality" which he contrasts with "simple balance"). With Stout, one experiences parts to parts (figure to ground, edge of the

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[78] Kaprow writes that the qualities described as pure are: "clear, uncontaminated . . ., unweakened . . .; formal . . . abstract, essential, authentic, true, absolute, perfect, utter, sheer . . . also help make up our idea of the Classical." "Impurity," 31.
[79] Ibid., 54.
[80] This argument bears a close relation to later ones made for Minimalism, but should be a reminder Minimalism did not have a monopoly on it; a Happening was at least as likely a successor to the extension of art into the realm of the "real."

shape to rectilinear sides of the canvas) as they relate to the whole, and back to parts again. Stout, Kaprow implies, occupies a classical rather than a modern world in this way:

> the painting on some level is *made* to be wondered at. . . .
> Painted by a man who perhaps wonders as deeply at his
> own creation, it hints at the separation between us and art.[81]

Unlike Newman's work, which makes the viewer part of its world, Stout's makes a separate world. His paintings have a strong experiential aspect to them, but they are small enough that one can see them all at once. A viewer of Stout's work stands outside of it, looks on if not into it.

Nonetheless, the object of Kaprow's argument is to make these distinctions—between inside and outside, the painting and the world, aesthetics and politics—less polemical and more nuanced. He argues that "authentic pure painting" always contains the idea that the context in which it exists is impure and frail. Pure painting is not, as Newman suggested, meant to be a picture of the world (or a potential world). Kaprow claims he wants to make "purity human—that is to say, moral" (he shared this idea with Newman, but argues it differently).[82]

What is also significant about Kaprow's article is that the argument is made in terms of aesthetic judgement. Against the term purity, Stout wrote: "Paintings are more pure or they are less pure."[83] Kaprow, likewise, finds the meaning in the work itself, rather than where it stands in a teleological or historical explanation. Purism, for Kaprow, is a term that needs qualification:

> States of blessedness are rarely given to anyone, they are
> sought; and those whom we suppose have something divine
> are continuously seeking the greater fullness of a truth they
> know they shall never acquire completely. Mondrian's
> painting process, therefore, was essentially a purgatorial

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[81] Kaprow, "Impurity," 53, his italics.
[82] Ibid., 53.
[83] MS Journal-1, 516 (14 April 1961).

> exercise of the very loftiest kind, qualified and given meaning by the imperfection of the world in which he lived and which he hoped to improve by his difficult example. That he was a part of this world, as we all are, is implicit, and his works are poignant for this reason. This is their romanticism and their impurity.[84]

Kaprow's analysis notwithstanding, the reception of Stout's work here—inevitably perhaps—put him at the "end" of something rather than the beginning of another. (That he was himself in his 50s by now may have contributed to the sense he was of a previous generation, with earlier concerns.) As we have seen, along with other terms like geometry and purism, many critics referred to this style of art as "classical."[85] In the catalogue for the 1960 show *Modern Classicism*, Barbara Butler made a conventional division between the romantic and the classical (she cites the art historical argument between Ingres and Delacroix) as terms of style and expression.[86] But she saw the issue as metaphysical, and related to a longstanding argument about the perception of reality. She wrote:

> Heraclitus' description [of the Real] could be the credo of Abstract-Expressionism. To him, "everything flows and nothing is permanent . . . everything passes into something else and is thus seen to be something that assumes different shapes and passes through the most varied states." To his Eleatic opponent, Parmenides on the contrary, there is a stability behind the seeming world of flux, the Real is "a changeless unity—without beginning or end, continuous and motionless."[87]

What is perhaps compelling is the perverse way Butler's analysis avoids reference to twentieth-century chronologies. It normalises—and perhaps makes somewhat conservative—a practice that others wished to explain as completely new. Indeed, it is

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[84] Kaprow, "Impurity," 52.
[85] The first widely noted use of the term in this context was *Four Abstract Classicists* (1959) but there had been a show *The Classical Tradition in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1953) but no information on it is available.
[86] Butler, *Modern Classicism*, n.p. For Stout's inclusion, the gallery borrowed *Untitled (Number 3)*, 1954 from MoMA.
[87] Ibid.

written in spite of a certain impossibility about the concept of "modern classicism."[88] Classicism—its order, its reliance on a set of known rules about proportion and volume—is exactly incompatible with modernism's orientation towards change, flux, novelty, etc.

But with another logic, there does exist a sort of classical drive within modernism, a sub-category, or tendency within its range of expression that addresses a sort of obsession with order. Cézanne claimed he wanted to create a more solid and timeless art than that of the Impressionists.[89] Richard Shiff has pointed out that Cézanne's "classicism" did not mean that he copied the ancients, nor did he "deliberately idealize nature." There is room within modernism, it seems, for another mode, original but ordered. Shiff argues that classicism, in the case of Cézanne:

> involves an ordering of an individual vision (a "sensibility"), but an ordering, or composition, that grows naturally out of the artist and his work.[90]

The terms have been turned upside-down: classicism—to be modern—has to appear natural rather than conventional.[91] The analogy holds for Stout's work. Driven by an urge to innovate a set of forms that resonate with common, everyday perceptions, his painting is both innovative and ordered. Its innovations, however, are not signified by chaos or flux. He was interested in a totally new expression of something timeless and essential.

In this period sense, following Cézanne, the "classicism" of modernism could be seen as the drive to define and make lasting.[92] Classicism was clearly useful for critics of late Impressionism in explaining Cézanne's particular importance to modern painting, as it was for critics trying to find a way forward from Abstract Expressionism. In both cases it is

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[88] Fried rails against this concept in his review of *The Classic Spirit in 20th Century Art* show. See Michael Fried, "New York Letter," *Art International* 8, no. 3 (April 1964): 58-59. He writes: "What warrant have we for using terms like classicism or romanticism to describe 20th century art?" 58.
[89] The nineteenth-century critic Maurice Denis called Cézanne the "Poussin of impressionism" for how he tried to "create the classicism of impressionism." Shiff, *Cézanne*, 136.
[90] Ibid., 136.
[91] Emile Bernard also wrote of Cézanne's "classique par la Nature." Ibid., 130.
[92] Galenson makes the point that Cézanne wished to make a "museum art" in *Painting Outside the Lines*, 53.

understood (at least by its proponents) that the work's innovation is located in the individual's sensibility rather than in adherence to a set of rules.[93] Moreover, the classical moment in a period signifies its end, the consolidation of a set of ideas rather than the initiation of them.

As we'll see in the next chapter, even as these years are a rich (if usually passed over) episode in the critical discourse on abstract art, they are narrowed and consolidated into something Minimalism (and perhaps too, the beginnings of a critique of Modernism) can work "against."[94] As a postscript, it is notable, too, that the critic who was most associated with the "old" ("formalist") way of thinking—Greenberg—also, effectively, rejected Stout's work. As I've argued earlier in this chapter, Greenberg found the need in the early 1960s to account for the waning of gestural painting. A number of critics have suggested that at this moment Greenberg's historical rigour in fact was ceding to issues of taste. The artists that take their place in his progressive model are arbitrary. De Duve, for one, shows how "Modernist Painting" can read almost as a description of the aims of Frank Stella's black stripe paintings, whereas Greenberg dismissed them as "not good enough."[95] I feel he might have said the same about Stout, but the criteria would have been scale, or residual illusionism, rather than Stella's rather more advanced challenge in terms of the minimum requirements for a work to be considered a painting. Likewise, Greenberg's idea of "radical simplification" seems wholly relevant to a teleological account of Stout's work: if flatness is a register of an artist acknowledging painting's historical dimension, Stout's black and white paintings are flatter than those of most other painters of the 50s. Stout looked to Hofmann

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[93] Denis: "[We do not] seek the motive of the work of art other than in the individual intuition, in the spontaneous apperception of a correspondence, of an equivalence between these states of mind and those plastic signs which must translate them with necessity." Quoted in Shiff, *Cézanne*, 135. If one follows Denis's argument, the classical tradition was in fact opposed to the academic method, with its conventions and rules that evacuated individuality.

[94] Jameson has commented upon this phenomenon as characteristic of Modernism itself, that is, the response to a "crisis" is not to abandon whatever project (in his text he is discussing the limits of the historiography), but "as in the modernist aesthetic itself—in reorganizing its traditional procedures on a different level." Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s," 180.

[95] De Duve, "The Monochrome and the Blank Canvas," *Kant After Duchamp*, 204.

and Mondrian and emerged with a style of painting related to both but strictly resembling neither, dispensing, as it were, Hofmann's gestures and Mondrian's residual deep space. It bears asking why Greenberg never wrote on Stout (and lets us consider the effect it might have had on Stout's career if he had). Greenberg's account of the emergence of flat, clear, and linear painting in the early 60s in fact echoes the prevailing idea—in Tillim and Kaprow, among all the others—that it was a reaction to or resolution of the gesture in Abstract Expressionism. He makes this most clear (and prosaic—that is, relating to practice) in his 1964 catalogue essay "Post Painterly Abstraction." Greenberg writes that the artists in the show "have won their 'hardness' from the 'softness' of Painterly Abstraction; they have not inherited it from Mondrian, the Bauhaus, Suprematism, or anything else that came before." (He cites, in fact, the "Tenth Street touch" which "spread through abstract painting like a blight during the 1950's.")[96] Indeed, it seems remarkable now that Greenberg's teleology effectively ignores the geometric work being done in the 1950s, specifically any work that could be connected to Neo-plasticism. Of the artists whose work Stout was (and could be) formally compared with, the only one Greenberg addressed—and he did so with reservations—was Kelly. He mentions in a number of articles that Kelly's 1955 New York exhibition was the first instance of an artist turning away from painterly art, but he finds Kelly's work "a little too easy to enjoy" and considers Noland and Louis to be more substantial artists.[97]

Greenberg's embrace of Noland and Louis is on one level symptomatic of his mixed feelings towards Mondrian. In his first review of Mondrian's work, he thought the artist used theory too prescriptively:

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[96] Greenberg, "Post Painterly Abstraction" (1964), CG4, 196, 194.
[97] Greenberg, "The Crisis in Abstract Art" (1964), CG4, 179. "Louis and Noland" 1960), CG4, 95. This is a good example of where Greenberg stopped describing and started prescribing. In the light of Stout's (and others') production and *exhibition* of hard-edge, linear work in the 50s, Greenberg's account is notably distorted.

> Theories were perhaps felt necessary for justifying such revolutionary innovation. But Mondrian committed the unforgivable error of asserting that one mode of art, that of pure, abstract relations, would be absolutely superior to all others in the future.[98]

A few weeks later, however, in a Hofmann review, he changed his position. It wasn't Mondrian's work itself, but the idea that it could be extended into future practice:

> I may have seemed high-handed in my disposal two weeks back of Mondrian's theories. The irritation caused by any sort of dogmatic prescription in art was most likely responsible. Mondrian attempted to elevate as the goal of the total historical development of art what is after all only a time-circumscribed style. That style may be—I myself believe it is—the direction in which high art now tends and will continue to tend in the foreseeable future. But in art a historical tendency cannot be presented as an end in itself. Anything can be art now or in the future—if it works—and there are no hierarchies of styles except on the basis of past performances. And these are powerless to govern our future.[99]

The issue hinges on the difference between seeing art's history as deductive or inductive.[100] For Greenberg, history is driven by artists' innovations rather than a set of rules drawn from existing works. There can be no absolute form for all time; works that are significant emerge out of specific historical situations. In the same review he asserted, "What may have been the high style of one period becomes the kitsch of another."[101] Indeed, this indicates that

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[98] Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Mondrian, Kandinsky and Pollock; of the Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists; and of the Exhibition *European Artists in America*" 1945), CG2, 16. It seems significant that Mondrian, Pollock and the AAA appear here all together in one review. Greenberg continues to see Pollock here "as the strongest painter of his generation and perhaps the greatest one to appear since Miró" and dismisses the AAA show ("The rules laid down by the epigones of cubism are a little too carefully observed"), 16 and 17.

[99] Greenberg, "Review of an Exhibition of Hans Hofmann and a Reconsideration of Mondrian's Theories" (1945), CG2, 19.

[100] "Deductive reasoning is a logical process in which a conclusion drawn from a set of premises contains no more information than the premises taken collectively. . . . Inductive reasoning is a logical process in which a conclusion is proposed that contains more information than the observations or experience on which it is based. . . . The truth of the conclusion is only verifiable only in terms of future experience and certainty is attainable only if all possible instances have been examined." *Random House College Dictionary*, ed. Jess Stein (New York: Random House, 1975), 347.

[101] Greenberg, "Hofmann and Mondrian," CG2, 19.

Greenberg's real ambivalence was about Mondrian's legacy, specifically in the AAA and (neo) Neo-plasticism as it was being practiced in New York in the 50s (which explains why his "historical" account of geometric painting ignores all such practices). Paradoxically, in "Modernist Painting" Greenberg insists that self-criticism was never an end in itself ("As I have already indicated, it has been altogether a question of practice, immanent to practice, never a topic of theory."[102])

Moreover, he borrowed the term "intensification," which Mondrian used in his well-known essay, "Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art."[103] Greenberg used it to back up his identification of the self-critical tendency as something resolutely modern. These things only deepen the resonance between Greenberg's criticism and Stout's practice, and the sense of wonder at the actual lack therein. For Stout style was always an issue of intuition, never theory, whereas this point indicates a break between Greenberg's and Stella's ideology.[104] Nonetheless, it appears that two quite instrumental issues become markers for Stout's irrelevance to Greenberg: his small scale, and his adherence to Mondrian.

There are several things going on that are important to note for Stout. The exhibitions Stout was included in during this decade are precisely the ones dismissed later as claiming some false internationalism or universality. These surveys *generalised* about abstraction. Although they may limit "historical" interpretation, they have an important and different agenda, that is to equate abstraction with modernity.

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[102] Greenberg, "Modernist Painting" (1960), CG 4, 91.
[103] Ibid., 85, 87 and 90. Mondrian's essay is collected in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 387-393.
[104] Stout's very first black and white paintings came to him very fast, almost like a drive. His practice is about this reaching for something just beyond his perception, never about trying to arrive at an appropriate form for a set of ideas. Further reading of Greenberg suggests that there is a balancing act played between *intuition* and *induction* in the work of a modernist artist (see his review of Michel Seuphor's book, *Piet Mondrian: Life and Work*, in CG4, 12.) Once Mondrian developed his "vocabulary" from looking at Cubism, his work was entirely intuitive. Greenberg quotes Seuphor quoting von Wiegand: "He tests each picture over a long period by eye: it is a physical adjustment of proportion through training, intuition, and testing." This could, of course, describe the way Stout worked. Stella's rather more advanced challenge was in terms of the minimum requirements for a work to be considered a painting.

What we have is several versions of modernism at play; firstly one that sees art's development as a progressive series of induced breaks, artistic gestures that force a kind of before and after situation; second there is a modernism that draws on broader categories of "modern" v. "ancient," which is not limited to artistic practice but to a sense of an individual responding to the modern situation (progress and destruction of technology, individual v. community, privacy and subjectivity v. state and totalitarianism); thirdly there are art-critical versions of modernism, like Greenberg's or Bois'. Perhaps the defining issue between the 1950s and the 1960s should be rearticulated as having to do with speed, and perhaps, too, with scale. Kaprow describes Stout as a slow artist, and this distinguishes him from other painters he resembles. See for example Kelly's 1955 painting, *Black Ripe*, which within the sides of the canvas performs reductions similar to Stout's (fig. 55). The black shape is full, and engages dynamically with the white background to make a single image. However, Kelly's paintings is nine times the size of Stout's largest painting, and his "touch" has even less affect than Stout used. We see here, perhaps, aesthetic differences between using a paint brush and a roller, or better, as Stella said, using paint "straight from the can."[105] In both cases there is a radical simplification in the final image, but the way to it is categorically different.

Historical accounts of the early 1960s often reduce this whole complex of ideas about aesthetics and making work that represented experience to a (mere) issue of style. What perhaps can be recovered is the compelling idea that these things signified then, even if they are inaccessible to us now. In a similar turn of events, Meyer Schapiro critiqued Barr's separation of abstraction from art in general:

> All rendering of objects, no matter how exact they seem, even photographs, proceed from values, methods and viewpoints which somehow shape the image and often determine its contents. On the other hand, there is no "pure

[105] "Questions to Stella and Judd," in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 157.

> art," unconditioned by experience; all fantasy and formal construction, even the random scribbling of the hand, are shaped by experience and by nonaesthetic concerns.[106]

Instead of being unique in his development of a style, Stout very much belongs to a field of artists working on problems of painting in general. Neither "expressionism" nor "purism" held the answers because they asked the wrong questions. Back in 1954, Stout articulated the direction his painting needed to take:

> The abstract expressionists are trying to solve their painting problem by a radical swing toward the subconscious—hence the often over-played "automatic" quality (which leads to emptiness) where they don't succeed. The abstract formalists try to solve it by an intensification of the consciousness of their effort, hence the arid quality (which also leads to emptiness) in their failures.[107]

His work wanted to resolve these polarities.

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[106] Meyer Schapiro, "The Nature of Abstract Art" (originally published in 1937), as quoted in Frascina, *Pollock and After*, 4.
[107] MS Journal-2, 71 (1 December 1954).

Chapter 4:

Stout & Minimalism

The polemics that surrounded the art of the sixties, and minimal work in particular, bespeak the deeply competitive nature of the New York scene. Art mattered. Who showed and where one showed mattered. Who reviewed one's show mattered. The situation demanded strong voices . . . Judd and Morris rose to the occasion and prospered. The majority of artists did not.

