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**Towards an American Postmodernism: Allegory, Appropriation,  
and Post Studio's Intervention into Modernism**

Jennifer A. Rissler

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TOWARDS an AMERICAN POSTMODERNISM: ALLEGORY, APPROPRIATION, and  
POST STUDIO'S INTERVENTION into MODERNISM

Jennifer Anna Rissler

Submitted to the faculty of  
The Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

October, 2020

Accepted by the faculty of the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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“Decentered, allegorical, schizophrenic...-however we choose to diagnose its symptoms, postmodernism is usually treated, by its protagonists and antagonists alike, as a crisis of cultural authority, specifically the authority of vested in Western European culture and its institutions.”

-Craig Owens

*To my father*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my dissertation director, Dr. Giovanna Borradori, who guided me so gracefully through this entire process, reminding me to trust my intuition along the way. I also thank my committee members Dr. Dejan Lukic and Dr. Jason Hoelscher. Thank you to Dr. George Smith, whose visionary leadership of IDSVA is unparalleled. I also thank Dr. Simonetta Moro and Dr. Christopher Yates for their unwavering support throughout the program. And to VG5 – Dr. Keren Moscovitch, Angelalynn Padua, Gabriel Reed, and Jeffrey Siemers – I thank you for your friendship these past six years.

My SFAI family - in particular academic affairs staff Zeina Barakeh, Diana Vasquez, and Yasmin Lambie-Simpson - had my back the entire time and kept the lights on during my residencies. Thank you. To SFAI faculty members Dr. Claire Daigle, Dr. Jeannene Przyblyski, and Meredith Tromble, and past SFAI faculty members Dr. Nicole Archer and Dr. Sampada Aranke, I am forever grateful for your encouragement along the way. I also thank my mentor Dr. Lowery Stokes Sims for her words of wisdom and steady support. I owe a deep acknowledgement of gratitude to SFAI Librarian and Archivist Jeff Gunderson, who pulled so many amazing nuggets from SFAI's archives, encouraging me to tell a story I knew needed to be told. Additional thanks go to the archive staff at the California Institute of the Arts and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

To my family, in particular to my mother, who values education and knew the importance of my journey, and to my brother, Matt, thank you for pushing me to finish and for understanding my limited free time these last few years. To Robert Earl and Ruth Clementine, my rocks: I could not have finished this project without your emotional support. And, to all of my closest friends (Janette Andrawes, Shannon Castleman, Carin Jacobs, and Julia Weinberg) your encouragement and understanding were invaluable throughout the process. And, to the next generation (Rafael Noor, Caiden Lee, and Roma Pearl) – anything is possible if you put your minds to it...

I concluded this project during an unprecedented year; not only in the midst of a global pandemic, but during times of racial injustices and political upheavals the likes of which I have never experienced in my lifetime. This project kept me grounded and sane, and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to John Baldessari, who left me the clues I needed to embark on this journey. John passed away in January 2020 and I felt his spirit leading me throughout. To John and to all of the artists banished from the polis, this is for you.

In loving memory of my father, whose hummingbird spirit and presence I felt the entire time.

## ABSTRACT

Jennifer Anna Rissler

TOWARDS an AMERICAN POSTMODERNISM: ALLEGORY, APPROPRIATION,  
and POST STUDIO'S INTERVENTION into MODERNISM

This project began as an inquiry into the archive of the California Institute of the Arts' (CalArts) Post Studio Program, whose only relic is a course description written by its founder, artist John Baldessari.<sup>1</sup> An equally important component of this early inquiry was the discovery of Jean-François Lyotard's palimpsestic text, *Pacific Wall*, whose frontispiece, "Five Car Stud," was first publicly displayed at documenta V by artist Edward Kienholz. These two materials led toward a novel articulation of how post studio artistic methodologies – embodied by both Baldessari and Kienholz – intervened in the master narratives of modernism. I argue that the absence of a formal archive of post studio allows for such an intervention. The paucity of materials written on post studio led me to original sources within archives (including the San Francisco Art Institute, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and the Getty Research Institute), lending agency to each artist's voice.

By engaging the missing archive of post studio through ventriloquizing its lack, this project deconstructs the normative apparatus of modernism and deromanticizes the sacred space of an artist's studio. Scholarship generally has understood post studio practice as a methodology eschewing the studio as a space for generating art, its reliance on the political economy of the art

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<sup>1</sup> In allegiance with John Baldessari, I do not hyphenate the term 'post studio.' Craig Owens, alternatively, hyphenated the use of the term.

market, and its spatialization of sovereign subjectivity. A site of resistance, with aesthetic implications, post studio offers a narrative of its own that defies the artistic conventions of modernism; including, importantly, the authorial legacies, master narratives, and the cult of originalism to which modernism was heavily invested.

Informed by French poststructuralism and its debates over postmodernity, I reclaim, posthumously, Craig Owens's theories on power and representation alongside allegory and appropriation as the key methodologies of post studio artistic practice. These methodologies challenge postmodernity through a heretofore undocumented *intervention* into modernism.

Keywords: Allegory, Appropriation, Archive, Modernism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism,  
Post studio



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## INTRODUCTION

### **California Dreamin'?: From Pacific Wall to Post Studio**

“It is precisely at the legislative frontier between what can be represented and what cannot that the postmodernist operation is being staged – not in order to transcend representation, but in order to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others.”

-Craig Owens<sup>1</sup>

#### 0.1 Context

This project represents the coalescence of both a concept and a methodology that have shaped me as a scholar – California post studio practice and archival research - specifically, pedagogical research on the histories of fine art curricula and post studio in particular. The former - the concept and attitude of a practice largely defined as anti-material and existing outside of the confines of the studio – was manifest in California and indeed informs its art colleges, specifically at SFAI and CalArts. Because of my two-decade tenure at SFAI, I have a very personal relationship to the practice. Radical artistic experimentation and pedagogy interest me deeply, and in my quest to understand its legacies and lineages, I have travelled far and wide to research in the archives of Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina; the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Canada (important because of its press in particular); the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California; the San Francisco Art Institute, and the Getty Research Institute. Together, this archival research has formed a web of inquiry and offered deep connections that informed this project. Many of the connections pleasantly surprised me as I pieced this project together over the last three years.

This entire project is predicated on the non-existent archive of post studio practice. Early within my tenure as an IDSVVA student I travelled to Valencia, California and to the campus of CalArts to research its archive on post studio. This trek was important because the first known

post studio art program in the United States was founded there by John Baldessari in 1970.

Which links back squarely to the pedagogical imprint of this entire project. While initially I was surprised by the lack of a formal archive, in retrospect and near the conclusion of my writing, I came to understand John Baldessari in a very profound way, through his writings, his work, and documentation of interviews that I was able to unearth at both CalArts and SFAI, and I now believe that he would not have been interested in leaving behind an archive for others to steward. He was far too nonchalant and humble, embracing a laid-back California attitude. I also believe that the lone clue left in the post studio folder at CalArts – his course description – was left in order for me to perform the lack of a robust archive, to perform its intervention into modernism. Together with the concept paper for CalArts, which was established in 1970 to replace the Chouinard art college in Burbank, California, with backing from Walt Disney, the course description and concept paper illustrate how post studio artistic practice should be viewed within this pedagogical genealogy:

“In that uncatalogued no-man’s land between the collage and the Happening, divisions between painting and sculpture are dissolving into history. Some artists, **defying** the pressures of the modern, will want to reclaim the distinctions from the vanishing point”

The following current attitudes will be explored: Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-Illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance. The investigation of such questions and issues as: Is the object necessary – originality in art – must art be visual – what is order – durability – place and process – art as experience – art as time -, etc.? The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.<sup>2</sup>

The clue offered in CalArts’s concept paper from the school’s archive, informs my definition of post studio practice as one which *defies artistic conventions of modernism* – importantly, medium specificity and competency, art for art’s sake, and the master narratives associated with its evolution – including authorship, materiality, and originality.

At its core, post studio also is a practice that interrogates the studio as a legislative site of sovereign subjectivity and art practice. The studio's allegiance to modernism also is critiqued within this project. This is perhaps best illustrated within the context of 1972's documenta V and reified by its artistic director, Harald Szeemann. I reference this to underscore how significant his curatorial methodologies were to this study and indeed to the evolution of post studio practice. Szeemann often is cited as the first curator to bring together conceptual artists trans-nationally; specifically his seminal exhibition *Live In your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunstalle Bern in 1969, three years preceding documenta V. As anti-product and pro-process, *When Attitude Becomes Form* aimed to show the "inner attitude" that elevated artistic process over finished product. This curatorial turn is extremely significant to the development of post studio practice as a legitimate postmodern practice. Szeemann also is considered the most important post-world war II curator, which also holds significance for this project; specifically, for his engagement with documenta V in Kassel, Germany, which was founded as a way to reconcile Germany's role in world war two and the genocidal horrors at the hands of the Nazi party. Post war and cold war politics resonate strongly within post studio practices, as I will show with the work of John Baldessari and Edward Kienholz. The Getty Research Institute acquired Harald Szeemann's entire archives in 2011, representing the largest single archival collection ever acquired by the Getty. Particularly notable is the copious amount of correspondence between Szeemann and the artists he worked with throughout his career, including John Baldessari and Edward Kienholz. Never before printed documentation of Kienholz's tableau, *Five Car Stud*, is included in his archive and documented in this project. I

borrowed heavily from Szeemann's methodology by focusing on the artists' own writings about their works and their intentions.

There is a direct link between documenta V, *Pacific Wall*, and post-studio practice.<sup>3</sup> documenta V's catalog suggests, as an operative element, the critique of the frame of reference of artistic production as held within the studio and, specifically, within the frame of the canvas. The catalog's frontispiece is a series of reprinted French postcards from the nineteenth century. Depicting a traditional, European, atelier environment, the scene is titled "Ebauche d'idylle," or a first attempt at perfection. After a young male painter asserts his intention to "paint a beautiful landscape," an interior studio scene unfolds where another young painter, also male, embarks on painting the portrait of a young female model. "Do you like this pose?," he asks. "Be a good girl, be well behaved, and in three strokes I'll paint your portrait." As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that the girl is not satisfied with the outcome, and proceeds to push her head through the canvas, tearing it down the middle. "Here you go," she says, "now it's much better I hope." "And who is going to find it perfect, its little father." The father of modernism, the patriarchal figure whose lineage is being contested in this episodic, stop motion sequence, portends the founding of post studio pedagogic practice at CalArts in two ways; the first as a confrontation of the authority of modernism's formal obsession with medium and the frame; the second, as a reclamation of Craig Owens's disdain for easel painting, his theories on allegory and appropriation, and how they function within post studio practice and postmodernity. Founded in 1970, CalArts's concept, gleaned from a document within its archives, suggests that a material or a method is "not an imposition but an experiential risk." Post studio artists contested modernism, as we recall from the CalArts concept paper: "In that uncatalogued no-man's land between the collage and the Happening, divisions between painting and sculpture are dissolving into history.

Some artists, defying the pressures of the modern, will want to reclaim the distinctions from the vanishing point.”<sup>4</sup> The vanishing point of the West, of California in particular, offered an un-griddable place, as we are reminded in Jean François Lyotard’s *Pacific Wall*, that becomes centered precisely because it is without coordinates, or grounding methodologies of past known practice. As elliptical, and westward moving, the initial author of the text, Michel Vachey writes, authority and empire are like “waves taking on narratives of ex-centers of previous abandoned wests in search of new potencies, power.”

The discovery of the curious text, a palimpsest by Lyotard – *Pacific Wall* – had equally important implications for this project. Initially, it was discovered by Lyotard in the library at the University of California, Irvine, and its author was Michel Vachey, a visiting Fellow who was in residence from France. There is a deep connection between French poststructuralism and California, which I reference in the dissertation but which I cite here as another way in which the symbiosis of poststructuralist thought and the psycho-geographies of California intersect. Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida all were affiliated with California universities at some point in their careers. Of all the theorists I use within this project, it is not surprising that Jean Baudrillard was the most taken with California and the astral America he wrote about within his work. However, Lyotard’s writing in *Pacific Wall* bears significant meaning for this project, in particular, by how the role of elliptical thinking migrates into the West, to California, as an un-griddable space of de-imperialist and un-masterable thinking and ideals, which post studio espouses within its antagonism toward the studio. It is also very important to recall that *Pacific Wall’s* frontispiece is none other than Edward Kienholz’s *Five Car Stud*. Within this work, the imperialism shifts from being territorially inscribed, and westward moving, into what Kienholz referred to as the ‘minority strivings’ inherent in the work. Although on its surface the

tableau references white supremacy and American treatment of Blacks, what I label as his ‘discursive portability’ allows it to be an equally scathing critique of the treatment of Jews under the Nazi regime, particularly as cited for the first time publicly at documenta V in Kassel, Germany, this move highlights the transnational, post war discourse at play throughout this project. Such discursive portability is evident in many of Kienholz’s work, most notably, *Portable War Memorial*. Although not the subject of this project, Kienholz’s work *Eleventh Hour Final* serves as an equally scathing critique of the burgeoning war in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was a televised spectacle. It made its way into the hallowed ground of the American living room. This is what *Eleventh Hour Final* reminds us of; Kienholz was unable to be a detached viewer. The Vietnam War, it should be recalled, was the first war to be televised. The day’s atrocities and casualties invaded American homes and living rooms nightly. The still image in the television set in *Eleventh Hour Final* acts like a single-frame photograph, locking in the death count and wounded count above a severed doll’s head. We can hear the bombing, the shelling, the sound of the guns and helicopters. The image becomes aural, to reference Marshall McLuhan. It is clear that Kienholz makes use of mass media by disturbing its reception and mode of delivery. This distortion will become more acute in the exhibition *Volksempfänger* at Nationalgalerie Berlin in 1977, and, I suggest, the body of work which aligns most closely to *Eleventh Hour Final* for its formal attributes and use of a relic of mass media, the German radio or *volksempfänger*.

Both John Baldessari and Edward Kienholz offered their own critiques of the studio and modernism, and, by extension, equally scathing critiques of culture. I suggest that both artists created political work, albeit with different degrees of potency. Which is precisely where Craig Owens’s theories on postmodernity come into play, suggesting a uniquely American take on



postmodernist art, through the reclamation of **allegory** and **appropriation** specifically.

Throughout the project, I have attempted to dissect how each methodology operates within the seminal works of Baldessari and Kienholz.

In particular, it is Baldessari to whom I looked to see how his appropriative gestures – his violation of esthetic convention, to use Owens’s words – and his alliance with Owens to wage an all-out war against painting; specifically, against easel painting. In “Telling Stories” Owens stated that he believed Baldessari’s work functioned in a register of esthetic error. And, as a reminder, as a deliberate violation of several esthetic conventions, including: authorship, composition, and hanging in galleries. An ethos emerges within this claim. An ethos of an artistic practice forever liberated from the shackles of archival provenance, destined to perform its own legacies and to defy aesthetic conventions of modernism. Baldessari believed that a canvas was an automatic art sign, and one tethered to modernism. His *auto de fe*, the *Cremation Piece*, is an utter and all out atomization of his early paintings and indeed his own allegiance to modernist tropes, specifically, easel painting.

Appropriation of authorship is best understood within the penance Baldessari asked others to perform in his other seminal work *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*. The title and provenance for the work comes from a set of optional course assignments that Baldessari gave to students in his post studio seminar, rewritten here, typos intact. Instructive in nature, and indeed written approximately 4,000 times throughout his exhibition at NSCAD, Baldessari’s pedagogical stance bled often into his own work – including non-allegiance to his own hand. Eric Cameron, in his writing in *The Last Great Art College*, a compendium of essays and reproduced projects from NSCAD, refers to Baldessari’s piece as “lines of scholarly penance,” and, writing further, “In that context, the activity picks up the connotations of the school

situation; when his own sample instructions are enlarged to form a print, the emphasis shifts to the implicit academism of conceptual art.” If Baldessari’s work can be framed in an academic yoke of conceptual art, or ‘idea’ art, it must be done with a grain of salt, with the nonchalant California attitude, which he embodied, lest we take his penance too seriously. Here we are reminded that Baldessari used humor and parody as a counter – an antidote to the perils of what was ramping up in the postmodern art world: over –intellectualism. Baldessari was critiquing many tropes of modernism, and, no doubt, did so in a seemingly intellectual manner. He is, I suggest, performing the critique of the postmodern art world, which Owens vowed to be a necessary component of postmodernity, and Baldessari is doing it in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* as a surrogate himself. As a repetition and replica of a visual experience, and an exceedingly tangible physical presence as a wall text testimonial, Baldessari critiques instruction, the receivership of information, authorship, of emission and reception, which form the building blocks and pillars associated with painting’s representational apparatus.

Edward Kienholz asserts his post studio methodology by siting meaning differently, in an allegorical manner. Witnessing will emerge within Kienholz’s tableaux as an important methodology to contest what has been excluded from the public record. Using allegory throughout his work, Kienholz turns the tables on his audiences, forcing them to participate in what Owens suggests is “the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it.” In situ, an unwelcomed supplement, which, paraphrasing Owens, exposes a literal level – an image as fictional, implicating the symbolic to function through reversals of meaning or substitutions. Such an allegorical turn advances this contingency further. And, it does so, Kienholz shows us in his tableau, within a highly directorial mode. The distinction between directorial and documentary artistic methodologies is another important theoretical point that

Owens makes in his theorization of postmodernism. I appropriate his use of this distinction not only to suggest, in agreement with Owens, that the directorial turn is an important hallmark of California post studio practice, but also in order to advance this distinction further, to suggest that Kienholz – above and beyond many of his contemporaries – capitalized on this pivot from pure documentation of events, performances, and happenings, and claimed a directorial point of view as the driving force behind his tableaux. *Five Car Stud* directs our responses to the behavior we witness in the tableau as much as it offers us a theatrical stage from which to view Kienholz's work. As evidenced in the Getty Research Institute's images of contact sheets, Kienholz clearly was in charge of directing the spectacle, as he documented the faces and movements of his characters individually, isolating each micro scene within the tableau in advance of actually realizing the finished piece inside a tent at documenta V.<sup>5</sup>

*Five Car Stud* capitalizes on what Owens calls the directorial mode that is open to the intervention of obtuse meaning. As both an interventionist action and a direct confrontation with Roland Barthes's failure to fully define obtuse meaning, Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* uses a different site-specific strategy to illustrate allegory's contingency. The symbolic dimension becomes meta-figural. The literal meaning at work in *Five Car Stud* lays bare a trap of believing anecdotally what we see before us in situ – in Owens's paradigm, the costumes, the setting, the relational contexts of the protagonists. Within this symbolic confusion, where the meta-figural advances against our will – we are in receipt of a proposition that negates a reality that would give us license to release ourselves from the debt owed for perpetrating such violence before us. White on black violence, specifically. Not so fast, according to Kienholz...we are, in fact, culturally complicit, subsumed by the very narrative we created – that of the N-I-G-G-E-R. The man being castrated is our own cultural and symbolic creation. Kienholz's use of an oil-filled

belly pan with the letters N-I-G-G-E-R in fact makes it highly unlikely that they will ever be spelled, and perhaps, if so, without our ever witnessing the spelling. The contingent nature of the kinetic sculpture, that of the perpetually-recycled stream of ejaculate from the victim's penis, ensures that we can never, indeed, actually identify the man as a N-I-G-G-E-R, let alone a black man. The perpetrators assume the identity of their victim, as Kienholz suggests, through the sheer melding together of their body parts within the composition. Or, as Owens would assert (and I concur) we are confronted not by a black man or our constructed version of him, but rather by a de-figured version of him.

This latter anecdote is exceedingly important to this entire project and is one of two interesting discoveries I made on this journey, which indicate a few areas of contested scholarship with regard to the work of Kienholz and Baldessari. Continuing with Kienholz, I was in correspondence with his oral history interviewer, Lawrence Weschler earlier this year. It becomes exceedingly unforgiveable that Weschler, to this day, denies Kienholz's own artistic intentions and aesthetic decisions that in reality, there is no black man in the tableau *Five Car Stud*. Or that he would not consider that to be a reality, and to ponder how race and power function within the tableau. Weschler delivered a lecture on *Five Car Stud* at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) as recently as February 20, 2020. Following the lecture, in a series of email exchanges, I asked him if Edward ever spoke about the absence of a black man in *Five Car Stud*. His response was very clear:

“ Well, to be sure, there IS the black man who is being castrated, although interestingly he is the one figure who is not a complete plaster cast human being, being constructed, as it were, out of that metal automotive garage tub torso (with the six letters floating in the black oil) and then four outstretched limbs (conspicuously jet black where the pants creep up that one calf) and then the double-sized screaming head (one of only three non-mask covered heads in the piece—him, the woman, and the boy—all the others being grotesquely masked.) It is I, not so much Ed, who insists that the piece is about whiteness...”<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Baldessari, a discrepancy exists between the years he painted his cremated works. It should be noted and inserted into the record that there is, as uncovered through my research, a discrepancy with regard to the years – both commencing and ending – the cremated works. This is contested in Yve-Alain Bois’s introductory essay, “Is It Impossible to Underline in A Telegram” in John Baldessari’s *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*. Bois states that 1966, as opposed to 1967, is the end date for the paintings ultimately destroyed in *Cremation Piece*. However, the catalog lists no paintings from 1966, and the ultimate, painting CP67.1, is listed as being painted in 1967. A minor detail, I cite it as a way to underscore how an archive, above all else, is a malleable construct.

Discrepancy aside, my sampling of Baldessari’s cremated paintings suggest a nascent interest in semiotics. He critiques the American vernacular within a semiotic field; uncovering and contextualizing his unease, all the while leaving a foreboding feeling of their impending destruction. His act of dematerialization through their cremation repositions the archive in relation to the aesthetic frame of painting, within the choreography of the paintings’ frames and the equally aesthetic choreography of Derrida’s writing on the parergon in *The Truth in Painting*. There is a reconciliation between the moral judgement (and indeed moral imperative) of Baldessari to cremate his paintings, the adjunct nature of the parergon, and Owen’s rediscovery of the Greek term through Derrida, to reclaim the lack Immanuel Kant so desperately wanted to hold outside of reach. Functioning as another mediality, the parergon does not demarcate the limit between inclusion and exclusion, but reinforces the play or the performativity between inside and outside, a function with profound implications for this project. For, the reintroduction of the parergon into poststructuralist theory allows for its reclamation as a characteristic of post

studio practice, shaping a definition of an American postmodernism simultaneously. The archive's penchant to both exclude and include serves as a warning- a gentle warning with a dissonance behind it, to invoke Baldessari's own words – underscoring, above all else, its imperialistic nature of determining where the power lies, and who controls it. Can we escape the cynicism of the aesthetic regime, a cynicism so endemic to Baldessari's cremated paintings, based on the descriptive analysis I offered of the works, and offer instead a counter path or methodology to circumvent modernism's imperialistic tendencies? Can we instead adapt an attitude that bears allegiance to a mentality that art must not function according to these overly prescribed and legislative mandates?

Within this project, I intentionally juxtaposed Baldessari's post studio course description from the archive at CalArts and Derrida's writing on the parergon from *The Truth in Painting* to make clear the allegiances they shared with regard to the function and meaning of art. Baldessari was questioning, among other things, whether the object is necessary, and whether art must be visual. Derrida, for his part, questioned the implications of failing to question what art is, and what the meaning of both art and its history convey. Failure to transform or destroy the form of those questions, Derrida reminds us, will forever indoctrinate and support the hierarchical classification of the arts. Framed within these questions is a reliance on a teleological function of art: it must serve a purpose, a final goal. It must be object-based. Baldessari flipped this script when he introduced a pedagogical roadmap within which to insert an onto-interrogative response to the questions "What is art?" "What is the meaning of art or the history of art?". The *Cremation Piece* was anti-materialistic, anti-teleological with regard to functioning as an object with a purpose (it was, however, teleological in terms of quelling Baldessari's unease about his path as an artist), and unequivocally responded that art must not be visual. His act intervened into

the hierarchical order of the visual arts' classification system. It took advantage of the lack Kant so desperately wished would stay hidden, undiscovered, upholding the moral imperative of the formal structures of art and the middle term which adjudicates judgement, as toggling forever between understanding and reason. Craig Owens rediscovered this lack, this theoretical blind spot, within his writing on the parergon which Derrida had introduced in his text, *The Truth in Painting*. Their discourse is helpful to understand how Baldessari's work intervened in the moral and legislative structures of modernism, the studio, and the archive. Owens's theories imbue an American orthodoxy of critical, exceedingly individualized feedback on how we can understand the play or performativity of the archive and Baldessari's removal of his work from it. Baldessari's gesture in the *Cremation Piece* is an onto-interrogative response to the death of the author, to the machinations of modernism and serves a bellwether for emerging conceptual and post studio practices.

“Four times, then, around painting, to turn merely around it, in the neighboring regions which one authorizes oneself to enter, that's the whole story, to recognize and contain, like the surrounds of the work of art, or at most its outskirts: frame, title, signature, museum, archive, reproduction, discourse, market, in short: everywhere one legislates on the right to painting by marking the limit, with a slash marking an opposition [d'un trait d'opposition] which one would like to be indivisible” (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 11).

The painting always and forever reminds us of the indivisible nature of the frame, rather than demarcating the limits of what is included and what is excluded. It legislates, as does the archive, the signature, and the museum, to call out a few sites that Derrida references and that also respond to this project directly. It is not a stretch to include the studio within his list, as an equally legislative structure and construct to determine corresponding artistic activity and output. With the cremation of his painting, Baldessari – and by extension, his post studio attitude – dismantles the role teleology and hierarchy play in ascribing a final, definitive, narrative

interpretations to art. Owens's reclamation of allegory also allows for a radical aesthetic transformation by semiotics. As seen in Baldessari's paintings, their content coalesces together to function as one large signifying structure, a system of signs to be decoded. This line of inquiry was espoused by Owens in his writing "Detachment: from the Parergon," in which he claims that "art exists in constant relationship with other domains of culture" (Owens, "Detachment: From the Parergon" 31). One can see this visual script in Baldessari's cremated paintings, which invariably work together to manifest this thought that "meaning is fleeing words and images in modern life" through their content. Whether through the primal urgency of his brushstrokes and abstractions; the ontological dilemma which places man against – or within – inhabited natural spaces they equally suggest; apocalyptic landscapes of ashen hues; or the pop-inspired paintings of his later art that more emphatically connote advertising, commerce, and capitalistic tropes; finally migrating into an American vernacular, through these depictions of *Budweiser* beer advertising, a Raggedy Ann doll, or Old Glory herself. Painting, according to Owens, supplements nature, working through cultural signs. Baldessari's work functions in an equally semiotic manner, offering clues into his psyche and the ultimate destruction of his paintings. The aesthetic signs within his paintings are only determined within a cultural system, to paraphrase Derrida, and one for Baldessari which included not only modernism, but also the migration from modernism and the optimistic sensibilities of post-World War Two America into postmodernity. If the theory of art is equivalent to a theory of mores, with Kant's claims to form as a prerequisite to taste, it is no wonder that Baldessari destroyed his work and the visual, semiotic field that they supported. It also is no surprise that Edward Kienholz would recoil at the word 'culture' due to its allegiance that form is tethered perpetually to good taste. As another supplement, the parergon also functions as both an increment and a substitute.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, and



in allegiance with the supplement, the parergon equally compensates for an absence of a speaker. As an adjunct, and, therefore, not “an intrinsic component of the complete representation of an object,” the parergon, as resuscitated by the Greek from Kant, always remains an additive construct. Marking the limit between the intrinsic and the extrinsic – the parergon – akin to the supplement, “may compensate for a lack within the work.” What Owens suggests the parergon to signal, to call forward, is a methodology “of transforming the object, the work of art, beyond recognition.” A lack of recognition which I unabashedly ventriloquize.



Figure 1 Edward Kienholz, *Five Car Stud*, 1969-1972 (Kienholz / *Five Car Stud*)

## 0.2 Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud*

The 1972 quadrennial exhibition, documenta V, featured a disturbing work by American artist Edward Kienholz, a new realism tableau titled, *Five Car Stud*. Staged in a tent outside the main building, the Fredericianum, his tableau depicted the castration of a black man by six white men, while a white woman seated in a car vomits in horror. The headlights of five large, mid-century American cars highlight the spectacle. That Kienholz's piece was shown at documenta in Kassel, Germany, is significant, as the international exhibition was founded following World War II as a way to mitigate the persecution of artists under the Nazi regime. Kienholz's work

was a commentary not only on race relations in the United States, but also of fascism and the eradication – or “final solution” -- of minority Jews under Adolph Hitler. Kienholz’s tableau was particularly disturbing in that it physically inserted viewers into the scene itself, rendering impossible the negation of a record of historical trauma.

By seemingly transferring ethnic violence away from Germany toward America, Kienholz’s piece also is a commentary on the history of American Manifest Destiny, and of the conquest implicit in Westward expansion. *Five Car Stud* was a seminally important work, one that illuminates a burgeoning artistic practice that was westward looking, aimed at shattering the imperialism of European modernism on North American soil. This artistic practice is called post studio; founded by California artist John Baldessari in 1971 at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts), a year before documenta V. I suggest that post studio artists affiliated with this movement, most importantly, Edward Kienholz and John Baldessari, critiqued the aesthetic regime, in particular, European modernism’s inward-looking tendencies and concomitant reliance on purity of medium and form.<sup>8</sup> The result was a seismic dismantling of previously accepted, visual coordinates through an artistic intervention heretofore undocumented.

*Five Car Stud* also is the focus of an obscure work by Jean-François Lyotard, *Pacific Wall*. Published in 1979, the curious palimpsest offers a provocative analysis of Kienholz’s work in the context of imperialism and conquest. Lyotard discovered the original text in a library at the University of California, Irvine - a text written by a fellow Frenchman Michel Vachey - who was a Fellow at the school. Lyotard added subtitles and offered his commentary within the peculiar work itself, a work that has as its frontispiece *Five Car Stud*. Vachey states that Kienholz’s refusal to show in the Fredericianum, opting instead to exhibit in a portable tent, was an “act of revenge on an imperial American Roman Germanic name by wandering nations” (Lyotard,

Pacific Wall 12). *Five Car Stud* was, in fact, symbolic of minority strivings, according to Kienholz's writing in the documenta V catalog, in a letter he wrote from Los Angeles in February 1972. Understood in these terms, these minority strivings allude also to artistic practice that eschews modernism's insular tendencies, offering a parallel history, what Vachey refers to as "a mentality that's not particularly political in an imperial sense" (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 56). The mentality of post studio artistic practice in the burgeoning years of the early 1970s was political, however, in that it adopted a critical stance toward modernity's imperialistic, aesthetic tendencies, in a uniquely American, emancipatory spirit. I define post studio practice as an attitude – an artistic mentality that defies aesthetic convention, and specifically, the aesthetic conventions of modernism. Vachey suggests that, as a culture becomes foreign it must become critical. Riffing off the methodology of the Greek preceptors that Vachey references in *Pacific Wall*, I will conscript a new teacher of postmodernity to position my argument in an equally palimpsestic manner; in particular, Craig Owens and his seminal collection of writing from *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. This entire project is predicated on the missing archive of post studio, whose only relic in CalArts's archive is a set of iterative course descriptions for the post studio course at CalArts, founded by John Baldessari. Therefore, it is not surprising that significant research for this project also comes from additional archives, including the archives of the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI), the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD), and the Getty Research Institute GRI).

### 0.3 The Uncoordinated American West, Post Studio's Genealogy

Representative of a territory of unbridled opportunity, California offers a ripe discursive field in which to locate post studio artistic practice as an equally uncharted methodology of artistic experimentation. From Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's plea in the 'Futurist Manifesto' for

artists to continue their “violent spasms of action and creation,” speeding away from the barriers preventing them from expressing their dreams completely - to Jack Kerouac’s Odyssean continental dream in *On the Road*, where “The only thing to do was go” – movement has shaped artists’ pursuits toward vast, uncharted lands, including North American artists who wanted to escape the art market and economic forces of New York City and migrated west (Marinetti, “Futurist Manifesto” 148; Kerouac, *On The Road* 119-120). As a popular imaginative space and a land of limitless promise, the American frontier offers post studio artistic practice a potential to reshape modernism via interventionist tactics, offering a re-envisioned space alongside Craig Owen’s equally interventionist theorizations of allegory and appropriation.

Approached in this way, California post studio artistic practice and poststructuralist thought form a symbiotic relationship that legitimize each other within the intersection of art and theory. The former, through a rupture of accepted artistic methodologies in the uncoordinated terrain of the West, as seen in Lyotard’s curious text, *Pacific Wall*; and the latter, through the use of theories germane to this practice, including the political nature of the archive (which post studio lacks from a formal standpoint); imperialism and authorship (tropes commonly referenced within post studio artistic practice); and into Owens’s theories regarding allegory and appropriation. This last reference to allegory and appropriation offers a new theoretical terrain, I argue, where the emergence of an American strain of postmodernism comes to the foreground. To consider the West as a framing device, a geographical setting that offers an imaginative space for artistic experimentation, one that is conceptually expansionist, it is useful to turn to Lyotard’s palimpsest *Pacific Wall* and his use of Edward Kienholz’s piece, *Five Car Stud*, in relationship to post studio practice. *Pacific Wall* foreshadows Lyotard’s ‘postmodern condition,’ placing the concept of ‘post’ outside of a synchronized, temporal landscape, situating it instead in a

diachronically determined, spatially constructed field of perception. As knowledge drifts into new terrain, as a means rather than an end in itself, the social bond becomes observed within its own language moves, in its language games whose rules indicate an implosion of knowledge and power. Moving outside of the unilateral grid which links messages in a relationship between that of sender, addressee, and referent, Lyotard invokes a series of “posts” where one is located and through which various kinds of messages pass, however not necessarily in a linear manner. The result, he suggests, is a shattering of grand narratives and the quest for their legitimacy. It also brings into light the contested terrain of postmodernity itself, understood by Jürgen Habermas as an unfinished project, by Jacques Rancière as a construct, which subsumes modernity’s rupture, and into Craig Owens’s claims that modernism failed to embrace allegory, which this project restores. I also claim appropriation as an equally eschewed, artistic methodology that threatens modernism’s agency and ushers in a postmodernist turn.

Just as Jean Baudrillard went searching for what he would term an astral America, one corresponding to a nonphysical realm of existence (a simulacrum) – my quest to find post studio’s archive at CalArts, where the first pedagogical mention of it exists – yielded only course descriptions from various catalogs. *Cela n’existe pas*. Or did it? If, as Baudrillard suggests, everything can have a second birth, the eternal birth of the simulacrum, the need to define post studio practice becomes more emergent. John Baldessari’s post studio work (specifically his *Cremation Piece*) can be seen within this enduring creation myth, as a loop, or a reconstruction of history. Moving my research into missing archives politicizes this project, for, as Derrida reminds us in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, there seemingly is no political power without control of the archive. Could post studio practice hold political agency because it

determined its own destiny? Could the lack of post studio's archive eschew modernity's moral imperative, instead offering a transgressive gesture that problematizes representation?

In what Roland Barthes categorizes in "Death of the Author" as a move toward the performative, (post studio practice founder) Baldessari's actions can be viewed as a gesture away from "recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting" toward a linguistic turn in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered (4). Questioning authorship offers another avenue for situating post studio practice within poststructuralism. In "What is an Author?" Michel Foucault develops a theory of transgressive discourse in which discourses are objects of appropriation, risky acts outside of exchange circuits of ownership, placed in bipolar fields of "the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous" (Foucault, "What Is an Author?"108). As such, Kienholz and Baldessari should be viewed as trans-discursive authors of post studio practice, ascribing more to the profane, illicit, and blasphemous modes of artistry; all hallmarks of a defiant aesthetic stance. This defiance is, in fact, called out in the concept paper for the founding of CalArts. Post studio artistic practice should be viewed within this pedagogical genealogy:

"In that uncatalogued no-man's land between the collage and the Happening, divisions between painting and sculpture are dissolving into history. Some artists, **defying** the pressures of the modern, will want to reclaim the distinctions from the vanishing point" (CalArts Concept Paper, 1970. Box 37, Folder 5. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.).<sup>9</sup>

The clue offered in this document, CalArts's concept paper from the school's archive, informs my definition of post studio practice as one which defies conventions of modernism.

#### 0.4 Debates over Modernism and The Western Round Table on Modern Art

Walter Benjamin's seminal 1936 essay, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," offers fertile ground for the debates on modernism that would follow between he, Theodore

Adorno, and Clement Greenberg. He suggests, through his treatment of authenticity – the aura of an art object - that “what is jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object” (Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” 521). Mechanical reproduction not only removes the semblance of the autonomy of the art object, it places authenticity outside of a theologically grounded, *l’art pour l’art* doctrine, forever politicizing artistic production and reproduction. The instant the “criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production,” Benjamin writes, “the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics” (Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” 522). Authenticity, therefore, is not only historically inscribed, but it is grounds for political contestation.

Art for art’s sake, the legitimizing maxim of modernism, was ushered in by Clement Greenberg’s essay, ‘Modernist Painting’ first published in 1960. Unabashedly pro-Kantian in his line of inquiry, Greenberg suggests that immanent criticism is the hallmark of modernity’s grand gesture toward self-criticism. Citing Kant as the first real modernist, Greenberg views the essence of modernism as its ability to criticize artistic disciplines to “entrench it more firmly in its area of competence” (Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” 774). The agency of such self-definition was the purity it rendered to art by ascribing elements of medium specificity to modern art, guaranteeing standards of “quality as well as of its independence” (Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” 775). Through such a conscious exercise of acknowledging simultaneously the limits of art and the legitimizing the power they hold, Greenberg aligns with Habermas’s conception that modernity is an unfinished project. Obdurately rigid in his proclamation that modernism “may mean a devolution, an unraveling of anterior tradition, but it also means its continuation,” Greenberg asserts the authority of modernism through empirical – rather than

theoretical – possibilities. Its intelligible continuity, it seems, is forever cast within taste and tradition.

Although somewhat in alignment with Greenberg, Theodor Adorno's 1970 text *Aesthetic Theory* offers new theoretical frameworks for understanding the project of - and problems with - modernity. Taking up the issue of authenticity, he presents a paradigm for measuring modern art's durability that shifts Benjamin's argument; mechanical means of reproduction seem to "set up a universal regime of durable art," yet durability and duration are not the same (Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* 42). In alliance with Greenberg, Adorno suggests that art "has to go beyond its own concept in order to remain faithful to itself" (43). Yet the mechanism forcing it to do so is grounded in a concept of anti-art, as seen in the rise of 'isms' – potential schools which replace traditional and institutional authority by functional authority. By giving credence to such jargon, the authorial integrity of modern art is questioned, and works of art replaced by their processes of creation. Conceptualism, the 'ism' of post studio artistic practice, can therefore, according to Adorno, be cast as a mindset of aesthetic reactionaries. Yet, Adorno seemingly warns, a mindset still tethered to an essentializing foundation. Less aesthetic reactionaries, Baldessari and Kienholz act in defiance of aesthetic conventions through post studio practice.

"The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp."

(John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.)

Returning to Baudrillard, in *The Conspiracy of Art*, he casts modernity as an era marked by the rise of conceptual – or trans-aesthetic- art, which made "readymade" everything, resulting in a loss of the illusionary values of modernism and an excess of art (Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* 63). His reference to Marcel Duchamp is worthy of further reflection, as it is



Duchamp whom we must consider as a pivotal figure in the rise of post studio practice, an aesthetic reactionary in his own right, cast in between modernism and postmodernism. His role as a participant in The Western Round Table on Modern Art, held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in April 1949, is significant and sheds new light on the dialogues of modernity that took place on opposing coasts of America. Chronicled in both *Life* and *Look* magazines, one can understand more fully the East/West divisions and Duchamp's pivot toward conceptual art (or, in Baudrillard's terms, trans-aesthetic art), which would feed into emergent post studio practice in California.



Figure 2 Marcel Duchamp and Gregory Bateson, Western Round Table on Modern Art, 1949, (Courtesy of SFAI archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library)

*Life* magazine previously organized a 1948 symposium at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, including such seminal figures as Clement Greenberg and Meyer Shapiro. Moderator Russell W. Davenport, *Life* magazine's representative, had asked, "How can a great civilization such as ours continue to flourish without the harmonizing influence of a living art that is understood and enjoyed by a large public?" (Clearwater, *West Coast Duchamp* 48). Seemingly a clarion call toward responsible artistic practice, the tenor of the symposium suggested that modern art should be intelligible to a general public. And, more importantly, palatable and

recognizable. The San Francisco retort was, not surprisingly, much more skeptical of the role of modern art, in large part because of Duchamp's presence on the panel and his insistence that something more powerful – the 'aesthetic echo' – was operating in modern art. Duchamp contested the unifying element in modern art – the emphasis on formal qualities – as remaining in the realm of what he called 'retinal art.' Aligning instead with the surrealists, whom he suggests were the exceptions to the formal claim of modernism, Duchamp championed the intellect and the ability of art to service the mind. This move initiates the conceptual turn in art that modernism eschewed. Interestingly, this part of the Round Table dialogue was omitted from the transcripts, suggesting that his provocation was destined to remain outside of the archive on modernism. However, his term 'aesthetic echo' emerges as a means to reconcile such an omission.

Citing a distinction between taste and the aesthetic echo, Duchamp claimed that the former was readily accessible by many viewers and the latter, by few:

DUCHAMP. "...Taste gives sensuous feeling, not an aesthetic emotion...Taste presupposes a domineering onlooker who dictates what he likes and dislikes, and translates it into 'beautiful' and 'ugly'..."  
 (Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 7).

Equating the victim of the aesthetic echo to a believer or man in love, who must dismiss his ego and submit to a "pleasurable and mysterious constraint," Duchamp questions a fundamental agent within modernism, the Kantian analytic of taste and categorical imperative implicit in tropes of beauty espoused in his *Critique of Judgment*:

DUCHAMP. "My personal conclusion is that," Duchamp stated, "generally speaking, very few people are capable of an aesthetic emotion – or, an 'aesthetic echo.' While many people have taste, only a few are equipped with aesthetic receptivity"  
 (Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 8).

Continuing with the thread of Duchamp's thinking within the Round Table, in a section of the transcript titled, 'The Beautiful,' Duchamp argues against a fixed or absolute understanding of the beautiful, suggesting instead that, culturally:

DUCHAMP. "We are dealing only with that which is in motion"  
(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 20).

Motion implies movement outside of fixed preconceptions of beauty and taste. The echo of which Duchamp speaks is the immanence of the work of art itself, its ability to live by itself, by the authority of its author's intellect. The artist who makes the work of art is "like an irresponsible medium" (Clearwater, *West Coast Duchamp* 52). On the surface this comment seems to support modernism's reliance on the autonomy of art. The earlier symposium in New York, chronicled in *Life* magazine, also supported this tendency, framing the dialogue within formal analyses of art. Duchamp's presence on the West coast panel shifted the debate irretrievably. For the echo is not bound to the qualities that make the work autonomous, grounded in formal attributes of the medium. The artist as medium suggests direct intervention into this paradigm. The conceptual attributes of the work, as extension of the artist's intellect, emerge. Perhaps the geographical distance from the art market set Duchamp at ease to make such a statement, to confront Greenberg from across the North American continent, in a new territory of modernism, led by a new generation of artists:

DUCHAMP. "There are several kinds of basic principle: first, the basic principles that change with every generation, like the concept of the 'beautiful' ..," Duchamp states. "But I don't believe in the existence of eternal laws governing art metaphysically."<sup>10</sup>  
(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 23)

Circling back to Greenberg, we can see the emergence of an anti-Kantian proposition through which to understand the fundamental shifts in art practice that were on the horizon, specifically into postmodernism.

### 0.5 Questioning Postmodernity

To fully begin contextualizing this shift, it is necessary to revisit debates on postmodernity within critical French poststructuralist aesthetic theory, primarily between Jean François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas. What openings emerge within their debates that point to post studio artistic practice? How do contested terrains of modernity allow us to reimagine and place a missing archive of California post studio practice into its lineage, contesting further its hold on authorship, historicity, representation, beauty and taste? And, ultimately, how can we look ahead to the placement of post studio practice into an American poststructuralist discourse, led by Craig Owens? The pivot to Jacques Derrida provides one line of inquiry; similar pivots to the works of Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Jacques Rancière, Michel Foucault, and specifically, to Jean François Lyotard's *Pacific Wall*, will provide other relevant lines of inquiry into this project. In order to foreshadow such a turn, first one must reenlist lingering questions about modernism's role in legitimizing postmodernity and the subsequent aftershocks on aesthetic theory. For, as divergent as Lyotard and Habermas's critical engagement with modernity may appear to be, both view modernism as postmodernity's sire (albeit each contests whether legitimate or illegitimate).

Postmodernity, from Lyotard's point of view, owes much to Kantian theorists. Perhaps the uncontested father of modernity, as a figure through whom we must initially revisit its tropes, Kant instigates the debate between Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* and Habermas's "Modernity – and Incomplete Project" through his "Analytic of the Sublime." At

the core of Lyotard and Habermas's critical pugilism is presentation versus conception (the other contenders, unity and fraction, will be addressed at a later point). Lyotard suggests that the sublime sentiment is "where modern art finds its impetus and the logic of the avant-gardes finds its axioms" (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism" 1134). As an index of incommensurability, the sublime offers a methodology for questioning the subject's faculties to conceive and to present. Postmodern art and postmodern artists, therefore, are witnesses to that which is unrepresentable. As such, they deny "the solace of good forms," and "consensus of a taste, which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable." (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism" 1136-37). Rather than shirk from the subliminal, Lyotard suggests that the search, indeed the quest for new aesthetic presentations and new ways of sensing the unrepresentable, offer a truth not found within a *sensus communis* of Kantian ideology. For, as Lyotard reminds us, consensus may never be attained. As master narratives and master referents, Kantian judgments of taste and beauty are subsumed within the sublime, where the avant-garde can flush out "artifices of presentation which make it plausible to subordinate thought to the gaze and to turn away from the unrepresentable." While Habermas's aesthetics bear allegiance to the former, remaining "that of the beautiful," post studio artists disqualify that reality, hurling questions at "rules of image and narration" (Lyotard, "What Is Postmodernism" 1136).

Postmodernism's incredulity toward metanarratives supports its concomitant reliance on the rupture of Kantian consensus. For, as Lyotard suggests to Habermas, seeking consensus reinforces the emphasis on a social bond based on commensurability. Habermas counters through his conception of a 'shared life world' as a structure whose own metanarrative – its 'communicative rationality' – upholds and protects the threatened need for preservation of cultural traditions, socializations, and social integration. However, the very attributes of modern

societal modernization which Habermas suggests pit individualization against societal forces (mainly, economic and administrative, institutionalized rationality) are to be found in none other in the validities and methodologies espoused by Kant. Truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty are mediated and force fed to us through Enlightenment tropes of knowledge, justice, mortality and taste. They form the backbone of modernity, understood by Habermas as a movement that confines “science, morality, and art to autonomous spheres separated from the life-world and administered by experts” (Habermas, “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” 1130). “What remains from the project of cultural modernity,” he continues, “is only what we would have if we were to give up the project of modernity altogether” (1131). Would we?

Is it not possible to call Habermas out on his idealistic and utopian tendencies? To both dismantle modernity’s reliance on art and martyr artistic culture according to modernist tropes? The breakdown within his theory is that it relies conveniently on these tropes in suggesting that, through them, we can simultaneously dismantle modernity’s reliance on one specialized knowledge complex (autonomous art above cognitive or moral fields) – to reconcile the rupture of life-worlds – but only through the embrace of the layman. The expert has, it seems, muddied the waters of culture. Yet, can the layman reconcile this divide, our need of cognitive significations and our normative expectations? Duchamp, it seems, would counter this formulation of postmodernity as an unfinished project of modernity. Here it is helpful to revisit the Western Round Table on Modern Art to contest Habermas’s notion that “nothing remains from a de-sublimated meaning or a de-structured form; an emancipatory effect does not follow” (Habermas, “Modernity – An Incomplete Project” 1128).

From where, then, is one expected to find artistic emancipation within modernity? Was not Lyotard suggesting, through his admonitions that we must “wage war on totality,” be

“witnesses to the unrepresentable,” and “activate the differences,” an admonition that the categorical imperative of universality has consequences for artistic production? That, as he adds:

“Kant also knew that the price to pay for such an illusion is terror. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience” (Lyotard, “What Is Postmodernism” 1137).

The Western Round Table on Modern Art, and Duchamp, specifically, offer respite. As the debate continues, the tension between universality and specialization, hallmarks of the Habermas-Lyotard debate on postmodernism, emerges, as well as a debate over nostalgia for a changing world. Two participants on the Round Table, cultural anthropologist Gregory Bateson and philosopher Kenneth Burke, take issue with Duchamp’s aesthetic echo, linking it to a privileged language game shared only between artists and culturally astute audiences.

BATESON: “In Mr. Duchamp’s ‘aesthetic echo, terminology, the ‘aesthetic echo’ is a thing which can be shared by a very large number of people in that group”  
(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 9)

Bateson continues:

BATESON: “But we live in a culture which is changing very rapidly, and the ‘aesthetic echo’ that is carried in modern art, as far as I can see, tends to be the aesthesia – if that be the word – of a changing world.”  
(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 23)

He continues, linking the “aesthesia of nostalgia” for an unchanging world to an aesthetics that has as its main objective resistance to this change. Within this fissure, I suggest, a philosophical split is referenced that forever changes the course of modern art into postmodern art – not only within the larger discourses of modernity and the debates on postmodernity – but into a

geographical divide as well. This seismic shift will have repercussions for California post studio practice in the decades following the 1949 Western Round Table on Modern Art.

Additional aspects of the Round Table discussion also foreshadow the development of California post studio artistic practice. Within the transcript, there are references to communication and language, as well as to attitudinal shifts already taking place within modern art; tropes that will unfold further and challenge cultural, artistic production, and commodification. Kenneth Burke suggests:

BURKE. “The artist too is a specialist, in his fashion...But insofar as the public does not understand his special language, his act of communication is ineffective”  
(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 10)

As if to offer a counter-perspective, Kenneth Burke later suggests that something more intuitive is occurring within modern art, which anticipates the shifts toward post studio practice: new statements. Of all the suggestions made within the debate of the Western Round Table on Modern Art, the idea that new statements can emerge outside of prescribed, shared communication structures of the culturally astute has great bearing on the emergence of a post studio artistic community. The result, it seems, is an insular turn, one that eschews not only the dialectic of critic and laymen (such a force within modernity’s hold as the legitimate art practice) but also implodes on itself as a protective measure against commodification, institutionalization, and other forces of modernism. One is reminded, through the transcription of the Round Table, of another force at play:

BURKE. “There is also an internal process: the artist’s interaction with his own work in the course of creating it.” And, continuing on in a section titled ‘The Artist as Self-Critic’: “an artist is not merely expressing himself; he is considering the ‘attitude of the other,’ he is anticipating objections. There is thus a critical function interwoven with the creative function...”



(Western Round Table on Modern Art transcript, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library 50-51)

And, so, the pivot into postmodernism and post studio artistic practice remains a curious move. It seems as though modernism is both the contagion and the antidote for post studio practice. When attitude becomes form, what is left to archive? If artistic practice slips away from heretofore accepted tropes of representation, perhaps not having an archive is inevitable. Perhaps, instead, the Californian strain of post studio practice should be viewed as a simulacrum of modernity; understanding both its genealogy, yet not concerned with leaving behind tangible archives. Within this context it intentionally reifies a reality it disrupts.

Returning to the archive, a few emergent questions arise that are worthy of further investigation into how we may situate post studio artistic practice into postmodernity. Could post studio practice hold political agency because it determined its own destiny? Could the lack of a post studio archive eschew modernity's moral imperative, offering instead transgressive gestures that problematize representation? Here it is important to turn to Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* to frame this investigation. Taken from a lecture Derrida gave in June 1994 during an international colloquium entitled "Memory: The Question of Archives," he sets out in his introductory remarks to question the politics of the archives.

#### 0.6 The Simulated Archive

"There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory" (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 4). In this seemingly innocuous, statement, Derrida suggests that post studio practice would have no power without a material archive on which to stake its claim within the art world. Yet if we begin by understanding that the post studio archive which I reference – and indeed which I went in search of at CalArts – rests within an educational context, the archive is best understood as anti-derivative from the Greek *arkheion* (a domicile,

house, or physical place) but rather rests within artistic transmission and exchange, within the discourses of pedagogy. As Duchamp so rightly foreshadows, post studio artists were considering - anticipating – the attitudes of others and their objections within a critical framework. Derrida continues, “{I}t is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret” (4-5). Could we imagine California post studio practice through a lineage that subverts the very relationship Derrida references, subverts the institutionalized nature of the archive as a requirement of being seen as such, not held in house arrest, but rather uncontested by its very absence? And, as such, open for ventriloquizing?

Returning to John Baldessari’s course description – the only document in CalArts’s archives to directly reference ‘post studio,’ it becomes clear that the entire pedagogic provocation eludes such institutionalization. Within the course description itself, Baldessari asks, “Is the object necessary?”<sup>11</sup> At the core of post studio artistic practice is the dematerialization of the artwork itself. It is not surprising, then, that the archive in question dwells within a different topology, which, in solidarity with Derrida’s treatise on the archive - is privileged – but not necessarily with “this archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archic, in truth patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 3). Rather, it is privileged between those who investigated the emerging tropes of post studio artistic practice, residing in the attitudes of “Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance.”<sup>12</sup>

To understand the archive outside of Derrida's use of the term as a designated place, or a dwelling, it is perhaps a natural pivot to consider Baudrillard's use of the term simulacrum – a copy without an original - to situate the archive in terms of an imaginary dwelling that juxtaposes mapping to the real. Here we should recall the premise of this investigation, as one that posits that a lack of a formal archive – in this case the archive of post studio – actually catapults the necessity for a physical remnant into another territory: an intervention into modernism. According to Baudrillard, the imaginary serves to reorient our geographical and spatial exploration. He writes in *Simulacra and Simulation*, “when there is no longer any virgin territory, and thus one available to the imaginary, when the map covers the whole territory, something like the principal of reality disappears” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 123). When confronted with the loss of a territorial referential, a natural byproduct is one of “derealizing (dematerializing) human space, or transferring it into a hyperreal of simulation” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 124). The hyperreal ushers in a universe of simulation. Although the physical detritus of an archive is not readily available, Baudrillard suggests that it would be a misguided endeavor to attempt to recreate one. Rather, it is more fruitful to embrace the diffusion of coordinates (as he suggests – mental, temporal, spatial, signaletic) and delve into the hyperreal and its attendant imaginary space where the original can riff within an aesthetic indeterminacy. Here it is worth referencing Lyotard's text *Pacific Wall*, in which the vanishing point of the West, of California in particular, offers an ungriddable place, that becomes centered precisely because it is without coordinates, or grounding methodologies of aesthetic practice. As elliptical, and westward moving, authority and empire are like “waves taking on narratives of ex-centers of previous abandoned wests in search of new potencies, power” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 42). This phrase suggests a new context for decentered narratives and other voices to emerge –

minority strivings to use Edward Kienholz's terminology – of artists who were determined to intervene in the authorial legacy of modernism. The action Baudrillard invokes is perhaps what John Baldessari intended in his *Cremation Piece*, when he atomized the extant collection of his paintings. His provocative gesture mimics the call in his action toward a derealization of his artistic mark. The symbolic death of Baldessari's work should be viewed as an insurrection against modernity and authorship, of the sacred terrain of the artist's studio, rather than as a commemorative action in favor of the enduring signature of the artist's hand. In what Roland Barthes would categorize in "Death of the Author" as a move toward the performative, Baldessari's actions can be viewed as a gesture away from "recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting"" toward a linguistic turn in which "utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered" (Barthes. "Death of The Author" 4).

We must, it seems, return to Baudrillard's treatment of the simulacrum in the context of the political economy of the sign to further ground this investigation of post studio practice.<sup>13</sup> By referring to the social progression toward the residual, and away from fixed points of meaning exchange, Baudrillard seemingly dismantles Derrida's more psychoanalytic treatment of the archive and moves it into a system of economic exchange. He writes:

“{P}syoanalysis itself is the first great theorization of residues (lapses, dreams, etc.). It is no longer a political economy of production that directs us, but an economic politics of reproduction, of recycling—ecology and pollution—a political economy of the remainder. All normality sees itself today in the light of madness, which was nothing but its insignificant remainder” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 145).

According to Baudrillard's definition of meaning, “most literally: the possibility of going from one point to another according to a vector determined by the respective position of the terms,” when the respective positions no longer exist – when the linearity from original to reproduction is lost – the resulting image is both turned inside out, having disappeared from its original place

of authority (Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 144). The hyperreal emerges. Meaning is destroyed within the rise of postmodernity, which Baudrillard calls the second most important revolution outside modernity's radical destruction of appearances in the nineteenth century.

While melancholia may fill this void, the resulting erosion of modes of production into modes of disappearance is the exchange agent capable of mobilizing the imaginary – and artistic practice – along new pathways. “Theoretical violence, not truth” Baudrillard writes, “is the only resource left us” (163). Is it possible, against a backdrop of such theoretical violence, to imagine reconciliation between modernity and postmodernity? Or, between the model and the copy? Or is the postmodern artistic imaginary - post studio practice in particular – capable of breaking out of the Platonic dialectic, of situating itself within the simulacra as a modality of difference? Several clues reside in the Deleuzian treatment of Plato's original use of the simulacrum, in his 1968 text, *Difference and Repetition*, clues which offer a means to reconsider and to reclaim the simulacra from the banishment it received within Platonism.

Deleuze defines simulacra as phantasms, “differential systems with their disparate and resonating series, their dark precursor and forced movements” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 126). In defining simulacra in this manner, he simultaneously refers back to the anti-Platonic logic inherent in Platonic thought itself, exposing a theoretical contradiction. Positing a theory that favors difference over the original and the copy, Deleuze insinuates another claimant into the dialectic of copy and original. He suggests that the true Platonic distinction is elsewhere: “it is of another nature, not between original and the image but between two kinds of images {idoles}, of which copies {icons} are only the first kind, the other being simulacra {phantasmes}. The model-copy distinction is there only in order to found and apply the copy-simulacra distinction” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 127). Plato's allegiance to the model

is based on a desire to shape the selection of good images, “the icons which resemble from within,” and thereby exiling bad images – or simulacra. He simultaneously, according to Deleuze, subjugates the notion of difference to ideas of the same and the similar. Deleuze will posit that the claimant to whom we must pay attention is a model of the Other, “another model, the model of difference itself from which flows that interiorized dissimilitude” which is far removed from any reference to a model.

Why is the simulacrum, in terms of understanding a missing archive and also the relationship of representation within postmodern (post studio) artistic practice, important to this investigation? It allows, first and foremost, a reconsideration of the legitimacy of “good” images, an extension of the idea of an image without likeness outside of a moral paradigm (of man in the likeness of God) and even, as Derrida reminds us, outside of the tropes of psychoanalysis that blur lines between fantasy and reality. Instead, as challenging agents “to do their underground work and to the possibility of a world of their own” suggest that, against Baudrillard’s admonition that the age of simulacrum should be considered with trepidation for its social demise, perhaps linking it back to the Platonic and thereby providing a fulcrum back to modernity, simulacra challenge both the notion of the copy and the model. As Deleuze states, “The model collapses into difference, while the copies disperse into the dissimilitude of the series which they interiorize, such that one can never say that one is a copy and the other a model” (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 128). Images thrust inside-out, having, as Baudrillard suggests, disappeared from their original place of (Platonic) authority, makes room for simulacra to function as themselves, as Deleuze states, “passing and repassing the decentered centres of the eternal return” and into the uncoordinated, elliptical territories of new power and potency in Lyotard’s Pacific Wall (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 128). Into California post

studio practice itself, whose lack of a formal archive disassociates itself from a material need. Copy without original, forever cast out to dwell in exchange and memory.

