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Publication Date

2015

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In Situ and On Location: The Early Works of Maria Nordman

by

Laura Margaret Richard

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Film Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Associate Professor Julia Bryan-Wilson, Chair

Professor Whitney Davis

Professor Shannon Jackson

Associate Professor Jeffrey Skoller

Summer 2015

Abstract

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Laura Margaret Richard

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art

and the Designated Emphasis in Film Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Associate Professor Julia Bryan-Wilson, Chair

This dissertation begins with Maria Nordman's early forays into capturing time and space through photography, film, and performance and it arrives at the dozen important room works she constructed between 1969 and 1979. For these spaces in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, Italy, and Germany, the artist manipulated architecture to train sunshine into specific spatial effects. Hard to describe and even harder to illustrate, Nordman's works elude definition and definitiveness, yet they remain very specific in their conception and depend on precision for their execution. Many of these rooms were constructed within museums, but just as many took place in her studio and in other storefronts in the working-class neighborhoods of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Milan, Genoa, Kassel, and Düsseldorf. If not truly outside of the art system then at least on its fringes, these works were premised physically and conceptually on their location in the city.

This project pays particular attention to the relationship between studio and storefront works in Los Angeles vis-à-vis not only their museum-based and international counterparts, but not before exploring Nordman's earliest films and desert performances to set up fundamental terms, conditions, and themes consistent throughout her oeuvre. Ultimately, I argue that rather than a "Light and Space" artist, her seemingly exclusively formal and phenomenological room works are actually in close dialogue with Hollywood movie-making, cinematic avant-gardes, and the "post-studio" and feminist art movements. Because the works' difference is most visibly manifest in their use of space and place and sight, I draw on theories of vision and feminist geography to investigate the cultural, social and political dynamics at play within the work and between its concept and site and to suggest a more intrinsic political reading of Nordman's works vis-à-vis the Cold and Vietnam Wars.

For My Darlings,
Olivia, Alexandra, and Helena Janku

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Acknowledgements

The seven-year journey that concludes with this dissertation has been incredibly rich, marked as much by intellectual as personal growth. Any kind of long-term project is ultimately a collaborative effort, and there are many people who have made my experience an extremely satisfying and sane one.

None of this would have been possible without Anne Wagner. Her belief in my “pluck” and potential opened up great possibility, for which I remain forever grateful. I also offer many thanks to Kaja Silverman for her model of creative, rigorous scholarship, and generous pedagogy. George Janku’s early support was essential in setting me on my way. Thank you. Without Connie Lewallen’s introduction to Maria Nordman’s work, I may not have found so rich a topic; I am grateful for that, and for her ongoing friendship.

Archivists, librarians, and scholars everywhere smoothed the way for my research, and I commend them for their professionalism and kindness: Marisa Bourgoïn and Erin Kinhart at The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute; Jessica Gambling at the Balch Art Research Library, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Amy Wong and Brandon E. Barton in Special Collections, and Charlotte Brown in University Archives, at UCLA; Bart Ryckbosch at The Art Institute of Chicago; Aimee Calfin at the Getty Research Institute; Tom Norris at the Norton Simon Museum; Stephanie Cannizzo at the UC Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive.

David E. James was particularly encouraging in offering new contexts and angles for thinking about Nordman’s films. I am similarly thankful to Thomas Hines for elucidating the artist’s relationship with Richard Neutra.

I am indebted to the UC Berkeley Arts Research Center for the community and support they provided during my fellowship, and to the Townsend Center for the Humanities for their funding of the Townsend Working Group in Contemporary Art, where I was fortunate to work with Jadine Collingwood, Sarah Cowan, Jez Flores, Aglaya Glebova, Megan Hoetger, and Emma Silverman.

Very little of this scholarship would have come to light without the ongoing commitment, generosity, and forbearance of the Department of the History of Art at UC Berkeley. Special thanks go to Linda Fitzgerald, Matt Joyce, and John McChesney-Young for keeping me on track. Classes with Todd Olson, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, and Margaretta Lovell pushed my practical, pedagogical, and theoretical proficiency in our field, as did teaching with Diliانا Angelova and Aneka Lenssen. Courses and conversations with Whitney Davis and Tim Clark were particularly influential to my thinking, and I am grateful to them both for being readers of my early work. Jeffrey Skoller’s generous comments and suggestions around film and its history were indispensable. And I am privileged to have not only benefited from Shannon Jackson’s expertise in time-based art, but to have worked together at the Arts Research Center. Finally, I am most indebted intellectually to Julia Bryan-Wilson for her excellent advising, invaluable pragmatic advice, and unflagging optimism.

Countless empathetic friends have seen me through this venture. My warmest thanks go to Elizabeth Ferrell, Meredith Tromble, and George Frazier for their ongoing interest, encouragement, and inspiration. I am especially grateful to Moira Roth, whose broad knowledge, generosity of spirit, warm friendship, and unwavering, everyday support were present throughout the process—and were crucial to its completion. Thank you so very much, Moira.

Finally, I am extremely lucky to have been surrounded by many whose patience, understanding, and love made this journey so meaningful: Paula Richard, Cathy Richard, Russ Richard, Olivia Janku, Alexandra Janku, and Helena Janku. My deepest gratitude always to Laurie Hessen Pomeranz for the constancy of her wit, wisdom, and friendship. And to John Edgcomb for showing up to help me close this special chapter in the best way possible.

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Introduction: Sites, Institutions, Situations

Two images. A single room, each located in a different neighborhood. Both vacant. One abandoned and in disrepair, yet still filled with stuff, the traces and detritus of a life: a frayed chair, a cockeyed lamp, their backdrop a crumbling wall through which the outside world pushes in. (Fig. 1) The other, immaculate: a white void, brimming not with artifacts, but defined by directed sunlight. (Fig. 2) The seeming disparity in these two works by Maria Nordman is underscored by their difference in time, space, and dimension. Where the first, *Venice Boulevard* (1967) from the Found Rooms series, is a photographic work, the second, *Washington and Beethoven* (1979), was an actual environment, a “room work,” the filmic image merely its evidence. Yet, despite their many superficial distinctions and their physical separation by a decade and a few miles, these two works are actually quite aligned conceptually in the ways they use light to make visible time and space—the fundamental coordinates that subtend the everyday experience.

This dissertation begins with Nordman’s early forays, like *Venice Boulevard*, into capturing time and space through photography, film, and performance and it arrives at the dozen important room works she constructed between 1969 and 1979. For these spaces in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, Italy, and Germany, the artist manipulated architecture to train sunshine into specific spatial effects. They were darkened rooms with diminished visibility, inside which visitors experienced an initial psychological discomfort, followed by intense self-awareness and, finally, by the “revelation” of “walls” of subtle light. And although “light and space” are often Nordman’s rooms’ most visible characteristics/components/elements—especially in reproduction—they are only that: the materials from which a more complex work “unfolds” in time.

Hard to describe and even harder to illustrate, Nordman’s works elude definition and definitiveness, yet they remain very specific in their conception and depend on precision for their execution. Many of these rooms were constructed within museums, but just as many took place in her studio and in other storefronts in the working-class neighborhoods of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Milan, Genoa, Kassel, and Düsseldorf. If not truly outside of the art system then at least on its fringes, these works were premised physically and conceptually on their location “in the context of the persons present in the city.”¹

This project pays particular attention to the relationship between studio and storefront works in Los Angeles vis-à-vis not only their museum-based and international counterparts, but not before exploring Nordman’s earliest films and desert performances to set up fundamental terms, conditions, and themes consistent throughout her oeuvre. Ultimately, I will describe how all of her works, but particularly the seemingly exclusively formal and phenomenological room works, are actually in close dialogue with Hollywood movie-making, cinematic avant-gardes, and the then temporally and geographically proximate flourishing of the “post-studio” and feminist art movements. Furthermore, because the works’ difference is most visibly manifest in their use of space and place and sight, I will draw on theories of vision and feminist geography to investigate the cultural, social and political dynamics at play within the work and between its concept and site and to suggest a more intrinsic political reading of Nordman’s oeuvre.

Recalibrating History

¹ Maria Nordman, *De Sculptura II: City Sculpture* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, and Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1997), 9.

Because of their ephemeral existence, the difficulty in photographing them, the highly subjective nature of describing them, Nordman's work has been hard to locate historically and geographically. This dissertation proposes that we think about the relationship between Nordman's work and space differently—beyond the Light and Space Movement in which she continues to be miscategorized. I am interested in the ways they inhabit, entwine, and resist the histories and discourses of both art history and film. Beginning with the deterritorialization of film and the dematerialization of sculpture, I will consider to a range of issues around “the spatial.” To investigate the attendant social, cultural, economic and political implications of Nordman's use of everyday spaces and gestures, I will return throughout to Michel de Certeau's notions of the use of unscripted daily life as “tactics” by which to call out or resist the “strategies” of institutions both visible and internalized.

I will consider how Nordman's highly conceptual, self-reflexive films and their celluloid-free in situ performances combine strategies and tactics to complicate the binaries of illumination/obscuration, distance/proximity, motion/stasis, nature/culture, actor/spectator/participant, set/location to offer a very different kind of antecedent and logic for her rooms than the Minimalist sculpture and Hard Edge Abstraction from which the Light and Space artists' installations emerged. Specifically, I will look at how, by subverting the conventions of narrativity, continuous editing, projection and viewing, and in repurposing special effects, Nordman's films and fires toyed with the tropes, props, topographies, and economies specific to Hollywood moviemaking.

Nordman's subsequent room works, however, take on more formal qualities—especially in photographs—that evoke the cinematic avant-gardes that were less concerned with the culture and industry of Hollywood and more focused on the physical properties and ideological apparatus of film. Like Structural Filmmakers Malcolm Le Grice in London and Anthony McCall in New York whose last “Solid Light Film” renounced the projector altogether in favor of pure light, space and time, Nordman's first interior room works manipulated architecture, light, and time to create an immersive experience. And, like her Fire Performances, they eschewed the mechanical camera and projector in favor of natural light and ambient effects. However, though they may forgo the material and ideological trappings of cinema, as rooms, the works remain “cameras” or “chambers” in the original Latin and Greek sense of the word. But while Nordman's cameras train natural light, they are not traditional camera obscuras that through a pinhole project a visual inversion of the scene just beyond the wall. Nordman's cameras in fact use and diffuse light in such a way that challenges the visual and foregrounds the other senses.

Social Context

I propose that Nordman's formal works exceed epistemological concerns to address current events. In other words, the conditions they allegorize are not just of local or material or historical production, but the social and geopolitical conditions of the late 1960s. I will consider how ongoing international situations of the Cold War and Vietnam War and their proximate effects like the rise of the military-industrial complex in Los Angeles inform Nordman's work. I will also explore the impact of local events with national reverberations, like the Watts Riot, which occurred just a few weeks before and a few miles away from Nordman's start in Masters

of Fine Arts program in the Fall of 1965 at University of California, Los Angeles, and the Artists' Peace Tower in 1966.

While I make concrete arguments for the allegorical presence of aspects of some of these historical events and social upheaval, the entire context and logic of her work is informed by other events in more subtle and fundamental ways. Text and language and pushing and crossing of boundaries and borders is everywhere in her oeuvre at a time of the Free Speech Movement of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and later, the 1968 student and worker protests in Paris, whose constitutional freedoms and right to expression would have had added import for an artist emigrant from a Soviet Bloc country.

Biography

The far-flung, multiplicity and physical heterogeneity of the works—their diasporic status—can be seen to reflect class relations, as well as Nordman's own personal history. The artist has been careful to contain and manage her biography and to eschew connections between the facts of her life and the meaning of her work. Early catalogues offered some basic information, but Nordman grew increasingly restrained to the point where her "Artist's Biography" was often blank or simply her birthdate and place—themselves a register of her own originating coordinates in time and space. Other details culled across various interviews and articles offer details of varying reliability. Nordman was born in 1943 in Görlitz—the largest town in Silesia, a then-East German province on the Polish border. Her family, which apparently included her mother and father and herself, left in 1954, travelling to Virginia and Pennsylvania before arriving in Los Angeles in 1961. The 1968 entry from the "Chronology" included in her *Saddleback Mountain* catalogue reads: "Travel in Europe / Max Planck Institute, Stuttgart, Germany / Collaborative Research, coherent light models."² Nothing has been written about the circumstances and details of her emigration, nor about her return trips to Europe, which at some point became so regular a journey as to be formalized in subsequent catalogues as "Lives in Santa Monica and Germany."

Chapter One: Ever-Moving Images

Ever-Moving Images proposes Nordman's films and photographs as investigations of technology and epistemology, but whose real interest and subject is the human. This may not be apparent at first in the unpopulated Found Room photographs, but, I will argue, as recently evacuated spaces and as images that record the presence of the artist, Nordman's photographs are social documents and portraits in absentia. Without the distraction of a manifest human subject, these images offer an opportunity to think about the spaces we inhabit, to project ourselves into the work while also opening up their specific geographic locations as constellated sites of social history.

Similarly, Nordman's films are highly invested in the machinic, but ultimately project a human preoccupation. Where the absence of the body in the photographs allowed for relations of space, time, volume, and light, corporeal presence, in the films, the specificity of gender, age, race shifts the attention of relations to the interpersonal and the social, themes that anticipate the

² "Chronology," in Barbara Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain* (Irvine: University of California, 1973), u.p.

room works in Chapter Four. Nordman's films are populated in two distinct ways. First, people are depicted; they are subjects and subject matter. And, in the later Film Rooms, bodies literally become figurative screens on which to project footage and certain utopic ideas about community, publics, and freedom. The human body as a membrane and its permeable, mutable, unpredictable, and flexible habitus is both highly analogous to movie scrim and screens, and in distinct tension with the materials of the built environment it inhabits. In its multiple modes and ever-unstable position, the body in Nordman's films co-locates and complicates issues of subjectivity. Furthermore, in the late 1960s at a time when gender and race were very much a part of national consciousness, Nordman's exploration of characters and instability exceeds formal, technical or historical interest to take on the charge of early identity politics.

Models of subjectivities—and their intellectual traditions and histories—are also reinforced by the strategies by which Nordman brings into tension with the history of cinema. Pre-, proto-, and early cinematic technologies and socialities are redeployed here and placed in conversation and contradistinction with Hollywood. Typical of the avant-garde, this chapter draws on David E. James's explicit histories of minor cinemas in Los Angeles as well as his Marxist claims for the way in which experimental cinema analogizes the conditions of its production.³ My consideration of Nordman's films is also shaped by their liminal position between film and art worlds and between discrete objects and participatory experiences as well as her own position between solo artist and dependent auteur.

Chapter Two: Fires, Fragments, Words, Books

Chapter Two extends my analysis of Nordman's work vis-à-vis regimes of vision, epistemology, and representation to include particular analysis of photographs that document her Fire Performances from 1967–68. That these images are found, in various manipulations, in her limited edition catalogues/artist books, expands the discussion to consider the ways in which her works occupy multiple modalities and discursive sites. Given this dispersion, and the ways it raises the question, "What is the work?," I invoke theories of the fragment, the multiple, and ideas about context, nomination, and site-specificity. This theoretical matrix here is key in establishing a foundation and framework for elucidating the eventual room works.

Chapter Two also explores the pro-filmic events themselves—the Fire Performances—to offer a particular historical context and material analysis in the environs of the contemporaneous movements of Fluxus, Earthworks, and performance. I consider how a larger social context and the history of materials invests the work with a broader politics and, I argue, an implicit critique of urban expansionism, the military industrial complex in Southern California, and the Vietnam War.

Chapter Three: Beams and Walls

Nordman's initial association with the Light and Space movement likely began as a result of the seeming consonance between her experiences with anechoic chambers and her work with

³ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

lasers at the Max Planck Institute in Stuttgart in 1967 and Robert Irwin and James Turrell's explorations with Ganzfelds and anechoic chambers as part of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's The Art and Technology Program (A&T) which began that same year.⁴ Though never realized, Nordman's, "plans for rooms to be constructed out of various kinds of coherent light," certainly would have appeared to be of a kind with the light installations that Turrell had already been working on in his studio.⁵

This chapter will consider this relationship, and think about the ways in which Nordman's laser experiments connect to her other lesser-known works use different spaces and lights to reflect the political currents and events of the late 1960s. This investigation of geopolitical space, space exploration, urban spatialities, and social relations will segue into a discussion of Nordman's work with the modernist architect Richard Neutra, an important connection and influence which has only ever been mentioned superficially.

Rather than focusing, as did the earlier chapters, on discrete series of works, Chapter Three extends Chapter Two's social context to consider in more depth, particular events—the Space Race, the Art and Technology Program at LACMA—as well as general ideas about time, space and architecture, and Nordman's relation to them. Like the camera, and naming and categorizing discussed in earlier chapters, the clock too proposes itself as a neutral truth-telling device. But like captured photographs and catalogues, kept time is highly mediated, culturally conditioned, and deeply political. Within this more developed framework, I return to extend my previous analysis of the photographs and films, and then move on to consider several unrealized experiments or seemingly "one-off" works. In paying close attention to the material history and construction of these works, to Nordman's interest in science in general—and to the theoretical and practical applications of quantum physics in particular—I demonstrate the ways in which these under-discussed works can be seen as contiguous with her earlier photos, films, and performances, and her later rooms discussed in the final chapter.