—James Meyer[1]

Several recent studies of Minimalism posit different kinds of "canons" for the movement that help frame a discussion of Stout's place in it. James Meyer's anthology, *Minimalism: Themes and Movements* presents a classic model, breaking the artworks and critical material it contains into categories such as "1959-63: First Encounters," 1964-67: High Minimalism" and "1967-79: Canonization/Critique."[2] As one might suspect, his study is narrow and exclusive, and aimed at consolidating a core discourse around the movement. Its last category, "1980-present: Recent Writings" is more a consideration of Minimalism's legacy than a reconsideration of its original ground. Ann Goldstein's show and catalogue, *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968*, is equally "canon-building" but aims to describe a wider originary moment, less dependent on a teleological model. Instead of holding to Minimalism's core rejections (Goldstein cites illusionism, reference, gesture,

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[1] Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 46.
[2] James Meyer, ed., *Minimalism: Themes and Movements* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000).

anthropomorphism, composition) or its formal and material properties (industrial material, seriality, wholeness) she draws out some of its internal debates:

> Rather than proposing a circumscribed definition, "A Minimal Future?" features an expanded field of practices, many of which would not necessarily be immediately associated with Minimal art. In particular, the inclusion of work from the early to mid-1960s by artists not bound with any particular movement or style . . .[3]

This is a significant shift that parallels Strickland's 1993 study, which I cited in the Introduction. Instead of seeing Minimalism as only legitimately practiced by the most "radical" proponents, or by the artists whose work became canonical, Goldstein's approach orients us to the ground—which by its nature is heterogeneous and not necessarily agreed-upon. While a study like Meyer's effaces Stout and his practice, Goldstein's—while not in fact including him—does not methodologically exclude him. Closing her argument above, she writes:

> Even without a unified lineage, Minimalism's emergence in the late 1950s within the context of Abstract Expressionism signals a considerable aesthetic shift. This exhibition is an opportunity to consider the critical transition in art-making that began in the late 1950s with Minimal art's early period, when a new generation of artists began to redefine painting and sculpture, and culminated with its canonization in the late 1960s as a part of the radical cultural shifts that challenged convention in all forms.[4]

Goldstein's study is not typical for this subject. The conventional discourse on Minimalism, since early arguments made for it by Frank Stella and Donald Judd and later ones by,

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[3] Ann Goldstein, "A Minimal Future?" in exh. cat., *A Minimal Future? Art as Object 1958-1968* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), 18.
[4] Goldstein, *A Minimal Future?* 18.

amongst others, Hal Foster, depends on its exclusions; it is defined by its rejections.[5] Krauss wrote in 1977, that:

> By claiming that these meanings [language of form reporting on experience] are no longer credible, Judd is rejecting a notion of the individual self that supposes personality, emotion, and meaning as elements existing within each of us separately. As a corollary to his rejection of the model of the self, Judd wants to repudiate an art that bases its meanings on illusionism as a metaphor for that privileged (because private) psychological moment.[6]

Barbara Haskell made a similar comment for Stella, suggesting he was a Minimalist because he was "the first artist to accept geometric abstraction but abrogate its subjectivity and metaphysical aspirations."[7] Such an account would never see Stout as a Minimalist proper—at the very most he might be a stylistic precursor still attached old ideas about self-expression. In Meyer's second, more discursive study *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, he mentions Stout once in passing as one of the hard edge painters Judd looked at and rejected in the late 1950s. Thus Stout here is on the receiving end of an exclusion, literally and canonically footnoted.[8] Minimalism's first gestures—which as we see remain wholly central to some of its histories—were to distinguish it from what it *resembled*—geometric painting.

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[5] What I am calling "limiting" accounts include: Philip Leider, "Literalism and Abstraction: Frank Stella's Retrospective at the Modern," *Artforum* 8, no. 8 (April 1970): 44-51; Krauss, *Passages*; Hal Foster, ed., *Discussions in Postmodern Culture* 1 (New York and Seattle: Dia Art Foundation and Bay Press, 1987); Bois, *Painting as Model*; and de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp*. Meyer's method is empirical—via primary research into original documents and works—but he does not challenge the inherited reading. Raskin recently recontextualised Minimalism in relation to American Pragmatism, but keeps Judd as the central figure. "Specific Opposition: Judd's Art and Politics" *Art History* 24, no. 5 (November 2001): 682-706. The recent exhibition *Beyond Geometry* integrates Minimalism into an international discourse, but never challenges its "radicality." (Zelevansky even amplifies it: "Minimalism was arguably the most original North American artistic development of the postwar period. There were European precursors, and artists in Europe and South America were working on many of the same ideas as the minimalists, but nothing created elsewhere looked quite like minimalism." "Beyond Geometry: Objects, Systems, Concepts," in *Beyond Geometry*, 10.

[6] Krauss, *Passages*, 258.

[7] Barbara Haskell, in exh. cat., *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism and Performance 1958-1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984), 91. As quoted in Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 6-7.

[8] Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 35. Meyer's slur is compounded by the sentence that follows, that Judd later called his own works from the late 1950s "half-baked abstractions." Meyer is quoting Roberta Smith, "Donald Judd," in exh. cat., *Donald Judd*, edited by Brydon Smith (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), 7; the "rejection" can be contextualised further in that the Judd paintings in question are very Stout-ish. Could Judd have been following Stout's work closely in the late 50s? See figs. 1-4, 7-9.

What Goldstein's and Strickland's studies question is whether this difference should be taken at face value. The issue this chapter explores is the degree to which the differences were ideological (and thus categorical and thereby should mark an important distinction) or about building a canon, whether it is productive to posit Minimalism's originary moment as "inclusive" and internally heterogeneous, or to maintain the differences it claimed for itself. The former would include Stout, and the latter might clarify what he did not embrace in Minimalism.

There is a clear parallel between inclusivity/exclusivity and the synchronic/diachronic model I discussed in the last chapter. In each paring the former represents a "field of practice" and the latter an historical or time-based explanation.[9] The terminology for this chapter reflects what I see as the gesture behind efforts to widen the field—and that is to account for artists who have been left out for various ideological and institutional reasons.[10] The approach of this chapter follows Strickland and Goldstein in seeing the discourse around Minimalism's inception as diverse—and more to do with painting than more conventional histories would allow. What is interesting is that Minimalism sought its own diachronic explanation for its practice while rejecting the one made for geometric or reduced painting.

As with the critical discourse of the previous decade, Stout is "absent" in Minimalism's institutional history. Other than one exhibition, *Plus By Minus* (Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1968), Stout was never seriously considered a proper Minimalist. However, the headline of his obituary in the *New York Times* reads, "Myron Stout, Abstract Artist and Minimalist, Is Dead at 79."[11] Of his paintings and drawings that were shown during the

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[9] Goldstein uses terms like "comprehensive" and "diverse." *A Minimal Future?* 18.
[10] Strickland in particular suggests that the "high" moment was not an actual beginning point: "the strongest and most daring Minimal painting was created before the 1960s even began, and long before the term reappeared in 1965—just as "action painting" was in its dotage by 1952 when Harold Rosenberg popularized the phrase . . ." *Minimalism: Origins,* 4.
[11] Michael Brenson, "Myron Stout, Abstract Artist and Minimalist, Is Dead at 79," *New York Times* (8 August 1987): 50.

1960s, all were begun in the 50s.[12] (Thus, in a period sense, Stout's *work* cannot be considered straightforwardly. We cannot say—as we do regularly with other artists—that a particular work sits firmly in the year it was made or exhibited. Further complexity is added by the fact that Stout's working process did not evolve substantially after 1955.) But he was not apparently held up by the younger artists as a proto-Minimalist, as Reinhardt and Newman were.[13] Stout cancelled his only solo show of the decade, scheduled for the month of April, 1962 at the Green Gallery.[14] This was a missed opportunity to contribute to the dialogue in those crucial years in a place where Minimalism was in formation (in fact, after that month, when Stout's individual exhibition was replaced by a group show that included him, he did not show at all at the Green Gallery).[15] Thus Stout's practice and his personality—slow but constant, and sequestered—were antithetical to the new brand of artist that was emerging: someone who performed as both an artist and a critic, and whose work also "performed" a distinct critical position in relation to "old" values. Stout was absent at the exact moment when presence counted. As Michael Fried noted in his review of Judd's 1964 Green Gallery show, "it is an assured, intelligent show; it also provides a kind of commentary on the criticism and is doubly interesting on that count."[16] Fried's emphasis on making an ideological position *visible* suggests that the work itself ought to manifest an

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[12] Of the thirteen paintings sketched out and begun in 1955, Stout finished five in 1957, and three in 1968. Of the remaining five, two were finished for the 1980 retrospective, and three remained unfinished at his death.
[13] On Newman see Shiff, "Whiteout: The Not-Influence Newman Effect" in Temkin, *Newman*, 78-111. Reinhardt was included in *10* (Dwan Gallery, New York, 1966) that was otherwise made up of much younger artists. Lippard described Reinhardt and Newman as "sixties" artists in the 50s. Lippard, "Diversity in Unity," 231. Barbara Rose called Reinhardt a "precursor" in her essay, "ABC Art," *Art in America* 53, no. 5 (October/November 1965): 62-65. As I mentioned before, Bois argues that Reinhardt's relevance in the 1960s hinged on his critique of "composition," exactly what Stella and Judd rejected in European painting. "The Limit of Almost," 13.
[14] MoMA-RB, file: "Kent/Flynn." In preparation for the 1990 three-gallery exhibition of Stout's work, someone photocopied the pages from *Art Gallery* and *Arts Magazine* that listed Stout's exhibition. In handwriting on top, "Dick [Bellamy] re: Stout show that was cancelled."
[15] The group show included Stout as well as Diller, Agostini, Pavia, Chamberlain, Kline, Rosenquist, Andrejevic, di Suvero, Bladen, Williams, Hatofsky, and Magar. Judith E. Stein, "A Chronology of Green Gallery Shows," (unpublished), n.p.
[16] Michael Fried, "New York Letter: Donald Judd," *Art International* 8, no. 1 (15 Feb 1964): 26. As quoted in Meyer, *Minimalism: Themes,* 195.

ideological position.[17] Taking Minimalism at its word, for Stout to have "succeeded" in the discursive battles from 1965 onwards, he would have had to reject most of the aesthetic issues he held to be important, like making paintings that were products of the emotional body, that were grounded in observing nature, motivated by exploring the nature of experience. The basis of his interest in abstraction remained Hofmann's teachings and Mondrian's painting.

On the other hand, it is actually quite easy to "find" him between the lines of this history. He is there in several of Minimalism's canonical documents, namely the 1964 interview, "Questions to Stella and Judd," and in Judd's early, pre-"Specific Objects" art criticism. Through his connection with the Green Gallery Stout was readily conversant with its ideas, and friendly with its practitioners. Indeed, after a "dry spell" in his work and journal writings from the late 1950s through the early 60s, Stout appeared to be buoyed up by the new discourse. 1964, the year Meyer cites as the advent of "High Minimalism," sees Stout with renewed energy, reconsidering the origins of his work, commenting on the newer work and how it related—and diverged—from his own practice.[18]

An inclusive approach would emphasise these things—the fact that the Green Gallery's exhibition programme was not at all narrow nor aligned with *one* Minimalism. It included many artists whose work contributes to a heterogeneous scenario, like Ronald Bladen, Oldenburg, Chamberlain, and di Suvero, as well as Diller and the abstract painters

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[17] On the quicker changeover of styles that divided the critical community see Meyer, *Art and Polemics*, 215. Hal Foster argues that artists in the 1960s were more "self-aware" than previous generations, being university educated in prewar avant-garde histories, "and some began to practice as critics in ways distinct from belletristic or modernist-oracular precedents." *Return of the Real*, 5. Strickland, on the other hand, finds this self-awareness the signal of academicization. He argues: "Rather than a stylistic impulse informing a variety of distinct and even adversarial sensibilities, it became formalized as an aesthetic axiom. Rather than an individual discovery, Minimalism became an imposed theoretical precept as lifeless as the worst painting it generated." *Minimalism: Origins*, 24.

[18] The journals are very thin from 1958 until they begin to pick up in March 1964. In this month he also refers explicitly to his "dry" years. MS Journal-1, 625 (28 March 1964). Minimalism holds a certain pride of place by being the concern of the very last set of entries in Stout's journal, in December 1966.

Richard Smith and Jo Baer.[19] An inclusive approach would expand the ground to Minimalism's dialogue with Pop, as Goldstein does, and even out of the gallery as Chave did recently in an important article, "Minimalism and Biography." An inclusive approach would thereby accommodate readings of Minimalism other than as a rejection of expressionism or a flattening of aesthetic experience. Stout's own interpretation of Minimalism was unorthodox. He was entirely interested in its content, and especially its "metaphysical" dimension. Stout himself would fit in because his work effected the aesthetic shift from gestural complexity to simplification and reduction.

The arguments made on Minimalism's behalf—that is, a narrow version of it—are still powerful. For some influential critic-historians writing today, the 1960s is the key decade out of which important ideas of the last forty years emerge, and Minimalism its key movement.[20] For Hal Foster, whose writings return continually to Minimalism, it represents art's first "postmodern" movement, that is, the first movement to coherently and categorically reject modernist ideologies. In his study, *The Return of the Real*, he makes the following argument:

> Although the experiential surprise of minimalism is difficult to recapture, its conceptual provocation remains, for minimalism breaks with the transcendental space of most modernist art (if not with the immanent space of the dadaist readymade or the constructivist relief). Not only does minimalism reject the anthropomorphic bases of most traditional sculpture (still residual in the gestures of abstract-expressionist work), but it also refuses the siteless realm of most abstract sculpture. In short, minimalist sculpture no longer stands apart, on a pedestal or as pure art, but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place. In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe,

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[19] Bladen for example is included in *A Minimal Future?* His "Romantic," and "emotional" Minimalism is attended to by Susan L. Jenkins, "Ronald Bladen," 172-73.

[20] See for example, "Round Table: The Reception of the Sixties," *October* 69 (Summer 1994): 3-21. The participants generally agree that the 1960s is a moment of "triumphalism," that is, the hegemony and institutionalisation of American Modernism. Against this artists like Judd and Robert Morris "broke"; Hal Foster in particular speaks as if these gestures still need to be defended. Benjamin Buchloh, by contrast, expressed history as something more reflexive, pointing out that Minimalism itself became triumphalist in the 1980s. See 4-6.

> sovereign space of formalist art, is cast back to the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site. This is the fundamental reorientation that minimalism inaugurates.[21]

Foster's chronology marks Minimalism by means of its various "breaks"—with "transcendental" or "siteless" space, and the apparent "abstractions" of time and viewer that abstract expressionist or formalist work performed. Taken at face value, it would suggest that artworks (like Stout's) that do not make these crucial moves towards postmodernism are logically then either modernist or irrelevant. Foster's critical method claims to be a "radical rereading," an incision into the root causes and effects of the ideas rather than their (mere) uses or effects.[22] As he sees it, in America, formalism filled the vacuum left by the absence of art with a radical-political agenda: "Greenbergian formalism . . . not only overbore the transgressive avant-garde institutionally but almost defined it out of existence."[23] Foster's study is not a history but a "meta-narrative," aimed at clarifying an agenda, in this case the transgressive avant-garde and its historical eclipse. His account, though necessarily partial and narrow, is problematic in its generalisations—not only for the way they exclude Stout, but cannot account for any deviation from "strategy." Statements like the one above do not in fact hold for particular works or artistic practices once detail is attended to. (Foster's analyses of individual works, though at times compelling, are remarkably ahistorical, never referring to production or reception, rather acting as if an *interpretation* were a law unto itself.) Foster's study in this regard periodises in a manner that could be deemed historicist.

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[21] H. Foster, *Return of the Real*, 36-8.
[22] The "radical re-readings" Foster has in mind as models are Lacan's of Freud and Althusser's of Marx. Both perform the rupture with modernism that Foster is interested in. Foster points out that Althusser's and Lacan's were *structural*, "not so much what Marxism or psychoanalysis means as *how* it means." H. Foster, *Return of the Real*, 2.
[23] H. Foster, *Return of the Real*, 56.

Where theory is concerned, however, we are well trained now to be suspicious of historical abstractions and grand narratives, and to seek the specific grounds for a situation.