### 0.7 When Attitudes become Form

More than an attitude, post studio was a belief system manifest in California at CalArts, within an uncoordinated terrain offering circuitous systems of highways, a desert-like horizontality, and the Pacific shelf which is perpetually prone to seismic shifts, including aesthetic shifts. “California,” Baudrillard writes, “creates a different state of mind. There is something of the freedom of movement that you have in the desert here, and indeed Los Angeles, with its extensive structure, is merely an inhabited fragment of the desert” (Baudrillard, *America* 55). California’s networked systems of highways were signs of destiny, offering a demand toward expulsion from a paradise, via a “providential highway” that “leads nowhere” (Baudrillard, *America* 55). Implicit within the exit signs on the aesthetic highways of post studio art practices is a collective call toward defiance, a derailment from the tropes of European modernist tendencies: the California dream.

Is the reconstitution of history a uniquely American obsession or characteristic of a society that has, as Baudrillard suggests, “become emancipated here as nowhere else on earth”? (Baudrillard, *America* 46). Emancipated from a purely moral doctrine, placed into an interstitial web of self-reference, in a “paradisiac and inward-looking illusion”? (Baudrillard, *America* 46). And, how can one situate Lyotard’s admonition that the breaking up of grand narratives is haunted by “paradisiac representation of a lost ‘organic’ society”? (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 15). Is post studio practice an illusionary operative, steeped in an a-historical provenance, an author of its own narrative, or is it found within the symbolic death of modernism that fates it to legitimize narratives it seeks to terminate?

To begin to posit answers to these questions, it is useful to cite Lyotard's text *Pacific Wall* to reinforce the argument that post studio practices embody not only imaginary spaces but also aesthetically dematerialized attitudes. *Pacific Wall* curiously complicates the lineage of authorship, through its palimpsest structure, which superimposes Lyotard's critique over a text written by another author, Michel Vachey. Lyotard moves Vachey's text to the shores of California, to a cultural landscape where:

“a combination of geographical, historical, and cultural distances, accumulated influences, grace of skies and environment, together with the wealth, have freed Americans more than others from the European past, predisposing them to take on a version of Capitalism that's now pagan, disencumbered of thoughts of legitimization, interested instead of thinking up this or that new plan and carrying out the effects of it. A mentality that's not particularly political in an imperial sense” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 56).

The irreverence of the phrase, “A mentality that's not particularly political in an imperial sense” is replicated in Baudrillard's observations on American culture, and the depoliticized attitude in the American west, specifically, Los Angeles. As a site where space is the “very form of thought,” Baudrillard's creation myth for California emanates from a space where “an object is beyond the control of architects” (Baudrillard, *America* 17). Baudrillard arrived in San Diego in 1974 with the “idea that California was the testing ground of simulation,” only to find that “this experimental side” was to be found in its deserts (x). “The form that dominates the American West, and doubtless all of American culture, is a seismic form: a fractal, interstitial culture, born of a rift with the Old World; a tactile, fragile, mobile, superficial culture – you have to follow its own rules to grasp how it works: seismic shifting, soft technologies” (Baudrillard, *America* 11). One must, it seems, return to the original fault line of the Pacific wall itself, as a construct for de-territorializing the boundaries in artistic practice:

“We might understand,” Baudrillard writes, “why Lyotard calls the “Pacific Wall” as the wall of crystal that imprisons California in its own beatitude. But whereas the demand for happiness used to be something oceanic and emancipatory, here it comes wrapped up in a



foetal tranquility. Are there still passions, murders, and acts of violence in this strange, padded, wooded, pacified, convivial republic? Yes, but the violence is autistic and reactionary. There are no crimes of passion, but there are rapes...” This is a foetal violence, as gratuitous as ‘automatic writing’. It seems an expression not so much of real aggression as of nostalgia for the old prohibitions” (Baudrillard, *America* 46-47).

The violent tendencies of former empires, of “an imperial American Roman Germanic name,” change when confronted with a more pacifist stance, an indoctrination of nostalgia for modernism’s past (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 12). Lyotard reminds us:

“For what does Vachez’s poorly constructed Wall mean if you take it literally? America comes to a halt dumbstruck before an ocean that puts an end to the Western border. The golden dream’s accomplished, and people go about enjoying it. Social consensus isn’t sought for in authority of the capital but becomes displacement westward. The history of States is coming to an end. Something else can be heard at work –something in the silence of what’s finished. What’s at issue has stopped being an occupation of lands, and, even less, an exploitation of resources. The issue is conquest of this or that kind of knowledge, committing it to memory, making it available, and the usefulness of this knowledge in creating new plans or developments. And isn’t space-time in which they’re resident, in which the game is played, isn’t that space-time as your ‘ungriddable space’? (57).

The displacement of social consensus westward, into a space-time dimension, seems rooted in continental expansionism, in the lull of California’s golden dream. The conquest for knowledge which Lyotard suggests is detached from an occupation of lands and an exploitation of resources resonates with several tenets of post studio practice, including the dematerialization of the object and the deterritorializing effect of artistic practice removed from literal constructions – be they of a gallery wall, a canvas, or a studio. Metaphorically, Lyotard suggests such literal constructs of traditional artistic practice are broken apart within the ungriddable spaces – perhaps of imagination’s interiority itself – the incommensurable.

Lyotard’s reference to post-industrial knowledge production and exchange systems foreshadow his inquiry into the question of knowledge in advanced industrial societies in his seminal 1979 work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Here one must

consider the concept of ‘post’ outside a synchronized, temporal landscape, instead placing it in a diachronically determined, spatially constructed field of perception. As a means rather than an end in itself, knowledge conquers new terrain, losing what Lyotard calls its “use-value” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 4-5). Moving outside the unilateral grid – an organizing system linking messages in between sender, addressee, and referent, Lyotard suggests a series of “posts” where one is located and through which various kinds of messages pass, however not necessarily in a linear manner. The result is a shattering and delegitimization of grand narratives. Within this formulation is the dismantling of modernity and the migration into post studio artistic production. Directly linked to the deconsolidation of knowledge, Lyotard writes: “Given equal competence (no longer in the acquisition of knowledge, but in its production), what extra performativity depends on in the final analysis is “imagination,” which allow one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game” (52).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a new move, a new argument, corresponds to the development of post studio practice, outside the boundaries of modernism and an art for art’s sake mentality, and into an embracement of the defiance of aesthetic conventions.

“A mentality that’s not particularly political in an imperial sense,” is worth revisiting, for it suggests a counterargument that post studio artistic practice is nothing more than a depoliticized attitude of the American west, if not rumination on the California dream. The statement also suggests a vacuous approach to dismantling the power of modernism; suggesting, by extension, that its power still holds, that its irreducible imperialism cannot be conquered through a superficiality of believing that the “golden dream’s accomplished, and people go about enjoying it” (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 57). Is it really possible to think that the history of States, as Lyotard suggests, is coming to an end? And, moving Lyotard’s provocation into an aesthetic terrain, is it fathomable that modernism could really come to an end? Or is he,

as Habermas would argue, misguided in his belief, and rather, that modernity is and always will be an unfinished project? Baudrillard would agree, adding, quite cynically, in *The Conspiracy of Art* that the rise of conceptual – or trans-aesthetic- art, to use his terminology, contributed to make ‘readymade’ everything, resulting in a loss of the illusionary values of modernism and an excess of art. Modernism dies because of this excess, not because of the erosion of “nostalgia for old aesthetic values” (Baudrillard, *The Conspiracy of Art* 63). Here, post studio insinuates itself unwittingly, precisely because of its depoliticized mentality which Lyotard rightly cites. For, less concerned attitudinally with imperialism, it intervenes aesthetically with the imperialistic tendencies of modernism in direct defiance of its conventions and regimes.

#### 0.8 Aesthetic Regimes

If we can begin to fully substantiate post studio artistic practice as a politicized endeavor, perhaps what is needed is an understanding of the regimes and apparatuses against which it can transcend a label of passivity and laissez-faire mentalities. Understood in what Jacques Rancière terms the ‘aesthetic regime of art,’ where the meaningful fabric of the sensible is disturbed, perhaps post studio practice pushes beyond postmodernity. As a construct, postmodernity, according to Rancière, actually subsumes modernity’s rupture. Rancière’s aesthetic regime, therefore, finds more kinship with Lyotard’s palimpsest *Pacific Wall* than *The Postmodern Condition*. Less a mourning of or nostalgia for master discourses, the uncharted territory of post studio practice is in “...fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations” (Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* 59). Post studio is an aesthetic in solidarity with the loss of coordinates inherent in recasting the sensible, and a

practice comfortable within the space of the ungriddable, the incommensurable - an aesthetically defiant proposition. It is equally important to invoke Rancière's notion of dissension in relation to the pedagogy of post studio practice, to more fully comprehend and position post studio artistic practice as an intervention into modernity.

“Dissensus,” Rancière writes, “does not refer to a conflict of interests, opinions or values, but to the juxtaposition of two forms of the sensory implementation of collective intelligence” (Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* 80). How can one position this recurring refrain in his text, and the notion of dissension more broadly, in relation to the pedagogy of post studio practice, to more fully comprehend and position post studio artistic practice as an intervention into modernity? Rancière's definition of dissensus calls upon the aesthetic sphere to dismantle and to recreate a new form of equality of intelligence and sensibility, implying an “overturning of the hierarchy of form over matter and activity over passivity” (81). Aesthetic freedom can embody two opposing interpretations according to Rancière: one maintains the aesthetic sphere as isolated from the sphere of existence; the other juxtaposes the “supplementary and dissensual political community to the true community.” It does so by invoking a new revolutionary attitude realized “in the materiality of the lived world” (81). The implication, it seems, is a move full circle away from the previously understood, Kantian *sensus communis*. Rancière's proposition radicalizes this Enlightenment stance and offers a new understanding of how a true community – one dedicated to destroying and recreating a new artistic proposition - emerges. If Kant's notion of *sensus communis* is grounded in a shared, public sense, or a judgment that heeds to an a priori mode of representation and collective reason, on this plane the concept seems aligned with Rancière's assertion that dissensus is not in conflict with shared opinions. Yet, Rancière's paradigm of the aesthetic revolution places intelligence as the fulcrum to self-legitimization. It is

here that the rise of post studio artistic practice can emerge from Kantian stasis, into a new revolution realized “in the materiality of the lived world.” “This means,” Rancière writes, “that the collective intelligence has to re-configure the totality of the material world in order to turn it into the product of its own immaterial power” (81). A true community, as a consensual community, Rancière suggests, moves the legislative delight one sees in Kant’s communal, disinterested judgments into a community in which “the spiritual sense of being-in-common is embedded in the material sensorium of everyday experience” (81). It seems that within the aesthetic realm, as a site of revolutionary artistic practices, the movement in aesthetic theories of Enlightenment through postmodernity, from *sensus communis* to dissensus, offers lasting implications for pedagogy. Rancière seems more in line with Schiller’s schema that re-animates the body politic through the embodiment of a new mythology, a unification through aesthetic apprehension of a common life. He also, through the solicitation of dissention, aligns with Marx’s equally humanistic plea that producers reclaim their agency through the very exchange of ideas and intelligence, through an actuality based in its critique of power structures. This movement – or realignment – seemingly reverses state power and institutionalized power structures, and realizes that the struggle is within the materiality of the lived world. In other words, and according to Rancière, “it contrasts the supplementary and dissensual political community to the true community” (81).

As the conclusion of this introduction will highlight, through a further synthesis of these aesthetic theories, are the pedagogical implications that such movement has had in shaping post studio practice. Rancière’s use of the term *intempestive* offers a foreshadowing mechanism for understanding post studio practice as both relating to and not relating to time, or a linear, griddable space; but, rather an untimely, interventionist mentality emerges. He also, and rightly

so, invokes self-legitimization as a product of the immateriality of concepts and images, which squarely evokes the terrain of post studio practice, in a manner not as reductive as the argument which equates dematerialization with de-commodification – a trap too often fallen into in theorizing post studio practice.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the premise of this project, to continue to situate post studio practice within a materialist dialectic (as anti-object, pro-dematerialization) negates, as Rancière suggests, its transgressive voice and emergent philosophical discourses that initially gave it agency. It also subscribes to a simplistic definition of the practice's modality. In order to claim this philosophical terrain appropriately, we must revisit the issue from both postmodern and genealogical points of view unfolding at the intersection of the imaginary of the West and artistic and pedagogical expansionism. One way to achieve this is by returning to California specifically, and into pedagogic platforms that emanated from the West coast and define post studio along ahistorical, atemporal constructs. By invoking not only Rancière's use of *intempestive*, but also his definition of anarchy and *arkhé*, it is possible to refute the claim in *Pacific Wall* that what emanates from the beatitude of the West is "A mentality that's not particularly political in an imperial sense" (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 56). As I previously acknowledged, this stance suggests that post studio artistic practice is nothing more than a depoliticized attitude of the American west, if not merely a rumination on the California dream. However, by revisiting the pedagogical platforms of post studio practice at CalArts it is more evident that within the transmission of transgressive knowledge exchanges, a highly political attitude emerged within the 1970s with lasting implications for postmodernism. Before taking this step and situating post studio in a purely geographical imaginary space – in California – it is imperative to revisit the movement

from modernity to postmodernity, from Europe to the shores of America (specifically, New York), to fully comprehend the political nature of California post studio artistic practice.

#### 0.9 Attitudinal Shifts: Postmodernism

The anti-imperialist attitude of post studio practice is one that eschews modernist tendencies of medium-specificity and art for art's sake methodologies. Post studio practice, as Brian O'Doherty writes in a series of articles published in *Artforum* in 1976, opposes two forces, "the fragmentation of the self and the illusion of holding it together" (O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of Gallery Space* 61). Furthermore, as he suggests, the hard-core conceptualist methodology of such practices eliminate "the Eye in favor of the mind" (62). Moving into the interior space of our consciousness (and simultaneously invoking its lack), builds upon Duchamp's aesthetic echo in a space that exposes the effect of context within art, in this case the politicized context of an attitude that has as its clarion call a new examination of artistic containment, which Duchamp recognized as an area of art not yet interrogated satisfactorily. As early as the 1949 Western Round Table on Modern Art, Duchamp was proselytizing this attitude and suggesting that the movement from European modernism to New York looks differently when approached from the geographical distance of California.

Since Duchamp, Joseph Beuys perhaps is the other main European player to continue this attitude west, through his early musings on social sculpture that were chronicled in *Avalanche* magazine's May 1974 interview on the occasion of his first trip to the United States. Advocating for a staunchly ahistorical approach, he states the following, pulled from the interview transcription:

BEUYS. "I was invited to come here (the New School for Social Research) to speak about my idea of art, which is to enlarge the effectivity of art beyond the idea of art as coming out of an art history" (Beuys, *Avalanche* 5).<sup>16</sup>

Speaking of the evolutionary power art invokes for history, Beuys suggests that through a holos, or a holographical approach to artistic practice one can invoke a new artistic medium to reclaim the illusion of the self, toward a reconciliation where aesthetics=human being. In response to being asked how he would describe his new aesthetic, Beuys responded:

BEUYS. “I describe it radically: I say aesthetics=human being. That is a radical formula. I set the idea of aesthetics directly in the context of human existence, and then I have the whole problem in the hand, then I have not a special problem, I have a holography”  
(Beuys, *Avalanche* 7).

The idealistic tendency these statements evoke are political gestures, in that what Beuys was espousing was a move away from alienating tendencies of artistic practice *vis a vis* contained systems, and into a political arena where all human activities have become art, and therefore must be organized by artists themselves. The agency moves from within the contained studio and gallery system into the newly imagined, attitudinal consciousness of this holographical, aesthetic zone.

If attitudinal consciousness can be perceived as the definitive turn in post studio artistic practice, the treatise, “Attitude,” written by James Irwin about the San Francisco Art Institute’s equivalent post studio program - its Performance/Video/Computer Arts (PVC) program - created in the late 1970s is another key, Californian primary source to consider, offers clues linking back to an ahistorical construct. The department, he states, “was a department of concept, of process, most importantly, of attitude” (Irwin, “Attitude” 1, Courtesy of SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). Founded by sculpture faculty member Howard Fried, the department was established outside the modernist trope of sculptural practice, and extended into a realm where art was understood as a process, an approach where all mediums, including the body, were open for use. At times described as the “emergence of 4-dimensional activity (time being the fourth),”



the relationship of what was understood as sculpture morphed into its subsequent forms of “performance, video, film, and video installation, as well as various forms of 2-dimensional documentation and installation” (Irwin, “Attitude” 2, Courtesy of SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). Within this expanded definition of artistic practice, the relationship to Ranieri’s terms *intempestive*, *anarchy* and *arkhé* become activated within a pedagogical shift, and indeed into a more political realm refuting the imperialism once held firmly by modernism’s grip. *Pacific Wall*’s refrain, “A mentality that’s not particularly political in an imperial sense” becomes contested within this expanded definition of what art could be, and indeed became, at SFAI and at SFAI’s Southern California rival, CalArts.

The idea of medium expansion links directly to territorial expansion. Craig Owens’s mentor, art historian Rosalind Krauss, in her work “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” published in October in 1979, suggests that the elasticity of sculpture displays “the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything.” (Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” 36). Including, as we will see in the later work of Kienholz’s tableaux, to corridors, TV monitors, mirrors and large photographs, and manipulation of the desert and land, among other things. Krauss’s writing also aligns with the concept paper for CalArts that states: “In that uncatalogued no-man’s land between the collage and the Happening, divisions between painting and sculpture are dissolving into history.”<sup>17</sup> Krauss categorizes early American 1960s art work as “a categorical no-man’s land: it was what was on or in front of a building that was not a building or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape.” (Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” 41). The shared allegiance to mapping a “no-man’s land,” whether through dialectical categorization of the built versus non- built and the cultural /natural, which were Krauss’s preoccupations, or the divisions and rifts within artistic practice, a seismic shift was occurring. A

shift which Krauss would label ‘post-modernism’ to name “this historical rupture and the structural transformation of the cultural field that characterizes it,” suggesting that “one must have recourse to another term.” (44) The term postmodernism escapes definition in relationship to a given medium, and positions itself in relation to a set of cultural terms, according to Krauss, allowing for any medium to be used. The expanded field within postmodernist practice, therefore, is no longer dictated by the conditions of a particular medium. “The bounded conditions of modernism,” Krauss writes, “have suffered a logically determined rupture” (46). A rupture within which post studio practice inserts itself.

Revisiting Irwin, and to further contextualize this shift, he suggests that “revisionist histories can have a way of liberating the student from the oppression of the past,” and that the philosophy of the PVC department was “an attack on all that is held sacred,” combined with “a constant demand for creative production, so that a higher (artistic) truth will take shape and fill whatever voids remain” (Irwin, “Attitude” 3, Courtesy of SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). The resulting practice embodies an anarchistic attitude, and links to Rancière’s ahistorical notions of materiality, invoking not only Rancière’s use of *intempestive*, but also his definition of anarchy and *arkhé* in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Rancière’s use of the term *intempestive* offers a foreshadowing mechanism for understanding post studio practice as both relating to and not relating to a time: ahistorical. Extending ahistoricity into artistic practice further politicizes its relationship to modernism, and offers an interventionist space for questioning authorial lineages along a newly constituted space-time continuum. Whether embraced as a fourth dimension, an ungriddable terrestrial domain, or a simulacrum, the emergence of post studio practice dismantled modernity’s legitimizing power within these new

constructs. A new trope of knowledge production, it seems, was needed to fill the void cleft open by such interventionist tactics.

Returning to the platform of postmodernity, and harkening back to Beuys's use of social sculpture as a means to reconcile the division of human aesthetic activity within a holos, Rancière's politicized notions of aesthetics embody, first and foremost, the actions of supplementary subjects, "inscribed as a surplus in relation to every count of the parts of society" (Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* 33). The core question of politics, therefore, resides in this zone between surplus and void. Understood as an-archy, the void constitutes the absence of any legitimacy of power and [is] itself constitutive of the very nature of political space." It also, and importantly for this project of archival intervention, reduces the "logic of politics to the question of an originary scene of power" (Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* 34). "An arkhè," Rancière writes, "is two things: it is a theoretical principle entailing a clear distribution of positions and capacities, grounding the distribution of power between rulers and ruled; and it is a temporal beginning entailing the fact of ruling is anticipated in the disposition to rule and, conversely, that the evidence of this disposition is given by the fact of its empirical operation" (51). If the corpus of the body politic is absent, void, anarchistic, then the legitimizing power is seemingly up for grabs, contested without proof of the corpus. Could post studio practice hold political agency because it determined its own destiny? Could the lack of a post studio archive eschew modernity's moral imperative, instead offering a transgressive gesture that problematizes representation? John Baldessari's cremation of his entire corpus of paintings ushered in post studio practice as an emphatic declaration that not only such a denial, but rather a calculated intervention into the body politic, could emancipate artistic practice. This

emancipation can be considered within theories of power and representation, specifically, of allegory and appropriation, as this project uncovers.

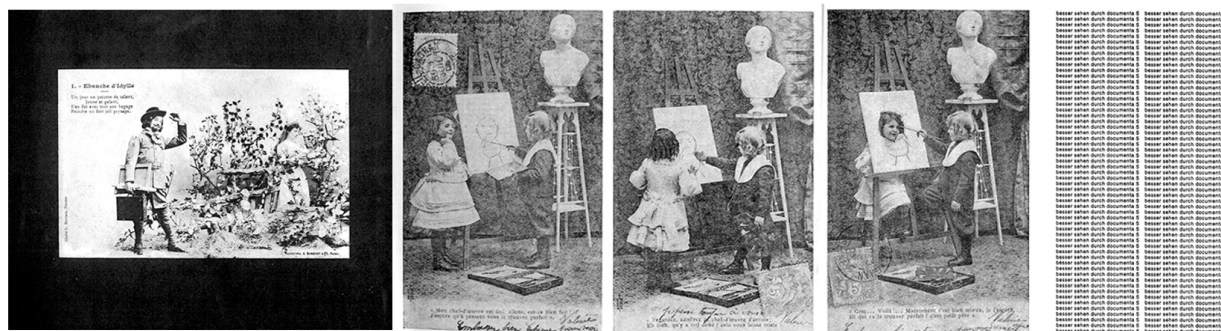


Figure 3 Frontispiece from *documenta V catalog*, 1972 (Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library)

There is a direct link between *documenta V*, *Pacific Wall*, and post-studio practice.<sup>18</sup> *documenta V*'s catalog suggests, as an operative element, the critique of the frame of reference of artistic production as held within the studio and, specifically, within the frame of the canvas. The catalog's frontispiece is a series of reprinted French postcards from the nineteenth century. Depicting a traditional, European, atelier environment, the scene is titled "Ebauche d'idylle," or a first attempt at perfection. After a young male painter asserts his intention to "paint a beautiful landscape," an interior studio scene unfolds where another young painter, also male, embarks on painting the portrait of a young female model. "Do you like this pose?," he asks. "Be a good girl, be well behaved, and in three strokes I'll paint your portrait." As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that the girl is not satisfied with the outcome, and proceeds to push her head through the canvas, tearing it down the middle. "Here you go," she says, "now it's much better I hope." "And who is going to find it perfect, its little father" (Frontispiece from *documenta V catalog*, 1972, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). The father of

modernism, the patriarchal figure whose lineage is being contested in this episodic, stop motion sequence, portends the founding of post studio pedagogic practice at CalArts in two ways; the first as a confrontation of the authority of modernism's formal obsession with medium and the frame; the second, as a reclamation of Craig Owens's theories on allegory and appropriation, and how they function within post studio practice and postmodernity. Founded in 1970, CalArts's concept, gleaned from a document within its archives, suggests that a material or a method is "not an imposition but an experiential risk." Post studio artists contested modernism: "In that uncatalogued no-man's land between the collage and the Happening, divisions between painting and sculpture are dissolving into history. Some artists, defying the pressures of the modern, will want to reclaim the distinctions from the vanishing point."<sup>19</sup> The vanishing point of the West, of California in particular, offered an ungriddable place, as we are reminded in Lyotard's *Pacific Wall*, that becomes centered precisely because it is without coordinates, or grounding methodologies of past known practice. As elliptical, and westward moving, Vachey writes, authority and empire are like "waves taking on narratives of ex-centers of previous abandoned wests in search of new potencies, power" (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 42).

#### 0.10 John Baldessari's Cremation

On July 24, 1970, artist John Baldessari embarked on a project to quell an emergent anxiety, and uneasiness over his thinking that, "art might be more than painting" (Baldessari, SFAI lecture, April 30, 2003, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). In response to his ruminations over the accepted, modernist tropes of painting and traditional sculpture, Baldessari cremated the majority of his paintings made between 1953 and 1966, which lined the walls of his movie theatre turned studio in National City, California. In a project he titled *Cremation Piece*, the remains of his early artistic practice were relegated to nine "adult-

sized” and two “baby-sized” crematory boxes, 12” x 3” x 6” and less, respectively, in dimension. To commemorate the “ritual of ending the wrong road I was on,” Baldessari commissioned a plaque, etched only with the words: John Anthony Baldessari: May 1953-March 1966 (Baldessari, SFAI lecture, April 30, 2003, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library).

As noted previously, the symbolic death of Baldessari’s work should be viewed as an insurrection against modernity and authorship, of the sacred terrain of the artist’s studio, rather than as a commemorative action in favor of the enduring signature of the artist’s hand. In what Roland Barthes would categorize in “Death of the Author” as a move toward the performative, Baldessari’s actions can be viewed as a gesture away from “recording, of observing, of representing, of “painting”” toward a linguistic turn in which “utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered” (Barthes, “Death of the Author” 4). In September 1970, the Jewish Museum inaugurated an exhibition titled *Software: Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* in which Baldessari’s piece evolved into the *Cremation Project*, in response to the Museum’s refusal to exhibit his painting’s physical ashes. In its new iteration, the project morphed into mere documentation of the cremation, a series of photographs illustrating the act of destruction. Within this transformation of the artists’ intent, Baldessari’s paintings reached their metaphorical death by virtue of the fact that photographs of the crematory act, rather than the urn holding his works’ ashes, were displayed. As a superimposed representation of their utterance, a breach of aesthetical integrity in deference to morality and historical duty took place.

The conceptual turn in Baldessari’s work is emblematic of a shift occurring in artistic practice during the nascent decade of 1970, away from traditional mediums of painting and sculpture, toward performance, text, photography and land art as new ground for artistic

authorship. The rise of post studio art practice, a unique regional strain of conceptual art in the American west – in California specifically – took aim at the accepted modernist tropes afar from the commercial center of art, New York City. One of the earliest references to “post studio” art occurred in the 1972 course description for “Introduction to Post Studio Art” at the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California.<sup>20</sup> However, Baldessari credits artist Carl Andre with coining the term post studio. During a two-day symposium at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) on October 5 and 6, 1970, *The Halifax Conference*, Andre engaged with Joseph Beuys over the idea of artistic quality. One exchange in particular is relevant to this project and the genealogy of the term post studio. Andre states:

ANDRE. “I’m just saying, art is not something which lives absolutely in the studio, even in the studio in a relative social democracy”  
(Khonsary, *The Halifax Conference* 93).

Earlier within the transcript from the conference, Andre was already questioning if, among other things, art could be taught; why the artists at the conference were not in Vietnam; and, most germane to this project, how to label the art they were doing - terms he used include ‘advanced art,’ ‘experimental art,’ and ‘research art.’ He ended session two of the conference with the statement:

ANDRE. “I don’t put any value on the container”  
(Khonsary, *The Halifax Conference* 74).

This statement finds itself reflected in CalArts’s course description of post studio two years later:

“A workshop for students who are interested in the possibility of defining themselves as artists in ways other than using oil on canvas or doing sculpture in the round. The course will proceed on the assumption that any material can be an art material and any idea is worthy of exploration within the art context. From that point, each student must develop his own critical construct.”<sup>21</sup>

As the founder of and instructor in the post studio program, Baldessari himself was interested in interrogating such questions and issues as “Is the object necessary, originality in art, must art be

visual, what is order, durability, place and process, art as experience, art as time and etc.”<sup>22</sup> As an artist interested in dismantling the adherence to visual artifacts, Baldessari pledged his allegiance instead to a phrase he attributes to Francisco de Goya, *this is not to be looked at*. By referring back to the destruction of his own corpus as a negation of a visual realm, leaving us instead within a cultural dissonance— Baldessari offers an enduring epigraph reminiscent of Lyotard’s words in the forward to *Pacific Wall*, where his palimpsestic journey emerges: “No sooner is the eye caught in a book’s plot or tangle of landscape lines,” Lyotard writes, “than it begins to jump from one to the other, and the suspicion arises you’ve been had. And that getting either in or out is impossible for the precise reason that there is no in or out” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 3). Baldessari’s anxiety, indeed his own suspicion of being able to locate aesthetic discourse within a specific visual grid, is an unearthing of previously grounded, accepted artistic methodologies. His crematory act is an act of ultimate dematerialization of both the studio and the artist’s signature, indeed of the artist’s body itself.

Here it is useful to turn to Lyotard's text *Pacific Wall* to reinforce the argument that post studio practices embody an imaginary space in the quest for aesthetic dematerialization. More than an attitude, post studio was a belief system manifest in California, within an uncoordinated terrain that offers an endless horizontality within in deserts, circuitous systems of highways, and the pacific shelf which is perpetually prone to seismic shifts, where the ground physically moves below you. As Baudrillard reminds us and I restate, “California creates a different state of mind. There is something of the freedom of movement that you have in the desert here, and indeed Los Angeles, with its extensive structure, is merely an inhabited fragment of the desert” (Baudrillard, *America* 55). The networks of California’s highways struck Baudrillard as a sign of destiny, as a demand toward expulsion from a paradise, a “providential highway” that “leads nowhere” (55).



Implicit within the exit signs on the aesthetic highways of post studio art practices is a collective call, a derailment from the tropes of European modernist tendencies.

Indeed, in *Pacific Wall*, Michel Vachey shifts his commentary not only onto America, but specifically to California, stating: “There’s necessity causing untainted spaces to regress westward. The imperial limes stretch East, but the metropolis never stops moving West. We chatted about Kassel on the shores of Southern California. Which is absolute West. Or the enabling mechanism of American capitalism—in other words, Roman power” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 27). By situating his analysis of Edward Kienholz’s tableau, *Five Car Stud*, in the space of Southern California, which he deems “absolute West,” Vachey invokes the problematic of Westward continental expansionism and the lure of the West as a promised land. *Pacific Wall* simultaneously complicates the lineage of authorship, superimposing Lyotard’s critique over a text written by another author. As Barthes reminds us, “We know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture” (Barthes, “Death of The Author” 4). Lyotard moves Vachez’s text Westward, to the shores of California, to a cultural landscape where:

“a combination of geographical, historical, and cultural distances, accumulated influences, grace of skies and environment, together with the wealth, have freed Americans more than others from the European past, predisposing them to take on a version of Capitalism that’s now pagan, disencumbered of thoughts of legitimization, interested instead of thinking up this or that new plan and carrying out the effects of it. A mentality that’s not particularly political in an imperial sense” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 56).

The phrase, “A mentality that’s not particularly political in an imperial sense” is curiously irreverent – but one that brings to view Baudrillard’s observations on American culture, in

particular, on Los Angeles and the seemingly depoliticized attitude in the American West. As written previously, Baudrillard arrived in San Diego in 1974 with the “idea that California was the testing ground of simulation,” only to find that “this experimental side” was to be found in its deserts (Baudrillard, *America* 17). Using the term “desertification,” Baudrillard asserts that in America, there exists a fundamental “rejection of the ‘civilized’ in favour of the timeless and pre- and post- historic (or, if you prefer, pre- and post-human) desert (17). Here, Baudrillard shifts the moral narrative to the side of preservation, to a puritanical stance grounded in its vitality from a lack of roots, relegated to moving within an interstitial territory: “The form that dominates the American West, and doubtless all of American culture, is a seismic form: a fractal, interstitial culture, born of a rift with the Old World, a tactile, fragile, mobile, superficial culture – you have to follow its own rules to grasp how it works: seismic shifting, soft technologies” (17). As a site where space is the “very form of thought,” Baudrillard’s creation myth for California is steeped in its mythology, a space where “an object is beyond the control of architects” (17). Baudrillard, we recall, went searching for what he would term an *astral* America, one corresponding to a nonphysical realm of existence, one in which the physical human body is said to have a counterpart, a simulacrum. Everything, according to his theory, can have a second birth, the eternal birth of the simulacrum. Baldessari’s post studio work can be seen within this enduring creation myth, as a loop, or a reconstruction of history, in particular through his *Cremation Piece* and his reference to a phoenix rising from the ashes in the *Software* exhibition. Displaced somewhere in the atomization of Baldessari’s corpus is a lasting critique on the space of objectification, belief systems, and preservation, or what Baudrillard suggests is the intersection of the imaginary and survival: “Not only are the Americans missionaries, they are also Anabaptists: having missed out on the original baptism, they dream of baptizing

everything a second time and only accord value to this later sacrament which is, as we know, a repeat performance of the first, but its repetition as something more real. And this indeed is the perfect definition of the simulacrum” (42). Baldessari’s work captures the real in an imagined space, an astral space that has as its goal a perpetual recreation myth, in this case, against modernity. A heroic gesture.

If heroism is manifest in Baldessari’s gestures, it is through an equally imaginary, heroic narrative grounded in the concept of the American west’s founding. In his text titled *California: A Study in American Character*, American moral philosopher Josiah Royce suggests that, “social construction of knowledge has transformed the way we think about the American West in general and California history in particular” (Royce, *California: A Study in American Character* xxix). As such, Royce views the history of the American West in metaphysical terms, as a societal shift from a purely willful individualism into a cohesive social community. “Early California history is not for babes nor for sentimentalists; but its manly wickedness is full of the strength that, on occasion, freely converts itself into an admirable moral heroism” (175). The conversion Royce alludes to is endemic to the struggles nascent societies undertake between longings for liberty (and in the case of California, the lure of gold) and moral judgments:

“California was full of Jonahs, whose modest and possibly unprophetic duties had lain in their various quiet paths at home. They had found out how to escape all these duties, at least for the moment, by fleeing overseas and deserts. Strange to say, the ships laden with these fugitives sank not but bore them safely to the new land. And in the deserts the wanderers by land found an almost miraculous safety. The snares of the god were, however, none the less well laid for that, and these hasty feet were soon to trip. ...For nowhere and at no time are social duties in the end more painful or exacting than in the tumultuous days of new countries...” (216)

Royce’s use of a biblical reference in relation to the founding of California is not surprising; indeed, Royce is usually viewed as a moralist. His writing adopts an equally romantic tenor, describing the pioneering spirit of early settlers as one of ardor, high aims, generosity, honor –

supporting what he refers to as “the good order of the Californian community” (215). Royce’s use of the story of Jonah, of the flight over the deserts, of the moral struggles associated with such endeavors, foreshadow, albeit somewhat perversely, the poststructuralist analysis of the Californian deserts and the quest for new knowledge in Baudrillard’s text *America*, written exactly a century after Royce’s *California*, in 1986.

If Baldessari can be viewed as a hero, a leader of post studio’s imaginary dissent against the established and legitimized tropes of modernism, we must return to the wall itself, to the Pacific as a construct of boundaries in artistic practice, “the wall of crystal that imprisons California in its own beatitude. But whereas the demand for happiness used to be something oceanic and emancipatory, here it comes wrapped up in a foetal tranquility” (Baudrillard, *America* 46-47). Baudrillard seems to suggest that the violent tendencies of former empires, of “an imperial American Roman Germanic name,” change when confronted with a more pacifist stance, an indoctrination of nostalgia for modernism’s past (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* 12). Lyotard seems to concur, reminding us:

“For what does Vachez’s poorly constructed Wall mean if you take it literally? America comes to a halt dumbstruck before an ocean that puts an end to the Western border. The golden dream’s accomplished, and people go about enjoying it. Social consensus isn’t sought for in authority of the capital but becomes displacement westward. The history of States is coming to an end. Something else can be heard at work –something in the silence of what’s finished” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 57).

The space of interiority, the ungriddable space which Lyotard references in juxtaposition against the literal construct of a wall can be viewed metaphorically as the conquest of painting and traditional sculpture, of a movement outside of a canvas. Not a completed modernity per se, but an intervention defying the aesthetic conventions of modernity. Equally, the displacement of social consensus westward, into a space-time dimension, is firmly rooted in notions of continental expansionism, in the promise of the golden land of California itself. The conquest for

knowledge which Lyotard suggests is detached from an occupation of lands and an exploitation of resources resonates with several tenets of post studio practice, including the dematerialization of the object and the deterritorializing effect of artistic practice when it is not predicated on the literal construction of a wall, a canvas, a studio. A defiance against modernist tropes.

Returning to Royce, and to the figure of the Californian desert, we see a delimiting field of both visibility and invisibility, becoming activated metaphorically as a territory for a new imaginary. Both its destabilizing horizons and mirages mimic a disconnectedness between the lure of a promised land and its wealth, and the realities of the work necessary for reaping such rewards. “For such realities, then,” Royce reminds us, “the golden dreams were preparing the dreamers” (Royce, *California: A Study in American Character* 185). Reinforced metaphorically, the aesthetic dreamers in Californian post studio practice inhabit this desert as a site of experimentation, dwelling in an ungriddable space, paradigmatically adrift within Baudrillard’s astral American dream, dominated by hyperreality and simulacra. *Pacific Wall* also reminds us that California is a site of desire, and it is desirous because it is geographically female. Vachey’s opening text is dedicated to Marilyn Monroe, a Hollywood icon to whom he refers as a “light beige tabby” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 7). Under the subheading ‘A Few Axioms’, an interpolated heading created by Lyotard to organize the text, a metaphor emerges between the West as not only gendered female, but ethnically white. “The white skin of Western women—meaning the most Western of European-descended American women—is absolute West. My name for the situation of this skin today is California” (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 7). To desire that skin, Vachey continues, places you within the same position as the Negroes, and the Indians, and refers back to the frontispiece of the text, back within Edward Kienholz’s tableau, *Five Car Stud*. The “constantly parting, shifting silky thighs” Vachey refers to in *Pacific Wall* invoke power and

rape, two shifting polemics on one political scale, or as Lyotard suggests, a genealogy of politics and sex (7). And, also, a genealogy of imperialism, of conquest, and a concomitant denial of a plurality of voices. Kienholz would refer to the ‘minority strivings’ at play in *Five Car Stud*, as if to push back against the dominant master narratives, les grandee récits of modernism. He was successful, as we will see throughout this project, through his use of appropriative methodologies - most importantly, allegory. He emerges in alignment with Craig Owens’s critical reference to the indignity of speaking for others.

#### 0.11 The Indignity of Speaking for Others

Allegory and appropriation are silently defiant constructs. As such, they form an alliance with the palimpsest, as forms of montage, a layering of others’ voices, a juxtaposition of narratives, each using an individual voice to superimpose thoughts, ideas, contestations, and provocations upon one another. The indignity of speaking for others, I suggest, is contested by post studio methodologies. Such an artistic methodology, that of collage, and/or pastiche – these terms are used interchangeably – is often cited within American aesthetic theory as the demarcation of postmodernism, specifically through the work of Robert Rauschenberg. “Collage,” writes Gregory L. Ulmer in “The Object of Post-Criticism,” is the transfer of materials from one context to another. And “montage” is the dissemination “of these borrowings through the new setting.” (Ulmer, “The Object of Post-Criticism” 95). Borrowing fragments gives new signification to the whole, and uses a simulacrum as an operative mechanism – a readymade addition, Ulmer suggests, rather than an illusionistic reproduction. In allegiance with *Pacific Wall’s* use of the palimpsest, and to Baudrillard’s use of the simulacrum, the superimposition element within montage - its procedure - to reference Benjamin, in “The Author as Producer” is to disrupt context. Allegory and appropriation are inherently disruptors,

challenging significations. In a similar manner as montage and collage, they muddy the representational waters of signification and representation. As artistic methodologies, they also remind us of the constant push and pull between nature and culture, our desires to control the former through the advancement of the latter. Yet, returning to Rauschenberg as the first American modernist to embrace these methodologies, the very notion of culture comes into question – specifically, its allegiances to tradition and authorship, grand écrits and genealogies. Owens claimed that something very important was lost in the transposition of Derrida’s and Foucault’s poststructuralism into other disciplines or – important to this project – to another continent. Much akin to the loss of aura within mechanical reproduction, the loss of self-reflection, Owens suggests, characterized American intellectuals who identified as either Derridean or Foucauldian. To paraphrase Owens, Derrida questioned, among other things, what interests so called ‘reform philosophy’ served in France. Foucault questioned what interests and purposes intellectual work served. Owens humbly asserts that his work and that of the journal *October* equally lacked the self-criticality to “analyze the position of your own work vis a vis the channels through which it must pass if it is to reach an audience.” (Owens, *Portrait of A Young Critic* 73-74). What Owens calls out in this confessional is a critical lack of self-reflexivity that he believed characterized the work of Derrida and Foucault specifically, and French poststructuralism generally, when it emigrated to America. A foetal tranquility. What Owens critiques is an immobilized, critically bankrupt American avant-garde. “What kind of revolution doesn’t question its own?”, Owens asks incredulously. “It was a different criticism,” he continues. “It was the idea of a critically theoretical avant-garde” (Owens, *Portrait of A Young Critic* 76). Which led Owens into the existential threat that would fundamentally claim his place in American poststructuralism. He needed to search for an equally critical and theoretical stance

to prove, against Clement Greenberg, that there is more to the dichotomy of the avant-garde and the so-called rear-garde. Or, at a minimum, that the avant-garde is capable of emerging outside of the academic construct, that avant-garde culture is “The imitation of imitating,” in Greenbergian terms<sup>23</sup> (Greenberg, “Avant Garde and Kitsch” 542). Caught within a genealogical feedback loop, of both the avant-garde and the rear-garde, or the avant-garde and kitsch, there seemingly is nowhere to advance. Which is where Owens emerges as a unique theoretical voice, a voice that recognizes the gap that exists when one fails to recognize an ideological notion, and, therefore, its contradictions. A lack of criticality will find its home within this interstitial space. Owens owed much to Derrida and Foucault, leading his critical inquiries squarely into questioning for himself what many artists and producers knew all too well: that their work was subsumed and perpetuated by economic and institutional factors. Owens was, in his words, “suddenly forced to take stock of what interests my work was performing, perhaps for the first time. I also had to deal with the market in a way that sensitized me to certain decisions being made about artists’ work, or that were being made by artists simply to gain visibility” (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 78). In this manner, I suggest, we are able to see the connections between French poststructuralism and Owens’s idea of a critically theoretical avant-garde, into which he inserted his ideas on allegory and appropriation and their relationship to postmodernity. The other emergent affiliation is with post studio as an equally antagonistic practice that questions modernist ideologies and the legislative structures of both economic and institutional apparatuses. Which leads to the critique of the studio as well, its ties to the market and gallery systems – exposing the contradictions that occur when “what one denounces in a text is precisely what one continues to perform,” which, Owens believed, inflected the discussions of postmodernity (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 77). The very people who “are



declaring the death of modernism,” he writes, “are nevertheless resurrecting many of the key features of modernism” (77). By claiming that such contradictions were largely unexamined through much of that work, he embarked on his own self-reflexive journey that yielded the reclamation of allegory eschewed by modernism – to represent work within the entangled, appropriative and reductive gestures, to engage the culture and present historical circumstances, rather than upholding the postmodernist mantra that called for the defense of culture. To Owens, the idea of culture had been compromised, entangled with and linked to capitalism. Here, Owens shares an affinity with Edward Kienholz, who remarked that the very word ‘culture’ would result in him wanting to put a gun to his head, bristling at the term that is linked to social mores and economic gains. Baldessari also cautioned against the potentiality that culture could sway an artist’s intentions. Kienholz and Owens turn instead to the critique of culture, its apparatuses and its ideologies. Owens did not believe that the task of postmodernism was to defend culture, as an “embattled and endangered entity” (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 100). At the core of Owens’s critique of representation, we find a presciently motivated desire to engage culture in its present historical circumstances, a proclivity that he shared with both Edward Kienholz and John Baldessari. And, at the time of his critical writings, America was in the midst of the Reagan era and within what Owens referred to as a paradoxical historical moment, with unprecedented proliferation of cultural activity, fueled by capitalism. Underlying his inquiries, therefore, was a strong urge to question the status of truth and the economic and political interests that truth serves. At the core of his belief system was the affirmation that capitalism promotes culture specifically for economic interests. It is, therefore, no surprise that Owens was concerned with his own complicity within this nexus. He was, at the end of the oral history interview in *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* with Lyn Blumenthal, admittedly self-

conscious of the fact that his own livelihood was fueled by the very system that held artists hostage to produce work for a market system; specifically, the gallery system.<sup>24</sup> “What kind of revolution doesn’t question its own?” (76). Owens clearly was thinking in these terms and within a borrowed sensibility from French poststructuralism: critical self-reflexivity. It would lead him even further into his inquiries on postmodernism, and, I argue, specifically in alignment with the tenets of post studio artistic practice.

Owens’s critical self-reflexivity is perhaps on display in its most fervent manifestation in an imaginary interview between himself and himself acting as an imposter interviewer. As an unabashed double soliloquy, the grandiose solipsism he invokes is hyper-subjective, yet also curiously palimpsestic in structure. Owens speaks for himself and overrides himself simultaneously, layering his theories over others within modernism, specifically Walter Benjamin and Karl Marx. Referring to a 1972 interview between Foucault and Deleuze, the title of Owens’s critical essay/interview is borrowed from an exchange between the two philosophers. In response to the imaginary interviewer’s prompt, “What you are saying then, is that to represent is to subjugate,” Owens offers a response invoking the aforementioned philosophical exchange. “Precisely,” Owens asserts. “There is a remarkable statement by Gilles Deleuze in a 1972 interview with Michel Foucault that encapsulates the political ramifications of the contemporary critique of representation: “In my opinion,” Deleuze remarks, “you were the first...to teach us something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others” (Owens, “The Indignity of Speaking for Others: An Imaginary Interview” 261-262). Why Owens calls out this exchange is paramount to understanding why his voice is so crucial to this entire project. Owens was, in my estimation, one of the first American critics to ask a vitally important question: while acknowledging how fundamentally important the work of Deleuze and Foucault,

was as well as writings by Derrida and Barthes, to problematize the entire enterprise of representation, Owens asks, “But to what extent have their texts influenced contemporary artists?” (262).<sup>25</sup> Owens liberates the artist’s voice, laying the groundwork for their post studio intervention. He allows for them to speak on their own terms, seemingly passing a judgement that the debates over modernism’s fate are irrelevant; as well as how to position postmodernism within a critical aesthetic field. Lest the criticality of the artists’ voices themselves emerge and are liberated from these debates and dialogues, artists will remain subjugated, dominated by philosophical discourses that fail to converse with or consider incorporating artists’ interventions into the project of modernism. Owens allows for their inclusion, acknowledging their intervention into theories of modernism through post studio practice. The answer to the question to what extent have contemporary artists been influenced by the work of Deleuze, Foucault, Barthes, and Derrida, Owens responds, “Very little, I’m afraid” (262). How, then, does Owens suggest a recuperation, a reckoning to redress this philosophical oversight? His strategy identifies the dangerous effect of representative inequality, domination, and economic exploitation – to reposition contemporary artists within the discourses of representation itself. Owens suggests that contemporary artists do not oppose “their own representations to existing ones;” they do not subscribe “to the fallacy of the positive image” (262). To do so would reify an oppositional stratagem of “true” representivity to a “false” representivity. Which, lest we forget, also invokes the legislations of modernism, including mimesis, master narratives, and the indignity of speaking for others. Eschewing these entrapments, instead Owens ends his interview with the emphatic statement: “Rather, these artists challenge the activity of representation itself which, by denying them speech, consciousness, the ability to represent themselves, stances indicted as the primary agent of their domination” (262). Hence the equal reclamation of

allegory, and the allowance for others to speak on their own terms. This statement by Owens is the clarion call for this entire investigation. By engaging the missing archive of post studio through ventriloquizing its lack, this project deconstructs the normative apparatus of modernism and deromanticizes the sacred space of an artist's studio. Scholarship generally has understood post studio practice as a methodology eschewing the studio as a space for generating art, its reliance on the political economy of the art market, and its spatialization of sovereign subjectivity. A site of resistance, with aesthetic implications, post studio artistic practice offers a narrative of its own that defies the artistic conventions of modernism; including, importantly, the authorial legacies, master narratives, and the cult of originalism to which modernism was heavily invested.

Post studio artists used a methodology not dissimilar to those of postmodern theorists; mainly, to critique representation from within its modernist, productivist stance – its tendencies to link artistic success to established and sanctioned modes of artistic production. Which include, as this project highlights, easel painting, which was a preoccupation of Owens. He contends, within the imaginary interview, that “the last group of artists to which the productivist argument applies emerged in the late 1960s, constituting what was known as the post-studio movement”<sup>26</sup> (260). Owens continues, “In an attempt to counteract those forces which work to alienate artists from their production, post-studio artists either withdraw from the studio-gallery-museum power nexus, which administers the discourse of art in our society, or they attempted to subvert this nexus from within, addressing the invisible mechanisms which define art in our society” (260). What those invisible mechanisms are, Owens asserts, have less to do with the control of the means of production, but, rather, with the control of the representational methods, the code. “What was needed, then,” Owens suggests, “was a critique of representation – but one free from

a productivist bias. And it was such a critique that his new group of artists set out to provide” (260). The productivist bias Owens speaks of is perhaps no better illustrated than through Baldessari’s most iconic work, *Cremation Piece*. As the subject of *Chapter One: The Archival Impulse*, it offers several clues for understanding the drive toward de-archivization (or anarchivization to use Derrida’s term) alongside dematerialization. The latter term often is associated with post studio, in relationship to an anti-object sensibility. That was, by far, not an umbrella methodology under which to place post studio. Yet, as dematerialization relates to the archive, post studio’s lacking archive bestows more theoretical power to the very term, and takes on a new resonance through this project. Both Baldessari and Kienholz produced material objects, often on a very large scale, as seen within Kienholz’s tableaux. Baldessari’s metaphorical cremation would not have been possible without the paintings which were offered to the pyre. Their ashes remain physical manifestations of the work, albeit transformed through the act of their destruction.

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*Chapter One* foregrounds the performativity of the archive as viewed within poststructuralist discourse, suggesting that, because of its omittance from the public record, an opening exists through its lack which allows for a new articulation of postmodernism. As an insurrection against modernity, authorship, and the sacred sovereign space of the artist’s studio, Baldessari’s *Cremation Piece* of 1970 negates and challenges the commemoration of the enduring signature of the artist’s hand. Using Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* and Achille Mbembe’s “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” I suggest a new, fourth term to the latter’s list of archival attributes: performative (the others are tactile, visual, and cognitive). The project then migrates into the role post studio art practice plays in relationship to

the authority of an archive's discourse, contrasting Derrida's term *metonymy* with Mbembe's *chronophagy*. The play between these terminologies is equally performative, offering and opening within which to perform the real power of the archive, the parergon, the marginal, indeed the limit between intrinsic and extrinsic, using allegory and appropriation to do so. As an allegorical performance, Baldessari's *Cremation Piece* also challenges the possession of the politicized circuit of property values associated with contemporary exhibition practices. A democratizing, chronophagic art migrates into an imaginary zone – the instituting imaginary of the archive.

Within *Chapter One*, I describe in detail a sampling of Baldessari's cremated paintings from the *Cremation Piece*, which in my estimation is a first, based on the research I conducted for this project. This action - inventorying his cremated paintings - fills a void, an equally missing archive. As a collective body of work, painted between 1957-1967, significant clues are uncovered under the guise of common modernist tropes in figurative and abstract work.<sup>27</sup> As I chose the sample, I did so intentionally, appropriating a methodology which Baldessari used so frequently in his work: choosing. In doing so, I embodied his questioning of the divisions between what is included versus what is excluded, a function equally ascribed to an archive, a delimiting function. Several themes and clues emerge from the descriptive analysis of Baldessari's cremated paintings. Most notably, Baldessari's use of semiotics – in particular, advertising semiotics – suggest a preoccupation with commercial exchange and the inability or hindrance to choose; rather, we are spoon fed suggestions for what we should do with our leisure time. The paintings also suggest that Baldessari was aware of how a frame acts as an automatic art signal – the frame of a painting in particular, ascribing to a hierarchy of vision. Another thread lurking within the paintings is the struggle, the ontological dilemma that places man

against – or within – an inhabited natural space within which it is uncomfortable to dwell. The nature / culture opposition emerges strongly within Baldessari's cremated works as the 1960s unfold. The world became stratified, grounded in layers of sediment and earth, before devolving into a darker side of humanity, using assemblage in many of his works. What becomes muddled is a linear projection of signifier – signified, and a more conscious delimitation between sign and reliquary. His later works also suggest a commentary on the historical now, the present, returning to the temporal as content. Owens also would interrogate notions of 'the immediate,' interjecting another theoretical layer to Derrida's *metonymy* and Mbembe's *chronophagy*. Baldessari seems to suggest that he was looking for an escape route, a portal to leave behind the universe as one big repository for all our materialistic endeavors: through cremation, atomization, and pulverization.

As stated previously, Baldessari's cremated paintings suggest a nascent interest in semiotics. Such an act of destruction, dramatized at its core, repositions the archive in relation to the aesthetic frame of painting. In the final section of *Chapter One*, Derrida's aesthetic chronophagy in *The Truth in Painting*, is considered to reinforce the play – the performativity – between the inside and the outside, using his notion of the parergon to consider such a mediality functioning within a framing apparatus, whether an archive or a painting. Painting, Owens reminds us, supplements nature by working through cultural signs. Baldessari seems poised, following his crematory gesture, to trouble the representational field accordingly. The representational field will become even more troubled as this project migrates from an archival impulse into a reclamation of allegory, using Edward Kienholz's tableaux as examples of how allegory supplants antecedent meanings, laying claim to culturally significant, albeit confiscated imagery, to reveal alternative interpretations.

*Chapter Two: Reclaiming Allegory* moves from the idea of an incomplete and nomadic archive into how allegory de-figures meaning and reinserts itself into the post studio's intervention into modernism. *Five Car Stud* is examined more closely through archival images from Harald Szeemann's (documenta V artistic director) collection, held by the Getty Research Institute. Within this tableau, Kienholz uses minority strivings to reconsider the violence and trauma of the holocaust against and in relation to America's treatment of blacks. He does so by means of direct aesthetic confrontation and intervention, demanding his audience does the same. Taken together, Baldessari's *Cremation Piece* and Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* foreground and introduce the political nature of the entire post studio project. Specifically, the intersectionality of separate histories of structural violence. How violence manifests within both artists' seminal works – the destruction and atomization in Baldessari's and the racial and ethnic violence within Kienholz's, is linked back to a violent imaginary which uses destructive forces to create a remainder, a trace, and even the imprint of what was once cast within a material realm. The institution of memory is implicated specifically within Kienholz's violent tableau. How memory is de-figured via anarchivizing destruction, sets a stage for an alternative narrative ascribed to the creation myths frequently associated with archives. Witnessing will emerge within Kienholz's tableaux as an important methodology to contest what has been excluded from the public record. Using allegory throughout his work, Kienholz turns the tables on his audiences, forcing them to participate in what Owens suggests is "the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two" 79). In "The Allegorical Impulse," Owens cites attributes of allegory that are analyzed in relation to Kienholz's tableau *Five Car Stud*, including: the use of appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization. Taken together, I argue



that these traits are manifest in not only *Five Car Stud*, but also within other tableaux by Kienholz to signify a new preoccupation with dismantling meaning, representation, and sign to signifier, offering a more cogently aligned discourse within which to unpack these works allegorically. Allegory is a de-figuring literary device, with the ability also to de-figure symbolic visual metaphors. As such, allegory perpetually haunts modernism, according to Owens, along several vectors. Allegory returns – or rather as I argue, it reappears and insinuates its power – within postmodernist works in ways that move beyond mere supplement. Allegory is neither an overlay nor an added veneer of meaning; or, in Owens’s terminology, an aberration. It is, however, unsettling in its ability to trouble and to problematize meaning. It rescues counternarratives and provocatively threatens traditional modes of symbolic representation.

Allegory is silently defiant. It not only ruptures the gap between a present and a past, but also re-emerges in the work of Kienholz to confront its suppression within modernist discourse. Nowhere is this return of allegory so important that in Kienholz’s own counter-narrative that, in actuality, there is no black man in *Five Car Stud*. *Chapter Two* ends with an analysis of this operational element, neglected entirely in critical writings on Kienholz’s most important tableau. Using research, specifically from the monograph on *Five Car Stud* published by Gemini G.E.L., and archival imagery of the fabrication of the tableau, and a private exchange with Kienholz’s oral historian, Lawrence Weschler, I reclaim this provocation – the artist’s own intention – into how his work and its prominent protagonist have, heretofore, been misrepresented in scholarship. Here, Kienholz’s own posthumous voice is reinstated into the public record to underscore how his work offers an allegorical sleight of hand that needs correction.

Kienholz’s work remains the focus of *Chapter Three: Appropriation as Cultural Critique in Edward Kienholz’s Tableaux*. Migrating the project more squarely into appropriation, this

chapter illuminates how his tableaux critique the legacy of modernism and culture's power apparatuses within this methodology. Using Owens's 1982 work "Representation, Power, and Culture," I suggest that the discursive portability inherent in Kienholz's work affords a transnational commentary that allows for the whole of civilization and various nation-states to be called into question. Toggling between exclusion and inclusion, Kienholz de-figures the patterns of recognition and decipherability of state-sanctioned archives and master discourses. Along with Owens, Sigmund Freud returns and enters into the intertextual analysis of how Kienholz's work critiques civilization and its discontents. Representation is a function of the imagination, and not born to it a priori. It is to Freud who we must credit the use of the term 'representation' and his descriptions of memory and dreams specifically. Freud, Douglas Crimp writes in "Pictures," constantly turned to metaphors as "pictograph, hieroglyph, and rebus" (Crimp, "Pictures," 28). Reflecting on the writings of Freud and his insistence that dreams are represented through visual images, then postmodern art deserves a "return to the writings of Freud with a completely new understanding of how they might be useful for criticism is one of the prospects that this art offers" (30). Here emerges an opening to consider the structure of signification through another visual platform: Edward Kienholz's tableaux and his critique of culture.

*Chapter Two: Reclaiming Allegory* sets up Kienholz as a searing cultural critic par excellence. It does so through a juxtaposition of Kienholz's seminal exhibition catalogs, Freud's theorizations in "Civilization and Its Discontents," and Craig Owens's writings in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. It is necessary to reconsider Freud, whom Derrida invokes in *Archive Fever* (le'mal d'Archive) by appropriating a psychoanalytic methodology, in relationship to Kienholz – to better understand man's tendencies toward archiving which sanction state control over the individual. Equally, and in relation to Freud's

writing about civilization generally, I propose that Kienholz critiques society alongside an equally potent critique of beauty, which Owens eloquently supports through his reclamation of poststructuralist critique of representation.<sup>28</sup> Kienholz champions detritus. He advocates an art that is not only in-your-face but also understood through the disposed artifacts and materials of mankind in its quest to control nature – both human and earthly. The motivations behind such a proposition are multifold: to engage in a dialogue with his work to advance a notion that beauty can be tethered to de-figuration as much as re-presentation; that allegory, archive, and appropriation share potentialities for pluralism and an othering of narrative control; and the discursive portability of Kienholz’s work renders his contribution to postmodernism undeniably significant. Working within and in between such theorizations is a post studio mentality. If the studio is the site of an artistic archive, and in direct lineage to gallery system (which is another mode of representation), Kienholz shifts the power dynamic and control back to the artist in a much more expansive and nuanced terrain of cultural appropriation.