Chapter Four: On and In Location: The Room Works

In 1969, Nordman began constructing the "rooms" for which she is now most well known. Situated within her studio, other neighborhood storefronts, and museums, these architectural interventions created uncanny illusions of space. Like the Film Rooms before them, Nordman's room works are both ephemeral and continuous "situations" that involve time, light, space, and people. They are carefully crafted, but the experiences they engender are highly contingent. Whether a temporary darkened room with carefully cascading sheets of light, or a planted ambulatory of trees along a river, all of Nordman's works engage physical and social space and each is but an instantiation—a time slice—of an idea that continues in perpetuity. Though all her works are conceived for the ordinary person, the "passerby," this conceptual tactic is most explicit in those that take place within pre-existing storefronts and are embedded in urban mixed-use neighborhoods.

If in Chapter Three time and space are made explicit as cultural constructions shaped by political and economic pressures, and as strategies and technologies by which to perpetuate

⁴ Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 222. Nothing else has been written about the origins, location, details, duration, or extent of Nordman's work at the Planck Institut.

⁵ In 1973, Nordman said, "I used to go into an anechoic chamber a few years back, where I discovered that I was emitting everything myself into a black and soundless space. My eyes were projecting white onto the void, my ears were playing my body sounds." (Nordman interview by Barbara Haskell and Hal Glicksman in Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*, u.p.)

power, Chapter Four considers temporality as the intersection of rational and natural time — a matrix I examine through theories of the everyday and urban geography. The thinking of Henri Lefebvre’s everyday time, Guy Debord’s *dérives* and *détournements*, Walter Benjamin’s phantasmagoria, and especially, Michel de Certeau, offer ways into understanding the political stakes of Nordman’s Room Works, especially those situated in her studio and sited in the neighborhood.

According to de Certeau institutions of all kinds are “producers” of “strategies” in the service of maintaining hegemonic power.⁶ Their overarching and predetermined plans are either passively accepted by “consumers” or “tactically” reused and subverted by “users.” They “poach” the gestures, rules and products of everyday life to create a resistance that is never wholly outside nor determined by that culture. Nordman’s works operate in this interstitial way both conceptually and spatially. They explore the in-betweens of institutions, and literally occupy and are preoccupied with their back alleys, vacant buildings, and transitional neighborhoods. Her works’ re-use of the everyday represents the ways in which humans can co-opt subvert the stuff and strategies of closed systems of representation, knowledge, and power to create open conditions for connection and collaboration. Just as de Certeau signals this shift and its empowerment of the everyday person by calling them “users” rather than consumers, so too does Nordman activate the perception of “viewers” by calling them “participants.”

Regardless of its location, I contend that every iteration of a Nordman work can be understood as a fragment, or what Graeme Gilloch calls a “monad” or that which,

Points beyond itself, comes to stand for, or stand in for, the totality of which it is a part. What is present is incomplete, apparently trivial what is complete is absent, unrepresentable except through the trivial. This paradox frames the ambiguous status of the monadological fragment it is derided and prized in the same moment. Above all, the fragment serves as a sign for or, more precisely, becomes an allegorical representation of, the infinite.⁷

This aspect of infinite incompleteness, of endless possible performances of a score is fundamental to Nordman’s work, and is in distinct tension with the complete control she attempts to exert over her work’s reception which, in turn, complicates traditional modes of art historical legibility: She is so selective about the exhibitions in which she will show her work that she risks art historical elision; she has never permitted casual photography of her work and does not part easily with the right to reproduce the photos from her archive.

Nordman also challenges art historical methodologies and conventions within her own written and visual documentation, which has the result of fragmenting rather than cohering information. First, she often changes the titles of her work. A piece instantiated in a particular place and time can be found referred to by multiple names, the result of both critical error—which is then perpetuated in the scholarship—and Nordman’s own, intentional, endless revisions. This creates an emphasis on the status of the works as continuous, and is most overt in Nordman’s inclusion of the date in the title followed by an em-dash. As a result, for example, we

⁶ Michel de Certeau, “General Introduction” to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi–xxiv.

⁷ Though Gilloch here is referring specifically to the work of Walter Benjamin, the idea of the fragment and its connection to historical materialism has, as I later develop, a conceptual corollary throughout Nordman’s oeuvre. Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Polity Press, 2002), 40.

are clear that *Untitled, 1969–, 1983*, is a part, a fragment of an endlessly extendable concept, a performance of a score, or what Mel Bochner coined in the mid-1960s as a “portable idea.”⁸ Unlike the discrete portable object or the site-specific work which can only exist in one place at a time, for Bochner and Nordman, physical location is “merely a minor variable” to a mobile idea. Its ontology is one of “internal relationships”: “As long as the internal relationships of measurements and materials remain constant it’s the same work no matter where it is.”⁹

The portability of Nordman’s works, combined with the fact that many are similar conceptually and physically, makes it easy to mistake the fragments—photos and plans—of one work for another. There is also a second kind of descriptive instability at play in the documentation of these works. It has to do not with how the work is captioned, but how it is captured in photographs. I call on “capture” here in its full force to evoke the ways in which words and images are believed to tame and train meaning in artworks, but whose subjects—especially those of a dematerialized nature—ultimately exceed the domestication of common description. As with the limits to historical materialism described by Walter Benjamin, even when in plain sight, photographs of Nordman’s work are not only radically insufficient in their inescapable emphasis on the physical parameters of the work—its light and space—but, alone these images can misrepresent the work altogether. To wit, in photographs, the clean lines within the crisp compositions and architectural rhetoric of Nordman’s room works appear Minimalist; their materials and location suggest they are part of what Claire Bishop calls Minimalism’s “West Coast response”: the “Light and Space” movement.¹⁰

Thus, the main ways in which historians survey and study works of art—title, image, quotation—are rendered partial, unreliable, or inaccessible. Paradoxically, this fragmentation and historical occlusion illustrates—albeit theoretically—the work better than any visual or verbal description could. Photographs and text represent *a minima* works whose unbounded *maxima* include epistemological critique of nomination, categorization, and objective knowledge.

Naming

Like clocks that assign arbitrary numbers to the lived experience of time, titles have long been important to the institution of art history. If Duchamp’s nomination opened up the possibility that all objects could be art, for the connoisseur, registrar, gallerist, and scholar, names operate in an inverse way. They serve to fix, to track, to define and describe what is seen, to disambiguate one work from another. For Nordman, titles are but another site to assert the expansive, discursive, and complex terms of her work. As noted, Chapters One and Four look at naming as tactic and conceptual element throughout Nordman’s work. The minor grammatical inconsistencies, varied formats, or completely different names throughout her captions and catalogues are tactical instabilities that allow Nordman’s works to circumvent institutional strategies circumscription. And because destabilizing language is a political move—a form of nominative institutional critique—it, as intended, creates issues in documenting and discussing

⁸ Mel Bochner, “An Interview with Elayne Varian” in Mel Bochner, *Solar System & Rest Rooms: Writings and Interviews, 1965–2007* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008), 57. The title of Bochner’s book comes from a sign in the Hayden Planetarium at the American Museum of Natural History that was included in the article he co-authored with Robert Smithson, “The Domain of the Great Bear,” and appeared in the Fall 1966 issue of *Art Voices*.

⁹ Bochner, 57.

¹⁰ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 56.

the work. So, while I will offer a meta-analysis of the seeming inconsistencies of titles in Nordman's practice, making such analysis intelligible, paradoxically requires some consistency. Whether subconscious or translational slips, intentional conceptual tactics, or just plain errors, they also prevent conclusive cataloguing and deter the undetermined scholar, all which contributes to her continued status among the understudied.

For the sake of consistency and clarity, I will refer to works—and their subsequent iterations—by the titles conferred in Nordman's books or to the titles she has used that best indicate their locations; iterations of a previous work in a different location will be addressed in the text and variations on any titles will be acknowledged in the footnotes. I have also maintained the art historical conventions of upper and lower case roman font for the names of series and upper and lower case italics for the titles of individual works. At first mention, I include both the series and title separated by a colon; in subsequent reference the series name often drops off. In the case of works that have been exhibited in more than one location, I have included both the original date and the succeeding date, even if the date is included as part of the title.

Chapter One: *Ever-Moving Images*

In 1964, with already over two-and-a-half million inhabitants, Los Angeles had grown sixty-percent since the beginning of World War II to become the second most populous city in the United States.¹¹ Rather than the typical modern, planned metropolis radiating out from a defined center, Los Angeles's development was uneven, an "archipelago" of discrete communities between the mountains and the Pacific Ocean, born of successive waves of immigration throughout the century. "Anglos from the Midwest and South, blacks and Mexicans, and most recently East Asians," David E. James describes, "created distinct enclaves, many of them internally homogenous and essentially segregated from each other by race and class."¹²

In the 1960s, culture was used as a strategy to develop a civic core and identity. But rather than unify these polynucleated neighborhoods and towns, the establishment of arts institutions underscored socioeconomic disparity while celebrating Los Angeles's arrival as an international destination. Walt Disney had founded the Los Angeles Symphony and Ballet downtown and the visual arts was gaining traction through a variety of venues; the staid Getty Museum in Malibu, the Norton Simon Museum, and the Pasadena Museum of Art, under the leadership of Curator Walter Hopps. Indeed, *Artforum* dedicated their summer 1964 issue to "The Los Angeles Scene Today," a series of articles about collectors, architecture, artists, and museums. The inside cover of the magazine featured a double-page spread of the new Los Angeles County Museum of Art which was scheduled to open in West Hollywood the following year and promised to give institutional chops to a burgeoning and scattered local avant-garde. In one article, "The Cool School," whose moniker would stick, editor Philip Leider identified the "Los Angeles avant-garde" as including Robert Irwin, Ken Price, Larry Bell, Billy Al Bengston, Ed Ruscha, Joe Goode, and Llyn Foulkes—a group he touted as behind the, "most interesting and significant art being produced in American today."¹³

This was the summer before Nordman's final undergraduate semester at University of California, Los Angeles where she had matriculated into the College of Fine Art in 1961. The College, which only been established the preceding year, granted degrees in the traditional "fine arts" of art, dance, music and theater arts; but its progressive Theater Arts Department included not just dramaturgy, but television, and film.¹⁴ The multifarious structure and spirit of the College and, especially, the department, meant that art students focusing on sculpture, as Nordman did, could sample courses in a variety of not only other media, but disciplines as well. The College also saw in 1965 the completion of the Dickson Art Center where Nordman would have her culminating student exhibition in 1967, the year she graduated with a Masters of Arts.¹⁵

Given the integrated organization and experimental ethos of UCLA art department, it is not surprising that, as a graduate student, Nordman made a body of photographic work and films

¹¹ The Official US Censuses of 1960 and recorded 2,479,015 and 2,811,801 people living in the City of Los Angeles. California State Data Center, http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/historical_census_1850-2010/view.php

¹² James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 5. For a postmodernist history of Los Angeles see, Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London and New York: Verso, 1990); for a postmodern geographic perspective see, Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹³ Philip Leider, "The Cool School," *Artforum* (Summer 1964), 47–52.

¹⁴ Lee Mullican was assistant professor in the Art Department during 1966–67; Richard Diebenkorn was Professor of art in 1966–67; Robert Heineken taught Photography in 1966–67.

¹⁵ Nordman matriculated in 1961; UCLA 46th Commencement Program, June 11, 1965; Nordman is listed as "Marie Louise Nordmann," Memorial Archives, Center, UCLA University Archives.

that blur the boundaries between objects, film, and performance to propose an intermedial definition of three-dimensional work. For the Found Rooms series (1966–67), Nordman photographed existing publicly accessible interior locations in Los Angeles and New Mexico and then manipulated the prints. These images, their titles, and their contexts framed otherwise unremarkable stumbled-upon scenes like abandoned buildings (Found Room: *Venice* and Found Room: *New Mexico*), a cavernous bank, or an empty storefront (Found Room: *Lincoln Boulevard*), and complicated the relationship between sculpture, architecture, and photography. (Figs. 1, 3, 4) As “found” rooms, they extend Marcel Duchamp’s *trouvés* to include not just *objets* but places too. Just as Duchamp transformed the stuff of everyday into “readymade” sculptures by placing them on pedestals in an exhibition, Nordman too “nominates” her Found Rooms as art through her uses of lenses, text, space, and context. In a conversation from 1970, she explicit about the influence of the French artist: “What [Duchamp is] making clear with the ready-mades—[is] that the sites used for instating meaning are clearly limited—they also isolate meaning—this is not without humor, considering that he himself never limited meaning.”¹⁶

Her first films would also include rooms, but rather than the found spaces captured in her photographs, her Film Rooms, *Eat* (1966) and *Smoke* (1968), would be specifically constructed, at the ready, by Nordman.¹⁷ (Figs. 5, 6) As such, these “intermedial” works combine sculpture, photography, film, and architecture to challenge not just modern categories and uses for art, but, what Dick Higgins saw in 1966 as the political possibility of “intermedia”:

A new way of looking at things, but more totally, since we are more impatient and more anxious to go to the basic images. This explains the impact of Happenings, event pieces, mixed media films. We do not ask any more to speak magnificently of taking arms against a sea of troubles, we want to see it done. The art which most directly does this is the one which allows this immediacy, with a minimum of distractions.¹⁸

Nordman’s photographs and films in their formally straightforward images, unedited footage, unmediated performances, and her plentiful explanatory text, offer just such an immediacy and, as I will demonstrate, go beyond, “simply talking about Viet Nam or the crisis in our Labor movements.”¹⁹ Without overtly using traditional or representational images of protest, Nordman indeed “find[s] the ways to say what has to be said in the light of [intermedia’s] new means of communication.”²⁰ This chapter will explore specifically how Nordman uses an “emphasi[s] on the dialectic between media,” especially the spaces between art and cinema, between performance and image, between object and viewer, and, especially between the spaces

¹⁶ Nordman, “Discussion Details on Pico Boulevard,” in *De Sculptura II*, 61.

¹⁷ Her films are briefly but incisively discussed in “The Work Room and the Museum Space: Maria Nordman,” in Diana Burgess Fuller and Daniela Salvioni, eds., *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections, 1950-2000* (Berkeley: University of California; San Jose: San Jose Museum of Art, 2002), 281–83.

¹⁸ Dick Higgins, “Statement on Intermedia,” August 3, 1966, in Wolf Vostell, ed., *Dé-coll/age (décollage) * 6* (Frankfurt: Typos Verlag and New York: Something Else), 1967. <http://www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Higgins/intermedia2.html>.

For a history of Fluxus see Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, eds., *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993) and Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Dick Higgins.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

within cinema to create works that responds obliquely but clearly to Higgins's social call to arms.²¹

But Nordman's curiosity and interests exceeded intermedial arts to be rigorously interdisciplinary in their scope and politics. Indeed, she cites her choice of university as a matter of geographic "proximity," but, significantly, one that offered greater exposure to the far-flung ideas of the hard and soft sciences: "I think [the university] is important as place for the study of art," reflected Nordman, "in the sense that there is so much chance possibility of what you might meet or who you might meet, in what field."²² Proximity, chance, possibility, meeting, art, science, fields: these are not only some of the thematic concerns that recur in Nordman's student work begun at UCLA, but are essential to logic and physical structure of all that she has made since. This chapter will explore how these early photo and film-based works made at UCLA dematerialize sculpture into rooms and reterritorialize sites into spaces that co-locate and activate production, consumption, and participation. I will also consider how Nordman's strategies and interventions, which included repetition, inversion, appropriation, recreation, and nomination, expose and challenge naturalized technologies of sight, representation, and site. But rather than merely aggressive disruptive or reinscriptive, I will argue that the interrelation between these formal procedures, exhibition strategies, and the social functions of Nordman's photographs and films not only, "internalize the conditions of [their] production," as James puts it, to make themselves "an allegory" of such procedures, but that such internalization is in fact brought forth in disclosive ways that propose a broader, politically-charged perspective on issues of class, race, gender, identity, and epistemology.

West Coast Conceptualism

Nordman's work emerged within a specific local climate in Southern California—one marked by a widely acknowledged indebtedness to and familiarity with Duchamp. The French artist's readymades were considered a form of Dada at the time they were created, and the deft, daft, and irreverent use of language and appropriation behind them were a foundational strategy for another, later visual avant-garde: conceptualism. Emerging at once from and as a strain of both Pop and Minimalism in the mid-1960s, conceptual art, or "idea art,"—emphasized the concept behind the art works over its material and aesthetic qualities.²³ The final work—that which might be displayed in an exhibition—was often regarded as more byproduct or incidental evidence of the ideas it explored. To emphasize process and intellectual significance instead of a work's physical and economic preciousness, conceptual artists often used "deskilled" techniques and unconventional media that lay outside of "fine art." Performance, drawing, and photography emerged in the 1960s from the shadows of high modernist abstract painting and sculpture to use rules and rulers the fodder of quotidian life not just to challenge art of their day, but to question

²¹ Ibid.

²² Maria Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield. Untranscribed Recording of Personal Interview. April 1978. Jan Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²³ For an overview of conceptual art see: Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer. *Reconsidering the Object of Art 1965-1975*. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996). For a contemporaneous collection of artists' and critical writing on "idea art" see, Gregory Battcock, ed., *Idea Art* (New York: Dutton, 1970); for a specific consideration of the conceptual uses of photography see, Douglas Fogle, *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960-1982* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003).

the very epistemological traditions on which modernism was both founded and eventually founded.