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One of the core early statements on Minimalism turns out to be indirectly related to Stout's exhibition history. "Questions to Stella and Judd" was aired as a radio interview on the left-leaning New York station WBAI, in February, 1964.[24] In conversation with critic Bruce Glaser, Stella and Judd explain the differences between their work and art that it resembles. This interview is always excerpted in a certain way, usually by quoting Stella explaining, "I wanted to get the paint out of the can and onto the canvas" and "what you see is what you see," or Judd saying, "I'm totally uninterested in European art and I think its all over with."[25] In part its recognition comes from being published in the first anthology on Minimalism. But the interview signifies in the critical discourse an early articulation of differences between "old" and "new" ways of making art. Another well-cited passage is by Stella:

> I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting—the humanistic values they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there.[26]

Stella was aiming at artists—like Stout—who saw their work as a means of expressing lived experience. He emphasises that it's only important what can be *seen* in his work, its objective factuality. This was meant, of course, to disallow "exterior" content, by which is

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[24] It was edited by Lippard and published in *Art News* in September 1966, then anthologised in Battcock, *Minimal Art.*
[25] Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 157, 158, and 154
[26] Ibid., 157-8. Notably, this follows a passage in which he defends Morris Louis's against criticism of its being "thin, merely decorative"—parallel, of course, to Stout's rejection of Kelly's work.

implied anything that related to spirituality, idealist philosophy, or humanism. While Stella's move is basically Greenbergian in its rejection of metaphysics, its formalism, and its embrace of reduction as a way for painting to clarify its meaning, it is used by later critics to clarify where Minimalism breaks from modernist (and medium-specific) painting. A close reading of the interview suggests, however, that their argument is a continuation of the discussion around geometric art's rejection of the gesture. Stella and Judd articulate through the interview numerous strategies for making a work relevant rather than decorative, like employing symmetry, or "wholeness" rather than making a "relational painting" where "You do something in one corner and you balance it with something in the other corner."[27] Instead of using small brushes, which makes painting like "drawing with a brush," Stella said, "I didn't want to record a path. I wanted to get the paint out of the can and onto the canvas."[28] For the person looking at a work, Stella and Judd didn't want them to engage in a process of "explor[ing] painterly detail," rather, to see the work all at once.[29] In other ways, however, the strategies they use to distinguish their work from an abstract expressionist-style process-heavy approach are different from those taken by Stout. Stella said:

> We believe we can find the end, and that a painting can be finished. The Abstract Expressionists always felt the painting's being finished was very problematical. We'd more readily say our paintings were finished and say, well, it's either a failure or it's not, instead of saying, well, maybe it's not really finished.[30]

As I said above, "Questions to Stella and Judd" is cited as a document that explains the divisions between abstraction generally and the kind of abstraction being made by Stella, Judd and others who came to be associated with Minimalism. Following the artist's lead, it is used to characterise Minimalism as a sea-change rather than a continuation. Stella's

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[27] Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 149.
[28] Ibid., 157.
[29] Ibid., 159, 158.
[30] Ibid., 161.

comment "what you see is what you see," for example, is taken to mean that aesthetic value is culturally constructed rather than innate. It posits Minimalism as an end to the conversation about content in abstract painting. There is nothing in art but its materials; "meaning" as it had been understood was merely a subject a particular group of people had agreed to discuss. Nonetheless, elsewhere Stella insists he is interested in what is "entirely visual" and Judd claims he is interested in art with feeling, just not "painterly feeling."[31]

Within an account of the period that describes the ground, or field, it becomes important that there is an indirect connection between this interview and Stout's work. Research by Meyer revealed it was in part a comment on the exhibition, *The Classic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art*, held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1964.[32] As well as Stella (but not Judd), this show included Stout, and this fact contextualises what appears otherwise in the interview as an abstracted critique of "European" and "geometric" painting.[33] Like other shows about twentieth-century abstraction, the show emphasised style, and proposed a "history" to explain the appearance of a reduction of means. The short catalogue essay by Janis used this diachronic model to draw connections but also differences between older

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[31] Ibid.,158 and 161.

[32] In *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 87, Meyer notes that the opening question of the radio interview—edited out of subsequent versions—referred to the Janis show. Re-reading the interview in this light, Glaser's first question in the Battcock version ("There are characteristics in your work that bring to mind styles from the early part of this century. . . ") orients the whole interview towards Stella and Judd defending themselves against being "old" geometric artists. Moreover, the original title was "New Nihilism or New Art?" which itself would provoke a more radical type of argument. In *Minimalism: Themes*, Meyer published an expanded version of the interview with other excised material, but didn't include the original opening question, 197-201. Meyer noted that the interview took place as Minimalism was being institutionalized, a few weeks after the opening of the exhibition *Black, White and Grey* (Wadsworth Athenaeum, January 1964), by many accounts the first show to define the movement. It is also notable that Flavin was part of the first interview, but asked to be edited out of the written versions.

[33] Judd reviewed *The Classic Spirit* for *Arts Magazine* as did Fried for *Art International*. As mentioned before, Fried took issue with the show's broad view of abstraction and the terminology used for explaining its aims, for example: taking special umbrage with the use of the term *purism*: "purism is, in its deepest aspirations, profoundly a-historical. It aims at a kind of metaphysical validity, and proceeds as if on the assumption that by somehow distilling art down to its basic essence one can arrive finally at whatever it is that gives art the power to exist *sub specie aeternitatis* . . . In contrast to this, Stella's paintings, like Barnett Newman's, are historically self-aware. They both arise out of and demonstrate a personal interpretation of the particular historical situation in which 'advanced' painting first found itself in the late fifties." Fried, "New York Letter," 59. An example of how this angle get recycled is when Meyer writes that Fried "demolishes the ahistoricity [sic.] of the show." *Minimalism: Themes*, note 58, 286.

"classic and purist" work and the "retinal" concerns of the younger artists.[34] Stout was represented by a single work: *Untitled (Number 1)*, 1956 (fig. 3). Stella's work consisted of six one-foot square "sketches" from 1961.

In light of Meyer's discovery, parts of the interview can now be read as a critique of the Janis show. At one point, in response to a prod from Glaser about his reference to the Hungarian-born painter Victor Vasarely, Stella said: ". . . it still doesn't have anything to do with my painting. I find all that European geometric painting—sort of post-Max Bill school—a kind of curiosity—very dreary."[35] Although the exhibition is not mentioned in text versions, Stella's desire to control his historical influences could have been provoked by an uncomfortable proximity in the Janis show between his work and what was arguably becoming a "tradition" of abstract painting.[36] What it has come to stand for, however, is a period issue for Minimalism: it broke with formalism, with European modernist abstraction, with metaphysics, with a whole twentieth-century preoccupation with art as provoking, or representing an aesthetic experience.[37] Meyer attends to Stella's and Judd's ignorance and chauvinism but adds: "but then, minimal practice might not have arisen but for such blindness."[38]

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[34] It was organised chronologically into "pioneers," "middle-generation," and "younger artists." See Appendix 2 for full list of artists; Stout and Stella were both "younger." Janis, *The Classic Spirit*, n.p. "Retinal" refers to "op" art, which was increasingly being accounted for in these years. Recall that Stout used the term "optical effects" derisively in relation to Kelly. Reynolds argues that the conversation about op was *ended* by MoMA's show, *The Responsive Eye* (1965). Ann Reynolds, *Robert Smithson: Learning from New Jersey and Elsewhere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 45-55.

[35] Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 149. Stella's dismissal had a powerful effect: Vasarely is still spoken of disparagingly as a "relational painter." The term however may have its origins in Glarner, who titled many of his paintings *Relational Painting*. Although Glarner had lived in the US since 1936, he was Swiss, which links him to Stella's "dreary Max Bill thing."

[36] Stella could also have had in mind the Whitney's *Geometric Abstraction* show, as it was quite similar in approach. Glarner's works in the Whitney show were all titled *Relational Painting*.

[37] I quoted Judd earlier in the Battcock interview, but he makes an equally strong statement in "Specific Objects." "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors—which is riddance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art." Judd, "Specific Objects" (1965), in *Complete Writings 1959-1975* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), 184. I developed this argument against Judd's parochialism in relation to neo-Constructivism being made and shown in Paris in the late 1950s further for my paper, "An American in Paris and a German in New York," Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, Liverpool, April 2002.

[38] Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 88.

The effect of the argument being made here—and its legacy of course—was that aesthetic decisions were made categorically trivial. Whereas before it was an issue of *how* you did it—whether you made it "relevant," as Stout put it—now the doing of it was itself problematic. In his well-known 1960 Pratt Lecture, Stella explained how the situation of being a painter was a dead end:

> The painterly problems of what to put here and there and how to do it to make it go with what was already there, became more and more difficult and the solutions more and more unsatisfactory, and finally it became obvious that there had to be a better way.[39]

Stella's solution was to change the process; his paintings began with a plan (stripes of certain widths following a pre-determined pattern) which he followed to its completion. This approach meant he did not have to make any decisions once he began painting. The "painting" then becomes an execution of an idea rather than the site in which a series of decisions are made, or where a work is "found." At least in terms of technique, Stout's approach to painting would put him on the wrong side of the divide Stella described.[40] To abandon aesthetic decisions during the making of a painting—this was profoundly different from the way Stout worked.

The historical turn here, of course, is that by pre-conceiving, Stella and Judd tread on the tricky ground of American Neo-plasticism and the problems suggested by Tillim in "What Happened to Geometry?"[41] The metaphor Stout used to describe when a work was

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[39] Stella, "The Pratt Lecture," as quoted in Meyer, *Minimalism: Themes*, 193.
[40] Stout told Maartens that he never made paintings "after" drawings, although the charcoals sometimes worked as enquiries into the direction he might go (he drew a musical analogy, calling them "Etudes"). Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 87, 90. Sandler recalled his initial sense of Stella's work as "pre-conceived." Irving Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s* (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1988), 6. Seitz draws a parallel explanation for Reinhardt's importance for Stella, that instead of the improvisation and intuitive approach of Abstract Expressionism, the divisions and the colour of Reinhardt's paintings were "*predetermined*." (His italics.) William C. Seitz, *Art in the Age of Aquarius, 1955-1970* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), 35.
[41] Tillim and Judd both wrote for *Arts Magazine* in the 1960s, but read things very differently.

going well was when he was "inside" his work. To be inside is to be integrated, for it to matter, for it to be individual and unique rather than *copied*.[42] In 1965 Stout wrote:

> I don't believe I really have got what I want on the canvas (no matter how much it looks right as I back off for the long view) unless I've seen (felt) it happen under my brush as I make the change. It must appear there, out of the void, so to speak (for I won't know that it's me and my brush doing it)—a "becoming"—an epiphany.[43]

In Stout's own register, to be "outside" is for the work to be mechanical, "impersonal" and "over-intellectualized."[44] To be inside a work is to attend to its making, to be fully involved as a person with intellectual, emotional and perceptual faculties. As in his critique of Kelly's work, art that was reduced for the wrong reason might be stylish, but its "thinness" made it verge on decoration. It had "minimal effect."[45] For Stout, of course, Stella's procedure further dispensed with visual experience and observation. He told Maartens in 1978 that when a paintings is good:

> there's still a line back to the original visual experience. . . . The more it departs from actual visual experience, it tends to become abstract in a bad sense. . . *It loses its completeness*.[46]

And yet, despite differences in approach and procedure, Stella and Judd were both interested in the "wholeness" of the work rather than its merely being a series of part-to part relations. It seems important to suggest their similarities in the regard. Indeed, aspects of Stout's work appear to have been predetermined, if only provisionally, like his limitation to black and white, or the singular-shape format. Exercises in simplification, these aesthetic

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[42] Stout wrote: "The crux of the whole situation of the painter is to know this mystery [existence, visual appearance], this magic, these epiphamies [sic.] appear visually. He has to be inside the mechanism of visual appearance—to be 'with it' . . ." MS Journal-1, 2 (22 September 1964).
[43] MS Journal-1, 19 (28 January 1965).
[44] MSOH-1984, cited in Chapter 3. Stout also writes about Minimalism as impersonal and over-intellectualised in MS Journal-1, 132 (5 December 1966).
[45] This is Glaser's comment to Judd. Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 90.
[46] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 48. My italics.

decisions were aimed at seeing the painting as a whole thing—a unified image—that hit you at once. This of course, was not a new discussion. In his review of Stout's 1954 Stable show, Feinstein wrote:

> Each picture presents itself as a totality—like a suddenly illuminated object—and its impact, like the movement of a dancer, creates a gesture that is not a reflection of nature, but its equivalent.[47]

As Stella said, "parts" leading you through the work was no longer that interesting. The experience is meant to be apprehended in one go.

The "single image" was in fact a preoccupation for Judd throughout his early writings. While Judd did begin—around 1964—to distinguish between work that excited him and what he called "the older geometric painting," before that he used more descriptive, less polemical terms to discuss prevailing issues, like non-instrumental thinking and contemporary art's relationship to art history.[48] Certain instances in his writings suggest his judgments were not as definitive as some canonical divisions suggest. Moreover, Judd—in a sense like Greenberg before him—was more interested in artists than in generalisations. He writes, for example: "If Ellsworth Kelly can do something novel with a geometric art more or less from the thirties, or Rauschenberg with Schwitters and found objects generally . . . then someone is going to do something surprising with Abstract Expressionism."

> It isn't necessary for an artist who was once fairly original and current to abandon his first way of working in favor of a new way. The degree of his originality determines whether he should use a new situation or not. This, of course, is the complicated problem of artistic progress. A new form of art

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[47] Feinstein, "Unified Image," 16. Compellingly, he makes the point by referring to Mondrian.
[48] The first instance I've found is in a review of the Swedish painter, Olle Baertling: "It's better than discrete or rationalistic parts, but it's inferior to a more direct consideration of continuity and infinity, as in Frank Stella's paintings. On the whole, Baertling's work is still too near the older geometric painting." Judd, "In The Galleries" (1964), *Complete Writings*, 134.

> usually appears more logical, expressive, free and strong than the form it succeeds.[49]

What is important is that Judd did not "reject" geometric abstraction in quite the same way some critics have asserted. As a historical category, it was up to an artist to make it interesting again. He was interested, however, in artists that push the issue to some point of clarification, and to that end Judd is interested in flatness, materiality, "singleness" of form, and scale.

Judd knew Stout's work. Contra Meyer, evidence suggests he even admired it. Judd, of course, was a prolific critic, and he and Stout knew each other through the Green Gallery.[50] There is something recursive in Judd's approach to writing. Like Greenberg, ideas about an artist's work developed from one review to another. Judd sometimes took several shows to warm to an artist's work. This may be the case with Stout—the first show Judd reviewed (the Whitney's *Geometric Abstraction*) did not mention him; the second (the Jewish Museum's exhibition *Black and White*, 1963) mentioned him in passing; in the third (*The Classic Spirit*, 1964) he implies interest in him in the midst of an otherwise negative review.[51] Later that year, Judd singled Stout out of a large exhibition of drawings Alloway had curated at the Guggenheim Museum. Most of the review critiques the show's unwieldy size and the limitations of its premise (that "drawing" was too technical an approach),

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[49] Judd, "Local History" (1964), *Complete Writings*, 150. (Note that the same year, in a long Newman review, he asserts that hard edge, "primarily defined by Ellsworth Kelly's work, is mainly old abstraction." 202.) Though he sounds like Greenberg, he also offers corrections to the other critic's account of the early 1960s. Against Greenberg's tidy, evolutionary history, Judd asserts: "The history of art and art's condition at any time are pretty messy. They should stay that way." Moreover, against Greenberg's identification of a radical shift in Pop (see Chapter 3, note 39), Judd writes: "The change from the relatively uniform situation of 1959 to the present diverse one did not suddenly occur with pop art in the 1961-62 season. The list of exhibitions a while back shows that it didn't . . . A lot of new artists were already showing. Almost all of them had developed their own work as simply their own work." 151.

[50] Judd's earliest review of a show at the Green Gallery was of Mark di Suvero, in October 1960; he reviewed ten exhibitions there over the next three years, before his own work was included there in a group show in January 1963 (see fig. 58). Judd had his first one-person show there in December 1963 (see fig. 57).

[51] "There are interesting and uninteresting works shown. There is an excellent relief by Pevsner made of sheet bronze and cream plastic, Gabo's well-known construction, a piece by Max Bill, paintings by Van der Leck, Lissitzky, Léger, Kupka, Schwitters, Albers, and Myron Stout. Of course Glarner, Diller and Bolotowsky are represented. ..." Judd, "In the Galleries" (1964), *Complete Writings*, 123.

however, out of thirty-five artists Judd writes of Stout twice. The mentions appear merely factual, but in the context of Judd's spare and perfunctory writing it reflects a level of interest. Judd was explicit about what he did not like—in another section of this review he listed twenty artists whose works either were "middling" or didn't interest him at all.[52] There were several artists he unreservedly supported, like Noland, Stella, and Lichtenstein. To a degree, Judd's silence on Stout is relevant—we might infer from it that to Judd Stout was neither an artist investing geometric painting with new life, nor one of the "old" artists bound by fixed geometry, illusionistic space, or naturalism.

Judd's take on Stout, thus, needs to be created indirectly, from comments he makes in other contexts that can be applied to Stout's work.[53] From the late 1950s, Judd regularly reviewed shows of artists working similarly to Stout. Perhaps not surprisingly, he wrote often on abstract, reduced painting, and his mind was far from being made up. Two longer articles in particular are relevant to shedding light on what he might have thought about Stout's work: "Local History" published in *Arts Yearbook* in 1964, and a feature on Newman, written in 1964 and published in *Studio International* in February 1970.[54] "Local History" is the first long piece Judd wrote where he reflected on the previous four or five years of the art scene in New York. (It was followed, a year later, by his now-canonical

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[52] "The drawings by Johns, Myron Stout, De Kooning and Lichtenstein are as developed as their paintings, only smaller." Later, "The drawings by Stout and Youngerman looked well together, since all were black and white but clearly differentiated by geometric and amorphous forms." Judd, "In the Galleries: American Drawings" (1964), *Complete Writings*, 141. I am presuming he means Youngerman used "geometric" and Stout "amorphous" forms.

[53] It remains a question what Judd would have written if given, for example, the space of a whole review. Stout did not provide this opportunity, as he did not have an individual show during the years Judd was actively writing (1959-1965); Judd did not mention Stout in his review of the Whitney's *Geometric Abstraction* show, but he did mention him in all the subsequent shows he reviewed that Stout was in.

[54] The former was a round-up of the year's issues that appeared in a [special publication of *Arts*]; the following year Judd wrote his important essay, "Specific Objects," which is usually cited as his first polemic; yet he developed some of the main ideas in the earlier text—like "three-dimensional work . . . which approaches' being an object.'" "Local History," *Complete Writings*, 152. I feel I have license to read between the lines of the Newman review vis-à-vis Stout because a large portion of the text was taken from Judd's review of the Black and White show at the Jewish Museum, which Stout was in; therefore, I am making a presumption that Stout was in the back of Judd's mind while addressing issues of Newman's scale.

"Specific Objects.")[55] While the latter was predictive and identified new trends, Judd wrote historically in "Local History," accounting for the occlusion in the 1950s of Johns, Rauschenberg and Reinhardt because of the general focus on Abstract Expressionism. He also recounts here the failures of criticism:

> At any time there is always someone trying to organize the current situation. . . . The bandwagon nature of art in New York also comes out of the urge to make categories and movements.[56]

He attends to the status of geometric work several times in this article. However, unlike the parts-whole question in the Glaser interview—which is a sign of Minimalism's difference—here Judd suggests it has immediate precedents:

> The singleness of objects [three-dimensional work that approaches object] is related to the singleness of the best paintings of the early fifties. Like the paintings, such work is unusually direct and intense.[57]

In this article, Judd makes an historical argument for the mistake of "second generation" Abstract Expressionists—they turned a personal expression into a *style*. They added "archaic composition and naturalistic color" where what was really important about Abstract Expressionism was that "The more unique and personal aspects of art, which had been subservient before, were stated alone, large and singly."[58] Even though he puts it in formal terms, Judd is writing about individualism and originality over style or period-concepts.