In this chapter, my methodology is an exegesis of exhibition catalogs and artist monographs on Kienholz, extracted from the archives of the San Francisco Art Institute (many of which are rare and out of print), and proceeds chronologically from 1967-1986. My intention is to both bracket the decades of the rise in conceptual, West-coast post studio practice to the allegorical turn of the 1980s (which Craig Owens captures in his collected writings, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*) to illustrate an evolution in thought on Kienholz’s work by art criticism. While acknowledging the use of Freud’s most commonly known essay, the subtext I believe makes it exceedingly important given the year in which it was written (1929) and my ancillary desire to show how Kienholz’s work moves from American racism toward blacks to German xenophobia toward Jews. Put simply, one cannot deny the fact

that Freud was writing his seminal text alongside the burgeoning threat and power of Nazism. What Freud deduced regarding the impulses of mankind is relevant today, ninety years later, both in terms of the tension between Eros and the death drive, and also – germane to this inquiry – for what it offers as a lens through which to understand Kienholz’s work, specifically, his tableaux – as vehicles for transnational critique of man’s worst destructive tendencies. As a less sinister operative element, I suggest the destruction of master narratives and archival tendencies repositions artists’ individual voices against a collectivity of commercialism and gallery representation that post studio practice initially sought to challenge.<sup>29</sup> And, as seen previously with regard to *Five Car Stud* and the contested theories of the representation of a black man, safeguards the artist’s agency by not misrepresenting Kienholz’s intentions and aesthetic decision-making processes. Here, there is a coalescence between Derrida’s admonishment that whomever controls the archive holds the power over its interpretive legacy and hermeneutic functioning, and Owens’s counter, or additive theory that representation is, ultimately, the founding act of power in our culture. Within this analysis of Kienholz’s work, it is evident that his tableaux challenge culture as a dominant, agreed upon set of mores that shape societal relations. Kienholz uses appropriation to shift power dynamics through his scathing cultural critique. I use three important exhibitions and monographs to argue this point: *The Art Show* (1967); *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* (1976); *The Human Scale* (1984); and *NO! Contemporary American DADA* (1985).

*Chapter Four: On Appropriation: John Baldessari*, returns to the work of John Baldessari to examine how his work affiliates with this methodology, in a manner not overtly dissimilar from Kienholz’s use of appropriation. Baldessari, we will see, is subtler in his politics but in no way do the subtlety of his artistic gestures diminish the potency of his work. I argue

that appropriation functions through the de-acquisitioning of straightforward meaning between signifier and signified, ushering in new authorial claims to meaning and forever changing the artistic control post studio claimed through the work of John Baldessari. Poststructuralism's strategy is to critique the art historical discipline's authority, unique language and distinct mode of thinking through specific vectors, including: as a critique of power that is and cannot be neutral; as a critique of the economics of the art world; and finally, and importantly, as a critique of itself. As such, poststructuralism is a kindred spirit to post studio artistic practice.

Craig Owens knew Baldessari's work quite well. As one important example, he wrote about Baldessari in an article published in *Art in America* on May 1, 1981, titled "Telling Stories," in which he asserts, among other things, that Baldessari uses strategic moves to "both stimulate and frustrate our desire for meaning" (Owens, "Telling Stories" 129). Citing Baldessari's works that involve the use of parables and allegories, Owens suggests that Baldessari's works produce a sense of indirection, where meanings are concealed or veiled. If meaning is a property of works of art and criticism regards meaning as intrinsic to art, then Baldessari's "strategic resources are marshaled" against this, Owens asserts (Owens, "Telling Stories" 130). How, exactly, does Baldessari's methodology deploy such tactics? One response, and indeed my argument, is that Baldessari must be viewed as a master appropriator, a post studio artist who dominates the historical narrative of postmodernity, alongside Kienholz, but through his ardent use of parody. He performs, and indeed the performative aspect of his work shares kinship with the performativity of the archive. While his motivation was primarily one of comparing the role of the art market and how it relates to the broader economic processes of society, an equally important economic operation is at play within the spheres of repression and Baldessari's use of parables, allegories, and humor. Or, put more succinctly, the economic

operation of appropriation, the concealment of meanings, the sense which emerges from nonsense, all require an initial reconciliation between concealment and repression – which I suggest operate within an economic realm. Returning to Owens, in “Telling Stories” he stated that he believed Baldessari’s work functioned in a register of esthetic error. And, as a reminder, as a deliberate violation of several esthetic conventions, including: authorship, composition, and hanging in galleries. An ethos emerges within this claim. An ethos of an artistic practice forever liberated from the shackles of archival provenance, destined to perform its own legacies and to defy aesthetic conventions of modernism.

Craig Owens’s notion of postmodernism is, uniquely, American. His conception of modernism, as a legacy that left allegory marginalized and failed to fully account for the use of appropriation, emanates from an artistic embrace of a practice that characterized many of the artists working within California in the late 1960s and early 1970s: post studio. This suggests a further paradigmatic rupturing of the non-existent archive of post studio, appropriating its history alongside that of modernity’s eschewal of allegory. The reading of post studio’s historical archive is indeed problematized within this proposition, suspended in its own uncertainty. Owens’s structural logic, then, offers up allegory instead as a structural interference on both literal and rhetorical levels. If Owens’s theory of postmodernism is a preoccupation with reading, the fundamental un-readability of signs themselves is a roadmap, a methodology, a counter-reading of the archive of post studio (which, as previously discussed, doesn’t exist in a formal way), then an allegorical overlay allows a point of entry into problematized notions of reading; or to say, a material referent such as an archive, is not necessary to superimpose a different history onto its ethereal footprint.

As reading becomes problematized, and allegory's intervention into modernism more identifiable, one can identify equally an altered terrain where the distance which separates signifier from signified, and also the distance between sign and meaning, confounds any logical notion of readability, or ability to deduce grand narratives. Our ability, and in fact our reliance on and need for clear narration and easily identifiable relationships that provide legible roadmaps demarcating meaning as relatable to signs, becomes compromised. It is an uneasy juncture. Owens reminds us of this unease, a discordant displacement of referential meaning. Meaning becomes contingent – or perhaps, meaning has always been contingent or propositional – but postmodernity's revisiting of allegory which he relied on heavily during his short career, is meant to problematize aesthetic theories and heretofore accepted tropes of modernism. "Consciousness," Owens writes, "being in the world, is in fact identified with reading – an identification which is not, however, unproblematic, for the legibility of signs is always uncertain" (Owens, "Telling Stories" 130). Uncertain, if not non-existent, in the case of post studio's archival legacy, as expressed in the immateriality of CalArts's post studio archive. The signs, therefore, must be deconstructed on a material plane and within the materiality of the works of post studio artists themselves. How to undertake such a journey is much more identifiable and emerges from Owens's appropriation of histories of modernism – and toward what I suggest to be a uniquely American postmodernist logic and trope: post studio art practice.<sup>30</sup>

CHAPTER ONE  
**The Archival Impulse**

The following current attitudes will be explored: Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-Illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance. The investigation of such questions and issues as: Is the object necessary – originality in art – must art be visual – what is order – durability – place and process – art as experience – art as time -, etc.? The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.<sup>31</sup>

--Post Studio Art course description, Cal Arts, 1972

...we come to this collusion: between the question (“What is art?,” “What is the meaning of art or the history of art?”) and the hierarchical classification of the arts. When a philosopher repeats this question without transforming it, without destroying its form, its form as a question, its ontointerrogative structure, he has already subjected all space to the discursive arts, to the voice and to logos. We can prove it: teleology and hierarchy are prescribed in the envelope of the question.

--Jacques Derrida<sup>32</sup>



Figure 4 John Baldessari's National City Studio, 1969 (John Baldessari Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One)



### 1.1 John Baldessari's *Cremation Piece*: A Life's Work Goes Up in Flames

“There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 4). In this seemingly innocuous statement, Jacques Derrida suggests that post studio practice would have no power without a material archive on which to stake its claim within the art world. Yet, if we begin by understanding that the post studio archive which I reference – and indeed which I went in search of at CalArts – rests within an educational context, the archive is best understood as anti-derivative from the Greek *arkheion* (a domicile, house, or physical place) but rather dwells within artistic transmission and exchange, within the discourses of pedagogy. Derrida continues, “[I]t is thus, in this domiciliation, in this house arrest, that archives take place. The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret” (4-5). Could we imagine California post studio practice through a lineage that subverts the very relationship Derrida references, subverts the institutionalized nature of the archive as a requirement of being seen as such, and held in house arrest? The answer to this provocation lies at the intersection of what I call the archive's ability to perform, and the mentality offered by California post studio practice that defies convention, and within that paradigm, equally defies the domicile of the artist's studio.

Returning to John Baldessari's course description – the only document in CalArts's archives to directly reference ‘post studio,’ it becomes clear that the entire pedagogic provocation eludes such institutionalization. Within the course description itself, Baldessari asks, “Is the object necessary”? At the core of post studio artistic practice is the questioning of productivity. Baldessari's course description continues to question originality in art, process and

place, art as time and art as experience, order, and durability, which are tropes equally germane to Derrida's inquiry into the political nature of the archive. It is not surprising, then, that the archive in question dwells within a different topology, which, in solidarity with Derrida's treatise on the archive - is privileged – but not necessarily with “this archontic dimension of domiciliation, with this archic, in truth patriarchic, function, without which no archive would ever come into play or appear as such” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 3). Rather, it is privileged between those who investigated the emerging tropes of post studio artistic practice, residing in the attitudes of “Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance.”<sup>33</sup> Dematerialization is antithetical to romanticized artistic production and also to the romantic sensibility one places on the artist in his studio. The studio is a house, a domicile, an arkheion, where the creative act is born, is sustained, and is rewarded via production. A reliance on materiality overshadows the studio, and extends into the artist's archive of extant works. Pivoting away from such a reliance on stasis, and into a realm of artistic transmission and pedagogy, circles us back to the document housed in the archive at CalArts: John Baldessari's Post Studio course description from 1972 course catalog:

“The following current attitudes will be explored: Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-Illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance. The investigation of such questions and issues as: Is the object necessary – originality in art – must art be visual – what is order – durability – place and process – art as experience – art as time -, etc.? The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.”<sup>34</sup>

It also leads us into a deeper investigation of the archive, working within critical theorizations of how the archive has been viewed within poststructuralist discourse specifically. Beginning with Derrida's psychoanalytic reading in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, expanding into Achille Mbembe's, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits” and Jacques Rancière's, “What Medium Can Mean,” and most importantly, to Craig Owens's essay, “Detachment: from the

Parergon,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, this project aims to reclaim Owens as the preeminent American poststructuralist to formulate an American postmodernist agenda alongside his theories. In dialogue with Derrida, Owens offers many insights on the project of modernism and what it left out or neglected, which must be reclaimed alongside the missing archive of post studio to better and more fully understand how we can revisit and reinsert the adjuncts – most importantly, allegory and appropriation – into the narrative of postmodernism from a uniquely American lens.

It seems fitting to begin this study with John Baldessari’s most seminal piece, an *auto da fê* titled *Cremation Piece*. Putting this work, which morphed into the *Cremation Project* when it was exhibited at the Jewish Museum in New York (1970) into discourse with Owens, Derrida, Mbembe, and Rancière, will outline how the missing archive of post studio (outside of a mere course description) functions alongside Owens’s theorizations because of its omittance from the public record. The result creates an opening which allows us to define a new theory of postmodernism that reclaims allegory and appropriation within a post studio mentality.



Figure 5 John Baldessari, documentation of *Cremation Piece*, July 24, 1970 (*John Baldessari Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*)

The preeminent example of post studio intervening in the grand narrative of modernity is artist John Baldessari's *Cremation Piece*. On July 24, 1970, Baldessari embarked on a quest to quell an emergent anxiety, and uneasiness over his thinking that, "art might be more than painting" (Baldessari, SFAI lecture, April, 2003, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). In response to his ruminations over the accepted, modernist tropes of painting and traditional sculpture, Baldessari cremated most of his paintings made between 1957 and 1967, which lined the walls of his movie theatre turned studio in National City, California. In a project he titled *Cremation Piece*, the remains of his early artistic practice were relegated to nine "adult-sized" and two "baby-sized" crematory boxes, 12" x 3" x 6" and less, respectively, in dimension. To commemorate the "ritual of ending the wrong road I was on," Baldessari commissioned a plaque, etched only with the words: John Anthony Baldessari: May 1953-March 1966" (Baldessari, SFAI lecture, April, 2003, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library).<sup>35</sup>

The symbolic death and archival destruction of Baldessari's early paintings should be viewed as an insurrection against modernity and authorship, of the sacred terrain of the artist's studio, rather than as a commemorative action in favor of the enduring signature of the artist's hand. In what Roland Barthes would categorize in "Death of the Author" as a move toward the performative, Baldessari's actions can be viewed as a gesture away from "recording, of observing, of representing, of "painting"" toward a linguistic turn in which "utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered" (Barthes, "Death of The Author" 4). Baldessari's gesture also conjures Achille Mbembe's theory of the archive's materiality as one that results in an instituting imaginary; where the action is placed within the aesthetic movement away from such materiality and its reliance on tactility. Cast alongside Mbembe's theorizations,

Baldessari's actions blur the distinctions the former makes between ritual and an instituting imaginary. No longer tethered to a material body of work, Baldessari's artistic cremation underscores the seemingly urgent and anxious feelings he had about not only the imperialism of the studio to dictate and to determine artistic output/production (and specifically the painting's frame), but of the archive as well. His piece is a preeminent example of a critique of "the exercise of a specific power and authority" over the archive, in which material documents are privileged and others discarded (Mbembe, "The Power of the Archives and Its Limits" 20). Baldessari's archive of painting, through his crematory act, intentionally – and in protestation of this moral authority – destroys the material imperialism of the modernist mentality. What results in the imaginary is forever cast to dwell in a performance of memory that offers a direct aesthetic secularization (against Mbembe's assertion that an archive cannot be secular) because the act itself lacks specifically religious or spiritual motivations. Instead, it responds to an internal pathos that art could be more. The status of Baldessari's debris offers a fourth term or characteristic to Mbembe's list of archival attributes; which includes tactile; visual; and cognitive. This fourth term, I suggest, is: *performative*.

In September 1970, the Jewish Museum inaugurated an exhibition titled *Software: Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* in which Baldessari's piece evolved into the *Cremation Project*, in response to the Museum's refusal to exhibit his painting's physical ashes. In its new iteration, the project morphed into documentation of the cremation, with a series of photographs illustrating the act of destruction. Within this transformation of the artists' intent, Baldessari's paintings reached their metaphorical death by virtue of the fact that photographs of the crematory act, rather than the urn holding his works' ashes, were displayed. As a superimposed representation of their utterance, it could be argued that a breach of aesthetical

integrity in deference to morality and historical duty took place. However, this would be misguided if we enlist the play between Mbembe's theorizations of the archive and Rancière's defining term *mediality* to enunciate a performativity which suggests that there is a limit to the power, imperialism, and authority of an archive and that the artistic debates over medium offer an opening heretofore perhaps not engaged in relationship to an archive as extant body of art.

Within this theoretically challenging and seemingly unrelated theoretical framework, Baldessari's action (or utterance if we look back to Barthes) can be linked to a mediality that Rancière associates with medium, specifically, to that of photographic documentation and reproduction. The curatorial turn in the *Software* exhibition to mounting documentation of the cremation, via a series of photographs illustrating the act of destruction, elicits what Rancière would call the creation of a new sensory world, and in an echo back to Mbembe, that of a new social world, secularized and anti-ideological in the sense that it exceeds the constraints of behavior suggested by aligning with judging what is put on display for consumption, either through an archive or, in this instance, through an exhibition. "Art," Rancière writes, "is art when the constraints of the material and instrument free it from itself, free it from the will to make art" (Rancière, "What Medium Can Mean" 35). As anti-ideological, as Rancière suggests accompanies the idea of medium in excess of the idea of the apparatus itself, Baldessari's forced exhibition of documentation of the crematory act conjures the notion of mediality by exceeding the idea of medium, the very idea of art, and offers a performance of art outside of a technical apparatus.

Baldessari referred to the "fake wall" constructed by the Jewish Museum to mount documentation of his crematory project, implying that it functioned as a screen separating an imaginative narrative from the performative embodiment of the act itself – an embodiment that

would have been manifest if the urns themselves had been exhibited. Yet instead, a wall was constructed behind which the urn was placed, forever out of sight of the museum patrons. In determining the site and context for his *Cremation Project*, the museum dissociated the discursive act of the urn from its instantiation into photographic representation, offering what Michel Foucault would suggest is an action situated in a “bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous” (Foucault, “What is An Author?” 125). Viewed in this manner, Baldessari’s gesture was an institutional critique, challenging the possession of the “circuit of property values” associated with contemporary exhibition practices. (Foucault, “What is An Author?” 125). How could one place a monetary value of the ashes of his paintings, his artistic presence reduced to a new and ephemeral, semiotic realm?

Perhaps Baldessari’s anxiety over the exhibition’s methodology could be alleviated if he invoked Mbembe’s functionality of the archive in tandem with Rancière’s performativity. For, if viewed less as a screen separating an imaginative narrative from the performative embodiment of the act itself, and more as an ingredient in constructing the instituting imaginary, the “fake wall” emerges alongside an architectural milieu, which, Mbembe suggests, is a property of the imaginary (the second property, according to Mbembe, is religious). Here Baldessari perverts the archive’s reliance on the lack of an author, or at least a living author, offering yet another protest against the ideal of collective ownership when the author is no longer identified and the narrative is contested. The exhibition of Baldessari’s photographs seemingly illustrates Mbembe’s treatise on the architectural nature of the archive, made even stronger by the association against citational authorship. Baldessari, we must not forget, was very much alive at the time.

Mbembe writes, “Through archived documents, we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be put in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate

a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 21). The documentation of Baldessari cremating his paintings aligns with a period of time that is linear, referencing the thirteen years of his painting practice. We recall the plaque he made to commemorate the “ritual of ending the wrong road I was on,” etched only with the words: “John Anthony Baldessari: May 1953-March 1966” (Baldessari, SFAI lecture, April, 2003, Courtesy SFAI Archives, Anne Bremer Memorial Library). His claim that his performance was ritualistic is tethered to his death; cremation emerges as an allegorical performance. Returning to Mbembe, we are reminded that, “A montage of fragments thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity. In this way, just like the architectural process, the time woven together by the archive is the product of a composition” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 21). Could the composition relate to the constraints of painting, to the attempt at modernist perfection, and the crematory act equate to aesthetic defiance? Is it possible for Baldessari to emerge outside of the composing elements of the documentation of his act in the *Software* exhibition?

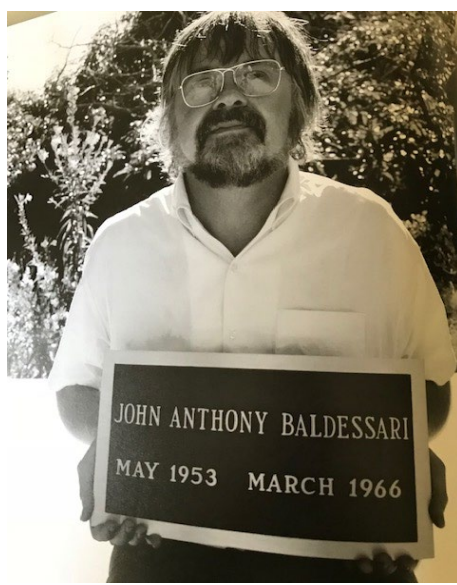


Figure 6 John Baldessari, Cremation Piece, 1970 (*John Baldessari Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*)



Rancière's formalization of mediality offers some clues. First and foremost, the freeing or liberating of the relationship between medium and apparatus, which is endemic to Rancière's formulation of the term mediality. The rupture of the aesthetic regime collides with the performative nature and definition of mediality. Not only does the decomposition of unity emerge as being more important than the effects of serial reproduction, an implosion of Greenbergian ideas of the autonomy of art and purity of medium seems to take place, and the idea of the enclosure of the artist's performance and the prohibition of its meta-performativity limits the very concept of social experimentation. Mbembe and Rancière join forces within this dual articulation of aesthetic regime and archive, the former through his disengagement with the ideal of collective ownership (which the imaginary archive seeks to disseminate), and the latter, through his allegiance to the belief that mediality trumps imperialistic tendencies of modernism and denies renewal of the idea of art's sovereignty. In essence, the lacunary nature of Kantian aesthetic judgements return as contested terrain within the dissolution of art in a technological world and the feigned idealism that an archival impulse can elude death.

Rancière reminds us that a photograph's aesthetic quality resides in a perfect equilibrium, between two forms of Kantian beauty: "that which adheres to a form adapted to its function" and "the false beauty of finality without end" (Rancière, "What Medium Can Mean" 41). If there is no concept being adequate to representing the imagination, and representation is a re-presentation of the mimetic order, a performative element must be at play within photography's ability to document both the sensibility of beauty as finality without end and also the intentionality to pursue such an end. Rancière suggests that dispossession is the element that gives photography such a privileged aesthetic status. Yet in Baldessari's *Cremation Project*, the photographic documentation of his action was not what he intended to exhibit. He was forced to,

leaving his urn behind a scrim, a wall, an architectural device. In a leap to Mbembe, perhaps what transpired through this turn in the work is an artistic trade with death. Not a literal death, but a symbolic death. But a death, according to Mbembe, that is required, so that the archival remains enter into an imaginary zone through death as an architectural event.

The photographs trade positions with the urn and ashes of Baldessari's paintings, neutralizing or dispossessing the act of defiance, and presenting a "multiplicity of gazes and readings" or "zones of transfer between modes of approaching objects" which Rancière suggests multiply not only the functioning of images but also the attribution of meaning to them (Rancière, "What Medium Can Mean" 42). What meaning emerges as the legitimate, authorially-inscribed version of Baldessari's death? Or, to put it more crudely, is Baldessari's metaphorical death reproducible? If cast into an instituting imaginary, it logically escapes the forces of collective ownership; his death is simulated and equated with his artistic practice. Who owns that? It is not autonomous, and not something other than art. His gesture is art. "Art," Rancière writes, "is art when the constraints of the material and instrument free it from itself, free it from the will to make art" (35). Baldessari's will and impetus for cremating his work lies in the fact that art, he thought, could be more than painting. Lurking behind this sentiment is a belief that a medium's objectivity is caught in the opposition of presence and absence. And, by extension, that as containers of reproducible images, photographs somehow absorb human labor, and perhaps, the signatory so oft associated with painting. Or the artist himself, in an act of dispossession.

"There will always remain traces of the deceased," Mbembe writes, "elements that testify that a life did exist, that deeds were enacted, and struggles engaged in or evaded. Archives are born from a desire to reassemble these traces rather than destroy them" (Mbembe, "The Power of

the Archives and Its Limits” 22). Perhaps the ashes bear an irrefutable logic that Baldessari, as an artist, did exist, due to the simple fact that his hands created the remains that are enclosed in the urns. Albeit not the artist’s human remains, but remains created by a human. Interred, and in fact, archived, born from the desire to reassemble traces rather than destroy them. An archival impulse therefore seemingly remains victorious, dictating the future narratives and authorial conquest. This would be the case in Baldessari’s *Cremation Piece* were it not for one sinister element lurking within the exhibition of this work, and that Mbembe calls out. Mainly, that the dead should be prohibited from “stirring up disorder in the present” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 22). Baldessari’s superimposition of the documentation of the internment of his work functions as a sort of alternative to lacunary functioning in reconciling lived experience. In short, it appears to be another Baldessarian intervention.

Baldessari’s crematory act was not an iconoclastic gesture. While cremating not only the physical manifestation of his work in painting, but also the temporal extension of the studio in which they were produced, his actions highlighted the art historical preoccupation with representation, offering instead a new parlance aimed to legitimate the introduction of post studio practice as a system of exchange. The curatorial platform of *Software* equally dismantled the supremacy of the studio as the only legitimate space for artistic production. Curator Jack Burnham suggests that the term ‘software’ connotes a kind of environmental conditioning or stimulus that shapes public opinion and cultural discourse. Functioning as signs, artworks signify their operative elements, normally in the context of a painting, sculpture, or gallery environment: “Contexts lend meaning to art works or art ideas: they “frame” the work, so to speak” (Burnham, *Software: Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* exhibition catalog 12). When removed from the traditional framing device, knowledge is freed from the “effects of direct

sensory affirmation. The objective of *Software*, however, is to stress the fact that information is simply a measure of response between sender and receiver; the ability to change someone's mind about something as the measure of data's worth as information" (12). For Baldessari, the reduction of his work to ashes was not a destructive act, but "it was a matter of atomization, making all those things small, and in some how work would still exist in all those reduced ashes" (Baldessari, John. Interview with Hermine Freed, Los Angeles, March 1973). Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive. California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California. Video).<sup>36</sup> Atomizing his work and removing it from an understandable visual realm referred, according to Baldessari, to Goya's famous phrase, "this is not to be looked at," a phrase that has "a dissonance behind it, you can get so if you're not careful, swayed by culture, you forget about investigating your own self and your own ideas, a gentle warning."<sup>37</sup> Atomizing his work removes the "direct sensory affirmation" which Burnham alludes to, substantiating further the relevance of informational exchange as an artistic medium, against a neo-Platonic philosophy of insubstantiality that relegates knowledge to the effects of this affirmative and perceptible realm. There is also a pedagogical relationship functioning in much of Baldessari's work, which emerges in a later chapter on his equally seminal piece, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, and to which I return to in *Chapter Four*.

## 1.2 Archive as Site of Aesthetic Performance

Achille Mbembe's essay, 'The Power of the Archive and its Limits,' suggests an opening through which to interpret the lack inherent in Kantian judgements of beauty, moving away from Derrida's critique of the frame into an analysis of the archive's enframement directly. "Over and above the ritual of making secret," Mbembe writes, "it seems clear that the archive is primarily the product of judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which

involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 20). Discarding documents, or, rather, determining their relevance to the historical narrative (whether by state or individual) seemingly elicits the same protocol Kant speaks of through the subjective alliance in *sensus communis* – mainly, the universalizability of aesthetic judgment. This project addresses the role of post studio art practice in relationship to the authority of an archive’s discourse, intervening between artistic methodologies which defy convention and the master narratives that wish to reify convention. Seminal works not only of John Baldessari, but also of contemporary post studio artist Edward Kienholz, both redress the need for an extant archive and refute historical narratives such records afford. Furthermore, the opening within Mbembe’s characterization of the archive, on the one hand, owes an allegiance to Platonic ideals, and the fear of the artist within the polis. For, if the state and the individual are complicit in ascribing meaning to and power of the archive through interpretation, and along a materialistic framework, as Mbembe suggests, what could be the role of the artist in performing the archive? I suggest that this intervention is necessary and, more provocatively, that it already has been manifest into a strain of artistic practice - post studio - whose very performativity offers a methodology for engaging the instituting imaginary of the archive.

Mbembe offers additional clues as to how we must answer this provocation, specifically by his extension of Derrida’s equation between power and the archives, referenced in his statement in *Archive Fever*, “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 4). It is Mbembe’s writing on the archive’s power and limitations that commenced this inquiry into the missing post studio archive at CalArts, as well as his distinction between metonymy – a Derridean terminology for simple

past tense - and chronophagy - Mbembe's notion of how the past is anaesthetized. What the dialectics of these terms suggest is a performativity between a simple has been, a complete anaesthetization, and an opening within which to perform the real power of the archive, the parergon, the marginal, the limit between intrinsic and extrinsic, using allegory and appropriation to do so. This tension, this caught-in-between, this interstitial and abeyant modality is exactly the same tension that consumes theorizations over postmodernity. Inciting the "little narratives" that Jean François Lyotard invokes to resuscitate an incredulity toward metanarratives, post studio's intervention into modernity's historical grasp functions to remind us that, via Jürgen Habermas, communication is perpetually distorted, filled with gaps and misunderstandings, all due to transcription. Overarching this entire project, therefore, is a notion that interpretation, and in particular, the "right" interpretation, is an impossibility. Such is the guiding principle of poststructuralism, this project's muse.

Returning to the dialectics between Derrida and Mbembe, there emerges a more nuanced vector through which to understand the archive, which I alluded to previously - *performativity*. Invoking other voices, and other lived realities, the need for a post studio archive would be nullified, because this artistic practice sought to negate the master narratives of modernity and modern art practice in general. The four vectors of Derrida's postulations on the archive include a canonical orientation of the archive; the temporal play of death held in abeyance; the notion that representation is fictionalization, and that delimitation is a construct. Baldessari's *auto da fé*, the *Cremation Piece* (later the *Cremation Project*) toggles between all four of these theories. In between a sanctioned archive, bestowed as the genuine and ordered narrative, a metaphorical death held in abeyance, Baldessari's cremation fictionalizes an equality of image to representation, and indeed moves between a total annihilation (to use Baldessari's terminology,

*atomization*) and the need, the urge to commemorate. After all, when we scale back, all Baldessari wanted to end was the wrong road he was on as a painter. He offers a testimony outside of the confines of traditional representation. His testimony is a work of art, which abandons a classical concept of attestation. He performs a different narrative. Mbembe's theorizations, offering a dialectical frame within which to better understand Baldessari's work, also engage four discrete vectors: proof, debt, commemoration and dispossession. This latter through-line differs from Derrida's, reminding us of the bias of the commemorative, and in a politicizing stance toward this tendency, into or toward a ritualized forgetting. Which is where Baldessari inserts himself, via the *Cremation Piece*, equally espousing a lack of desire to repeat his act, his crematory gesture. Mbembe equally ascribes the commodification of memory into his archival theorizations. Which is one area where we can fault Baldessari's move to migrate his singularly autographic act of the destruction of his paintings into a transference for a public, a museum audience, with the exhibition of the *Cremation Project* – which includes photographic documentation of the event in addition to the urns placed behind the wall in the museum. This transference is an economic tendency of the archive, and in this instance, it is a transference into a talisman by commodification and mass consumption, a function of the museum. Which, as this project does not suggest to be ignorant of nor eschew, post studio art practice was never fully immune to economic reward.<sup>38</sup> However, a lasting testimony emerges in the *Cremation Piece* and *Cremation Project* – a democratizing, chronophagic act that migrates into an imaginary zone.

Regarding Mbembe's theories toward archiving, we recall the other three characteristics – proof, debt, and dispossession, to understand further how Baldessari's work functions outside of a physical remainder. The archive, Mbembe writes, acquires proof, thereby activating

subjectivity within a sphere of selectivity and status. Baldessari was not interested in achieving a certain status as an artist, nor did he intend to leave behind archival residue of an art – painting – which he could not fully embrace. The representations of his cremated work are only known through reproduction or ashes; the latter not the typical type of physical materials one would expect to find in an archive. His act was much more personal. He felt an obligation to correct his unease, a denial of debt owed to modernism. Yet his crematory act would not, could not negate the debt owed to the modernist art he made and derived from the canon. The documentation in the *Software* exhibition illustrates his indebtedness to testimony, to witnessing. We must recall the violent act that liberated his artistic practice. As referenced earlier, such penance will reemerge later in the piece, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, in *Chapter Four*.<sup>39</sup> The last characteristic or functionality of an archive, according to Mbembe, is dispossession. The move to dispossess begins with restoration, and is restorative before it can be destructive. This notion aligns well with Baldessari's ritual. He had to reconcile his work between 1957-1967, entering it into a public domain, to better destroy it. Little recompense or total dispossession of authorship? Dispossession is the opposite of possession, which as a functionality of appropriation, leads us to Craig Owens, the lead theorist within this larger project and the third protagonist – alongside Baldessari and Kienholz, to lead the discourse back toward an American postmodernism.

Extending the Derridean equation between power and archives, Mbembe writes:

“The relationship between the archive and the state is just as complex. It rests on a paradox. On the one hand, there is no state without archives—without its archives. On the other hand, the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state. The reason is simple. More than on its ability to recall, the power of the state rests on its ability to consume time, that is, to abolish the archive and anaesthetize the past” (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 23).

The power of the state is temporally inscribed, through a term Mbembe calls ‘chronophagy,’ or the practice of denying debt by denying the materiality of the archive. The domicile, the house, it



seems, is not necessarily an attribute of the archive that we should be concerned with. Rather, the refusal to recognize a debt owed by the state to its past through material destruction of an archive is the real threat. Baldessari's destruction of his paintings, his chronophagic act, is a denial not only of a debt owed to modernism, but also a provocation that the formal lack of a post studio archive – the name he gave to his emergent practice and the program at CalArts- illustrates the radical pivot away from the archive's reliance on materiality into an imaginary zone, and instituting imaginary. In deference to his practice, it seems, Baldessari invokes a curious combination of commemorating a defiant act while simultaneously destroying the material substance of his painting and its future archivability, thus negating a controlled or civilized consumption of his work.

By placing the emphasis of the archive on an instituting imaginary, Mbembe safeguards the power of the archive in a realm of exchange and imaginative circulation. "Material destruction," he writes, "has only succeeded in inscribing the memory of the archive and its contents in a double register" (Mbembe, "The Power of the Archives and Its Limits" 23). One element of this duality is fantasy, and the other, spectre. Prohibition or destruction of an archive sends the mind to dwell fantastically, in an imaginary zone, allowing for what Mbembe cites as a "space for all manner of imaginary thoughts" (24). The state's desire to withhold or displace its debt by denying an archive has, it seems, very dire and unintended consequences. On the one hand, the virulent nature of the imagination, so chastised within Plato's polis, offers more content to the material archive than the state could imagine. On the other hand, the destroyed archive "haunts the state in the form of a spectre," lacking objectivity and transformed because of its material death or denial into a "receptacle of all utopian ideals and of all anger, the authority of a future judgement" (24).

### 1.3 A Selection of John Baldessari's Cremated Works, 1957-1967

“I am the only one who can testify to my death – on the condition that I survive it.”  
-Jacques Derrida<sup>40</sup>

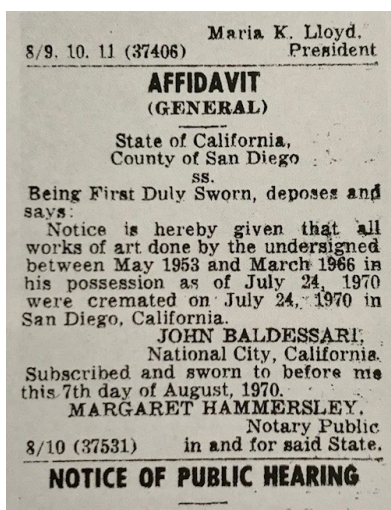


Figure 7 John Baldessari, *Cremation Piece*, 1970 (John Baldessari *Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume One)

The inventory of Baldessari's cremated paintings fill a void, a missing archive. By reinscribing to them the formal attributes of each, as a way of reassigning a moral authority to the works that Baldessari so desperately tried to escape through their cremation; the formal attributes of his cremated paintings must be inventoried and submitted to the historical record – through a descriptive analysis of a sampling of the cremated paintings in Baldessari's *Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume One.<sup>41</sup> These paintings, as a collective body of work, offer significant clues to uncover both the modernist tropes of figurative and abstract work, as well as demonstrate the formal training and acumen Baldessari possessed. It should be noted and inserted into the record that there is, as uncovered through my research, a discrepancy with regard to the years – both commencing and ending – the cremated works. This is contested in Yve-Alain Bois's introductory essay, “Is It Impossible to Underline in A Telegram” in *Catalogue Raisonné*,

*Volume One*. Bois states that 1966, as opposed to 1967, is the end date for the paintings ultimately destroyed in *Cremation Piece*. However, the catalog lists no paintings from 1966, and the ultimate, CP67.1, is listed as being painted in 1967. Not a minor detail, I cite it as a way to underscore how an archive, above all else, is a malleable construct.

Baldessari admitted to an internal struggle with regard to how he would realize the cremation of his paintings. It should be noted that he gave away many works and also retained some from the pyre. While this vignette – the descriptions of his cremated paintings – does not describe those saved works, which were left outside the inventory in *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* (which is another project altogether), it does suggest a judgement of sorts on the part of Baldessari himself, in terms of which paintings he chose to cremate and which were spared such a fate. As I have previously mentioned, choosing was a common thread within Baldessari's artistic methodology, as he questioned the divisions between what is included versus what is excluded, generally speaking, by human judgment, invoking the parergon's functionality. Ultimately, Baldessari chose a very public route for the *Cremation Piece*, by advertising his obituary and project in advance of the cremation in a local paper in National City, California; by including students he was teaching at the time at San Diego State University (reinforcing the predilection for the pedagogical in his work); and, as seen previously, by choosing to document the entire affair, which allowed the work to manifest later as the *Cremation Project*.

It has been suggested that Baldessari had an unease he needed to quell, a nagging thought that art could be more than painting. Surely the crematory act of destroying – atomizing – these works is a strong condemnation of painting. Here, Baldessari shares an allegiance with Craig Owens's writing on the metaphorical death of painting and the overdetermined stature painting

held in the burgeoning postmodernism that claimed appropriation as an artistic methodology. Baldessari's anxiety was not only founded on this notion that art could be more than painting, but through his belief that meaning is fleeing words and images in modern life. His belief contextualizes much of the formalist attributes of his cremated works, and in particular, underscore his use of semiotics – in particular, advertising semiotics – in many of the later paintings. Equally germane to this investigation is the fact that Baldessari's entire artistic output was predicated on his belief that there is an inherent hierarchy of vision. Akin to Derrida's statement regarding the hierarchical classification of the arts, Baldessari seemingly interfered with such hierarchy, becoming an artist-philosopher who not only asked the question, but transformed it, and in doing so, also destroyed its form, its form as a question, or what Derrida would call its *ontointerrogative* structure. The hierarchy of vision includes the notion of a frame as an automatic art signal, to paraphrase Baldessari, and the container validates the content. The dematerialization embodied by the crematory act negates the signified site of artistic practice, removing any allegiance to a frame, the frame's romanization in modernism. As if to claim that a medium has to reach its limits to give voice to and to disturb the canvas as the home – the domicile – of painting. Less an iconoclastic gesture, with much more significance than Baldessari's own pragmatic approach suggests; rather, his desire to teach us to look elsewhere, to see artwork askew (his musings), to disrupt the hierarchy of vision – Baldessari burned this sense of demarcation, adding a searing testimony of the frame as a site of both exclusion and inclusion, and the tension between annihilation and commemoration. He survived his own death to testify to that affect.

Baldessari has stated his desire “to play a painting backward,” to dismantle and to reuse the creative gesture that birthed each discrete painting that he later cremated. Such a mentality

suggests that the truth of art lies within its own destruction, fragility, and indeed its own precariousness. For painting, and specifically for Baldessari's painting, his constructive act is inseparable from his act of destruction, his *auto-da-fé*. As if to disrupt a hierarchy of vision and art, to become indivisible, to inhabit a boundary's ultimate instituting imaginary – one without visual images.

**1957**



Figure 8 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP.57.2, *Bulldozer*, CP57.12, *Plant on Chair*, CP57.11, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

The year 1957 commemorates the first year of paintings which would become part of Baldessari's *Cremation Piece*. Twelve relatively small oil paintings on canvas (24" x 36", for example), including three which employ mixed media, are seemingly innocuous modern gestures within an academic canon; playing with figuration, abstraction, color, still life, and chiaroscuro. Even the titled works give little to ponder in terms of content, in particular CP57.2, *Bulldozer*, and CP57.12, *Plant on Chair*: their eponymous titles are didactic indicators of each painting's individual content.<sup>42</sup>

*Plant on Chair* is the most playful painting in this subgroup, using a depth of field technique to blend the plant's base into a tine of the wood chair. The plant divides the canvas into symmetrical grids. However, lurking within the work symbolically is a religious connotation of a papal hat, as well as a light beacon in lieu of a palm frond. The three branches above the

plant's pot offer another grounding element to the work, subdividing further the grid of the painting. The branches also form a cross-like structure.

Adjacent to the left of *Plant on Chair* in Baldessari's *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One, 1956-1974* is an abstract-figurative oil on canvas, CP57.11, whose gesture connotes many symbolic forms, running the gamut from playful (a robot-like figure), to irreverent (reminiscent of the tin man in the film the *Wizard of Oz*), to the more religio-serious hand in an offertory stance. What, exactly, this abstracted hand offers is indistinguishable, even when viewed from an upside-down vantage point; its long, emaciated digits extend off the frame, forever obscuring what may be being offered to the viewer. Together, these paintings announce what is to come in his subsequent five paintings of 1958, although the symbolism migrates noticeably toward nature.

## 1958



Figure 9 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP58.2, *Untitled*; CP58.3, *Untitled*; CP58.4, *Untitled*; CP58.5, *Untitled*; CP.57.10, *Manipulated Surface* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

Baldessari's 1958 paintings usher in a naturalistic turn, evoking landscapes, including one canvas that places a window-like frame within the frame of the canvas itself, CP58.2. The horizontal sill appears to separate a large body of water from a cascade of mountaintops. Or, from a more nuanced vantage point, the top rectangle could be a windowpane filled with broken

glass. The rough-hewn brushstrokes within this top pane suggest that, even if it were a literal depiction of a window, any attempt to open it could have dire consequences. It is better, perhaps, to enjoy the vista from outside, within a safe zone, not unlike a Kantian admonition that the subliminal view is best enjoyed from afar.

All four works from 1958 are untitled oil on canvas paintings, roughly similar dimensions to his paintings from a more prolific 1957. The window pane painting, CP58.2, is a gateway piece, hinging together and fostering movement between a dark, abstracted painting to its immediate left in the catalog's inventory, and the two whitewashed paintings to its immediate right. On the far right of these two anomalies is another dark abstract painting, CP58.5, with undulating white and grey barnacle-like shapes that seem to breathe life into the cascading slides of black paint. The way in which these 1958 paintings are catalogued force the eye to rest and to contemplate the two light paintings specifically.

There is almost a primal urgency within Baldessari's brushstrokes in the two-whitewashed paintings, CP58.3 and CP58.4. Although an earlier painting from his 1957 oeuvre, *Manipulated Surface*, CP57.10 (included here), foreshadowed this aesthetic migration; the urgency suggested in the 1958 paintings is palpable. The first of the two 1958 paintings, CP58.3, centers a talon-like object in the center of the canvas. It is an ochre-colored hand, mixed from natural clay of the earth, with sandy texture. The brownish-yellow color grounds the hand's gesture and movement, simultaneously causing a sense of counter-clockwise swirling, as if the talon is moving snow, agitating the canvas's very surface. The primitiveness of the shapes also suggests an oblique (at least) reference to the cave paintings of Lascaux, yet instead of depicting animals and a natural surrounding environment, it seems as if the early human handprint, albeit

not a perfect representation of such (it has four digits), is fighting to liberate itself from its own terroir, its existence as an insignificant being within the larger evolutionary context.

This scene portends a struggle, an ontological dilemma that places man against – or within – an inhabited natural space within which it is uncomfortable dwelling. Lacking clear dexterity, its struggle becomes one of representation, of lassoing in and submitting to its hierarchical, representational order. All of this becomes evident in CP58.4. The cracks within the paint evoke liberation - a breaking free from the frame of identification. The hand, the talon, any evident or recognizable anthropological armature of mark making is gone. Its counter-clockwise movement appears to have come to a head in a frenzy; the snow like background now has subtle patches of ochre, earth tilled by the violent gestures of the paintbrush. An extension of the artist only reversed as if to offer an escape route.

## 1959



Figure 10 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP59.8, *Untitled*; CP59.9, *Untitled*; CP59.16, *Untitled*; CP59.17, *Untitled*; CP59.20, *Untitled* (*John Baldessari, Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

The year 1959 is Baldessari's most prolific – his output of paintings totals twenty-two. All but one is oil on canvas. One is mixed media. All are untitled. The cacophony of painting motifs in this destroyed series of 1959 is reflective of all common modernist tropes; Baldessari seems to be showing his mastery of modernist techniques as well as those of avant-garde abstract expressionists (albeit highly didactic copies of such).<sup>43</sup> What is striking about this grouping is the emergence of a strong, and a brighter, color palette. The first (sequential) eight paintings use



color to depict figures in varying states of activity: including one in repose; two whom appear to be models in a more academic, atelier setting; one side portrait of an unidentifiable man in the style and manner of renaissance portraiture; a man clad in a pinkish-red robe, sitting side-saddle in a chair; and a curious painting of two figures in the background of a painting which depicts an academic atelier setting of a female model posing before three male students. The eighth painting, the final one to use color, CP59.8, shatters this lineage of portraiture completely, unsettling the order by inserting cubism overtly into the mix. An emphatic stance not yet seen in Baldessari's paintings of previous years, CP59.8, *Untitled*, evokes a stained glass. The cathedral-like frame, a high arch with geometric shapes of blues, yellows, whites, and blacks, is buttressed against six vertical columns. This work also serves as a portal into the next phase of works Baldessari completed in 1959. He returns to the ominous, white on black abstractions in the subsequent nine paintings, eschewing recognizable symbols and delving into a darker perspective and point of view that dismantle figuration altogether. CP.59.9 is particularly ominous. While not a figurative work per se, the white marks illustrate a figurative choreography, a ghost-like dance that simultaneously evokes a phantasmagorical movement of souls rising from the dark ground. The ashen palette retreats from both the playful colors in his figurative work of the same year, and reconfigure a high-water mark of pure cubism into more sinister canvases. Again, ushering in a more naturalistic turn, the subject matter lays bare and barren the inner turmoil of capturing an untidy world. Emotions stir. The sky is dark. The prisms of cubism turn into muddied shapes and muddled thoughts, order is lost within a sinister, apocalyptic landscape. Paintings CP59.16 and CP59.17 capture the point where a stark tree-like grove of black branches against a cold, white backdrop of sky metamorphose into shattered shards of glass, perhaps obsidian, or quartz, perhaps cohered by ash. CP59.17 is oil and mixed

media on canvas. As seen previously, Baldessari reintroduces mixed media in his work to signal an immanent shift in his subject matter. This particular example denotes such a moment, for his next and last five paintings from 1959 return to a similar color field as the first seven in this series, albeit more replete with blues, turquoise, ochre and sienna. Chards of glass become clouds and a nightscape reminiscent of Edvard Munch's *the Scream*, and other twentieth-century modernists. Yet, one above all others, CP59.20, commands attention, warranting a second look and a deeper deconstruction.

CP59.20, the next to penultimate painting from 1959, is an untitled oil on canvas, dimensions unspecified. It is both a negative dispositive of CP59.16, of the ashen grave of trees against an apocalyptic sky, and a return to the primal gestures of CP58.3 from 1958. The canvas, symmetrical, has four trees or talons placed vertically, almost equidistant apart, in the reverse color of black. The ochre color employed in his earlier painting to announce the emergence of a hand (or equivalent anatomical body part capable of mark making) has traded places with the black and consumes the background. It suggests a new (different) means of encountering nature: less ominous, illuminated as with a camera's flash.

## 1960

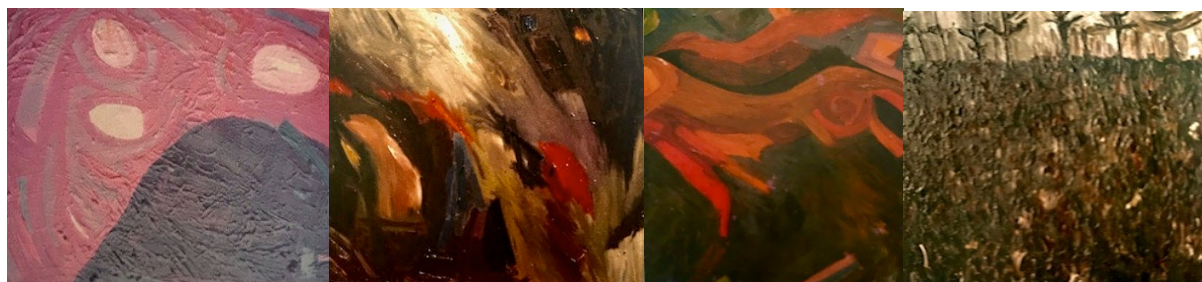


Figure 11 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP60.1, *Untitled*; CP60.4, *Untitled*; CP.60.6, *Hooked Landscape*; CP60.18, *Torrey Pines on Cliff* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné*, Volume One)

In 1960, Baldessari's eighteen destroyed crematory paintings are bracketed, rather than positioned in a binary fashion of before-and-after techniques. It is as if the new decade

commences Baldessari's more optimistic, playful mindset. Canvas CP60.1 is particularly whimsical, portraying a mountaintop with three cumulus clouds floating overhead. This painting leads into subsequent abstract gestures trapped in a subdued, pastel finish of pinks, beige, yellow, grey and deep charcoal colors before descending into a denouement of five seemingly lost canvases, in terms of palette. The mood turns reflective. Darker skylines with village-like structures return the viewer to a mood more evocative of figuration and representation of apprehensible imagery before returning to eight paintings in which Baldessari seemingly admixes his palette and returns to a more optimistic point of view. The world becomes stratified; natural references become more grounded in the layers of sediment and earth, reclamation perhaps of earlier, dark and foreboding imagery.

Yet, before arriving at this juncture we must return to the fourth painting in the 1960 series of eighteen destroyed works. Here, Baldessari's palette is eerily reminiscent of Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* series:



Figure 12 Francisco de Goya, *Third of May, 1808*, 1814 (Museo del Prado, Madrid)

The movement of this particular painting, CP60.4, although lacking any figures, mimics that of Goya's *Third of May, 1808*. The sweeping movements of red, white, burnt orange and pinks

toward the upper left-hand side of the canvas reenact the stances of Goya's revolutionary protagonist, hands held above his head in surrender. Baldessari's painting is a serial landscape, if painting CP60.6, *Hooked Landscape*, offers any clue. Yet, as if in defiance of pure figuration, Baldessari offers a commentary hidden to the viewer, yet understood if Baldessari's fascination with and influence of the Spanish master is understood.<sup>44</sup> Baldessari's 1989 exhibition at the Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, NI POR ESAS (NOT EVEN SO) borrowed its name from Goya's print, "Desastres de la Guerra" (War Disasters). In a press release by Spain's Minister of Culture, the similarities between Goya and Baldessari are noted, which include pessimism, individuality, and romanticism. There is also a reference to the black ink that Goya used in many of his works, a black ink that was called "print ink." Used as paint, it gives an excessive and raw black, and Baldessari countered with a black color in his work in the 1989 exhibition that was exaggerated. The press release states further, "In Goya, white comes from the walls of the house, and in Baldessari from a lost perspective. Both introduce colours as an intense freedom feeling."<sup>45</sup> Moving through the subsequent eleven paintings and arriving at the final piece, CP60.18, *Torrey Pines on Cliff*, one returns to a narrative all too familiar in Baldessari's work: tall, sinewy, almost burned looking trees atop a charred foreground. It is as if to suggest a return to a darker side of humanity, the seven or eight trees symbolizing fallen bodies, commemorating a defiant stance of revolutionary tendencies incapable of being snuffed out without hope of re-ignition.

1961



Figure 13 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP61.15, *Brandenburg Gate*; CP61.9, *Untitled*; CP61.14, *The Sign as the Universe, the Trashcan*; CP61.13, *Dying Signboard (#2)*; CP61.16, *Sign for One Way (Version 2)* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

In 1961, the reemergence of political (politicized) content occurs in a much more straightforward and non-abstract, non-conceptual manner. Of Baldessari's twenty destroyed crematory paintings completed this year, CP61.5, *Brandenburg Gate*, emerges as one of two explicitly symbolic paintings (the other, CP61.9, is a mixed media, representational assemblage with a baby doll's right arm protruding out of a wood structure that appears to be a birdhouse). The shift toward assemblage is in line with the tendency in modern art of the burgeoning decade – in particular, of Robert Rauschenberg – as referenced in the introductory chapter.<sup>46</sup> The noticeable shift in Baldessari's paintings of 1961, however, has not so much to do with a gestural and insignificant pivot toward an assemblage work (1/20 of his works from 1961 use this aesthetic methodology), nor is it necessarily productive to imbue meaning into his *Brandenburg Gate* painting. Rather, what is worthy of further deconstruction is Baldessari's early move toward semiotics, a trope and thematic tendency in his later word and image works commencing in the late 1960s. The three titular works combine abstract gestures with strident black X's and white, horizontal lines subdividing the canvases into grids. This pop-influenced move on Baldessari's part provides a commentary on, among other topics, advertising, commerce, and

capitalism. The trifecta of titles, CP.61.14, *The Sign as the Universe*, *The Trashcan*, CP.61.16, *Sign for One Way (version 2)*, and CP61.13, *Dying Signboard (#2)* belie a straightforward, linear projection of signified-signifier; for lost in the abstract work is a referential relationship between what is portrayed and how each canvas is titled.

By linking the universe to the trashcan, Baldessari ostensibly offers a critique of commercialism, most likely equally related to the rise of pop art as a trope that sheds light on consumerist tendencies of the American post-war years. Baldessari's contemporary Edward Kienholz equally offers a cultural critique through his tableaux, which is a topic of *Chapter Four*. It also suggests that Baldessari was beginning to think equally about trashing his paintings, in an act of ultimate artistic dispossession. The two large, white, square-ish shapes in the canvas's center could equalize each other, in a negation of two here-to-fore conceptualizations as the universe being geocentric or heliocentric. Baldessari's hand offers an ultimate commentary on these perfectly ordered views of the cosmos. The universe is one big repository for all our materialistic endeavors. Cremation, atomization, pulverization create the ashes of consumerism. Within this paradigm, perhaps, Baldessari could relinquish the precariousness of the artists' works. Absolutism, absolute knowledge paradigms about the universal composition are negated in a cynical titular move on Baldessari's part. As if to jab at Hegelian dialectics, a new synthesis always zeros out the binary oppositions of thought. Man's natural disposition lends itself more to destruction even cloaked within a materialistic, optimistic orientation toward creation.

1962



Figure 14 John Baldessari Left to Right: CP62.5, *Lament for the Last Sign on Broadway with an X*; CP62.7, *Sign without an X*; CP62.8, *X Sign and Reliquary for a Small Town* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

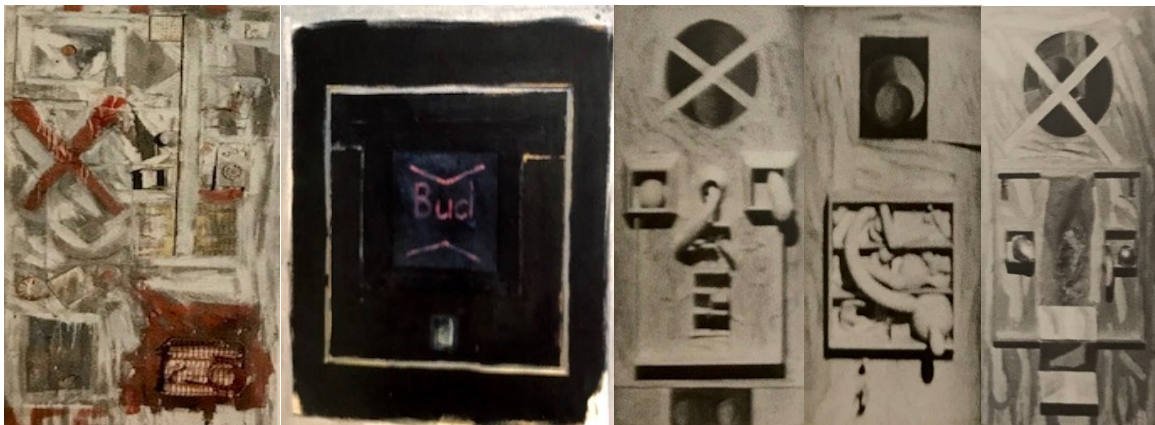


Figure 15 John Baldessari Left to Right: CP62.10, *X Sign—For There is No News from Auschwitz*; CP62.16, *Bud Sign*; CP62.17, *The Rolly Polly Puppy Mommy Daddy Swank Dude Special*; CP62.18, *The Brave Little Jolly Jumping Regular Intimate Shocker*; CP62.19, *The Fraidy Raggedy Ann Bingity-Bangity Bed of Sin Bonus Offer* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

The year 1962 marks a turning point in Baldessari's work, in that of the twenty destroyed crematory paintings, all but two are mixed media. His cynicism heightens, as reflected in some of his more humorous titles: CP62.17, *The Rolly Polly Puppy Mommy Daddy Swank Dude Special*; CP62.18, *The Brave Little Jolly Jumping Regular Intimate Shocker*; CP62.19, *The Fraidy Raggedy Ann Bingity-Bangity Bed of Sin Bonus Offer*; and CP62.20, *The Magnificent*

*Sonny the Bunny Torrid Handy Coupon*. Irreverent as these titles seem, lurking within each is a popular-cultural reference or reference to consumerism. Ironically these titles belie a cotton candy, saccharin palette one would imagine accompanying such playful, tongue-in-cheek titles. As a grouping of four, each work is 96”x48”, rectangular, vertically oriented, mixed media pieces, done in varying shades of grey, white, and black. Each conjures a system of exchange; pleasure for hard work; leisure time for labor value; with mixed-media allegories using a cash register, abacus, and computer motherboard that must be appeased before one can enter the accompanying black box for the awaiting surprise or reward. Or, in an equally plausible deconstruction/description, what is behind the box, within the closed off peephole, is a gamble. Baldessari, in inscribing each piece with attendant leisure and television culture of the early 1960s is critiquing the banality of American post-war life.<sup>47</sup> Having yet to fully witness the horrors of the Vietnam War, televised in living rooms that share equally in the viewing pleasures of commodification and reward – and long since well anaesthetized to the horrors of World War Two, this sub grouping of four paintings from 1962 packs a powerful aesthetic punch. Edward Kienholz addresses the horrors of the Vietnam War as well, especially within his tableau, *Eleventh Hour Final*, which is addressed in a later chapter. Both artists were critiquing the ways in which American culture had become anaesthetized, immobilized, content, and entertained. Or perhaps merely complacent within an exchange system that delivers the goods – and our pleasure – directly into our living room. Baldessari’s astute use of his palette in this series reinscribes this sensibility of American life.<sup>48</sup>

Bracketing this foursome, and earlier within the twenty destroyed works of 1962, is another powerful commentary on exchange systems. Using billboard advertising as a point of critique, Baldessari foreshadows a critically conceptual technique that he would utilize in later



work, that of sign painting.<sup>49</sup> The series entitled *Commissioned Paintings*, from 1969, will also be addressed in a subsequent chapter. It will pivot toward a methodology which shifts the mark making from his own hands and brushes to those who work professionally within this commercial field. Again, within this subset of six works from 1962, their titles underscore a vernacular orientation, pseudo-obsessive, perhaps, with signs as a gaming device. In this regard, the literal deconstruction of a sign's outer edges – be they billboards, neon bar signs, or storefront advertisements, Baldessari highlights and confronts their functionalities as framing devices of a different ilk; mainly, of our own enframement within an exchange system that delivers news, sales, specials, or iconographic imagery, of which we rely on for reification of our cultural mores, values, and expectations.

For instance, CP62.8, *Sign and Reliquary for a Small Town*, a mixed media work, uses a red, white, and blue palette to symbolize the stars and stripes of Old Glory. The dimensions of this work are reminiscent of an altarpiece, with a main central image abutted by two smaller, protruding structures on either side of the main piece. The central square is where the American flag image is captured, flanked by two small squares that extend the painting horizontally. It is difficult to decipher what, exactly, is the reliquary in this work. Perhaps it is the sign itself, a vestige of propaganda from the war years. Perhaps, metaphorically, it is patriotism. The title leaves the piece open to interpretation, with the insertion of 'and' in the title, a conscious delimitation between sign and reliquary. The use of 'and' could be a conjoining device, deliberate and intentional within Baldessari's proven proclivity for and tendency toward verbal puns and double entendres. But, as an altarpiece, it suggests one must bow down and conform to a faith and belief system of both God and country, a unique admixture of what is traditionally separated in the United States: church and state. For in wartime, one upholds the values of both

religiosity (a Christian doctrine in this case) and right to land ownership. These are the ideals worth fighting for. Or, minimally, for the right to praise god while drinking a Budweiser in your own front lawn.