In the United States, conceptualism had regional developments, and its emphasis varied based on location. Generally speaking, many early conceptual artists in New York—Sol Lewitt, Hanna Darboven, Christine Kozlov, Mel Bochner, Robert Barry, and Vito Acconci among them—developed practices that sought to either execute sets of conditions or set out to gather data; the physical appearance of these rigorous works was minimal, if it hadn't been dematerialized altogether.²⁴ And though there were notable exceptions in the East and elsewhere, on the West Coast, conceptualism, like Pop art, engaged more readily with humor, advertising, and everyday objects—the stuff of Duchamp.²⁵

This inflection likely resulted from the fact that though Duchamp lived in New York at the time, his first American retrospective took place on the West Coast in 1963.²⁶ The landmark exhibition, *Marcel Duchamp*, organized by Walter Hopps that fall at the Pasadena Museum of Art, was seen by many young artists including Robert Irwin, Andy Warhol, and Ed Ruscha—all of whom also had their first solo exhibitions—in 1963, 1959, 1962 respectively—at Ferus Gallery in West Los Angeles, which was then co-directed by Hopps and Irving Blum.²⁷ The varied connections and community among these artists and institutions attests to not only Hopps's prescience as a curator and his foundational role in promoting Light and Space, Pop and conceptual art, but to the ways in which Duchamp directly influenced these artists, who, in turn, further circulated his ideas locally. Thus, by the time Nordman began graduate school at UCLA in 1965, Duchamp, and his conceptual legacy—l'air Duchamp, as it were—had been atomized across Los Angeles.

Though Duchamp is not known primarily as a photographer, his interests can be considered if not photographic, then at least in spirit certainly proto-photographic. Works like *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour* (1918) and *Rotary Glass (Precision Optics)* (1963; second version of 1920 original)—both on view in the Pasadena show—examine machines and systems of seeing, saying, and knowing, ideas that were subsequently explored by the conceptualists' cameras or in practices that repurposed existing—or readymade—photographs. Perhaps not surprisingly, many Southern California artists would go on to use photography in ways that continue both Duchamp's interest in vision, language, and epistemology—and his slyly dry humor.

Indeed, photoconceptualism was not only more prevalent in the West, but it was also provocative.²⁹ The mass production, practical beginnings, and farcical ends of Duchamp's readymade urinal were transposed into photography as mass media, advertising/document, and deadpan, dead-end projects of scientific purport but zero import. The textbook example is of course Ed Ruscha's *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) whose absurdist methodical mimicry—photographing every gasoline station between Tulsa and Los Angeles—is only outdone and

²⁴ Lucy Lippard offers an insightful contemporaneous analysis of dematerialization in Lucy Lippard. *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. (New York: Praeger, 1973).

²⁵ This difference in inflection is central to the exhibition thesis and catalogue essays by Constance M. Lewallen and Karen Moss, eds., *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). For a specific consideration of conceptual art in Los Angeles, see: Catherine Grenier, ed. *Catalog L.A.: Birth of an Art Capital, 1955–1985* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006).

²⁶ The exhibition, which was on view October 8 to November 3, 1963, included 114 works by Marcel Duchamp or his alter ego, Rose Selavy and was considered a challenge to the East Coast as art world authority.

²⁷ During its existence between 1957 and 1966, Ferus Gallery introduced and exhibited many male artists who would go on to have notable careers including:

²⁹ A notable exception here is Robert Barry.

undone by the sheer drone of the images themselves. By minimizing, “overt signs of an authorial presence,” Anne Rorimer explains, conceptual photography gives the impression that it has run its own, “logically self-propelling course in accordance with the directives set up for it.”³⁰ In this way, by aspiring to its “essential” form and potential, conceptual photography, paradoxically, can be misunderstood to exemplify the modernist ideal of material self-referentiality.

However, Rorimer continues, photography like Ruscha’s was able to reject, “pure solipsism along with materiality” by virtue of its ability to, “make contact with recognizable aspects of reality.”³¹ Nordman too begins with straight-photography. But, I believe, her practice misses the modernist *mise-en-abyme* not by making contact through re-presenting the “real” world, but by way of complicating and destabilizing such contact to question representation itself. Where other conceptual artists played on and ironized photography’s false claim to objectivity and transparency through seemingly straightforward presentation in familiar and authoritative “real-world” formats like the book, the advertisement, and the planful series, Nordman manipulated her photographs such that the images were, from the very start, hard to read and subtle in their critique.

Her use of duplication, inversion, collage, recycling, layering, repurposing, cropping and recontextualizing to disrupt legibility and this or “making strange” of reality connects her practice, thematically, politically and technically, to another early avant-garde: Russian Constructivism.³² Like Dada and the surrealists, Bertolt Brecht and the Russian Constructivists also rejected the modernist idea of autonomous art but did so by using printed media and photomontage to divest art of elitism and recalibrate it as a social practice.³³ Just as Brecht used theatrical techniques to remind the viewer of the constructed nature of representation, Nordman’s films can also be understood to encourage a critical perspective of reality and the possibility to change that reality.³⁴

Found Room Photos

Like her West Coast colleagues’ Duchamp-inflected work, with which she would have been familiar, Nordman’s Found Room photographs also trade on documentary traditions, conceptual repurposing, the serial format, and alternative distributions. But unlike many of them, her work, like the Constructivists, is in no way narrative, nor does it hinge on shtick, and her usually carefully composed images—and their subsequent collages—do not fall under the umbrella of deskilled art. Instead, they productively foreground artistic labor and production, calling as much attention to their own surfaces and statuses as to the scenes they depict.

Though she may not have suffered foolishness gladly, Nordman’s rigor and logic do embrace a certain aleatory in their use of another seemingly opposed operation and condition: chance. In fact, her works would become increasingly contingent, ultimately enacting nothing but a set of conditions. As we will see in Chapter Three, Nordman’s film-less architectural room works—begun in 1969—would eventually manifest, not a particular physical materiality or

³⁰ Anne Rorimer, “California Art Circa 1970: New Mediums and Methodologies,” in *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970*, ed. Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011), 229.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See Maria Gough, *The Artist as Producer: Russian Constructivism in Revolution*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³³ See John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

morphology, but would be defined by the specific relations of their parts, like Mel Bochner's "portable ideas." In this way, the chance and contingency implicit in attendant conditions would dictate the particular texture, tone, and scale of works whose intellectual proportions were fixed. As with Higgins' intermedia, Allan Kaprow's Happenings, and other contemporaneous Fluxus works, the interplay between life and art, reality and representation, image and language, word and meaning, act and evidence is a constant presence—and in constant flux—informs all of Nordman's practice, and was visible even in her earliest student works at UCLA.

Tactics and Poetics of and in the Everyday

One of the ways in which these works can be understood to carry a political charge is the way in which they use chance and aspects of everyday life to resist the strictures of a formalized structure. Where the "portable ideas"—the architectural plans and scores for her works—function as what Michel de Certeau calls "strategies" associated with institutions as "producers" of social order and power, Nordman's work depends equally on chance and viewer participation are "tactics"—actions by "consumers" that cannot be predicted or controlled by the existing structure.³⁵ In this way, just as Nordman's works use or "poach" images, ideas and allegories of the institution, so too do they play out this tension internally: the strategy of the artwork is constantly being shaped and changed by the tactics of both the consumer and Nordman herself.³⁶

Find, Repeat, Revise

If we take the Found Rooms at their titles' face value—Found Room: *Venice*; Found Room: *New Mexico*; Found Room: *Lincoln Boulevard*—the primary condition of their production is their being found, and as such, following James, they in some way internalize and allegorize this foundness. (Figs. 1, 3, 4) "Discovery"—as a structured strategy with its implicit etymological, scientific, exploratory, expansionist, and colonial histories—usually implies something "new," but usually intentionally sought, whose existence now applies to and affects a significant group of people. The "found" tends to be more localized and mundane, an everyday tactic often the result of chance. A new cancer drug or planet is discovered; missing socks are found. Put more generally but pointedly, discovery, with its institutional ring of planning, forward progress and public good, can be seen as being gendered masculine, where finding, with its more private, small-scale victories over everyday entropy—where order is maintained—is tacitly tinged with the feminine. But Nordman's work does not settle easily into binaries; instead there is constant negotiation and instability among received visual and social distinctions between male and female, public and private, inside and outside, real and representation, discovery and mundane. And more than either/or configurations, these seeming oppositional categories often necessarily contain elements of its other. As Henri Lefebvre points out, "knowledge, science and scientific discovery sometimes consist of brief instants of discovery. Yet science has its everyday life: training, teaching, the climate in scientific circles,

³⁵ de Certeau, xi–xxiv.

³⁶ Ibid.

administrative questions, the way institutions operate, etc.”³⁷ Much of Nordman’s work explores these kinds of everyday contexts and processes essential to making her work, and its many productive ambivalences. Its refusal to accede, to explain itself, to align itself with one side or the other—especially in its inclusion of and dependence on contingency has the remonstrative political pulse seen in de Certeau’s everyday life. Like him, she, “side-step[s] the binary logic that infects the analysis of the social...to generat[e] a poetics subtle and tactical enough to allow for the differentiation of a multiple everyday.”³⁸ Importantly, and more in line with de Certeau’s poetics than Lefebvre’s Marxism, Nordman’s work reimagines its potency and potential: “What would a politics be like that emerged from the everyday, instead of one that was simply applied to the everyday?”³⁹

The locations and allusive compositions of the Found Rooms speak to the spectrum betwixt and between such vexed binaries. Some are very public spaces: a downtown bank, the Los Angeles train station. And even those that were once private—a house—have become, through dereliction (an extreme lack of maintenance) publicly accessible. (Fig. 1) The series, as recently illustrated, consists of at least two images of the same interior, which are displayed, together in a printed publication.⁴⁰ “By taking more than one photo of a particular subject at different exposures, at different times of day, or with different objects in the picture, etc.,” Rorimer explains, the artist, “embarked on questioning ‘the photograph’s acceptance as an instigator of reality.’”⁴¹ But where Rorimer focuses this questioning at the level of representation—more than one photograph of a scene—it also occurs at the level of presentation, for the prints of those negatives themselves are multiple and malleable. Nordman manipulates and duplicates her prints to also illustrate the systems of vision and the insufficiency of photography as a purveyor of reality and “truth.” As we have already begun to see, like other conceptual photographers that time, Nordman uses the modernist ideal of photography—in which it fulfills its material potential by documenting the real world—to question its very ability to do so. Indeed, even with very close looking at the Found Rooms images, it is not always apparent whether the prints are exactly the same or if they are prints produced from the same negative but made different in the darkroom process—or if they are very similar looking images that actually originated from different negatives.

Publishing Images and Words

Nordman has always been a prolific writer—of notes, poems, instructions, descriptions, letters, postcards, and artist’s books.⁴² These texts are often pragmatic and related specifically to

³⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, vol. 2 (1961), trans., John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 41.

³⁸ Ben Highmore, “De Certeau’s Poetics of the Everyday,” in *Everyday Life and Cultural Theory: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁰ I have found no evidence that the Found Rooms series was ever framed or exhibited on a wall.

⁴¹ Anne Rorimer, “Reality in Early Works by Maria Nordman,” essay for unpublished exhibition catalogue for *Maria Nordman*, Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art in Porto, Portugal, May 6 – July 16, 2007, u.p.); Nordman had also been included in the museum’s inaugural exhibition, *Circa 1968*, which ran June 6 – August 29, 1999, and was curated by Vicente Todoli.

⁴² Maria Nordman, *Fragment from the Notes of Maria Nordman*, Kunstraum München, 1977; Maria Nordman, *Working Notes/Aantekeningen*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, 1980; Maria Nordman, *Poeima, Notizen/notes 1970* (Cologne: Walther König, 1982); Maria Nordman, *De Musica: New Conjoint City Proposals* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzern, New York: Public Art Fund Inc. and Dia Center for the Arts, Hamburg: Kulturbehörde, and Rennes: FRAC Bretagne, 1993); Maria Nordman, *De Sculptura: Works in the City: Some Ongoing Questions* (Munich:

the conditions of the work and the status of certain objects vis-à-vis the work itself. For example, a sketch for *Saddleback Mountain* (1973), are clearly marked as “architectural drawing” and photographs of her Fire Performances are stamped with “FRAGMENT.” (Figs. 7, 8) These insistent and recurring marks suggest an attempt to maintain a distinction between ephemeral art work and the plans and documents that bracket it; such a distinction is seemingly contradictory to the open system model that the works as ideas aspire towards. But, as will be analyzed in detail in subsequent chapters, this censure may be a practical measure, not to restrict ideas, but rather to ensure that incomplete versions or fragments of the work do not, like so much ephemera associated with conceptual art, slip into the market as misleading synecdoches.

Because of the liminal and slippery status of these documents, Nordman still owns them, maintaining a singular and, largely inaccessible archive of her work and its documentation. She has, however, over the years, released images and information about her early oeuvre through a series of limited edition artist’s books, each published on the occasion of a significant exhibition; these are considered in depth in Chapter Two. Given that her books are often the only source of images and exhibition histories of her work, it is unclear how the original Found Room photographs would have appeared in the late 1960s. Four works from the Found Room series would come to appear, three decades later, in Nordman’s artist’s book *De Sculptura II: City Sculpture* (1997).⁴³ But, tellingly, each subsequent published image of a Found Room is composed differently, a strategy that requires and seems to point out the ultimate limits of close examination and comparison, hallmarks of Comtean epistemological systems. This is true both among the different images as well as different publications of the same image. Sometimes, as in Found Room: *Venice*, several small prints of different views of the same space are inset into a larger one. (Fig. 1) Other times two distinct views appear adjacently: stacked in Found Room: *Lincoln Boulevard, Venice, California* and placed on opposing pages of a double-spread in Found Room: *New Mexico*. (Figs. 1, 4, 3) Occasionally, two prints of the exact same negative are used, as seen in Found Room: *West Los Angeles* (1966) where the image has been rotated ninety-degrees clockwise and doubled horizontally.⁴⁴ (Fig. 9)

There is also variation—and visual insecurity—at a higher level. Though these descriptions—both mine and the images themselves—are specific, they are not definitive, for the works can manifest themselves in distinct visual iterations. For example, the image on the left in Found Room: *New Mexico* is also illustrated in Anne Rorimer’s *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*.⁴⁵ (Figs. 3, 10) But, here, it appears twice, in a vertical pairing, under which appears a text block formatted in the style of a gallery wall label, which includes not only a differing title, *Mountain Air, New Mexico* (1967), but this description:

Open to any person passing twenty-four hours a day.

Midday projection of sunlight through doors and windows, adobe, wood, water and chance elements entering the open door with the wind. Two rooms: each 8’ x 14’ x 9’ high, each with two doors and two windows.

Schirmer/Mosel, 1986); Nordman, *De Sculptura II*; Maria Nordman, *Trabajos en La Ciudad de Ondas* (La Jolla: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985.)

⁴³ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 35–39.

⁴⁴ All of these works appear in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

⁴⁵ Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222.

These conditions become a work of art, in the case that a person passing by chance, chooses to give it this name.

In concert with the original adobe builders, an anonymous co-authorship is arrived at—during the time that it exists as being found and named, by any person arriving by chance.

(No alterations of the given site, other than entering the site, and the making of a photo-fragment negatives. Prints each 8”x 8”)

This work has its potential of being named or not named twenty-four hours a day, as long as the above conditions are maintained.

The bottom image above the text box is, as it is in her artist’s book *De Sculptura*, on its side; and above it, its double is right-side up. The square format of the images, the strong contrast in their exposures, and the abstracted geometry of the planes of light and shadow, make it difficult to quickly establish the correct spatial orientation—and the exact visual correspondence between the two. But if the images are in danger of being flattened into two-dimensional formal studies, the text insists on both their physical presence and the presence of the viewer. In the first stanza, Nordman’s combination of evocative language and specific detail—midday, sunlight, doors, windows, chance, elements, adobe, open, wind, dimensions—allows the reader to imagine being in such a space. These details are not just descriptive, but the conceptual “conditions” which, seen and “named” by a person, transform the abandoned space into a work of art. In providing the very measurements of the room, 8’ x 14’ x 9’, Nordman gives specificity to the place and depth to our reading of the photograph; we no longer just see it, but it now more vividly inhabits the mind’s eye. But haptic projection—picturing ourselves in a space nominated by the artist—does not seem to be the whole point. If for Duchamp calling a urinal art was possible by virtue of his being an artist, Nordman seems to aspire to denominate the power of the artist. By ascribing to anyone who passes by chance the agency and the choice to call the conditions a work of art, Nordman opens up the possibility for everyone to be artists. In a move that demythologizes the genius—technical or intellectual—of the solo artist or auteur, she proposes a conceptualization of conditions and co-authorship between the viewer and the original builders of the adobe structure. She of course is too one who passes by chance, but she does not assert any claim to being the only one who could see this Found Room as art. But at the same time, while she believes anyone could experience it as art, she does not go quite so far as to say that anyone could nominate any *space* as a work of art; the conditions—though contingent themselves—remain determined by Nordman. As a result, there remains a tension between open possibility, the utopic ideal of everything being art and everyone being an artist, and the authority and framing, through agency, images and text, necessary for art work to be visible.