Stout shared with Judd several key conceptions of art, history and quality when it came to describing the early 1960s. Like Judd, Stout applied his own interests to diverse work. One 1964 journal passage comes very close to sounding like Judd's argument above:

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[55] For recent discussions of "Specific Objects" see Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 134-141; Fer, *On Abstract Art*, 131-151; and Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination: Figurative, Modernist, Minimalist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 269-284.
[56] Judd, *Complete Writings*, 150, 151.
[57] Ibid., 152.
[58] Ibid., 151.

> . . . the basic concept [in Pop Art] is probably leaning in the direction of a single wholeness of conception. Where it does achieve this it does it through exclusion rather than inclusion, through limitation rather than scope. . . . Only Oldenburg . . . has marked directness of expression, individualism of means. (underlying the grotesquerie, the bizarrerie, the pungency and wit, the acid but penetrating observation of life as it is, there is a strong lyricism.)[59]

What is compelling about this writing is that Stout's own interests drive—but do not limit—it. It was an issue of individual practice, but also of inter-connectedness. For him art was social and it was personal, and he was interested in artists that he knew. Stout felt he shared with Oldenburg the desire to assert oneself subjectively back into the world. He saw his own reductive and plain pictures, borne from observation of natural forms, simplified and generalised and meant for everybody to understand, as connecting with conviction. Then again, inter-connectedness was not a value over aesthetic or artistic success. Not everyone was able to do it. It is, however, surprising that Judd comes so close to embracing heterogeneity, when a whole critical discourse has been developed out of his rejections.[60]

The second text that bears close attention for "finding" Stout is the article Judd wrote on Barnett Newman—also in 1964 although not published until 1970.[61] He makes an argument in it for Newman's relevance based on the "wholeness" of his paintings. Judd also introduces here the idea of "specificity," making it a positive characteristic that Newman's individual works stand for themselves and don't imply a continuum with other works, indeed with other forms of knowledge. Stout is not mentioned in the article, but Judd's text appears

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[59] MS Journal-1, 623 (27 March 1964).
[60] It may be important at some future point to compare "Local History" and "Specific Objects," to see if Judd's position "hardened" between the two.
[61] Judd, "Barnett Newman" (1970), *Complete Writings*, 201.

to be mainly informed by the recent show at the Jewish Museum, *Black and White*, which included Newman and Stout.[62]

There are several qualities Judd identifies in Newman's work that make it important. The first is scale, the second is what Judd calls "wholeness," and the last is that the paintings are "open." Although it is impossible to say what Judd actually thought, I wish to argue that there is nothing in Stout's work that would make it "older abstract painting" according to Judd's criteria. The two paintings by Stout Judd saw in *Black and White* were his *Untitled*, 1954 and *Untitled (Number 3)* 1956 (figs. 1 and 5).[63] Both are made up of a white figure on a black ground; both asymmetrical and non-referential. *Untitled* can only be described as a "shape"—somewhat like a punctuation mark. In three places the figure comes close to the edge of the canvas; it sits centrally in terms of overall weight. *Number 3* is an upside-down "U" shape, whose "legs" are of different widths and lengths, creating a sense of depth against the flat application of the paint. The "U" figure is centred in the canvas more evenly than the more idiosyncratic figure in *Untitled*, because it is compact and itself internally balanced. There are differences between these paintings and Newman's—size, colour, and paint application—but it is important that Judd did not reject Newman's metaphysics. "The openness of Newman's work," Judd wrote:

> is concomitant with chance and one person's knowledge; the work doesn't suggest a great scheme of knowledge; it doesn't claim more than anyone can know; it doesn't imply a social order. Newman is asserting his concerns and knowledge.[64]

In the first instance, while it is clearly important that Newman's work is large (he even notes the dimensions of *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*), Judd points out that scale is not the same as size.

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[62] Judd reviewed the exhibition for *Arts Magazine*, and called Newman's painting *Shining Forth (To George)* "great." *Complete Writings*, 121. He goes into great detail about this painting in the subsequent article, mentioning that it was shown earlier that year.
[63] The exhibition catalogue lists the date of the second painting incorrectly, as 1957.
[64] Judd, *Complete Writings*, 202.

Scale is a quality of a work that has to do with creating an expansive interior space.[65] With Newman's work, scale is suggested by the singleness of the stripe and its relationship to the background and edges of the painting. Judd calls it—in his characteristic terseness—the "assertion of the stripe and the two areas."[66] Thus, while Stout's paintings are small, the simplicity of their composition, and the dynamic way that the interior figure relates to the background makes them seem big.[67] Kaprow wrote about *Untitled (Number 3)*, 1956 in "Impurity," that: "The whole reverses just as slowly into its negative state, its white now a yawning opening beyond a totemic finger of black erected in its midst."[68] This aspect of his work makes it function less like a conventional figure-ground painting, and more like Judd's term, "area."

There are big differences, of course, between Newman's and Stout's work, like the fact that Newman's lines bisect the canvas—touch, or run off the top and bottom—where Stout's figures sit in a cushion of background, never touching or going over an edge (for Newman see fig. 64).[69] In Judd's analysis this matters, since "Ordinary abstract painting and expressionistic painting are bound in the rectangle by their composition. Their space and color are recessed by a residual naturalism."[70] Newman also retains some brushwork in his paintings, often in or around the stripes, and in the ground, which in some case creates a

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[65] "It's important that Newman's paintings are large, but it's even more important that they are large scaled. His first painting with a stripe, a small one, is large scaled." Judd, *Complete Writings*, 201. The two Newman paintings in *Black and White* were *Shining Forth* and *Onement IV*, 1949. It is probable that Judd is referring to *Onement I*, 1948 (fig. 64) which is, at 27 x 16 inches, almost the exact size of Stout's paintings. Even though Newman had used stripes in his paintings before, "*Onement I* is the painting Newman later proclaimed as his personal artistic breakthrough . . . It marked Newman's decisive move from what he called 'pictures' to 'paintings.'" "Catalogue," in Temkin, *Newman*, 158.
[66] Judd, *Complete Writings*, 201.
[67] I had this experience seeing a Stout painting in a room with several larger works, by Pollock, Joan Mitchell and Raymond Parker at the Washburn Gallery in April 2002. Despite the fact that the Stout painting was smaller, less colourful and had apparently less "going on" in it, it had an intensity that made it equal to the other works in the room. I believe this has something to do with scale in the sense that Judd means it.
[68] Kaprow, *Essays*, 37. The argument can be made more strongly with paintings like *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)*, 1955-1980 and *Aegis*, 1955-, which have even simpler figures set in black grounds. They were begun in the same time period as *Untitled (No. 3)*, but completed (if ever) years after Kaprow and Judd were writing. Kaprow is astute in his formal analysis and I don't doubt his judgment, but I wonder whether he made the point about reversibility with one of these other paintings in mind.
[69] Even in Stout's most "Newman-esque" work, there is a central figure. See Chapter 2, 66.
[70] Judd, *Complete Writings*, 202.

sense of depth.[71] Stout, by contrast, leaves minimal evidence of brushwork; depth is "represented" as a consequence of the figure and ground rather than "expressed" through the illusion of paint. And yet, these differences may mean less than the way each signifies an opposition to a "classically" ordered sense of space. In both cases, a comparison to Mondrian helps clarify the shift. For Judd, Newman's "wholeness" is the fact that his works are each "specific" and do not imply a continuum with other works or other forms of knowledge. "This wholeness is also new and important. It is why the stripes and edges don't correspond."[72] With Mondrian, on the other hand, Judd writes: "The lines are dominant and the white is secondary, volume and space once removed. . . . Mondrian's fixed Platonic order is no longer credible."[73] In other words, the ordered and rational space in Mondrian's paintings relate to a world-view that no longer makes any sense. Nonetheless, in these terms, Stout's work is *different* from Mondrian. As Judd valued in Newman, each one of Stout's works has its own order, a result of the balancing of the individual shape in its background space. Kaprow differentiated between Stout and Mondrian in terms quite similar to Judd's: "Mondrian has answers, difficult as they may be, whereas Stout poses questions."[74]

The appearance of Tony Smith's *Die* on the cover of *Art News* in December 1966 provoked Stout to consider Minimal art directly in his journal. In this section—only several pages before its end—Stout deliberately "misreads" Minimalism, saying it has a "dual source," both aesthetic and anti-aesthetic. He resists using the term, calling it "Basic Structures" and "Primary Forms" and asks whether works such as Smith's have a fundamental religious

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[71] This is so in *Onement I*, where the thinly applied background colour contrasts with the thicker cadmium red laid down with a palette knife.
[72] Judd, *Complete Writings*, 202.
[73] Ibid., 202.
[74] Kaprow, *Essays*, 37. Written a year prior to Judd's, Kaprow writes in remarkably similar term but to this reader performs a more masterful and cogent analysis of formal and cultural issues. For example, "Newman's paintings, unlike Mondrian's do not require us to perform continuously the mechanics of counterpoise to grasp the meaning of his work. *Vir Heroicus* strikes us as a whole, rather than a part-to-part-to-whole, conception." *Essays*, 43-44. The difference between the two essays, however, is important. Kaprow's reads academically, whereas Judd's has the urgency of a call-to-arms.

character.[75] With Flavin, another now canonical Minimalist, Stout read him through more general abstraction. To Maartens in 1977 he said:

> Flavin is working with very intense sensation—actually the sensation of light is so intense that you can hardly class him as a minimalist. There's a richness that he handles with classical simplicity. It's fully expressive with as little as possible.[76]

This approach of course is wholly incompatible with a narrow Minimalism. But it accords with a more "inclusive" one, which sees different precedents, proponents, and interpretations of works in those years.[77]

As we see, in many cases Stout admired artists whose work was Minimal, but he had philosophical differences with the "anti-aesthetic." He explained it as a fundamental difference of approach:

> . . . the [anti-aesthetic] artist tried to get outside of himself, as it were, before he created, rather than going beyond himself to find himself.[78]

It is clear that Stout would put his own practice on the "aesthetic" side of things. Nonetheless, he did not reject Minimalism, writing instead that the anti-aesthetic was "at least as positive—searching, finding, proclaiming—as it is negative—denying the usual Artist-as-Hero-Creator aesthetic."[79] He also recognised it as an historical gesture:

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[75] These terms refer to the exhibition *Primary Structures* (Jewish Museum, 1966), referred to explicitly in the article.
[76] As quoted in Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 50.
[77] Chave identifies *Die* as an important early manifestation of what would become Minimalism; according to her biographical approach, Smith is an important if under-noted figure because he taught at Hunter College along with Eugene Goosen, Reinhardt, and later, Krauss, Morris, Maurice Berger and Phyllis Tuchman. "Minimalism and Biography," notes 4 and 51, 160 and162.
[78] MS Journal-1, 132 (5 December 1966). He stopped writing between January 1965 and April 1966, which is a significant time vis-à-vis Minimalism. On 26 April 1966 he refers to "all this time that, for the last three years, I've been 'down'—physically depleted—I have been, temperamentally or psychologically 'asleep." 130.
[79] MS Journal-1, 132 (5 December 1966). Along with Smith, he mentions Michael Steiner and Robert Morris.

> As in most avant garde psychology there is a denial of previous (especially immediately prior) aesthetic aims. . . . I think it a wholly natural development and a sound one.[80]

And yet, from his vantage at the very end of 1966, Stout was not yet convinced, and it seems remarkable that neither Judd nor Stella appear in his journals at all. At that time Stout wrote:

> . . . so far, there seems to be no individual in the movement of a stature and force to give it a strong enough and clarifying enough expression and direction. (As, for example, there were three or four very powerful figures in Ab. Ex. [sic.] who clarified and defined the movement.)[81]

When Judd does appear, later, during the Maartens interviews 1978, Stout is more emphatic about Minimalism's failures. Speaking about its "intellectualism," he says:

> Maybe this is the theoretical aim of minimalism. But when it goes to the point where it loses the essential aesthetic validity—reducing experience rather than plumbing the full depths of experience—then it's not worth it.
>
> [. . .]
>
> The whole business of the minimalist movement through the sixties and on, the effort has been to reduce the emotion, to reduce the feeling, and to push the intellectual as far as possible. Where some of them achieve something with that, then it is certainly to their credit. But it points up that your strength can also be your weakness.[82]

Nonetheless, while Stout calls Judd "intellectual," he also considers him a good artist. He writes, with perhaps a Judd-ian irony: "Donald Judd remains unemotional with a real passion."[83]

It is compelling to wonder what Stout's place in the current, wider view of Minimalism would have been if he had gone through with his 1962 exhibition. Would it have made an

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[80] Ibid., 133.
[81] Ibid., 133-4.
[82] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 49-50, 51.
[83] Ibid., 50.

impact of some sort, and changed subsequent readings of his work such that he would have appeared in the recent, more inclusive studies? One even wants to entertain the thought that Judd would have reviewed this show. What would he have said? From a perspective of Stout's output, one wonders whether, if the show had taken place and a number of the paintings had sold, might Stout have started some new ones? What in that case might have come after? What impact would Minimalism thus had on Stout's work?

There are two tentative proposals for that 1962 exhibition. The first is outlined in a long letter Stout wrote to Bellamy in March 1961. The letter first inventories finished work in the studio and storage, and describes works recently begun (all charcoal drawings). Stout proposed that the show be made up entirely of drawings, about twenty to twenty-five of them. He had several arguments in favour of this scenario: first, that the drawings were equal in substance to paintings, that they had been received well before, and they represented an aspect of his work that hadn't been shown before. Moreover, he emphasised their intimacy. To a large degree, Stout argued that there was enough variety in them to hold an entire exhibition:

> In spite of the single medium, the single style, the exactly similar format of each to the other, I believe that a whole show of them will reveal a great variety of expressive aspects. I can show myself so to speak, in the drawings, to an even more complete degree than in the paintings.[84]

The other thing Stout suggested indicates he was thinking in terms of the works' installation. He proposed that, even at his expense, the gallery could be divided into smaller spaces, so that the drawings could be grouped and looked at more closely, rather than having to be hung sequentially on the "flat continuity of the wall space" in the relatively large gallery.[85] It is interesting to think about these proposals in terms of the type of show taking place in the

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[84] Stout Letter to Bellamy, 10. MoMA-RB.
[85] Ibid., 12.

gallery at that time—from Oldenburg's *Store* to shows by Flavin, Judd and Robert Morris (see figs. 56-62). On the one hand, Stout was not thinking of works experienced *in space* as were the Minimalists; Stout's drawings were to be looked at one by one. On the other, he was thinking of the whole show as a unified experience, or something stage managed—which is characteristic of early 60s work across different styles and movements (see Oldenburg, and Kaprow too—fig. 63).

The second document—undated but certainly later—outlines how many works (paintings, charcoals and drawings) would be included, which paintings, and to whom the gallery hoped to sell the works.[86] It is clear that in the time between these documents the plans for the show became more conventional; it included a range of Stout's work over different mediums rather than just drawings. Perhaps more interesting about the second document is that it lists which paintings and charcoals were considered. The list itself then indicates a possible reason for the show's cancellation—that Stout had not, indeed could not, finish the paintings. Of the eight paintings listed, four (*Hierophant, Aegis, Leto II, Untitled (Wind Borne Egg),* and *Apollo*) were unfinished at his death.[87] Two (*Demeter*, and *Untitled*) he did not finish until 1968.[88] The final one, an untitled work, he finished in 1970.[89]

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[86] MoMA-RB, untitled file. On two sides of a sheet of Green Gallery letterhead, in Stout's and Bellamy's handwriting. On one side is a mock-up of a card that gives the show's title (Myron Stout: Paintings Drawings) and date (April 10-May , 1962 [sic.]); and above a (blank) list of eight paintings, eight charcoals, and six conté pencils. On the other side are sketches by Stout of the eight paintings and four of the charcoals, with sizes noted and potential collectors below each of the paintings. I have been able to identify all of these. In Stout's handwriting is a list of all of his works already in private collections, and in someone else's handwriting below (possibly written in preparation for the Whitney exhibition), more Stout works in private and public collections.
[87] This situation of the "unfinished" paintings was taken up in the 1997 exhibition, *Myron Stout: The Unfinished Paintings* (New York: Joan T. Washburn). I'll deal more extensively with this is Chapter 5. In short: *Aegis* and *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)* were repainted in advance of the 1980 show, and now two versions of each work exist.
[88] The fact that Stout had trouble finishing would preoccupy the critic who reviewed the Corcoran Biennial. Uncharacteristically, Stout wrote a letter of protest to the magazine, correcting her. See Appendix 4 for a copy of the letter.
[89] I cannot identify this painting, but it was described by Vito Acconci in a review of a group show at Goldowsky in 1970: a "white shape on a black field is a kind of keyhole whose bottom is out of kilter . . . " V[ito] H. A[cconci], "Reviews and Previews: John Chamberlain, Burgoyne Diller, Mark di Suvero, Myron Stout," *Art News* 68, no. 9 (January 1970): 12.

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Far beyond the physical and aesthetic differences between Stout's work and Minimalism, the legacy of this decade's battles is a philosophical sea-change that problematise claims that art could be a representation of "experience," or that it belongs to an autonomous history explained by formal lineages and aesthetic interpretations. The "problem" of countering Stout's practice with a contemporary account of Minimalism is the compelling idea—now associated with poststructuralism—that language and perception are culturally determined. Poststructuralism has indirectly—if intentionally—laid low many of the concepts that Stout found compelling—like fixing basic, generalised ideas about visual perception and working through intuition rather than intellect. The very notion of believing in fundamental units of knowledge and communication can now be bracketed, philosophically, within Western (male, educated) elite and capitalist aims.[90] Moreover, the human capacity for understanding, even action, suddenly stands in a more precarious, contextual situation than before.