An equivalent reliquary gesture emerges in CP62.16, *Bud Sign*, homage to an American identity, appropriating the iconic Budweiser beer logo, shortened to “Bud” and reminiscent of the advertising imagery that equates drinking a Bud to American grit and determination.<sup>50</sup> Baldessari uses a double-frame in this work, only 48”x48,” to place the trademark label seemingly out of reach to the spectator – the rugged outer white frame grounds the work, while the finer white inside frame pushes back into the perceptual distance the piece’s centerfold. Adding to this depth is the framing device used in the Budweiser logo itself, two brackets that are boomerang shaped, inverted into the three letters and placed simultaneously in high relief and out of reach. The placement of the logo leaves our own palettes insatiated.

In between these subsets, or sub categories of work that appropriate systems of exchange as both content and technical methodology (particularly, in the letter sign paintings) is painting CP62.10, *X Sign – For There is No News from Auschwitz*. The reference to Auschwitz also reminds one of Adorno’s admonition that, after Auschwitz, there could be no more poetry. The holocaust is a theme addressed by both Baldessari and Kienholz; the latter, in an oblique manner by exhibiting his piece *Five Car Stud* for the first time publicly in Kassel, Germany as part of documenta V. Ostensibly about race relations in America, *Five Car Stud* also bears witness to the genocidal horrors of the holocaust and Germany’s treatment of Jews. Baldessari’s later work would use appropriated images of holocaust victims against supermarket shelves in American supermarkets. Baldessari was exceedingly troubled by images of the holocaust he saw in his youth, and his piece *Inventory* (1987) dealt with, among other issues, the disposability of human

life. One of several paintings in the twenty destroyed crematory works of 1962 to use the ‘X’ mark, this particular piece is one of three to call out the ‘X’ in its title. The other two works that reference ‘X’ in their titles are CP62.5, *Lament for the Last Sign on Broadway with an X*, and CP62.7, *Sign Without an X*.

## 1963



Figure 16 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP63.1, *Untitled*; CP63.2, *Ear*; CP63.3, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné*, Volume One)

Relative to subsequent and previous years, 1963 is rather unprolific. Laid bare in the catalog’s inventory of this year are three works, CP63.1, CP63.2, and CP.63.3, respectively. Taken together they form a disconnected, discordant triptych, for the stylistic range varies wildly. The discombobulating imagery is grounded by the piece in the center, an oil and mixed media on canvas, 59”x41”, titled *Ear*. The simple grey background sets in relief a peach and lavender-hued human head, askew on the canvas and bleeding off to the right-hand side margins, with an arm that is right-handed in orientation. Yet, the head is missing any facial elements – its eyes, nose, mouth, and eyebrows are non-existent. Therefore, the positioning of the ear leads one to deduce that either the painting is an incomplete or unfinished representation of a face, or that, more probably, the ear is placed intentionally backwards, as an irreverent conceptual gesture that

begs deduction: What is Baldessari asking us to consider? What provocation is meant by this sleight-of-hand? One interpretation is the suggestion that humans are subject to the historical past, an audible, narrative loop playing in our ears as a historical soundtrack we are incapable of dubbing over the historical now, the present. History reminds us of atrocities committed by the human mind and hand yet we are deaf to its reminders.<sup>51</sup> This piece in particular foreshadows what imagery Baldessari will focus on in 1964. The adjacent paintings – to both the left and right-hand sides, are seemingly insignificant, misplaced works that neither frame the *Ear* painting, nor engage with it formally or conceptually.

### 1964



Figure 17 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP64.7, *Three Fingernails*; CP64.8, *Standard Hand*; CP64.9, *Untitled*; CP64.10, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)



Figure 18 John Baldessari, Middle Row, Left to Right: CP64.12, *Untitled*; CP64.13, *Untitled*; CP64.14, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

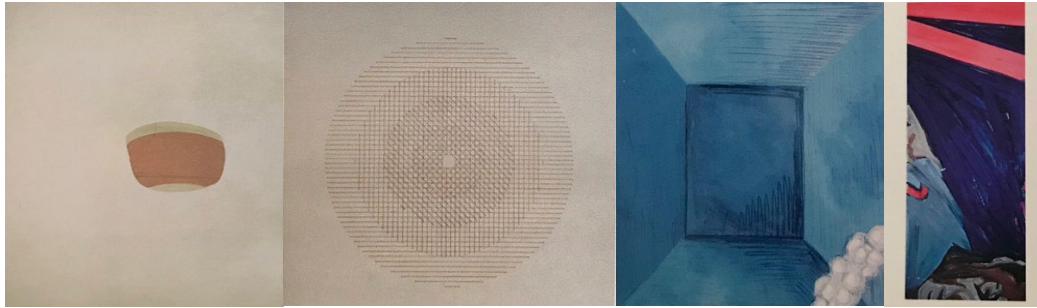


Figure 19 John Baldessari, Bottom Row, Left to Right: CP64.15, Untitled; CP64.16, Untitled; CP64.17, Untitled; CP63.1, Untitled (*John Baldessari, Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

In 1964, Baldessari returned full force to figuration. This time, specific facial parts are rendered large-scale relative to the size of the frame (16”x18” on average). In another formal move, the works are done on wood. There are seventeen total works in this year. The first eight rift off of the *Ear* painting from 1963, CP63.2, and in fact, the first painting from 1964 is of an ear. Perhaps a close-up detailed rendering of the former piece, the accompanied placement of a hairline indicates that the face it is on is facing forward, although any recognizable facial part is outside of the frame. Baldessari also paints a close-up of an eyebrow, an eye, and thumb in the subsequent paintings. Deconstructed in this manner, it is as if Baldessari painted from photographic snapshots or advertisements. The lines are crisp, the rendering simple in their gestural manifestation, with flat shadowing techniques and clean palettes, almost as if painted by numbers on a pre-existing outline. Baldessari is foreshadowing in this work his later and important pivot to working from photographs. The apprehension of an actual person, identifiable only through disparate body parts, is troubling, both in its lack of cohesion and fully recognizable portraiture, but also in that it disturbs identification with an ‘Other’ – as if to offer commentary on our disenfranchisement on the one hand from forming a cohesive human bond through mutual recognition, to a more sinister undertone that we are disposable, made up of discrete and compostable body parts.<sup>52</sup> In fact, this last sentiment is reflected later in Baldessari’s

1987 work, *Inventory*.<sup>53</sup> CP64.8, *Standard Hand*, offers an ominous composition that alludes to such a denuded reality.

*Standard Hand* reads aesthetically more like a surreal still life; the hand, rendered in a naturalistic manner with skin tones, is wrapping itself around something, and only four of the five fingers are visible. The movement conjures Salvador Dali's melting clock in *The Persistence of Memory*, occupying the painting's foreground. On the right side, the word 'Stations' is visible going from the bottom to the top, turned vertically. On the left is an image that could be interpreted as a fireplace with a single billow of white smoke rising from its top. The suggested overture is that of a cremation, and Baldessari's title suggestive of one of many hands to have been atomized within the crematory process itself, a moment when all that has been authored, rendered recognizable from an artist ceases to hold significance when meeting a fate shared by innumerable bodies and hands. The hand still seems to be alive, human in its gesture. Unlike CP64.7, *Three Fingernails*, which uses a palette of greys and blacks, CP64.8 is more pastel-like, muted color field of yellow, beige brown and light blue. The juxtaposition of CP64.7 to CP64.8 is palpable in that CP64.7 monumentalizes three fingers, standing erect and upright and scaled to occupy the majority of the frame. The digits in *Three Fingernails* approximate chimney stacks, the background ominously reminiscent of the ashes falling downward, enveloping the imagery in a chiaroscuro effect.

Painting nine, CP64.9, *Untitled*, is a return to a bright palette of red and white and offers a detail of a sign, perhaps partly painted over, perhaps torn as made visible in the tear-like quality that vertically separates the left red rectangle from the white rectangle on the right hand-side of the rift. In the upper right-hand corner, two shapes outlined in black evoke letters, although completely unrecognizable, they reinforce aesthetically that this could be a painting of

an old sign or billboard. The subsequent painting, CP64.10, *Untitled*, is almost fetish-finish in quality, black and red chevron-esq lines playing off of one another in a slick, high resolution rendering.<sup>54</sup> CP64.10, *Untitled*, also is a detail from one small section of the first painting from 1963, CP63.1, *Moschops You Are a Loser!*

The remaining paintings drift back into a more subdued palette of greys, blues, and whites. CP64.12 is an abstract rendering of a little girl in a wagon, almost out of focus and reminiscent of a snapshot that has been worn by holding and years of sun exposure. A white swath of paint with a red apron pointing down into the wagon seems as if it could have been added by the owner of the snapshot (if it were actually a photo as opposed to a painting), suggesting one look more closely at what accumulated in the girl's lap.

Of the remaining paintings, CP64.13 returns to a highly figurative, social realist image of a man's face in profile, with aquiline nose and parsed lips that suggest he is a dictator or political figure caught in the act of speaking. A single grey star cast down from his lips on the bottom-left portion of the canvas suggests either propaganda or monument. CP64.14 carries this movement forward through a milky way like waterfall descending down out of a black and white starry sky. As if celestial, or divinely delivered, Baldessari seems to render indoctrination mute – or, if viewed alternatively, the white swoosh could manifest movement upward, out of sight in the atmosphere, an escape route from terrestrial and pedestrian concerns. The subsequent two paintings, CP64.15 and CP64.16, both *Untitled*, are over exposed, whitewashed paintings; the first with a vibrating beige mark near the middle axis, and the second a barely visible bulls' eye derivative of a Josef Albers grid painting. Both paintings appear to be rendered in a manner that denies full representation of the image as if polaroid's have been exposed and we are left with a

ghost-like outline of the image's subject. All comes into high relief in the final painting of 1964, *Untitled*, an oil on board.

Returning to color in CP64.17, Baldessari uses composition to draw the eye into a frame within the frame, a chamber-like passage outlined in dark blue, surrounded by lighter, mottled hues and blue brushstrokes. Is it a portal toward emancipation of an earthly (terrestrial) corpus? Or, a prelude to the *Cremation Piece*? A small, billowy, white confectionary shape occupies the bottom right corner, as if propped against the wall awaiting an exit, or, alternatively, already liberated, atomized, pulverized, freed from the constraints of ideologies and terrestrial concerns, a more providentially-oriented pile of ash that holds all aforementioned imagery within its billowy, amorphous shape.

## 1965

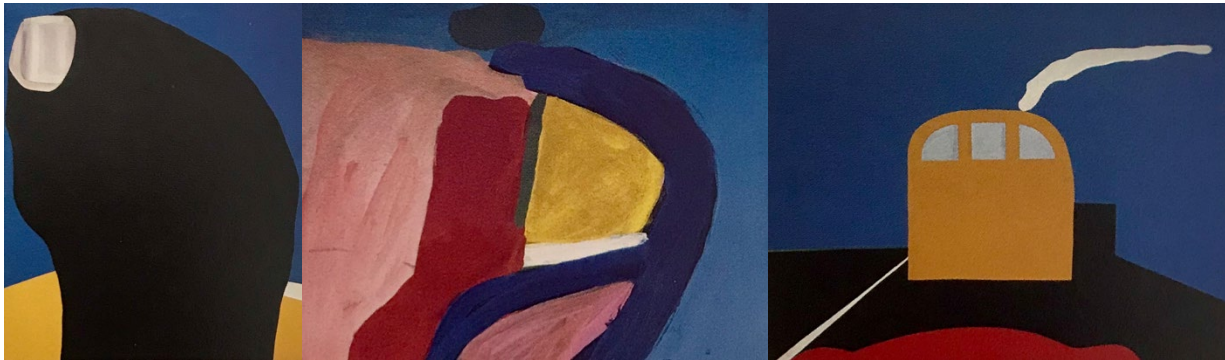


Figure 20 John Baldessari, Left to Right: CP65.1, *My Heart Belongs to Dada but I Know Motherwell*; CP65.2, *Untitled*; CP65.3, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

An overt art historical reference in the title of 1965's catalogue painting, CP65.1, *My Heart Belongs to Dada but I Know Motherwell*, commences 1965. An oil and acrylic on canvas, 68" x 56", the introduction of acrylic with the combination of a primary color palette, the shapes are derivative of Robert Motherwell's gestural works in black and white. Baldessari is illustrating his reference to a contemporary painter yet paying homage to a movement – Dada –



that he shares an affinity with. It should be noted that Kienholz's work is also given a Dadaist interpretation in *Chapter Four*. The work can be viewed as an extension of his facial paintings from 1964, as the main shape within the canvas could be a self-portrait in black, a faceless head with a dialogue bubble located on the temple, as if to illustrate his Dada-like stream of consciousness that is a white rectangle enclosed in a light grey circle. As if to announce liberation from a rectilinear canvas frame and highly representational subject matter, the symbolism imbued in the shape suggests a closure of this modernist methodology, and appears as if the last part of the neutral canvas is to remain unpainted. Compositionally, the painting is well balanced. If not a reference to a self-portrait (albeit a shadow drawing/outline of a face), it could be interpreted as a large thumbprint, whose lines are erased save for the dialogue bubble containing a white rectangle. As a sole source of identification, Baldessari seems to comment that he is still here, in the foreground, superimposed onto the legacies of modernist abstraction and Dadaist tendencies.

The middle two paintings, CP65.2 and CP65.3 carry the strong, primary color palette forward. The first, CP65.2, *Untitled*, could be viewed as an aerial patchwork of a peninsula, jutting into a blue ocean, its landscape turning pink and maroon and into yellow as the movement of the shapes migrates east. It is by far the smallest painting in the grouping, 9"x11 1/2". CP65.3 returns to a more recognizable figurative point of view, and the movement recedes to the back of the painting along a white angled line emanating out from the bottom left of the canvas. It rests at the side of a yellow shape that appears to be the back of a cable car, train coach, or bus. A white plume of smoke rises from the top of the structure, furthering the movement of the white line on the ground upward into the dark night sky and off to the upper right-hand side of the canvas. There are three windows on the backside of the vehicle, however no wheels are depicted,

and the movement is generated through the formalism of the lines rather than the literal parts of a moving vehicle required for mobility.

This interpretation stems from Baldessari's 1963 photographic work, *The backs of all the trucks passed while driving from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara, California, Sunday 20, January 1963*, snapshots of the backsides of cars and trucks that he shot on a California highway. He was struck by how each reminded him of a painting's canvas, in particular, the varying ways in which the bodies of the vehicles framed their backsides. CP65.3 suggests a return to a similar trope or influence, only this time in painting form. Another read suggests a factory – working to exhale the smoke and particulates of the manufacturing activity taking place inside. One cannot help but make a mental reference to the *Cremation Piece*, as 1965 draws closer to the end of the decade in which his crematory pieces were painted.

#### 1966 – 1967



Figure 21 John Baldessari, CP67.1, *Untitled* (John Baldessari, *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

There are no documented crematory works in 1966 within Baldessari's *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*. The last year in which he painted works that were cremated, 1967, has

one destroyed painting, CP67.1, a mixed media piece on board. The painting's orientation is misleading, in that it is positioned vertically, yet the work needs to be seen sideways to fully decipher its imagery. The work suggests a final offering. On the upper plane (left plane if viewed sideways), a boy is sitting at what appears to be a table, his left arm and hand propped up against the table's edge while he eats. In the foreground are several yellow ears of corn on the cob, five total. As a composition full of symbolism, it suggests a reference to Thanksgiving, of a fall harvest of the ever-important bounty that fed America's first pilgrims. Corn, or maize, was a staple for white settlers as much as for the indigenous population of the North American continent. The figure appears framed within a windowpane, in a gesture back to Baldessari's earlier work from 1958, specifically CP58.2 The pane bleeds into the bottom half of the painting in a jagged, protruding triangle. Behind it, the dark background recedes, and another white structure, a staircase perhaps, leads up to the bottom corner. It could be a torn edge of a photograph. The modernist style of the work is derivative of regional painting from early twentieth century American painters, such as Andrew Wyeth. The boy's fingers seem oversized and the bend of each digit and his knuckles mask the view of the watermelon he eats. As a final work, as an offering, it is a return to a purely American vernacular.

#### 1.4 Rediscovering the parergon

As mentioned previously, Baldessari's cremated paintings suggest a nascent interest in semiotics. He critiques the American vernacular within a semiotic field; uncovering and contextualizing his unease, all the while leaving a foreboding feeling of their impending destruction. His act of dematerialization through their cremation repositions the archive in relation to the aesthetic frame of painting, within the choreography of the paintings' frames and the equally aesthetic choreography of Derrida's writing on the parergon in *The Truth in Painting*.

There is a reconciliation between the moral judgement (and indeed moral imperative) of Baldessari to cremate his paintings, the adjunct nature of the parergon, and Owen's rediscovery of the Greek term through Derrida, to reclaim the lack Kant so desperately wanted to hold outside of reach. Functioning as another mediality, the parergon does not demarcate the limit between inclusion and exclusion, but reinforces the play or the performativity between inside and outside, a function with profound implications for this project. For, the reintroduction of the parergon into poststructuralist theory allows for its reclamation as a characteristic of post studio practice, shaping a definition of an American postmodernism simultaneously. The archive's penchant to both exclude and include serves as a warning- a gentle warning with a dissonance behind it, to invoke Baldessari's own words – underscoring, above all else, its imperialistic nature of determining where the power lies, and who controls it. Can we escape the cynicism of the aesthetic regime, a cynicism so endemic to Baldessari's cremated paintings, based on the descriptive analysis just offered, and offer instead a counter path or methodology to circumvent modernism's imperialistic tendencies? Can we instead adapt an attitude that bears allegiance to a mentality that art must not function according to these overly prescribed and legislative mandates?

This chapter commenced with a reproduction both of Baldessari's post studio course description from the archive at CalArts and Derrida's writing on the parergon from *The Truth in Painting*. The intention behind that juxtaposition was to make clear the allegiances they shared with regard to the function and meaning of art. Baldessari was questioning, among other things, whether the object is necessary, and whether art must be visual. Derrida, for his part, questioned the implications of failing to question what art is, and what the meaning of both art and its history convey. Failure to transform or destroy the form of those questions, Derrida reminds us,

will forever indoctrinate and support the hierarchical classification of the arts. Framed within these questions is a reliance on a teleological function of art: it must serve a purpose, a final goal. It must be object-based. Baldessari flipped this script when he introduced a pedagogical roadmap within which to insert an ontointerrogative response to the questions “What is art?” “What is the meaning of art or the history of art?”. The *Cremation Piece* was anti-materialistic, anti-teleological with regard to functioning as an object with a purpose (it was, however, teleological in terms of quelling Baldessari’s unease about his path as an artist), and unequivocally responded that art must not be visual. His act intervened into the hierarchical order of the visual arts’ classification system. It took advantage of the lack Kant so desperately wished would stay hidden, undiscovered, upholding the moral imperative of the formal structures of art and the middle term which adjudicates judgement, as toggling forever between understanding and reason. Craig Owens rediscovered this lack, this theoretical blind spot, within his writing on the parergon which Derrida had introduced in his text, *The Truth in Painting*. Their discourse is helpful to understand how Baldessari’s work intervened in the moral and legislative structures of modernism, the studio, and the archive. Owens’s theories imbue an American orthodoxy of critical, exceedingly individualized feedback on how we can understand the play or performativity of the archive and Baldessari’s removal of his work from it. Baldessari’s gesture in the *Cremation Piece* is an ontointerrogative response to the death of the author, to the machinations of modernism and serves a bellwether for emerging conceptual and post studio practices.

“Four times, then, around painting, to turn merely around it, in the neighboring regions which one authorizes oneself to enter, that’s the whole story, to recognize and contain, like the surrounds of the work of art, or at most its outskirts: frame, title, signature, museum, archive, reproduction, discourse, market, in short: everywhere one legislates on the right to painting by marking the limit, with a slash marking an opposition [d’un trait

d'opposition] which one would like to be indivisible" (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 11).

The painting always and forever reminds us of the indivisible nature of the frame, rather than demarcating the limits of what is included and what is excluded. It legislates, as does the archive, the signature, and the museum, to call out a few sites that Derrida references and that also respond to this project directly. It is not a stretch to include the studio within his list, as an equally legislative structure and construct to determine corresponding artistic activity and output. With the cremation of his painting, Baldessari – and by extension, his post studio attitude – dismantles the role teleology and hierarchy play in ascribing a final, definitive, narrative interpretations to art. Owens's reclamation of allegory also allows for a radical aesthetic transformation by semiotics. As seen in Baldessari's paintings, their content coalesces together to function as one large signifying structure, a system of signs to be decoded. This line of inquiry was espoused by Owens in his writing "Detachment: from the Parergon," in which he claims that "art exists in constant relationship with other domains of culture" (Owens, "Detachment: From the Parergon" 31). One can see this visual script in Baldessari's cremated paintings, which invariably work together to manifest this thought that "meaning is fleeing words and images in modern life" through their content (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné Volume One* 364). Whether through the primal urgency of his brushstrokes and abstractions; the ontological dilemma which places man against – or within – inhabited natural spaces they equally suggest; apocalyptic landscapes of ashen hues; or the pop-inspired paintings of his later art that more emphatically connote advertising, commerce, and capitalistic tropes; finally migrating into an American vernacular, through these depictions of *Budweiser* beer advertising, a Raggedy Ann doll, or Old Glory herself. Painting, according to Owens, supplements nature, working through cultural signs.

Baldessari's work functions in an equally semiotic manner, offering clues into his psyche and the ultimate destruction of his paintings. The aesthetic signs within his paintings are only determined within a cultural system, to paraphrase Derrida, and one for Baldessari which included not only modernism, but also the migration from modernism and the optimistic sensibilities of post-World War Two America into postmodernity. If the theory of art is equivalent to a theory of mores, with Kant's claims to form as a prerequisite to taste, it is no wonder that Baldessari destroyed his work and the visual, semiotic field that they supported. It also, as will be addressed in a subsequent chapter, is no surprise that Edward Kienholz would recoil at the word 'culture' due to its allegiance that form is tethered perpetually to good taste. As another supplement, the parergon also functions as both an increment and a substitute.<sup>55</sup> In so doing, and in allegiance with the supplement, the parergon equally compensates for an absence of a speaker. As an adjunct, and, therefore, not "an intrinsic component of the complete representation of an object," the parergon, as resuscitated by the Greek from Kant, always remains an additive construct. Marking the limit between the intrinsic and the extrinsic – the parergon – akin to the supplement, "may compensate for a lack within the work" (Owens, "Detachment: From the Parergon" 34).

The lack within the work, as enunciated by the return of the parergon, ultimately is a failure on its part to communicate without recourse to metaphor. For, poststructurally speaking, communication is metaphor. As Owens continues, "Kant's is a moral semiotics which presupposes the presentational union of an inside and an outside and links beauty to the visible expression of what lies hidden" (Owens, "Detachment: From the Parergon" 37). Therefore, and according to Owens's logic, Kant's entire thesis in the third critique rests on a belief that the judgement of taste is universal. That, by extension, judgements of taste are also universally

communicable, adhering to a theory of *sensus communis*. What Owens suggests the parergon to signal, to call forward, is a methodology “of transforming the object, the work of art, beyond recognition” (38). Allegory and appropriation – as adjuncts and supplements themselves – equally trouble the representational field and offer an alternate mode of thinking about the deconstructing apparatus of semiotics – beyond moral communication, beyond the relationship of history to discourse, and into a newly liberated semiotic field of post studio artistic practice. It is, therefore, to these supplements we must return to shape a theory of American postmodernism from within a post studio attitude. And, it is within the concept of a parergon that I can ventriloquize the lack of post studio’s archive; through an equally performative gesture that prioritizes the supplement – the external, the inessential and the secondary – and bring it to the fore.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Reclaiming Allegory

“Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery; the allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos + other + agoreuei = to speak). Its source of theoretical significance is as a supplement. Allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement.”  
 – Craig Owens<sup>56</sup>

#### 2.1 From Archive to Allegory

The performativity of Derrida’s archival theorizations dwells within violence, destruction, and consignment. Derrida is emphatic in his suggestion that archives perform in contrast to Mbembe’s definition of the archive’s characteristics (tactile, visual, and cognitive) to which I added a fourth: performativity, as a means to reconcile a mechanism for post studio to perform its intervention into modernism (Mbembe, “The Power of the Archives and Its Limits” 20). Derrida’s emphasis on destruction is anti-domicile, anti-arkheion, and guarded by archons, those who both command and control. Un-moored from such house arrest, the archive is freer to reside in a more liberated zone of interpretation. However, a differentiation exists within these formulations of performativity; Mbembe’s connotes a much more positive orientation, a dwelling within an instituting imaginary zone, where one constructs according to what is housed materially as opposed to what is destroyed. Both Mbembe and Derrida, however, would find alignment in their individual postulations that archival power rests within whom controls its interpretation and dissemination, and also, and perhaps more importantly, by the very materiality of the archive’s contents. What is omitted can be restored via performativity – whether through Mbembe’s instituting imaginary, and conversely, through Derrida’s suggestion that violent instituting effaces equally the material impulse, reaffirming an external resting, an ‘outside of’ generated by destruction of the substrate. To which I ask, if, as Derrida posits, the “archives need

a substrate or residence,” what occurs when an archive is nomadic, dwells elsewhere, unencumbered from the arkheion, instituting a new arkhé, a new commencement and the commandment to consign? (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 2). John Baldessari’s contemporary, fellow post studio artist Edward Kienholz’s violent protestations (or at least the violence emanating from his work – a threat to the here-to-fore trajectory of modern art of the 1960’s) align with and exemplify Derrida’s theorizations.

Specifically, I suggest, by positioning modernity and modern art’s legacy against archival conceptualization that speaks to and admonishes both tendencies; the first, the doctrine of medium specificity, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and transcendent possibilities; and the latter, le mal d’archive, a tangential reliance on materiality, substrate, or physical manifestation of narrative. Kienholz’s narrative, which represents a push and pull between concept and actualization, extrapolates Derrida’s concept of an archive across the violence manifest by institutions, including the archive as house of a master narrative. Kienholz’s oeuvre can and should be viewed as being housed within a searing institutional critique of the art marketplace, museum systemization and allegiance to modernist tropes in the post-World War Two era. His extant body of work, including, importantly, his seminal tableau *Five Car Stud*, exhibits a tendency toward de-figuration, demarking and delineating the trajectory of modernism, and its concomitant reliance on representation and privileging medium specificity. Kienholz’s tableaux often are violent renderings of aesthetic discourse that affront the aforementioned legacies of modernism. Aligning with Derrida’s notions of the archive, specifically a recognition of a new interpretation of art, which performs and reifies the following Derridean tendencies of the archive: That something or things is/are omitted; That some narratives are privileged above others; That histories / voices are erased from the historical record.

To summarize by way of introduction, I suggest that Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* should be viewed as a calling to understand the violent instituting of the archive. A violence that positions a forward-looking, hopeful disposition against repressive tendencies, all contained within and animated by the virtual institution of psychoanalysis. By positing a new platform of archivization from this text, we can simultaneously create a dais from which to link Kienholz's work to an emergent thinking by Freud – reassessed and repositioned by Derrida – that illustrates man's human nature to fight institutions, as well as, dialectically, his archival impulse and deferred obedience to a purely material archive. As the isolated frames of *Five Car Stud*, taken from the Harald Szeemann archive at the Getty Research Institute show, Kienholz's three-dimensional installation is an illustration of repression, leaving one to question or at least to consider, as Derrida suggests, a repression of an archival tendency that leaves a remainder, an outside, or in his terms, a "door" to open onto reinterpreted notions of a master archive – in this case, the archive of aesthetic modernity.<sup>57</sup> An intervention emerges.

## 2.2 Minority Strivings: Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud*.



Figure 22 Edward Kienholz, Contact sheets for *Five Car Stud*, 1971 (courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Collection of the Harald Szeemann Archives)

Edward Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* was mounted at 1972's documenta V exhibition in Kassel, Germany. The official documentation of this piece, exhibited inside of a tent just outside of the main exhibition hall – the Frederichinium – belies a more sinister and residual violence when the images from the curator's archive, Harald Szeemann, are witnessed in isolation. Viewed in this manner, one can imagine Kienholz's motivations to distill and to isolate the figurative manifestation of evil-doers. This perhaps is realized with more urgency when one considers how Kienholz took stock of each grotesque character before assembling them into a tableau vivant, judging from the X'd out images on the contact sheet from Harald Szeemann's archive at the Getty Research Institute. Ultimately, these characters come together in the middle of three cars, whose headlights illuminate the castration of a black man by them. Derrida's treatment of the archive within *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* clearly elucidates a psychoanalytic characteristic of the 'le mal d'archive' that links this malady (the obsession to archive) to the death drive and man's penchant for a-historicizing a material ontological legacy, while psychically ascribing a spatio-logical tendency to dwell within a future-to-come {va 'a venir}. Such postulations offer hope to historically persecuted groups, including African Americans and Jews, groups of peoples to whom Kienholz offers an aesthetic discourse into their persecutions. Post studio, and in particular Kienholz's *Five Car Stud*, functions as an aesthetic vehicle to illustrate this cultural malaise. That Kienholz' first public mounting of *Five Car Stud* was realized at documenta V, a quadrennial exhibition created in Germany following the Second World War to atone for the atrocities of the holocaust is significant. Its exhibition carries strong theoretical implications for linking or suggesting a link between Kienholz's artistic production and Derrida's theoretical postulates about the archive, Jewishness, psychoanalysis as a Jewish science, and perhaps most importantly, the instituting violence suggested in man's drive to

simultaneously forget his past and traumatic memories, while holding hope that a better future is to come. As “spectral messianicity,” Derrida situates the problem of the archive into a forward-oriented psychical realm through an important re-reading of Freud’s *On Moses and Monotheism*.<sup>58</sup> As mentioned previously, Kienholz’s work uses minority strivings to reconsider the violence and trauma of the holocaust against and in relation to America’s treatment of blacks.<sup>59</sup> He does so by means of direct aesthetic confrontation and intervention – and indeed asks and demands – that his audience does the same.<sup>60</sup> Issues of repression, suppression, and impression (Derrida’s terms) conjure a new dwelling, a new arkheion, in which to locate both an archival tendency and an inclination towards its destruction: in a psychic house. A house, a domicile, an address, a residence that manifests a “destruction drive in the psychic economy” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 9). Derrida’s propositions hold significant relevance to Baldessari’s *Cremation Project* as well, in particular the drive toward destruction, yet in a much more overt, violent manner. Taken together, Baldessari’s incineration project, *Cremation Piece*, and Kienholz’s *Five Car Stud* foreground and introduce the political nature of the entire post studio project. In this instance, specifically, the intersectionality of separate histories of structural violence, which foster the phenomena of racial conflict in the United States, genocidal tendencies, including the Nazi’s ‘final solution’ with regard to Jews, and continued racial conflicts both in the United States and in Europe.

### 2.3 The Violent Imaginary

All of Freud’s texts, Derrida suggests, specifically those from the period when he wrote “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” “explain in the end why there is archivization and why anarchiving destruction belongs to the process of archivization and produces the very thing it reduces, on occasion to ashes, and beyond” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 94).

How is this duality reconciled, if not through an imaginary? Here, Derrida offers another methodology to counter what Mbembe suggests is an instituting imaginary; a violent imaginary which uses destructive forces to create a remainder, a trace, and even the imprint of what used to be cast within a material realm. If we deconstruct the term “instituting” we can qualify further Mbembe’s construction of this trope of imaginary as both one of creating and building as much as offering an oblique reference to an institution, the institution of memory, which suggests that the imaginary zone is still legislated. This opening of meaning and interpretation is where Derrida equally performs, by performing Freudian analysis. And, I suggest, liberation from this entrapment is achieved through a performative vector.

How is the institution of memory itself implicated within Kienholz’s violent instituting? Can memory be de-figured, a figurative de-manifestation, according to this anarchiving destruction? And, moreover, does *Five Car Stud* succeed in its violent movement to recall/witness/make visible an internal proclivity to mask such trauma deep within the human psyche? Is this visuality in Kienholz’s work, laid bare in the context of a tableau vivant, not a suitable example of Derrida’s posturing on these archival characteristics, in that *Five Car Stud* places the viewer within the traumatic scene, yet suppresses full identification with the perpetrators through Kienholz’s use of the grotesque, and at times de-figurative representations of man? His aesthetics serve two purposes: to impede the ‘communal we’ identification Derrida suggests as integral to Jewish identification, and secondly, to offer a uniquely American undertone of violence and unlawful disobedience, transposed on German soil and implicating German violence against Jews in the holocaust.<sup>61</sup> This junction is precisely where Kienholz shrewdly manages a transnational critique of repression and violence, within two very different cultural, social, and political contexts. While not allowing documenta V’s audience an out, an

exit outside of the arkheion, they are forced to dwell within and to consider man's tendencies toward annihilation – whether at the hands of Nazis or American white supremacists, the perpetrators called out by the semiotics within the tableau, yet transposed equally to the Nazi party, often an important critique rendered by his work at documenta V.

Kienholz, through his own admission in writing his preface to the book published by Gemini G.E.L., (the Hollywood, Los Angeles gallery) in 1972, states that he had experimented formally with the faces of each figure in the tableau, ultimately eschewing bandanas that he tied over the features, as well as silk stockings which he laid over each face. Ultimately, Kienholz decided to use rubber masks. He explains his formal decision through the following anecdote:

“This decision was confirmed by the little old man in the Hollywood Magic Shop who kept watching me each time I bought masks. I finally asked him what in the hell he was staring at and he quite apologetically explained that the police want descriptions of all people purchasing masks, as they are frequently used in committing crimes in the L.A. area” (Kienholz, *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition*, edition 41/75, produced by Gemini G.E.L., Collection of Margo H. Leavin, 1971, page 3).

It seems as though Kienholz was aware not only of the message that cloaking his figures in masks would connote, but that reaffirmation of such a decision carried a more socially nuanced proposition for having done so. In his writing for the Gemini G.E.L. text that introduced *Five Car Stud*, he states not only that “My scene is invented – the germane complexities within today's societies are not,” but also, in his concluding statement, that: “The conversation with *Five Car Stud* is still very painful and slow, but one thing that has been established for sure: if six to one is unfair odds in my tableau, then 170 million to 20 million is sure as hell unfair odds in my country” (6). Kienholz, in referencing this ratio, reminds his viewers of the disproportionate degree to which blacks in America in 1972 were facing discrimination a mere eight years following the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by President Lyndon B.

Johnson. Not to mention that at the time of his writing, Jim Crow laws legislating the segregation of American blacks from whites had ended officially in 1965, and made more manifest when the United States Supreme Court upheld desegregation busing for K-12 students in order to realize a more integrated educational system.<sup>62</sup> His ongoing conversation with his work suggests that it was not a *fait accompli*, a finished critique of race relations in the United States. Rather, Kienholz reminds us that this dialogue, emergent when he was working on the piece, was embedded deep within his consciousness and not easily reconciled when he completed the tableau. Subsequent work by Kienholz will illustrate this on-going social justice orientation in his tableaux.

It is worth pondering Kienholz's statement that his piece was invented. His statement has repercussions outside of any formal decision-making process one can deduce within his tableau, and this phrase "my scene is invented" is worth revisiting in relation to Derrida's theories of the archive, specifically, the concept that invention is the iterative legacy of all archives, as perpetually interpreted for the future, outside of neatly bound theories of any past any said archive can conjure. One of many vectors that Derrida elicits in his theorizations within *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, the remainder, or what is perpetually cast outside of the legislative rule of the archive is its ability to remind us that exclusion is a hallmark of its resonance. Invention suggests an alternative narrative ascribed to the creation myths frequently associated with archives.

Kienholz himself admitted a personal angst related to the memorialization of a public record/discourse, as related to his own work. In a 1976 interview with Lawrence Weschler, sanctioned through the University of California, Los Angeles oral history project that documented artists in the Los Angeles area, his reticence – or what Weschler called his "ornery"



disposition – is clear. In his last question of the interview, Weschler comments on and probes Kienholz regarding the experience of re-reading their interview, which would be housed within a university’s oral history archives, in forty- or fifty-years’ time. To which Kienholz retorts:

“Yeah. It’s a frustrating experience because on one level I feel like in being interviewed, that I should have interesting things to say, or it should be accurate, or it should be in proper order or even proper language or whatever because it’s going to be listened to and worked over by other people at a later time. It’s like what we’ve done today now goes into the future in an unknown quantity and an unknown quality. And I have no way to anticipate any of this, what we’ve done, into the future. So I’m very edgy about it. And then, on the other hand, it’s the same thing. I’m honestly sitting right here in this chair, so fuck it. So both ways it works. But it’s been frustrating, and I’ve been purposely cantankerous. I think that’s just part of the fun of it. If it were all serious, I couldn’t take it” (Weschler, Lawrence. University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program, © 1977).

All kidding aside, Kienholz’s statement, “It’s like what we’ve done today now goes into the future in an unknown quantity and an unknown quality. And I have no way to anticipate any of this, what we’ve done, into the future. So I’m very edgy about it.,” resonates with Baldessari’s uneasiness at thinking there is more to art than painting.<sup>63</sup> How the qualitative aspects of Kienholz’s work would be recalled, and no doubt have been recalled, gave him significant unease as well. Which, referring back to Derrida, underscores the archival tendency toward omission, an equally if not more important aspect of the archives than what is ultimately included within the public record. The interview between Weschler and Kienholz also takes a private exchange, between interviewer and interviewee, into a public realm, in a dalliance that is never fully reconciled, in abeyance or the ‘outside’ that Derrida recalls often in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*.

Perhaps what this anecdote, taken from a private dialogue between artist and interviewer, recalls is an act of consignment, a handing over of sorts from Kienholz into the hands of an official repository. Consignment dwells within an exterior realm, no longer within a sacred and

protected, and, ostensibly, a private and privileged space of the one who consigns. The exchange between Kienholz and Weschler underscores the hypomnesic nature of the archive, which is to say that it becomes a public record stripped of original context and meaning, that has been consigned, to which Kienholz acknowledges in this statement, “It’s like what we’ve done today now goes into the future in an unknown quantity and an unknown quality. And I have no way to anticipate any of this, what we’ve done, into the future. So I’m very edgy about it.”<sup>64</sup> To which Derrida reminds us, “There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a technique of repetition and without a certain exteriority” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 11). Or to deduce further, there can be no archive without an outside. Kienholz’s anxiety over how his words and his work will be memorialized is situated, as Kienholz acknowledges, alongside two vectors, one qualitative and the other quantitative. The former aspect is the more nebulous of the two, and likely the most anxiety-inducing for an artist of Kienholz’s ilk, an artist whose work functions contemporaneously to conjure historical wrongs, which often, as critical scholarship of his works suggests, is not always understood.

Take, for example, the author Robert L. Pincus, who wrote *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*. Pincus rightly refers to Kienholz’s work as a-temporal, “themes are continually renewable,” “layering of time became a central characteristic of his tableaux in the mid-1960s” (Pincus, in *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 44). Yet, in his writing on and observations of *Five Car Stud*, Pincus capitulates, suggesting that this work can only be understood in the context of the era in which the signifiers within the tableau suggest, in particular, the 1950s era automobiles reflecting a period of post-war America, in which bigger was equated with better, underscoring capitalistic tendencies which ultimately, in America,

privileged whites over blacks and other minorities. Here Pincus seemingly sidesteps his earlier argument, and deregulates Kienholz's artistic intentions to a-historicize, to allow his social commentary to resonate for all eras. Repetition, it seems, is a hallmark of Kienholz's work, repetition of dark social ills, violence, and trauma. "My scene is invented," Kienholz reminds us, "the germane complexities within today's societies are not" (83). His searing commentaries on society, which are seen again in a subsequent chapter, although rendered in a specific historical period, are transcendent, and destined to be repeated, as Derrida reminds us, through our equivalent impulses to both archive and to destroy its contents:

"If there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then we must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 11-12)."

This aspect of the interview between Weschler and Kienholz performs Derrida's musings on the archive, or the indissociable nature linking repetition to the death drive, as a means to ensure an iterative, forward thinking and forward looking need to reproduce narratives, to abate the fear that something will be lost without this psychic tendency. Here it is important to remember that, through Kienholz's own admission, "My scene is invented" (Pincus, in *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 83). His commentary is a perverse reckoning of the very thing he is fearful of, or skeptical of: how his work will be reproduced in "an unknown quantity and an unknown quality" (Weschler, Lawrence. University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program, © 1977). Kienholz's works, his tableaux, invent and objectify societal realities, and indeed, are created based on the psychic goods and ruminations by an artist, untethered to a strictly material archive, but rather, taken out of the artist's intuition. This psychic dwelling is perhaps where Derrida suggests the death drive plays out the 'le mal d' archive.'<sup>65</sup>

The vehicle Kienholz uses to manifest art, the ‘tableau,’ is, according to Pincus, the “only strong and sustained West Coast manifestation of this environmental aesthetic in American art of the late 1950s and 1960s” (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 2). By environmental aesthetic, Pincus refers to the rise of assemblage art, and specifically, to Alan Kaprow’s definition of art that lacks a frame or a framing mechanism. Kaprow suggests, building upon the definition of artistic intuition to discover new modes of material – and more importantly – immaterial means of artistic production, that there is both a physical and metaphysical substance within a work of art that will exceed and outlast a canvas, a substance of a work of art that continues indefinitely. Here is precisely where a uniquely Kienholzian methodology plays with and performs Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. For, if the repetition and reproduction is within the viewer’s own mental and psychic capacities to recall the violence and trauma invoked by Kienholz’s tableaux, inevitably, something or things is/are omitted; some narratives are privileged above others; histories / voices are erased from the historical record. Such is the tendency of anarchiving which Derrida incites within his theories on the archive. Which is to say, a violent tendency emerges within the recognition that omission is a characteristic of de-figuration. Which is also to say, something else – a supplement to the archive – is lurking operatively behind the scenes of Kienholz’s tableaux.

Returning to Pincus, he himself writes that Kienholz was an “inadvertent and unwilling participant in the rise of conceptual art” (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 58). As a socially engaged and highly critical artist, Kienholz confronts his viewers with dark and unpleasant aspects of American society. Accordingly, Pincus suggests the following attributes are manifest and evident to viewers of his

tableaux: The subjects are “society’s victims and methods of their victimization: the loneliness of death, furtive sex, violent acts motivated by racism,” the tableaux highlight “institutional contexts of abuse,” and his characters are represented as “generic types” or archetypes, “rather than as fully realized individuals.” An allegorical impulse is suggested by these attributes, which on the surface would connote a continuous referential point with which to interpret and to understand Kienholz’s tableaux. Allegory as a substantiation of the figurative drive, an artistic device where metaphor functions as a device for conveying truths, messages, and generalized notions of human conduct and experiences. Yet this is misleading if we fail to reconcile Kienholz’s overarching intent to physically distort his protagonists and to place the viewer directly into the tableaux. Which negates the ability to view the work as a metaphor, and here is where I suggest Kienholz’s imaginary uses violence to burn the archive, and with it, any memory with which to recall the metaphor of time and place, to recall figuratively. De-figuration commences, is the commandment of “every archontic primary,” once the amnesia associated with the burning of the archival tendency settles in, thanks in large part, as Derrida suggests via Freud, “thus refuting the economic principle of the archive, aiming to ruin the archive as an accumulation and capitalization of memory on some substrate and in an exterior place” (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 11-12).

#### 2.4 The Pivot to Allegory

Allegory is steeped in an economic tendency to repeat, to recirculate, and to rearticulate man’s need to understand and capture images within a place of shared understanding. Which, on a certain level, Kienholz’s work performs, but performs by disassociating and dislocating – indeed, by disfiguring the grounds on which to hold on to exegesis as an operative methodology. Placed in situ, the viewer becomes not only a voyeur, but also an active participant in the

legacies of violence, whether manifest by man or by institution. When Kienholz coined the term 'concept tableau' around 1967, he was referring to a type of actualist art, according to Pincus, which distinguishes his work from other forms of representation. I suggest that this trope, the 'concept tableau,' not only references but also destroys any opportunity that brings with it assured meanings. It (the concept tableau) dismantles the notions of the archive which Derrida suggests include: "to recall faithfulness to tradition," "to point toward the past," and "to refer to the signs of consigned memory" (Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* 17). A de-figuration of the archive occurs through such destruction, through a leveling of the playing field that modernist tendencies of art sought to uphold.

Kienholz's work, if viewed allegorically, offers new terrain within which to position his work against predominant, modernist narratives, which privileged representational tendencies, including (importantly) figuration and figurative gestures. Acknowledging, of course, the era of American domination of modern painting, in particular figurative and also abstract, following World War Two that opened up more conceptually minded tropes of painting and sculpture (the two most common plastic arts of this period), the reliance on figuration had occupied visual presentation for several centuries. A rupture in representation began in the period following the Second World War and crescendoed in the 1960s and 1970s, the period in which Kienholz was most actively exhibiting, prolific in his output, and produced the bulk of his tableaux. In an uncanny manner, one could see within his work a suggestion to return to allegory, and indeed it is allegory, as a component of postmodernism that offers several clues for re-contextualizing further his artistic production of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pincus alludes to this methodology (device) briefly within his writing yet fails to fully comprehend the use of allegory in a full and critical manner.

Pincus references Craig Owens's writing, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" obliquely, without clearly citing the work. When he declared the tableau as the "only strong and sustained West Coast manifestation of this environmental aesthetic in American art of the late 1950s and 1960s" he unwittingly invoked the formal characteristics of allegory which Owens enumerated in his text, yet failed to enumerate them, and by extension, illustrate how they function in *Five Car Stud* (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz 2*). He also falls into the trap of placing Kienholz's work into "a narrative mode of presentation," which he cites as a distinguishing characteristic of Kienholz's work – if not the main characteristic which he deconstructs. He also refers to the work as stop-motion, which, although a worthy assignation, negates the a-temporal movement of his work, as if a screen or frame is frozen in celluloid. This is clearly not the case, not only because of Kienholz's own thinking about his work, but also because narration is too superficial a term to use if the outcome is to adequately deduce the conceptual and theoretical logic at play in his tableaux, especially in *Five Car Stud*. Here one must pivot to allegory in a more comprehensive manner, according to Owen's roadmap. For allegory, I suggest, conjures the movement of trauma, violence, and humanity's proclivity for both more than a static reliance on symbolism, sign to signifier, and modernism's choke hold on representation. Ferdinand de Saussure, Owens reminds us, deviated from using the term 'symbol' and used 'sign' in an effort to move past the fixed nature of symbolism. Pincus relies too heavily on both, describing Kienholz's tableaux as renderings of scenes in which "highly related symbolic figures surface in the same archetypal scene on subsequent ones. Each tableau presents a different episode in his stop-action drama of American culture – a collective dramatization of tragic predicaments of the powerless, the marginal, and the victimized" (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World,*

*the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 39). Owens's own definitions of allegory's functionality, written in the "Allegorical Impulse," a two-part article written for and published by *October* in 1980, identify several traits of allegory that, together, offer a road map to unpack further Kienholz's concept tableaux generally, and *Five Car Stud* specifically. These attributes include: the use of appropriation; site-specificity; impermanence (or documentation – which is why X'd out Getty images matter); accumulation; discursivity; and hybridization. Owens summarizes these allegorical vectors by stating:

"Appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, hybridization – these diverse strategies characterize much of art of the present and distinguish it from its modernist predecessors. They also form a whole when seen in relation to allegory, suggesting that postmodernist art may in fact be identified by a single, coherent impulse, and that criticism will remain incapable of accounting for that impulse as long as it continues to think of allegory as aesthetic error" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" 53).

When viewed separately, before, as Owens suggests one may consider the impulse as a coherent gesture, and in relationship to *Five Car Stud*, the evidentiary nature of a symbiosis between theory and practice emerges. Continuing with Owens, and working through his list of formal attributes of allegorical work, his theories come into high relief, especially when paired with the formal decisions made by Kienholz in *Five Car Stud*.

Appropriation: "...artists who generate images through the reproduction of other images. The appropriated image may be a film still, a photograph, a drawing, it is often itself already a reproduction." As such, Owens claims, they both "proffer and defer a promise of meaning; they both solicit and frustrate our desire that the image be directly transparent to its signification. As a result, they appear strangely incomplete – fragments or runes which must be deciphered" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" 1027).





Figure 23 Edward Kienholz, Contact sheet for *Five Car Stud*, 1971 (Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Collection of the Harald Szeemann Archives)

Owens's conceptualization of appropriation, as linked to a need or an urge to decipher, resonates with the images of *Five Car Stud's* first staging in the parking lot of Gemini G.E.L. in Hollywood. The isolated and fragmented images – or runes – suggest a need to decipher a context and narrative in order to make sense of the disturbing imagery. Although not appropriated imagery per se, it does unfold visually as if it were, as the images were X'd out, coded, selected for reproduction of some kind, not necessarily connoting that they would become a tableau vivant of *Five Car Stud*.

Site-specificity: "...the work which appears to have merged physically into its setting, to be embedded in the place where we encounter it" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" 1027). Staged in a tent outside the main building, the Fredericianum, at documenta V, *Five Car Stud* depicted the castration of a black man by six white men, while a white woman seated in a car vomits in horror. The headlights of five large, mid-century

American cars highlight the spectacle. Kienholz's work was a commentary not only on race relations in the United States, but also of fascism and the eradication – or “final solution’ -- of minority Jews under Adolf Hitler. Kienholz's tableau was particularly disturbing in that it physically inserted viewers into the scene itself, rendering impossible the negation of a record of historical trauma. The dirt on the ground within the tableau also had the effect of bearing witness to the horrors unfolding before the viewers, their footprints becoming part of the site specificity, a tapestry of bearing witness.

Impermanence: A characteristic that provides “the measure of their circumstantiality” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 1027). Owens here is referencing land artists, like Robert Smithson and the *Spiral Jetty*, and works that by intention are meant to fall into ruins or ruinous aftermaths of decay. Although not a land art piece per se, *Five Car Stud* did vanish into the hands of a collector who only brought it out of storage in 2016 to exhibit at the Prada foundation in Milan. A commentary on collectability and archivability is inherent in this development, suggesting that the tableau functioned as an “emblem of transience, the ephemerality of all phenomena; it is the *memento mori* of the twentieth century” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 1027). Tethered to the concept of impermanence is documentation, which Owens also elaborates on in relation to the allegorical potential of photography, and specifically, of documentation. Ironically, the documented contact sheets of *Five Car Stud* allowed Kienholz and his wife Nancy to recreate parts of the tableau that had deteriorated beyond use when it was shown in 2011 in Los Angeles, only the first time it was exhibited stateside after documenta V.

Accumulation: ...“the paratactic work composed by the simple placement of ‘one thing after another,’ akin “to obsessiveness, neurosis, photo montage” (Owens, “The Allegorical

Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 1027). As the Getty Research Institute images suggest, Kienholz was greatly concerned with the ways in which the individual figures in the tableau would function collectively. Exceedingly detail oriented and obsessed with getting each right, the contact sheets offer further insight into the inter-workings of his vision and rendering.



Figure 24 Edward Kienholz, Contact sheet details for *Five Car Stud*, 1971 (Courtesy Getty Research Institute, Collection of Harald Szeemann Archives)

Discursivity: Here I recall briefly Michel Foucault’s writing on the topic of discursivity as it relates to authorial function and ideological status, in “What is an Author?” as a means to position the possibilities and the rules that allow for the formation of other texts. This is a play on allegory, where the root -allos- alludes to others, and ultimately, conjures the palimpsestic nature of discursivity. Kienholz’s tableaux, most notably, *Five Car Stud*, are environs which allow the ‘othered’ voices, those of the marginalized, to speak their truths.

Hybridization: As a confusion of genres, hybridization in modern art was perhaps most notably ushered in and anticipated by Marcel Duchamp, and subsequently became a hallmark of post studio art practice. As synthetic, or work that “crosses aesthetic boundaries” and in “eclectic works which ostentatiously combine previously distinct art mediums,” Kienholz’s tableaux

utilized an eclectic array of media, denying any allegiance to medium-specificity and rupturing further the Greenbergian maxim of a unique and ‘proper’ area of competence (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 1027). It should also be recalled that Baldessari’s post studio course description required students to be “familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.”<sup>66</sup> According to Owens, Duchamp anticipated a “hopeless confusion of all aesthetic mediums and stylistic categories (hopeless, that is, according to any partitioning of the aesthetic field on essentialist grounds)” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” 58). A death knell for art for art’s sake, and for no function of meaning outside of the its heretofore protected frame.

Returning to Kienholz’s own anxieties around how his work would be contextualized in perpetuity, both qualitatively and quantitatively, criticism and censorship are two important vectors with which to consider his work in relation to archival tendencies. Criticism frequently excludes, negates, or mis-contextualizes an artist’s intent. Omission shares an association with censorship, in that censored works or even work that is forced to be changed from its original conception is either left outside of the historical record altogether, or misrepresented. In either scenario, the authenticity of an archival record of such works can be questioned. And, to Derrida’s point, left to dwell outside of the public record, and cast in between a public that refuses to accept it or within a private repository that Kienholz, as we will see, will let go of in his (reluctant) acceptance of its domiciliation.

*Five Car Stud* has a legacy of censorship. It is worth reconsidering that this piece was never exhibited in the United States until 2011 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), with the exception of its early staging in 1971 in the parking lot of Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles, from which the contact sheet included in the Getty archives was created. Rather,

*Five Car Stud's* provenance is one of censorship, a series of exclusions from the public record. The only public exhibition of the work was at the 1972 documenta V in Kassel, Germany, under the auspices of artistic director Harald Szeemann. For over forty years since this initial public offering, *Five Car Stud* was stored in Japan, purchased by a Japanese collector and housed within the permanent collection of Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art.

In 1971, London's Hayward Gallery was poised to exhibit *Five Car Stud* in a show titled, "Los Angeles Artists." Ultimately removed from the show, the rationale for doing so was cloaked within a ruse that the work was too difficult and expensive to ship. Admittedly, such an audacious piece would have required Herculean efforts to physically move the work into the gallery, as a plan was devised which would have required a stoppage of traffic across London's Waterloo Bridge and a large construction crane to lift each crate onto the roof. Kienholz later discovered that it was most likely the work's content that prevented it from being exhibited. As Kienholz notes, black castration was more sensitive and difficult than England could cope with. His statement would continue to resonate for several years to come, transposed onto other of his works as they were exhibited at American institutions.

In spring 1972, the newly refurbished Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted a mid-career retrospective of Kienholz, including seminal tableaux including *Roxy's* (a bordello-like environ); *The Beanery* (a bar filled with regulars whose faces are replaced with clocks); and *Back Seat Dodge '38* (a scene depicting a couple entwined in furtive sex in the back of a 1938 sedan). As Weschler writes in the introduction to his oral history with Kienholz, "The L.A. Board of Supervisors had gotten itself worked up into paroxysms of righteous puritanical indignation at the horror, in particular, of that latter piece (the head supervisor, Warren Dorn, was getting all set to run for governor on the strength of his manifest fortitude as a protector of

public decency).”<sup>67</sup> Kienholz’s response was to mount an intervention, secretly taping a private preview and walk-through of *Roxy’s* by the supervisors themselves, in which they jovially recalled their own encounters in similar contexts. Kienholz’s actions provide an overlay, a palimpsest within which to counter supposed accusations of indecency with man’s own proclivity toward the same behavior. Not surprisingly, the exhibition opened on schedule and was well received by record numbers of museumgoers. Kienholz’s tactic, it seems, recalls also the tension between private and public discourse and the abeyance within which archival impulses dwell, in between such realms. Omitted from this retrospective, and indeed left outside of a formal exhibition history, is *Five Car Stud*. The museum’s board of trustees, Kienholz writes, has “overwhelmingly voted the proposal down, in some vague demonstration of censorship or aversion to controversy (or probably just aversion).”<sup>68</sup> Taste, it seems, is implicated through its dialectical opposition – aversion.

## 2.5 Allegory’s Reclamation

Theories of and debates about postmodernism, in particular by and between Jean François Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas, have tendencies toward situating the discourse of their theories within a temporal mode, debating the coming of a ‘post’ that ruptures modernism, or suggest a superimposed attribute of modernism that relegates it to perpetually fold back on itself. The subject of postmodernism and indeed the projects of both Baldessari and Kienholz, usher in multiple readings of modernism through a rupturing of both grand narratives (a nod to Lyotard) and also to Habermas, via a suggestion that the *Cremation Piece* and *Five Car Stud* intervene in postmodernism’s evolution. Yet neither work necessarily folds back onto modernism nor suggest modernism to be an unfinished project. The focus and critique their works elicit are not ones of concern over the status of modernism held within a temporal terrain. Rather, their work signifies

a new preoccupation with dismantling meaning, representation, sign to signifier, and muddies the metaphorical waters of allegory. In this vein, it seems that Craig Owens's theories of postmodernism – via allegory – offer a different and more cogently aligned discourse within which to unpack these artists' seminal works. Within this landscape, Kienholz's work specifically is worthy of further deconstruction within Owens's critical lens.<sup>69</sup>

Allegory is a de-figuring literary device, with the ability also to de-figure symbolic visual metaphors. As such, allegory perpetually haunts modernism, according to Owens, along several vectors. Allegory returns – or perhaps a better argument is that it reappears and reasserts its power – within postmodernist works in ways that move beyond mere supplement. Allegory is neither an overlay nor an added veneer of meaning – or, in Owens's terminology, an aberration. It is, however, unsettling in its ability to trouble and to problematize meaning. It rescues counter-narratives and provocatively threatens traditional modes of symbolic representation. Allegory is silently defiant. It not only ruptures the gap between a present and a past, but also re-emerges in the work of Kienholz to confront its suppression within modernist discourse.

According to its etymological roots, allegory is the combination of *allos*=other and *agoreuei*=to speak. While Owens characterizes the palimpsestic nature of allegory, indeed by invoking its etymology of one voice superimposed over another or over several, I suggest that this structural positioning allows allegory to de-figure images. As a structural methodology, that is to say, it so dismantles the representational relationship between sign and signifier as to de-figure the figure itself, rendering mute and inconsequential any further annunciation of symbolism that adheres to a tidy, neat, and linear unity of sign to meaning. Kienholz's tableaux, and in particular, *Five Car Stud*, de-figure meaning and interpretation by belying the actual scale and figurative manner in which he constructs them. The in-your-face mentality his work arrests

viewers in situ. Yet the majority of figures in his works are indeed faceless or masked, disfigured grotesquely to elicit caricature. Looking at earlier tableaux for aesthetic clues, including his 1965 piece *The Beanery* and 1962's *Roxy's*, it is evident that Kienholz was playing with imagery and distorting pure figurative and recognizable tropes.



Figure 25 Edward Kienholz, *The Beanery*, 1996 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

*The Beanery* depicts a notorious Los Angeles bar, with customers sitting alongside a countertop or standing and leaning on the counter. Some patrons sit in adjacent booths. Whether middle class, middle-aged women (judging only from their dress and accompanying pearls or fur stoles) or blue-collar men in work uniforms from a moving company, to everyday collegiate customers and sports fans in variously distinguishing garb that suggest their class and self-identifications, one formal attribute stands out above this landscape: the majority of the figures' heads have been replaced with clocks. Time to Kienholz is the intermediary space before a subject's death. Whether consciously or not, his barroom subjects are essentially killing time, evading the death drive. And, of course, escaping from their various realities with alcohol. Yet Kienholz's preoccupation with time and death cannot be taken literally, as the writer of his exhibition catalog *11+ 11 Tableaux* at the Moderna Museet, suggests. The personal countdown of time before death may be reflected by Kienholz's formal use of timepieces as faces, but the movement



of each face cum clock actually effaces the individual and moves toward a universal preoccupation where a bar is only a metaphor, an artifice that supports communal forgetting. Such a literal reading deconstructs a metaphorical reading and the game between denial and affirmation shines through. Such is the brilliance of Kienholz's concept tableau – his allegorical play that simultaneously disarms and affronts our senses and sensibilities – overshadowing the denial at play in our own psyches as witnesses to the tableau, denying also that we are active and complicit participants. There is a potent un-readability to Kienholz's work that is manifest through its ability to disarm the viewer initially, to be complicit in a space where one seeks truths rather than structural interference.