Returning to the images of Found Room: *New Mexico*, the *De Sculptura II* version has none of the didactic support seen in Rorimer’s book. (Figs. 3, 10) This is perhaps because the images are not only different, but are more visually distinct, due, in part, to the much higher contrast of the image on the bottom. Such tonal extremes could have been achieved either by a longer shutter time in the camera, or effected in the darkroom through longer printing exposures, burning and dodging, or chemical baths. Where modulation is lost in either of these processes, darkroom manipulation of another kind—enlargement—renders other details more readable.

Lacking the instructional text, which for all of its aleatoric possibility still circumscribes and fixes the work, we look more closely. The greater size of the *De Sculptura II* image reveals a person just outside the doorway; we are unable to see them in the bright glare, but their shadow is registered on the floor. The relationship cast between body and shadow is analogous to—and doubles—that between the light and the negative the photographic printing process, and, especially, the original exposure of the scene in the camera. It is even more pronounced in the original moment of the photograph's taking, in which the beam of light bounces off of the object, through the camera's lens and onto its chemically sensitized plate. The continuity carried by light—its indexicality—is seen to give the photography a special correspondence with the real world and is cited throughout semiotic and photographic theory as evidence of its ability to accurately and objectively represent it.

In *Found Room: Venice*, Nordman uses indexicality literally by exposing the film strip directly as a contact print—and does so to conceptually question the veracity of its information. (Fig. 1) Here, multiple views of the space appear on the right of a single large enlargement, and as a whole, serves as an object lesson in the printing process. To create a contact strip or print, the developed film is laid directly onto the photographic paper and exposed to light. The resulting sequence of small, negative-sized images is usually the first step in the printing process, and an intermediary step in the creative process. From these thumbnails, the artist can select the negatives that they will go on to print in larger format. Often, they will also mark the contact sheets with directions for how the images might be cropped or adjusted. While contact sheets are, for most photographers, purely procedural and practical, the direct contact between the film and paper means that the images are in a one-to-one size correspondence with their negative—they are neither enlarged nor reduced. This direct and indexical contact also relates them to the “Rayograph,” an avant-garde technique used first by Man Ray, who like Duchamp—with whom he collaborated on the *Rotary Glass* included in the Pasadena show—was affiliated with the Dada movement in early twentieth-century Europe. Also known as “photograms” these photographic images were made without a camera. Instead of using an enlarger to project the small celluloid film negative taken earlier with a camera onto photosensitized paper, Ray placed everyday objects like thumbtacks, light bulbs, a cheese grater, and, delightfully, an unraveling spool of camera film whose scrolling underscores its frames and sprocket holes, but reveals no exposed images.

The defining difference between the photograph and Rayograph lays in their relationship to representation and its measure between object and image: Photographs re-present images of things in the world from a distance—Rayographs directly trace the contours of those very things. But regardless of distance and media, the inscription of objects onto any surface necessarily flattens three-dimensions into two. In the Western tradition of drawing, this translation uses the Albertian perspective, a compensatory system of lines, contrast, color, scale and other conventions of graphic description that aspire toward visual verisimilitude of the third-dimension. In their use of a supposed truth-telling technology to reveal the real as abstraction, Rayographs made plain an important new way of seeing, one that was an extension of the Dada and Duchamp, but also contemporaneous with the constructivist-influenced Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. In the early 1920s Moholy-Nagy was also experimenting with placing objects on sensitized paper. His “photograms” were essential to his “New Vision” which saw the potential of photography and its various technologies to create new ways of seeing the world. And like Ray and Duchamp, he was also interested in reassembling essential aspects of the camera—light, glass, lenses, moving parts—into kinetic sculptures, like the *Light-Space Modulator* (1930)

which cast light about its environment—important precedents for Nordman’s photography, films, and room works.⁴⁷

If the Rayograph/photogram abstracted the real as a function of the proximity between three-dimensional subject and two-dimensional inscription surface, the abstraction of Nordman’s contact prints—which remained two-dimensional throughout translation—required a different strategy: repetition. Where repetition in the service of a series was a common tactic among conceptual artists, straight up visual repetition was more aligned with Pop art and Minimalism. In preserving the several, serial frames and their small scale, Nordman renders each image less legible and less individual. No longer easily distinguished from those at its tangents, the single representational unit is absorbed into a visually abstracted whole. Whereas pure all-over repetition could be seen, according to Rosalind Krauss, as a resistance to a compositional center and the idea of teleology it implies, by including both a central image, and flanking it with repetitive related images, Nordman seems to suggest the singular not as self-evident in the modernist sense, but as one choice among many.⁴⁹

Editing

Indeed, in placing an enlarged final print in Found Room: *Venice*, Nordman makes explicit the selection and editorial process. (Fig. 1) In doing so, the work both challenges photography’s purported objectivity and reminds us that every choice has motivations and implications, and as such, choosing can be a political act. Though single photographs appear to be direct, transparent recordings of the world, they are the result of a series of highly subjective decisions by the photographer in the darkroom. And while the “raw footage” of the celluloid film strip, with its multiple views and its proto status in the artistic process might seem more objective, it too has already been subject to the artist’s myriad conscious and unconscious decisions—both in terms of style, content, and composition—that shape the way it will be read.

This subjectivity—the presence of the photographer—is made clear here in the composition and progression within the filmstrip’s sequence. The strip of five begins at the top with an image that appears to be taken from the doorway: a jamb and peeling wallpaper frame the image on the right, while the view into the space takes us from an armchair in the foreground through another doorway into another space whose demolished back wall opens onto a parking lot behind, with buildings and mountains in the distance. The second of the two images repeat this composition, though the camera has shifted ever so slightly to the right. In the fourth shot down, Nordman has stepped past the armchair into the second doorway to fill the frame with the debris and the building’s demolished back opening. The bottom image appears to be a close-up from the heap: a quasi-abstracted, all-over composition of wood shards and architectural molding.

In a way, the opening in the wall itself functions as a shutter, bringing the outside in, as well as a lens and frame that train and concentrate looking. The clean, machined edges of shutters, lenses, and frames are necessary to their transparent and discrete effect; they elude notice and are devices to be looked through rather than at. By contrast, the jagged, shambling

⁴⁷ See Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision: Fundamentals of Bauhaus Design, Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture* (New York: Wittenborn and Co., 1946).

⁴⁹ Rosalind Krauss, “The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture,” in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998), 250.

wall here is materially and messily manifest. Its hole is both a rupture between public and private, and a lens by which we look out from a private room—a camera—onto a public space; this interface allegorizes the ways in which our personal selves and lives frame the ways in which we see the larger world. Also like a lens or shutter, the aperture in the wall lets the light into the room, and can be seen as an important prefiguration of Nordman's later room works in which she cut holes into the architecture to light her immersive, sculptural chambers, themselves too sited in interstitial spaces and neighborhoods.

Though the image on the left of the Found Room: *Venice* collage appears to be an enlargement of one of the top three images from the contact sheet, closer looking reveals that it is more cropped—the Coca-Cola sign has been clipped at the top and only a sliver of wall on the right remains. These compositional choices could have taken place either during the shooting process, indicating that the close up image is an entirely different (if visually similar) negative, or Nordman could have cropped one of the contact frames in the darkroom process. In the first instance, the effect would be a multiplicity of slightly different views of the same place. The second is a different kind of manipulation: taking an existing negative and mechanically adjusting its scale and size in such a way that seems to be a different view of the scene, but is really a different view negative.

Where contact sheets are normally a preliminary step by which to select the “best” images for final printing, Nordman's inclusion of all of the shots argues against the idea of a “better” or singular view and instead makes a case for multiple equivalent views. Yet, this democratic reading of the collage is complicated by its visual and temporal resemblance to cinematic film. At first glance, the multiple uncut frames that constitute the contact sheet might be mistaken for a filmstrip from a moving picture. This reading is reinforced by the similarity of the images in each frame. Where in photography the exposures could have recorded images taken far apart both temporally and geographically, in a 16 mm movie the images would have been recorded at twenty-four-frames per second and thus each frame would be only slightly different from the ones preceding and following it. Like cinematography, Nordman's still photographs here are taken in close succession to record movement through space: They document her forward progression into the room. By invoking narrative sequence—and progress—and then disrupting it with the single enlarged image, Nordman illustrates the ways in which photography dislocates time and space and, in its access to and uniform delivery of detail beyond the human visual ability, it suggests the rational omniscience that has undergirded the instrumental shaping, imaging, and promulgation of modernity.

Everyday Images

This sequence of images moves us through the space of Found Room: *Venice* with attention to the rough textures and details of the shambling architecture— revealing not just an interior space, but the insides of objects themselves: the extruding chair, the crumbling lathe and plaster, the heaped fallen moldings. This interest in interiority, in revealing, in physical fragility gives the images a psychological charge and suggest them to be elusive self-portraits. More than just circumstantial documents of moments in time and place in which Nordman was uniquely present, they tactically occupy and re-present an interstitial space. In severe disrepair, the building if not already officially condemned threatens civic order. Nordman's intervention is a cascade of subversion: her physical presence is the primary transgression; her shooting of

photographs, a form of poaching, is the second; thirdly, she manipulates her images in ways that both co-opt and disrupt the normative power structures of photography. Neither narrative nor documentary, they are conceptually interstitial themselves, self-portraits manqués in which Nordman's absence can be seen to echo her many indeterminate positions: as an artist in a society determined by use-value, as a woman in a male-dominated art world, as an immigrant, as a physical body defined by change. By engaging with and foregrounding and photographing the “found,” the marginal—the everyday—she tactically claims the space in between and empowers its disenfranchised occupants.

Though *Found Room: Venice* speaks to the fragile and contingent nature of space, particularly personal space and notions of home and identity, it is not clearly domestic. The stuffed chair, its cushion and companion standing lamp suggest a living space, yet the signage—Coca-Cola, Use This Door, a cigarette ad—and the rear parking lot and absence of neighboring houses indicate that there may in fact be a commercial dimension to the space. In the case that it is a domestic space, the use of commercial signage might have been décor. Either way, public and private are intermingled in a way that suggests a proximity and overlap between domesticity and display, and that speak of mixed-use neighborhoods such as Venice where, the title tells us, it was taken. The dilapidation and shift from public to private are also echoed in Venice's own history from vacation destination to seedy and often non-descript drive-through insula along the LA archipelago. A past capital of the California leisure industry in the 1910s, by the 1960s Venice's economic fortunes had foundered, and its once-grand pools, piers, arcades and aspirational canals had given way to transitional businesses, empty lots, and enclaves of artists' studios, including Nordman's.⁵⁰

A pair of images also taken in Venice the preceding year gives different emphasis to interiority and framing. As we saw earlier, the top, left image the a collage/suite of two photos that comprise *Found Rooms: Lincoln Boulevard, Venice* (1966), depicts a spare interior, a space whose emptiness is emphasized by the light that falls from a single rear window to fill the floor. (Fig. 4) Unlike the fullness of *Found Room: Venice*, or its open wall that revealed the exterior world, here the window functions as a limit, not a threshold. The brightness of the incoming light makes it impossible to see through it, and instead illuminates and defines the space itself. Though it initially appears to be a different scene altogether, the second image in this pair was actually taken from the exact same place. The buildings, billboards, and passing cars are not seen looking out from the space, but are reflected in the window looking in.

We know this because of two important details: the lettering in the signage is backwards and the rear window seen in the image on the left is still present. This suggests that Nordman took both images through a window while standing outside that window. In the first instance, no flash was used and a slower shutter speed would have made the interior of the room visible through the glass. In the second, a flash was likely used and its bright glare transformed the glass into a quasi mirror, which then reflected the scene behind it. However, the window in the rear of the room was also sufficiently well-lit to also register on the film. Where the first image is focused on looking in, the second looking in is layered beneath the reflected looking behind. This double action of simultaneous reflection and transparency creates a spatial dislocation and conflation—the three-dimensions of the interior become flattened and abstracted as the rear window is mapped within the reflection on the front window.

The visual collapse of space is the direct result of a specific, brief flash of light; any longer and it would have illuminated the interior. The flash, as both metaphor (a flash of insight)

⁵⁰ For a full history of Venice, see Andrew Deener, *Venice: A Contested History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

and machine (a photographer's burst of light) can be figured as modern ways of seeing, of revealing more than meets the eye. And the material history of the flash is equally modern: The manganese flash enabled night photography and quickly gave way to the strobe, whose calculated and insistent repetition when synced with the camera, broke motion down into a series of frozen, visible poses. However, Nordman's tactical use of the flash and the modernist strategies it evokes and enables—regimentation, examination, classification, discovery, efficiency, preservation—results in a paradoxical effect. Rather than reveal the depth of the space they represent, the Found Rooms of Venice Boulevard collapse into a composition of overlapping geometric planes of black, white, light and detail—a montage that documents more than anything, the invisible presence and vision of the artist.

Pluralities

As we now know, titles are also sites to be complicated, a place of conceptual collapse rather than elucidation. Nordman refers to her photographs as both “Found Room” and “Found Rooms” and it is even unclear whether it is part of the actual title or refers to the series in general. In the case of Found Rooms: *Lincoln Boulevard, Venice* the plural “rooms,” despite the fact that the two images are actually of the same room, suggests that with different lighting—in variable conditions and effects of visibility and time—the appearance, perception, and experience of a single room can be radically different. Alternately, by creating the illusion of the cars being inside the room, it reframes, as did Found Room: *Venice*, the street scene as a room—if we understand “room” to consist of a set of conditions rather than walls. Similarly, though the negatives of the Found Rooms were exposed decades ago, they can still be endlessly manipulated in the printing process in the present. In this way, importantly, the prints are neither standalone photographs nor documentation of a work, but essential, conceptual parts of the work as a whole that includes the profilmic found space, the unique negatives, and every print they proliferate.

Moving Attractions

Given the ways in which Nordman's photographs play with the filmstrip and narrative sequence, it is not surprising that in the same year that she was shooting the Found Room photographs—1966—she took courses in “motion pictures,” most notably, “Theater Arts 152B: Advanced Motion Picture Direction” with the eminent Hollywood director Josef von Sternberg who was “Lecturer in Theater Arts” in the spring semester of 1966.⁵² As a major player in commercial cinema, von Sternberg's presence in academia and among experimental filmmakers makes vivid the tension between Hollywood and the avant-garde. “Given the immediacy of the culture industry's attempts to colonize even initiatives most profoundly antipathetic to it,” James claims that, “Los Angeles has been the single most important point of origin of radically new possibilities for cinema.”⁵³ Nordman's contact with von Sternberg—along with her conversations with, “a cinematographer who had worked with Jean-Luc Godard”—resulted in her first experimental films, which used Hollywood conventions to challenge classic cinema at

⁵² Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield.

⁵³ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 19.

the level of image, narrative, and projection.⁵⁴ This training exposed her to the techniques of commercial, documentary, and experimental filmmaking, which she co-opted into her first films that were, like her Found Rooms, conceptual inquiries into systems of vision and seeing.

Many of the techniques and visual strategies that make the Film Rooms experimental and avant-garde were actually characteristic of the very first films that were made six decades earlier at the turn of the twentieth century. By bringing these visual historical quotations into dialogue with aspects of later and contemporary filmmaking, Nordman offers not just a critique on Hollywood conventions but of the systems of vision and power that are so dominant in classical film as to be invisible. Early cinema was marked not—as teleological film histories would have it—by a drive toward verisimilitude and narrative potential, but by the new art’s power of “making images seen.”⁵⁵ Like early photography, film before 1906—what Tom Gunning calls “the cinema of attractions”—was interested in the very “harnessing of visibility” and its “act of showing and exhibition.”⁵⁶

Though Nordman appears nowhere in avant-garde film histories, the self-reflexive formal structures of representation and reception in her Film Rooms are in-line with post-classical experimental cinema, especially structural, materialist, and Fluxfilm of the 1960s. In these practices, the cinema of attractions did not merely, as Gunning suggests, “go underground” and resurface in the historical avant-garde or as “components” of narrative film.⁵⁷ Instead, these underground films—take as their content, film’s material and form, especially those aspects and effects—the attractions—by which Gunning defines early cinema. In 1969, P. Adams Sitney coined the term “structural film,” and by 1974 had settled on its definition as a film that “insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline.”⁵⁸ In expressing the purity of the media, experimental film falls into both of the then-opposed camps of high-modernism and the avant-garde. It at once reveals the essence of its making yet does not fulfill the modernist expectations of film as documentary or narrative. Marked by one or more of four distinct strategies—the fixed frame, the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen—structural film, according to Sitney, is exemplified by the works of Michael Snow, George Landow, Hollis Frampton, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Ernie Gehr, and Joyce Weiland.⁵⁹

In England, Malcolm Le Grice and Peter Gidal (members of the London Film-maker’s Co-operative) developed their own philosophy of “structural” filmmaking—referred to as “structural materialist,” and later just “materialist”—which Gidal characterized in terms of its “tension between materialist flatness, grain, light, movement, and the supposed real reality that it represented.”⁶⁰ This genealogy and history is further complicated by other related but distinct

⁵⁴ In a conversation with Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, Nordman mentions that she also took a course with “Jean-Luc Godard’s cinematographer” which possibly refers to Raoul Coutard. Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, “Asco, Ed Kienholz and Maria Nordman in ‘Pacific Standard Time,’” *Artnet*, September 13, 2011, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/drohojowska-philp/pacific-standard-time-lacma-9-13-11.asp>

⁵⁵ Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-garde,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI, 2008), 56.