For Foster, the importance of Judd's practice is that he performed a structural-historical reading of art, along the lines of if not directly connected to other "radical" readings of history in the 1960s.[91] Judd's critical writings disconnected his practice from ways of working that were outmoded, and thus created a new space in which to work. The importance, in this regard, of rejecting geometric painting and claiming for himself a broader

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[90] This is Chave's approach in her first essay on Minimalism, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990): 44-63.

[91] Again, the comparison is implicit. Hal Foster writes: "For Althusser this is the scientific Marx of an epistemological rupture that changed politics and philosophy forever, not the ideological Marx hung up on humanist problems such as alienation. For his part, in the early 1950s, after years of therapeutic adaptations of psychoanalysis, Lacan performs a linguistic reading of Freud. For Lacan this is the radical Freud who reveals our decentered relation to the language of our unconscious, not the humanist Freud of the ego psychologies dominant at the time." *Return of the Real*, 2. He disposes of "humanism" in favour of a structural, scientific, historical version of these separate disciplines (political ideology and psychoanalysis), evacuating their use-factor along the way. This is where Foster's vaunting of Judd rings hollow—it claims too much for him, too much critical and historical insight, too singular a reading of Judd's practice as a critic and an artist.

and more varied set of precursors, was "to turn the very limitations of these models into a critical consciousness of history."[92] In other words, in rejecting a linear-stylistic model of influence and calling upon non-formal relations between artists and works, Judd re-wrote history for the needs of the mid-1960s.

For many critics like Foster, the 60s needed historicity.[93] In this scenario, abstract painting's subject matter ("metaphysics," as it was being defined in 1950s American painting) gets deconstructed by a new "political" agenda which finds it falsely conceived. As we have seen, critics like Rosenberg actively adopt a Marxist methodology (which he used explicitly in his 1962 article on Hofmann); younger ones like Kozloff approached Abstract Expressionism's claims for itself as ideology, and refused "formalism" as a normative approach to addressing what art had. And yet, it is clear that in the service of these bigger arguments, certain simplifications were made, and differences between practices made to seem incompatible rather than continuous. It bears note that the primary documents (for example both "Local History" and "Specific Objects") are dependent on a broad field of artistic practice, but the histories that result from the ideological readings downplay this. In Hal Foster's narrative, to take an extreme example, Judd's work is *unconnected* with what it rejects. Abstract Expressionism, geometric painting, and Pop are excised from its context and Judd's work is given a different pedigree, based on:

> defin[ing] the institution of art in an epistemological inquiry into its aesthetic categories and/or to destroy it in an anarchistic attack on its formal conventions, as did dada, or to transform it according to the materialist practices of a revolutionary society, as did Russian constructivism—in any case to reposition art in relation not only to mundane space-time but to social practice.[94]

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[92] H. Foster, *Return of the Real*, 3.
[93] Jameson remarks that the re-emergence of Marxist discourse was "a contemporary political replay of the seventeenth-century *Querelle des anciens et des modernes*, in which, for the first time, aesthetics came face to face with the dilemmas of historicity." "Reflections in Conclusion," Aesthetics and Politics (London: New Left Books, 1977); here cited in "Aesthetics and Politics," Harris and Frascina, *Art in Modern Culture*, 64.
[94] H. Foster, *Return of the Real*, 4-5.

This formation, crucially, provides alternatives to formalism and its apparent autonomy and medium-specificity. What is ironic perhaps is that Foster's cites "social practice" as an aim, but this is *not* an argument for inclusiveness, nor for a reading of Minimalism that takes the diversity of practices as a starting point. Where Foster would claim "historicity"—that is, the *relevance* of his "meta-narrative" over the need for full representation as it were—it appears, rather, like another abstraction when primary documents are reexamined. By contrast, Chave's critiques of Minimalist "ideology," in her articles "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power" and "Minimalism and Biography," are indebted to historical detail. In the first one, she argued that a "political" reading of Minimalism is impossible in the face of Judd's "obdurate" formalism and the obvious reference in his work to corporate/industrial power. In this reading Judd's work is entirely conventional and aligned with institutional values.[95] In the second article, Chave attends to the social relations between artists, critics, gallerists, etc., in the formation of Minimalism's history. While her argument is ultimately feminist and aimed at recouping figures like Robert Morris' partner, the dancer Simone Forti, her essay suggests a compelling (if also controversial) reading of the discourse on Minimalism that clarifies its "winner take all" rhetoric, as well as its particular embrace of codes of masculinity in scale, material, emphasis on logic and "history," all means by which an artist like Stout becomes irrelevant. Echoing the approaches taken by Griselda Pollock and Ann Gibson, Chave writes:

> By particularizing, deidealizing, and complicating the construction of masculinity, we can move toward foiling the normativizing yardsticks against which those who are counted as "different" . . . are always implicitly measured and found to be stunted, peculiar, other. . . we can also

[95] She argues that the general public sees these power relations clearly, and rejects Judd on its basis, while the art-critical establishment is blinded toward them, so enamored they are of Judd's use for art-critical arguments. Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 52. Strickland echoes Chave's take, saying that Judd et al. were not "radical," but the "academic" moment of Minimalism. *Minimalism: Origins*.

> move, importantly, toward defeminizing and so upwardly revaluing those realms of experience . . .[96]

Like Gibson did for Abstract Expressionism, Chave presents an opening for Stout's work to be reevaluated as not "lacking" for its differences from canonical Minimalism. In this case, the size of his works, and their apparent conventionality (in Minimalism's terms—they are "old painting") could be read as less important than earlier critics have made them out to be.[97]

Stout's perspective on what was crucial in artistic practice in the 1960s is notably not based on style, nor is it historical-teleological. Difficult as it is to pin Stout down on the "content" his work, there is ample evidence that it was of major importance that his work be "specific" (to put it in Judd's terms), although Stout's specificity came with his insistence on an authentic, singular experience.[98] Over and over in his journals he tries to explain the importance of "first-hand experience." Crucially, however, this was put in terms of *individual* expression. For Stout, neither style nor form signifies the criteria for important art. The question is how well the work:

> carr[ies] the message of something humanly felt, and felt about <u>human experience</u>, and felt with, you might say, an esthetic poignance . . . a keenness, an intensity of "point"; . .

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[96] Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," 159.

[97] Ibid., 153. Chave identifies Krauss as having a "hand" in this. In an early canon-making article that which deals extensively with Morris's work, Chave tells us that: "[Krauss] advanced the importance of a 'model of meaning . . . severed from the legitimizing claims of a private self.'" (Krauss, "Sense and Sensibility: Reflections on Post '60s Sculpture," *Artforum* 12, no. 3 (November 1973): 48.) Chave establishes that in 1973 Krauss and Morris were romantically involved; Chave suggests along psychoanalytic lines that Krauss's interest in art that suppressed personal or contextual meanings—in other words, an abstraction that makes art historical—is a compensation for her over-identification with her subject.

[98] Judd complained about the rush to name and define things in his 1964 round-up; Stout made the same point in relation to "purism," "Neo-Plasticism," and "Hard Edge" in 1961, but also places blame on the artists not knowing their practice: "I think the uncertainty of terminology is quite reflective of the uncertainty of the critics and art public as to the essential quality and aims of the art and artists, and also of a certain vagueness in many of the artists themselves. Their art has, finally, too often, an indeterminate quality. One feels they go for an abstract idea of Purity without ever determining what Purity is, in the human experience, expressive <u>of</u>." MS Journal-1, 520 (15 April 1961). A month later, he touched upon the issue again, calling the work of some Neo-Plasticist painters "arid abstractions—signs rather than expressive symbols, pointing not even to what they have come to feel through experience—their own experience, that is—but toward the paintings of Mondrian, toward the-already-achieved expression of what someone else has felt, and in another time, under other circumstances. What we get from them, then, is second-hard experience." MS Journal-1, 539 (18 May 1961).

> . It is not enough that a painting induces us to recall certain sensations . . . felt in the middle of experience; it must take us in with it to the heart and core of experience.[99]

Stout was not alone is seeing the differences between his own work and Minimalism in terms of the anti-aesthetic, of course. What may be interesting is the degree to which Stout's thinking is reflected in another key document of Minimalism—Michael Fried's 1967 critique, "Art and Objecthood."[100] Although Stout is not mentioned in this text, Fried's analysis clarifies what in modernist painting was so objectionable to Minimalism. Where Stout's work produced the "whole" and "unified" experience Judd was interested in, the experience was an illusion because it occurred in a painting. It was a *representation* of an experience rather than a "real" one. The difference, of course, between objects (Minimalist sculpture) and painting is that in painting the space is *pictorial*, and therefore ideal. For Fried—and, I would argue, for Stout—reducing "art" to an opposition between reality and pictorial convention is to miss the point about what art could actually do.

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[99] MS Journal-1, 538 (18 May 1961).
[100] Cited here in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148-172.

Chapter 5:

"Art Historical Time," Lived Time, and Not Finishing

Tiredness, not necessarily real, "active" sleepiness, but a stupored kind of drowsiness . . . all these would encourage my sinking into this state [of somnambulance].

It was a way of alienating myself from myself. It must have been what brought about my constant use of spy and detective novels, for reading them is, rather ritualistically, to dream.

It has been somehow necessary apparently in the state I was in, to absent myself thus from myself. . . .

In these somewhat dream like states, however, I believe this problem somewhat eased for me. I concentrated the focus; but to such an extent that I couldn't get out of that focus and to another.

—Myron Stout[1]

The photograph—in black and white of course—shows a carpeted room. Two small sofas (modern, dark cloth with chrome bases) are facing each other across a low glass table. In the middle of the table is a simple but elegant arrangement of white tulips. They look to be potted, still growing. The paintings and drawings arranged on the walls are small, and spaced out in a deliberate rhythm. Some are to be seen alone, some in pairs, some in close relation. Larger works punctuate smaller ones. It is quiet and there is space. It is a *hanging*, a very sensitive and well-considered picture gallery, an exemplar of late modernist exhibition

[1] MS Journal-1, 131 (26 April 1966).

practice. No clutter, nothing to distract you from the experience of standing and looking at paintings and drawings (fig. 65).

Maybe it is the walls that give it away, thick like an orange peel, layers of flat white paint built up from countless repaintings. The location of this show comes rushing in as a fact: the Whitney. But where is the unmistakable cast concrete ceiling that identifies every installation photo from the Whitney's Marcel Breuer building, such that you know where you are before you read the caption? Where is the room that Stout's show took place in?

What I am describing is an installation photograph from Stout's 1980 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The show is a remarkable anachronism. A full twenty years after the revolutions in exhibition practices brought about by "installation art," Stout's exhibition stands as if none of it had ever happened. I'll introduce another photograph, dated 1969 (fig. 66). This one has the trademark ceilings, and they are higher, you notice—the room to the scale of a warehouse rather than a gallery. The floor is stone, the walls more obviously temporary, put up for this show. In the foreground, parallel rows of cast metal are on the floor, flakes and dribbles of it left around the work and in the corner as if the artist had just made it. Other works lean or sit against the wall, but nothing is hung there explicitly. The wall is just another space; the floor seems of higher value in this scenario. Things are still arranged, and each object has its own space. Nonetheless, a fundamentally different order is at work here than in Stout's room. Art objects occupy volumetric rather than linear space. They are tactile and index bodies rather than—according the way Stout's work is hung at head height and its scale—being visual and related to the face and eyes. Another difference: the 1969 space itself signifies the artist's studio rather than the domestic setting of showing that is referenced by the Stout installation. It is a place of work rather than leisure. Of effort rather than contemplation.

The second photograph is of the Whitney's exhibition, *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, and the works installed in this room are Richard Serra, Eva Hesse,

Carl Andre, Robert Loeb, Rafael Ferrer, and Keith Sonnier. Where Stout's show sits in some unspecified time, this is a show that marks a period. When it occurred, it brought together artists using materials in a different way, and whose work was moreover aspiring to question the space of the museum itself. For many critics the show marks an important point on a trajectory away from the specialised categories and viewing spaces of modernism, and toward the "post-medium condition."[2] According to such an art-historical account, this kind of work depends, in fact, upon the "move" made by Minimalism for art to be something *not* painting and *not* sculpture. It signifies, moreover—by contrast with modernism's "timelessness"—an art that occupies "real" time and space. Crimp writes:

> The idealism of modernist art, in which the art object *in and of itself* was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning, determined the object's placelessness, its belonging in no particular place, a no-place that was the reality of the museum—the actual museum and the museum as a representation of the institutional system of circulation that also comprises the artist's studio, the commercial gallery, the collector's home, the sculpture garden, the public plaza, the corporate headquarters lobby, the bank vault. . . . Site specificity opposed that idealism—and unveiled the material system it obscured—by its refusal of circulatory mobility, its belongingness to a *specific* site.[3]

Stout's show at the Whitney demonstrates what Crimp calls the no-place of the museum. It could be anywhere. It is a space idealised in museums around the world, in fact. A show like Stout's Whitney retrospective could take place again, in any number of places. However, Crimp's opposition between modernist idealism and site-specificity is itself anachronistic to the degree that he depends on a fixed reading of the latter practice. By the time Crimp was writing, site specific art, not to mention Minimalism, had taken their place as "museum art," circulated and institutionalised in the very system he identifies for its system of power. Their

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[2] See Rosalind Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000). I looked at this exhibition in my M.A. thesis, "'Producing Works or Just imagining Them': *When Attitudes Become Form* and the History of Conceptual Art" (University of Texas at Austin, 1998). In this context, there are interesting ways in which "process" (the not finishing in Serra's or Hesse's work especially) could be related to Stout's.

[3] Crimp, *On The Museum's Ruins*, 17. The italics and ellipses are original to the text.

oppositions and unveilings, it seems, belong not to the work itself but to a particular historical moment. To follow this argument to its conclusion, modernist painting, therefore, is not *in itself* idealist, ahistorical or transhistorical, any more that Minimalism is.

Nonetheless, there is a logic to modernist art that aspires to something other than "real time" (by this is suggested *political* or *historical* time). The fact that Stout's 1980 show looks as if 1969 had never happened is what I wish to address in this chapter. Against a reading of modernism like Crimp's, I suggest a difference between being *ahistorical* and *non-historical.* Following Elkins again, one could proceed by being momentarily but judiciously "disaligned from historical narratives."[4] There are compelling reasons to think about Stout in a time-less way, that is, outside of the art historical periods that seem to have trouble with his timing and/or ideological position. As we know, Stout himself created distance. He moved away from New York, and moreover he made time—or physical absence—a mode of working, which of course is exactly the convergence of identity and artistic practice that make individuals problematic for history.

This issue has arisen for commentators and supporters of Stout's work before. When it seemed difficult to place it in terms of the main line of postwar art history, a few tried to configure him as a "visionary."[5] In the catalogue essay for the first of these exhibitions, *"I Knew It To Be So!" Forrest Bess, Alfred Jensen, Myron Stout: Theory and the Visionary*, poet John Yau wrote:

> It is unfortunate the term "visionary" has been invoked so often. It should be reserved for the handful of solitary sojourners who have been both blessed and cursed with believing in the sanctity of the world. . . . Once they establish links between the microcosm and the macrocosm, they shed the strictures of temporal time and recover the eternal—the timeless void from which the world sprang and to which it will return. . . .

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[4] James Elkins, review of David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003), *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 2 (June 2004): 376.

[5] It was there in Sandler's characterisation of Stout as not being from New York. See Chapter 2, note 65. The two shows are: Lawrence Luhring and David Reed, exh. cat., *'I Knew it To Be So!' Forrest Bess, Alfred Jensen, Myron Stout: Theory and the Visionary* (New York: New York Studio School, 1984) and *In Pursuit of the Invisible* (Windsor, Conn.: Richmond Art Gallery, 1996). See Appendix 2 for full details.

> Born during the decade prior to World War I, [Bess, Jensen and Stout] are linked chronologically to the Abstract Expressionists. However what separates them from their generation and, indeed, each other is the solitary path they took in order to clarify their vision. Holding council with themselves, they joined no groups and spawned no imitators.[6]

To a degree this works. You get to abandon all the tricky junctures where Stout "fails" against art-critical discourse and address him on his own terms. You get to take his mad, eccentric and unreconstructed writings, and his paintings that are deeply concerned with "vision" and connecting to nature, and put him in a grand tradition of eccentrics, Romantics and transcendentalists seeking out ideological and geographical marginality. This is not, however, what interests me. It bears comparison that it has never been suggested that Pollock was anything but central to the New York art world, even though he lived on Long Island for the key years of Abstract Expressionism's critical embrace. Nor has any such argument been made for Judd, who left New York in the 1970s for a cow town in West Texas. Stout was not isolated, nor isolationist, unaffected, nor separate. Provincetown is not *nowhere*. One historian wrote recently that of all the East-Coast summer art colonies, it was the closest in spirit to Manhattan: "it had the narrow streets, cafés, the close social proximity of urban life."[7] Provincetown is itself an art institution, full of associations, galleries, workshops, and schools; Stout was a full participant there.

There are, however, different kinds of time worth exploring here. The first is what could be called "art historical time," and its logic is evident in the apparent timelessness of Stout's Whitney show. The second is lived time, and it can be developed by looking at the place Stout chose to live and work. Even though it took him fifty years to get there, it is where he stayed for the next thirty. The last is an issue of practice: how *not finishing* becomes an investment in process, and a connection to some place of infinite contingency.

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[6] John Yau, in Luhring and Reed, *"I Knew It!"* 5.
[7] April Kingsley, *The Turning Point: The Abstract Expressionists and the Transformation of American Art* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 196.

This is where, perhaps, an interpretation of Stout's painting can take place—in the act of making it rather than its reception in discourse.