The temporal in *The Beanery* does not function in direct reference to a bar's ability to foster forgetting through imbibing alcohol. Perhaps the curatorial platform of *11+ 11 Tableaux*, Kienholz's 1970 exhibition in Stockholm at Moderna Museet would wish it so. In his introduction, Pontus Hultén suggests that Kienholz's works are "direct, they are not ambiguous, there is little room for interpretation." He takes this assumption further, quite naively, by stating that Kienholz's "aesthetical conception differs widely from what have been current for some time when ambiguity has been one of the key notions of art" (Hultén, *11+11 Tableaux* Introduction). Ambiguity is an incorrect term; any ambiguity inherent in his work is confused for allegory. As a vehicle for distancing signifier from signified and sign from meaning, allegory ruptures interpretation but the manner in which allegory functions is unambiguous. It ruptures interpretation. The curator is conflating his terminology. Allegory as rhetorical de-figuration seeks to deconstruct what it purports to illustrate, through Owens's terminology.<sup>70</sup> This is achieved in Kienholz's concept tableaux effectively through the rupture of a direct, coefficient relationship to the thing represented, and our understanding of it as such. The distance or

movement elicited in *The Beanery* serving as an example, and *Five Car Stud* follows suit, suggests that the mimetic tendency of modernism, which merely appends allegory to works of art, safeguarding and bracketing aesthetic pleasure derived from adequating an image to a referent in a tidy box. Postmodernism ruptures this equation through not only a preoccupation with reading, but through deconstructive complicity. Offered by postmodernist art as a strategy of reading, this deconstructive impulse – which I suggest is the mechanism or methodology behind what Owens describes as an impulse toward the allegorical, allows and affords viewers of postmodernist art an opportunity to participate in, to paraphrase Owens, “the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two” 79). Within Kienholz’s tableaux, this functionality is intensely acute. No longer safe to sit as a bystander, Kienholz transcends the tendencies of modernist mimesis and denounces the spectacle to subsist. In Kienholz’s work, we are complicit in our deconstructive tendencies and must admit to the pleasure of joining in its denunciation. Allegory as enemy of modern art, or, according to Owens: “Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference. When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence; rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence” (Owens, “Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two” 80). Within Kienholz’s *Kienholz/Five Car Stud* catalog, published in 2011 by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, Roberto Ohrt cites an inability to classify Kienholz’s work, due to the allegory it projects: “every classification misses the mark, becomes blind to its subject precisely at the point of supposedly being able to identify it” (Ohrt, *Kienholz/Five Car Stud* 74). Ohrt’s words bear an uncanny resemblance to Owens’s admonition that as witnesses of postmodernism,

we participate in what we denounce in order to denounce it. Kienholz lays bare this trap consciously in *Five Car Stud*, through its formal attributes, content, and complicity in the postmodern movement from third to second person tense (which is what makes such complicity possible), and, to circle back to Owens's treatise on allegory, through a visual stereographic lens of stop-motion, freeze-frame gestures. Kienholz's concept tableaux also deconstruct the museum through the sheer un-collectability of the work alongside the commentary suggested in his use of detritus, found objects, and in Ohrt's essay, "Car Takes Command," his "communication" is one that "reconstructs the violence that follows the use of commodities by human beings" (Ohrt, *Kienholz/Five Car Stud* 78). Perishability, both literally in reference to Kienholz's materials, and metaphorically as commentary on materiality, is another vector of allegory that reminds us of "the inevitable dissolution and decay to which everything is subject" (Owens, "Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two" 70). Before circling back to the methodologies of allegory present in *Five Car Stud*, it is worth pausing to note another attribute of allegory that has implications for the archive: the movement from third to second person tense; specifically, a denunciation of established modernist thinking which privileged mimesis and held allegory in abeyance, denying the performativity of its own rupture and holding allegory in potential – or in Derrida's words, in a tense of *va a' venir*. The preoccupation with reading that characterizes postmodernist thinking is, I suggest, not dissimilar from *le mal d'archive* that Derrida considers as an equally postmodernist tendency. That an archive performs or could perform its own rupture suggests an allegorical characteristic of archiving. Perhaps allegory and archive coalesce to perform a new house for other voices. Which, I argue, posits a new vector of postmodernism, steeped in performing a new tense and dwelling outside of grand modernist narratives.

Kienholz should be placed in the canon of conceptually minded (or conceptual) artists. The conceptualism that emerged on the West coast, and within a Californian vernacular specifically, was more than an artistic methodology. It was an embodiment of an anti-market attitude, one that had roots in the post-studio practices which John Baldessari institutionalized at CalArts. Both Baldessari and Kienholz, one should remember, identified as painters in the early years of their practices. Baldessari cremated his paintings to end the ‘wrong road’ he was on. Kienholz, in a somewhat similar move, although at a much later juncture in his career (1977, to be specific), began considering his work of concept tableaux as both three-dimensional paintings and vernacular forms. In *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* for example, Robert Pincus states that concept tableaux had a “penchant for language,” which stripped it of “its need to be painting or sculpture” (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 59). Although Kienholz would more likely express his artistic approach as embodying that of a painter who worked in three dimensions (a statement he made in *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*), to suggest that Kienholz was an “inadvertent and unwilling precursor” to concept art, as Pincus asserts, relegates Kienholz to a position of allegiance to modernism that clearly no longer was the case, when, in 1967, he coined the term *concept tableau*. The formal qualities, content, approach, and attitude within his concept tableaux coalesce to reinforce a stance which was anti-medium specificity, anti-art for art’s sake, and, clearly, anti-modernist. As a metanarrative on the studio as a site of artistic production and exchange, Kienholz stepped into an allegorical state of mind, a palimpsestic modality that superimposed a critique of site and representation (ironically, both representation of artist and an

artist's subject matter). As Craig Owens reminds us, a palimpsest is the mechanism of postmodernist thinking that counters any dominant – or master – narrative.

A palimpsest also suggests a distancing from an archetypal point of view, of understood, recognized and sanctioned roles and habits, a confusion of sign and signified – all to suggest a counter logic operating within Kienholz's work that pivots toward allegorical impulses. Pincus's attempt, therefore, to argue that Kienholz's tableaux are not steeped in realism because his "generic types" are archetypes rather than fully realized individuals, falls a step short of supporting a rift in meaning and representation. *Five Car Stud* is a compelling example of the complication Kienholz adds to this assertion; the masked figures are oppositional to archetypal representation, they become de-figured – we cannot fully comprehend the voice or voices behind the masked figures who perform the violence – although together as witnesses we all are become implicated in a palimpsestic overture that becomes a cacophony of others speaking (allegory's root, *allos*).

Continuing to deconstruct Pincus's theoretical casting of Kienholz opens up space to insert an allegorical impulse into the scenes of concept tableaux. Kienholz's "sculptural scenes" and rooms, Pincus states, "require the viewer's immersion in them to activate the socially resonant drama each establishes" (Pincus, *On A Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 60). Kienholz not only urges, but also requires that we confront what we denounce, which is a defiantly anti-symbolic stance. Pincus, however, seeks to reify the symbolic within Kienholz's work, which he views as a distinguishing characteristic of his tableaux. He does so by referring to the "highly related symbolic figures" which surface in the same archetypal scene or subsequent ones" (59).

Perhaps Kienholz's own words used to describe his works' unifying and underlying contents and thematic orientations are worth revisiting at this juncture, but in an urgent manner, for what Kienholz suggests, and I certainly attempt to illustrate via allegory, is Kienholz's indomitable quest and ability to coalesce form with scathing social criticism. His statement, "our culture may be attacking itself from within," connotes not only the mechanism of capitalism which was rising in post-war industrial America, but also of cultural ills such as the burgeoning war in Vietnam, systemic racism and attempts of the civil rights movement to temper America's legacy of unfair and violent treatment of blacks. (Hultén, *11+11 Tableaux* 83). "Our culture may be attacking itself from within" resonates with allegorical impulses. It is not difficult to discern this critique across most of his works. While *Five Car Stud* packs the most sinister punch, earlier works evoke a similar critique of American culture. *Roxy's*, for example, was shown in an earlier iteration of documenta, 1968's documenta IV, under the auspices of founding artistic director Arnold Bode.<sup>71</sup> Bode had led documenta since its inaugural exhibition of 1955, and he also founded the Society of Western Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, having been a painter and professor of art previously. His society's founding mission was to present works considered degenerate by the Nazis and to offer audiences a sampling of works from classical antiquity through modernity. 1972's documenta, under the curatorial guidance of Harald Szeemann, would alter this pedagogic platform significantly, not only through his curatorial methodologies, but also through his appointment to Secretary General of documenta, leading its board and the newly established international juries who would select subsequent artistic directors. As an altruistic move, it seems Szeemann's appointment also was politically motivated, as Germany had been absent from the international art scene throughout much of the 1930s and 1940s. And, in fact, the main exhibition hall of documenta – the Friedericianum – had been destroyed in Kassel during World War Two.

The inclusion of *Roxy's* in 1968's documenta IV aided in cementing Kienholz's career on an international stage.<sup>72</sup> As a tableau, indeed the work that was first referred to by Kienholz as a 'tableau,' it shows interior space as one would expect its subject matter – a brothel – to look. *Roxy's* was a notorious Las Vegas whorehouse.



Figure 26 Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's*, 1996 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

The tableau both relegates its female figures to traditional roles of domesticity, through and assemblage of a mannequin over a pedal-lever sewing machine, for example, and also places clues to help deconstruct the time period it references. A 1943 calendar, for example, shows a neatly dressed woman superimposed onto a liberty bell. Similarly, a *Lucky Strike* cigarette tin case and daily periodical resting on a side table are undeniably from the same time period. Articles on the vanity equally evoke the 1940s post war decade. Ideals of feminine beauty espoused by these objects, however, belie an over-arching social commentary of decay and unfulfilled desire.



Figure 27 Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's (The Madame)*, 1996 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

The matriarchal figure, the Madame, stands guard in Victorian-era dress, her head replaced by that of an animal skull. Kienholz's other female figures assume the fictional names Zoe; Miss Cherry Delight; Cockeyed Jenny; Dianne Poole, Miss Universal, Five Dollar Billy, and Fifi, A Lost Angel. *Roxy's*, it should be mentioned, re-stages characters and scenes from Kienholz's youth, specifically through "...costumed, stop-action presentations seen in his youth in rural churches and grange halls" (*11+11 Tableaux* 1).



Figure 28 Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's*, (Five Dollar Billy; Dianna Poole, Miss Universal (uncovered); A Lady Named Zoa) *Kienholz: A Retrospective*, 1996 (Whitney Museum of American Art)



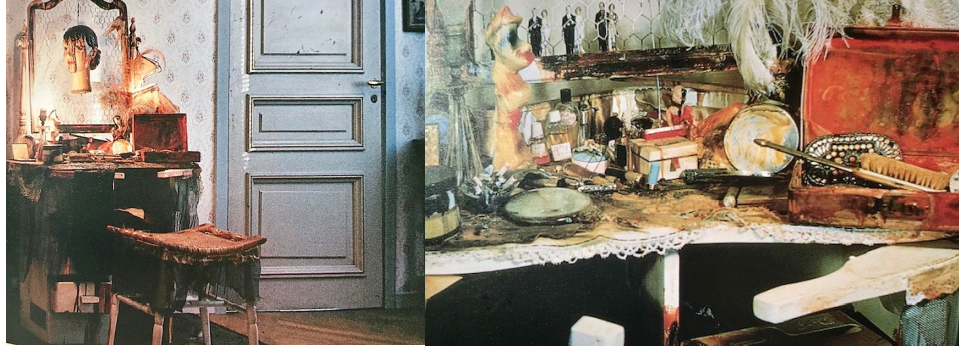


Figure 29 Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's*, (Miss Cherry Delight; Miss Cherry Delight (detail), *Kienholz: A Retrospective*, 1996 (Whitney Museum of American Art



Figure 30 Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's*, (Cockeyed Jenny), *Kienholz: A Retrospective*, 1996 (Whitney Museum of American Art)

Kienholz's pathetically represented female figures use assemblage to reinforce the themes of decay and unfilled desire – Zoe's only recognizable anatomical element is her legs. Her lower and upper torsos are replaced by boxes, one an enameling kiln, the other, a dispensing machine of some sort with a spigot, the lower of which has a front-loading door opened. Her head has been replaced with a child's doll, its shoulders and arms draping over a pedestal whose base is a gold gilded orb, ornately patterned. Miss Cherry Delight's head is in suspension, alternating between states of profile and seen straight ahead. It suspends and moves within a cutout circle of chicken wire, which replaces what normally would have been a mirrored top to a woman's vanity or dressing table. Her head is the only recognizable body part. The bottom

portion of the vanity is messy and disheveled, with missing drawers and others whose contents are more askew, revealing stockings, discarded shoes, and other various items one would ascribe to beauty routines. A black acrylic paint has been poured over Miss Cherry Delight's head, oozing from her severed mannequin neck down over the entire vanity. Cockeyed Jenny, in contrast, is headless, until the garbage pail that simultaneously functions as her torso opens to reveal the word 'love,' painted on the inside of the pail's articulated top. Her abdomen is a bedpan, her artificial legs splayed spread-eagled atop a small divan. Dianna Poole, Miss Universal, sits upon a chair, her long mannequin legs extended, uncrossed, while two marionettes – one a clown and the other a tuxedoed smiling man, rest against her upper right thigh, sharing the seat with her while their cords fall over her thighs and rest on its upper inside region. A burlap sack covers her head, with the words 'California' and 'Long Whites' – the only clearly legible printed material on its outside.<sup>73</sup> Once removed, however, her mannequin face with jack-o-lantern like facial features, sits atop her amorphous torso. Diana Poole has not been spared the black paint splattering, which streams down her torso and legs from her head. Compositionally speaking, Five Dollar Billy occupies the center of Kienholz's tableau, *Roxy's*. Her name is the only one to be referenced by a plaque, which appears on the sewing machine's pedestal, replacing what one can imagine would have been some recognizable, mass-produced brand name. The trundle base still has its pedal and the entire cast iron structure is ornate, its delicacy belying its sheer physicality and heft. All four legs are on casters, set astride a ceramic tile square base. The sewing machine has been removed, replaced instead with Billy's body, a crudely hewn body of various mannequin parts. Her legs are shrunken, indicating they perhaps were taken from a child mannequin. She lays with her back on the table, her head and legs dangling off either side. Her right hand appears to be in a side pocket. Her right arm is detached

from her shoulder, exposing the artifice, which Kienholz constructed inside her torso to hold her body together. Her hair is replaced with feathers attached to her hairline and cascading down due to gravity. Billy's face resembles weathered statues from Greek antiquity, androgynous in its facial features due to its wear. When viewed overhead, her large breasts seem to have been molded from a full bodied woman (indeed Kienholz used live models to cast his figures). A squirrel curiously pokes out from her left breast and appears to be nibbling on her stomach. A rosebud is sticking out from her esophagus. In profile, the squirrel's head appears to be peeking out above her right breast and the rosebud seems to grow out of her throat. Kienholz's commentary seemingly suggests that Five Dollar Billy is pieced together – the fruit of domesticated, feminine labor, yet in an un-idealized fashion and imperfect symmetry. Her body is the closest of the female figures (prostitutes) to resemble a human form. Rather than that of exquisite corpses that Kienholz crudely formed in a Lady Named Zoe, the Madame, Miss Cherry Delight, Cockeyed Jenny, Diana Poole (Miss Universal), or Fifi, A Lost Angel.

Fifi, A Lost Angel, has a bravado and attitude that suggest a more feminist point of view, in terms of how her stance suggests that she is a strong woman who understands her beauty and its power over men. Her lower body is an ideal female sized figure, with a flat stomach, hairless vagina and long legs. She is resting slightly back on her left hip. Likewise, her baby doll head is tilted back to the right, with pursed lips and perfectly (if not overly) tweezed eyebrows to suggest she is well manicured. Her head has a full amount of curled hair, and her neck rests above a small corset and baby doll sized dress. The diminutive dress is striped red and grey and resembles a can-can girl's outfit, universalized in Toulouse-Lautrec's painting of Parisian life. The hem of Fifi's dress falls delicately just below the mannequin's waist, and, taken together, the entire composition comes together to reveal an hourglass figure. However, as an enduring

reminder of nature's ridicule, a clock is mounted over her lower abdomen to suggest withering fecundity – regardless of beauty and idealized notions of femininity her body connotes. Fifi also stands on a ceramic tile based, her left foot in demi pointe over an in-progress game of solitaire. The card game solitaire also shares a relationship with the futility of time. Taken together, Kienholz's use of a timepiece and card games level the playing field of humanity and render optimism mute, for we are caught in a perpetual fight against the death drive, and will whittle away our time in any we can, and as this tableau suggests, rather mindlessly.

The other protagonists in *Roxy's* are not figurative sculptures (or a grotesque parody of human figures) but rather provide a backdrop for deconstructing the political and social narratives at play within the piece, which operate on a less figurative, but allegorical plane. These protagonists include General MacArthur, Maxfield Parrish's most famous painting *Daybreak*, an innocuous framed needlepoint (perhaps created by the Madame), and a black jockey named Ben Brown, which in actuality capitulates back to Kienholz's maxim that American culture may be attacking itself.<sup>74</sup> Taken together, thematically speaking, these three protagonists return to critical tropes Kienholz uses to highlight American's societal ills – specifically the military industrial complex, racism toward blacks, and consumerism. While *Five Car Stud*, more than other tableaux, occupies such thematic tendencies most overtly, the characters, both literally and metaphorically represented in *Roxy's*, are worth further deconstructions and commentary as a prelude to the most formally comprehensive, allegorical and difficult of Kienholz's tableaux – *Five Car Stud*.

In the introductory text of the *11+11 Tableaux* catalog, it is suggested that there is a logic to interpreting Kienholz's tableaux, a disambiguation, or removal of ambiguity that gives the viewers a clear semiotic road path from which to deconstruct Kienholz's methodologies.

Returning to the theoretical concept of ambiguity, this passage, cited in its totality, is misguided, and provides a blind spot for inserting the use of allegory into the larger context and artistic narration of Kienholz's tableaux:

“The Tableaux are direct, they are not ambiguous, there is little room for interpretations. Especially in the newer work, Kienholz is not concerned with the conception that the spectator might put into it. These pieces are precise and strict statements. Many of them are built like traps, a purposely inviting environment that Kienholz entices the spectator into. Once the spectator is captured, the artist uses every possible means; three dimensional forms, literary references, colors, sounds, smells to make his point clear” (Hultén, *11+11 Tableaux* Introduction).

Entrapment and captivity are, no doubt, at play in Kienholz's work. He places the viewers within provocative and highly complex scenes to make them complicit. Yet, to suggest, as Hultén so clearly does within this statement, that there are “precise and strict statements” at play within Kienholz's work, negates his nuance and rupture of semiotic planes. We become captured, rather than trapped, in an abeyant moment of structural interference that allegory presents within the tableaux. No longer spectators, but complicit in the rupture of grand narratives we rather capture ourselves within this complicity. Kienholz de-figures symbolism, presenting instead an in-your-face proposition against the symbolic and toward the allegorical. His interlocutors are, in fact, us. We are complicit. Kienholz was aware of this; therefore, he was concerned with the conception the viewer might associate it with.

As a point of entry, we must return to a subtle, yet powerfully subversive interlocutor in *Roxy's*, the two marionettes astride Dianna Poole, Miss Universal. She appears to be chained or tethered to a chair, silenced by a burlap sack over her head and upper torso. Kienholz's placement of the sack is intentionally rife with metaphor, in that the product that once filled it was “long whites,” which could be any Californian agricultural product. Yet, in this setting, the placement suggests that Kienholz intended his viewers to draw their gazes down to her long,

lean, coyly placed legs. To sexualize Dianna Poole, Miss Universal perhaps missed the mark and Kienholz's artistic intentions. When covered by the sack, she appears overtly desexualized, denuded, and stripped bare of her own voice. In fact, the documentation of this particular mannequin offers a stop-motion diptych – one in which she is covered, and the other, showing her face – which in reality is a grotesque caricature of a rabbit's head, or some sort of animalesque face, carnivalesque, or even that of a carved jack-o-lantern. Attaching a referent, or having an ability to clearly associate what her human head has been replaced with is unimportant. Kienholz clearly is invoking allegory, disrupting a clear chain of sign-signifier relationship through his provocatively and disturbing aesthetic play. For, the viewer's ability to identify Dianna Poole, Miss Universal's head is negated by another narrator who forces us to negotiate a confused metaphorical composition. It is, rather, the substitution of her voice with those of the two marionettes on her right side that should concern us as viewers. They speak for her. They are discursive interlocutors within a tableau that suggest an alternate narrative. Does Dianna Poole, Miss Universal's feminine agency diminish by her repetitive sexual acts in the brothel? Rote, routine, repeated acts she performs for economic gain, while being controlled by a Madame who is lurking behind the scenes, as a puppeteer? As if to say, a string-pulling performativity controlled by a marionettist who commands her actions? Or is Dianna Poole, Miss Universal's agency in fact controlled by her transformed characterization as de-humanized, de-figured mannequin? Perhaps in a most perverse manner this is, in fact, what Kienholz presents. The transference of meaning and rupture of a narrative in which one assumes a prostitute is always controlled by others. Miss Diana Poole is taking a break rather than being tethered against her will. She controls the marionette's actions. And, through an allegorically-ascribed defiance, she also controls her own actions.

Such a reading of Dianna Poole, Miss Universal's role in the tableau is reinforced by yet another interlocutor – but, rather than being a parody of a human figure, in this case the interlocutor is a material protagonist – a framed needlepoint. Kienholz's use of this domestic activity, which is temporal if nothing else, for the labor involved in developing such a tedious tapestry represents innumerable hours of sustained focus. The repetitive nature of such a pursuit also is metaphorically inscribed in other feminine outputs – including the rote repetition of the prostitutes in *Roxy's*. The temporal also manifests in terms of a historical preoccupation of repeating history; a temporal vector that Kienholz, no doubt, was championing against in his tableau. To be specific, he was interested in arresting time in situ. The tapestry of needlepoint reflects an equally arrested duration of time. Yet, Kienholz uses an innocuous, innocent, highly gendered medium to pack an equally charged, scathing cultural critique. He does so through text and language, and indeed offers a new layer of textuality to belie the domestic tranquility of its production. Often referred to as 'canvas work,' the creation of a tapestry through needlepoint provides an oblique reference back to a framing, or to an entrapment. Frames and hoops, to use the vernacular of needlepoint, were used to hold taught – in abeyance – the portion of the canvas which was being worked on at any given time. The focus of its producer, therefore, could be held in isolation for a fixed period of time. Here it can be suggested that Kienholz extended his critique of the frame – which he abandoned in the sense that his early painting practice evolved into sculpture (or 3D painting, as he referred to his own artistic evolution) into a highly gendered space, a space in which women occupied their time with mundane projects and artistry. Yet, as is his proclivity, Kienholz disrupts this proposition by problematizing the picture frame through text. The tapestry is framed with a border. On the top left and right corners, two female silhouettes appear in direct opposition to one another. Between their profiles is a flower

arrangement. Bracketing the lower half of the tapestry horizontally is a woman in an antebellum hoop skirt and broad rimmed bonnet, watering tall stocks of flowers. Several birds appear above her head, caught in mid-air flight. Lurking in between the women in profile and the women who waters her garden are four lines of text, which states the following maxim in bargello:

“There is so much good in the worst of us,  
And so much bad in the best of us.  
That it little behooves any of us  
To talk about the rest of us”  
(Hultén, *11+11 Tableaux* Introduction).

It is signed with the initials “J.M.” What this phrase, or poem, signifies is complicity, and lack thereof simultaneously. This duality is the milieu within which Kienholz operates. Here we see both a self-referential leveling of a moral playing field and an introduction – in perhaps the most direct and acute sense – that Hultén referred to in his introductory text – of the plurality of interlocution that Kienholz manifests in situ and by placing us directly into an open engagement with his commentary on American society. We are docile. We are complicit in extending a moral impotence and unwilling admittance that we are responsible for social ills. Silent, allegorical defiance operates within a relatively tranquil trope of domesticity. The medium, a needlepoint, belies the urgency of Kienholz’s critique. Were mankind able to renounce its complicity that easily, Kienholz’s tableaux likely would not resonate and capture its audience so powerfully. Our tendencies toward violence and evil on one side of the equation, and our equally empathetic and ethical stances to one another are confused by Kienholz. It does, simply stated, behoove Kienholz to talk about the rest of us – which is actually to say, all of us. We are and have become his interlocutors.

Interlocution continues, materially speaking, through a print of Maxfield Parrish’s highly recognizable and reproduced painting, *Daybreak*. Reprinted in the *11+11 Tableaux* catalog, in a



full half page, suggests that it occupied a more significant role within *Roxy's* than providing a nice, ornamental wall hanging. As Kienholz has shown repeatedly, if nothing else, he intentionally interjects seemingly innocuous references into his tableaux as a way to provide clues for deconstructing his narratives. Traversing along a line of feminist tropes, the insertion of Parrish's print into the setting of *Roxy's* seemingly adds a critique of idealized and romanticized beauty. Set against an impossibly sublime backdrop of mountains, a horizontal plane breaks up the pictorial dimension and perspective, foregrounding a flat and verdant field of grass. Working against this pictorial orientation, a pair of neoclassical columns bracket the viewer's main point of interest – two young figures, one a woman lying supine on the grass, her left arm crossed over her forehead in repose, matched by her left leg, which is at a forty-five-degree angle to her tight leg, outstretched on the ground. Her attire is reminiscent of a Grecian dress, flowing and billowy with a belt wrapped multiple times around her waist, almost serpent-like. Above her another figure, more androgynous in representation, bends over her, smiling with her hands over her bent knees. This second figure is nude. A panoply of flowering tree boughs frames the scene from the top and both right and left sides of the painting, suggesting spring has sprung. It is clearly a verdant landscape, if not geographically impossible.

There is a stark and strident discord between the nature and beauty of the nubile and fecund creatures in Parrish's composition and the decay and artificiality of the detritus within *Roxy's*. Kienholz is evaluating and reassessing the nature versus culture opposition. Within Kienholz's tableaux the illustration of this chasm is realized materially. As allegory is prone to do, it subverts and transposes binary oppositions, unfolding previously accepted philosophical divisions, only to fold them back onto themselves in new and propositional ways. In this regard, the age-old tensions between nature and culture, including romanticized notions of the former

and suspiciously or imperially inscribed allegiances to the latter, must be readdressed from a critical vantage point. As we will see within the next vignette, nowhere is this division more acute and provocative than within the counter-narrative Kienholz presents in relation how *Five Car Stud* was received, interpreted, and historicized.

## 2.6 “There is No Black Man”: Edward Kienholz’s Counter-Narrative

“White people will have to ask themselves precisely why they found it necessary to invent the nigger; for the nigger is a white invention, and white people invented him out of terrible necessities of their own” -James Baldwin<sup>75</sup>



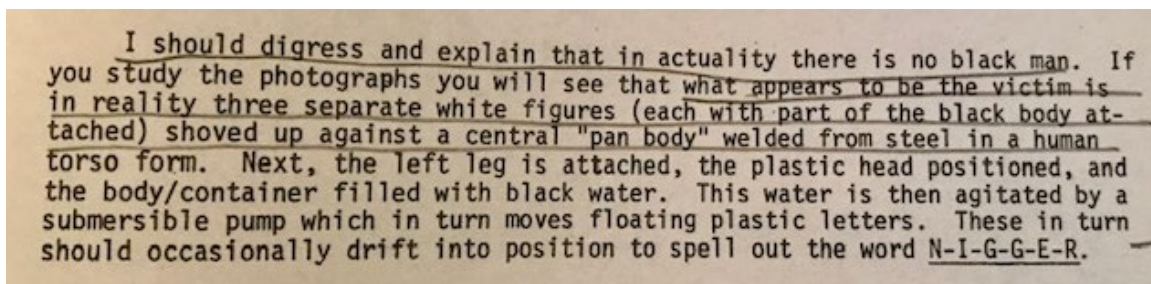
Figure 31 Edward Kienholz, *Five Car Stud*, 1969-1972 (Kienholz: A Retrospective, Whitney Museum of American Art)

In the case of *Five Car Stud*, Baldessari’s maxim “this is not to be looked at” is transposed within Kienholz’s concept tableau as an inverse admonition that some things have to be looked at – an in-your-face methodology that carries with it several contingencies. Other deconstructive methodologies also are unpacked by Owens in part two of “The Allegorical Impulse” situating them in dialogue, once again, with Barthes’s poststructuralist theories on rhetorical de-figuration. Barthes distinguishes between three types of meaning: literal, symbolic, and obtuse. Of these three, Owens highlights a blind spot that emerges in Barthes’s unfinished treatment of obtuse meaning within this trifecta. Owens suggests that literal meaning, according to Barthes, is the placement of an anecdote – be it a setting, a costume, or protagonists in their relational contexts.

Symbolic meaning is purely rhetorical, created within the transparent relationship between meaning and referent or sign. Obtuse meaning, or rather a signifier without a signified, suspends the relationship between image and description. Yet, Owens argues, Barthes does not fully reconcile his own definitions of obtuse meaning, which for Owens creates a rift within which to insert a new proposition of what Barthes could have meant, or at least an attempt by one academic to complete the missing logic of another's theorizations. As a palimpsestic text, "The Allegorical Impulse" itself works in a manner that Owens suggests reifies his postmodern theories, specifically the use of other voices to speak – which in itself is an allegorical proposition.

Owens's assertion that obtuse meaning has "something to do with disguise, or the combination of literal with artifice, creating a fiction of disruption of narrative's referential illusion," provides an opening into understanding further Kienholz's rhetorical de-figuration. "The actor," Owens writes, "is revealed as the (metaphoric) substitute for character; his facial contortions, the emblem of grief, not its direct expression" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two 76).<sup>76</sup> To suggest a performativity at work in Kienholz's tableau simultaneously suggests that perhaps, although not actors per se, the figures are emblematic of pathological archetypes, who both manifest violence without a direct authorial context, for they are removed through the distance travelled between a direct anecdotal/rhetorical relationship, but rather act within a problematized plane where obtuse meaning performs to reveal our own separation from such violence. Kienholz turns this proposition on its head with his mega counter-narrative that, in reality, there is no black man in *Five Car Stud*. The main protagonist, whom we take to be a black man, is only signified by a physical form which on the surface manifests through his belly pan that could spell the word N-I-G-G-E-R within the

floating liquid of his torso. This lone signifying element suggests that indeed it is a black man who is being castrated in this horrific scene. The headlights of the five large mid-century American cars, which operate as additional actors within the tableau's staged environment, provide a highly cinematic spotlight onto the violent act in the middle – reinforcing the fact that N-I-G-G-E-R is a term constructed by whites. And, adding another theoretical layer, are Kienholz's own thoughts on the piece, reprinted here from the original text in the Gemini G.E.L. monograph:



I should digress and explain that in actuality there is no black man. If you study the photographs you will see that what appears to be the victim is in reality three separate white figures (each with part of the black body attached) shoved up against a central "pan body" welded from steel in a human torso form. Next, the left leg is attached, the plastic head positioned, and the body/container filled with black water. This water is then agitated by a submersible pump which in turn moves floating plastic letters. These in turn should occasionally drift into position to spell out the word N-I-G-G-E-R.

Figure 32 Edward Kienholz, *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition*, 1971 (Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles)

The perpetrators have been subsumed by the black man, their physical caricatures having become part of the black man's vestige, or, as James Baldwin suggests, the black man rather has been invented, in this case, by Kienholz's artistic decision-making process directly. As such, a play emerges, a rhetorical performativity between literal and symbolic meaning. Kienholz asserts his post studio methodology by siting meaning differently, in an obtuse and allegorical manner. In situ, an unwelcomed supplement, which, paraphrasing Owens, exposes a literal level – an image as fictional, implicating the symbolic to function through reversals of meaning or substitutions. Such an allegorical turn advances this contingency further. And, it does so, Kienholz shows us within his concept tableau, within a highly directorial mode.

The distinction between directorial and documentary artistic methodologies is another important theoretical point that Owens makes in his theorization of postmodernism. I appropriate his use of this distinction not only to suggest, in agreement with Owens, that the directorial turn is an important hallmark of California post studio practice, but also in order to advance this distinction further, to suggest that Kienholz – above and beyond many of his contemporaries – capitalized on this pivot from pure documentation of events, performances, and happenings, and claimed a directorial point of view as the driving force behind his tableaux.<sup>77</sup> *Five Car Stud* directs our responses to the behavior we witness in the tableau as much as it offers us a theatrical stage from which to view Kienholz's work. As evidenced in the Getty Research Institute's images of contact sheets, Kienholz clearly was in charge of directing the spectacle, as he documented the faces and movements of his characters individually, isolating each micro scene within the tableau in advance of actually realizing the finished piece inside a tent at documenta V.<sup>78</sup>

*Five Car Stud* capitalizes on what Owens calls the directorial mode that is open to the intervention of obtuse meaning. As both an interventionist action and a direct confrontation with Barthes's failure to fully define obtuse meaning, Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* uses a different site-specific strategy to illustrate allegory's contingency. The symbolic dimension becomes meta-figural, that is to say, a figure of a figure. The literal meaning at work in *Five Car Stud* lays bare a trap of believing anecdotally what we see before us in situ – in Owens's paradigm, the costumes, the setting, the relational contexts of the protagonists. Within this symbolic confusion, where the meta-figural advances against our will – we are in receipt of a proposition that negates a reality that would give us license to release ourselves from the debt owed for perpetrating such violence before us. White on black violence, specifically. Not so fast, according to

Kienholz...we are, in fact, culturally complicit, subsumed by the very narrative we created – that of the N-I-G-G-E-R. The man being castrated is our own cultural and symbolic creation.

Kienholz's use of an oil-filled belly pan with the letters N-I-G-G-E-R in fact makes it highly unlikely that they will ever be spelled, and perhaps, if so, without our ever witnessing the spelling. The contingent nature of the kinetic sculpture, that of the perpetually-recycled stream of ejaculate from the victim's penis, ensures that we can never, indeed, actually identify the man as a N-I-G-G-E-R, let alone a black man. The perpetrators assume the identity of their victim, as Kienholz suggests, through the sheer melding together of their body parts within the composition. Or, as Owens would assert (and I concur) we are confronted not by a black man or our constructed version of him, but rather by a de-figured version of him, a topological reading that uses disguise as parody.

Negating or contradicting the general, critical consensus of how this tableau was received, it is to Kienholz's collaborators who penned contextualizing theories about *Five Car Stud* that the record of the artist's intent must be corrected. In his essay in the catalog *On a Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*, Robert Pincus states, rather emphatically, that "It's uncompromising cruel scene undoubtedly reflected a disillusionment with the current state of American society at the turn of the decade. The relations between whites and blacks was presented in an utterly stark fashion" (Pincus, *On a Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz* 82). If a curator can state such a claim without acknowledging the artist's intention in his own words, what is this assessment if not an easy out, a scrim to take meaning at face value, literally speaking, without an assessment from the artist he was working with? For Kienholz was quite clear in his writing for the Gemini G.E.L. monograph on *Five Car Stud* that: "I should digress and explain that in

actuality there is *no* black man.<sup>79</sup> If you study the photographs you will see that what appears to be the victim is in reality three separate white figures (each with part of the black body attached) shoved up against the central “pan body” welded from steel into a human torso form” (Kienholz, *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition 5*). If that were not egregious enough, we recall the earlier interview between Kienholz and Lawrence Weschler, in which Kienholz admitted to hold some reservations about how his work would be recalled in the future. Kienholz said in that interview:

“Yeah. It’s a frustrating experience because on one level I feel like in being interviewed, that I should have interesting things to say, or it should be accurate, or it should be in proper order or even proper language or whatever because it’s going to be listened to and worked over by other people at a later time. It’s like what we’ve done today now goes into the future in an unknown quantity and an unknown quality. And I have no way to anticipate any of this, what we’ve done, into the future. So I’m very edgy about it.”<sup>80</sup>

It becomes exceedingly unforgivable that Weschler, to this day, denies Kienholz’s own artistic intentions and aesthetic decisions that in reality, there is no black man in the tableau *Five Car Stud*. Or that he would not consider that to be a reality, and to ponder how race and power function within the tableau. Weschler delivered a lecture on *Five Car Stud* at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) as recently as February 20, 2020. Following the lecture, in a series of email exchanges, I asked him if Edward ever spoke about the absence of a black man in *Five Car Stud*. His response was very clear:

“ Well, to be sure, there IS the black man who is being castrated, although interestingly he is the one figure who is not a complete plaster cast human being, being constructed, as it were, out of that metal automotive garage tub torso (with the six letters floating in the black oil) and then four outstretched limbs (conspicuously jet black where the pants creep up that one calf) and then the double-sized screaming head (one of only three non-mask covered heads in the piece—him, the woman, and the boy—all the others being grotesquely masked.) It is I, not so much Ed, who insists that the piece is about whiteness...”<sup>81</sup>

Weschler continues later in the email, ... “[t]hough I think Ed would have concurred that that was his subject, he might have rephrased it as the bullying by any majority of its minority subjects, but it’s basically the same thing. After all, it is precisely the point that almost everyone in that piece is white, and certainly all the perpetrators are” (Weschler, email exchange with me, February 23, 2020). The tableau *Five Car Stud* certainly references whiteness, and in particular, white supremacy. The semiotics within the work acknowledge this fact, including the overpowering American cars with their various accoutrements – most noticeably the bumper sticker “America: Love it or Leave It,” but also the American flag on a bumper above a license plate with “Brotherhood 71” printed where the state would normally appear. By not acknowledging the excised words of Kienholz in relationship to the tableau, Weschler perpetuates the very same error that archives fall prey to; mainly, excising or purging from a public record all voices, all narratives, and in this instance, the artist’s own words to describe how we as viewers should engage with the work. *Five Car Stud* is about whiteness, but about how whites have constructed the “negro problem,” not dissimilar from how the Nazis created a “final solution” to fix what they constructed to be a Jewish problem. Again, one only needs to recall the writing of Baldwin to more fully understand how race functions within Kienholz’s tableau: “The confusion in this country that we call the Negro Problem has nothing to do with the Negroes,” Baldwin writes in *Cross of Redemption*, and continues, “it’s a class-based/economic power problem” (Baldwin, *Cross of Redemption* xxix-xxx). Going further, Baldwin makes the claim that in general, people prefer fantasy to a truthful recreation of their experience, and that people, generally speaking, “cannot bear much reality” (3). It falls to the creative artist to right this wrong, this pathology, and Kienholz and Baldwin both in their own



works took their responsibilities seriously. That Kienholz's own words in relation to his work's methodology were not taken into consideration, an assessment I came to through the research for this project and scholarship on Kienholz, makes it even more of an urgent project to restore his intentionality to *Five Car Stud*. Baldwin reconciles this egregious omission with his belief that the "multiple truths about a people are revealed by that people's artists – that is what the artists are for" (17). The truths that seemingly underscore *Five Car Stud* are ugly. We become monstrous, to paraphrase Baldwin, as conspirators in the scene in front of us. But, rather than acting as interlocutors we become what we destroy, through our own fictionalization of a narrative that, to Kienholz's credit, has multiple meanings.

Kienholz's masked characters confound our cultural mythologies, masking and removing an identifiable master narrator, implicating instead us within a culture that castrates itself. The bracketing and suspension within the Getty Research Institute contact sheets is problematized by its allegorical content. This is how Kienholz's work operates within a postmodernist moment. As Kienholz himself wrote, in the catalog *On a Scale that Competes with the World, the Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*, "I think of that piece in terms of a social castration like what a tragedy we didn't use the richness of America, which includes the black" (82). Would we as a society be ready – could we be ready – to accept and to confront what would be exposed; our complicity in our own diminished vitality and the destruction of our dominance and imperialistic tendencies? An assertion which refers back to Lyotard's *Pacific Wall* in an impactful way, as if to critique Kienholz's work along a modernist grand narrative that asserts there is, indeed, an imperious tendency of domination contested in California, along the Pacific coast, where:

"America comes to a halt dumbstruck before an ocean that puts an end to the Western border. The golden dream's accomplished, and people go about enjoying it. Social

consensus isn't sought for in authority of the capital but becomes displacement westward. The history of States is coming to an end. Something else can be heard at work – something in the silence of what's finished. What's at issue has stopped being an occupation of lands, and, even less, an exploitation of resources. The issue is conquest of this or that kind of knowledge, committing it to memory, making it available, and the usefulness of this knowledge in creating new plans or developments. And isn't space-time in which they're resident, in which the game is played, isn't that space-time as your 'ungriddable space'?" (Lyotard, *Pacific Wall* 57).

Kienholz and Baldessari knew, in some manner, that their work, *Five Car Stud* and *Cremation Piece*, respectively, would complicate forever the belief that modernism is an unfinished project through their incredulity to the grand, Greenbergian trope of modernism. In Kienholz's case, he also used that strategy to dominate the narrative according to his own ends. He perpetuates it – to Habermas – by being incredulous - to Lyotard - toward a narrative that no longer makes sense to a culture that fosters violence and imperialistic tendencies to remain sovereign. And, concluding with Owens, he tells of a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred; as such, its deconstructive thrust is aimed not only against the contemporary myths that furnish its subject matter, but also against the symbolic, totalizing impulse which characterizes modern art" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part Two" 80).

## CHAPTER THREE

**Appropriation as Cultural Critique in Edward Kienholz's Tableaux**

*“The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be in this respect precisely the present time deserves special interest.”*

*- Sigmund Freud<sup>82</sup>*

*“It became clear to Hopps that he was dealing with an incredible individual, indomitable conman, vigorous organizer, a man who was attempting to “see what could be done to shake up and change any number of status quo situations vis-à-vis ‘culture,’ a word which would cause him [Kienholz] to reach for a gun if he heard it at the time.”*

*-Betty Turnbull<sup>83</sup>*

*“Representation, then, is not – nor can it be – neutral; it is an act – indeed, the founding act – of power in our culture.”*

*-Craig Owens<sup>84</sup>*

## 3.1 Discursive Portability

It is evident in Kienholz's work that what he critiques is both a legacy of modernism and modernist tropes (including, importantly, medium specificity), and in doing so, he extends his critique into culture and its apparatuses of power. His commentary on the state of society is not sequestered on American soil – but, rather, provides an expansive multinational critique that owes much agency to his work's formalism. Specifically, the portability factor, which I argue is the most profound gesture within his tableaux. By portability, I suggest a move beyond their literal abilities to be transported to different venues, which is one way to understand portability; but rather into a transnational commentary that allows for the whole of civilization and various nation-states to be called into question – not merely American but also, in the case of *Five Car Stud*, German. This formalist turn has not particularly been acknowledged within art criticism. Pivoting the conversation away from purely American racism and white supremacy, into the ideological commentary of socialist Germany, and the final solution for exterminating Jews,

portability also subtly suggests that state violence and the concomitant toggling between exclusion and inclusion de-figures the patterns of recognition and decipherability of state-sanctioned archives and master discourses. Kienholz gives his viewers an unsettling view into a symbolic sphere that ruptures any given state authority and confuses by dismantling a clear authorial legacy. In doing so, he takes a critical stance as an artist who de-figures the symbolic plane and our patterns of recognition, by appropriating discarded artifacts and detritus within his work.

This chapter sets up Kienholz as a searing cultural critic par excellence. It does so through a juxtaposition of Kienholz's seminal exhibition catalogs, Freud's theorizations in "Civilization and Its Discontents," and Craig Owens's writings in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. It is necessary to reconsider Freud, whom Derrida invokes in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (le'mal d'archive) by appropriating a psychoanalytic methodology, in relationship to Kienholz – to better understand man's tendencies toward archiving which sanction state control over the individual. It is to Freud who we must credit the use of the term 'representation' and his descriptions of memory and dreams specifically. Freud, Douglas Crimp writes in "Pictures," constantly turned to metaphors as "pictograph, hieroglyph, and rebus" (Crimp, "Pictures" 28). Reflecting on the writings of Freud and his insistence that dreams are represented through visual images, then postmodern art deserves a "return to the writings of Freud with a completely new understanding of how they might be useful for criticism is one of the prospects that this art offers" (30). Equally, and in relation to Freud's writing about civilization generally, I propose Kienholz critiques society alongside an equally potent critique of beauty, which Craig Owens eloquently supports through his reclamation of poststructuralist critique of representation. Kienholz champions detritus. He advocates an art that is not only in-

your-face (which I have considered previously via Owens's writing on the allegorical impulse) but also understood through the disposed artifacts and materials of mankind in its quest to control nature – both human and earthly. The motivations behind such a proposition are multifold: to engage in a dialogue with his work to advance a notion that beauty can be tethered to de-figuration as much as re-presentation; that allegory, archive, and appropriation share potentialities for pluralism and an othering of narrative control; and the discursive portability of Kienholz's work renders his contribution to postmodernism undeniably significant. Working within and in between such theorizations is a post studio mentality. If the studio is the site of an *artistic* archive, and in direct lineage to gallery system (which is another mode of representation), Kienholz shifts the power dynamic and control back to the artist in a much more expansive and nuanced terrain of cultural appropriation, working with a methodology well outside of the studio's purview: the tableau.

My methodology is an exegesis of exhibition catalogs and artist monographs on Kienholz, extracted from the archives of the San Francisco Art Institute (many of which are rare and out of print), and proceeds chronologically from 1967-1986. My intention is to both bracket the decades of the rise in conceptual, West-coast post studio practice to the allegorical turn of the 1980s (which Craig Owens captures in his collected writings, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*) to illustrate an evolution in thought on Kienholz's work by art criticism. While acknowledging the use of Freud's most commonly known essay, the subtext I believe makes it exceedingly important given the year in which it was written (1929) and my ancillary desire to show how Kienholz's work moves from American racism toward blacks to German xenophobia toward Jews. Put simply, one cannot deny the fact that Freud was writing his seminal text alongside the burgeoning threat and power of Nazism. What Freud deduced

regarding the impulses of mankind is relevant today, ninety years later, both in terms of the tension between Eros and the death drive, and also – germane to this inquiry – for what it offers as a lens through which to understand Kienholz’s work, specifically, his tableaux – as vehicles for transnational critique of man’s worst destructive tendencies. As a less sinister operative element, I suggest the destruction of master narratives and archival tendencies repositions artists’ individual voices against a collectivity of commercialism and gallery representation that post studio practice initially sought to challenge.<sup>85</sup> And, as seen previously with regard to *Five Car Stud* and the contested theories of the representation of a black man, safeguards the artist’s agency by not misrepresenting Kienholz’s intentions and aesthetic decision-making processes. Here, there is a coalescence between Derrida’s admonishment that whomever controls the archive holds the power over its interpretive legacy and hermeneutic functioning, and Owens’s counter, or additive theory that representation is, ultimately, the founding act of power in our culture. Within the following analysis of Kienholz’s work, it is evident that his tableaux challenge culture as a dominant, agreed upon set of mores that shape societal relations. Kienholz uses appropriation to shift power dynamics through his scathing cultural critique.

### 3.2 *The Art Show*, 1967

In the 1967 catalog *The Art Show*, curator Walter Hopps (who co-founded the LA-based Ferus Gallery with Kienholz in 1957) posits in the catalog’s foreword that an important element in Kienholz’s work is his use of “asserted visual metaphor” (Hopps, *The Art Show* catalog 6). Hopps is describing this methodology within Kienholz’s 1957 painting, *George Washington in Drag*. Within the canvas Kienholz transforms America’s founding father into an effeminate figure, as the title suggests, in drag. While on the surface somewhat kitschy, Hopps suggests that

“Kienholz has mixed, in a sort of pun, two national compulsions: cleanliness and aggressiveness” (7).



Figure 33 Edward Kienholz, *George Warshington in Drag* (cat. No 8), 1957 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

The verbal pun – replacing the word *wash* with *war* – packs a metaphorical punch that equates violent tendencies with our general proclivity to cleanse, or to purge, societies with which we disagree and to whom we eradicate or at least decimate. As two sides of a sinister coin, Kienholz seems to critique the patrimony of warfare, instead suggesting that war is a more cowardly act by representing George Washington along a feminized plane. Freud equally draws out these competing yet interrelated tendencies of man. On one hand, man’s predisposition toward aggression prevents him from fully embracing and becoming a member of the human community. On the other hand, Freud asserts that mankind places equal importance on – in fact demands – compliance with cleanliness and order. In an equivalent verbal pun, Freud’s belief that the use of soap is an “actual yardstick of civilization,” finds a strange alliance with Kienholz’s President Warshington (Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 739). Strange

bedfellows, or similar critics of a society that fights decay at any cost, even by the destruction of fellow citizens?; the alliance is significant, linking Kienholz's artistic methodology – that of the use of man's discarded waste and consumer artifacts as his material – with a critique of valuation of cleanliness and order.<sup>86</sup> “Dirtiness of any kind,” Freud writes, “seems to us incompatible with civilization. We extend our demand for cleanliness to the body too” (739). Freud's words foreshadow Kienholz's obsession with exposing the underbelly of man, suggesting that Kienholz's compulsion is equated not to the need for order, which Freud suggests is a tidy algorithm (order=compulsion) but rather, for dis-order, de-figuration, a deep dive into decay and dissolution. The body, Freud tells us in “Civilization and Its Discontents,” seeks, via the pleasure principle, an escape from its own decay. While an unavoidable and unescapable fact of being mortal, Kienholz's obsession with this decay and dissolution unsettles us as viewers, by using the very detritus of our own destructive acts to dominate nature in both human and earthly form. Kienholz's methodology is perverse. It subsumes an external world which rages perpetually against us as a reminder of our own futile aggressions. It purges from us – once and for all, any inclination we may have about our ability to conquer the pleasure principle. In its place is a stark and strident reality – which leads Marcus G. Raskin, the other writer in *The Art Show* catalog, to suggest that Edward Kienholz “is the first of the modern phenomenological artists” (Raskin, *The Art Show* catalog 12). While Kienholz is, undeniably, thrusting a somber reality upon us as viewers in his tableaux, something more substantial is at work than a mere phenomenological reference affords. Here a tension emerges between Ruskin's and Hopps's articulations regarding the real force of Kienholz's work, which needs further consideration.

Kienholz makes misery his content. Within his tableaux, the allegorical impulse reemerges, exposing the tension between two art critics' musings about his work. Freud is a



fulcrum between these two theorizations: Hopps, on the one hand, suggests that Kienholz's first foray into three-dimensional work, *John Doe* (1959) and *Jane Doe* (1960) was the "critical moment when he began to combine actual everyday objects and things in works that would embody his insights about our everyday thoughts and lives" (Hopps, *The Art Show* catalog 7).



Figure 34 Edward Kienholz, *John Doe* (cat. no 16) and *Jane Doe* (cat. no 21), 1959 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

As figures both "absurd, humorous, pathetic, corny and tragic," equally so are the materials he uses (Hopps, *The Art Show* 7). Materiality begins to personify allegory. Kienholz's materials, crudely deconstructed and reassembled must take with them hidden meanings; pluralities of usages and narratives ascribed to them by their former owners. Not, as Hopps suggests, merely revealing a vernacular ambience, but rather extending allegory away from the obvious symbolism of lifeless props. Criticism of Kienholz's work misses his perversion of material specificity if it is only referred to as creating "special meanings resulting from the juxtaposition" of Kienholz's unusual range of materials (7). The detritus and discarded waste of mankind imbue so much more to his work and, I argue, offer a complicating factor to the trajectory of modernism that kept work neatly tethered to a formal framing apparatus and purity of medium.

Something else is at play here. Kienholz makes misery his content. He thrusts his viewers into an external world that rages against us, yet is of our own making. Concomitantly, Kienholz prevents us perpetually from any attainment of the pleasure principle. There are no substitutive satisfactions within his work; no diminishment of our misery as offered by art. Substitutive satisfactions, Freud suggests, “are illusions in contrast to reality, but they are nonetheless psychically effective, thanks to the role which phantasy has assumed in mental life” (Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 723). Perhaps the three-dimensionality in Kienholz’s work, as expressed by Hopps, does indeed succeed in showing his extraordinary sense of vernacular imagery. Perhaps, equally, Kienholz’s use of materials conveys “a vernacular ambience” (Hopps, *The Art Show* 7). But they function in a most perverse manner – they propagate what I suggest to be substitutive *dis*-satisfactions. For his audience, once folded into the tableau as unescapably complicit, never able to psychically escape the misery recreated within. We dwell within it, created by avarice and aggressive tendencies of mankind. The discarded materials and refuse Kienholz repurposes illustrate our never ending and futile quest toward conquering nature. Within that struggle, we perpetually destroy ourselves and objectify one another simultaneously.

The objectification of others runs through Kienholz’s work and this artistic turn is what I suggest Raskin attempted to codify by his suggestion that Kienholz is the “first of the modern phenomenological artists” (Raskin, *The Art Show* 12). ‘Junk sculpture,’ the term Raskin uses to describe Kienholz’s assemblages, allows Kienholz to confront things as they are, to “make art letting us know how they *really are*” (12). Kienholz’s phenomenological turn – if we embrace Raskin’s theory about Kienholz’s work in “The Art Show” catalog, presents his viewers and aesthetic reality that, returning to Hopps, is “beyond the framing edge,” beyond the neat and tidy brackets of a priori meaning (Hopps, *The Art Show* catalog 8). Our senses are disturbed when

confronted by Kienholz's one-two punch of a mode of work that simultaneously places us in-situ and references a sinister appropriation of our own objectification through artifacts that we ourselves used, discarded, and which are turned back upon us to narrate a reality we would rather not imagine. As if to say that some things are not to be looked at – which is John Baldessari's refrain – lest we forget. A pathos emerges which extends beyond what art is to what we are, how we act, all the while exposing man's predilection for aggression toward one another. Kienholz confronts his audience through a formal sleight of hand. He implicates us all – yet to suggest his work is devoid of formalism, as Raskin argues, misses an important mark and is a blindspot in his theorizations. In denying Kienholz's formalism that objectifies his audience, we are relegated to a myopic vision which suggests art that is politically and socially challenging cannot be considered formal. We also should recall the formalism manifest within the discursive portability of Kienholz's tableaux in general. Appropriation disturbs an artistic trope so tethered to modernism- the represented framing of our innocuous existence. The extension of art's frame, to conjure Hopps's thinking in this catalog, is a formalist move. It's a game changing proposition. Perhaps art history was ill-equipped to reconcile such a proposition in 1967 when this show was mounted at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art. That is a fair analysis applied retrospectively. The objectification of an audience, so fundamental to Kienholz's work being both successful and disturbing, foreshadowed relational aesthetics as a formal art-historical term.<sup>87</sup> For this critical turn, a debt of gratitude should be given to Raskin. He was beginning to see the potency in Kienholz's work as it related to the audience. Kienholz, Raskin writes, "forces our involvement by asking us to do something we are forced to participate with our hands in much of his work so that we can understand and be involved (Raskin, *The Art Show* catalog 12). Such involvement, however, does not suggest that we will change our behavior and treat one

another differently – to, as Freud suggests – “become a member of the human community,” rather than turning away from the external world (Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 730). Somewhere there is symbiosis that exists at the intersection between an expansion of medium to include found objects and an aesthetic challenge that invokes socio-political artistic tropes more profoundly. Such is Kienholz’s milieu.

Raskin’s assumption, which I suggest is an overlooked proposition of objectifying Kienholz’s audience, and representing junk and refuse as an extension of our bodies and hands, results in us as viewers becoming “the sum total of the objects we make of one another” (Raskin, *The Art Show* catalog 12). Kienholz’s junk sculptures reinforce this ideology and illustrate our very subsumption into a material reality. For, as Raskin writes, “If we treat our fellow beings as objects, and thereby they become as objects, surely the next step for the artist to present ourselves in art as compromising the objects we have become” (12). Nature colludes with culture in a perverse and unsettling manner within Kienholz’s tableaux, with *Five Car Stud* being the preeminent example of such a turn, wherein we become complicit viewers to the horror unfolding before our eyes, and simultaneously we become objectified – pawns within Kienholz’s tableaux and his allegorical tendencies. Not only do others speak – those of authority and designers of racial violence and genocide – but we speak and converse within a cultural narrative that Freud suggests is a struggle to be civilized. As much as we as viewers want to isolate ourselves from the horrors in front of us, to disassociate from master narratives that dominate control and power, we are complicit within the dialogue. Kienholz usurps Freud’s vision of a civilization as one in which justice is the first prerequisite. Our footprints on the dirt surrounding *Five Car Stud* are indexes of man’s proclivity toward aggression. Our individual power and ability to render judgement against the crime in front of us are now part of a stronger, communal

power, which Freud writes “constitutes the decisive step of civilization” (Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 740).



Figure 35 Edward Kienholz, *Five Car Stud* (detail) 1969-71 (*Kienholz/Five Car Stud*)

The replacement of individual power by communal power is acted out within Kienholz’s tableau, but unbeknownst to us. This action exposes us to another part of our existence, to paraphrase Raskin, that we would rather not see. Kienholz subverts Freud’s insistence that the first requisite of civilization is justice, replacing a shared belief system that is intended to regulate man’s relationship with fellow man and their social relationships toward order and cleanliness, with that of vigilante justice (in the case of *Five Car Stud*, specifically). A similar interference occurs within modernism when Kienholz’s work appears on the scene and breaks from painting into junk sculpture, and even further into tableaux. The framing edge is beyond recognition, transposed with a multitude of points of view and reactions by his viewers. As an outlier of extreme individualism, Kienholz neither seeks nor demands cultural consensus. But he does, I suggest, demand that art can do more than represent beauty. Art, as Walter Hopps writes, is redefined within Kienholz’s work along two interrelated objectives. Within Kienholz’s work,

such objectives include the “power for an artist to re-define directly his place and role in society” and also “that art can become a real issue with a public concerned with more than social embellishment” (Hopps, *The Art Show* catalog 8). Such admonitions would turn into realities for Kienholz, an artist not content to dwell within predetermined, sanctioned means of artistic production. Pushing the boundaries of his artistic output, Kienholz will, as I shall illustrate, advance the notion that the archive of modernism, in particular the Greenbergian strain, is indeed a more plural concept with regard to the historical voices working silently within its frame to defy it and to appropriate it, culturally speaking.

In the 1967 exhibition, *The Art Show*, as we have seen, Kienholz already indicated his move far away from painting, and squarely into three-dimensional junk sculptures. Setting up discrete vignettes within the exhibition, his ‘constructions,’ as referenced in the exhibition catalog, are parts to a larger paradigm shift Kienholz had been contemplating. For, within the exhibition, he also included an inventory of *Tableaux*, which are life sized, functioning as complex environments. Kienholz outlines clearly the titles and years in which he conceived each, dimensions, and lenders for the three tableaux featured within the show. Kienholz, it should be mentioned, distinguished – at least at this 1967 juncture – between tableaux and *concept* tableaux. The latter, not surprisingly, were suggestions for future constructions. Written in type and framed, four such concept tableaux were mounted in the exhibition, and, additionally, one was included as part of the tableaux, *The State Hospital*.



Figure 36 Edward Kienholz, *The State Hospital* 1966 (Kienholz: *A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

Structured in a fashion similar to Marcel Duchamp's final work, *Étant donnés*, the tableau allowed viewers to peer through a door, door #8, into an unsettling scene of an old man who is tethered to a lower bunk bed, naked, with his head replaced by a fishbowl with two live fish inside. A duplicate man on the bed above is encased within a bubble-like structure, indicating he is the personified thoughts of the man below. The concept tableaux *The State Hospital* had a purchase price of \$16,000 plus the artist's wages. Each concept tableau could be purchased as indicated on each plaque in the exhibition.