⁵⁶ Gunning, 56.

⁵⁷ Gunning, 57.

⁵⁸ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde 1943–2000*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 348.

⁵⁹ Sitney, 350. In a fixed frame, the camera remains stationary capturing whatever moves into its view. The flicker effect, is the strobing that results from the individual image frames running through the projector. When a film is loop printed, it has no beginning and end but moves in a continuous, theoretically endless repetitive cycle. Rephotography is when already existing footage is projected and then filmed by a second camera.

⁶⁰ *Studio International* 190, no. 978 (November/December 1975). This special issue was devoted to ‘Avant-Garde Film in England & Europe.’

categorizations like the international Fluxfilms and what Los Angeles-based critic Gene Youngblood's described as "expanded cinema." The associate editor and columnist between 1967 and 1970 of the underground newspaper the Los Angeles Free Press, Youngblood, in his 1970 book *Expanded Cinema*, proposed that multimedia forms of the moving image, in which the space of projection, multiple screens, and interactivity, are ways to unite art and life in a step towards "cosmic consciousness."⁶¹

Regardless of their theoretical and geographic origin, the expanded cinema and structural/materialist film movements—and some Fluxfilms—emphasized and used film's physical properties in order to question, if not subvert, the genre's established narrative power, and were recognized as much as objects in their own right as information media. The notion of expanded cinema is in line with James's reading of the Los Angeles avant-garde as not existing outside of Hollywood, but in being defined by its very adjacency to it. He argues:

New York avant-garde film theory and historiography reproduced the key premise of Greenberg's Kantian modernism, his proposal that the defining project of aesthetic modernism was each medium's search for its own, irreducible properties and the consequent elimination of what was not essential to it, and so the proper occupation of filmmaking was taken to be the search for the purely filmic. In these projects, American avant-garde film was traced primarily to French Surrealism and experiments in graphic abstraction made in other European countries in the 1920s, as these had been brought to the United States by emigrés like Hans Richter, or reinvented here by Maya Deren and Sidney Peterson in the 1940s.⁶²

But rather than recording readymade scenes and spaces as she had in her photographs, she began—in a process analogous to the way in which she manipulated the prints of these photographs—to shape the very space in which her films were to be projected. As Nordman writes, *Film Room/Projection Room* (1966) is the first work in which, "I build walls into a room."⁶³ (Fig. 11) Here, at the center of an existing room, a single wall is constructed to extend midway into the space, and results in two adjacent half-rooms and a third, larger room. The two smaller rooms are, Nordman explains,

Used for simultaneous filming by two cameras...each on a tripod in the room: the full scene is filmed with a fixed camera...The second camera is simultaneously manipulated for detail shots. During filming, the existence of the three rooms is implied, but not built... For the subsequent double projection, the wall is built. Left wall: whole image of the action/right wall: details of the action in and out of synchronization. The larger open area is for the two projectors and for the two person audience.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1970).

⁶² David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 12.

⁶³ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 40.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Like a non-narrative storyboard, this description clearly lays out the conceptual terms of a template for any number of works. Temporal and spatial coherence are key concerns, complicated by the tension Nordman intentionally sets up by proposing and then disrupting simultaneity and the field of vision. The wall and its reinforced status as built —“I build a wall”—sets up and frames the cultural constructions it critiques: regimes of vision, social regimens, gender relations, the regimented registers of discourse. As a material work of art, it also reframes the relationship between three-dimensional objects and three-dimensional space to exist as what Rosalind Krauss would later refer to as, “sculpture in the expanded field.”⁶⁵

In 1966, Nordman made the first Film to inhabit the Room, *Film Room: Eat*:

The action of this film is that of two persons meeting at a table and eating. The film is constructed by images of the whole action interfacing with its detail. A wall of an existing room is used as the background for filming. A table decked with a white cloth and food, stands close to the wall.

Two actors arrive and start to serve each other a full meal.

The scene is filmed by a camera that is continuously focused on the same scene with the two persons acting before the wall. Simultaneously, the lens and body of the other camera is being moved around to follow action close-ups: *Leaning forward—lighting a cigarette—a glass being lifted—reaching with a fork—drinking—the actors regarding each other.*

The same wall that was a backdrop for filming is used as the screen for the showing of the film. The prop for the original action, a table with a white cloth is there again during projection (this time without food). Both the table and the wall behind it, receive the whole scene during the projection. On the wall at the right, the detailed image is moving freely. The image of the whole scene, and the image of the detail are not synchronized.

In the places where the two cameras stood before in the room for the filming, the projectors are set up during the showing of the film. They stand in the room together with the observer.

The sound for the film is the sound of the projection motor, and

⁶⁵ Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985); for a general sense of the field of sculpture then see, Richard Armstrong, and Richard Marshall. *The New Sculpture 1965-1975: Between Geometry and Gesture*. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990).

whatever the observers may say or do.

The two images are separated by a newly built wall, giving each image its own theatre, and giving the viewer the choice of which image to focus on, or both.

This wall constitutes [sic] the first room construction for the work in which I am engaged.

The two actors of the film are also its observers. Anyone can take their places.

These texts and these images constitute a first synoptic documentation of these works in the context of their related works.

*Directing, cinematography and lighting: Maria Nordman*⁶⁶

I include this rich description in its entirety to illustrate the degree to which Nordman conceived, executed and controlled the production of the work, and also as a stand-in for the paucity of visual record of the work. Undocumented and not exhibited since UCLA, *Film Room: Eat* is illustrated only by a stretch of film strip in Nordman's book, *De Musica*.⁶⁷ (Fig. 5) Though at the time of making of her own film in 1966, Nordman may not have actually seen Andy Warhol's underground film, *Eat* (1963), it is highly likely, given its screening by the already influential Jonas Mekas in New York in 1964, and Warhol's visibility on the West Coast, that she would have been aware of it as well as his other "anti-films." Like his other endurance films *Sleep* (1963), *Screen Tests* (1964–66), *Blow Job* (1964), and the eight-hour-and-five-minutes *Empire* (1964), *Eat* is a single shot of an extended scene. Here, shot in close up, in black-and-white, without sound, we watch the artist Robert Indiana eat, for forty-five minutes, a mushroom. Like Warhol's films, Nordman's Film Rooms, as she specified for one room, would use close-up framing and long, unbroken and unscripted footage. The raw nature of both uncut filming and unedited watching results in a mixture of direction and spontaneity that seems in line with the experience of dining itself. Where the white cloth and set table point to socially elaborated etiquette, the actors serving each other can be seen as both perfunctory protocol and as a gesture of reciprocity—an exchange that both falls within and exceeds Western social convention.

Smoke

Where *Eat* closely followed the explicit original Film Room plan of filming and then projecting into the same room, the subsequent Film Room: *Smoke* (1967)—the last work Nordman made at UCLA—used the same physical/conceptual framework for the projection, but, like the Found Rooms, the film was shot elsewhere, or, "on location." (Fig. 6) *Smoke*'s particular footage captures a man and a woman smoking and sitting in and on an overstuffed armchair at

⁶⁶ Nordman, *De Musica*, 19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

the beach in Malibu. In this unscripted situation, the professional actors move about the chair, all while dappled by sunlight and lapped at by the tide. Nordman captured this profilmic scene with two cameras: one stationary at mid-distance and one hand-held at closer range.⁶⁸ The footage from these was then projected, respectively, into the left and right cubicles of the constructed tripartite Film Room. From the back of the whole room, visitors—or “participants” as Nordman refers to those who experience her work—could see both adjacent and synced projections simultaneously, toggling between the “big picture on the right” and details of it on the left.⁶⁹ The multiple projection screens, sculptural elements and full integration of live bodies had an important precedent in works by Josef Svoboda. Along with Emil Radok, Svoboda conceived and showed *Laterna Magika I* at the Brussels Expo in 1958, a multimedia production that staged live performers alongside real-time projections of them.⁷⁰ *Laterna Magika I* would become the basis for the permanent non-verbal theater of the same name located in Prague whose plays combined film and theater. As would be the case with Nordman’s later Film Rooms, *Laterna Magika* as well as Svoboda’s *Polyvision*, combined film and theater, and because silent, could be understood regardless of language background.⁷¹ Yet, an important distinction is that while the media was integrated, internationally accessible, and sometimes immersive—as was the case in his *Polyvision* environment at the Expo ’67 in Montreal—the role of the viewer in Svoboda’s work remained spectatorial.⁷² If for Svoboda the integration of experimental film and theater—with an eye to an international audiences and exhibitions—is political in a utopically-inflected Brechtian sense, the politics of Nordman’s Film Rooms are localized within sites and across bodies.

James argues that in the minor cinemas in Los Angeles, there is a process of “deterritorialization and reterritorialization” that results from a desire to distance themselves from Hollywood, but that because of economic necessity they still must, “also avail themselves of the resources of their immediate environment for their production. The links between the two geographies are integral, and often avant-garde films manifest or inscribe the relationship between the environment in which they are produced and that which they represent.”⁷³ For Nordman, this relationship, and the way it too sets up and echoes de Certeau’s institutional strategies and radical everyday tactics is not just inscribed, it is self-consciously described. Her use of the local is not just the result of economic pressures and availability; her locales are part of a conceptual strategy that willfully represent rather than repress Hollywood. By co-opting standard on-location movie sites like Malibu, and hiring local actors, she collapses and co-locates places of production and critique. The de- and re-territorializations in her work, instead then, occur between the now fixed profilmic location (the beach scene) and the multiple, indeterminate, indefinite possible exhibition locations.

⁶⁸ The “profilmic” scene or space or event includes everything in the area in front of the camera’s recording field.

⁶⁹ In an inversion to Nordman’s original plan, in the LACMA installation the armchair was placed within the small room on the left-hand half where the handheld close-up footage was projected; the small room on the right-hand half projected the wider, stationary shot. From the back of the whole room, visitors could see both projections simultaneously: the “big picture” on the right and varied views and details of it on the left. For writings on what would be come known as “participation” in art, see Claire Bishop, ed. *Participation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2006).

⁷⁰ Stewart Kranz, *Science and Technology in the Arts: A Tour through the Realm of Science + Art* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974), 228.

⁷¹ Josef Svoboda, *The Secret of Theatrical Space* (New York: Applause Theater Books, 1993).

⁷² Though fraught with internal politics, anti-Vietnam war protests, and a major transit strike, from the perspective of visitor attendance and nation participation, Expo 67 (The 1967 International and Universal Exposition) is considered to be the most successful World’s Fair of the twentieth century; it occurred in Montreal, Canada from April 27 to October 19, 1967 and was themed “Man and His World” after a book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

⁷³ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 17.

Home to many of Hollywood's movie stars, and a site of on-location filming site since the 1920s, by the time Nordman was filming there in 1967, Malibu was also the crucible of surf culture. Its widespread representation across various popular media—the movie *Gidget* (1959) and its subsequent TV series (1964), the Beach Boys' 1964 hit "Surfin' USA," and the cult classic, *Endless Summer* (1966), had brought what was once a fringe subculture into the mainstream. The resulting growth in popularity of Malibu's beautiful beaches also highlighted them as contested borders between public and private.⁷⁴ Technically public below the median high tide line, the owners of expensive ocean front real estate had long sought to exclude or limit access to the beach by non-residents. Thus, because Nordman is specific in her filming on location in Malibu, as opposed to any beach, a reading of *Smoke* must attend to it as a particular place, in this case an interstitial space—an intertidal zone of high society and popular culture, of nature and artifice, leisure and everyday, of public domains and private rights.

Though, "civic access to nature in Los Angeles was conceptualized as something domestic and democratic," it never actually, "enacted large-scale plans for parks or public spaces to bring nature into the city."⁷⁵ As a result, by the mid-twentieth century, after explosive population growth, recreational sites in Los Angeles like beaches were largely the province of the upper classes who could afford to live near by or the mobile middle class who had access to automobiles. Even if one could get to the coast, access to the beaches themselves was limited.⁷⁶ And though the post-War building boom of suburban ranch houses with backyards and swimming pools brought an increasingly private conceptualization of nature and recreation over a public one, the rise of surf culture meant that beaches continued to be a zone of middle class leisure. For minorities, the historical issue of access to nature was not so much a aspirational or spatial as racial: In the early twentieth century, African Americans were banned from almost all beaches in Los Angeles County yet, they were "forced to pay taxes to buy up even more beach land that they would be expressly prohibited from using."⁷⁷ Even after Jim Crow laws were lifted, beaches—especially those in Malibu—remained de facto segregated by the limited social and physical mobility of minorities. Such embedded and socialized racism would come to a head in 1965 with the Watts Riots. Thus, by the time of Nordman's filming of *Smoke* in 1966, Malibu beach culture stood in stark if proximate contrast to the smoldering inner city just a few miles away.

Structure and Reception

Though Nordman makes good use of fixed-frame and loop printing, her emphasis on the film's space of exhibition, its audience and its reception, aligns it more closely with "expanded cinema" and is particular resonant with early cinematic practices that preceded abstraction, and with Surrealism. Just as her Found Room photographs avoid conceptual art's possibility for grand ideational solipsism by foregrounding artistic labor, so too do her film rooms avoid

⁷⁴ Lawrence Culver, "Race, Recreation, and Public and Private Nature," in *Greening the City: Urban Landscapes in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Dorothee Brantz, Sonja Dümpelmann (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 97. For more on the history of recreation in Los Angeles, see Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁵ Culver, 97.

⁷⁶ Between 1880 and 1930 it grew from "a town of 11,000 to a city of 1.2 million, the fifth-largest city in the United States, with another 1 million residents in the rest of Los Angeles County. (Culver, 97.)

⁷⁷ Culver, 103.

dogmatic material purism by including not just people but laboring bodies both in the film and in its space.

Most obviously, *Smoke*'s simultaneous, parallel projections of two shots of the same scene immediately and directly “solicit,” as Gunning puts it, “spectator attention.”⁷⁸ Part of this initial “visual curiosity” lies—as with the Found Rooms photographs—in the challenge to determine the correspondence between the clearly related but not identical adjacent images.⁷⁹ And, even after the spectator is aware that they are indeed seeing different views of the exact same profilmic scene and moment, they continue to attempt to match up the details seen on the left with the full view on the right reveals the images, a process that is constantly frustrated and renewed by the two projections being ever so slightly out of sync. Like the flicker effect, this insistent visual stutter keeps the spectator in a constant state of vigilant attention, unable to move beyond the surface of the image to become, as with classical cinema, immersed in its representation.

While the use of multiple screens goes back to Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927), and was reintroduced by Stan Vanderbeek's *Movie Drome* (conceived 1957; prototype 1965), the closest analogue to the *Film Rooms* is another work by Warhol—*Chelsea Girls* (1966)—which he produced in New York the same year as Nordman made *Eat* in Los Angeles.⁸⁰ Though *Chelsea Girls* projected two distinctly different scenes, it, like *Smoke*, recorded actors in an unscripted scene and used cinematic techniques—like the long shot and the close-up—to amplify the visibility of its construction rather than to render it invisible for narrative efficacy. Both Warhol and Nordman here literalize parallel editing: instead of intercutting frames from two different scenes into an alternating sequence to suggest that they are simultaneous, two uncut fixed-frames are projected next to each other. For Warhol, the horizontal, physical adjacency of the projections, rather than the vertically sequenced film frames, creates the illusion that the scenes with Nico and Ondine were taking place at the same time in different—adjoining?—rooms of the Chelsea Hotel. By contrast, in Nordman's *Smoke* we can see—in two physically adjacent rooms separated by the half-wall—that the profilmic action in both projections actually did occur in the same time and place. However, in both works, the synchronicity of action—whether illusionistic or true—is undercut by the fact that we can only watch one screen at a time.

This constant physical shifting between screens both displays and disrupts techniques central to narrative cinema. Instead of a careful montaged sequence of distance shots and close-ups to evoke emotional intensity, in *Smoke*, these views are seen contiguously, frustrating psychological absorption or identification with the “characters” normally experienced in narrative movies. But Nordman's strategy also plays with avant-garde codes and effects. Rather than using an aggressively edited montage—a term and strategy devised by Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein in the 1920s—of attractions Nordman instead achieves “sensual impact”

⁷⁸ Gunning, 58.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Sitney points out that though, structural film differs “spiritually” from Warhol's films, they have their roots in his pioneering use of the fixed frame, loop printing and rephotography. (Sitney, 350.) Warhol also made a film called *Eat* (1963) which features a fixed frame of the artist Robert Indiana slowly eating a mushroom. Here the nine three-minute films that Warhol shot have been reassembled out of order so that the correspondence between profilmic and projected time is disrupted. Another important landmark in the history of multiple projection was the Labyrinth Project which appeared the same year as *Smoke* as part of Expo '67 in Montreal. For a discussion of the intersection between art and film and their histories, see Chrissie Iles, *Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art, 1964–1977* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2001) and “Round Table: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art,” *October*, Spring 2003, 71–96. Participants were George Baker, Hal Foster, Chrissie Iles, Malcolm Turvey.

through the constant montage of glances by the viewer.⁸¹ Nordman uses continuity literally—by projecting straight, unedited footage—to reveal the artifice, and effectiveness, of both classical continuity editing and avant-garde montage.