Part 1

Stout's work was made to be seen in museums, made according to a high modernist attitude towards looking at art and understanding art's development over time. In this logic, the exhibition space is *not* a place of work or of life; it is *another place,* where real time and actual geographic space are collapsed into intellectual and bodily acts of perception and interpretation. In a sense this is a kind of timelessness, as it is both present moment, but one infinitely repeatable.[8] It was understood, nonetheless, that in this present one was connected to history, to all the other things that had been made or done before. André Malraux's idea of the *musée imaginaire* is important here. As someone who trucked in photographs, he observed that the reproduction of art objects in photography changed the terms of the debate about art history. There was no longer a mythical ideal, works of art now had to be judged against other works of art. A masterpiece had to prove its worth rather than lay claim *a priori* to history or aesthetic theory. Likewise, there was a democratising effect, a correction of histories limited to hearsay. The *musée imaginaire* let you rejudge the ground of discourse, and consider lesser known artists alongside known masters. It offered the potential for infinite access, making financial and geographical hurdles insignificant for gaining knowledge of works of art. Photography made this situation potentially limitless.

Classification, in fact, is necessary. Malraux writes:

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[8] Stout wrote: "...The timelessness of a work of art, its survivable quality through various human cultural transmogrifications depends on its quality of human expressiveness—of otherwise unformulated and possibly unconscious (or subconscious) evaluative impressions, outpourings of inner, basic states of being." MS Journal-2, 75 (7 October 1955).

> By presenting some two hundred works of sculpture, an album of Polynesian Art brings out the quality of some; the mere fact of grouping together many works of the same style creates its masterpieces and forces us to grasp its purport.[9]

Organising objects according to style lets you participate in a process of aesthetic judgment. *This* works better than *that*, *that* is more interesting than *this*. And collectively, all of these things tell you more than can be understood from the single example. The group, Malraux points out, challenges historical understanding, and it also changes what we value. The *musée imaginaire* presents information in depth and complexity, and shifts our conception of the history of objects and styles from something based in memory (and therefore untested) to something we can demonstrate, or point to. This has an important consequence:

> To the question "What is a Masterpiece?" neither museums nor reproductions give any definitive answer, but they raise the question clearly; and, provisionally, they define the masterpiece not so much by comparison with its rivals as with reference to the "family" to which it belongs.[10]

Malraux's conception of the *musée imaginaire* is, of course, "art historical." It is the logic in the contrast-and-compare student essay. It is also the logic behind a project like Seuphor's, to collect all examples of international abstraction. Seuphor's books aim at Malraux's goal—universal representation within a category—and he was relentless about it, publishing books like *Dictionnaire de l'art abstrait*, *Abstract Painting: Fifty Years of Accomplishment, from Kandinsky to the Present*, and the monumental and comprehensive study, *L'art Abstrait*, written with Michel Ragon and published in five volumes in 1974.[11] Given the rigour of this aspiration, Seuphor is surprisingly attentive to lived history. As Malraux suggested,

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[9] Malraux, *Voices of Silence*, 19.
[10] Ibid., 21.
[11] Only the English-language publication, *Abstract Painting* includes Stout—although only in the reproduction of an image (*Untitled (Number 3)*, 1956), not in the text. Both ellipses work fine in a Malrauxian sense. For a good account of the French context surrounding the publication of these books, see John-Franklin Koenig, "*Abstraction chaud* in Paris in the 50s," in Serge Guilbault, ed., *Reconstructing Modernism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 1-16.

classification is not about fixing meaning, but clarifying it. In the column of text adjacent to the illustration of Stout's painting in *Abstract Painting*, Seuphor makes a startling admission:

> Within the four sides of the picture frame, there is no such thing as excess, as I said before. And it is not my business to know what is going on in an artist's mind. All that matters is what he makes: his offering to the world. Whether I am capable of accepting his offering, of committing myself to it—this matters here. I must say I have been given great pleasure by recent works of Kline and de Kooning. However, my pleasure in their works has not made me incapable of experiencing an altogether different pleasure in the works of Soulages and Schneider, and still other delights in the presence of certain paintings by Vasarely, Mortensen, R.F. Thépot, and Glarner.[12]

As the Seuphor suggests, it is in the viewing of things that preconceptions are tested. But his ideological position is important and notably like Stout's: one group of artists, or a single style, does not have any claim over success in art.

Another important figure in this conception of "art historical time," but one who does not aim at inclusiveness nor comprehensiveness is Greenberg (one of his favourite conceits is to describe something he doesn't like as "backward art"—which exemplifies his use of time as a form of exclusion).[13] Time imbues most of his important statements on modernism. For example, in a passage from his 1947 article, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture," he summarises his ideas from the previous few years, and uses his compiled evidence to writes unreservedly for the first time about Pollock:

> Significantly and peculiarly, the most powerful painter in contemporary art in America and the only one who promises to be a major one is a Gothic, morbid and extreme disciple of Picasso's cubism and Miró's post-cubism, tinctured also with Kandinsky and Surrealist inspiration. His name is Jackson Pollock . . . Of no profound originality as a colorist, Pollock draws massively, laying on paint directly from the tube, and handles black, white and grey as they haven't been handled since Gris's middle period. No other abstract painter since cubism has been so well able to retain classical chiaroscuro.[14]

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[12] Seuphor, *Abstract Painting*, 192.
[13] See, for one example, "Review of Exhibitions of Mondrian, Kandinsky, and Pollock; of the Annual Exhibition of the American Abstract Artists; and of the Exhibition *European Artists in America*" (1945), CG2, 15.
[14] Greenberg, "The Present Prospects," CG2, 166.

In order to make the comparisons he does, Greenberg performs a kind of violence against chronological time, making in its destruction an art historical time where the normal lines of influence and effect do not follow geography or social experience. Time is stretched and compacted so that you get an American painter in New York in the 1940s "culminating" the achievements of several European artists working several decades before him. The battles, of course, are fictitious. But they are life or death. Moreover (like it was for Benjamin), this version of history is redemptive. "The avant-garde," Greenberg writes, "believes that history is creative, always evolving novelty out of itself. And where there is novelty there is hope."[15] This is, of course, exactly where Greenberg comes under sharpest attack for the "history" that he developed—critics later argued he used history to lay claim to objectivity and disinterestedness.[16] As we have seen, Greenberg is a figure against whom corrections were made toward "real time" (on different fronts: contemporary, political, and social). While Stout had certain arguments with Greenberg's writings, he shared with him this model of art historical time as an intersection of the historical and the aesthetic. For Stout, historical time was spatial, and like Greenberg's, it was flexible. In a short thought-piece entitled "The Tension of Time," Stout wrote:

> The long drawing out of the thread of life—or the music string—of an idea or form—a mode of feeling and seeing.
>
> Its course running through time, its substance vibrating in response to the various influences of the various positions along its course—an influence at a late position setting up renewed vibrations along its course backward in Time, which shows us how the past actually lives in the present.
>
> The necessity of conceiving Time as something other than chronological—a system for its conception other than perspectival. Is it continuous through ways other than through contingency?[17]

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[15] Greenberg, "Review of Exhibitions of Mondrian, Kandinsky, et al.," CG2, 15.
[16] For an overview see Sidney Tillim, "Criticism and Culture, or Greenberg's Doubt," *Art in America* 75, no. 5 (May 1987): 122-3.
[17] MS Journal-2, 18-19 (7 September 1952).

Stout wrote constantly about historical time in his journals, especially in the years 1950-1956, not coincidentally the years when he was most productive in his art practice. This statement, its main metaphor itself referring to Stout's long interest in music, relates time in a historical sense to present experience. Although not explicitly, he is thinking of painting, and how a chosen form can reverberate over time. This is essentially Bergsonian: taking on the implications of Einstein's special theory of relativity, Bergson developed the idea that time was something you lived through (*durée*) rather than something absolute, objective and quantifiable.[18] He argued that the spatial definition of time inherited from Aristotle and reorganised by Newton fails to capture the actual experience of it. Bergson orients us toward *human* time, which is against abstract, fixed or chronological time. As Stout suggests, perspectival space (rational and mathematic) is too fixed to explain the relationship between individual actors and historical time.

What is also compelling in this piece of writing is Stout's idea that something you do now could have an impact on the *past*. Metaphysics aside, this is akin to a painter like Chris Martin calling Stout a "secret hero." Stout was talking about painting, and he knew painting was nothing if not deeply influenced by the past. But new work, as an interpretation of past work, joins past work in this space-time, and can create a new field of interest around it. Philip Taaffe—who in many regards needs to be understood in terms of postmodernism—has himself worked "off of" Stout. In a 1996 interview, he said:

> When I started to make paintings, I thought about a kind of infinite scale, and looking at an American painter such as Myron Stout . . . in a sense I understood that I shared my sensibility with other artists and other locations. . . . I start to think about all the artists in the world making a geometrical painting, and all the geometrical paintings that have ever been made, it becomes a tribal art in a psychological sense.[19]

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[18] Henri Bergson, *Duration and Simultaneity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press,1999), v-vi. Original publication 1923. Pamela Lee writes about duration, but presents it as a 1960s concept, as if it was not an already extant mode of thought. *Chronophobia,* esp. 47-55.
[19] Interview, "Prinzhorn mit Taaffe."

Taaffe, likewise, is describing "art historical time"—all the geometric paintings that have ever been made all in one place (his mind, of course). This is a place you can be critical, too. Throughout his journal, Stout is equally dismissive of artists whose work he has seen, but this is what you do in your *musée imaginaire*. Formed in the experience of looking and constructed in his own studio, an artist imagines work he has yet to make against the great artists of his day.

Stout hoped for, and perhaps even expected, that his work would take its place on museum walls alongside work by artists he admired. (As we'll see a little later in relation to Stout's practice, the museum or gallery space was an important alternative to Stout's studio.) The space of the museum was then closely tied to Malraux's *musée imaginaire*—this place was not *ahistorical*, but represented a change having to do with access (that is, moving art out of private collections) and the material examination that could now take place in clear, light spaces (fig. 67). The "art historical" space of the museum does not present fixed and unchanging account of its objects. Quite the opposite, it is about demonstration. Malraux's logic is behind the retrospective exhibition of a single artist which lets you see an entire body of work in one place. It is also behind group exhibitions that focus on a particular theme. Seen from this perspective, shows like *Geometric Abstraction in America* and *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* are co-equal, whereas read "historically" they would be differentiated (the former based on style and resemblance over time and geography, the latter on a specific generation's attitude).[20] Both shows take a synchronic approach, and make it available. Here it is, to look at.

It is of course also the point that the first moment that the *musée* occurred for Stout in reality—in the late 1950s—he was dismayed. Actually seeing his work up in a gallery

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[20] Recall here how Fried called the 1964 show *The Classic Spirit* "ahistorical." Was it the act of classification, or the terminology? See Chapter 3, note 89 and Chapter 4, note 33.

next to a painting it resembled let him see differences. Here in the gallery, they weren't mediated by his imagination, by photography, or, more importantly, by historical categories. The complexity—as we see here—of art historical space is that it usually needs more information. Making aesthetic judgments through photographs, for one, suggests the limitations of the medium pf photography. How do you perceive scale in different pictures? How do you see touch?[21] By making the comparisons concrete, we are able to see the differences. This in fact is an argument that the museum can make against critical discourse. Mark Rosenthal, who curated the 1996 exhibition *Abstraction in the Twentieth Century: Total Risk, Freedom, Discipline* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, described several things that such a show can achieve:

> Scanning the museum's spiralling ramp, one could, from a single standpoint, take in Malevich's paintings and Richard Serra's sculptures, or works by Dan Flavin and Vladimir Tatlin—both pairs of artists were included in a single exhibition for the first time anywhere. Olga Rozanova's green stripe painting could finally be seen in proximity with Barnett Newman's *Zip*. Typical of the uniqueness of these juxtapositions was a comment made to me by both Ryman and Ellsworth Kelly—namely, that their work had never been shown together in an exhibition. These two contemporary abstractionists—long pigeonholed, respectively, as Minimalist and Color Fielder—had not been seen for their basic shared lineage and the ways in which they related to that background. The exhibition is the most effective medium to enable the discovery of such relationships—or differences—and this potential shapes its methodology.[22]

Such shows are critiqued along the lines of their categories, Rosenthal is making an argument about affinities that can be made inside "art historical" spaces. Through this he challenges linear streams of movement-categories dependent upon ruptures, such that Kelly and Ryman would never be seen together before in exhibition. His view of art history, it seems (like Goldstein's for Minimalism) is as a field with artists working within and around

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[21] Clifford shows the degree to which such judgments via photography are nonsensical with his devastating critique of the cover of the '*Primitivism,*' exhibition, which compares a Kwakiutl mask and Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror. Predicament of Culture*, 193-94.
[22] Rosenthal, "Telling Stories Museum Style," in Haxthausen, *Two Art Histories*, 76. The show did not include a Stout, although it might have since the Guggenheim owns several drawings.

certain issues. In theory, at least, the museum space lets you compare them, physically and provisionally.

The problem with Rosenthal's show is—of course—the same as with the comparison that opened the chapter, the discourse that brings the modernist museum space under scrutiny. Rosenthal's show, like Stout's, was an anachronism because it proffers a space that has already been ideologically disrupted. Daniel Buren literally and philosophically did so in the 1972 Guggenheim International, with his huge striped painting that filled the space inside the spiral—preventing the very style-based connections Rosenthal saw as his show's purpose. The question these "anachronisms" pose is whether this "art historical" space-time can exist (I see an Einsteinian juxtaposition of two paintings from parallel universes) or are museums wholly (merely) social constructions dominated by architecture, ideological interests, etc.?[23]

Part 2

Let's peruse some other photographs, of Stout in his home and studio in Provincetown (figs. 68-71).

The first one is dated 1969. Hand to his chin, a sixty year-old Stout is listening intently to a younger, bearded man. They're drinking tea. The room is spare but the details seem important. One chair holds a manual typewriter, another a single newspaper (is it the *New York Times*? Another one is just visible in the foreground, on the table between the two men). A sliver of a bookshelf is visible. The furniture matches, it's sturdy and not flashy. A few items stand out, like the piece of glassware and the single silver candlestick on a dark

[23] Foucault's work on the asylum, the Panopticon, and the clinic suggests that all social-architectural spaces are demonstrations of power-relations. Doesn't it however matter that art history has never consigned anyone to a frontal lobotomy ("dumb as a painter" jokes aside)? Along these lines, for a certain period, curators operating in this visual mode were consigned to being mere "arbiters of taste." See Deborah Meijers, "The Museum and the 'Ahistorical Exhibition'," in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1994), 7-19.

wooden sideboard. The next is a decade later, taken by a different photographer, and Stout is notably much older. He looks alert but deeper in himself. He sits less actively, settled immobile in a sofa. But in the studio, taken the same day, Stout appears more lively, hamming it up for the camera.

This is the space where Stout lived and worked—where he spent a long time. What did he find in Provincetown? What did he make of himself there? Maartens logs a description in her thesis: "As soon as one enters, one has a sense of Stout's complexity. Here lives a man poised between extreme civilization and material neglect."[24] This is in the summer of 1977. Maartens visited Stout seven times there, and spent hours discussing with him his work and his life. Stout's apartment in Provincetown was on the second storey of a boxy wooden building that housed (and still houses) artists, 4 Brewster Street.[25] You access the apartment by an outside set of wooden stairs and a deck that runs lengthwise across the front of the building (fig. 93). Stout actually had two adjoining flats, each 16 x 22 feet; he used one for living and one for his studio. Maartens describes them as mirror images, structurally, but they also mirrored each other in other ways. The studio was cluttered, a working space—foot-high stacks of newspapers, books and magazines, cardboard boxes, portfolios, easels and pegboards, paintings faced away, and drawings tacked to the walls—every surface was covered with something. Curiously for an artist whose work aimed at perfection, his studio was a mess. The living space, however, was immaculate and spare—books were in shelves, objects arranged with care, the kitchen and bathroom clean, the bed made (he had someone come in to do his cleaning).[26] There was always a well-stocked bar

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[24] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, xvii.
[25] It was built in 1923 by the Days family, who ran the nearby Days Lumberyard and rented studio space to artists. Supposedly built with unsaleable lumber, it was intended as low-rent studio space. Ben Brooks, exh. cat., *Days Lumberyard Studios: Provincetown 1914-1971* (Provincetown, Mass.: Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1978), 6. Stout never owned his space. It is now used by another artist.
[26] Jeanne Bultman, interview with author, New York, December 2000.

and an invitation to partake.[27] He was very sociable, but he wanted to live alone. (Before he got the apartment on Brewster Street there had been one terrible summer spent at Days Lumberyard, the set of studios occupied by many Hofmann students. Ben Brooks recalls:

> Myron Stout—remembering the lone toilet and the intense heat, the noise and the lack of both shower and bath, the hurricane that shook his walls and made the furniture dance and blew in doors and windows, his shoes mildewed in the extreme humidity, his friends who slept till noon on the floor in front of his easel, their dog chewing quietly on the corner of his portfolio—laughing, remembering the whole long summer, said, "It was just miserable. I would never do it again."[28])

Two sides: one was public order, the other a private and productive chaos. Curiously for someone who settled into one place for so long, he never owned it. This was, of course, very far from the life he came from—it was spare because he was poor; he was poor because he didn't work for money; he didn't work for money because he was an artist.