Figure 37 Edward Kienholz, *Installation of Concept Tableaux*, Kunsthhaus Zürich 1971 (Kienholz: *A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

Although not part of this writing, it is worth mentioning the inclusion of the concept tableaux in *The Art Show* to reference a gesture Kienholz made within these works – acknowledging a conceptual turn in his work, based in language and concept, but also providing a referendum on the need for an artist’s hand to substantiate a work of art. For, each plaque had a fingerprint of Kienholz’s included in the contract. He seemingly equates the artist’s hand with commodification – and not subtly so. A close read of *Contract for Purchase of a Concept Tableau* presents viewers with economic principles not commonly associated by a work’s treatise. However wry or ironic Kienholz was when he established the contract, the take away refers back to the post studio mentality he and others working in California and the West coast embraced. If, as I have suggested previously, the studio is the site of an *artistic* archive, and in direct lineage to a gallery system, Kienholz shifts the power dynamic and control back to the artist in a more expansive and nuanced manner, via the portable nature of the contract to appear in *The Art Show* and reappear in subsequent shows. As such, the concept that each discrete idea for a concept tableau can be transported literally between physical spaces, also extends, importantly, in between economic systems no matter which nation, collector, or patron is doing the purchasing. Kienholz’s critique of the art market is equally multifaceted and embraces discursive portability to extend his critique, and will return in subsequent exhibitions and catalogs. For the time being, it is sufficient to cite one proclamation within the *Contract for Purchase of a Concept Tableau*: “Whereas, art buyers are probably speculating in the art market or playing a glorified autograph-collecting game anyway,” a proclamation which reinforces the belief system that codifies and qualifies artistic production (Kienholz, *The Art Show* 35). Kienholz is mocking this system, all the while demanding a pay rate equal to that of “the combined hourly union wage scale for plumbers, electricians, and carpenters then prevailing in



the Los Angeles area” (36). Kienholz’s emphatic stance in direct reference to wages had been brewing within in him for over a decade before he ventured into creating concept tableaux. In 1953, having been rejected by art dealers in the Los Angeles area, he became incredibly determined to build his own gallery. We now can contextualize how important the 1957 opening of the Ferus gallery was to Kienholz.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.3 *The Last Time I Saw Ferus*, 1976

The conceptual movement reflected in the progression of Kienholz’s work from painting to junk sculpture, to tableaux, to concept tableaux, has yet more significant ramifications beyond an obvious artistic migration which is evident in the arc of most artists working alongside Kienholz, specifically those working within a post studio paradigm. The cultural critique and the contestation of cultural apparatuses in the late 1960s would open even wider in the 1970s for Kienholz. By 1976’s *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* exhibition at the Newport Harbor Art Museum (March 7 – April 17, 1976), the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War was advancing on its one-year anniversary (April 30, 1975).<sup>89</sup> The brackets of the Vietnam War, chronologically speaking, more or less match that of the duration of Kienholz’s work as a painter initially (ca. 1953) to full-bore tableaux artist. Leaving painting behind was not as profound a shift as that of migrating into a methodology whose subject matter is the contestation of culture, lest we forget, Baldessari equally eschewed his painting practice to end the wrong road he was on as an artist. However, in Kienholz’s concept tableaux emerges an equally significant migration of his contestation of dominant cultural paradigms, which I suggest align themselves with the equivalent movement away from modernism into postmodernism through post studio practice. Which renders an undeniably significant contribution by Kienholz to postmodern artistic practice.

More specifically, I argue that Kienholz's artistic migration from painting to junk sculpture through to tableaux and concept tableaux was a move from an exalted legacy of abstract expressionism toward a post studio practice uniquely positioned to critique society's ills. The very term *culture* was problematic for Kienholz. His maxim, that society may be attacking itself from within, represents his belief in the ability of culture to be parasitic, to feed off its excess to the detriment of a foundation which mitigating factors – capitalism, warfare, and general aggression – perpetuate. Betty Turnbull, curator of "The Last Time I Saw Ferus" writes in the exhibition catalog: "It became clear to Hopps that he was dealing with an incredible individual, indomitable conman, vigorous organizer, a man who was attempting to "see what could be done to shake up and change any number of status quo situations vis-à-vis 'culture,' a word which would cause him [Kienholz] to reach for a gun if he heard it at the time" (Turnbull *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* no page number). The cultural reference in this passage, and the agitation the term caused in Kienholz relates to 'culture' as a connotation of something tethered to morals and to a civilized lifestyle – and as related to aesthetics, to beauty and representation. As a compensatory attribute of art – beauty - Freud reminds us, typically is associated with human forms, gestures, and landscapes or natural creations. Not with the detritus of mankind, the underbelly of society, and certainly not depictions of the latter which were so prevalent in Kienholz's tableaux. Kienholz's tableaux for the most part are beyond grotesque, as far afield from beauty as one could possibly imagine. Adding significantly to this grotesqueness is the way in which his tableaux manifest in situ. We are invited guests into his malaise. Such a participatory practice and intentionality underscore just how compensatory beauty is; compensating for how it belies the hard and sobering truth that suffering is unavoidable. "This aesthetic attitude," Freud writes, "to the goal of life offers little protection against the threat of

suffering, but it can compensate for a great deal. The enjoyment of beauty has a peculiar, mildly intoxicating quality of feeling. Beauty has no obvious uses; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it” (Freud, “Civilization and Its Discontents” 733). Kienholz’s ‘aesthetic attitude’ negates beauty; in fact, it never intended to offer beauty as a relevant aesthetic component.

Here emerges an interesting sidebar which I referenced previously, in relation to a criticism of modernism. The particular practice of abstract expressionism, which ushered in an art for art’s sake mentality, not to mention a uniquely nationalistic force which would be used as a political wedge to triumph American democracy over cold war communism as anti-aesthetically pleasing, was steeped in medium-specificity and highly referential to an artist’s hand. Kienholz’s early paintings were more ensconced in figuration and also, we recall, were Baldessari’s early paintings. Figuration as a West coast phenomenon, in particular in San Francisco is significant as a challenge to New York-centric abstract expressionism. But a grotesque figuration, I argue, as his two-dimensional paintings in particular migrated into three-dimensional, hybrid paintings/assemblages.<sup>90</sup> Beauty was never Kienholz’s chosen milieu. His inclusion in the Ferus gallery, in particular during its inaugural year of 1957, then, is curious but not unexpected turn (he was a co-founder), although one could argue abstract expressionism was not necessarily championing beauty – but, rather was a migration away from representation. Kienholz’s work more emphatically embraces the ugly tendencies of man. And, his work does not seem to suggest that it was created to manifest American nationalism or pride, but more a clarion call for a new era that challenged the Eurocentric modernism of post-World War Two and implicated each culture in which his tableaux were exhibited. In fact, *Five Car Stud’s* use of large American cars could mislead viewers into a suggestion that pride in American-made

industrial machines of the post-world war two era was Kienholz's intent. He chose them, in particular, so the large headlights would give enough spotlight to accurately witness the violent act in the middle of the ring, which the vehicles frame. Kienholz's use of an American vernacular is a strong and prominent thread within his work. But, instead of reinforcing a patriotic ethos, it actually is subverted by Kienholz to illuminate malfeasant characteristics of American consumerism, capitalism, racism, and the military industrial complex (recall 1957's *George Washington in Drag*). Situated between the Second World War and the Vietnam war, the rise of industry in America and the ease of life fostered by the ubiquity of consumer goods (cars, in reference to *Five Car Stud*) and, in the case of *Eleventh Hour Final*, which I will discuss later, television sets, Kienholz's tableaux actually critique and criticize American culture and political policies.

I return to an earlier assertion that a parallel exists between the Ferus gallery's founding in 1957 and its reverence to abstract expressionism on the West coast, and the equivalent on the East coast with the opening of Peggy Guggenheim's gallery, *Art of this Century*, in 1942. The radical shift on the West coast, however, as seen through post studio practice, marked a divergent path away from modernism, toward a postmodern practice which would be difficult to rationalize in terms of beauty and representation, and purity of medium specificity, and, toward (via Kienholz's tableaux), what Freud described as civilization's insanities.<sup>91</sup> In the evolution of the Ferus gallery, and within a short period of years between 1957 and 1959, Turnbull reminds us of few facts worthy of mention. To begin, Ferus reached far beyond Los Angeles, by featuring works of California-based artists in the Bay Area toward the north. This fact is relevant for many reasons, for that it highlights the importance burgeoning cultural institutions in Los Angeles had on artistic practice. And, secondly, it suggests that the Los Angeles area imported the work of

painters to fill a void. Which, when taken together, form an assumption that the Los Angeles art community was poised for something different, an aesthetic migration away from previously sanctioned methodologies. I reference these points to suggest that both Baldessari and Kienholz had access to a nascent and burgeoning artistic practice that would become post studio. The lack of a robust and integrated system of galleries and dealers on the West coast allowed for the emergence of such practice which was tethered, in large part, to the influence of pedagogically deviant programs such as Baldessari's post studio practice at CalArts. Yet the only affirmation of it is located not in an official archive from CalArts, as previously discussed, but within exhibition catalogs, artist monographs, and interviews – an unassembled cacophony of documents, voices, and visual ephemera. Of all of these, the migration away from modernist tropes that was about to occur was due, in part, to the interference of the Ferus gallery and, more importantly, by Kienholz's hand in establishing the space with Walter Hopps. Turnball specifically references the gallery's opening in 1957 and the press it received when it opened on March 13, 1957, and its policy of bringing San Franciscan artists to Los Angeles. Critic Gerald Nordland's writing in *Frontier* magazine in May 1957 stated that Ferus would feature the 'spiritual descendants' of the California School of Fine Arts or CSFA, which was renamed the San Francisco Art Institute in 1961. Nordland's article also referenced the San Francisco School of painting. Here, Nordland is referring to artists such as Mark Rothko, Richard Diebenkorn, and Elmer Bischoff, all of whom taught at the CSFA, and all of whom worked within abstraction. The country seemed bookended by abstraction, with New York City serving as the East coast counterpart to the Bay Area on the West. In a dutiful nod to modernism, Ferus gallery opened with aesthetically palatable work, both recognizable to a knowledgeable gallery goer and upholding an established aesthetic status quo. It is not to suggest, however, that abstraction was

not also an indictment on the status quo of modernism, as Craig Owens also believed. I highlight this evolution in order to equally call out the fact that post studio practice would interfere with the status quo as a culturally accepted proposition by *intervening* in modernism's trajectory in such deliberate ways as to make it impossible to expect representation and beauty to remain the principle indicators of acceptable art.

By 1959, a mere two years after opening its doors to the public, Ferus gallery would receive an entirely different kind of review, linking it to the critique of modern art more directly. April 1959's *Artnews* article by Jules Langsand described Kienholz as both an enfant terrible of the Los Angeles art community, an artist who "playfully thumbs his nose at the pretensions of the art world" as well as at the "insanities of civilization in general" (Langsand, "Art news from Los Angeles," *ArtNews*, April 1959 48). These pretensions include, as previously noted, an embrace of abstraction at the height of modernism, which Kienholz seemingly eschewed as his practice migrated into freestanding sculpture - from relief paintings and assemblages specifically. Here also emerges an interesting proposition that links the rise of abstraction - and by this I cite American abstraction in particular, as a democratic offering against communism in the post war area. Individualism was often cited as a characteristic of American ideals. Abstract expressionism of the American variety was emblematic of this individual, autonomous spirit of American ideals as it was a uniquely American art practice to refute the hold of Western European dominance in modern art. Along these lines, one can deduce another theoretical thread that emerges directly from the post studio mentality of anti-commercial, anti-gallery stances embraced by these artists as a means to counteract the commodification of their work by an institutionalized system still tethered to a studio as site of artistic production. For, returning to Freud's writing in "Civilizations and Its Discontents," as civilization sets limits to man's

aggressive instincts, it invokes what he refers to as ‘psychical reaction-formations’ which, among other consequences, incite people into identifications. Identifications which reinforce an “I” verses “Other” mentality, and by extension (albeit perhaps gratuitously) a distinction for the purposes of this study which suggests and identification as a cultural producer tied to a dealer/gallery system or one for whom their works were de-commodified by their embrace of post studio production. It also mimics a representative paradigm that privileges recognition. Art history, Owens reminds us, has its own unique language and distinct modes of thinking about art, and as a discipline it upholds neatly categorized, hierarchical systems of art. It views representation as both disinterested, and also as a politically neutral activity. As a body of criticism, poststructuralism, on the other hand, views representation as an “inextricable part of the social processes of domination and control” (Owens, “Representation, Power, and Culture” 88). Although Freud was not referring to an art practice in his writing on civilization as related to psychical reaction-formations, if, as he suggests, communism is an example of this formation (equation), and private property is the real evil, then what unfolds in the intersection of art production and commerce in the post-World War Two era is a commentary on capitalism as it relates to this watershed moment. Abstract expressionism ushered in a uniquely American stance within modernism alongside acutely rugged individualism. As such, this practice of painting was described as anti-communist in orientation and pro-American, pro-democratic ideals. This practice also put blockbuster exhibitions on the map in New York (most germane for this investigation at Peggy Guggenheim’s the *Art of this Century* gallery). This high modernist moment also produced unprecedented capital for artists, commodifying artistic output as the private property of the wealthy. As if to underscore the “untenable illusion” which Freud suggests is the psychological premise on which the entire system of communism is built, abstract

expressionism shattered that illusion and highlighted not only American determinism but also material wealth in post-World War industrial America. Kienholz, in his pivot to concept tableaux, rejected that practice. Unabashedly so, as Turnbull writes: “the biting wit and double entendre of his earlier work were to become more devastating comments on society. This was a prelude to his unique tableaux” (Turnbull, *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* no page number).

Turnball’s conceptualization of Kienholz’s work as encompassing double entendres lacks a strong theoretical stance that the allegorical impulse fills, yet it is fulfilled in subsequent writings on his work – most notably, in the catalog accompanying his 1984 exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). And to it we must turn to analyze the allegorical at play in Kienholz’s work.

### 3.4 *The Human Scale*, 1984

SFMOMA’s exhibition is largely understood as one in which we see Kienholz return to deeply personal work, sophisticating his tableaux methodology simultaneously. Referred to vernacularly as the “Spokane Series,” the exhibition mounted eight discrete tableaux under the curatorial theme of the ‘human condition.’ One tableau in particular is not considered to be part of this series, *Portrait of Mother with Past Affixed Also* (1980-81).



Figure 38 Edward Kienholz, *Portrait of Mother with Past Affixed Also* (cat no.104), 1980-81 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)



The double entendre Turnball referred to earlier morphs into a much stronger theoretical premise in the writing of Lawrence Weschler, Kienholz's oral history interviewer. Weschler, in describing the energy within Kienholz's portrait of his mother (which is, in fact not traditional portraiture but rather a three-dimensional tableau), as being derived from "its composition as a series of self-enclosed dualities, polarities which in turn implicate each other, like interconnected loops" speaks to not only a two-sided equation which considers dual and ironic meanings, but a more sinister solipsistic operation (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 7). We see ourselves in the reflection Kienholz's mother sees of her younger self. Aging implicates youth and vice versa. Our own identities are held within this equation of self-containment. Yet in the personification of his audience, the solipsism Weschler references extends into what he calls a *third polarity*. We, as viewers, not only see ourselves reflected in the tableau, but equally see ourselves as being viewed by ourselves. Such a polarity is disarming, disconcerting, and the strength of Kienholz's work. This phenomenon which Weschler introduces as a third polarity was operative in *Five Car Stud* in a much more provocative manifestation, which I have discussed previously using his omission of Kienholz's acknowledgement that there is no black man in *Five Car Stud*.

We see throughout the SFMOMA exhibition an invocation of this *third polarity*, our solipsistic triangulation. Weschler's term is a much more philosophically driven term than its equivalent which I have referenced previously: 'relational aesthetics.' The term *relational aesthetics*, although a curatorial term and indeed representative of a late twentieth-century curatorial turn, does not reconcile as clearly as Weschler's the tension we face as viewers within the tableaux. Rather, the Nicolas Bourriaud term 'relational aesthetics' references the need of an audience to complete the work; an intersubjective operation that usually carries a work to fruition

by viewers who wish to be there as voluntary participants. A *third polarity*, rather, associates another subjective reality; that of a narrative of witnessing. Whether as witness to an underbelly of cultural detritus, of vigilante injustice, or of war and decay. Weschler's term also disassociates a purely aesthetic function and gives the viewer a much more prominent role in the work by forcing upon the viewer an encounter that often dehumanizes. Which, in turn, forces us into viewing tableaux that equally force us to confront civilization's uglier side. Kienholz displays an utterly astonishing empathy for the solitude of others, for their despair. The *third polarity* allows us as viewers to turn the dehumanization factor which is so prominent in his work into empathy, for we recognize ourselves within the assemblage, our tendencies to slip into equal states of being and inaction, whether aging, exhibiting anger towards fellow man, or – most importantly - failing to intervene when violence and aggression unfold in front of our eyes. “Over and over again, finally,” Weschler reminds us, “he is exploring that moment when the despair of absolute solitude is momentarily punctured by the grace of subjectivity” (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 13). This grace of subjectivity, or the recognition of ourselves within an ‘other,’ is perhaps the only part of Kienholz's work where the *third polarity* is not evoked. Intersubjectivity is empathy. The third plane of recognition that expands this intersubjective moment out into a place where we then see ourselves viewing ourselves in others is where we become witnesses to our very being. In works such as *Portrait of Mother with Past Affixed Also*, the process of aging and reflection into a younger life with all the nostalgia associated with it are shared parts of life and of living. As viewers we clearly engage in such activity and recognize that both will happen and indeed are, happening to us. The energy from this portrait, Weschler explains, derives from “interconnected loops” of “self-enclosed dualities, polarities which in turn implicate each other” (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 7). These loops manifest compassion and empathy. The

intersubjective grace is conferred upon us as viewers and referred back to us by Kienholz's mother. This equation becomes more profound in terms of a third polarity when what we witness are not so inter-subjectively related by representations of actual human beings, but by what is left by us after we live, remnants of decay and destruction, which pivot to an understanding of how we struggle with nature to overcome its power; and, ultimately, how we will always fail to do so. Other tableaux in this SFMOMA exhibition, within *The Spokane Series*, will speak to this gesture more acutely.

Three specific tableaux from *The Spokane Series* represent the tension between man and nature: *Night Clerk at the Young Hotel* (1982-83), *The Jesus Corner* (1983), and *The Pericord Apts.* (1982-83).



Figure 39 (Left) Edward Kienholz, *The Night Clerk at The Young Hotel*, 1982-83 (*On A Scale that Competes with The World: The Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*, 1990)  
 (Right) Edward Kienholz, *The Jesus Corner* (cat.no. 107), 1982-83 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)



Figure 40 Edward Kienholz, *The Pericord Apts.*, external and internal views, (cat.no.108), 1982-83 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

All three works also hold significant personal meaning for Kienholz, who was raised not far from Spokane, in nearby Fairfield, Washington. Weschler describes these tableaux as pieces of urban archeology. For, both structures were taken from their previous settings intact and rebuilt for the SFMOMA exhibition. As if a nod to Kienholz's belief that the earth is the ultimate found object, these individual tableaux are, in essence, ready-mades: "The earth has always been pretty much the size it is now," Kienholz states in the *11+11 Tableaux* catalog from Moderna Museet, "but the boundaries that men place on it do change at great human cost, with questionable justification" (Kienholz, *11+11 Tableaux* 12). The assemblage methodology, therefore, is intertwined with land art and conservation of the earth, positioning Kienholz as an environmentalist who preserves structures via reuse. There is also a critique lurking within Kienholz's statement that will become relevant later in his work the *Ozymandias Parade*. In that specific tableau, man-made boundaries – in the form of nation-states – are questioned for how they are determined and shifted according to imperialist greed and the subjugation of peoples –

reinforcing the imperialistic tendencies of modernism and the importance of discursive portability at play within Kienholz's tableaux.

At this juncture, another important Freudian link emerges in support of Kienholz's aesthetic strategies. On one hand, he constructs tableaux using tools to make material our recollections; he also used tools to physically deconstruct and reconstruct scenes from actual locations which were scheduled to be razed (and, in the case of *Night Clerk at the Young Hotel*, the remaining structure accidentally was burned to the ground by bums who had lit a fire to stay warm). Part of Kienholz's methodology uses auditory means to create a scene he imagined would be unfolding within any particular tableau. *Night Clerk at the Young Hotel* came from the lowest levels of a building on the same block as the Pericord building. When Kienholz constructed the *Pericord Apts.*, he recreated a foreshortened hallway inside the hotel turned single room occupancy (SRO) residencies in such a way as to invite viewers to walk past six stand-alone doors. With each step directly taken in front of each door, an audiotape is triggered, playing a soundtrack of what Kienholz imagined could have been unfolding behind each. In a pivot back to Freud, we are reminded that one of the first acts of civilization is the use of tools to alter nature. The majority of Freud's examples link back squarely to man's desire to control, tame, or conquer nature, to evolve into a culture of high attainment and prosperity, all the while exploiting the earth. Most citations Freud writes link directly to destructive tendencies, including the damming of rivers, mining minerals from the earth, moving soil for farming purposes, and killing or full-fledged extinction of animals for food or to make useful wares and tools from their bodies. Such acts disrupt the earth as an ultimate found object. Kienholz, then, is suggesting a restoration of sorts to the staged environs of our habitat, and in this series, of hotel rooms turned into apartment rooms, street corner storefronts, and hotel front desks alone a lonely block in

Spokane, Washington. He also invokes Freud's suggestion that "With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, either motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning" (Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents" 737). Kienholz shares an alliance with Freud in a sense that he uses re-assemblage to invoke the power man possesses "of recollection, his memory" (737). Freud in this particular passage of "Civilization and its Discontents" refers to tools that extend our abilities to record, capture and extend "fleeting visual impressions" and "the equally fleeting auditory ones," including the use of instruments such as the camera, gramophone, glasses, telescopes, microscopes and the like (737). All tools which altered man's visuality irretrievably. It is of interest to note that Kienholz's contemporary John Baldessari equally had concerns not only founded on his notion that art could be more than painting, but that, paraphrasing him, that in modern life meaning has been reduced to mere fleeing words. Kienholz, in the *Pericord Apts.*, alters the narrative field by overlaying his hypothetical notions of the activities in each room – he adds an aurally contrived, palimpsestic narration which we begin with our own footsteps when we reach each door. While he visually recreated the structure from photographs and drawings made before each was dismantled, the visual impression left is nonetheless not left for revision to the extent that a soundtrack of his creation is: our complicity with regard to affecting the start of each narration is again an indication of witnessing, of a *third duality*. Kienholz was still manifesting such complicity a decade after *Five Car Stud* was first shown publicly at documenta V.

Witnessing the solitude and destitution of others is a common thread throughout SFMOMA's *Human Scale* exhibition. Kienholz's tableaux manifest empathy in the viewers and a common, shared feeling of compassion. One particular tableau shifts into another paradigm which he threads throughout his work, that of cultural conquest. *Night Clerk at the Young Hotel*

(1982-83) evidences Kienholz's desire to show the minority strivings which *Five Car Stud* also attempted to capture, which Kienholz himself notes was a primary goal of the piece. *Night Clerk*, albeit subtly so, uses found imagery to remind the viewers of white man's conquests of Native Americans. Kienholz juxtaposes this reminder with over the top signage that regulates our relationship with society. The piece invites us into the foyer of a hotel that has been transformed into a single-occupancy residential hotel. Sitting behind a desk is a middle-aged white clerk who is working the night shift. The clerk's face is held within a metal frame that most likely belonged initially on a vitrine, as a latch suggests. As if he is held in abeyance, yet bound to repeat his witness to the comings and goings of the tenants. Behind him on the walls are what Weschler refers to as the "Thou Shalt Nots," or "shrill injunctions," and a "down-and-out Calvinism run amok" (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 12). Signs invoking the rules – when to pay rent, how much notice to give when terminating the monthly rental agreements, to an absolute admonition not to trespass behind the gate to the left of the clerk's desk, which displays a lone 'private' sign. A dirty, red and white textured wainscoting surrounds the clerk, offering a backdrop that frames the action within three walls. Above the wainscoting of the central wall, and as an important commentary and backdrop is a round commemorative sign that says 'Washington State, American Revolution.' The stage is set to reinforce rules, regulate behaviors, and all the while remind us of our duty to patriotism.

The invocation of state pride is no doubt intentional on Kienholz's part. Weschler recounts Kienholz's upbringing for us in an oral history weaved into his catalog essay. While he was growing up in Fairfield, Washington, Native Americans still ranged on lands adjacent to his family's wheat farm. One specific memory Weschler recounts is a time when a Native American had given Kienholz a pair of moccasins. Kienholz reflected upon his boyhood imagination and

how he had made a crude bow and arrow and spent a night in a field, pretending to be a member of a tribal society. Here we gain insight into Kienholz's innate feelings of empathy, and importantly, an empathy toward minority peoples. The land in which Kienholz was raised represents the final stop on a long persecutory journey for many Native Americans who were displaced from their lands and marched west. Washington state, as reflected on the commemorative sign in *The Night Clerk*, is the most westward state in the contiguous states of the Pacific Northwest. Together, the red, white, and blue graphically reinforce American containment, a final frontier and destination for several tribes.

Negating the cultural instincts of Native peoples in a quest toward domination, migration, and containment for economic gain is captured within *The Night Clerk* tableau. For, above the office door behind the clerk one sees a grouping of black and white promotional photographs of wrestlers, caught suspended in poses that embody machismo and acute physical fortitude. One important protagonist, Weschler reminds us, is Chief Thundercloud, who was a character actor in Westerns; in fact, he often is referred to as the first actor to play the role of Tonto in the American episodic series *The Lone Ranger*. Although Chief Thundercloud's ethnic background is contested – his real name was Victor Daniels – he was born to parents in Arizona territory – he nonetheless made claims to have been born in Oklahoma, and of Muskogee tribal affiliation. Here, Kienholz suggests a double cultural appropriation at play, which includes not only Chief Thundercloud's appropriation of American Indian mythology, but of popular culture's appropriation by us as viewers, and of whites in particular, that wishes to portray our version of conquered peoples. Kienholz slyly uses an image of an American Indian icon, not of Chief Thundercloud the character actor, but of a further appropriated image of a wrestler who took the same moniker, Chief Thundercloud. Dressed in full regalia, posed for a publicity shot,



reinforcing the cultural appropriation we as the dominant society wish to be perpetrated.

Weschler had asked Kienholz if he had any intention of developing a tableau about American Indians and their persecution at the hand of whites. Although Kienholz's response indicated that he was not planning anything in particular, we know from his earlier writing about *Five Car Stud* that he was already interested in what he referred to as 'minority strivings.' Within this lens it is easy to believe that Kienholz's use of found photographs was intentional and the associated commentary on appropriation important for unpacking his work in general.

As viewers, we witness the appropriation of others. We also witness a forced renunciation of instinct. Freud reminds us of the extent to which "civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means) of powerful instincts" (Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents" 742). Sublimation of instinct is necessary in the conquest of others. In the case of American Indians, as peoples who lived in communal tribes, we forced them into living among laws, cultural apparatuses, and within ways of life that were counter to their instinctual systems of hunter-gathering and living off the land in ways more harmonious than ours. Freud succinctly characterizes the loss of instinctual impulses as a core feature of cultural development. Its loss allows for what he calls "higher psychical activities" which in turn allow civilization to develop along these planes of "scientific, artistic, or ideological" activities. Appropriating the image of native peoples for our use further maligns their agency to retain their cultural instincts. Chief Thunderbird's portrayal in Kienholz's tableau *The Night Clerk* is perverse for two reasons: First, it positions an American Indian as a fighter, a brute force ready to take on his opponent, yet within a cultural construct – wrestling – that seeks entertainment where our imagination transposes our new aggressive tendencies onto a people whose own aggression was created

largely by our dominance and desire to ‘civilize’ others. Secondly, it suggests a cause of the hostility against which Freud writes, “all civilizations have to struggle” (Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents” 742). This *cultural frustration* Freud cites “dominates the large field of social relationships between human beings” (742). If left unchecked, he warns, such cultural frustration by a loss of instinct leads to perpetual hostility unless the loss is compensated for economically. Which, Kienholz reminds us, is at the heart of societal ills that he brings to life within his tableaux.

*The Night Clerk* installation references an underbelly of an economic system that causes and perpetuates economic disparities and a quest for satisfaction that is out of reach for Native peoples, whose minority strivings manifest perversely in the mock poses of the protagonists in his found photographs. Although not emphatically a piece about the treatment of Native Americans at the hands of whites, *The Night Clerk* serves as a moving reminder of our hostile tendencies. There is also, in Weschler’s words, a “strange, poignant way in which he’s accomplished such a witness with this piece, even if only tangentially: Indians who once ranged these lands and fished these streams are now reduced to mocking their own heritage as washed-up wrestlers on the walls of some SRO hotel” (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 12). We bear witness to the representation of loss of instinct, and the image of cultural frustration which colonized people are destined to perpetually inhabit, whether for our entertainment or as illustrations of an imaginative place where we wish them to dwell while we march toward higher civilized ground. We must recall Kienholz’s childhood engagement with Native Americans, his fascination with their hunting and use of rudimentary tools such as bows and arrows, to remind ourselves of his own complicity. His witnessing is informed by it, as is ours.

The fifth piece in the exhibition, which is part of the Spokane Series, is *The Jesus Corner*. Weschler describes this final tableau as Kienholz's "most self-effacing and transparent evocation of fellow-feeling" (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 12). In comparison to the *Night Clerk*, in which Weschler suggests Kienholz both cannibalizes and patronizes his subjects, *The Jesus Corner* restores a deep sense of empathy by Kienholz toward his subject. Here it is worth pausing to point to a blind spot within Weschler's theorizations. Rather than cannibalizing his subject - in particular, Native Americans - in *The Night Clerk*, isn't Kienholz actually working within an appropriative paradigm? One that does not necessarily cannibalize subjects but rather appropriates master historical narratives, extending a discursive commentary on the representation of subjectivity even further afield, and in so doing, refuting an acceptance of and control over dominant paradigms and authorless mythology? The role of appropriation in relation to narrative control is worthy of returning our attention to later, and especially as a methodology that has the potential to dismantle such control. Appropriation, I suggest, joins with allegory and archive in a powerful, alliterative, postmodern trifecta. Kienholz shows how beauty can be tethered to de-figuration as much as re-presentation, and that allegory, archive, and appropriation share potentialities for pluralism and an othering of narrative control. The discursive portability of Kienholz's work uses and relies on these in combination, offering a transnational criticism that renders his contribution to postmodernism undeniably significant. In an overt manner, Kienholz appropriates for his own use the detritus of another artist, another self-taught artist, to create the tableau *The Jesus Corner*. A janitor, deaf from years of boxing, spent years of his life installing a devotional altar in an empty and dilapidated storefront window on the same block as the Pericord and Young hotels. With access to discarded items from the department store where he worked as a janitor, Roland Thurman spent his spare time as an untrained artist with an

equivalent post-studio mentality as Kienholz. Kienholz had attempted to locate Thurman and talk with him about his altar, but to no avail. His name was all that Kienholz could find. As a janitor, Thurman's methodology functioned in a similar manner as Kienholz's: he used the discarded materials of consumer culture, including cellophane, cloth sashes, wire clothing hangers, cosmetic packaging and the like to build his devotional piece for all to encounter as they walked the city block, and to reflect upon the power of prayer. Weschler calls all five tableaux on view in *The Human Scale* exhibition "redemptive devotions – prayer offerings and witness bearings" (Weschler, *The Human Scale* 13). Kienholz emerges as a witness to another man's creative act, to another artist working with objects made outside of the studio. When Kienholz received word that the entire block was slated to be demolished to make room for urban renewal, he sent a crew to dismantle the window, its structural apparatus, and to remove all of its contents, which Thurman had put on display. Kienholz saved the work and brought it to his studio in Hope, Idaho in an act of redemption.

Kienholz's interventionist action offers another vector through which to deconstruct his methodology for creating his tableaux. The urban renewal taking place in Spokane which displaced Roland Thurman's devotional vitrine deeply affected how Edward and Nancy Kienholz approached their work. Spurred in large part by the World's Fair in 1974 held in Spokane, the renewal came at a cost to its residents who were displaced. Ironically, the EXPO's theme was 'the environment.' The premise for hosting such an endeavor that attracted approximately 5.2 million visitors was to reclaim land along the falls of the Spokane River. The land had been developed according to initial industrial development that needed railroads and warehouses for commerce and transit. The railways split the city into two parts, created major traffic problems, and the train trestles further segregated parts of the city by their sheer size. For

the *Spokane Series*, Kienholz capitalized upon the continued urban renewal, enabling him to dismantle and to remain intact significant architectural structures, including the storefront window that became *The Jesus Corner* tableau. In his exhibition catalog essay, Ron Glower describes “a bricoleur’s trove of salvaged building materials, by-products of Spokane’s urban renewal” (Glower, *The Human Scale* 20). Here we see the emergence of yet another term which connotes Kienholz’s obsession with using found and discarded objects: *bricolage*. On the surface one can deduce a very straightforward and literal interpretation of bricolage *vis a vis* Kienholz’s tableaux. Referring to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s formulation of the term bricoleur, we see Kienholz as someone who uses “the means at hand,” to which Derrida adds, “that is, the instruments he finds at the disposition around him, those which are already used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary to, or to try several of them at once, even if their origins are heterogeneous” (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 360). Kienholz uses found objects and repurposes them to fit his concept, and in so doing aligns with Lévi -Strauss’s supposition that a bricoleur uses the means he has at hand. Whether by transforming clocks into faces of bar goers in *The Beanery* to using taxidermy to replace women’s faces with skeletal remains of animals in *Roxy’s*, Kienholz re-appropriates such discarded materials toward his artistic end. One needs to recall Kienholz’s own words in relationship to his personal methodology, as one that views cause and effect as a way of invoking nature. In a reference back to Marcus G. Raskin, who in *The Art Show* exhibition catalog had called Kienholz the first phenomenological artist, this makes sense. Yet something else lurks behind this articulation and reaches further into human nature, the human scale which this exhibition takes as its title, and the discourse of the human sciences, which Derrida writes about while invoking Lévi -Strauss. Kienholz emerges as a bricoleur, as someone who makes do with

things that were meant, perhaps, for other ends. In opposition to an engineer, whose job it is to tether and ends with a means, a bricoleur understands the futile nature of that equation, the impossibility of the sign and the meaning becoming self-identical. A rupture to the field of representation occurs instead, within the free play of the infinite substitutions of signs.

Bricolage is a critical language, according to Derrida. A statement which supports and earlier assumption that Kienholz's use of found objects is his formal artistic methodology, and not one that merely repurposes them without intention. Expanding bricolage outside the confines of literary criticism, which tethers bricolage to a critique of language, through Derrida one sees an expansion into its mythopolitical virtue, and in so doing, we abandon all reference "to a center, to a subject, to a privileged reference, to an origin, or to an absolute arche" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 360). Empiricism is abandoned alongside an abandonment of received historical discourse. Kienholz's objects suggest an alternative discourse less tethered to what he calls an "all-seeing, all knowing intelligence" (Kienholz, *The Human Scale* 17). Which brings to the forefront a tension between Kienholz's restaged *The Jesus Corner* and that of its creator, Roland Thurman. Thurman seems to rely on bricoalge in kinship with Kienholz. For he too took his various materials for *The Jesus Corner* from a department store where he was employed as a janitor. These materials included devotional calendars and associated religious illustrations, as well as poems that spoke of salvation, goodness, and other tenets of Christianity. They also included the more mundane and pedestrian materials such as plastic candles, bags for disposing garbage, and aluminum foil. Yet what separates Thurman's and Kienholz's artistic approaches is a distinction between bricolage in service to ruin and bricoalge in service to coherence. Derrida breaks this down nicely: "If one calls bricolage the necessity of borrowing one's concept from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every

discourse is a *bricoleur*” (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 360). Kienholz dwells in the ruinous aftermath of culture, its detritus and discarded materials and he pieces together assemblages that illustrate equally pernicious tales of man’s tendency to repeat destructive acts. Kienholz achieves this through the discursive portability of his tableaux. As decentered narratives, his tableaux also suggest an absence of a subject and the absence of an author. And, as Derrida posits, Lévi-Strauss contends that myth functions in a similar manner as a musical conductor, in that it is those who listen who are in actuality the silent performers. The devotional act in Kienholz’s work is ours as viewers, and not that of an all-knowing author. Thurman’s devotional altar in *The Jesus Corner* asks us instead to re-inscribe an agency within the engineer, in a mythological accretion to a theological belief system that seeks a coherent, absolute origin of a discourse liberated from bricoalge. Yet an engineer is a bricoleur, unable to construct “the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon” (360). The engineer emerges as a myth created by the bricoleur. And not, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, as a singular entity in opposition to a bricoleur, a subject who would be the absolute origin of a master discourse of his own. Thurman’s work takes a more naïve approach. As a humble expression it manifests his and mankind’s belief in and devotion to an absolute being. Kienholz is adamant that anyone viewing *The Jesus Corner* would understand his intention. Kienholz’s intention is a material personification of allegory. In an evolution of terminology beginning with junk sculpture, which migrates into assemblage, and then landing on bricoalge, what occurs with the final term is an entry point into Kienholz’s work to rightly position his artistic practice in a formal, post-structuralist lens. Kienholz’s actions – recreating Thurman’s work as *The Jesus Corner* without alteration – is in itself a devotional act. This action reinforces another aspect of Kienholz’s methodology that we confront head on in his solo exhibition *Volksempfänger*, mounted in 1977 at the Nationalgalerie Berlin.

### 3.5 *Volksempfängers*, 1977

Expanding the previous exposition on bricolage and the bricoleur further, we see another critical layering to Kienholz's use of the instruments he finds at his disposal, those which are already used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt. Yet, in the instance of the *Volksempfängers* exhibition, we see a much more faithful use of the found object, the mass-produced German-made radio, the first model of which was called the VE301W in recognition of the date which Adolf Hitler seized power (January 30, 1933). It is worth recalling that the Kienholzes spent the majority of the year in Berlin throughout the 1970s, returning to their home and studios in Hope, Idaho each summer. Kienholz was, in his own words, an 'Ausländer,' a foreigner living outside his country, which he recalled within the exhibition catalog frequently, as a way in which to distance himself from criticism he could encounter as an artist using objects related to the rise of fascism and Nazism through a propagandist lens. Yet, and this point is the unifying thread of this chapter on Kienholz's work: front and center and above all reproach, Kienholz is an astute cultural critic, and his use of cultural appropriation within his tableaux makes his commentary on man's aggression and fight against the death drive discursively portable. The conclusion reached by Willy Rotzler in the opening essay of the exhibition catalog reinforces the fact that "Kienholz is at bottom a critic of society and his times, and in the last analysis even a moralist" (Rotzler, *Volksempfängers* 8). The layering of cross-continental discourse was not lost on Rotzler, who, as a non-American himself, even knew that Kienholz's work was of a different strain than those of his counterparts working in New York City:

"When the traveling exhibition of the "Tableaux" was opened in Stockholm early in 1970 – eleven major works done between 1960 and 1970 – the European museum-goer realized, if he had not already done so, that he was here faced by "another kind of art." The assemblages were not to be understood against the background of the New York art scene – which had meanwhile become familiar on this side of the Atlantic – and in fact had nothing to do with it. We noted that the farmer's son from Fairfield, Washington



working as a self-taught artist in Los Angeles from the mid-fifties on, had found his artistic idiom in a few years of experiment. Yet, it did not yet fit into our fragmentary conception of typical West coast art either” (6).

What does the exhibition *Volksempfänger* offer as a means to further deconstruct Kienholz’s artistic idiom? There are many answers, all of which align with a post studio mentality and suggest Kienholz’s contribution to postmodernity is undeniably significant. His critique of society through cultural appropriation and the portability of his discourse on man’s destructive tendencies find themselves tethered to the simple, German-made radio, forever personified objects of the rise of fascism in Nazi-era Germany.

Kienholz was drawn to the *volksempfänger* initially because of its industrial design. Roland H. Wiegenstein, in his exhibition catalog essay “Ed Kienholz, the “Volksempfänger” and the “Ring,” notes that Kienholz was drawn to these radios during a routine visit to a Berlin flea market because they, “like so many other things among that nostalgic trash, impressed him by being “German” (Rotzler, *Volksempfänger* 12). As an object disassociated from its propagandist function, for a moment we slip into the mindset of Kienholz’s that objects are capable of personification and manipulation, and that his use of objects alongside these two tropes show us the language of objects outside of their initial use. By re-appropriating radios, he critiques the rise of mass media culture and also – importantly – gives us his version of a readymade, by suggesting to us that objects are “right” in and of themselves. In a perverse counter-move, here we see that the object does the act of manipulation to the artist. The radio’s initial use becomes tethered to a new association, or, in Wiegenstein’s words, objects “come to life, that they allow and request the most different associations, reminiscences, appreciations, even irritations” (Rotzler, *Volksempfänger* 19). Kienholz’s intuitive turn with these works at times offers commentary on their history ignorant of their creator, and in others, very much

reinforces their genealogy. For example, *The Bench* (1976) shows viewers the provenance and evolution of eight distinct volksempfänger.



Figure 41 Edward Kienholz, *The Bench* (cat. no. 85), 1976 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

Positioned horizontally on a bench, we see seven radios in sequential order of their manufacture date; from the early 1930s through 1950s, ending with a contemporaneous model isolated on its own pedestal to the right of the bench. Kienholz chose to have the seven radios play Wagner, creating a cacophony of voices and invoking the quest toward the creation of a master race. In a nod back to previous works seen in *The Pericord Apts.* at SFMOMA, it is incumbent upon the viewer to initiate the soundtrack with a foot pedal. The foot pedal attached to the contemporary volksempfänger, when depressed, plays contemporary music of the 1970s. Here, Wiegenstein offers his own commentary that must be refuted if we can begin to see the portable discourse Kienholz offers regardless of country of origin, but rather as a metaphoric substitution given to us by the objects themselves.

Wiegenstein refers to Kienholz as a modest individual. And, extrapolating further, by “Being American he does not claim the right to criticize through his work another people’s

history and action in a similar way in which he has criticized his own country” (Wiegenstein, *Volksempfängers* 18). If we return to Kienholz’s belief that objects are “right” in themselves, the criticism Wiegenstein refers to is not nor would be Kienholz’s – rather, it is inherent within the object – the *volksempfänger* – itself. The criticism is forfeited by an individual (in this case, Kienholz) and rather is personified by the object itself. Objects have a language of their own, and in the case of the *volksempfänger*, a language of suffering. The supplementary discourses are part of the radios’ objectification. Kienholz is sensitive to this invocation, but it is not he who runs the risk of being criticized for repurposing them within his exhibition. Wiegenstein misses an important mark. In the subsequent essay by Jörn Merkert, “Ed Kienholz and the Language of Objects,” a more valid critical analysis ensues. An analysis that brings us back to the critique of mass media that Kienholz invokes throughout the exhibition *Volksempfängers*, and a critique of a history closer to Kienholz’s home.

Kienholz critiques culture by appropriating its discarded objects to show man’s tendencies toward aggression, and in particular, aggression toward the ‘other.’ His use of found objects and his belief that they possess a discursive “right” of their own, takes us back to bricolage and Derrida’s theories about language and an inability of language to be viewed as whole, or rather, that the idea of an *origin* of language can be considered outside of supplements. This is the terrain in which Kienholz dwells, where his understanding of any society is best understood “by going through its junk stores and flea markets. It is a form of education and historical orientation for me. I can see the results of ideas in what is thrown away by a culture” (Kienholz, *Volksempfängers* 12). As if to suggest the reclamation of voices, and of divergent historical narratives left behind within the objects and allowed to speak a supplementary truth. We witness in the *Volksempfängers* exhibition, according to Jörn Merkert, a “de-literalization”

(and a “de-psychologization”) through the abstraction process Kienholz undertakes as he migrates his practice from highly figurative tableaux to the sole reliance of found objects that are left unaltered. Here it may be a relevant point to suggest that the devotional act Kienholz made in reconstructing *The Jesus Corner* was a devotional act toward readymade objects and their own, inherent languages.

Returning to Rotzler’s opening exhibition essay, “Coded by Ed Kienholz,” we can extend further this notion of an object’s language into a semiotic realm. Referring to the seminal exhibition *The Art of Assemblage* (Museum of Modern Art, 1961), Rotzler reminds us that the early term assemblage was one that was, in his own estimation, “rather gropingly defined” (Rotzler, *Volksempfängers* 6). As if to suggest that the thematic and historical exhibition had failed or at a minimum not fully grappled with assemblage art’s significance. The somewhat inchoate definition from that exhibition underscores this point: “These collages, objects, and constructions are predominately assembled rather than painted, drawn, modeled, or carved” (Rotzler, *Volksempfängers* 6). This passage is important in relation to the burgeoning practice of post studio art. The reference to objects not touched by an artist’s hand – or, rather – not created through artistic means understood as such, relegates art as defined by the creation origin which modernism embraced and the public until that point had understood as: art = objects borne of an artist’s hand. Is not the act of assembling also a legitimate artistic methodology? The terms used to describe the art suggest a lack of formal painting, drawing, and sculpting which one associated with art production. Painting and drawing and sculpting are endemic to modern art production. The fact that the objects in this exhibition are not painted, drawn, modeled or carved suggests also an opening, a wider aperture with which to insert a theoretical nuance not previously extrapolated upon as it relates to post studio art, and in particular to Kienholz’s assemblage

work. Further within the MoMA exhibition text from 1961, we read: “Entirely or in part, their constituent elements are performed natural or manufactured materials, objects, or fragments not intended as art materials” (Rotzler, *Volksempfängers* 6). Can it be considered, in relation to this statement, that what Kienholz relies on, what he calls art, is the ability of found objects to perform for us as viewers their languages, their “rights” as objects? As capable of invoking suffering and most importantly, as turning the tables upon the artist, whereby their performative gestures manipulate the artist himself? In Kienholz’s own words: “Now you tell me, where I as the artist manipulating objects change to be manipulated by the objects. I’m going in one direction, the objects pull me another way and I find a new path in the middle” (Kienholz, *Volksempfängers* 6).

As conversant and personified, found objects perform their polyphonic histories, similarly to the archive. As untethered to an artist’s creation per se, they offer us passage into a pluralistic terrain and challenge the provenance of authorial right. Kienholz, Wiegenstein writes, “is definitely right in insisting on his theory that these objects are “right” in themselves, that they come to life, that they allow and request the most different associations, reminiscences, appreciations, even irritations” (Wiegenstein, *Volksempfängers* 19). Which fundamentally, I argue, negates the notion that the *volksempfängers* themselves are incapable of being art materials. Perhaps they are irritants, dismantling our heretofore conception of ‘art,’ and interfering with our reception of them as art objects. And, as Kienholz astutely shows his viewers, by allowing the objects to perform their ‘rights,’ he reminds us of their ability to disseminate information - whether propaganda from the German *volksempfängers* or the daily war casualties on the American television set during the Vietnam War. Their ubiquity as objects underscores this notion and supports the evolution of Kienholz’s work into mass media, as

Merkert suggests, it becomes evident that Kienholz “uses it, distorts it, changes it and as with any other object in his tableaux or sculptures” (Merkert, *Volksempfänger* 31). Oblique references to Marshall McLuhan aside (and there are many within Merkert’s exhibition essay), there are several takeaways from McLuhan that are worth reflecting on, particularly in comparison between Kienholz’s 1968 piece *Eleventh Hour Final* and *The Cement Box*, from the 1976-77 *Volksempfänger* work.

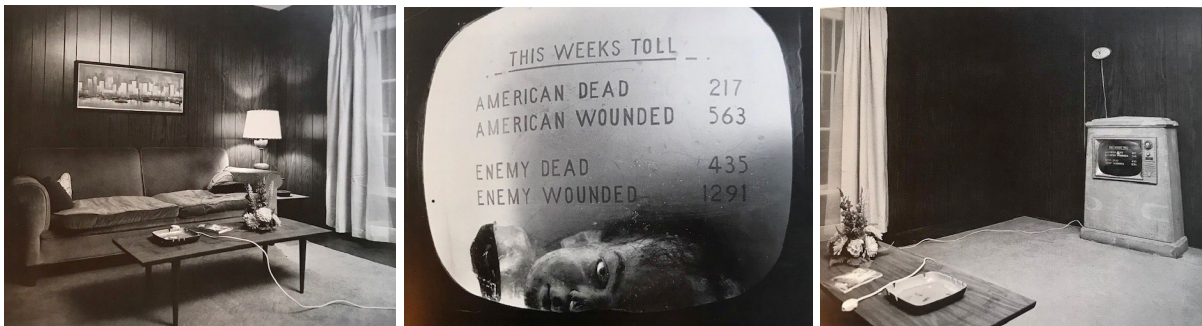


Figure 42 Edward Kienholz, *Eleventh Hour Final* (cat. no. 60), 1968 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

German homes, from the rise of the Nazi party when Hitler took power in January 1933 (and which date is recorded in the model number of the first mass produced volksempfänger of this era (VE301W), throughout World War Two, were places where families would gather around the radios to hear reports of the war, the reminders about rationing, and other ideological propaganda from the manipulating medium. Merkert suggests that, “through the identification with Hitler, the medium becomes a monument” (Merkert, *Volksempfänger* 23). To support his claim, Merkert includes a reproduction of the painting by Paul Mathias Padua, *Der Führer Spricht* (1939).



Figure 43 Paul Mathias Padua, *Der Führer Spricht* 1939 (bing.com images)

In *Eleventh Hour Final* (1968) Merkert asserts equally that Kienholz has created a monument, in this case re-literalizing the work because of its construction, which includes a concrete base or pedestal. The television set is ensconced within the concrete structure. The screen shows the day's casualties – American dead and wounded as well as enemy dead and wounded, with a decapitated doll's head below the data set. To escape such re-literalization and to hold Merkert accountable for an earlier assertion that the formal attributes of Kienholz's work within the *Volksempfänger*s series de-literalize, we must look elsewhere and into the theories of McLuhan, to whom Merkert references but not in a manner that solidifies his intention for having done so.

The escape mechanism for Kienholz suggests what I refer to as the performativity of the medium itself. McLuhan, writing in *Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity*, reminds us that the new media technologies, which regulate our activities, come at us unbeknownst to us and at a great cost for the social body. What McLuhan suggests is a radical shift in our sense ratios. For example, he posits, “The effect of radio is visual, the effect of the photo is auditory”

(McLuhan, “Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity” 755). This phrase bears repeating: “The effect of radio is visual, the effect of the photo is auditory.” Is this not what Kienholz’s work does to our sense reception? And, to McLuhan’s point, what Kienholz does so well and compellingly is to disallow his audience from having any control over such shifts, and also no means of escaping or avoiding their complicity. Moving outside of the so-called ivory tower, McLuhan suggests artists operate within “the control tower of society” (756). Kienholz transforms the radio into a visual rather than an aural tool – something to be looked at instead of heard. And lest we forget Baldessari’s seminal refrain “*This is not to be looked at,*” the tension and uneasiness of Kienholz’s actions become much more manifest by his gesture. As sculptures, the *volksempfänger*s migrate into a visual reminder of man’s desire to control – to invade, to migrate, to capture cities and states – all of which Freud recalled had happened during the first World War and were destined to be repeated in the Second. And, as Kienholz shows us and Merkert acknowledges, Kienholz does so freely and makes *portable* for us the destructive tendencies of man using the relics of media technology that speak to each culture – German in the case of the *Volksempfänger*s, and American with the television set. The Vietnam War, it should be recalled, was the first war to be televised. The day’s atrocities and casualties invaded American homes and living rooms nightly. The still image in the television set in *Eleventh Hour Final* acts like a single-frame photograph, locking in the death count and wounded count above a severed doll’s head. We can hear the bombing, the shelling, the sound of the guns and planes. The image becomes aural. It is clear that Kienholz makes use of mass media by disturbing its reception and mode of delivery. This distortion will become more acute in *The Cement Box*, a 1975 work within the exhibition *Volksempfänger*s, and, I suggest, the work, which aligns most



closely to *Eleventh Hour Final* for its formal attributes and use of a relic of mass media, the German radio.

In *Cement Box*, Kienholz freezes a *volksempfänger* in a cement rectangle box. Talons are placed at the radio's base, a visual reminder of the Third Reich's might and ever-watchful eye. The entire structure is tethered to a metal base, with a portable light affixed to a clip on the wall behind it. Extending out from the light's base is an electrical cord, which comes down the wall, behind the sculpture, and out from underneath to the floor in front of it. It ends as a foot switch, an invitation by Kienholz to his viewers to depress it. Although depressing the pedestal would most likely play an auditory command or propagandist refrain, the sheer visibility of the relic ensconced permanently in cement is what focuses our immediate attention – abiding by McLuhan's mandate that "The effect of radio is visual, the effect of the photo is auditory" (McLuhan, "Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity" 755). Kienholz simultaneously shows visually the object of agony and disassociates the auditory commands from the object itself. The 'right' to hear propaganda becomes that of the viewer and not forced upon the everyday German citizen who crouched around the radio in the 1939 illustration *The Führer Speaks*. The weight of oppression is three-dimensional, the cement forever encasing the radio and forcing upon the viewer an undeniable recognition of the *volksempfänger* for what it is – an object of subordination, oppression, and blind allegiance to the Führer. The auditory command is silenced, forever re-appropriated to be at the discretion of the viewer who chooses to hear what Kienholz has replaced wartime airplay with. Our sensibilities in relationship to a previously known and understood object have become dismantled. In a similar move, we see also in *Eleventh Hour Final* the muted efficacy of a television set whose purpose was to deliver the

news of the day aurally. Kienholz denies that functionality, freezing the image and muting the correspondence. Our correspondence with the television set ceases to be an auditory one.

Merkert suggests, through Kienholz's reclamation of man's discarded objects, a newfound sensitivity for each found and re-discarded object. Added to this factor is the genuine curiosity he believed Kienholz to have as an American toward Nazi wartime relics. Which is as if to suggest that Kienholz was able to present such work precisely because he was American. He had not lived in wartime Germany. Which is not to say, however, that Kienholz was unaffected by the war. He lived a very different reality in wartime America, which offers another layer onto the repurposing of found objects, which became his artistic methodology. The collection of scrap metal, which he recalls having done as a teenager in fields and on farms in Washington state, is another form of repurposing material, of reallocating the metals for wartime purposes and the creation of wartime ammunition and artillery. In a sense the *Volksempfänger* series is an act of witnessing, a devotional act by Kienholz, of reanimating for his German audience what Merkert suggests is a "secret life, which had been suppressed during the time of their "normal employment," but all the time they still are the objects which they were" (Merkert, *Volksempfänger* 23). The key difference with which one has to view *The Cement Box*, however, is that although the object – the radio – is still intact and the same object thirty years after the conclusion of World War Two, Kienholz has revoked "the distortion for which we are responsible," according to Merkert" (23). This statement implies a complicity with regard to being accountable for the rise of fascism and the Nazi party, of using the *volksempfänger* against its equal right *not* to spread propaganda. As if to scale back the function of the object to what may have been its purpose in non-wartime. Merkert also speaks of the mass production of the *volksempfänger* in the twentieth century; an attribute he blames for having destroyed their

integrity, and to which he credits Kienholz for having recovered through his work. Based solely on the monumentality of the work, *Cement Box*, the freezing in time of the object and the forced recognition of it as an object of war rather than leisure, one could understand this suggestion. The mass production enabled propaganda to spread. Relegating one or several objects to serve as art material does not negate this intended use. It does suggest, rather, a naivety on the part of Merkert, who slips into what McLuhan refers to as “the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner” (McLuhan, “Challenge and Collapse: The Nemesis of Creativity” 755). It is McLuhan who reminds us that technological literacy initially afforded the Western man detachment, an ability to “act without reacting” and that this detached sensibility was actually “a posture of noninvolvement” (754). For the electronic age, the rise of the global village renders this possibility obsolete. As a society that is technologically extended, McLuhan writes, we become involved in “the whole of mankind,” and as such we “incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action” (754-755). We are ultimately responsible for the ways in which we use technology to control, to colonize, to wage war against each other. Such social distortion at the hands of mass-produced media technologies and apparatuses is ours to claim responsibility for, and is a responsibility Kienholz seems to reconcile with his work in *Volksempfänger*. In his words, Kienholz expands upon how the war in Europe was something abstract and removed, less likely a feeling of being attached to a global society and more like that of an aloof, detached Westerner. Which would no doubt not be the case during the Vietnam War – perhaps it was a spiritual reclamation Kienholz sought through the work – as he had comprehended the ability of technologies to shape discourse and ideology with the ubiquity of the television set. The Vietnam War was a televised spectacle. It made its way into the hallowed ground of the American living room. This is what *Eleventh Hour*

*Final* reminds us of; Kienholz was unable to be a detached viewer. But in Germany, and as his personal experience of World War Two suggests, he could remain detached and let the objects speak their *right*: “We had some propaganda on the radio and talk about how terrible all this was, but when I came here and could feel the war, walking to Galvanistrasse to my studio, it became real for me. The bullet-holes are still there. And sometimes I talk with people who tell me of the tragedy that this war brought to their lives. It is still there” (Kienholz, *Volksempfängers* 13-14).

### 3.6 *NO! Contemporary American DADA*, 1985

The impact the war had on Kienholz’s German friends and acquaintances also reflects forward into his continued use of war and aggression as a theme, which permeates the content of future work. The 1985 exhibition *NO! Contemporary American DADA* perhaps is the most confrontational example of such work, made even more relevant for the fact that we see a return to Kienholz’s home state of Washington, where the exhibition opened on November 8, 1985 at the University of Washington, Seattle’s Henry Art Gallery. On a scale that perhaps is one of Kienholz’s largest tableau (151 ½ x 383 ¾ x 180”), the *Ozymandias Parade* is the most overt critique of imperial aggression, from a formal point of view, to be mounted by Kienholz. Gone are the subtlety nuanced references to the ‘rights’ of objects; in their place we see what Kienholz refers to as (T.S.s), ‘Trite Symbols,’ his term to describe objects used in the work that he intended to be made overarchingly visible.



Figure 44 Edward Kienholz, *The Ozymandias Parade* (cat. no. 115), 1985 (*Kienholz: A Retrospective*, the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996)

All objects in the *Ozymandias Parade* reference tropes of avarice, propaganda, and religion, and their part in fostering aggression. Mounted on a mirrored arrow with kiosk lighting around its edges, viewers are confronted with an unsettling tableau of a war general riding astride a hunched-over old woman, her face replaced by a skeleton, her arms outstretched and her hands resting on two walking canes. The catalog references her as an ‘Over-Taxed-Payer.’ She is drawing a child’s wagon behind her filled with a barrel, which has several pig snouts – Trite

Symbols – affixed along the top’s opening, with pig figurines grazing on top of the barrel. One hundred-dollar bills, toy army figures, toy tanks, airplanes, cannons, fences and helicopters lie within, around, and on the floor under the figures. The general holds a stick, which dangles a Christian cross and Jewish Star of David in front of the woman’s face, suggesting a motivation of salvation for her hard and physical work. Directly underneath her outstretched, cane-extending arms are four miniature servicemen with grenade or explosive detectors, forging ahead of the monstrous sculpture. In front of the general and Over-Taxed-Payer is another figure – that of a President/Chancellor/Premier/Dictator – astride his horse, yet rather than astride the back of the horse, he is mounted to its underbelly while the horse rears on its hind legs, its front legs fighting through the air above its head. The leader holds the receiver to a red phone, which dangles below his body and suggests that he has or is trying to issue the ultimate wartime command to send his enemies to oblivion. Both his face and that of the general wear white bandanas across their sunglasses, which spell out the word !NO!. Off to the left side of the parade we see a grouping together of figurines – including a pig, an elephant, and native peoples – with a gorilla leading the way several paces ahead of what Kienholz refers to in the piece as the “underdeveloped world” (Kienholz, *NO! Contemporary American DADA* 26). On the periphery of the entire mirrored arrow, Kienholz has placed miniature flags from countries throughout the world, providing us with his commentary that aggression, colonization, extermination, war, and annihilation are ubiquitous to man regardless of nation. A fact that the art historian Ileana Leavens affirms in her catalog essay by suggesting that “Dada annihilated the concept of nationalism, and thereby the notion of duty that it implies” (Leavens, *NO! Contemporary American DADA* 26). Her writing confirms that World War One had heightened man’s inhumanity to man – through the use of war technologies such as gases, air raids, tanks,

submarines, and the like, all of which Kienholz uses in *The Ozymandias Parade* in his coterie of ‘Trite Symbols.’ The Vietnam War, as we have seen in *Eleventh Hour Final*, was an equally inhumane war and one of the first to use guerilla warfare to ensnare its American aggressors. Regardless of which war Kienholz may refer to in his works, what becomes apparent is the universality of man’s complicity in toward aggression. A notion, as we are forced to recall at this juncture, Freud had deduced in “Civilization and Its Discontents,” on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War. The mood, anxiety and unrest to which he refers in this writing is not dissimilar to those during the Vietnam War and the 1960s/70s counter-culture movements that tried to critique and to halt American aggression. This universality comes through in Freud’s words when he writes:

“The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be in this respect precisely the present time deserves special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man” (Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents” 772).