Even when the spectator moves forward into one of the smaller rooms demarcated by the wall to look exclusively at one of *Smoke*'s films, other formal strategies still prevent the viewer from becoming fully captivated by the film. Indeed, the insistent “making strange” of *Smoke*'s structural set up is matched by the strangeness of what is actually represented. How and why did an armchair come to be at the beach? This odd scenario evokes earlier avant-gardes like surrealist films from the 1920s and Maya Deren's trance films from the 1940s, and recalls, as already mentioned, Warhol's *Screen Tests* (1962–64), and other silent film “portraits” in which the artist's friends and hangers-on are depicted straight-on in close-up in extended, unbroken footage.⁸²

As we have already learned from the exhibition's supplementary information—“explanation” being another essential component of early and experimental cinema—there is no script or story. But while the images do not explain themselves, Nordman offers extensive explanation in the form of captions in her books. What we watch then is a situation, as Gunning says, that makes possible a, “series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power, and exoticism.”⁸³ And what is exotic and appealing in *Smoke* is the opportunity to observe other humans without being observed. Knowing they are actors, we wonder: Are they playing themselves or are they playing actors playing themselves? The spectator scours the image for clues to distinguish between “performed” and “natural” gestures. How long will it take for them to settle into “character”? Nordman and Warhol's situations not only problematize the categories of fictional and documentary—both equally useful to and used by the cinema of attractions—but that very indeterminacy becomes “of interest in itself.”⁸⁴ Indeed, in the 1960s the interest in the self—the performance of self—was widespread as a result of the sociologist Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of human interactions.⁸⁵ However, Goffman's studies focus on the self as implicitly white male, and do not account for the ways in which gender and race would affect every social interaction.

Any post-classical return to pre-classical cinematic strategies is inevitably informed and primed by conventional classical viewing habits like expectation. Therefore, when we watch *Smoke*, despite knowing it is unscripted, we cannot help but expect something to happen. When nothing does, we simply “people watch” drawn in by the way in which the man and woman unconsciously play out subtle but clear, stereotypical gender roles: He sits in the seat and she hovers on the arm. He is largely indifferent to her while she seems to act in relation to him; she looks at him while he looks at the camera and away. Adding further tension to our encounter with *Smoke* is the fact that not only do we observe the actors, but they seem to observe us too—we cannot help but feel like they are not just looking at the camera, but directly through it to us. For Gunning, the recurring look at the camera by actors in early cinema because it, according to later classical codes of narrative film, “spoils” realistic illusion—and is characteristic of a cinema

⁸¹ Gunning, 59. Eisenstein's most influential early films include *Strike* (1925); *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925); *October* (1927) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938).

⁸² In a productive coincidence, Tony Smith's monumental sculpture from same time period, *Smoke* (1967), was installed in the building adjacent to Nordman's re-creation of *Smoke* in 2012.

⁸³ Gunning, 57.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁵ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).

that, “displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.”⁸⁶ By seeming to make eye contact with us, the actors draw us into the scene, an effect that is quickly diminished once the actors look away.

Exhibitionism is also manifest in the formal strategies and visual possibilities enabled by the technology itself, for, as Gunning points out, before 1906, “cinema itself was an attraction” in which machines were demonstrated as much as films viewed.⁸⁷ Often, early films developed fictional and non-fictional content not for narrative or didactic content, but for its ability to foreground and display the technological effects like proximity, magnification, time-lapse, speeding up/slowing down the film, running film backwards, splicing, etc. Such cinematic effects were reinvigorated and deployed in varying degrees of critique by post-classical filmmakers like Warhol’s endurance films, the slow zoom in Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* (1967), and Yoko Ono’s high-speed film, *Blink* (1966). Other Fluxfilms, like Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1962) and George Maciunas’s *10 Feet* (1966), as well as structural films such as George Landow’s *Film in Which There Appears Sprocket Holes* (1968), and Anthony McCall’s *Line Describing a Cone* (1972), took medium-specificity to its logical conclusion by eliminating representation altogether so as to focus attention to the very material conditions of cinema: the projector, the celluloid filmstrip, the beam of light, the space of projection, the audience.⁸⁸

In *Smoke*, Nordman too exhibits and foregrounds certain technical possibility particular to film. The artist, who did all of her own cinematography, and her camera approach and recede, and the resulting unsteadiness of the image is a constant reminder of the machine and artist as mediators between viewer and viewed. This is no all-seeing disembodied eye, suggested by 1970s film theory. Here the wobble of the hand-held camera reminds us that we are along for the ride, going where she goes. The presence of the stable stationary projectors at the thresholds of the larger and two smaller rooms reminds us that this mediation is in fact double: the camera that captures the profilmic and the projector that projects it.

It also reminds us of instability of vision itself. Where we look and how we look are not constants, and they are a matter not just of physical conditions and limitations, but of mental predispositions, acculturation and habit. So while *Smoke*’s double projection might be seen to allegorize “normal” human binocular vision, it also seems to resist this model because the views were not sourced from a single, stationary vantage point of the “ideal viewer”—who is posited theoretically and historically within classical cinema by Laura Mulvey to be Western, white and male.⁸⁹ And, despite all of its structural and conceptual redirection and foreground of technology, within *Smoke*’s image itself, it is the woman who seems to be most on display.

Indeed with motion, the parallax—or angle of incidence between the different sight lines of each of our eyes—changes. More proximate objects have a greater angle of incidence than those farther away and the perceived changes between them create visual depth. However, because the camera is monocular, it actually diminishes the parallax effect and the perceived depth of field, which is why without other compensating strategies, straight film can appear

⁸⁶ Gunning, 57.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁸⁸ Perhaps most emblematic of the trajectory between the pre- and post-classical film attractions is Tony Conrad’s *The Flicker* (1966) which opens with a warning—handwritten in the style of an intertitle—about the physical hazards that might result from watching the movie, and is followed by the title. This two-and-half-minute sequence is accompanied by vaudevillean music and then cuts to twenty-five minutes of silent, blank, flickering film frames. For an examination of Flux Films among other avant-garde practices see, Bruce Jenkins, “Fluxfilms in Three False Starts,” in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993).

⁸⁹ See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* (Autumn 1975), 6–18.

flat.⁹⁰ So while Nordman's double-projection imitates and displays the conditions of our binocular visual systems, because we can only watch one of the films at a time, what we see via the camera remains monocular; the slippage between set up and effect is itself disorienting.

Though Nordman's work, and most structural films, predate Mulvey's conception of "the gaze" and Jean-Louis Baudry's ideology of the cinematic apparatus—theories that pointed to the hegemonic model of spectatorship implicit in classical narrative cinema—the destabilized and divergent focal lengths of Nordman's images challenge not only conventional cinematic strategies, but also complicate the analogizing the camera/film with human perception implicit in these critiques.⁹¹ Nordman's work, like Anthony McCall's *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1976), suggests other, less unified models of vision like those Jonathan Crary associates with pre-cinematic instruments like the kaleidoscope and thaumatrope, and especially the stereoscope, whose imitation of parallax vision is also evoked by Nordman's bicameral set up.⁹²

Importantly, one of the profilmic props in *Smoke*, the armchair, is also displayed prominently within the Film Room. But rather than positioned as mere cineaste ephemera, it is located against the projection wall of the small room on the left, where it becomes part of the screen. The armchair is indeed a kind of "theatrical display," which, "dominates over narrative absorption, emphasizing the direct stimulation of shock or surprise at the expense of unfolding a story or creating a diegetic universe."⁹³ The armchair manifests a kind of physical double take. Its unexpected presence within the projection area both surprises us—we look again to "believe our eyes"—and compels us to visually reconcile the physical contours of the chair with its image. But while the armchair may interrupt illusion and redouble our visual efforts, it also paradoxically offers a surprising continuity between the profilmic and the projected. The very overlap between physical prop and virtual image collapses temporal and physical registers. Onto the chair is projected footage of itself at an earlier moment; we see the chair as it is and as it once was.⁹⁴ It, like the actors who look at the camera, "establishes contact with the audience"—a contact that becomes physical when these audiences actually sit in the chair.

Moreover, as a *de rigueur* part of suburban décor, the chaise might be thought of a *meuble* prop for the mobile bourgeoisie. And by extension, the decrepit arm chair in Nordman's photograph, *Found Room: Venice* (it can be seen to represent, in contrast to the upward mobility of Malibu, as we have seen, the dystopic effects of suburban sprawl on historic neighborhoods.⁹⁵ (Fig. 1)

And if the chair is an actor, it follows too the cigarettes, which, here and in the mid-1960s, do not so much figure as specific symbols of the bohemian lifestyle as they do female empowerment. After being a social sin associated with prostitution, in the 1920s cigarette smoking by women, in its challenge to Victorian mores, came to symbolize their liberation—that

⁹⁰ See Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" [1970] in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 288–89.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 286–98.

⁹² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990). His argument is taken up vis-à-vis film and projected images by Anne Friedberg in *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006). For a discussion of McCall's films see my "Anthony McCall: The Long Shadow of Ambient Light." *Oxford Art Journal* 35:2, June 2012, 251–283.

⁹³ Gunning, 59.

⁹⁴ Malcolm Le Grice uses a similar strategy in *Castle I* (1966), in which a light bulb is hung in front of the screen onto which is projected filmed footage of the light bulb. Malcolm Le Grice, "Time and the Spectator in the Experience of Expanded Cinema," in *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, ed. A.L. Rees, Duncan White, Steven Ball, and David Curtis (London: Tate Publishing, 2011), 148–56. See also Peter Gidal's consideration of this work in *Materialist Film* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 106, 110.

⁹⁵ For a full history of Venice, see Andrew Deener, *Venice: A Contested History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

is, their freedom to act as men.⁹⁶ In the 1940s and 1950s, cigarettes had shifted from masculine representation to “crucial erotic prop” and as a cultural link between smoking, power, and sexual challenge, and by the 1960s the smoking woman was seen not only as politically liberated, but as social sophisticated and upwardly mobile.⁹⁷ As such, the smoking woman is line with the class reading of the chair; yet her very position on it undermines the notion of her empowerment. Where the male actor sits comfortably, she hovers on the arm, an accouterment in a well-appointed portrait. Her instability in terms of posture and social position is further pitched by the dearth of direction within the film. Scriptless, she fidgets somewhat nervously, unclear of her role she seems to default—like many post-women’s liberation—to traditional gendered performances of self.

Recreation

If representation, projection, and construction were base terms for Nordman’s Film Rooms in the late 1960s, later recreations display shifting relations—de- and re-territorializations—between not just space but time as well, and they occur within and without the work. Seen as contemporaneous to and coherent with, both visually and thematically, the world in which it was projected in 1968, a 2011 exhibition of *Smoke* made time visible in new ways. Installed in its own gallery at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the work, now titled *Smoke, 1967–Present*, featured the footage projected in a space constructed according to most of the 1966 *Filmroom* floor plan and specifications.⁹⁸ (Fig. 12) If, then, for many people in 1967, the projector, usually locked up in a projection booth at a movie house, was still something to behold, and if we understand technological exhibitionism to still be an inherent part of *Smoke*, what does it mean for the tripod mounted stationary projectors to be replaced at LACMA in 2010 by ceiling mounted digital projectors? What is lost when the whirl of reels and human-sized machine is gone? Though practically speaking it is infinitely easier to project at looped DVD than a looped film, Nordman’s decision to eliminate the 16mm projectors was likely completely conceptually-driven. While purists may take issue with technological concessions necessary to “re-create” work, in the case of *Smoke* including a 16mm might actually have a paradoxical—or at least unwanted—effect.

Rather than an exhibitionistic display of technology—the marvel of the new—the now vintage projector would inevitably solicit attention of the wrong kind: nostalgia that would lock the work into a specific, overdetermined moment in history. Though historical specificity could also be traced in details like the actors’ clothing, this is less problematic for the way in which fashion seems to recycle itself. Nordman’s choice of “classic” black-and-white lends it a “timeless” quality that would be impossible by color stock that tends to shows its age. By using digital projectors, Nordman does not so much update *Smoke*, as remains true to its original concept, for she considers it to be not a static but an ongoing, dynamic installation of relations between space, film, and participants—one that she dates, “1967–present.” Assuming that in ten

⁹⁶ Lorraine Greaves, “Smoke Screen: The Cultural Meaning of Women’s Smoking,” in *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity*, ed. Anna Alexander, Mark S. Roberts (Albany: State University of New York, 2003), 267.

⁹⁷ Greaves, 268.

⁹⁸ Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Press Release, August 2011): “*Maria Nordman Film Room: SMOKE, 1967–Present*, September 4, 2011–January 15, 2012.” This exhibition was part of *Pacific Standard Time*, “an unprecedented collaboration initiated by the Getty, bringing together more than sixty cultural institutions across Southern California to tell the story of the birth of the Los Angeles art scene.”

years, another iteration of *Smoke* would include the projection system du jour, we might then extend James's notion that "every film internalizes the conditions of its production," to say that Nordman's work, in its various iterations, "externalizes the conditions of its projection."⁹⁹ Despite the ways in which these now-dated theories "embalmed" the classical spectator at the very moment in which cinema had become post-classical, Miriam Hansen points out that, "insights in to the workings of cinematic text and the psychic mechanisms of reception" remain important to developing a "theoretical understanding of the possible relations between films and viewers, between representation and subjectivity."¹⁰⁰ An important detail in *Smoke* that suggests a different model of subjectivity is the fact that in addition to the woman and man, Nordman considers the sun and the Pacific Ocean to also be "actors" in the film. Implied here is the idea that while the spectator may be engaged by the actors who look at and display themselves to the camera, there are many other coeval if inanimate objects on view, if only we turned our attention to them. As we have already seen, the chair as stand-in for suburban life, functions, albeit metaphorically, in such an expanded way to warrant also being an "actor." It follows then that other objects specific to Nordman's storyboard be considered in this way.

Interpellation

What is radical here is the way in which this democratic sense of complicates notions of agency and what Baudry calls film's power of "interpellation"—or calling the viewer—altogether.¹⁰¹ Instead, Nordman seems to suggest that display is not so much a choice privileged by subjectivity as it is a condition of the world. The Freudian ego and Cartesian "ergo"—key premises in the psychoanalytic and apparatus theory—are leveled by giving equal billing to natural phenomena, a move underscored by the indiscriminating field of view of the camera. It, unlike spectators, is indifferent to its subject, ideas we have seen already touched on by Nordman's multiple photographs in the Found Rooms. This suggests an unorthodox pre-modern notion of apprehension in which humans are equally surveyed by the world onto which they see themselves surveying. Nordman's work is an experience whose structure disperses man's gaze into a worldly glance and makes visible—enables—the agency of non-human actors.¹⁰²

By virtue of its de-emphasis and problematizing of the visual and empirical in favor of the relational and experiential, Nordman's work represents the "public" in more ways than just outside scenes and interior pictures of accessible places. Defined as "a discursive matrix or process through which social experience is articulated, interpreted, negotiated and contested in an intersubjective, potentially collective and oppositional form," such a definition of "public" can be applied to each Found Room and Film Room.¹⁰³ Such a reading of *Smoke* is premised not only on the structure and representation and exhibitionism of its filmic imagery, but in the broader cultural, kinetic, institutional, temporal, and architectural—and decidedly contingent—dimensions of its exhibition. Like the voice-overs, sound effects and theatrical settings of early cinema which, according to Gunning, "reflect a lack of concern with creating a self-sufficient narrative world upon the screen," many aspects of *Smoke*'s installation speak to—and amplify—

⁹⁹ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Miriam Hansen, "Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere," *Screen* 43 (Autumn 1993), 206–07.

¹⁰¹ Baudry, 288.

¹⁰² For an extended argument of early photography as analogic, see Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰³ Hansen, 201.

its constructedness and instability, and frame its reception.¹⁰⁴ Nordman's projected images—like Hale's Tours of the World which used motion and sound to simulate the experience of railway travel through an exotic location—are but one part of an entire experience of visual and technological exhibitionism, in which the real and representation are mutually constitutive.¹⁰⁵ The installed artwork, into which the participants and literally makes physical the “energy” that Gunning sees as moving outward from the projected cinema of attraction, “towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inwards towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, *Smoke*, engulfs the viewer in an expanded diegesis of which the projected film is just one aspect.

Territorializing

Had *Smoke* maintained Nordman's original conception for the Film Rooms by including the live actors in the scene of projections, the temporal confusion effected by the armchair would be even more pronounced and the de- and re-territorializations would be mapped not just against space but across time and bodies. Live human actors would shift the work's mode from theatrical display to performance and labor, from Hale's Tour to variety show, and along with it, its reception and stakes. If, for example, the 2011 installation had included the original actors, how would we interpret the relationship between the projected image of them shot in 1966 and their visibly aged living bodies? Between labored and laboring bodies of the actors and the leisuring bodies of the viewers? Perhaps because the effects of time might overdetermine or overemphasize certain aspects of the work, Nordman altered the concept of the installed work. Now, the spectators took the actors' place on the chair, in front of the camera. In this move they fully assumed Nordman's designation for those who experience her works: “participants.” No longer “spectators,” participants were “absorbed by the film” in a decidedly post-classical way that collapses the laboring into the leisuring. No longer absorbed by the film's illusion or narrative, they are instead absorbed by its light to become part of the work—to be working in the film. Sitting in the chair, they become both screens and body doubles, and, given that the decision not to have live actors in an extended exhibition is likely to be as practical as conceptual—these free-laboring participants can be understood to not just allegorize but to enact the physical conditions of this production.