Maartens also provides us with a physical description and a character-sketch:

> Stout is about 5'7" and 135 lbs. He says he was stronger, about 145 lbs., in his army days. He was a tow-head child and his hair is still tonally yellow. His big, blue eyes twinkle and they are deep. He is erect, tactful, honest and fragile. His expression is at once discerning and aspiring. . . .
> His voice is soft, slow and melodic, perfect for listening. There is still a trace of the Texas drawl; mostly it is the rhythm that remains. He is a natural storyteller, with clear enunciation and thoughts, enriching intonation and the warm, glowing sound of patience and, somehow, quiet. The quality of his frequent laughter at "the human condition" shows Stout's wisdom and overview, penetration and strength.[29]

For her, Stout's biography—his personality, his physical type, and the decisions he made about where and how to live—indexes his work. They are co-equal. If we take it at face value, as a projection of what Stout wanted us to see, then the place and his self-presentation

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[27] Paul Bowen, interview with author, Provincetown, August 2001.
[28] Brooks, *Days Lumberyard*, 12.
[29] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, xviii. This passage is characteristic of her thesis overall, which is not historical-critical but presents Stout as he presented himself to her. Nevertheless, for this reason it is representative of Stout in a way unlike any other text about him.

is relevant to what he made as an artist. This, too, makes him of his generation—everything is of one piece.

The space that Stout made for himself, as I'm suggesting, is remarkable because it is domestic. He lived there at the same time as he used it for artistic pursuits. The missing part of the picture, the place implied I argue, is the museum or gallery where the works get cleaned up and sorted and properly framed, and shown in a space where it can be looked at closely and quietly, as it was in a one-person show at the Inverleith House in Edinburgh in 1998—the only time his work has been seen in the United Kingdom (fig. 72). Stout's situation seems importantly different to the place Judd made for himself in West Texas, where he in effect created his own museum (fig. 73 and 74). It's important, too, that Judd made an equivalence between living and working spaces—it was all the same. Art was installed in living spaces, and likewise domestic objects became as aesthetic as art. Judd, of course, was commercially more successful than Stout, and had the means to do such a project on a grand scale—but he was also driven to it by a desire to control the conditions in which his work was shown. Stout, too, thought about an idealised space for living, but it remained a fantasy. Back in the 1950s he thought about building a small house set in the dunes, even made a drawing for it (fig. 75). It was modernist in style, slightly Japanese in feeling, with lots of windows. But it was never built, Stout's energies expended elsewhere. It may be that he was not been able to get the money together for the house in Provincetown. Real estate was never cheap there. But it wasn't an entirely idle idea—with his sister Stout had designed and overseen the building of two ranch-style houses in Denton in the 1940s, and in the 1960s he and his nephew developed a large apartment building there in the 1960s (see Appendix 1, figs. 88 and 98).

This was his place, and what he surrounded himself with is more than just a collection of objects from his life, it is a construction of ideas and aspirations, his *musée*. There was—of course—a map of Greece. The heavy wool rug covering the sofa, he brought

back from Crete. The wall hanging was a Japanese obi, long and narrow and made of silk, alternating squares of soft grey, green, cream and white, hung vertically over the sofa. There was also a small painting by Jan Müller, entitled *St. George and the Dragon*, a version of Müller's monumental work on the same subject. Through all of Stout's deferrals with the general public and other systems of authority, this is the place where we are endlessly redirected. This is the place where he thought, where he lived, where he found himself able to be the artist that he wanted to be.[30] And yet, he was *so slow*. This is the place where the slowness happened. 4 Brewster Street, Provincetown was the place where he spent thirty years on twelve paintings.

Part 3

Art dealers all want the same combination. They want corpses because they're easy to handle and present no problems—living artists are problems—and they want great productivity. They want productive corpses.

—Lee Krasner[31]

"Myron and I were sitting in front of one of the large black-and-white paintings [*Untitled*, 1955-68, fig. 6], which he had started in 1955," the collector Charles Carpenter wrote about a visit to Stout's studio in the mid-60s. "It was a simple white V shape on a black ground. To me it looked finished and very beautiful, and I said as much to Myron.

"'No,' he replied. 'There is a bit more work to be done on it yet.' He got up, walked up to the painting, pointed to the bottom of the V shape, and said, 'The curve here is too flat.

[30] Alison Deming was one of the FAWC resident-poets that read to Stout after he went blind. She wrote the poem, "Staying Over Nature," that describes in detail what his place looked like and what he was like. Alison Hawthorne Deming, *Science and Other Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).
[31] Excerpt from B.H. Friedman's journal (17 December 1960), in Friedman, "Introduction" in Hobbs, *Krasner*, 18.

It should be rounder, fatter.' He made the curve with the sweep of his hand. I stared at the picture, and at the offending curve. . . . The next time I saw the picture, a year or so later, it looked a trifle different from what I had remembered. When I mentioned this to Stout, he answered, 'Oh yes, there have been several changes since you last saw it.'"[32]

"How long did it take to complete *Leto II*?" Maartens asked Stout that summer of 1977.

"I'm not through."

"How long have you been working on it?"

"Twelve years. I've over-worked it as far as the surface, the canvas and the paint is concerned. . . . I've ruined the paint film scraping and repainting and whatnot. It's got to where I can no longer produce and even paint film which will present the picture. I'll re-draw it and start again on another canvas."[33]

The last section here is about Stout's practice, and the particularly acute problem he had with finishing his paintings. To be sure, this is an analogue to being "underknown." As Krasner's wry comment suggests, the art market cannot deal with underproduction (normal collectors won't come back for a second visit and dealers don't really like cancelled shows). We can look at this issue as the exact site of negotiation between biography and history, in the parsing out of a life from the time during which it was lived. In recent years, the former has been given more credibility as a valid source of difference from previous concerns with structural or abstracted concepts of historical development. Historians, for example, argue now that putting an individual's life span in relation to historical change challenges the broad assumptions made about the impact of progress. Differentiating between biological stages and socially constructed ones, for example, clarifies the convergences and

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[32] Charles H. Carpenter, *The Odyssey of a Collector* (Pittsburgh: The Carnegie Museum of Art, 1996), 54.
[33] Maartens, *Myron Stout*, 76.

divergences between the two, and starts to explain the origin of issues like "belatedness" or artistic innovation. In a non-art historical context, Hareven used these terms to discuss what she calls "transitions": moments when individual and historical time either coincide or do not. The question she orients us toward is how the individual acts within socially constructed timetables. Is an act "normative" or "critical"?[34] In the same volume, Spivak develops the idea of "timing" as different from "Time," indexing the human and historical respectively. She writes: "It is my contention that Time often emerges as an implicit graph only miscaught by those immersed in the process of timing."[35] The goal here of course, is to find Stout's agency in the decisions he made that have put him out of synch with the art world and with art history. For the latter is constructed on what is visible to its own structure, timescale, and critical *apparati*.

Stout's case is very particular. It seems inevitable that not finishing—as the follow-up to being underknown and out of time—would become the subject of a show. After several exhibitions had been organised that presented Stout's career as coherent, substantive and complex, an exhibition is mounted in 1997 called *The Unfinished Paintings*. Writing in a pamphlet published for the show, Schwartz says that it "presents our first look at what it cost Stout to allow his every picture to become a battleground."[36]

The show is of course totally relevant to "art historical" space-time, but also very rarefied. It showed two versions of two of Stout's paintings—*Aegis* and *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)*—side by side (fig. 76). Stout, it turns out, remade paintings. Schwartz tells us that in preparation for the Whitney retrospective, four of the last black and white paintings (the two above plus *Hierophant* and possibly *Apollo*) were started over by transferring the shapes onto new canvases. Moreover, Stout himself did not paint them, as his eyesight was

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[34] Hareven, "Synchronising Individual Time, Family Time, and Historical Time," in Bender and Wellbery, *Chronotypes*, 171-72.
[35] Spivak, "Time and Timing: Law and History," in Bender and Wellbery, *Chronotypes*, 99.
[36] Schwartz, *Unfinished Paintings*, n.p.

so bad and his hand tremoured. This is, then, the ultimate comparison—the *same* work, but totally different. Different hands, different amounts of time, different time periods (different materials, by their nature?) I suspect the differences are in fact enormous.

Schwartz attributes Stout's inability to finish certain paintings with their symmetry, noting that the works that did get done in the mid-50s and late 1960s were all asymmetrical, and moreover, "lyrical and goofy." By contrast he notes the unfinished paintings are larger, symmetrical, and have "an almost forbidding monumentality."[37] This may be true, but it seems also that *not finishing* was there in Stout's practice from the very beginning, when it was a way of investing himself in the process. In 1953 he wrote:

> I feel all the time that my efforts are so dissipated that I can't bring an essay, I can't bring a painting to conclusion. I keep broadening, deepening, in such a way that I've come to feel I'm utterly inadequate, and time too short to ever achieve even the least satisfaction. All this would be encouraging for at least it should indicate that I stay more or less alive, except that the broadening, a progress, comes in such tiny stages. I learn and labor, and through my effort am able to leap from one clod to another. Is it possible to have the steadiness and patience it seems to require?
>
> I think that I approach painting as though it were some massive and unwielding weight that can never be lifted and tossed about at will, but must be moved by inching it a little from this side, then from that, just barely moved forward, and then often it seems not to budge one inch, but to remain [in] position, defiant and unconquered.[38]

This suggests moreover that slowness rather an effect of his method, which perhaps in itself indexes resistance to expectations as an appropriate mode of modernist art.

Stout shared his slowness with other painters formed in the same moment as he. In fact, then, slowness is a mark of Stout's generation (his chronological one, not his artistic one, but this is important). When he decided to become a painter in the late 1940s Stout was surrounded by late-bloomers. The generation of artists who were his models (and his

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[37] Ibid.
[38] MS Journal-1, 44-5 (31 May 1953).

chronological age)—Newman, Reinhardt, Pollock—most hit their stride in their forties.[39] Rothko, it was noted, spent more time looking at his paintings than applying paint to them. An assistant who worked with him in the 1950s remarked that he "would sit and look for long periods, sometimes for hours, sometimes for days, considering the next color, considering expanding an area."[40] When asked a question similar to the one Maartens asked Stout—how long it took to make a particular painting—Rothko responded with similar evasion: "I'm 57 years old, and it took all that time to paint this picture."[41]

In his very unorthodox art historical study based on statistical analysis of sales and exhibitions, *Painting Outside the Lines*, David Galenson posits an idea that provides a compelling context for the question of time in Stout's work. His thesis is that how an artist makes his or her work determines *when* they make their important innovations. Separating art practices into "experimental" and "conceptual" approaches, he shows how "experimental" artists tend to be slower, later, and more repetitive and "conceptual" artists more prolific, earlier and more diverse. His approach dovetails very neatly with the differences commonly understood between artists of the 1950s and 60s, and the long and numerous quotations he uses to defend this structure play that out. For example, Galenson quotes Motherwell and Rosenberg:

> One might say that the School of New York tries to find out what art is precisely through the process of making art. That is to say, one discovers, so to speak, rather than imposes a picture. What constitutes this discovery of one's own feeling, which none of us would dare to propose before the act of painting itself.[42]
>
> In Action painting the pressing issue for artists was: When is a painting finished? Answer: At exactly the end of an artist's lifetime.[43]

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[39] This would change radically, and influences the "problem" of Stout's timing. Most of Stout's social milieu found success younger.
[40] Quoted in James E.B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 317.
[41] Quoted in Breslin, *Rothko*, 326.
[42] Motherwell quoted in Terenzio, *Collected Writings*, 78.
[43] Harold Rosenberg, "Act and the Actor," (1970): 9, quoted in Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines*.

Galenson observes that "experimental" artists focus on visual and aesthetic considerations, and typically their work involves exploration, intuition, tentative and incremental developments of imprecise (but nonetheless ambitious) goals. "These artists repeat themselves, painting the same subject many times—sometimes even painting over a single work many times—but gradually changing its treatment in an experimental process of trial and error. . . . They often describe the production of a painting as a process of searching. Their innovations appear gradually over extended periods: they are rarely declared in any single work, but rather appear piecemeal in a large body of work."[44] Sol LeWitt is an example of a "conceptual" approach:

> There are several ways of constructing a work of art. One is by making decisions at each step, another is by inventing a system to make decisions.[45]

Conceptual innovators, Galenson argues, want to communicate ideas. Their goals are more precise, and can already be articulated before the work actually begins. It is more likely to be systematic. They will often set up a set of rules, and follow them to their conclusion in the work. "Conceptual innovations typically appear suddenly, as a new idea produces a result quite different not only from other artists' work but also from the artist's own previous work. One consequence of the suddenness of these innovations is that they are often embodied in individual breakthrough works. . . . Unlike experimental artists, whose inability to achieve their goals often ties them to a single problem for a whole career, the conceptual artist's ability to be satisfied that a problem has been solved can free him to pursue new goals."[46]

In answer to the question whether this is merely an aspect of *temperament* rather than generation, Galenson argues that these models are linked to motivations external to an

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[44] Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines*, 50.
[45] "Excerpts from a Correspondence, 1981-1983," in Adachiara Zevi, ed., *Sol LeWitt: Critical Texts* (Rome: I Libri di A.E.I.U.O, 1995), 106.
[46] Galenson, *Painting Outside the Lines*, 51.

artist, a set of conventions that defines and delimits "art" for a particular period of time. Indeed, his argument offers an explanation for the question of why Abstract Expressionist painters' careers typically started late—external rather than internal forces. The consensus of opinion collected in his quotations, being uttered by artists we generally think of in individual terms, is also striking:

> Newman: I am an intuitive painter, a direct painter. I have never worked from sketches, never planned a painting, never "thought out" a painting before.[47]
>
> Rothko: Ideas and plans that existed at the start were simply the doorway through which one left the world in which they occur. . . . Pictures must be miraculous . . . The picture must be . . . a revelation, an unexpected and unprecedented resolution of an eternally familiar need.[48]
>
> Rosenberg: Self-discovery has been the life principle of avant-garde art . . . and no project can, of course, be more time-consuming than self-discovery. Every step is bound to be tentative; indeed, it is hard to see how self-discovery can take less than the individual's entire lifetime. . . . for a coherent body of significant paintings to spring directly out of an artist's early thoughts, a new intellectual order had to be instituted in American art.[49]
>
> Newman: I think the idea of a "finished" picture is a fiction. I think a man spends his whole lifetime painting one picture.[50]
>
> Motherwell: I often paint in series, a dozen or more versions of the same thing at once—the same *theme* at once. . . . It's the long haul that counts, and in that sense, all of these pictures to me—everybody talks about them as individuals, and they *are* in one sense—they're all sentences, or paragraphs, or slices from a continuum that has gone on my whole life, and will till the day I die.[51]
>
> Rothko: If a thing is worth doing once, it is worth doing over and over again—exploring it, probing it.[52]

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[47] Quoted in Bois, *Painting as Model*, 190.
[48] Quoted in Shapiro and Shapiro, *Abstract Expressionism*, 397-398.
[49] Harold Rosenberg, *The De-Definition of Art: Action Art to Pop to Earthworks* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), 130-131.
[50] Quoted in Goodnough, "Artists' Sessions at Studio 35," 12.
[51] Motherwell in Terenzio, *Collected Writings*, 141, 228.
[52] Quoted in Breslin, *Rothko*, 526.

> Stella: We believe that we can find the end, and that a painting can be finished. The Abstract Expressionists always felt the painting's being finished was very problematical. We'd more readily say that our paintings were finished and say, well, it's either a failure or it's not, instead of saying, well, maybe it's not really finished.[53]
>
> Lichtenstein: Stylistically, my work is devoid of emotional content. And it's what I want. . . . I guess what it's [using Bed Day dots] saying is that we're living in an industrial-scientific age, and that art is heavily influenced by that. Abstract Expressionism was very human looking. My work is the opposite.[54]
>
> Stella: The painting never changes once I've started to paint on it. I work things out before-hand in the sketches.[55]
>
> Warhol: I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings for me.[56]

Galenson's model explains neatly the difference between *intention* and style or form that makes Stout's work difficult to categorise historically. For example, despite stylistic similarities between Stout's work and Kelly's, the younger artist is better characterised by Galenson's notion of the "conceptual." Kelly's forms often come from photographs, and he uses "chance;" moreover his output is very large by comparison. In the case of Stout's late 1970s "remakes" one would likewise imagine big differences in physical fact because of the conditions of their production. One "found" over time, the other "copied."[57] (This resonates with the argument made in Chapters 3 and 4).

Nonetheless, I would also suggest that every artist operates in both modes, at different times. This is the limit of Galenson's study: although he claims what interests him

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[53] Quoted in Battcock, *Minimal Art*, 161.
[54] Quoted in John Gruen, *The Artist Observed: 28 Interviews with Contemporary Artists* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 1991), 225.
[55] Quoted in Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 90.
[56] Quoted in Stephen Henry Madoff, ed., *Pop: A Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 104.
[57] Another difference that Galenson observes is that Abstract Expressionism was a solo activity, where in the 60s it became common to employ a lot of assistants.

is how value is attributed to an individual artist's work in terms of their age, the book asserts canons and periods as totalising. Statistical analysis is exactly the type of tool that fails to account for individuality, for change over time, not to mention the influence that dealers or critics or museums might have over an artist's success. Stout's first black and white paintings were "conceptual" in that they deviated radically from the previous mode he was working in, and they came very quickly. But the group of paintings he began a few years later—although similar in style—are "experimental" because, while he began with a particular form (coming most often from a sketch), the final painting needed to emerge out of a process of adjusting, looking, and living with it. In a sense, there is no finishing a work if you approach painting as a process of discovery. Each addition you make changes the ground and you start over again. The process is endless (and perhaps exclusive to the maker). Describing working on *Untitled (Wind Borne Egg)*, Stout wrote in his journal:

> In doing anything so simple as the "Egg" with the extreme simplicity of only black and white, there is a very delusive element. The single line, or contour of the egg shape leads to thinking of the shape as being constructed of all its parts in a simple manner. This is: the articulating parts (where it swells out to its widest toward the top, for instance) seems solely to constitute the shape in an additive, arithmetical way, so to speak. I say to myself: 'If I can just get it swollen out to the right point and to the right degree towards the top, the remainder of the articulating elements naturally follow and will, so to say, logically "fall into place" or "all add up." But this isn't what happens at all. Of the thousands of arcs of which the shape is formed, every one is determined by every other . . . [and] you have, already, not a simple sum of the parts, but a complexly achieved figure which is probably of astronomical proportions.[58]

Is this a complaint, or a wish-fulfilment? He wants it to fall into place but finds instead an infinitely contingent situation. The "wholeness" Stout wants is not Hegel's idea of *Gestalt*, which is merely the given form, but a found form based in Hofmann's idea of plasticity. Wholeness in a sense is already everywhere, but Stout is after form that resonates through time, that can thus only be *built* over a long time. And yet, there are contradictions still.