Gone are the ethical concerns of the super ego. Ethics, generally speaking, offer man nothing more than an apparatus of ideals and demands, a framing device that seeks to dictate the terms of the relations human beings have to one another. Which, as Freud rightly suggests, sets the stage for the ultimate and pervasive impossibility of the cultural command to love thy neighbor as thyself. This ‘natural ethic,’ in Freud’s terminology, is not only impossible to fulfill, but also reminds us that perhaps the greatest hindrance to civilization is the “constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another” (770). Enter Dada and its overarching supposition that rebellion and negation – saying “no” to society’s ills – allows us to reevaluate

society itself, and as Leavens writes, “its nature and its illnesses” (Leavens, *NO! Contemporary American DADA* 7).

The curatorial pillars on which the NO! exhibition was set take, first and foremost, the idea that *involved* rebellion has political, ethical, and aesthetic connotations. It is the latter vector, the aesthetic plane, that is of particular interest to this study. The word “no” sums up Dada as an anti-aesthetic modality, and one that carries with it a migration of rebelliousness from modernism’s concerns about art for art’s sake, and into an “art for life’s sake” stance which emerges in the twentieth century. (Leavens, *NO! Contemporary American DADA* 7-8). As a negation of the former, Leavens posits that the readymade object, so central to Marcel Duchamp’s practice, essentially “negates the idea of art as the product of a special sensibility; it is an intellectual game, like chess, made visual” (15). The protestations on behalf of and for a continued relevance of medium specificity are devoid of an outright cultural critique. Abstract expressionism aside, which Craig Owens suggests was a form of protest to representation, the insularity of the triumph of medium specificity and the author’s hand is refuted by the spirit of Dadaism and by Kienholz in particular. Here I suggest a migration away from the necessity of visual (modern) art to legitimize itself. Now it needs to critique – it must critique – the horrors that affect humanity. The erosion of the allegiance to representation decenters rebellion, thrusting upon individual artists the responsibility for carrying forward new tropes of artistic practice, which protest. Kienholz is perhaps the best example of a West coast post studio artist who deals with, essentially, topics the public would prefer to ignore – *to not look at*. As the main premise of the NO! exhibition, the applicability of Dadaism into contemporary art, in particular its characteristic irreverence and negation, is somewhat superficially correlated. It is a relatively easy assessment of Kienholz’s work to cast him as the “indomitable con-man” (from *The Last*



*Time I Saw Ferus* exhibition catalog), as he was referred to early on in his career. Yet, the evolution of his tableaux and his understanding of the found object's 'right,' its language, its ability to migrate into the postmodern world of 'Trite Symbols' is a much more astute engagement with and critique of the cultural detritus which he used so eloquently within his work. Kienholz, in agreeing to exhibit in the NO! exhibition, understood the politics of sculpture and offered, through *The Ozymandias Parade*, a meta-commentary on nation-state leadership and his fundamental belief that the populace wanted peace, and that a few in power, to paraphrase him, "wanted to keep us fighting." This overarching sense of morality characterized Kienholz throughout his career. Indeed, several scholars throughout the exhibition catalogs surveyed in this study allude to his "uncompromising art of serious, moral purpose" (Leavens, *NO! Contemporary American DADA* 8). If, as Leavens suggests, "all NO!s have been assimilated," and that anti-art has become art, collected by museums and acquired by collectors, perhaps what Kienholz is suggesting is an acquiescence to the cultural apparatus for the larger stakes of artistic practice, a post studio practice that, albeit subsumed by itself, attacked from within as culture attacks itself – exists for the betterment of society.

As the introductory text in this chapter suggested, Kienholz gives his viewers an unsettling view into a symbolic sphere that ruptures any given state authority and confuses by dismantling a clear authorial legacy. In doing so, he took a critical stance as an artist who de-figures the symbolic plane and our patterns of recognition, by appropriating discarded artifacts and detritus within his work. As a cultural critic par excellence, Edward Kienholz's tableaux expose the ways in which domination and subjugation, according to Owens, "are inscribed within the representational systems of the West. Representation, then, is not – nor can it be – neutral; it is an act – indeed, the founding act – of power in our culture" (Owens,

“Representation, Power, and Culture” 91). Kienholz demonstrates how artistic production participates in the larger historical and social processes, through direct engagement within a transnational commentary that allows the whole of civilization to be called into question. Such discursive portability, offered by his tableaux, exposes the contradictions and complicity within a dominant social and cultural order, as well as an aesthetic order – modernity – that eschewed such discursivity. Appropriation restores and recuperates this narrative, and in the work of Kienholz, through the detritus of civilization itself.

CHAPTER FOUR  
**On Appropriation: John Baldessari**

We have seen in Kienholz's work acts of devotion – to objects' 'rights,' to another artist's tireless and tedious work with detritus in *The Jesus Corner*, as if to suggest a de-acquisitioning of intrinsic meaning and a repurposing of the meanings we give to objects a priori. Within these lenses emerges another medium within which to view Kienholz's work: *appropriation*. In this chapter, we turn our attention squarely back to Craig Owens's writing, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* to explore further not only appropriation's relationship to Kienholz's work, but also to that of his contemporary, John Baldessari. Doing so will draw connections in an equally important manner to those I distilled by positioning Kienholz's work alongside Owens's writing in "The Allegorical Impulse." De-acquisitioning meaning is an ultimate devotional act of artistic practice, to dismantle further modernism's relationship to the representational apparatus. I suggest appropriation works through the de-acquisitioning of straightforward meaning between signifier and signified, ushering in new authorial claims to meaning and forever changing the artistic control post studio claimed through the work of John Baldessari.

In "*Representation, Appropriation, and Power*," Owens suggests that poststructuralism should be seen as a body of criticism that views representation as an "inextricable part of social processes of domination and control" (Owens, "Representation, Power, and Culture" 88). Poststructuralism's strategy is to critique the art historical discipline's authority, unique language and distinct mode of thinking through specific vectors, including: as a critique of power that is and cannot be neutral; as a critique of the economics of the art world; and finally, and importantly, as a critique of itself. This latter vector is and will become more urgent as a

distinguishing characteristic from art historical modes of analysis and interpretation. Art historical analysis, Owens suggests, views representation as disinterested and politically neutral. Poststructuralism, as I argued previously via Owens, re-inscribes interpretation with processes of domination and control that suggest representation is anything but neutral. Here it is worth pausing to recall that in Kienholz, we have an artist who uses a revival of figurative modes of art making to show domination and control – indeed, he is emphatic in his stance to use such a methodology in the building of his tableaux. Baldessari, as we will see, is subtler in his politics but in no way does the subtlety of his artistic gestures diminish the potency of his work. Baldessari and Kienholz were kindred spirits operating on different ends of the same spectrum to challenge master narratives and art historical discourses of modernity. Kienholz appealed to Baldessari in an “oblique way,” because “he just seemed so far afield from everybody” (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 359). Baldessari admitted this fact openly when critic Christopher Knight interviewed him in 1992 for the Archives of American Art. Clarifying his statement further, Baldessari would add, “I mean it’s the phenomenon that sort of interested me” (359). Here Baldessari’s words find an allegiance with Marcus G. Raskin who proclaimed Kienholz as the first phenomenological artist.

#### 4.1 The Poststructuralist Impulse

Before turning our attention fully to Baldessari, it is worth exploring a remainder, or a blind spot within Owens’s postulations on appropriation that relate to Kienholz’s work specifically. Domination and subjugation, as inscribed within the representational systems of the West, suggest that representation is not nor can it be neutral. Rather, it is an act, as Owens writes, “the founding act of power in our culture” (Owens, “Representation, Power, and Culture” 91). Owens outlines several strategies that appropriation uses to dismantle meaning as tethered to

artistic objects – primarily, and importantly, to paintings. I will turn my attention more acutely to these propositions later, but for the purposes of this specific point, I will focus primarily on one key point Owens makes, but in my estimation, positions inadequately within his writing on appropriation. In a deeply engaging section about the panel between Martin Heidegger and Meyer Shapiro over the Van Gogh painting ‘*Old Shoes*,’ Owens articulates how this philosophical correspondence was still a subject of debate during the 1981 conference of the Modern Language Association (MLA) that put critic Michael Fried and art historian Svetlana Alpers squarely into this debate. 1981, it should be mentioned, was a moment steeped in poststructuralist, postmodernist critique, or what Owens referred to as a “poststructuralist invasion” that Fried and Alpers were defending at the conference.

Owens cites Heidegger’s writing in *Origin of the Work of Art* as one of the three great meditations on art in the history of modern philosophy. The other two, according to Owens, are Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Lectures on Esthetics*. Ultimately, Owens concludes that both writers’ interpretations of the ownership of the shoes rest upon an initial substitution: “of the person for the thing, the animate for the inanimate, the organic for the inorganic. The substitution is not, however, preliminary to the interpretation of the painting – it *is* the interpretation of the painting” (Owens, “Representation, Power, and Culture” 94). Which takes us back to art history’s reliance on the interpretation of a work’s implicit content. As if to reanimate the shoes during the time in which they were painted. Interpretation, Owens reminds us via Derrida, is a compensatory act, retroactively applied to works of art, and as such always responds to “a basic deficiency or lack within the work, which therefore must be supplemented by interpretation” (95). So where, exactly, do we go from the

debates between Heidegger and Shapiro – reanimated by Fried and Alpers? Into a poststructuralist mentality with Owens as our theoretical guide.

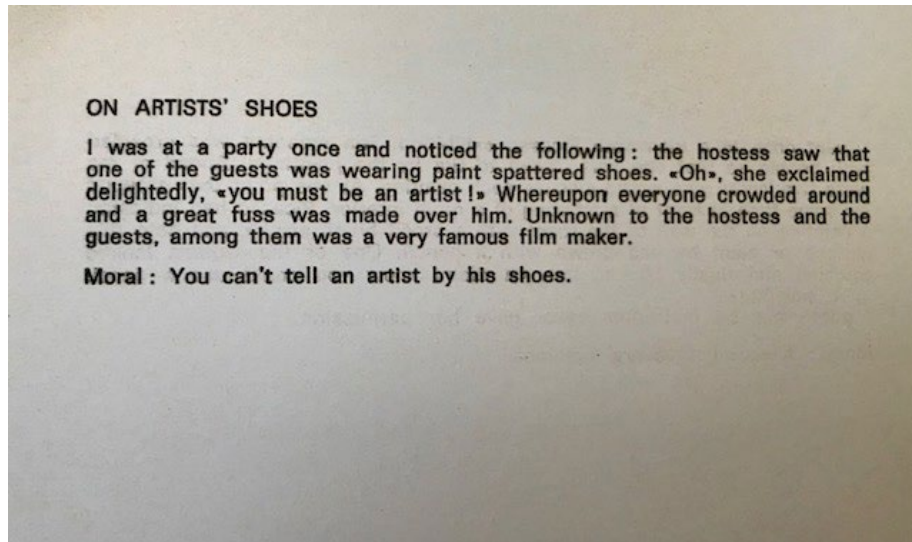


Figure 45 John Baldessari, *On Artists' Shoes 1973* (John Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume One)

Referencing Derrida's *Truth in Painting*, Owens cites three specific terrains for imagining a restitution of the "truth" of the painting in Van Gogh's *Old Shoes*: attribution, possession, and manipulation. Attribution, Owens reminds us, is always a property. Typically, attribution corresponds to inanimate objects that belong to an owner. In this sense, the art historical reliance on attribution is one that seeks to connect works to their authors; it is a restorative gesture. Shapiro's analysis of Van Gogh's shoes, we recall, involves a reliance on still-life as understood objects which are subordinate to man as objects of use, manipulation, and enjoyment, and convey a sense of man's power over them. Owens then takes this further when he asserts that possession is the medium through which representation communicates with power. Indeed, a desire for property, for "power over things," and an equal desire for propriety to adhere to decorum based upon respect for property relations yields back to our general desire for a proper name. Appropriation, then, in the Heidegger/Shapiro debate, is an act of repossession, but

repossession alongside a power dynamic. What Owens neglects in his analysis of this debate is the role that manipulation plays or can play within the hermeneutic field. Kienholz offers a response to fill this theoretical omission (as does Baldessari, which I will illustrate later).

Rather than continue to mediate the debates between interpretation and authorship, Owens rightfully moves the needle forward via poststructuralist analysis that is “an adversarial criticism, conceived in opposition to a dominant cultural order that isolates knowledge into various branches, each endowed with its own object of study and methodological instruments” (Owens, “Representation, Power, and Culture” 91). While art historical analysis wants to ascribe authorial provenance and interpretation that abides by such operational factors, poststructuralism highlights dominant power structures lurking behind such motivations. Representational systems are nothing if not apparatuses of power. They manipulate us as viewers, which is a perversity Kienholz highlights in his work. By suggesting that, as an artist, he was manipulated *by* objects, by their ‘rights,’ he democratizes any impulse toward possession, liberating represented objects from a straightforward authorial legacy. As an artistic methodology and gesture, Kienholz fulfills a legacy of postmodernism through his act of de-acquisition, and as such, offers a devotional act to dismantle modernism’s attachment to representational apparatuses. His defiant manipulation of objects, his allowance for their ‘rights’ to re-appropriate their uses, illustrates clearly Owens’s assertion that, through “appropriation, manipulation, and parody, these artists work to render viable the invisible mechanisms whereby these images secure their putative transparency – a transparency that stems as in classical representation, from the apparent absence of an author” (111). Why Owens omits or neglects manipulation as an important role in dismantling authorship is curious, yet one indication as to why he did so may be reflected by the artists he chose to use in his writing. Kienholz does not appear on Owens’s register. I have inserted

Kienholz within this correspondence intentionally, as yet another interventionist move to reclaim the voices and intention of such an important post studio assemblage artist. Other clues within Owens's work suggest that as a postscript on postmodernism, his work highlights photography and film as the more effective mediums of cultural persuasion, the easier also to navigate the supporting material and ideological apparatuses through their appropriative use. In this light, Owens was squarely tethered to a media-focused discourse, influenced by Walter Benjamin and Marshall McLuhan. Let the record state that Kienholz was, I suggest, the master manipulator and the missing protagonist in Owens's musings on representational power. As an artist who admitted to his own manipulation by the objects with which he worked, Kienholz bears witness to possessiveness, to an equivalent exchange of possession that further displaces authorial legacy through such a feedback loop. If Kienholz fulfills a void in Owens's writings, inserting his discourse and artistic methodology into a theory of manipulation, then it seems important to turn to John Baldessari to illustrate yet another master of appropriation and, specifically, a master of parody, another theoretical vector of appropriation within Owens's writing.

#### 4.2 John Baldessari: Master Concealer

Craig Owens knew Baldessari's work quite well. As one important example, he wrote about Baldessari in an article published in *Art in America* on May 1, 1981, titled "Telling Stories," in which he asserts, among other things, that Baldessari's works both "stimulate and frustrate our desire for meaning" (Owens, "Telling Stories" 129). Citing Baldessari's works that involve the use of parables and allegories, Owens suggests that Baldessari's works produce a sense of indirection, where meanings are concealed or veiled. If meaning is a *property* of works of art and criticism regards meaning as intrinsic to art, then Baldessari's "strategic resources are marshaled" against this, Owens asserts (130). How, exactly, does Baldessari's methodology



deploy such tactics? One response, and indeed my argument, is that Baldessari must be viewed as a master appropriator, a post studio artist who dominates the historical narrative of postmodernity, alongside Kienholz, but through his ardent use of parody. He performs, and indeed the performative aspect of his work shares kinship with the performativity of the archive. For, if we invoke Owens's article title, "Telling Stories," we should expect and anticipate a critique of narrative. Which, as expected, Owens delivers within his theoretical musings on Baldessari as an artist who makes sense out of nonsense. It is worth pausing briefly to note a return to Freud, and in this instance, to his 1905 writing "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious." Owens tees up his writing by suggesting that Baldessari is a master teller of the duplicitous story – or Freud's 'Aufsitzer'(130). Indeed, Baldessari's work uses humor and parody as readily available and accessible artistic tropes. As Freud exposes in his 1905 writing on jokes, as he investigated the essence of jokes, he found their technical acuity was similar to the methods employed in 'dream-work.' Which, to remind us, consists of condensation, displacement, and "the representation of a thing by its opposite or by something very small" (Freud, "Overture" 40) The surplus value we derive from hearing a joke lies in the momentary suspension it gives us from the mental exertion to repress. Repression of an instinctual representative is mobile, Freud argues, demanding a constant, persistent, and exceedingly arduous expenditure of force. Jokes offer a reprieve from this mental work, and suggest a technical device at play to remove the repression of the instinctual representative, an operation that explains Freud's interest in the study of jokes. Interestingly, and germane to this inquiry with Owens as a guide, one of the areas explored by Owens across his writings has to do with the political economy of culture in relation to art. While his motivation was primarily one of comparing the role of the art market and how it relates to the "broader economic processes of

society,” an equally important economic operation is at play within the spheres of repression and Baldessari’s use of parables, allegories, and humor. Or, put more succinctly, the economic operation of appropriation, the concealment of meanings, the sense, which emerges from nonsense, all require an initial reconciliation between concealment and repression – which I suggest operate within an equally economic realm.

Baldessari, Owens writes, uses the notion of error to dismantle a strict tethering of meaning to an artwork. This ‘error’ consists of the effacement and concealment of meaning, which runs counter to our instinctual tendency to interpret. Our desires demand it. An operation not dissimilar to repression, effacement suggests a conscious elimination or an indistinction, a muddling of meaning as well as a desire or intention to re-present something within our consciousness. A displacement of meaning between sign and signifier, which suggests a different kind of economic transaction requiring more nuance. And, to associate this line of inquiry with Owens more intentionally, the interpretive modality that our desires demand is based, in Baldessari’s work, not on a tangibly visible object, but, rather, on its *absence*. “The most conspicuous of his strategy of concealment,” Owens writes, “is to relocate his images within a charged context of story-telling” (Owens, “Telling Stories” 132). If we apply this logic model to the archive, and in particular, the archive of post studio art practice, it becomes more and more evident that Baldessari was most likely intentional in his disregard for leaving one behind. Did he leave the archive missing intentionally, forcing a quest for meaning? Was he ambivalent, uncertain, leaving the quest for meaning up to his successors? Applied retrospectively, the insight Owens gives into understanding Baldessari’s work and the function of narrative within it, I can only logically deduce that Baldessari left it to others to fill in the blanks, which legitimizes me to ventriloquize this treatise on how, exactly, we can create or write the post studio archive

through an imaginary zone, yet one tethered squarely to poststructuralist theory. If, as Owens suggests, Baldessari's narratives are circular, returning to their origins and restating the problems they posed at the outset, and Baldessari's main artistic motivation was to reconcile and to suppress his artistic unease, one would think him a reluctant participant in the development and the stewardship of an official archive. It would be too easy a trap to fall into, and counter-intuitive to his artistic strategies. We are, therefore, left to interpret post studio archive's absence. Baldessari's sleight of hand. In a similar move, as I suggested earlier, Kienholz also left us to interpret the absence of a black man in *Five Car Stud*. Thus, we have at our disposal two examples of concealment from two preeminent post studio artists.

Here it is important to return to the role narrative plays in Owens theories about the postmodern. "Narrative," Owens writes, "plays a compensatory role; it insinuates itself in the place of an original lack of the image, which can only be represented, never resolved" (Owens, "Telling Stories" 132). Therefore, my analysis of an absent or intentionally missing archive is equally compensatory. I am embarking, throughout this project, on an imaginative reconstruction of an object from a verbal description of it, on the verbal recitation of the post studio course description that sparked this entire investigation. I have been duped by Baldessari's own methodology, which Owens suggests is his recurrent strategy. In an equally appropriate gesture, I have taken possession of an archive, but a non-existent archive, a compensatory move for the lack of an original. My narrative, my story of post studio artistic practice, is therefore not a resolution, but rather an equally interventionist, compensatory act. To suggest otherwise amounts to a betrayal of my own devotional act, an act that appropriates an American postmodern methodology. My intervention extends the narrative of postmodernity within a post studio lens.

### 4.3 Compensatory Narrative

Owens writes that Baldessari acknowledged the compensatory aspect of narrative, which, he suggests, also accounts for the artist's interest in allegory. Here it is of interest to situate Baldessari's work alongside an allegorical impulse, as was previously done with the work of Kienholz. Before doing so, it is equally important to create parity between these two post studio artists, demonstrating that Baldessari also used manipulation within his work as a trope of appropriation, and one as stated previously that Owens chose to eschew. Specifically, and importantly, Baldessari shared a concern with Owens about the legacy and legitimacy of painting at a time of unabashed expansion of artistic mediums. The rise of media, including video, film, photography and television, offered artists more latitude than previously available to them before the Second World War. Baldessari was cognizant of this shift, as he migrated from painting into other mediums and felt an unbridled urge to cremate the majority of his early works, all of which were paintings. Baldessari, according to Owens, was influenced by the de Saussurian linguistic deconstruction of the sign/signifier connection. Rather than a linear connectivity, within his course in general linguistics, de Saussure demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, in fact substituting the term *sign* for symbol. This linguistic turn, Owens writes in the 'The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism,' suggests that the symbol "is thus a motivated sign; in fact, it represents linguistic motivation as such" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" 1031). Therefore, according to Owens, the symbol is indeed a motivated sign, while its antithesis, allegory, will be identified as "the domain of the arbitrary, the conventional, the unmotivated" (1031). Allegory is thus recognized as a supplement, or an expression that is added to another expression externally (a posteriori). Baldessari uses language in his work primarily as a supplement, borrowing the term from

Derrida's use of such to suggest the introduction of a double meaning, which is added at times to images, and at other times, supplants them. In a perverse move, Baldessari continued to use the conventions of painting – specifically of easel painting and its reliance on stretched canvas as a frame – “in order to,” as Owens writes, “exploit the expectations that it raises” (Owens, “Telling Stories” 134). Baldessari's manipulation par excellence, therefore, emerges from the modernist terrain of formal painting in order to subvert it alongside allegory.

Before diving into an analysis on how allegory functions within Baldessari's work – and I will do so with specific work he created using painting as his chosen medium – a reference to Owens's own feelings about the status of painting must be inserted for the record. Owens was a very reluctant participant within academia, refusing to anthologize his writings, in particular the critical essays he penned for the journal *October*. In fact, it was not until several years following his death in 1990 that his work was published posthumously as *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. In 2018, an oral history interview, a video titled “Craig Owens: An Interview,” from 1984, was published in its entirety. Originally part of the *On Art and Artists* collection in the Video Data Bank of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the published interview of Owens by Lyn Blumenthal gives several clues and insights into his critical thinking and stance toward painting. An alignment emerges between he and Baldessari, which explains why Owens chose Baldessari as a subject to illustrate his theories on allegory. Published as *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic*, in the introductory text by Lynn Tillman, she suggests that Owens's writings “anticipate and engage current debates about representation, and ideologies, psychoanalysis, structuralism and post structuralism” (Tillman, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 13). This statement is exceedingly important, as it indicates that Owens can and should be considered an American poststructuralist. Speaking with Blumenthal,

the following quote, re-written here verbatim, sets the stage for my analysis of Baldessari's work within an allegorical plane. Referring to his criticism and that of his contemporaries, Owens says, "The real fight for us was being waged on an aesthetic register. It was focused in opposition to a resurrection of easel painting. We were arguing for the death of painting and the absolute imperative that one make photo-based work" (Tillman, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 71). Baldessari performed this death of painting quite literally with the *Cremation Piece*. Also, and importantly, Baldessari emerged as an artist who straddled both modern and postmodern artistic tendencies, and who ultimately chose to insert himself, via his work, into a deliberate violation of esthetic convention, which I have suggested is the definition of post studio practice. Baldessari's violation was a violation of authorship and composition, as Owens suggests, and of "hanging in galleries" (Owens, "Telling Stories 135). Owens's use of the word 'violation' is important, and he himself draws caution to any belief that Baldessari actually set out to *destroy* convention; Baldessari, Owens cautions, was too ambivalent to destroy convention. And, as much as a post studio mentality suggests being averse to "hanging in galleries," Baldessari's career was one in which he saw tremendous success in the conventional exhibition of his work, which yielded many sales and museum acquisitions. A distinction between post studio practice and exhibition practice should be made. While many works created by post studio artists did indeed veer outside of traditional studio conventions, including most obviously, land or environmental art and assemblage, post studio artists did benefit from and voluntarily engage in formal exhibition practices within galleries and museums. What Baldessari and Kienholz, among others, were critiquing within their post studio practices was modernism's hold on narrowly defined conventions of artistic practice – practices which were legitimized by the studio structure itself, favoring painting above all else. If Baldessari was deliberate in his

violation of esthetic convention, perhaps the most strident violation being his *Cremation Piece*, is he not also suggesting, by extension, that the studio functions as an apparatus of power? That it, by definition, fosters the making/creating of what Foucault would refer to as a “museum painting,” reifying the relationship between studio production and museum legitimacy? Could a term such as ‘post studio’ offer a legitimately sovereign space free from such a relationship, dictated by economic exchange? Owens would be the first American poststructuralist to admit that such liberation and sovereignty were not possible.

Owens’s work, first and foremost, addressed certain illusions he had about the economic structure of culture. Sharing an allegiance with French poststructuralists, Owens equally questioned his own theoretical contributions and positioning, and, simultaneously, questioned what interests and purposes intellectual work serves. He questioned the “set of power relations that marginalized work like what was shown in *Pictures* and appeared in our writing, specifically, the power relations of alternative art spaces that gave viewers their first glimpses of such marginalized work” (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 70).<sup>92</sup> Alternative spaces were part of the economic apparatus of the art world, but were not functioning as a critique of the market. Which, is to suggest an equally utopian and displaced belief that applying the term ‘alternative’ could change the commodification of art and the economic market of art sales, any more than a similar application of the term ‘post’ could alter the hold the studio had on dictating the terms of artistic production. However, the term ‘post studio’ and the artists affiliated with such practice – including Baldessari and Kienholz – forever changed the allegiances between artist, studio, and market. It is important to lay claim to the provenance of the term post studio. Although Baldessari was the founder of the post studio program at CalArts, he acknowledged that in reality he appropriated the term from fellow artist Carl Andre, to whom he

credits the first utterance of the term. Andre, in fact, mentioned the term ‘post studio’ during his class ‘Art Now’ at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in December 1969. In a summary of Andre’s artist talk by Peggy Gale, published in *The Last Art College*, he urged his students to “get out of the studio,” and that he considered himself “a post studio artist” (Kennedy, *The Last Art College* 28). In fact, he suggested that “a vacant lot does just as well” as a functioning alternative to a studio. In an irony perhaps not acknowledged previously, it was Kienholz who used a vacant lot – the parking lot at Los Angeles’s Gemini G.E.L. – to realize the first exhibition, albeit a subterranean one, of *Five Car Stud*, to document the finished tableau.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4.4 Appropriation of Easel Painting

Previous writing within this project (*Chapter One*) referenced the opening frontispiece from documenta V’s catalog, which reproduced several French postcards depicting a small girl physically tearing through a painted canvas in an atelier environment. I share a portion of that writing here as a reminder that many post studio artists who participated in the quadrennial exhibition were working precisely against legislated sites of aesthetic judgment, specifically within the painting’s frame and that of the studio.

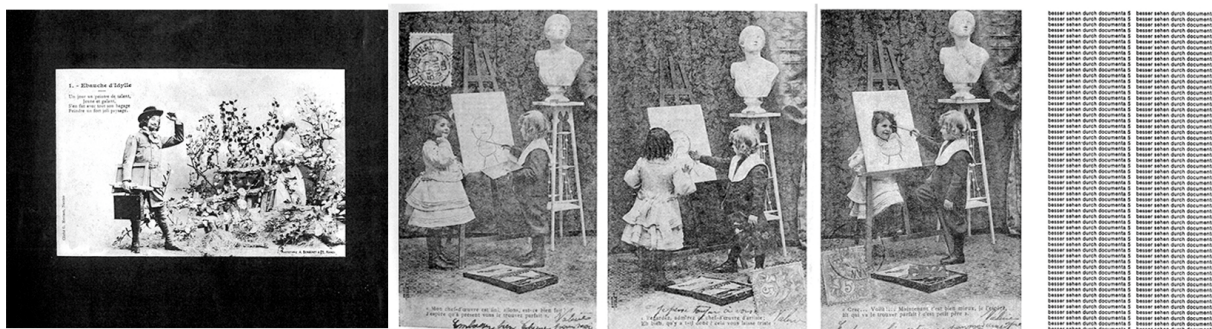


Figure 46 *Frontispiece from documenta V catalog, 1972 (Kassel. Documenta, 5th, 1972. Documenta 5 [i.e. fünf]. [Kassel]: Verlag GmbH, Bertelsmann Verlag.)*

1972’s Documenta V exhibition catalog suggests an emergent critique of the frame for artistic production that lies within the studio and, more specifically, is contained within a painting’s



canvas. The catalog's frontispiece is a series of reprinted French postcards from the nineteenth century. Depicting a traditional, European, atelier environment, the scene is titled "Ebauche d'idylle," or, roughly translated, a "first attempt at perfection." After a young male painter asserts his intention to "paint a beautiful landscape," an interior studio scene unfolds where another young painter, also male, embarks on painting the portrait of a young female model. "Do you like this pose?," he asks. "Be a good girl, be well behaved, and in three strokes I'll paint your portrait." As the scene progresses, it becomes clear that the girl is not satisfied with the outcome, and she proceeds to push her head through the canvas, tearing it down the middle. "Here you go," she says, "now it's much better I hope." "And who is going to find it perfect, its little father."<sup>94</sup> To which we should recall an equally important criticism of painting, as an important vector of postmodern critique. Owens reminds us, "The real fight for us was being waged on an aesthetic register. It was focused in opposition to a resurrection of easel painting. We were arguing for the death of painting and the absolute imperative that one make photo-based work" (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 71). Nothing could have been a more provocative counter message to the status painting has historically held in modern art than the inclusion and public witnessing of Kienholz's tableau *Five Car Stud* into the quadrennial exhibition, documenta V. And, the provocation was made even stronger through Szeemann's curatorial decision to cite the work in the middle of the quad, outside of the Fredericianum, in a stand-alone tent mounted specifically to house the tableau.

documenta V's artistic director, Harald Szeemann, was the first curator to exhibit *Five Car Stud* publicly (I have already suggested its initial private viewing took place in the Gemini G.E.L. parking lot) at this important international exhibition. Szeemann's archives, acquired by the Getty Research Institute, contain important and previously un-reproduced images of

Kienholz's documentation of the tableau, which in themselves offer clues to understand how he wished the work to be documented, and perhaps, published.<sup>95</sup> The X'd out images also suggest a concealment of images too harrowing to confront singularly, as if Kienholz shared Baldessari's adage that "some things are not to be looked at." Taken side by side, images from a contact sheet from Szeemann's archive and Baldessari's 1966-68 canvas *This Is Not to Be Looked At*, seen here together, show an apparent affinity between the two post studio artists.

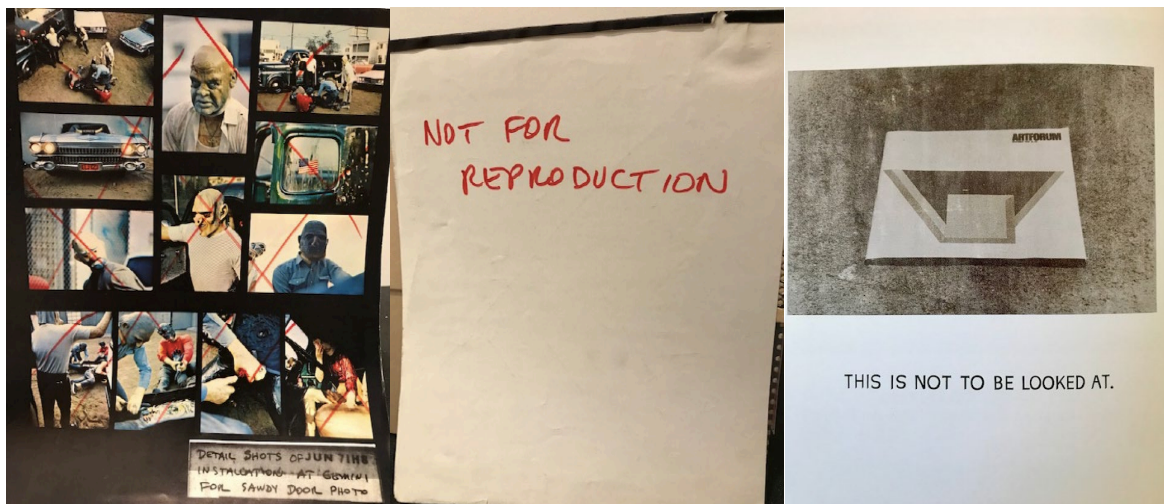


Figure 47 *Five Car Stud*, contact sheet from Harald Szeemann's archive 1969-1971 (Courtesy Getty Research Institute) and John Baldessari *This Is Not to Be Looked At*, 1966-68 (*John Baldessari Catalog Raisonné, Volume One*)

Although Baldessari's work is more tongue-in-cheek than Kienholz's, the reference being his retort to Frank Stella's painting 'Union III,' and also to Stella's phrase, "What you see is what you get," the multiplicity of voices coalesces together to question the visual representation and reception of both modern painting and troubling tableaux. These images offer further clues to support my earlier assumption that Kienholz was intentional in his statement that in reality there is no black man in *Five Car Stud*, suggesting a concealment of metaphor which were held within the tableau. What I intend to illustrate at this juncture, however, is how Baldessari used

appropriation – his violation of esthetic convention, to use Owens’s words – and his alliance with Owens to wage an all-out war against painting; specifically, against easel painting.

Returning to Owens, in “Telling Stories” he stated that he believed Baldessari’s work functioned in a register of esthetic error. And, as a reminder, as a deliberate violation of several esthetic conventions, including: authorship, composition, and hanging in galleries. Owens also cites Baldessari’s work that illustrates this esthetic error most acutely; a series he made about the rules – the ‘do’s and don’ts’ for making artwork. Commonly referred to within art historical scholarship, this series of work is not the focus of this writing. However, as a foundation it is worth referencing two such works in particular, to shed light upon how this work, in Yve-Alain Bois’ words in the first volume of Baldessari’s *Catalog Raisonné, Volume One* function as offences, as affronts to artistic conventions, which take “various guises, but it always consists in insulting art (its codes, institutions, actors, discourse, etc.)” (Bois, *John Baldessari Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 5). Baldessari’s seminal work, often cited as the preeminent example of artistic offensiveness, is a 1966-68 canvas titled *Wrong*.

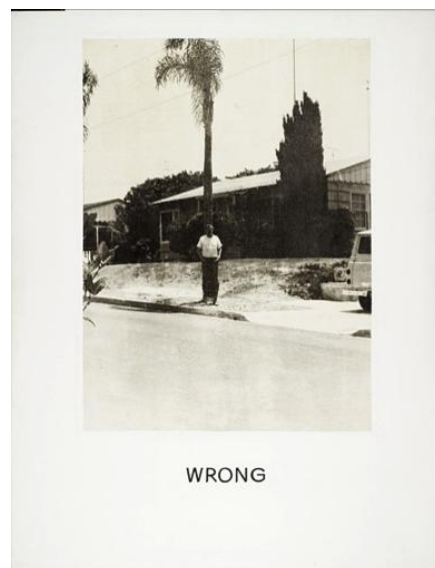


Figure 48 John Baldessari, *Wrong*, 1966-68 (*John Baldessari, Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*)

Working with photographic emulsion and acrylic on canvas, the work depicts Baldessari standing in front of a palm tree, his tall figure blending in with the tree's trunk, as if the tree is growing up and out of his head. Behind the tree is the front lawn of the house he was living in at the time, on East 1<sup>st</sup> Street in National City, California. Under the image is the word *WRONG* in all capital letters. Baldessari's wit and wry humor comes through in this not-so-subtle critique of how to compose a picture, in this case, a photograph. Artistic convention would dictate the terms of such a composition and view this image as breaking compositional ground rules that would prefer Baldessari's body not block the image of the tree. The humor in this work is grounded by the textual admonishment that such a compositional strategy, for that matter, could be "wrong." In a 1992 oral history interview with Christopher Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari," Baldessari discusses restrictions placed on artwork, acknowledging that such admonitions as "you can't do that" happen because it "wouldn't fit neatly into art history" (Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari," 363). By art history, here Baldessari is critiquing canonical, modernist tropes of artmaking and also obliquely referencing the commercial art market. The image *Wrong* offers a secondary clue into what motivated him to do such a work, and indeed other provocative, anti-painting 'paintings,' which I describe later. At the time he was living in National City, he was greatly influenced by European conceptual art, and in particular, through the copies of paintings his mother, who was Danish, would bring back from her travels to Europe. In fact, he credits his mother with fostering his burgeoning interest in photography, reading, and poetry: "It was a way again of beginning to live in your head," he states, "rather than living in National City" (Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari," 358).<sup>96</sup>

The world Baldessari dwelled within psychically was a skewed world, using conceptual art practice to frontload an idea, an attitude, or a concept. Much of his work uses humor and parody to achieve his desired outcome. A cursory analysis of *Wrong* certainly highlights his use of humor. Yet, there is a much more substantive critique operating within the work, in particular, his belief that “art could be something else” (Knight, “The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari,” 358). The use of text within a painting was a precisely forbidden move, something he viewed as beyond painting, and indeed a methodology that will emerge within his subsequent works of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. *Wrong* is on the surface a simple piece. The use of humor, however, belies a significant mental anguish that Baldessari was reckoning with. Yve-Alain Bois picks up on this clue in an oblique way, yet worth mentioning and considering – he also references Freud’s analysis of jokes, as did Owens initially, and like Owens, Bois argues that Baldessari’s use of jokes in his work “fail to make sense out of nonsense,” and, therefore, do not “correspond to Freud’s definition of a good joke, and are rather, pseudo-jokes.” By pseudo, Bois picks up on and acknowledges an ambivalence and discord between Baldessari’s intentions and the reception of his work. At this point in the trajectory of his work, Baldessari was experiencing significant unease about his work and his future artistic development. He had yet to take the defiant stance we see in *Cremation Piece*. His jokes, his critique of the do’s and don’ts of artistic convention were foundational, contingent, tentative, and, in Baldessari’s view, bogus or spurious attempts to reconcile the divide between what is sensical versus nonsensical. As a reluctant admirer of and believer in Baldessari’s intentions, Bois emerges as an important voice to insert into the critical discourse on Baldessari’s work. Bois, I suggest, offers a refutation to the naive notion that Baldessari simply wanted to see the world “awry or slightly off-kilter, or balancing on one foot” (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 364). As if to suggest that

Baldessari was not naively leading us into a trap, instead of calling Baldessari a “master teller of the duplicitous story,” as did Owens, Bois asks instead to suspend this accolade and use another mechanism of psychoanalytic theory, *denial*, to situate his work. Denial, as evidenced in Baldessari’s work, is a psychoanalytic trope within the hermeneutic field. By outright denying that he used humor intentionally, are we not then obligated to see his use of such a strategy as compensatory, mitigating the deep sense of uncertainty about his own work and the world around him?

As written previously, nothing demonstrated this unease and need for recompense more than Baldessari’s *Cremation Piece*. Within that work Baldessari injected a fair amount of humor, including the erection of a plaque commemorating his own death, and taking out a public announcement in a local paper to announce his – and not his painting’s - end per se. The cremation occurred several years after his continuation of examining painting, but afresh and in an expanded field that merged text with painting in an overtly instructive manner – setting the stage for perhaps the greatest acts of parody he would create – 1971’s *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* and, in a migration into video, *I Am Making Art*, of the same year. The year of the last painting he made that was cremated is 1967. The migration from abstract and figurative work that comprises the cremated work in general, offer a stark contrast to the instructive work, laden with textual overlays that comprised his output in the years immediately following the conclusion of that modernist trope of painting that comprised his artistic output between 1957-1967. Specifically, the years 1966-1969. *Wrong* is but one of several such works that aim to critique painting. His series of works titled *Commissioned Paintings*, made in 1969, took authorship to an entirely new level. This series of paintings also continued the notion of instruction that his works between 1966-1969 inaugurated. It is worthy of a deeper inquiry, as

several connections emerge between Baldessari as an artist and Baldessari as a teacher, and may begin to illustrate why he founded the post studio at CalArts, a program, it should be recalled, that aimed to question originality in art, process and place, art as time and art as experience, order, and durability.

Baldessari's work during the period 1966-1969 embodies the attributes of the post studio course he founded at CalArts: Irreverent, questioning aesthetic values, and deeply skeptical of what constitutes originality. The *Commissioned Paintings* series questioned authorship and ruptured the relationship to an original author. Abandoning painting entirely, Baldessari commissioned painters whom he had met at various county fairs as a child to paint from slides he had taken. The idea for this series came to Baldessari from his fellow conceptual artist Al Held. In an artist statement – one of many inventoried in Volume One of his *Catalogue Raisonné*, Baldessari recalls that it was Held who is reported to have said, “All conceptual art is just pointing at things” (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 376). Using Held's belief as a guiding post, Baldessari acted it out by asking an artist he knew, a friend, to point to things – mundane and quotidian – yet, things nonetheless that interested him visually. Baldessari then asked fourteen painters from the fairs he had attended in his youth to paint a copy of an image of their choosing from the slide inventory. In order to complicate further an authorial lineage, Baldessari then added another layer onto the canvases when he had professional sign painters add the text, “A PAINTING BY...” to each.



Figure 49 John Baldessari, *Commissioned Paintings*, 1969  
 (John Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One*)

Baldessari's intentions in this series, he recalls within the artist statement, was to give his viewers a chance to interrogate the idea of connoisseurship, by deconstructing and ascribing subjectively their own judgments as to how each finger was painted by the various sign painters. By taking such an approach, Baldessari pre-assigned each viewer's relation to the work, in a prescriptive move that Owens refers to as 'reception esthetics,' taking the term from its literary studies provenance and moving it into the aesthetic field. He also pre-assigned the authorial provenance of each work by deliberately adding the text "A PAINTING BY...", further complicating the work's lineage because the image, in fact, had been pre-ordained by Baldessari himself. The images, we recall, were already made – taken by Baldessari and developed as slides. A hyperrealism emerges, which blurs the field of reality - a postmodern methodology. Owens writes: "In the visual arts, the postmodernist critique of representation proceeds by a similar attempt to undermine the referential status of visual imagery, and, with it, its claim to represent reality as it really is, whether this be the surface appearance of things (realism) or some



ideal order lying behind or beyond appearance (abstraction). Postmodernist artists demonstrate that this “reality,” whether concrete or abstract, is a fiction, produced and sustained only by its cultural representation” (Owens, “Representation, Appropriation, and Power” 111). Owens brilliantly calls out how a postmodern artist such as Baldessari is attempting in this series specifically, to dismantle modernism’s attachment to representational apparatuses. Which representation is the original? Is it Baldessari’s, because he pointed at the thing that is represented in the work first? Or is it the imposter, Baldessari’s surrogate painters, who brought the image to life in a sanctified space of a canvas? Or, is it the sign painters, who actually superimposed the name of the artist who painted it?

Baldessari, in his interview with Christopher Knight, gives us some clues as to how he would answer this complicated scenario. Locked within the canvas is an equally complicated, referential debate between all three protagonists (by three, I mean for each discrete canvas). What Baldessari asks the viewers of this work to consider is connoisseurship. Or, to state it another way, his assumption is that viewers of a series or even a lone painting would, by default of the way in which the work is presented, assume that there is a judgment of taste to confer. Baldessari traps his viewers into thinking that taken together, viewers would necessarily pass their own critical judgments and select which “artist” painted the best, most realistic and accurately depicted image. He sets up this trap by offering visual clues, in his words, “such as a canvas and stretcher bars,” which read as art. (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 358). Baldessari most likely, therefore, would not be interested in knowing how his viewers would assign subjective platitudes regarding which painting was the best, the most accurate, the most convincing representation of an object pointed to by a finger. Rather, he would be more interested in reclaiming his authorial provenance as having been the one to set the work in

motion in the first place. Here, framing re-emerges – the frozen moments, he says, that he wanted to know about – the “excluded moments, before and after the frozen scene” (Baldessari, *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* 358). To reclaim the actions, intent, and concept as his own, and outside of sanctioned space which a canvas holds.

#### 4.5 Toward Pedagogy

The post studio program Baldessari founded at CalArts aimed to question originality in art, process and place, art as time and art as experience, order, and durability. *The Commissioned Paintings* embody this ethos and also function as a critique of art history. Art history, Owens suggests, is power’s collaborator. Art history also dictates the presentation of work alongside a predictable, dominant social and cultural order. Baldessari was acutely aware of this legacy, using the visual clues of the canvas and stretcher bars to lure his viewers into a known realm, only to subvert it. His humor – his positioning of fingers pointing to objects to draw one’s attention to directly in the *Commissioned Paintings* series, enact the art historical relationship between what is presented and what is received. These images set up a judgment, a critique of aesthetic beauty, by asking us to actively look and engage with a depicted object. And, unbeknownst to us, what actually is critiqued is not the depicted object, but the provenance of the work in a dominant social and cultural order. As an ally to poststructuralist thinking, Baldessari would take his disaffection with the conditions and terms of humanist discourse and place it into a pedagogical landscape of post studio instruction at CalArts. Although, as previously written, Baldessari did not coin the term ‘post studio,’ he affiliated with its potentiality to refute the restrictions, the ‘do’s and don’t’s’ of art historical mandates, dismantling the attitude that “you can’t do that” because it “wouldn’t fit neatly into art history” (Knight, “The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari” 363). The influence these maxims had on Baldessari are

embedded squarely into his approach to teaching. He used similar techniques in the classroom as those that guided his own work, particularly in the years leading up to both the *Cremation Piece* and the founding of CalArts – both of which occurred in the same year. The technique he frontloaded within his teaching was to try to challenge everything conventional that he felt had been handed to him. Returning to his interview with Knight, a few anecdotes emerge to more fully support his methodology. His first being his thoughts on the title of the program, post studio. It seemed to Baldessari that the term was “more broadly inclusive, and would indicate to people the class would not be about daubing away at canvases or chipping away at stone, that there might be some other kind of class situation. And so I elected to use that and it seemed to work” (Knight, “The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari” 360).

Art history, Owens suggests, is power’s collaborator. Baldessari borrowed this maxim, it seems, to suggest equally that pedagogy also is an accessory to power. In particular, the pedagogical turn he shepherded at CalArts, eschewing high plastic art traditions, and painting in particular, advanced artistic methodology and discourse within an educational apparatus. I suggest the flexibility that educational institutions such as CalArts gave to their faculty to adopt new modes of making and thinking about art outpaced and eclipsed art history’s ability to understand and to interpret the shifts occurring within a post studio context. Therefore, pedagogy’s power actually eclipses that of art history as a discipline. The pedagogical platforms of post studio practice at CalArts make evident that within the transmission of transgressive knowledge exchanges, a highly political attitude emerged within the 1970s with lasting implications for postmodernism. Which is what Owens so eloquently argued for in his writing. Under the influence of Rosalind Krauss, he was arguing for cultural history, rather than a history of the disciplines for art history. Speaking in his interview with Lyn Blumenthal, he states that

what influenced the journal *October* was their desire to “make the case for the relevance and importance of this new critical activity, which most people in the art world were at the time fairly ignorant of” (Owens, *Craig Owens: Portrait of A Young Critic* 62). This ‘new critical activity’ was the critical inquiries forged by French poststructuralism. While very much alive in Europe, and, Owens contended, affecting the American academy as well, it had little or no effect on art criticism specifically. Owens asks, “But to what extent have their texts influenced contemporary artists?” (262).<sup>97</sup> Owens liberates the artist’s voice, laying the groundwork for their post studio intervention. He allows for them to speak on their own terms, seemingly passing a judgement that the debates over modernism’s fate are irrelevant; as well as how to position postmodernism within a critical aesthetic field. Here an interesting convergence between Owens and Baldessari’s outlook on art history becomes evident. Owens was a self-proclaimed poststructuralist theorist. Baldessari was equally influenced by art journals, in particular, European journals. He also was known to have a strong affinity for the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Yet, Baldessari had a much more deliberate sense of how he engaged within poststructuralist discourse, as Yve Alain Bois suggests, and that was in a very arbitrary manner, intentionally so. Not, as Bois continues, in the motivated manner that other conceptual artists operated – most intentionally, Marcel Duchamp. Which is an equally interesting divergence to consider: Baldessari was deeply influenced by Duchamp, whose first retrospective was mounted in Baldessari’s backyard, metaphorically speaking, at the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1963. And, in a gesture of kinship with Duchamp’s artistic practice and import, Baldessari references him within the post studio course description, which references, among other things, “The investigation of such questions and issues as: Is the object necessary – originality in art – must art be visual – what is order – durability – place and process – art as experience – art as time -, etc.? The student should be

familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.”<sup>98</sup> In his oral history interview with Christopher Knight, Baldessari recalled how deeply influenced he was by not only Duchamp’s work, but specifically, by seeing the work in situ. Progress – changes in art history according to Baldessari, “come about from misinformation” (Knight, “The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari” 357). This belief equally influenced his approach to teaching at CalArts, which liberated post studio practice formally and forever, from its reliance on modernism.

The misinformation of which Baldessari speaks, which guides the shaping of art history and art-historical discourse, is steeped, it seems, in an eschewal of allegorical and appropriative methodologies, supporting Owens’s claims. Referent dismantling abounds in Baldessari’s work, and certainly in Duchamp’s as well. This ethos accompanied Baldessari’s as he founded the post studio art program at CalArts. He brought a distinct European conceptual bent into the classroom, bringing catalogs and artists’ books back with him from his constant travel between Europe and California. Essentially, Baldessari enacted a similar methodology as Harald Szeemann’s, who curated documenta V. In 1972, Szeemann had brought together conceptual artists from all over the world into that exhibition and also, earlier, into *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* (1969). Often credited with developing a new form of exhibition curation, Szeemann highlighted collaborations with artists and a globally oriented vision of contemporary culture. His exhibitions are often cited as challenging traditional narratives of art history. *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* is one of the best examples of this vision. Baldessari was equally an emissary and a trailblazer in terms of the access he was giving his students to new and expansive artistic practice, and all from an art college in the sleepy southern California town of Valencia. Between 1960-1984, Baldessari had twenty-six solo exhibitions in Europe, compared to four in Los Angeles. From the outset, the post studio

program differentiated itself from other programs in this manner. The access to contemporary catalogs, magazines, and slides, afforded to its students under Baldessari's tutelage, to emerging post studio practice specifically, led Baldessari to proclaim: "I would wager the students had probably the quickest access to these things of any art school in the U.S" (Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari" 361). His teaching technique was, at its core, a systematic challenge to everything conventional that he felt had been handed to him. He abandoned teaching painting completely, opting instead to start video and film, alongside other expanded media. Baldessari was a firm believer in the fact that art cannot be taught. "You can set up a situation where art might happen," he said, "but I think that's the closest" (Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari" 361). While he never went as far as his contemporary, Joseph Beuys, in the latter's admonition that anyone has the capacity and ability to become an artist, his pedagogical approach suggests that he would most likely be in alignment with Beuys in that respect. Similarly, he, like Beuys, approached teaching from a vantage point that accessibility was key. He viewed his art as an example or a metaphor for the things he was dealing with in class. His 'do's and don't's,' *WRONG*, and *Commissioned Paintings* are but a few examples of this type of instructive art. Yet other examples abound to support Baldessari's further mantra: "If you think that can't be art – that's exactly the point where you should begin to think that it could possibly be art" (Knight, "The Early Years: An Interview with John Baldessari" 365).

This quote by Baldessari offers a succinct summation of the driving ethos behind his pedagogy. It links nicely to another of his beliefs; mainly, that pedagogy is one of throwing people off balance. In Volume One of his *Catalogue Raisonné*, Baldessari's class assignments from CalArts are reprinted, offering further insight into how his own practice was, indeed,

metaphorically superimposed onto his lesson plans. ‘Cal Arts Post Studio Art: Class Assignments (Optional)’ from 1970, the first year of his teaching tenure there, offer two compelling avenues within which we can explore this relationship (making work and teaching) in-depth: the first is the irreverence that comes through by the title of the piece, which suggest making work is not absolutely necessary if students have an option to comply with the assignments in the first place. Secondly, the nature of the assignments themselves – which indicate Baldessari’s frustration with representation and the authorial legacy of the artist. They underscore a post studio mentality in and of themselves. A few examples can offer insight into my assertions.

In fall 1970, Baldessari commenced his teaching tenure at CalArts, which was using an interim campus in Burbank, California in advance of the Valencia, California campus being finished. His course was called ‘Post Studio Art: Problems and Issues.’ In taking the name post studio, Baldessari also acknowledged and attributed the term to fellow artist Carl Andre, as previously mentioned. And here we return to the beginning of this entire project: the clue from CalArts’s archive: Baldessari’s course description. It is exceedingly apt that this evidence is pedagogical. It reifies my claim that pedagogy is power’s collaborator. Working in silence within an institution to gather and to contest the misinformation Baldessari argued was what actually advances art history. Parts of his course description are worth reciting: “The following current attitudes will be explored: pop, minimal, ecological, anti-form, anti-illusion, information, language, and concept. The investigation of such topics as: originality in art, place and process, art as time, durability art as experience. Is the object necessary? Must art be visual? What is order?”<sup>99</sup> Is he not also suggesting, through his lines of pedagogical inquiry, that the studio itself may not be necessary? We see clearly within this course description a counter-attack on

representation and originality, two important themes tethered to modernism. We also see an allegiance to John Dewey's pragmatism in a nod to the experiential side of art. His probe into "ecological, anti-form, anti-illusion, information, language, and concept," further indicate a steady migration away from 'plastic art' into areas where an object holds no authority as previously understood via modern art. Authorship also is questioned, as is the baseline confrontation he makes by asking "Must art be visual.?" If, and with his course description is seems a logical assumption, new and expansive forms of art making would be explored and encouraged within post studio generally, the pivot to other forms of artistic production (including language, process, durability, the ephemeral, etc.) and the meta-critique he offers, it seems, are in themselves potent critiques of the studio. The name of his class begs this inquiry. His class assignments further this line of thinking, which I address next.

#### 4.6 John Baldessari's Penance

On the first day of his first post studio course at CalArts, Baldessari disseminated a list of 109 optional class assignments and ideas for artwork. Seven typed pages memorialize this act and are reprinted in Volume One of Baldessari's *Catalogue Raisonné*.

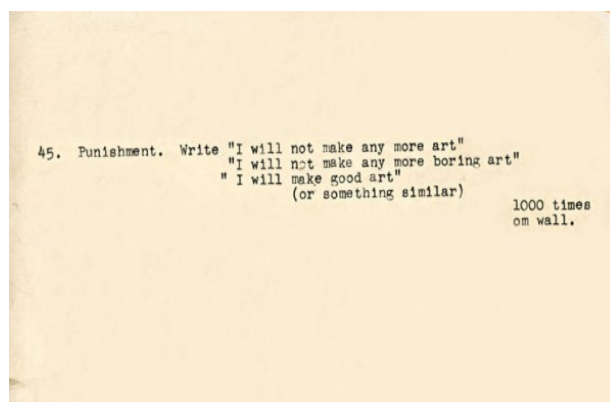


Figure 50 John Baldessari, *Class Assignments*, 1970 (John Baldessari *Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume One)



Of the 109 discrete optional assignments, three offer further evidence that Baldessari aimed to critique the studio as the legislative site for making art: Assignments 6, 13, and 45, respectively. Assignment no. 6 reads: “How can gallery use be subverted, as in land art? Exchange localities with another business? Photo gallery sq.ft. for sq.ft. and paste up another space? One way glass in front of gallery?” Assignment no.13 reads: “How can a gallery space be used rather than put art objects into it?” Assignment no. 45 reads:

Punishment. Write

“I will not make any more art”

“I will not make any more boring art”

“I will make good art”

(or something similar)

1,000 times

on wall.<sup>100</sup>

Assignment no. 45 sets the stage for another seminal piece Baldessari would go on to realize at another art school, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) in Halifax, Canada. Offering a call and response across the North American continent, the work, titled *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, debuted in 1971 and offers more insight into how Baldessari’s work underscored his pedagogical allegiance to post studio practice. Also, and germane to this project, the year previously – 1970 – was marked by NSCAD’s hosting of *The Halifax Conference* on October 5 and 6. The term post studio, we recall, was uttered by artist Carl Andre in a class he taught at NSCAD, also in 1970. Andre was one of several participants in the conference, which also included Joseph Beuys, Daniel Buren, Al Held, Mario Merz, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and Robert Morris, among others. At the present juncture in this writing, my intention is to make the connection between discussions occurring at NSCAD and the relationship to Baldessari, who, although was not a participant at the conference, had established the CalArts poststudio program only a few months earlier. That Baldessari, then, would mount

and exhibition a year later in Halifax with students from NSCAD, extending a course assignment from his CalArts students to the students in Nova Scotia, holds significance through its suggestion that Baldessari was a silent participant in the conference itself, not unlike his silent participation within the provenance of post studio's archive.