Just as only one story can emerge at time within allegory, the participant cannot be both actor and viewer simultaneously. In order to mimic or to pantomime—to “play” the actor—the participant must see the action. And in turning to the screen to do so, they no longer face the audience or match up with the image. Thus the only way to be “in the film” is to sit in the chair before a camera that does not record their body, but instead projects onto it, rendering it less visible—part of the scenery. Paradoxically, the participant's agency puts them in a position that embodies certain aspects of the classical spectator: silent, passive, immersed—absorbed into the machinery. But, with only the projector's bright beam shining in her face, which makes seeing other participants difficult, there is—in contradistinction to narrative cinema—little of visual interest to keep the participant in classic spectatorial mode. And by virtue of the viewing

¹⁰⁴ Gunning, 58.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of Hale's “Tours of the World” and their relationship to early cinema, see Raymond Fielding, “Hale's Tours: Ultrarealism in the Pre-1910 Motion Picture,” *Cinema Journal* (Autumn 1970), 34–47.

¹⁰⁶ Gunning, 59.

conditions—this is an installation not a screening—this position is but one of many possibilities within a situation defined by mobility.

Indeed, participants are most visible and effective inside the smaller rooms where, in front of the projector, but at enough distance from the screen, they throw their shadow into the film. Yet, though more obviously seen than the camouflaged sitter, these shadows offer less to see: they are black silhouettes that are defined by their lack and draw their power from their occlusion of by that defining element of cinema: light. But for experimental filmmakers like Malcolm Le Grice, whose entire *Horror Film 2* (1972) was created through shadowplay, the indexical shadow which as we have seen in the shadow in the doorway of Nordman's photograph *Found Room: New Mexico*, "is a denotation of bodily presence...rooting the viewer in an experience of cinema as an event in the 'here and now.'"¹⁰⁸ (Fig. 3) The live indexicality and deep pre-cinematic and global history of shadowplay, is for, Le Grice—and, I believe, for Nordman too—in contrast to the "retrospective reality" of dominant commercial cinema.¹⁰⁹

Between the Images

Following James again, by engaging professional actors, and working in the shadow of the movie industry, Nordman is in dialogue—at the levels of production, representation and reception—with Hollywood and by extension, mass culture. Indeed, alongside constructing rooms to screen her films, Nordman was staging works that seemed to directly critique the tropes and practices of the movie-making industry. *Jemez* (1967) is, the artist writes, "a film without a storyline...made between the images of silent [unscripted] interactions of a group of people in a[n outdoor] place where westerns are often filmed."¹¹⁰ (Fig. 13) Taken the same year, and possibly on the same trip as *Found Room: New Mexico*, Nordman again places emphasis on location by including it in her titles. Here, the place where westerns are filmed, takes precedent over the narrative conventions of the genres. This visual emphasis is also seen in the actor's costumes: ten gallon hats, vests, and dungarees are sartorial markers and semaphores for the American wild west.

If the Film Rooms reterritorialized and reinvigorated cinema by virtue of the roving terms of its exhibition and reception in the art gallery, *Jemez* and its subsequent documentation also plays with site and citation. It has become literally re-placed by film stills. Like the Found Rooms which used contact prints of 35mm still camera film to unfix notions of truth and to mobilize works across time and space, *Jemez* is known only through a page of eight columns of film, stripped from the movie and re-territorialized in Nordman's book, *De Musica*. Without narrative context or temporal continuity, the repetitive images of cowboys and a rough-hewn building, become visual abstractions, stand-ins and shorthand for a genre in which storylines are often fairly reductive.

Where Film Room: *Smoke* used professional actors in an unscripted situation, *Jemez* borrowed professional artists. The film's leads were John McCracken and Llyn Foulkes, who both were then teaching at UCLA, and whose practices were distinctly intermedial. The preceding year, McCracken had developed what would come to be his signature format, the

¹⁰⁸ Malcolm Le Grice in Lucy Reynolds, "Magic Tricks? The Use of Shadowplay in British Expanded Cinema," *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, ed. A.L. Rees, Duncan White, Steven Ball and David Curtis (London: Tate, 2011), 149.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Nordman, *De Musica*, 20.

“plank,” which hybridized painting and sculpture in the form of freestanding vertical works that rested both on the floor and against the wall. With their hybridization of painting and sculpture and their highly reflective and colorful surfaces, McCracken’s works were important precedents for the Light and Space movement. Foulkes had his first solo exhibition at Ferus in 1961, and in 1967 won both the painting prize at the Paris Biennale and represented the United States at the IX Sao Paulo Biennale, curated by Walter Hopps.

As we have already considered with the professional actors and participants in *Smoke*, just as minor cinemas use the locations available to them, so too do they depend on local labor—often that of friends and colleagues. This kind of collaborative, free-form, interdisciplinary—and pragmatically necessary—approach defined the avant-garde in distinct contradiction to the Hollywood studio system whose power and hegemony depended—and insisted on—the professionalization of all trades and labor within the industry in order to marshal efficiency and control. Furthermore, it also evidenced the changing notions of artistic labor within the fine arts. Nordman’s labor samples the entire studio system from building and editing its physical forms, to generating intellectual content, finding and feeding the “talent,” and negotiating distribution. We can also conceive of McCracken and Foulkes as well the actors and participants in *Smoke*—and as Nordman would have it, the sun and the ocean—as working towards the production of *Jemez, Eat, and Smoke*. In this way artistic labor, is predicated not on talent, but on location and nomination. Just as Duchamp defined art as that which an artist calls so and Bruce Nauman realized that anything an artist makes in their studio is art, then it should follow that a person can become an art worker by participating in the production of an art work. Yet, there is a tension between Nordman’s labor and her dependence on the labor of others—she is as much “art director” or “art organizer” as proletariat-inflected “worker.”¹¹¹ And these distinctions—even if unspoken—had particular stakes given the temporal and geographic proximity of the internally fraught and politically charged Artists’ Peace Tower erected in West Los Angeles in 1966 at a protest against the Vietnam War.¹¹²

Similarly, by virtue of a being an artwork created and funded by a single artist, not distributed, but installed discretely and available for an extended period of time, Nordman’s Film Rooms contradict the movie industry’s fundamental economic principles. While at first such a critique may seem productively anti-establishment, especially in the political tumult of the late 1960s when anti-American and anti-capitalist sentiments manifested in protests across university campuses like UCLA, it is important to remember that art world too—even in the late 1960s—functioned as a “public sphere of production” within the marketplace. And unlike mass culture, like the movies, which Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt point out, maximize inclusion for economic reasons, “fine art” can be seen to “reproduce the ideological exclusionary mechanisms of the bourgeois prototype.”¹¹³ And indeed, art objects gain economic value through exclusion: the smaller the edition, the rarer the piece, the higher the worth.

Yet, by creating ephemeral installations that are not easily owned, and straddling the worlds of art and film in the late 1960s, Nordman’s work can be read in part as an “institutional

¹¹¹ For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between artistic labor and self-labeled “art workers”, see Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

¹¹² Francis Frascina offers an extended description of the Peace Tower and its history in *Art, Politics, and Dissent: Aspects of The Art Left in t Sixties America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹¹³ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *The Public Sphere and Experience*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Daniel, and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) in Hansen, 204.

critique.”¹¹⁴ By foregrounding experience and excluding objects, Nordman complicates traditional modes and exhibition and exchange. Inherent to this critique is the very location—its proximity to the movie industry and its distance from the art world’s center in New York—in which the work was produced and which is visually represents. “Since Hollywood was the center of the medium that dominated global culture,” James argues, “cinemas located in Los Angeles but counter to Hollywood were the most critical and the most fundamental of all forms of resistance to the cultures of capitalism... Enveloped in the folds of commerce and art, of capital and emancipation, the Los Angeles avant-garde cinemas lived the contradictions of culture in the century of cinema with paradigmatic urgency and vitality.”¹¹⁵

Furthermore, because their drive towards inclusion is political rather than economic, and because they are defined by its relations of representation and reception, participatory film-based artworks like *Smoke* and open-ended, contingent photo projects like the Found Rooms, following Negt and Kluge, “a potential for instability, for accidental collisions and opportunities, for unpredictable conjunctures and developments.”¹¹⁶ These contingencies occur within Nordman’s works themselves as well as in the ways in which they exist in the world. By hovering in the productive, if precarious, “seams and fissures between uneven institutions of public life”—in this case, cinema, visual art, and the marketplace—work like Nordman’s can give rise to “alternative alignments” and make visible a “different function of the public, namely that of a social horizon of experience.”¹¹⁷ As live exhibitions—characterized by a heterogeneous audience and experiences—early film and expanded cinema like Nordman’s Film Rooms, “created a margin of improvisation, interpretation and unpredictability which made it a public event in the emphatic sense, a collective horizon in which industrially processed experience could be reappropriated by the experiencing subject.”¹¹⁸ This becomes all the more the case, as we will see in Chapter Three, when Nordman sites her works within the local neighborhood. If, as Hansen says, the historical significance of this connection between pre-classical and post-classical is that they “emerged at the threshold of a paradigmatic transformation of the ways films are disseminated and consumed,” their difference lies in their degree of self-reflexivity.¹¹⁹

Importantly, experience here vastly exceeds the visual, moving cinema from socially-mediated images to a social horizon mediated by images and the relations of their representation and reception to works. If early cinema was in thrall to visual effects as modern marvel, post-classical artists were interested in the ways in which these effects—and the modes of their exhibition—could not only critique classical cinema, but complicate the tidy and false, oppositional binary set up by such terms and push the semiotic, economic and social limits of not only of film, but the ways in which it is experienced and theorized.

¹¹⁴ For a complex argument that draws out a nuanced reading of museums and “institutions” and the possibilities for their critique, see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993).

¹¹⁵ James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Hansen, 205.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 206–07.

Chapter Two: *Fires, Fragments, Words, Books*

Before she abandoned orthodox film altogether in favor of rooms, Nordman made a series of works, the Fire Performances, in the Southern California desert in 1967 and 1968. For each of these—*Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]* (1967), *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Trona]* (1967), *City of the Clouds* (1967), *City of the Clouds* (1968), and undocumented works done in Panamint and Amboy in 1967 or 1968—Nordman ignited chemical fires to produce temporary works in specifically chosen sites in the Mojave Desert, a three-hour drive northeast of Los Angeles.¹²⁰ (Figs. 8, 14–16) Because they did not use cameras, celluloid, or projectors, the Fire Performances are not film per se, but, because they function as a relation between time and light and space and they exist directly on the land, I will explore them as, in addition to performance, both Expanded Cinema and Earthworks.¹²¹ While their general physical and conceptual distance from the institutions and economics of art and film inhere the Fire Performances with an anti-market valence, I will demonstrate how the specificity of their location can be seen as silent protest to particular social events and conditions and, in ways similar to and different from her photographs and films, establishes a political commitment for her oeuvre as a whole.

For *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]* (1967) Nordman outlined with a slow-burning smokeless fire compound the residual water marks—the tub rings of a shrinking shoreline—of a dry lake bed. (Fig. 8) Nordman describes this “action” as “thrown fire,” a “medium from the motion picture special-effects industry used at the time of day when the intensity of illumination on the ground and the sky equals fire.”¹²² On September 4, 1967, Nordman used another special effect to create a second work that in many ways seems an inversion of *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]*, but which also took place at “the time of day when the intensity of illumination on the ground and the sky equals fire.”¹²³ *City of the Clouds* was comprised of, “walls of clouds”—generated by an industrial grade smoke machine—that moved, “over the desert floor at the speed of the wind and that of a walking person.”¹²⁴ (Fig. 15) That Nordman is explicit about *City of the Clouds* taking place on Labor Day, September 4, 1967, suggests an interest not only in the “production value” of movies in the Hollywood sense, but in the use and exchange value of a performance—its labor—and in the participants as both “producers” and consumers of the work.¹²⁵ Furthermore, Nordman’s specification of the piece as a “city” of clouds also anticipates the importance of urban coordinates in her later room works. Where this iteration happened in the same location, and likely on the same trip as *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]*, another performance of *City of the Clouds* was staged later that year on December 19, 1967, on different, rockier terrain.¹²⁶ (Fig. 16) In *De Musica*, Nordman describes but does not illustrate, a subsequent iteration on October 23, 1993 at Margo Leavin Gallery, in Los Angeles. Called *City of the Clouds AE*, it was conceived in relation to “the new city’s center” where, similar to her

¹²⁰ The *Gardens of Smokeless Fire* and *City of the Clouds* are documented in Nordman’s books; she mentions the Panamint work briefly in Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield. *Gardens of Smokeless Fire* is also referred to as *garden of smokeless fire on a gypsum dry lake* (Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222).

¹²¹ For a discussion of Nordman’s films as Expanded Cinema see Chapter One. Though Gene Youngblood’s book *Expanded Cinema*, was not published until 1970, Nordman would have been familiar with the term and idea through his criticism which regularly appeared in the *Los Angeles Free Press*.

¹²² Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 7.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁵ See Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap, 1999).

¹²⁶ Nordman, *De Musica*, 25 and *De Sculptura II*, 6. In *De Musica* Fig. 16 appears on page 28 stacked below by Fig. 25; in *De Sculptura II* it appears a part of a diptych on pages 18–19 with another similarly figureless image of the work.

Unnamed 1967–present (1967), “the syntax of building is known and can be shown by any neighbor to another.”¹²⁷ (Fig. 29)

Moreover, and in keeping with Walter Benjamin’s notions of historical materialism, there seems to be some symbolic value to the ways in which the Fire Performances are inversions of one another, each consisting of only one aspect of the fire/smoke equation. This disruption of the deeply entrenched and naturalized connection between fire and smoke—that the two are mutually constitutive—can be extended to a challenge of the primacy of cause and effect in the western approach to history and science—and to the semiotic category of indexicality at the foundation of photographic theory. In other words, by obviating the fact that smoke does not require fire and fire does not necessarily produce smoke, Nordman destabilizes the fundamental idea of causality. Chapter Three will look in more detail at the ways in which Nordman uses photographs to further complicate these conventional connections.

In an extensive unpublished interview with Jan Butterfield in 1978, Nordman describes two other locations in which she made works with fire: Amboy and Panamint.¹²⁸ While neither site has been discussed in any scholarship, the work in Amboy was apparently part of a list by Nordman itemizing the Fire Performances, a list that did not include Panamint. It seems by her account that she forgot about the works in Panamint—“Well, there were four locations. One is not listed there...I just remembered... There were pieces in Panamint that are not listed.”¹²⁹ Unfortunately, Nordman and Butterfield do not go on to discuss the Panamint works, but the artist does elaborate those in Amboy, a place she describes, in contrast to nearby Trona’s white gypsum, as “volcanic black.”¹³⁰

Around Amboy, Nordman recalls, “I did something there with trenches. 500 feet of trenches... Which were already existing... Those were huge trenches, I don’t know, built for salt beds. I filled them all with fire for about five minutes, ten minutes.”¹³¹ More interested in the trenches than in the details of Nordman’s fire, Butterfield presses her on their original purpose, to which Nordman replies, “I don’t know. I accepted it as it was. I didn’t try to figure out the reason for it, because it was just the way it was.”¹³² The artist’s open acceptance and use of happenstance, rather than instrumental approach to searching and creating was also the essence of the sites discovery. When Butterfield asks, “How did you happen on the trenches?” Nordman replies, “Just driving around the desert a lot. Looking around. I spent a lot of time there.”¹³³ She describes the time of day as being one in which, “the light was balanced with the sky. The ground light and the light in the sky,”—likely around noon—and that while there were five people present she is clear that, “I did the piece myself.”¹³⁴

There remains a tension between her declaration of authorship here— “I did the piece myself”—and the conceptual, creative inclusivity of previous works discussed in Chapter One like *Found Room: New Mexico* which depended on the anonymous “co-authorship” arrived at

¹²⁷ Nordman, *De Musica*, 29. *Unnamed, 1967–present* is discussed later and is described on page 117 of *De Sculptura II*. Sketches for the work, which have varying widths of white negative space appear on pages 2, 13, and 116. The “List of Plates & Working Details” on page 6 of *De Sculptura II* erroneously lists one of the illustrations and the work’s description as being on pages 112–13; they are in fact on pages 116–17.

¹²⁸ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

“in concert with the original adobe builders” and “any person arriving by chance.”¹³⁵ (Figs. 3, 10) In the sense that it points to the ways in which her work enacts certain structures of cinema, in this case labor, makes this a productive ambivalence in line with de Certeau’s tactical reactions to institutional strategies, and one with a distinct analogy to the movie studio system: while the work itself requires other people to be completed, Nordman, like any director, insists on ultimate auteurship.