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[58] MS Journal-1, 619-20 (17 August 1963).

Stout wanted his works to have little or no trace of "touch" or "expression" left on their surface.[59] This is why he would describe a painting as "over-worked." He *wanted* them to have a finish, and to appear as if no work had been done.

In a sense, perhaps we should think of Stout's approach as fundamentally misguided, an adaptation of one technique into a context where it was always bound to fail. If you're interested in process, why not, for example, let the paint do what it does when you work for a long time on a single painting and build up? This is what the artists in the exhibition *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* tended to do: to let the form a work took be secondary to its materiality. Perhaps on some level, Stout knew this was the problem. His journal writings of the 1960s describe numerous problems: "troubles," such as impatience, inconsistency of inspiration and effort, being "scatter-brained," the paintings being stubborn and hard to get to. He notes a "dry spell" of five or six years from 1959 to 1964, as well as prior "hiatuses" between 1952 and 1954, and after 1957.[60] These seem to be linked to exhibitions, and also to external issues, like being part of a collective project (he recalled in 1964 that what had driven him in the mid-50s was the "adventure").[61] Perhaps these frustrated states can be linked exactly to the lows and highs of practice. 1954 was, of course, Stout's "conceptual" moment.

But then there are other explanations, too: in 1965 Stout got a new pair of glasses, and it seemed to change his emotional state. He wrote: "For a long time it's seemed to me as though I could only make beginnings... To what extent was this dependent on the inadequate glasses?"[62]

> In my neurotic condition I was unable for long—even years—to let my common sense register what it could have registered all the time. I had the

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[59] This was problematic given the length he would work on a painting. When a painting became too full of paint, he would trace the shape onto a new canvas and start working on it. The earlier painting would be thrown away. Rick Klauber and Kathryn (Ryn) Maartens, interview with author, New York, May 2002.
[60] Among other sections, MS Journal-1, 625 (28 March 1964).
[61] MS Journal-1 A (14 September 1964).
[62] MS Journal-1, 23, (18 February 1965).

> fear that I couldn't and never would be able to see properly and as I absolutely needed to finish those paintings. Finally I was released from all that—enough anyway to see what was happening when I looked very closely, measuring . . . [63]

This is astounding. Stuck in an unacknowledged panic about losing his vision, Stout makes his problems an issue of *painting*. And then, of course, this is exactly the intersection of biology and history that is most meaningful. His sublimations are what are interesting. His desire for finality becoming the weight that cannot be shifted; his suspicion of beginnings being easy the drive for never finishing. After the glasses change his relationship to his work, he readjusts his thinking, and finds a way of working again:

> There is a part of my process in painting and drawing that . . . seems irresolute, diddling. It's not even muddling (this implies a clearer purpose than this has). . . .
>
> It's a state that's almost somnolent. I'm a little bit removed—often deeply removed, possibly—from the alert time-and-place consciousness of where I am and what I'm doing—of purposefulness. . . .
>
> For *long*, I considered this a weakness—and something to be overcome—but my efforts to overcome it were useless. Then I decided it was a result of a physical state—weariness—or that physical and psychic lethargy that I have from arthritis, and this certainly tends to induce it, I'm convinced. I could work this way when I feel too second-rate to do most anything else and sit and read . . .
>
> Finally, I believe I have discovered that it is a very essential state in the whole creative process. As I get my feelings and "ideas" about what I'm doing muddled and unclear, I seem to resort to it—or to wait for such a state. I believe I don't really feel that ... the painting or drawing *is mine* until I've gotten muddled, then fiddled and diddled over it for long in this state; and then when I can approach the work again with the fresh, alert, comprehensive vision that seems most productive to me, it opens up, clears, seems beautiful to me again, and I can go on to a conclusion.
>
> What I think I'm doing is restoring the color—getting the black and the white to function properly as the colors that they are (instead of the sort of denotations they keep tending to become) . . . But at the same time I am either absorbing something about what I've already got on the canvas or paper, or I'm reaching into areas of my perceptivity that I don't otherwise reach, in order to add to what's there . . . [64]

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[63] MS Journal-1, 35 (11 April 1965).
[64] MS Journal (1 July 1965), quoted in MS-WMAA, 86-7.

We see Stout renewed in his efforts, but constitutionally, ideologically, philosophically unable to finish. It was perhaps inevitable that he would be exhausted before they were. A few weeks before Stout died, his friend the painter Pat de Groot pressed him on the issue. What will happen to his work? How will the unfinished paintings be dealt with?

"Myron, when Dick [Bellamy] was here yesterday did you talk to him about your work?"

"No."

"We have to talk about your work."

"Yes, we should." . . .

"Well, I want to know that we are going to be able to see this work that's unfinished. The paintings in particular, and the drawings too. They should be able to speak for you."

"Don't worry about that. They'll shout." . . .

"Well, then it has to be clear that you want these pictures to go out in the world."

"Dick can take care of that."[65]

* * *

Stout's investment in not finishing is connected, clearly, to his interest in time—long, flexible, non-perspectival time. It was also part of a very self-conscious resistance to work Galenson calls "conceptual." Stout saw this kind of work as merely a strategic response to art's history. Although it was crucial to *innovate,* be modern and of one's time, this was not, ultimately, art's subject. This was deciding the work in advance, rather than doing the hard work, which is engaging with one's self.

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[65] Pat de Groot Letter to Richard Bellamy, 20 July 1987, MoMA-RB.

Conclusion:

By necessity this dissertation is limited. It has focused on constructing a critical-historical account of Stout's art—on finding him in the critical literature and speculating upon why he is not in the historical literature. As this had never been done before—his work had in the main been "promoted" by fans rather than tracked historically—it seemed a necessary first step toward giving him a historical specificity. What it accomplished, I hope, is to show that his status vis-à-vis "history" has at least as much to do with the problematics of constructing history as with Stout's own failures at self-representation. But the burden is on historical writing and thinking rather than on Stout. It is our responsibility to try to make an history that can accommodate individuals. My assertion here is that historical "representations"—whether they be period-ideas, movements, styles, or even social identities—are not in themselves limiting. They are devices for interpretation, indeed for evaluation. But when they are reified, that is, made instrumental and categorical, there are consequences that need attention.

There are, of course, many other ways one could discuss Stout's work. This study indeed never really got to an interpretation of the *work*, although I tracked and noted his own ideas and other, historical attitudes to it. One could consider his "symbology" and address it in terms of current ideas in visual perception. I suspect that their basic qualities might have some resonance with the newest scientific discoveries on how we see and interpret visually. One could do a Deleuzean reading of his use of myth, micro-macroscopic forms, and time; there could be fruitful ground between the "gender" construction of Stout's imagery (Demeter, for one, was a goddess) and Deleuze's idea of "becoming-woman" in *A Thousand Plateaus*. This would remove the issue of actual social identity and allow for an associative reading of his work. One could also consider it through semiotics and poststructuralist

theories of what *exceeds* language, using Roland Barthes' writings on textual meanings. All of these would bring to it a contemporaneity this study has fallen short of. An interpretation of—indeed the work itself—still somehow evades an historical account of it.

In a journal entry from 1952, after Stout had cut loose from his Hofmann School classes and was about to embark on his first black and white abstractions, he wrote:

> A great work of art projects into a future which is never—can never be realized, convincingly consolidated as a high point of a period, a state of being the highest achievement; it is more a painting to infinite promise which will never be achieved. What actually does come afterward is too often an effort to fulfil those promises. What should come afterward is a new painting aimed towards an equally infinite and equally unattainable set of promises.[1]

The residual question, perhaps, is whether all objects in the world ought to have longevity. As the quotation above suggests, perhaps Stout's work is not as important as the future that it prompts, the works that come after and out of it. Perhaps the relevant audience is the one the critic Chris Martin identified—younger artists working now who find in Stout a "secret hero." In this scenario, Stout is exactly a conduit towards the future. Moreover, as in Stout's own conception, the work is not even that important. I sense it's the participation, the doing it that mattered to him. The object will always have problems.

From a perspective of long-term history, just because Stout made paintings doesn't mean they will be kept forever. We do not know what will be important then. It's a fool's game to predict; what is clear, however, is that Stout's work is relevant now, to *some*, if not to masses. Stout's work—I think—opens a future for thinking about art in terms other than ones prevailing in the current critical climate. His work is aesthetic and philosophical rather than historical-critical; it is fully "abstract" rather than topical; it is medium-specific rather

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[1] MS Journal-2, 21 (11 October 1952).

than of the post-medium condition; deep rather than on the surface; even "straight" rather than ironic. For an historian, Stout lets you think about these things, too.

Figures:

Fig. 20. Haynes Ownby, *Der Blaue Reiter*, 1952, charcoal on paper, 25 x 19 inches (Farnham, *Hofmann*, 95)

Fig. 21. Stout, *Untitled*, 1977-79, graphite on paper, 5 3/8 x 8 inches (MS-WMAA, 60)

Fig. 22. Hofmann, *Untitled (Provincetown Seascape)*, ca. 1935, ink on paper, 8 1/2 x 11 inches (Mary Drach McInnes and Kim Sichel, exh. cat., *Provincetown Prospects: The Work of Hans Hofmann and His Students* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1993), 2)

Fig. 23. Kaufman, *Art and Education*, 327.

Fig. 24. Stout, *Quartet*, 1948, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches (MS-WMAA, 17)

Fig. 25. Stout, *Untitled*, 1949, oil on canvasboard, 18 x 14 inches (author's photo)

Fig. 26. Stout, *Untitled*, 1950, oil on canvasboard, 18 x 14 inches (author's photo)

Fig. 27. Stout, *Untitled*, 1950, oil on canvasboard, 18 x 14 inches (MS-WMAA, 20)

Fig. 28. Stout, *Untitled*, 1950 (July 5), oil on canvasboard, 18 x 14 inches (MS-KFOS, 25)

Fig. 29. Piet Mondrian, *Composition No. 1*, 1938-39, oil on canvas, 41 1/2 x 40 1/4 inches (Rosenthal, *Abstraction in the Twentieth Century*, 126)

Fig. 30. Stout, *Untitled*, ca. 1950, oil on canvasboard, 20 x 16 inches (MS-KFOS, 30)

Fig. 31. Stout, *Untitled*, 1951 (March 5), oil on canvas, 24 x 32 inches (MS-KFOS, 31)

Fig. 32. Stout, *Untitled*, 1951, oil on canvas, 26 x 22 inches (MS-WMAA, 25)

Fig. 33. Stout, *Untitled*, ca. 1950, oil on canvas, 35 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches (MS-KFOS, 29)

Fig. 34. Stout, *Untitled*, 1950, oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches (MS-WMAA, 24)

Fig. 35. Stout, *Untitled*, n.d., oil on canvasboard, 19 ¾ x 15 7/8 inches (MS-DIA, n.p.)

Fig. 36. Stout, *Untitled*, 1952 (November 18), oil on canvas, 25 x 20 inches (MS-KFOS, 39)

Fig. 37. Stout, *Untitled* ("Cathedral"), c. 1950, oil on canvas, 30 3/16 x 26 inches (MS-DIA, n.p.)

Fig. 38. Stout, *Untitled*, 1953 (March 14), oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches (MS-KFOS, 41)

Fig 39. Jackson Pollock, *Cathedral*, 1947, enamel and aluminium paint on canvas, 71 1/2 x 35 inches (Varnedoe, *Pollock*, 225)

Fig. 40. *Myron Stout*, installation, Stable Gallery, New York, April 1954 (Masheck, "Pictures of Art," 38)

Fig. 41. *Myron Stout*, installation, Stable Gallery, New York, April 1954 (MS-KFOS, 56)

Fig. 42. Stout, *Untitled*, 1950-51, charcoal and pastel on paper, 25 x 19 inches (MS-WMAA, 26)

Fig. 43. Stout, *Untitled*, 1953-61, charcoal on paper, 25 x 19 inches (MS-WMAA, 34)

Fig. 44. Stout, *Untitled*, 1957-62, charcoal on paper, 25 x 19 inches (MS-WMAA, 37)

Fig. 45. Stout, *Untitled*, 1953, black conté on paper, 12 x 16 inches (MS-WMAA, 28)

Fig. 46. Stout, *Untitled* (Dunes with peaked brush), 1953 (August 8), black conté on paper (MS-IH, n.p.)

Fig. 47. Stout, *Tereisias I*, 1964, graphite on paper, 9 3/8 x 7 1/8 inches (MS-IH, n.p.)

Fig. 48. Stout, *Tereisias II*, 1965, pencil on paper, 11 1/4 x 10 5/8 inches (Cartin, *In Pursuit of the Invisible*, 68)

Fig. 49. Stout, *Untitled*, c. 1965-70, graphite on paper, 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 inches (Winkfield, "Tortoise Who Wins," 110)

Fig. 50. Jan Müller, *Provence, Aquaduct Series No. 3*, 1956, oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 22 1/2 inches (www.sothebys.com, accessed 22 March 2002)

Fig. 51. *Follett, di Suvero, Oldenburg, Samaras, Stout*, installation, Green Gallery, October 1961 (MS-WMAA, 12)

Fig. 52. *Geometric Abstraction in America*, installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, March – May 1962 (Auping, *Abstraction, Geometry, Painting*, 20. Photograph by Geoffrey Clements)

Fig. 53. Ad Reinhardt in his studio (Auping, *Abstraction, Geometry, Painting*, 117. Photograph by Walter Rosenblum)

Fig. 54. Leon Polk Smith, 1988 (Auping, *Abstraction, Geometry, Painting*, 125. Photograph by Fred W. McDarrah)

Fig. 55. Ellsworth Kelly, *Black Ripe*, 1955, oil on canvas, 63 x 59 inches (Rosenthal, *Abstraction in the Twentieth Century*, 158)

Fig. 56. Claes Oldenburg, *The Store*, Green Gallery, September – October 1962 (Seitz, *Age of Aquarius*, 85)

Fig. 57. Donald Judd, installation, Green Gallery, December 1963 - January 1964 (Fer, *On Abstract Art*, 138)

Fig. 58. *New Work: Part I*, installation, Green Gallery, January 1963 (Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 46)

Fig. 59. *Contemporary American Group Show*, installation, Green Gallery, May-June 1963 (Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 51)

Fig. 60. Dan Flavin, installation, Green Gallery, November - December 1964 (Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 100)

Fig. 61. Robert Morris, installation, Green Gallery, December 1964 – January 1965 (Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 114)

Fig. 62. Dan Flavin, *untitled (Green Gallery)*, diagram, 1964 (Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 101)

Fig. 63. Allan Kaprow, *Words*, installation, Smolin Gallery, New York, 1962 (Seitz, *Age of Aquarius*, 50)

Fig. 64. Barnett Newman, *Onement I*, 1948, oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 16 1/4 inches (Temkin, *Newman*, 159)

Fig. 65. *Myron Stout*, installation, Whitney Museum, New York, 1980 (MS-KFOS, 52)

Fig. 66. *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, Whitney Museum, New York, 1969 (*The New Sculpture*, 186)

Fig. 67. André Malraux, "Museum Without Walls" (Malraux, *Voices of Silence*, 12-13)

Fig. 68. Stout in his living room, 1968 (MS-KFOS, 1)

Fig. 69. Stout in his living room, c. 1978 (AAA-SS. Photograph by Rachel Geise)

Fig. 70. Stout in his studio, c. 1978 (Holt, *On Equal Ground*, 18)

Fig. 71. Stout in his studio, c. 1978 (AAA-SS. Photograph by Rachel Geise)

Fig. 72. *Apollo*, installed at *Myron Stout*, Inverleith House, Edinburgh, 1997 (MS-IH, n.p.)

Figs. 73 and 74. Donald Judd, two views of his architecture studio, Marfa, Texas (exh. cat., *Donald Judd: Raume/Spaces* (Stuttgart: Cantz Verlag, 1993, 64-65). Photograph by Todd Eberle)

Fig. 75. Stout, drawing for a house, mid-1950s, pencil on paper (MS-WMAA, 70)

Fig. 76. *Myron Stout: The Unfinished Paintings*, installation, Joan T. Washburn, October-November 1997 (gallery slide)

Figs. 77 – 102 are in Appendix 1: Chronology, and contain full listings there

The following have not been scanned at the request of the university:

Figures 1-76 (pages 202-259)

Appendices 1-4 (pages 260-304)

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William Littlefield Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Betty Simpson Papers, Denton Texas. Stout's niece by marriage, she holds personal and family material

Eleanor Ward Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Abbreviations for frequently cited archives, exhibition catalogues and journals:

AAA-LK	Lillian Kiesler Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.
AAA-SS	Sanford Schwartz Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.
MoMA-RB	Richard Bellamy Papers, Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York
MS-DIA	*Myron Stout: Pathways and Epiphanies.* Exh. cat. Bridgehampton, N.Y.: Dia Art Foundation, 1990.
MS-IH	*Myron Stout.* Exh. cat. Edinburgh: Inverleith House, 1997.
MS Journal-1	*Myron Stout Journals, 1950-1966.* Unpublished typescript manuscript, Sanford Schwartz Papers, Archives of American Art. My copy from collection of Pat de Groot, Provincetown, Mass.
MS Journal-2	*Myron Stout: Journals 1950-1966.* Draft version of forthcoming book. Tina Dickey Papers, Vancouver, B.C.
MS-KFOS	*Myron Stout.* Exh. cat. New York: Flynn, Kent and Oil & Steel Galleries, 1990.
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MS-WMAA	*Myron Stout.* Exh. cat. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980.

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