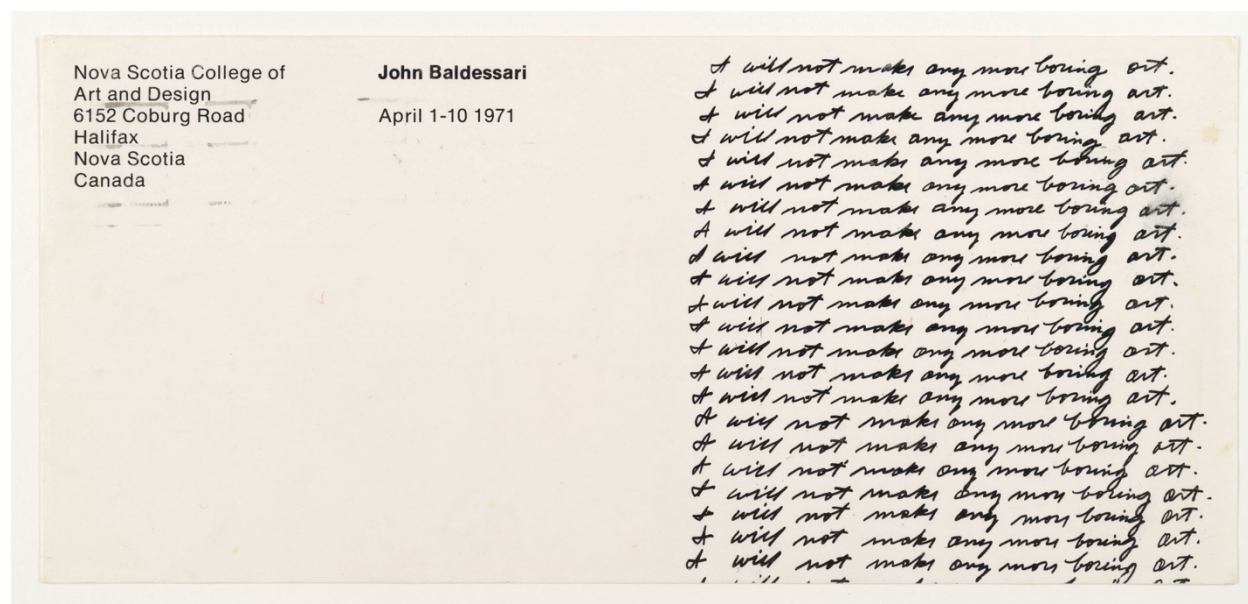


Figure 51 John Baldessari, Exhibition Announcement for *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* 1971 (*The Last Art College*)

*I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is, above all else, an act of penance. Not unlike Kienholz's devotional acts, Baldessari's act of penance relates to both denial and affirmation; a theme extended here from his earlier *Cremation Piece*. In Kienholz, we see an artist who re-inscribed to objects their natural 'rights.' Affirming their rights by denying any ultimate possession – and showing the futility of thinking that possession is even possible. Baldessari also uses the binary of denial and affirmation in this seminal work. The way in which his text moves from “I will not make any more art,” to “I will not make any more boring art,” to “I will make good art” elaborates this binary. At first, it seems, Baldessari is reluctant to make any art,

denying his artistic calling. What he is really denying, is painting, boring and mundane easel painting that he ultimately burned, hoping that art could be something more. Then, in the next phrase, he qualifies his statement further, and there is in this phrase a burgeoning affirmation that he will continue to make art, just not *boring* art. And, finally, his final phrase in the punishment piece is an unqualified affirmation that “I will make good art.” His modus operandi is caught within the subjective judgment of taste, simultaneously poking fun at the rules and legislation of subjectivity in the art world. What constitutes good art?

*I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* insults the codes of art, borrowing a move from poststructuralism. Front and center, his grand rupture of authorial rights moves the palimpsestic needle into surrogacy, by using others to complete his work, and to engage in his act of penance. In September 1970, the same time he began teaching his post studio class at CalArts, Baldessari was invited by Charlotte Townsend, then director of the Mezzanine gallery at NSCAD, to mount an exhibition. Staged April 1-10, 1971, the work was a temporary installation, comprised of graphite on the wall, dimensions variable, the original installation ultimately destroyed, and memorialized by a series of prints from the lithography workshop at the school that worked with well-known contemporary artists. The work also was recreated three times, including at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2010. In an undated draft letter to Townsend, Baldessari wrote, “I’ve got a punishment piece. It will require surrogates since I can’t be there to take my self-imposed punishment, but that’s ok since the theory is that punishment should be instructive for others.(...) The piece is this: from ceiling to floor should be written by one or more people one sentence under another the following statement: ‘I will not make any more boring art’” (*The Last Great Art College* 98). For the duration of the exhibition, over a ten-day period, surrogate students from NSCAD wrote the text for Baldessari, performing his penance. Baldessari never

made the trip to Canada, instead sending instructions from California, for both the wall piece and the lithography print. To this day, Baldessari's piece is associated with NSCAD, in fact, it remains the preeminent marketing slogan for the school.

Appropriation of an author – in this instance, Baldessari's appropriation of the one chosen and identifiable author – is best understood within the penance he asked others to perform. The fact that the work *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* was instructive in nature, and indeed was written approximately 4,000 times throughout the exhibition, underscores his pedagogical stance that bled often into his own work – both a nonchalant attitude and non-allegiance to his own hand. Eric Cameron, in his writing in *The Last Great Art College*, a compendium of essays and reproduced projects from NSCAD, refers to Baldessari's piece as “lines of scholarly penance,” and, writing further, “In that context, the activity picks up the connotations of the school situation; when his own sample instructions are enlarged to form a print, the emphasis shifts to the implicit academism of conceptual art.” (Cameron, *The Last Art College* 48). If Baldessari's work can be framed in an academic yoke of conceptual art, or ‘idea’ art, it must be done with a grain of salt, with the nonchalant California attitude, which he embodied, lest we take his penance too seriously. Here we are reminded that Baldessari used humor as a counter – an antidote to the perils of what was ramping up in the postmodern art world: over-intellectualism. Baldessari was critiquing many tropes of modernism, and, no doubt, did so in a seemingly intellectual manner. He is, I suggest, performing the critique of the postmodern art world, which Owens vowed to be a necessary component of postmodernity, and Baldessari is doing it in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* as a surrogate himself, as a poststructuralist imposter that takes Derrida's concept of *Darstellung*, or presentation and presence to an exceedingly hyperbolic terrain. As a repetition and replica of a visual experience,

and an exceedingly tangible physical presence as a wall text testimonial, Baldessari critiques instruction, the receivership of information, authorship, of emission and reception, which form the building blocks and pillars associated with painting's representational apparatus. Baldessari's piece places multiplicity squarely in the place of the reader, in a move away from the author and in a gesture back to Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author." Is this work a testimonial to the power of instruction? Why would his surrogates take his instruction, his penance, as their own responsibility? As mentioned previously, *The Halifax Conference* that was held the previous fall (October 5 and 6, 1970) was offering its own response to the changing artistic landscape brought on via postmodernity, and was equally challenging conventions of art practice through pedagogy. The trans-continental call and response, it seems, was purporting a new methodology of art practice. Baldessari's penance should be seen as pedagogy, and equally, his retrospectively inscribed, participatory gesture to the conference itself. In this view, we can situate the NSCAD piece and performance – a scholarly penance – as a collective, shared allegiance to post studio practice.

#### 4.7 The Allegorical Return

The multiplicity of voices and of hands used to create, to enact Baldessari's pedagogical penance, harken back to Barthes's reclamation of the term multiplicity as one focused in the place of the reader rather than the author. This expansive move by Baldessari, it seems, flips the Barthesian script, so to speak, and repositions Baldessari's understanding of – and demand for – a new means or lens with which to eschew a sovereign authorial hand.<sup>101</sup> And, by extension, eschewing the studio as a hallowed ground for authority and sovereign authorship. Within this pivot it is vital to also recall Owens's writing on allegory specifically, to understand how Baldessari emerges as not only an artist to embrace allegory in his work, but also to see him as a

demagogue who liberated artists from the studio, freed from the studio as a confining space of genius and the authorial artist's hand, toward a post studio mentality.

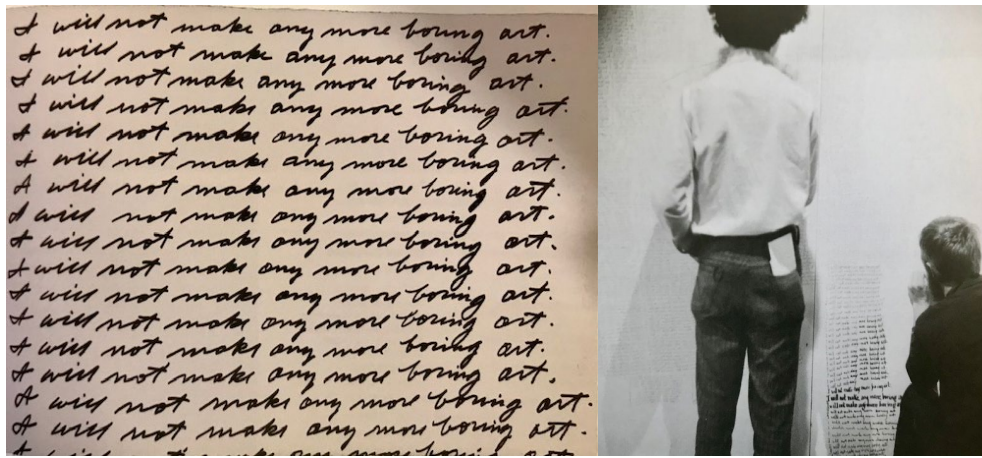


Figure 52 John Baldessari, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* 1971 (John Baldessari Catalog Raisonné, Volume One)

In 1971, Baldessari made his first print, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, at NSCAD's Lithography Workshop, a signature of the school's enduring legacy. The print emanated from his Mezzanine gallery exhibition of the same title, created between April 1-10, 1971, which he called, a 'punishment piece.' An important linkage between this work and allegory brings us squarely back into Owens's theorizations about allegory, its relationship to postmodern art practice, and offers another important lens through which to position Baldessari's work. For context, NSCAD's Lithography Workshop opened in 1969, and allowed, according to Eric Cameron, writing in *The Last Art College*, for "the removal of barriers created by the presuppositions of an autographic concept" (Cameron, *The Last Art College* 49). Cameron had taken a position at NSCAD in 1976 following a ten-year tenure at Leeds University and seven years at the University of Guelph, Canada, as Chair of the Art Department. His writing in *The Last Great Art College* makes important theoretical distinctions between autographic and allographic work; specifically, as illustrated by the lithographs made at NSCAD's workshops.

Autography, the act of inscribing one's name or signature to a work, photograph, writing, print, and the like, is an important vector to understand Baldessari's evolution as a post studio artist. Returning to Cameron's writing in *The Last Art College*, we are confronted with an important treatise, which illuminates a distinction between autographic and allographic procedures. Cameron suggests that this distinction encompasses "not only the fact of 'self-made' or 'other-made,' but a whole complex of issues like the distinguishing of such constitutive factors and the establishment of notational schemes and systems" (48-49). Absent within this dichotomy is any reference to or acknowledgement of the 'ready-made.' Kienholz best espoused the notion of a 'ready-made' (as previously written), through his belief system that objects have their own, legitimate rights. Returning to Baldessari, his *auto-da-fé* of 1970, *Cremation Piece*, was an unabashed atomization of the autograph. It ritualized his annunciation of allography. *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* succeeded this work and, in an iterative move addressing the concept of an autograph, Baldessari asked others to add their hands, their autographical embodiment of the refrain - 4,000 times. The students performed his reluctant autography. The discourse between the *Cremation Piece* and *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* holds significance for several reasons: first, the penance of the latter reifies for Baldessari and proclaims that, once and for all, his paintings and early work were nothing if not boring representations of modernist tropes of art; secondly, it manifests his pedagogical stance, via post studio, that art should defy convention. And just how *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* defies convention rests squarely within an allegorical terrain. Here we must pause and reflect further on Cameron's assertion that, "When art finds itself in a state of flux between modalities, as was the case around 1970, significance attaches variously to different aspects of that complex" (Cameron, *The Last Art College* 48-49). Less about concerns of the fragmentary and the imperfect, which suggest a

harkening back to a European poststructuralist concern with and debate over postmodernist aesthetics and characteristics, certainly as preoccupied by Jürgen Habermas and Jean François Lyotard, this comment by Cameron ushers in a new way of considering the postmodern. A North American derivative that suggests it is the supplemental act and provenance of allegory – and allegory as an appropriative gesture – that defines this type of postmodern artistic practice. A practice encapsulated by a post studio mentality. Baldessari is not concerned with the imperfect or the fragmentary per se. His allegorical stance “par excellence,” to paraphrase Owens, is, rather, the supplemental nature of his intervention. Baldessari intervenes in modernist legacies according to Owens’s script, bringing back allegory as a force to be reckoned with, and one abandoned within modernism. This is the crux of this project’s entire thesis.

How does Baldessari succeed in this intervention? *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is exceedingly cognizant of Croce’s definition of allegory, which Owens reminds us in “an expression eternally added to another expression” (Owens, “Telling Stories” 135). Baldessari’s piece performs Croce’s definition, and also, in a simultaneous way, equally performs Owens’s own postulations about allegory: specifically, that “allegory is a representation of an attitude as well as a technique and a perception as well as a procedure” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 53). These complementary methodologies underscore the structural logic of Owens’s allegorical impulses, and, taken one by one, we can unpack how earnestly and formally Baldessari’s refrain, ‘I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art,’ corresponds with the tenets of Owens’s theory. As an *attitude*, Baldessari’s piece breaks the stronghold of what art is or could be, which is Baldessari’s maxim. In the work itself, his attitudinal swagger migrates to others who actually perform the work. They embody and embrace this shift in artistic practice, indeed in conceptual art that suggests art is about an idea or



attitude or concept. His attitude also becomes ritualized (which we see also in his *Cremation Piece*). Here, however, the ritualization is done through an act of pedagogical penance.

As a *palimpsest*, when the doubling of text – in this case a refrain – is doubled over by another, Baldessari prescribes the direction of his own commentary. The phrase, ‘I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art,’ one must recall, was written approximately 4,000 times by people other than Baldessari himself, and done so legibly from floor to ceiling in the Mezzanine gallery. This legibility is an overtly hyper-palimpsestic gesture that leaves no one questioning the layers of attributes necessary to create the totality of Baldessari’s narrative. His act required surrogacy. In fact, it demanded surrogates to allow its allegorical meaning to accrue after the fact, or posthumously (another Baldessari authorial sleight) when taken together it results from acts of interpretation, an individualized, hermeneutic act repeated thousands of times by hands other than his. Or, in Charlotte Townsend’s words, she could “delegate the sentence to scapegoats” or she could “pay students as mercenaries” (*The Last Art College* 98). In another artistic sleight of hand, Baldessari seemingly denies the viewer’s expectation of multiple meaning, suggesting instead that the mere doubling of the text is not significant, that the audacity of an intentional surrogacy lends to a palimpsest the opposite of multiplicity and multiple meanings. Rather, Baldessari has doubled down on his demonstration that meaning is an aftereffect. In this regard, Baldessari’s use of allegory is strategic. In “Telling Stories,” Owens suggests that Baldessari’s work can never be accounted for in terms of determinate meanings. Rather, Owens postulates that Baldessari’s use of allegory is strategic. In *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, Baldessari’s use of allegory as palimpsest is nothing if not hyper-strategic.

Another tenet of Owens’s definition of allegory, as discussed previously, is *site-specificity*. *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* is site-specific, and chosen by and for an

educational setting, which could allow his student surrogates and/or mercenaries to complete the project. Baldessari, therefore, logically knew the space within which his piece would not only be located, and therefore what type of aesthetic offering he would be able to produce. But also, and importantly, he had the context of an art school to drive his content and methodological choices. Therefore, that he chose an instructional artwork, using his theory that his own punishment should be instructive to others, is not surprising. The visual manifestation of the work, done by others, uses his own maxim and transfers it knowingly and willingly – to others. Allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery, according to Owens. The allegorist, in this instance, Baldessari, “does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (allos=other + agonei=to speak) (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism” 54). It seems, equally logically, that in *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* the source of Baldessari’s theoretically driven significance within the piece, rests in its supplementarity. With each discrete re-writing of the phrase *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*, the allegorical meaning supplants its antecedent. Baldessari is invoking Owens’s theory on allegory, yet it would not be as significant without the educational context that equally performed his CalArts post studio mentality, nor would the work manifest to uphold Owens’s theory without the site specificity the Mezzanine gallery afforded Baldessari in the first place.

*As documented/documentation*, another characteristic of Owens’s treatise on allegory, Baldessari’s work lives on in perpetuity and, through the Lithography Workshop, it remains the key work associated with NSCAD to this day as the school’s unofficial insignia. Bookending the physical copies of the lithographs themselves, and important to this project, is the documentation

of the instructional side of the piece in Baldessari's 'Class Assignments (optional)', included and itself documented in his *Catalogue Raisonné Volume One*. It states:

45. Punishment. Write  
     "I will not make any more art"  
     "I will not make any more boring art"  
     "I will make good art"  
     (or something similar)  
     1,000 times  
     on wall.<sup>102</sup>

As the instructions morphed into the collaborative punishment piece at NSCAD, what emerged to document the piece are archival photographs at the College and, of course, the lithographs themselves. The bookends, therefore, are both housed in institutional archives – in this instance, within educational archives. Yet, it is imperative also to consider the reproduced lithographs in the context of Owens's theories on allegory. His structural logic, one should recall, as related to the emergence of postmodernism, mandates that an allegorical impulse include a proclivity for documentation. Documentation implies repetition. Documented images exist to be perpetually reshown, republished, re-disseminated to support divergent narratives as needed by the author or through the power of the archive by those who oversee and steward it forward. Allegory, however, fundamentally shifts the claim of modernity's master narratives, by appropriating narratives and imagery. This methodological impulse of allegory is what interested Owens and propelled him toward formulating his theories on allegory. In an unprecedented turn, Baldessari's punishment piece, through documentation of not only the act itself, which I have described previously, but – and importantly – through the production of the lithographs, performs for us the dismantling of a work's aura and offers a further distancing of authorial rights. His project *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art* succinctly tethers together these two components of allegory via documentation. Just how Baldessari achieves this is through a

blurring of the lines between the allographic and the autographic. Within the Lithography Workshop at NSCAD, which opened in 1969, the roles of master printer and artist drew attention to what Eric Cameron described in *The Last Great Art College* as “the literally allographic and autographic aspect in considering the NSCAD prints, but where a division does not always coincide with the distinguishing of roles of artist/master printer (Cameron, *The Last Art College* 49). The allographic, taken etymologically, means “other writing.” The autographic, in contrast, signifies something written in one’s own handwriting. It implies an authorial right. It assumes a linear provenance, unencumbered by multiple voices and the threat of a palimpsestic takeover. Baldessari completely turns these distinct propositions on their theoretical heads. The production of the lithographs did not come from documentation of the ritualistic penance performed by NSCAD art students. Rather, according to Christine Lalonde, whose writing on Baldessari’s piece appears in *The Last Great Art College*, the lithographs were made “from a photographic enlargement made from the sample writing that Baldessari sent” (Lalonde, *The Last Art College* 101). And not, it turns out, from a photographic documentation of the many and different individual scribes of those who realized the work. Baldessari manipulated the distinction between artist and master printer through the production of multiple prints, each of which is equally substantiated as an instance of the artist’s work. Of his work, of his idea. The autographic appropriates the allographic.

Moving beyond what Owens refers to as the ‘memento mori’ of the twentieth century, including the ephemeral, impermanent, circumstantial, emblem of transience, the shift in artistic practice toward documentation of actions, performances, and rituals, allows the equally emergent and important tenet of allegory – *accumulation* – to emerge in support of and as an offshoot of – documentation. As the fifth and final tenet of Owens’s theory of the allegorical impulse,

accumulation positions Baldessari's work in relation to the rise of postmodernism. In a reversal of the impermanence and transcendence of a work's aura, accumulation renders visible the allegorical "cult of the ruin" which Walter Benjamin identified as the "allegorical emblem par excellence," leaving in the wake of multiple reproductions *fragments or runes*, according to Owens, which must be deciphered. (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism" 55). The photographic enlargement of Baldessari's phrase "I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art," written by his own hand, illustrates the use of the allegorical potential of photography to, in Owens's own words, "rescue the transience of things for eternity" (56). This rescue is perpetuated as the lithograph, taken from the photographic documentation, further disseminates Baldessari's penance through multiple reproductions. If allegory piles up fragments ceaselessly, as Owens suggests, the sheer accumulation of Baldessari's refrain, "I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art," placed simply one after the other, captures the fragmentary gesture, written repeatedly, and exalts them to a reproduced status, the runes of Baldessari's thinking that art could be more than painting, and his corresponding belief to forever shape an artistic practice outside the confining space of a studio. As an intervention into the master narratives of modernity, Baldessari's piece exemplifies and embraces Owens's theories on allegory and appropriation, together acting as the epitome of counter-narrative, arresting narrative in its place, specifically, the narratives of modernity. As an attitude, as a palimpsest, as site-specific, as documented/documentation, and as accumulation, the reclamation of allegory alongside post studio practice makes room for an American theory of postmodernism.

## CODA

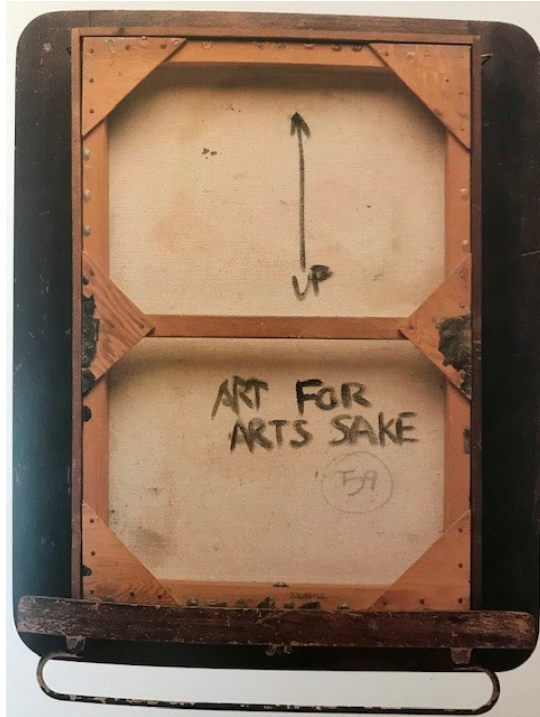
**Towards an American Postmodernism: Appropriated Histories of Modernism**

Figure 53 Edward Kienholz, *Art For Arts Sake* 1959 (Kienholz, *A Retrospective*, Whitney Museum of American Art)

Craig Owens's notion of postmodernism is, uniquely, American. His conception of modernism, as a legacy that left allegory marginalized and failed to fully account for the use of appropriation, emanates from an artistic embrace of a practice that characterized many of the artists working within California in the late 1960s and early 1970s: post studio. It is worthy to note that the West coast strain of post-studio practice, which Owens refers to so frequently, came from Baldessari's program at CalArts.<sup>103</sup> This suggests a further paradigmatic rupturing of the non-existent archive of post studio, appropriating its history alongside that of modernity's eschewal of allegory.<sup>104</sup> The reading of post studio's historical archive is indeed problematized within this proposition, suspended in its own uncertainty. Owens's structural logic, then, offers up allegory instead as a structural interference on both literal and rhetorical levels. Furthermore,

if Owens's theory of postmodernism is a preoccupation with reading, the fundamental unreadability of signs themselves is a roadmap, a methodology, a counter-reading of the archive of post studio (which, as previously discussed, doesn't exist in a formal way), then an allegorical overlay allows a point of entry into problematized notions of reading; or to say, a material referent such as an archive, is not necessary to superimpose a different history onto its ethereal footprint. Owens's anthology reprints his course syllabi, which offers a similar entry into his notions of postmodernism alongside the only clue of Baldessari's conceptualization of post studio: his course description.<sup>105</sup>

As reading becomes problematized, and allegory's intervention into modernism more identifiable, one can identify equally an altered terrain where the distance which separates signifier from signified, and also the distance between sign and meaning, confounds any logical notion of readability, or ability to deduce grand narratives. Our ability, and in fact our reliance on and need for clear narration and easily identifiable relationships that provide legible roadmaps demarcating meaning as relatable to signs, becomes compromised. It is an uneasy juncture. Owens reminds us of this unease, a discordant displacement of referential meaning. Meaning becomes contingent – or perhaps, meaning has always been contingent or propositional – but postmodernity's revisiting of allegory which he relied on heavily during his short career, is meant to problematize aesthetic theories and heretofore accepted tropes of modernism. "Consciousness," Owens writes, "being in the world, is in fact identified with reading – an identification which is not, however, unproblematic, for the legibility of signs is always uncertain" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two" 62). Uncertain, if not non-existent, in the case of post studio's archival legacy, as expressed in the immateriality of CalArts's post studio archive. The signs, therefore, must be deconstructed on

a material plane and within the materiality of the works of post studio artists themselves. How to undertake such a journey is much more identifiable and emerges from Owens's appropriation of histories of modernism – and toward what I suggest to be a uniquely American postmodernist logic and trope: post-studio art practice.<sup>106</sup> As points of entry into Owens's structural logic, one must consider the oppositional forces of nature and culture; pronominal discursive shifts; the relationship between and theoretical migration from reader to spectator; and direction (or theatricality) versus documentation as they relate to post-studio artistic practice.<sup>107</sup> Here, we return to Edward Kienholz to serve as our guide through these vectors.

### 5.1 Nature/Culture Opposition

As allegory is prone to do, it subverts and transposes binary oppositions, complicating previously accepted philosophical divisions, only to fold them back onto themselves in new and propositional ways. In this regard, the age-old tensions between nature and culture, including romanticized notions of the former and suspiciously or imperially inscribed allegiances to the latter, must be readdressed from a critical vantage point. As seen previously in Kienholz's work, *Roxy's*, he is a master provocateur with whom to reassess the nature/culture division. Here I refer back to the stark and strident discord between the nature and beauty of the nubile and fecund creatures in Maxfield Parrish's *Daybreak* print hanging on the wall of Roxy's brothel, and the decay and artificiality of the detritus of Kienholz's figures.



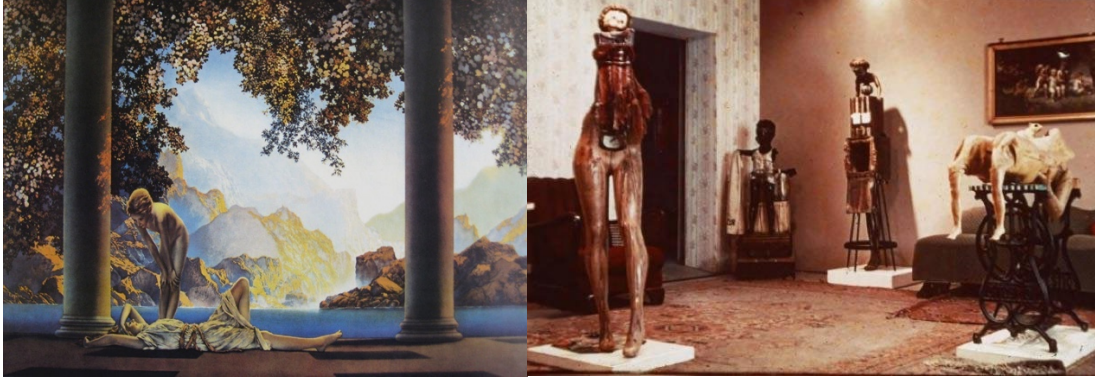


Figure 54 Maxfield Parrish, *Daybreak* 1922 (*Maxfield Parrish: A Retrospective*, National Museum of American Illustration), and Edward Kienholz, *Roxy's* 1960-61 (*Edward Kienholz: A Retrospective*)

Within Kienholz's tableaux the illustration of this chasm is realized materially. In a manner not unlike the 'Pictures' artists who used photomontage or photographically-appropriated imagery in their work, Kienholz's use of appropriation is extended into a three-dimensional, in-your-face embodiment of de-figured mannequins and grotesque compositions of decaying still-life. Both the scale and in situ environments of Kienholz's tableaux afford a vantage point from which to subvert the nature/culture opposition, rendering such a relationship untenable. As a post studio and indeed postmodern artist, Kienholz is complicit in the language games of the postmodern condition and the artistic methodologies that post studio artists use to thwart such neatly delineated oppositions.<sup>108</sup> Kienholz underscores the impossibility of accepting their oppositional relationship. By appropriating the idea of such opposition, Kienholz aligns himself with his poststructuralist counterparts. This is Kienholz's appropriation. As Owens reminds us, "In postmodernist art, nature is treated as wholly domesticated by culture; the "natural" can be approached only through its cultural representation" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" 66). Or, in Kienholz's concept tableaux, through the cultural detritus and ruinous reminders that man leaves in his wake. Such is a potent reminder of a culture

that “may be attacking itself from within” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” 83). From within power structures such as post-industrial capitalism, military industrial complexes, and systematic racism, among others. Yet, it is also possible to deconstruct Kienholz’s repeated maxim that culture “may be attacking itself from within” in terms of allegory and appropriation. Allegory, as Owen articulates, must turn against the very thing it surmises; to negate the validity of what it reifies. A culture that attacks from within must confront and understand how its structural tendencies lay bare this proposition in the first place, to launch an attack on itself, yet all the while propagating the very contingent nature of its destructive tendencies. Culture appropriates a structural logic and mounts a counter-offensive that only perpetuates its violence, its evil, its unease, yet does so in a new way that superimposes such tendencies over one another.



Figure 55 Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 (Wikimedia Commons)

Complicating this theorization further and extending the nature/culture opposition is Owens’s referral to Marcel Duchamp’s infamous readymade strategy of re-appropriating everyday material objects and re-inscribing their significance as art objects. Here is an obvious

reference to *Fountain*, Duchamp's seminal piece that placed a urinal on the floor of the 1917 Independent Artists' Exhibition. Through this gesture, Duchamp exposed the degree to which "nature" is "always already implicated in a system of cultural values which assigns it a specific, culturally determined position" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" 66-67). Kienholz's cultural critique bears allegiance to this methodology. His use of found objects and discarded scraps equally come together within his assemblages and concept tableaux to spotlight misguided cultural values, or at least cultural values that deserve to be challenged. Kienholz, in short, shows his audience how culture suffers from such horrific auto-immune disorders. His de-figuring, de-humanizing, disguised figures are at once disarming because of their sheer theatricality and artificiality, and yet capable of rendering a cultural critique that addresses us in the second person, unable to look away from the spectacle in front of us, indeed within us, and surrounding us in situ. His proposition forever changes our ability to remove ourselves from a different kind of nature – a *human* nature, an ontological orientation toward destruction and attack. Kienholz's strategies make Duchamp's gesture seem innocuous. Yet Kienholz owes a debt of gratitude to Duchamp and perhaps even re-inscribes Duchamp's *Fountain* with a culturally foreshadowing effect of the waste and cultural excrement that the late twentieth century would produce. As an unsettling deconstructive instrument, Kienholz's use of concept tableaux suggest, as he would later admit, that he viewed the earth as the ultimate readymade object. Rather than spending time deconstructing the opposition of nature to culture, Owens pivots his theorization from such overplayed ruminations on the topic into the pronominal emphasis on a shifting elocutionary mode of discourse.

## 5.2 Elocutionary / Discursive Shifts

The shift of pronominal emphasis, which Owens argues is characteristic of Duchamp's work in general, reminds us that, in Owens's words, "allegories are frequently exhortative, addressed to the reader in an attempt to manipulate him or to modify his behavior" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" 67). The third person verb tense, addressing something in a pluralized "we," significantly complicates narrative and situates narration in a complicit zone. It also implies a shift from an anonymous reader to spectators, who, by refusing to directly enter a narration, allows for spectatorship to emerge in such a manner as to perpetuate a lack of direct interference into a discursive zone. It is an emancipatory proposition, liberating once and for all an authoritarian author – for the purposes of this project, I suggest that such a pivot allows for counter-narratives to emerge. The exhortative modality of allegory, therefore, opens the door toward a manipulation of narrative authority, instead exhorting the reader toward behavioral modification. Which, in reference to Kienholz's tableaux, force the reader - in this case the spectator – to account for his behavioral complicity in order to modify it. This would be Kienholz's admonition to his viewers: to go into an allegorical zone and to deconstruct their complicity in order to alter it and to assume a position which liberates the cultural auto-immune disorder of attacking from within. This methodology assigns agency to the reader or spectator to manipulate meaning, which is squarely a postmodernist mentality. The allegiance of sign/signified is ruptured and indicates a polyphonic shift from author to reader. Such multiplicity is a product of the more nuanced relationship a reader has to authorship. Within this framework, the destination of narration becomes de-personalized which is in essence counter-intuitive to a pronominal shift from second to third person. However, if understood as a

platform from which alternate historical records can be reclaimed, the de-personalization is necessary before such reclamation can occur. Allegory at work.

Kienholz's artistic paradigm is the tableau. Inherent in such a methodology is the agency of the spectator to witness a rupture of modernist lineages that privileged static repetition of work that had an authorial mandate, a representational logic, and a sanctioned provenance. No longer forced to be complacent in the reception of a work of art, Kienholz ruptures what Owens refers to as a de-personalized destination. The reader - in the case of Kienholz's tableaux, the spectator, is rendered without "history, biography, psychology," a direct reference to Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" 67). This "stereographic" view of texts – and I take the liberty of and ownership for ascribing this trait to works of art generally, and to Kienholz specifically, to show Kienholz's intentionality in shifting the power from the author to the reader. This transference of power relations – toward the destination rather than the origin, to paraphrase Barthes, is a fundamentally important characteristic of postmodernist art and discourse. As a critique of literary devices and strategies, it also functions as a critique of the repositories of art – specifically, the museum. For, there is an equally strong institutional critique by Kienholz of museums that is manifest in situ, or within his tableaux. If, as Owens reminds us, allegories can be viewed as "an emblem of mortality of the inevitable dissolution and decay to which everything is subject," in order to break the referent to mortality vis a vis an artist's hand or author's signature, we must become enveloped into a new paradigm that eschews claims to authority, homogeneity, and coherence – three vectors of Owens's structural logic of modernity or its very intelligibility – and subsume those very attributes to propose a new potentiality that

puts such decay and mortality into a plane of perpetual return – one on which we collectively transgress (67).

### 5.3 Narrative to Counter-Narrative

The transgression I speak of relates directly to an a-historicized moment in the pivot toward postmodernist work – the concept that, being left without a biography, a reader has an opportunity to recreate his or her own narration. This is an opening within modernism that Kienholz and his post studio associate John Baldessari used as a place within which to mount a transgression toward counter-narrative stratagems. Allegory confuses the author-reader relationship; therefore, as much as - or perhaps in excess of – the extent to which it complicates the sign/signifier referential relationship. Counter-narration, within the *modus operandi* of post studio practice, is squarely aligned with institutional critique. As we have seen previously in Kienholz's work – within *Roxy's* in particular – he critiques post-industrial American society (this reinforces the notion that allegory is a remainder of, or emblem, of mortality, dissolution, and decay), by imbuing within his medium choices the use of discarded materials and found objects. His critique of militarized society during the Vietnam War is addressed acutely in *The Ozymandias Parade*, again as a scathing critique of American imperialism, cast in a portable tableau that suggests we can get it to go – neatly packaged and ready for consumption no matter where the conflict and American aggression takes both its combative tendencies and physical troops. A not so subtle reminder of man's proclivity toward evil, of mortality, and our propagation of war to keep the machine moving. As seen in *Five Car Stud*, systematic racism is not endemic only to America, for in transfiguring the tableau to Germany's documenta V in Kassel, Kienholz's critique becomes both transnationally inscribed and further problematized by the country's genocide of Jews. Yet, to understand the American strain of postmodernism, the

institutional critique of museums by post studio artists like Kienholz and Baldessari must come to the fore. Kienholz's tableaux, as much as Baldessari's *Cremation Piece*, align to confront the trifecta of authority/homogeneity/coherence operating within the critique of museums as anointed and sanctified exhibition spaces. Being placed in situ within a tableau extends the critique of museums, deconstructing the museum's discourse and its very intelligibility. Kienholz subverts the plane of curatorial narration moving vertically, compelling what Owens sites as "a vertical or paradigmatic reading" (Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism" 25). A vertical interference of modernism – equally interventionist in its methodology. In part two of "The Allegorical Impulse," and worthy of repeating here, Owens states: "Allegory is the epitome of counter-narrative, for it arrests narrative in place, substituting a principle of syntagmatic disjunction for one of diegetic combination. In this way allegory superinduces a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events" (25). Kienholz's syntagmatic disjunction is, through his concept tableaux, reinstating a moral authority by an artist working against constraints of a museum or gallery. *Five Car Stud*, as the best example of this alongside Baldessari's *Cremation Piece*, reclaims the traces which constitute a text, or a horizontally, linearly created work, inserting the spectator into the work, adding layers of footprints (literal in the case of *Five Car Stud*) to re-inscribe, re-figure, and reclaim the discourse of authority, homogeneity, and coherence.

Before continuing on this path, and in order to acknowledge the counter-logic that operates within this paradigm through allegory, one must admit to the duplicity post studio strategies offer. Owens would refer to it as an "error" – an error in judgment to think institutional critique of museums is without its own complicity. From an allegorical standpoint, which Owens so beautifully and tactfully articulates, "this triumph is ultimately an equivocal one, for in order

to function as deconstructions of the discourse of the museum, of its claims to coherence, homogeneity – the ground of its allegorical intel-legibility – they must also declare themselves to be part of the dumping ground they describe. They thus relapse into “the “error” they denounce, and this is what allows us to identify them as allegorical” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism” 71). The triumph is ironic. Although Owens is referring to Robert Rauschenberg’s combines and assemblages, his theorization of the “error” is easily extended to post studio practice – and indeed, perhaps more acutely, for the term ‘post studio’ involves the named site of sanctioned artistic production – the studio – to confront the “error” which Owens refers to is specific to museums – and in fact he accused Rauschenberg of making so-called ‘museum paintings,’ as a peculiar manifestation of site specificity. The lineage of painting for a museum links back directly to the artist’s studio. Meaning, in this case, that it has been done before but this time the call to arms appropriates the very term it launches an attack against – the studio as offspring of the museum, as another sanctioned space for art. Post studio is perhaps, as a counter-argument, merely another attempt to deconstruct and to disengage authoritarian dictates of the museum or gallery system by artists. Duchamp was certainly a complicit actor in this narrative, in that the strength and aesthetic punch of *Fountain* was that it was exhibited in the context of a sanctioned exhibition, one in which he fully anticipated being able to participate, due to the governance structure of the Society of Independent Artists. Before Duchamp, the Italian Futurists also had invoked an institutional critique of their own, within their manifesto that equated museums to cemeteries, among other proclamations, including the first paragraph from the “Futurist Manifesto”:

“Museums: cemeteries!...Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings. Museums: absurd abattoirs of painters and sculptors



ferociously slaughtering each other with color-blows and line-blows, the length of the fought-over walls! (Marinetti, “The Futurist Manifesto” 148).

Within the “Futurist Manifesto” lies a potent foreshadowing – through a palimpsest, another of Owens’s assumptions within his structural logic – of the extension of the “error” placed into high relief. Specifically, through Baldessari’s work to end the wrong road he was on as a painter by atomizing his work, and also within Kienholz’s in situ narratives which manifest not the blows of line and color, but of decay, detritus, and searing cultural critique. Both gestures refer back as well to Owens’s intel-legibility, as if to suggest an equally knowing, complicit behavioral response to the museum’s legibility – as a way to subvert the authority, coherence, and homogeneity of the museum’s role in culture and to propagate social norms. Both Kienholz and Baldessari had direct engagement with museums and their legislative agency to censor or alter work through the ways in which it is exhibited. The Jewish Museum, we must recall, refused to exhibit publicly the crematory ashes of Baldessari’s paintings that were contained in urns. Kienholz’s first public reception of *Five Car Stud* was not in America, but in a tent erected outside of the Fredericium at documenta V. There is, one can see, at least provisional acceptance on the part of both artists of the role of museums and quadrennial exhibitions on the scale of documenta, not to mention the legislative yoke of curation.<sup>109</sup> Yet, both artists also seemingly acquiesce to this acceptance in order to subvert, to superimpose, to deconstruct, and to expose the institutional systems at work. Which leads back to the propositions of postmodernism espoused by Habermas and Lyotard, and perhaps more obliquely toward the provenance of post studio’s archive as absent from postmodernist discourse. And for this we owe a debt of gratitude to Owens for inserting an “error” into the mix that is reversed by allegorical impulses.

At this final juncture, Derrida returns to reinsert a reclamation of the lost biography, which accompanied the theatrical death of authorship. One always must be cognizant of the allegorical sleight of hand, which, deducing Derrida significantly, is a methodology that preserves what you question, indicating an ever-evolving, unfinished and contingent mode of engagement. Derrida's proposition is folded into Owens's structural logic of postmodernism. And, ironically, it is Owens who appropriates the structural logics of both Habermas and Lyotard, in a reconciliatory move that supports both poststructuralists' theories of modernism. Equally germane to this investigation, it is perhaps not surprising that an allegorically-inscribed impulse would offer up such restitution. Habermas, we recall, in proselytizing that modernism is an unfinished project, suggests similarly to Owens that something within modernism has gone unaccounted for. Within Habermas's musings on postmodernism is a maxim that you absorb what you negate. Offered by postmodernist art as a strategy of reading, this deconstructive impulse – which I suggest is the mechanism or methodology behind what Owens describes as an impulse toward the allegorical, allows and affords viewers of postmodernist art an opportunity to participate in, to paraphrase Owens, “ the very activity that is being denounced precisely in order to denounce it” (Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Towards a Theory of Postmodernism, Part Two” 79). He replaces one narrative with another, recuperating modernist tendencies in a manner not dissimilar from allegory's palimpsestic nature. While Lyotard may seem to venture the furthest from Owens, his use of the palimpsest as a deconstructive instrument propagates Owens's logic. We recall, for example, the curious text *Pacific Wall* and Lyotard's superimposed text – an overlaid intel-legibility to deconstruct Vachey's writing on imperialism, the Pacific Ocean, and California – and most importantly, the use of Kienholz's *Five Car Stud* as the text's visual frontispiece. Together, a shared allegiance (albeit perhaps an unwittingly shared

discourse) permeates through both Habermas's and Lyotard's concepts of postmodernity. For deconstruction affirms what it denies, performs what it ultimately denounces, within a yoke of rhetorical de-figuration. Allegory's dual functions, both social and aesthetic, coalesce within the pathos of post studio work, emerging as the underlying methodology capable of resolving contradictions confronting modern society (as Owens reminds us, of individual interest versus general well-being as but one example). As allegory is wont to be, it promised what it is exceedingly incapable of delivering. Held in an abeyant modality, perpetually deferred, allegory's promise is, essentially, destined to be interventionist, if not intempestive.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism” 68.

<sup>2</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>3</sup> Not limited to the fact that Baldessari’s video work was included in documenta V, in addition to Kienholz’s. The two were contemporaries and at that time (1972) they were both residing in Los Angeles. Baldessari was no doubt familiar with Kienholz’s work, and in fact “John’s teaching consisted of returning from Europe with a suitcase full of catalogues,” including catalogs from *documenta V* and *When Attitudes Become Form* (see reflections from John Welling in *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia* 104).

<sup>4</sup> CalArts Concept Paper, 1970. Box 37, Folder 5. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>5</sup> Gemini G.E.L.’s parking lot is the only site where *Five Car Stud* was realized before documenta V, and the Getty images were taken in this makeshift setting.

<sup>6</sup> This quote is taken from an email exchange I had with Lawrence Weschler, on February 23, 2020, following his lecture, “The Fraught Crossroads Where Class, Race, Sex and Violence Keep Converging Across American History (and Who Gets to Address It) at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) on February 20, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Of note here is that documenta V’s artistic director, Harald Szeemann, also curated the seminal important 1969 exhibition, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form* at Kunsthalle Bern, a landmark show highlighting Post-Minimalist American artists.

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>10</sup> This text is printed verbatim as in the transcript. The word ‘principle’ is singular, rather than plural, which reflects a typographical error, however, I wanted to be true to the primary source material.

<sup>11</sup> (John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Baudrillard’s work in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (published in 1972) is relevant to this project as it casts doubt on the idea that production is the cause of modernism’s ills, moving it instead into the view that consumption – in particular the systems of cultural signs, is the real problem. Owens will reenter this discourse in his writing on the productivist orientation of aesthetic theory.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>15</sup> Ephemerality is a hallmark of post studio practice, as is photographic reproductions of ephemera, which is in itself a strategy of commodification.

<sup>16</sup> Here Owens aligns with Beuys’s belief that art is coming out of an art history. His writings suggest an equal penchant for a-historicizing artistic practice and legitimizing its agency instead within critical theory.

<sup>17</sup> CalArts Concept Paper, 1970. Box 37, Folder 5. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>18</sup> Not limited to the fact that Baldessari's video work was included in documenta V, in addition to Kienholz's. The two were contemporaries and at that time (1972) they were both residing in Los Angeles. Baldessari was no doubt familiar with Kienholz's work, and in fact "John's teaching consisted of returning from Europe with a suitcase full of catalogues," including catalogs from *documenta V* and *When Attitudes Become Form* (see reflections from John Welling in *Jack Goldstein and the CalArts Mafia* 104).

<sup>19</sup> CalArts Concept Paper, 1970. Box 37, Folder 5. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>20</sup> Frontispiece to documenta V exhibition catalog, SFAI archives, San Francisco, California.

<sup>21</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Here reference Rosalind Krauss's theories on the myth of the avant garde and her influence on Owens. And also, that Greenberg moved into kitsch as dichotomy to avant garde.

<sup>24</sup> The complicity Owens manifests within this statement is due to his believed that his salary for his editorial work with *Art in America* was furnished by the gallery system.

<sup>25</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>26</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>27</sup> The span of years of Baldessari's cremated paintings is in question within his *Catalogue Raisonné*, Volume One. Bois references 1966 as the cut off year of Baldessari's cremated works; yet within the *Catalogue Raisonné* itself, one painting from 1967 is included within the inventory of works he destroyed.

<sup>28</sup> Baldessari's retrospective at the Tate Modern, *Pure Beauty* (October 13, 2009-January 10, 2010) was also a critique of beauty.

<sup>29</sup> Kienholz's tableau *The Art Show*, shown at Rice University in November 1984-January 1985, offers a critique of the subsumption of post studio practice by the art market.

<sup>30</sup> And, within this equation, I put Owens's postmodern theories in the context of both Lyotard and Habermas's own theorizations of postmodernity.

<sup>31</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida, "The Parergon," quoted in Craig Owens, "Detachment: from the *parergon*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> A discrepancy exists between the years on Baldessari's commemorative plaque (1953-1966) and the inventory of cremated paintings in his *Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One* (1957-1967).

<sup>36</sup> Here it is important to identify a link between Baldessari's admonition to be careful of culture and Kienholz's absolute disdain for the term 'culture.'

<sup>37</sup> Baldessari, John. Interview with Hermine Freed, Los Angeles, March 1973). Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive. California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California. Video.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Owens addressed the economics of art and his own complicity in commodification and power structures, which is acknowledged within this project.

<sup>39</sup> Again, there is a return to pedagogy. Baldessari used students from the San Diego State University where he was teaching to realize the *Cremation Piece*, and students from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design for the wall text, *I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art*.

<sup>40</sup> Derrida, “Demeure: Fiction and Testimony” 45.

<sup>41</sup> Throughout my research for this project, I was unable to locate any art historical descriptions of Baldessari’s cremated works.

<sup>42</sup> Of the twelve destroyed paintings from 1957, the majority - nine - is *Untitled*. The cataloging system used in both the *Catalog Raisonne’* and this text uses the prefix CP, followed by the last two numbers of the year (64 for 1964, for example, and the sequential reference number, for example 2 for the second painting in the year reference). The catalog uses brackets and ellipses when no title is known; I have used the term *Untitled* instead, however it is possible (and probable) that these works at one time were indeed titled by Baldessari. The cataloging system used throughout this text is taken from Baldessari’s *Catalog Raisonne’ Volume One: 1956-1974*.

<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that the paintings destroyed in the *Cremation Project* are inventoried in *Catalog Raisonne’, Volume One*, according to interviews with Baldessari, visual documentation he kept, and from images of the cremation, taken by both Baldessari’s assistants and himself. It also should be noted, therefore, that this inventory may not be destroyed. Several paintings were also saved from cremation.

<sup>44</sup> Baldessari famously appropriated Goya’s phrase, “No Se Puede Mirar” or “This is Not to Be Looked At” on the cover of 1968 *Artforum*, in critique of a painting by Frank Stella.

<sup>45</sup> From the Ministerio de Cultura press release on the occasion of Baldessari’s 1989 exhibition NI POR ESAS, courtesy of the Getty Research Institute and Harald Szeemann archives. Date and archival citation unknown.

<sup>46</sup> Baldessari would have been aware of the seminal 1961 exhibition, *The Art of Assemblage*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

<sup>47</sup> The game show mentality of that era is reflected in such titles as *Let’s Make a Deal* and *The Price is Right*, underscoring consumerist tendencies of the post-World War Two era in America.

<sup>48</sup> Chris Burden, a Californian contemporary of Baldessari, would intervene directly into this paradigm with his iconic piece, *Through the Night Softly*, an interventionist advertisement broadcast for one month on public television in 1973. In the short video, Burden crawls over a parking lot of broken glass wearing only bikini underwear, his hands clasped behind his back.

<sup>49</sup> Specifically, Baldessari’s 1969 series, *Commissioned Paintings*.

<sup>50</sup> Budweiser’s first photographic advertising campaign in 1957 used the iconic slogan, “Where there’s life, there’s Bud.” The Bud slogan was reproduced on many consumer products throughout the late 1960s and into the 1970s.

<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting a reference to Goya’s deafness, which to a certain degree fueled his renderings of the *Disasters of War* series.

<sup>52</sup> Ethical recognition, in particular through our face-to-face interactions with each other, especially seeing another as different and greater than ourselves, is written on extensively in Emmanuel Levinas’s *Entre Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*.

<sup>53</sup> Baldessari’s 1987 work, *Inventory*, manifests a childhood trauma of seeing photographic documentation of the Holocaust. Within this work, black and white montages juxtapose the skeletal corpses of Holocaust victims with images of consumers and over-abundant grocery store shelves.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Finish Fetish’ was a Californian invention in the 1960s art world, using elements of the popular surfing and car culture in Los Angeles in rendering polished, sleek, slick finishes to work, many using resin, polyurethane and fiberglass.

<sup>55</sup> As Derrida suggests in *Of Grammatology*.

<sup>56</sup> Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward A Theory of Postmodernism, Part One” 54.

<sup>57</sup> Harald Szeemann’s archive was acquired by the Getty Institute as recently as 2011.

<sup>58</sup> In this provocative 1939 text, Freud boldly claims that Moses was Egyptian, based on archeological research that had been done in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Freud postulates that the Messiah symbolizes a hope for the return of Moses as the Israelites savior. Claiming that collective guilt – censored and/or repressed – which stemmed from the murder of Moses was passed down generationally, Jews were left to dwell in neurotic expressions and either to disperse or to cope with their inheritance of both guilt and trauma.

<sup>59</sup> *Five Car Stud* was, in fact, symbolic of minority strivings, according to Kienholz’s writing in the Documenta V catalog, in a letter he wrote from Los Angeles in February 1972. Understood in these terms, these minority strivings allude also to artistic practice that eschews modernism’s insular tendencies, offering a parallel history, referred to in Lyotard’s palimpsest *Pacific Wall* as “a mentality that’s not particularly political in an imperial sense” (Lyotard 56). The mentality of post-studio artistic practice in the burgeoning years of the early 70s was political, however, in that it adopted a critical stance toward modernity’s imperialistic, aesthetic tendencies, in a uniquely American, emancipatory spirit.

<sup>60</sup> In what Nicolas Bourillard would term ‘relational aesthetics’ in 1998, where the audience completes the work.

<sup>61</sup> See Kienholz’s own description of his formal artistic decisions in Gemini G.E.L.’s 1972 gallery notes.

<sup>62</sup> *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* is the specific case.

<sup>63</sup> Pincus reminds his readers several times within Kienholz’s Catalogue Raisonné that the artist identified as a painter throughout his career, albeit a painter of three-dimensional space.

<sup>64</sup> Weschler, Lawrence. University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program, © 1977.

<sup>65</sup> And, referring back to Pincus, one is reminded of his conjuring of Bernadetto Croce’s seminal text, *Aesthetics*, of 1902. Intuition, Croce suggests, is the mental attribute associated with anti-modern, indeed, post-modern artistic tendencies. His text offers an equally germane contribution to the rise of conceptual, and post-conceptual artistic practice.

<sup>66</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>67</sup> Weschler, Lawrence. University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program, © 1977.

<sup>68</sup> Kienholz, Edward. *Documentation Book for Five Car Stud Tableau and The Sawdy Edition*, edition 41/75, produced by Gemini G.E.L., Collection of Margo H. Leavin, 1971, page 5.

<sup>69</sup> Baldessari’s *Cremation Piece* is not neglected but my preoccupation with Kienholz bears more relevance to the current assertion that Craig Owens’s “Allegorical Impulse” resonates more acutely with *Five Car Stud*.

<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that Owens draws heavily from the theories of Paul de Man in his writing on allegory.

<sup>71</sup> Here it is worth noting Marcel Duchamp’s participation in the Western Roundtable on Modern Art in San Francisco, a mere six years prior.

<sup>72</sup> Roxy's was exhibited initially in Los Angeles's Ferus Gallery, and the piece is the first that Kienholz referred to as a 'tableau.'

<sup>73</sup> Here it hard to avoid referring back to Lyotard's characterization of California as Marilyn Monroe in *Pacific Wall*, in a similar gesture that Kienholz elicits metaphorically with the words 'Long Whites,' perhaps an equally overtly signification of the perceived superior beauty of white skin.

<sup>74</sup> Here I reference Clement Greenberg's treatment of kitsch, in "Avant-Garde and Kitsch", of "the schism between tradition and respect of the old masters, sanctioned by the state and its educational systems, and our desire in the advanced West to hang a Maxfield Parrish print or his equivalent on our walls, instead of Rembrandt and Michelangelo." Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch" 545.

<sup>75</sup> Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption* 97.

<sup>76</sup> Here Owens pivots back to de Man, as referenced earlier.

<sup>77</sup> Baldessari's *Cremation Piece* is equally directorial, in particular the photographic stills taken from the cremation.

<sup>78</sup> Gemini G.E.L.'s parking lot is the only site where *Five Car Stud* was realized before documenta V, and the Getty images were taken in this makeshift setting.

<sup>79</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>80</sup> Weschler, Lawrence. University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program, © 1977.

<sup>81</sup> This quote is taken from an email exchange I had with Lawrence Weschler, on February 23, 2020, following his lecture, "The Fraught Crossroads Where Class, Race, Sex and Violence Keep Converging Across American History (and Who Gets to Address It) at the San Francisco Art Institute (SFAI) on February 20, 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Freud, "*Civilization and Its Discontents*" 772.

<sup>83</sup> Turnbull, *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* no page numbers.

<sup>84</sup> Owens, "*Representation, Power, and Culture*" 91.

<sup>85</sup> As cited previously, Kienholz's tableau *The Art Show*, shown at Rice University in November 1984-January 1985, offers a critique on the subsumption of post studio practice by the art market.

<sup>86</sup> We will see this suggestion become clearer as Kienholz discusses the ability of detritus to evidence thrown-away, disposed ideas of man.

<sup>87</sup> The term 'relational aesthetics' became part of postmodernity's vernacular after being coined by author Nicolas Bourriaud in 1996 for the exhibition "Traffic" at the CAPC Musee' d'art contemporain de Bordeaux.

<sup>88</sup> This anecdote in Betty Turnbull's introductory remarks in *The Last Time I Saw Ferus* also points out that Kienholz had, at that point in 1953, only visited one art museum, which was on the East Coast. Suggesting, I propose, yet another layer of perversion in that Kienholz essentially subsumes the system - the gallery system - he spent so much time mocking.

<sup>89</sup> Also known as the Second Indochina War, and within Vietnam as the Resistance War Against America.

<sup>90</sup> By 1962, his paintings and assemblages had morphed into free-standing sculpture.

<sup>91</sup> Art schools, including CSFA (now SFAI) and CalArts provided a surrogate art ecology for California, given the State's lack of a viable gallery system on par with New York. For more analysis of how this transpired, see Richard Cándida Smith's *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California*, University of California, 1995.



<sup>92</sup> Many of the artists considered as ‘Pictures’ artists, those who were manipulating and appropriating photographic imagery, studied at CalArts. For an anecdotal analysis of their tenure at CalArts, refer to *Jack Goldstein and the Cal Arts Mafia* by Richard Hertz.

<sup>93</sup> Scholarship on Kienholz unanimously cites the 2011 exhibition of *Five Car Stud* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) as the first American exhibition of the piece. I problematize this unanimity alongside the post studio mentality that Carl Andre suggests drove many decisions of where and how work can be shown, and in this case, previewed and documented. Documentation of this pop-up ‘exhibition’ in the parking lot of Gemini G.E.L. is found in Harald Szeemann’s archives at the Getty Research Institute and reproduced within this project.

<sup>94</sup> Kassel. Documenta, 5th, 1972. *Documenta 5 [i.e. fünf]*. [Kassel]: Verlag GmbH, Bertelsmann Verlag.

<sup>95</sup> Szeemann’s archives also shed light on why, as artistic director of documenta V, he would have an affinity for Kienholz and his methodology – the tableau. The scale is of *Five Car Stud*, like many other of his tableaux, is similar to a 1974 work by Szeemann himself in which he recreated meticulously, in his apartment, a collection of his grandfather’s objects and inventions. The work was later shown at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2018, recreated to a scale that was, in essence, a tableau, inviting in the audience.

<sup>96</sup> The reference to “living in your head” is a nod, no doubt, to the seminal important 1969 exhibition, *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes become Form*, curated by Harald Szeemann at the Kunststalle Bern. Cited as the first international exhibition that brought together American and European conceptual artists, its negative reception by the Swiss public ultimately contributed to Szeemann’s resignation. As a phrase, “Live in your head,” given to the exhibition catalog by American light artist Keith Sonnier, captured the ethos of this late 1960’s artistic practice, and no doubt influenced Baldessari.

<sup>97</sup> Emphasis is mine.

<sup>98</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>99</sup> John Baldessari, Post studio course description, Cal Arts, 1972. CalArts publications, 1963-87, Bulletins, 1963-1972, Box 1, Folder 1. Courtesy of the California Institute of the Arts Archive, California Institute of the Arts Library, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA.

<sup>100</sup> This text is taken verbatim from Baldessari’s typed course assignments, and the typos are maintained in the text.

<sup>101</sup> The symbolic death and archival destruction of Baldessari’s early paintings should be viewed as an insurrection against modernity and authorship, of the sacred terrain of the artist’s studio, rather than as a commemorative action in favor of the enduring signature of the artist’s hand. In what Roland Barthes would categorize in “Death of the Author” as a move toward the performative, Baldessari’s actions can be viewed as a gesture away from “recording, of observing, of representing, of “painting”” toward a linguistic turn in which “utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered” (Barthes, “Death of The Author” 4).

<sup>102</sup> This text is taken verbatim from Baldessari’s typed course assignments, and the typos are maintained in the text.

<sup>103</sup> Specifically, and this clearly is demarcated in Owens’s writing, the so-called ‘Pictures’ artists who were working bi-coastally, many of whom emerged from CalArts’s post studio program (including Troy Brauntuch – whose revisionist appropriation of Adolf Hitler’s drawings is

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referenced frequently by Owens), Robert Longo, and Sherry Levine. Cindy Sherman also is cited frequently by Owens as an exemplary figure of this cohort.

<sup>104</sup> This is not to suggest that allegory was absent from modernism's registry altogether. Owens, through his theorizations on allegory, never made such a claim. We can cite, for example, Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* as a preeminent example of a modernist, allegorical work. Rather, Owens is suggesting that allegory operated in an inchoate manner, one not fully embraced as an artistic methodology within modernism, which American post studio practice, specifically, reclaimed. Hence the theoretical focus of this project became equally oriented toward a uniquely *American* definition of postmodernism.

<sup>105</sup> The Post Studio Art course description, from CalArts, 1972, offers that "the following current attitudes will be explored: Pop, Minimal, Ecological, Anti-form, Anti-Illusion, Information, Language, Concept and Performance. The investigation of such questions and issues as: Is the object necessary – originality in art – must art be visual – what is order – durability – place and process – art as experience – art as time -, etc.? The student should be familiar with the history of modern art through Duchamp.

<sup>106</sup> And, within this equation, I put Owens's postmodern theories in the context of both Lyotard and Habermas's own theorizations of postmodernity.

<sup>107</sup> In Part 1 of *The Allegorical Impulse*, Owens also cites appropriation, site-specificity, impermanence, accumulation, discursivity, and hybridization as distinguishing attributes of postmodernism.

<sup>108</sup> This is a play on Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, in particular, his reference to language games.

<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to note that Robert Smithson refused to exhibit in documenta V for the perceived restrictions that would have been placed on the exhibition of his work.

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