Chemical Fires

In the late 1960s, the highly televised spectacle of the U.S.-Soviet Space Race was approaching its zenith. A major setback for the United States was the Apollo 1 tragedy in which, on January 27, 1967, three astronauts were killed in a cabin fire during a launch test. I believe that given the proximity of these events, that there is symbolic and political significance to the Fire Performances’ use of chemical fire and their location within sight of a major military installation in the desert. Though the Apollo 1 space capsule exploded at Cape Canaveral, Florida, it was manufactured at North American Aviation, a subsidiary of Rockwell NASA, which then occupied over 200 acres of enclosed facilities in Downey, California, a neighborhood in South Central, Los Angeles. The military industrial complex, it seems, had quietly displaced Hollywood as its primary force in the local economy. The Downey facility was fewer than six miles from Watts where the 1965 Riots resulted in six days of martial law, thirty-four deaths, and 200 destroyed buildings. The smoke that looms large in the media representations of the Watts Riots, the Apollo tragedy metaphorizes the miasma of social unrest and connects them to Nordman’s desert performances and her Film Room: *Smoke*.

Even without their intended walls and spectators, the film footage of the Film Rooms, survive as material and evidence. By contrast, *Garden of Smokeless Fire* and *City of the Clouds* were purely conceptual and ephemeral. But importantly, unlike *Eat* and *Smoke*, for which no installation shots from the 1960s iterations exist, the Fire Performances are documented in photographs. Though in different ways, both the reels and the photographs are fragments of the artwork. The celluloid film is an internal part without which the work could not function; and while the camera that shot the *Smoke* footage was external to the original scene, it became internalized by virtue of its subsequent inclusion as a projector within the architecture of the Film Room installation. Like the photographs of the Found Rooms, the photographs of the Fire Performances on the other hand are external to—they are strictly documentation of—the artwork. Or are they? An examination of these photographs complicates not only the status of the photograph vis-à-vis the performance, but unravels the notion of the artwork as a “whole.”

The fragments here, and the Found Room images that preceded them, with their deployment in montage and as allegory, offer a closer reading—and new ways or seeing the work and the world. The use of fragments and the technical details of her creation and manipulation of images matter to my argument because of the way they both locate the work historically and continue Nordman’s earlier experiments with systems of vision. But rather than simply illustrate the culturally motivated and machinic basis of what Jonathan Crary and Paul Virilio would later refer to as, respectively, “techniques of the observer” and the “industrialization” and “regimes” of vision, Nordman manipulates and combines media, technologies, perspectives, and images in ways that stymy monolithic critiques, defy modernist

¹³⁵ Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222.

arguments of medium-specificity, and supplant foregone conclusions with a more compound approach to seeing.¹³⁶

While Nordman's writings indicate that *Garden of Smokeless Fire* took place in 1967, she is less careful—perhaps intentionally—to clarify that were two iterations of the work. She describes one as an, “action with a horizon. In the precincts of the edges of places of habitation and by the side of the road. Mojave Desert.”¹³⁷ (Fig. 14) A second took place, “At the edge of the town of Trona and in the Mojave desert on given formations on the gypsum dry lake.”¹³⁸ (Fig. 8) Comprised as it was of both a time-based action—burning fire, moving clouds and people—in a location far from the prizing eyes of the art world, photographs were an easy and essential way to document—to fix—Nordman's Fire Performances. But this visual evidence also ran the risk of reducing an expansive, ambient project—comprised of a carefully considered set of conditions including place, time, machine, and persons—to a superficial image or two. Indeed, given the shape and place of the *Gardens of Smokeless Fire* in photographs, they are suggestive of Earthworks. Likely as a result of her background in film, in which the “still” never suffices as a stand-in for the reel, Nordman made particular emphasis of the partial status of these images in terms of the work as a whole: On each of the seven published gelatin-silver prints of the photographs of the Fire Performances she stamped the word “FRAGMENT.”

Both of these images appear in *De Sculptura II: City/Sculpture*, a “book/sculpture for use by two or more persons at a time” published in association with the Museum Folkwang Essen on the occasion of Nordman's exhibition there in 1997.¹³⁹ Her description of the her other book in which the Fire Performances are documented, pushes and reveals the limits of each work and the constellated relationship between their versions, across her oeuvre as whole and its reception: “[*De Musica*] give some first records and photo-fragments of a work, as an entity having taken place in the cities of Münster, Lucerne, New York, Hamburg, between 1989-1993, in the context of earlier works.”¹⁴⁰ The book itself, insists Nordman, exists, “in relation to works inside their emplacement phase... [and] is prepared as a sculpture for eventual donation to a public library or to a special collections library as to the choice of the reader next to the unknown reader.”¹⁴¹ Given this expanded conception of the book, it is worth considering both some specific details of design as well as the general role of writing and publishing throughout Nordman's practice.

In addition to *De Musica* (1993) and *De Sculptura II: City Sculpture* (1997), Nordman published two other limited edition artist's books in collaboration with a European museum on the occasion of an exhibition of her work there. But where *De Sculptura: Works in the City: Some Ongoing Questions* (1986) is similarly formatted and bound as *De Musica* and *De Sculptura II*, *De Theatro* is spiral bound on the top with a hard back cover like a notebook to be used for field work.¹⁴² Nordman's titles recall Leon Battista Alberti's renaissance treatises on sculpture in *De Statua* (1434), painting in *Della Pittura* (1435), architecture in *De Aedificatoria* (1452). But where Alberti use optics and mathematics to describe a scientifically-based system for painting space and to categorize the study of art, Nordman's inconsistent, non-chronological, poetic books resist a systematic approach to her art, art which itself challenges the conventions of

¹³⁶ Crary; Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (London: British Film Institute; Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

¹³⁷ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 20, 21.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, title page. The title page also includes the subtitle “City/Sculpture” in German, French, and Italian.

¹⁴⁰ Nordman, *De Musica*, front flap of dust jacket.

¹⁴¹ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, copyright page; Nordman, *De Musica*, front flap of dust jacket.

¹⁴² *De Theatro* includes writing and works from the 1990s, as well as an interview with Stephan Heinlein, and essays by Stephan von Wiese and Gundrun Inboden.

Albertian perspective and media specificity. And just as her works draw on many disciplines and references, Nordman's volumes speak in many languages: her native German, the French she acquired when living in France as a child and adult, and the English she learned upon immigrating to the United States in 1961. In combining many dialects, she underscores translation and transposition, issues at the core of her portable ideas.

Like other conceptual works of the time, her smaller artist's books (both in size and edition), *fragments from the notes of Maria Nordman* (1968/1977) *Poeima*, *Notizen/notes* (1970/1982) use text and language as both content and form.¹⁴⁴ And just as she reappropriates documentation of her visual works into newer published works, so too did the original *fragments* and *Poeima* become inscribed into more recent works. For example in *fragments*, originally written in 1968, a single vowel appears on a single page, followed then by a sequence of pages with a single color name. Published, horizontally bound, as part *fragments* in 1977, its second half consisted of a German translation of the vowels and colors. Similarly, two poetic stanzas, one in English and one in German, "fragments" from the book *Poeima* originally published in 1970, appeared as Nordman's entry in the catalogue for Documenta 7 in 1982.¹⁴⁵ (Fig. 17)

"To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance [or ephemeral installation] is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself," observes Peggy Phelan. But, as Nordman would likely agree, "it does no good, however, to simply refuse to write about performance because of this inescapable transformation."¹⁴⁶ Yet, Nordman seems deeply ambivalent about managing the conflict between accurate understanding of her work and its historical visibility and viability. Though it may be inflected with a conceptual and political charge, her tactical refusal of the rules/strategies of both general and art historical writing through omissions (punctuation, description), inconsistency (grammatical, titles), and format (spacing, reproduction), do more to cloud rather than illuminate meaning. Contradictorily, other strategies, like her evocative use and multiplicity of language and translation, and her innovative use of fonts, directly take up, "the challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance...to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself" and, in doing so, approach the "experience of subjectivity itself."¹⁴⁷

Exhibition catalogues like *Documenta 7* were just such a site of possibility for Nordman to elaborate, explicate, and extend her work. Any discussion of her work, it seems, is seen by her as an opportunity for co-authorship and collaboration. However, because her work—especially the subsequent room works—is not easily reproduced in photographs, Nordman is very specific around their publication, and often prefers to illustrate her work with sketches or text. Not surprisingly, her commitment to very specific terms for describing and illustrating her work and biography has often resulted in tension with writers, curators, and publishers who are more interested in traditional photographic documentation. Often, this misalignment of vision,

¹⁴⁴ Maria Nordman, *Fragment from the Notes of Maria Nordman*, (Munich: Kunstraum München, 1977); Maria Nordman, *Poeima*, *Notizen/notes 1970* (Cologne: Walther König, 1982). Other publications include Maria Nordman, *Working Notes/Aantekeningen* (Otterlo: Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, 1980). Maria Nordman, *DE MUSICA: New Conjoint City Proposals* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Lucerne: Kunstmuseum Luzern, New York: Public Art Fund Inc. and Dia Center for the Arts, Hamburg: Kulturbehörde, and Rennes: FRAC Bretagne, 1993); Maria Nordman, *De Sculptura: Works in the City: Some Ongoing Questions* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1986); Maria Nordman, *De Sculptura II: City Sculpture* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz Verlag, and Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1997); Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*; Maria Nordman, *Trabajos en La Ciudad de Ondas* (La Jolla: La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, 1985); Maria Nordman and Germano Celant, "Conjunct: City of Light," *Artforum* (November 1990), 139–42.

¹⁴⁵ "Poeima," *Documenta 7*, vol. 2 (Kassel: P. Dierichs, 1982), 242–43.

¹⁴⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 148.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

occasionally exacerbated by short deadlines and small budgets, results in catalogue entries that are without images and/or with seriously abridged bios, or are in fact completely blank.¹⁴⁸

In some cases, usually dealing with her early work, the artist and institution can reach agreement about inclusion in the catalogue, but not the exhibition itself; such was the case with two recent shows that were a part of the Getty's 2011 initiative that took place across Los Angeles, Pacific Standard Time: *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970* and *Phenomenal: California Light, Space*. Thus, several catalogues include images and discussion of Nordman's work, which itself was not present in the exhibition.¹⁴⁹ Such slippage between event and documentation, continues to further confuse the historical record. In the extreme, when Nordman's advocacy and commitment to accurately presenting and experiencing her work—in person or in publication—can have the reverse effect and work is excluded from exhibition and its textual documentation. And not only is visibility limited, but so too are the relationships essential in the art world to maintaining and advancing one's career.

An exchange between Nordman and Berkeley Art Museum curator, Mark Rosenthal, makes plain these many points of tension. Though the exhibition of *6/21/79 Berkeley*—which remains Nordman's most well-known work—had been a resounding success, the artist wrote five pages of acerbic comments about Rosenthal's essay for the still-forthcoming catalogue and the general reception of her work. She concludes her letter with: "Until these points are clarified, I request that my notes, nor no photographs or the work be used in print."¹⁵⁰ A piqued Rosenthal responds,

A misunderstanding exists between what you and I believe the Museum's function to be. It seems you feel we exist to serve you entirely, and to make certain that everything meets your approval. I conceive our role as making certain, naturally, the artwork is realized as the artist intended. (I think you agree this was the case.) And second, our function is public oriented...I feel much of your criticism ignores our attempts in the latter directions...As you must acknowledge, you have been consulted in decisions regarding photographic documentation for the catalogue. However, another museum concern beyond documentation is that the catalogue be a contribution to the literature on art.¹⁵¹

Rosenthal's aggravation may be understandable given that, from the outset, he had been her biggest advocate. "I would like to expand 'Space as Support' to include Maria Nordman," writes Rosenthal to BAM Director David Ross in 1978. "It is clearly an extraordinary idea by an outstanding artist," he continues, that, "provides us with a chance to expand the Space show with a quite different kind of work, one by a woman."¹⁵²

While Rosenthal's personal offense at Nordman's eventual criticism evidences the challenge in working with the artist—"it is difficult to accept your abuseful attitude...(Everyone

¹⁴⁸ *Documenta 6*, vol. 1, 218; *Documenta 7*, 242; Barbara Haskell, *Fifteen Los Angeles Artists* (Pasadena: Pasadena Art Museum, 1972), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Lewallen and Moss, *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970; Phenomenal: California Light, Space*, ed. Robin Clark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Maria Nordman to Mark Rosenthal, circa August 1979. Archives of Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives.

¹⁵¹ Letter from Mark Rosenthal to Maria Nordman, August 22, 1979. Archives of Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives.

¹⁵² Memo from Mark Rosenthal to David Ross, August 30, 1978. Archives of Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives.

who has seen your letter agrees with my appraisal of your tone.)...After working very hard to make the work come about, I find your letter shocking,” a few of his specific rebuttals offer insight into the sheer contradiction between the proposed openness of the work when experienced in person, and the tightly circumscribed ways in which she wanted it to be described in images and text.¹⁵³ “In our conversation regarding the photographs,” says Rosenthal, “you rejected as untypical those in which people looked contemplative, were sitting, or playing, etc. Such a judgment, when you claim all-inclusiveness about what occurs in the ‘place’ is prejudicial control of the way the piece is understood. These events were as ‘typical’ as any others that could be mentioned.”¹⁵⁴ Rosenthal also questions another way in which Nordman resists institutional protocol: “Finally, I would like to comment on our publishing a bibliography selected only by you. Your insistence on this compromises our professional standing and is an attempt to completely inhibit information.”¹⁵⁵

The exhibition catalogue as contested site—and the case of *Space as Support* in particular—draws out the conceptual dimension of collaboration in general, and calls from behind the scenes another important figure: the art photographer. As part of her entry in the catalogue, Nordman included a page of text facing a grid of nine photographs taken of *6/21/79 Berkeley*.¹⁵⁶ (Fig. 18) It states in part, and, here I attempt to mimic its format:

photographs p. 55

Photographer John Friedman has studied earlier works of Maria Nordman
His position toward making a record of the work “I took as many photos
As possible to make each one less important.” Three different fragments
Are give 1. In the context of gallery with the historical collection
2. The entrance with opposing sets of doors. 3. Gallery A.

The numbers correspond to a row, in which each of three images of the same space is taken in variable light condition, or from a slightly different perspective. It is important to note that the other three artists’ entries were images only; that Nordman’ included this text on and by Friedman as an “illustration” of *6/21/79 Berkeley* suggests that she conceived his photographs to exceed documentation. They were, even if he didn’t make them under her direct supervision, an integral part—“Fragments” as they are captioned and described by Friedman—of the work itself. In a similar spirit and recalling the adobe builders who “co-authored” *Found Room: New Mexico*, Nordman also states that, “The realization of [*6/21/79 Berkeley*] was carried out together with persons named by the museum as “preparators.”¹⁵⁷ Yet, in another instance of the recurring tension between collaboration and authorship—between the contingency of the experience of the work and the control of the way it lives on in the world through documentation—Nordman ends her statement with:

—No title was given to the work by the artist. It is identified as
6/21/79 Berkeley.

¹⁵³ Letter from Rosenthal to Nordman.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Mark Rosenthal and Germano Celant, *Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman: Space as Support* (Berkeley, California: University Art Museum, 1980), 54.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

- Single photos, and those not proofed by the artist are not functional with the nature of the work. (Until this publication, the artist has published no photographs of the work.)
- Records as to sounds and conversations, movements of each person do not exist.¹⁵⁸

Where Nordman is explicit about Friedman’s role here, though his input does not seem to extend to the publication of his images, she is less clear, consistent, or generous elsewhere. For example, the same photo of the exterior of Nordman’s original studio on Pico Boulevard, appears in 1986 in Nordman’s book *De Sculptura* and, again in Jan Butterfield’s *The Art of Light and Space* (1993).¹⁵⁹ (Fig. 19) In the first instance, the photo credit, listed on the last page of her book, reads: “Book composition and Photography: Maria Nordman.”¹⁶⁰ However, Butterfield’s photo credits cite Frank J. Thomas as the photographer of the same image.¹⁶¹ In other books, Nordman does acknowledge photographs taken by others, though she distinguishes between two kinds of images. The credits in *De Sculptura II* (1997) appear as follows: “Photo-fragments used as collage material: Maria Nordman. With some photographs made in the presence of—and with specific requests of Maria Nordman: John Friedman p. 75 [*Fourth and Howard*], M. Chinese p. 78, 79 [*Galeria Toselli*], Paolo Pellion p. 80, 81, 83 [*Venezia*].”¹⁶² *De Musica* (1991) cites: “Photography: Maria Nordman; Photographs made by others in the presence of Maria Nordman: Phil Melnick [14]”; this is an image of *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Trona version]*, 1967.¹⁶³

Sometimes identical photos works, like *Newport Beach*, which appear in multiple publications—Peter Plagens’s review in *Artforum* (February 1974); Nordman’s own *De Musica* (1991); Goldstein and Rorimer’s catalogue, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975* (1995); and *Venice/Venezia: California Art from The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum* (2000)—are uncredited altogether.¹⁶⁴ (Fig. 20) Where no photo credit is given, and where it is not captioned a “photo-fragment”—meaning the collage/arrangement/edited was based on someone else’s original photograph—we are led to believe that the image was taken by Nordman and that it is, not just documentation but, either a standalone photographic artwork, or much more likely for Nordman, a part of a the larger conceptual work itself. Appropriately confusing is Nordman’s exchange with Jan Butterfield about photography, which suggests that she is either

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Nordman, *De Sculptura*, 17; Jan Butterfield, *The Art of Light and Space* (New York: Abbeville, 1993), 97. Other writings on Nordman’s work by Butterfield include, “Context: Light and Space as Art,” *Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art Journal* (Spring 1982), 57–61 and “Art Without Objects: Shaping Light and Space,” *Sculpture* (September/October 1993), 24–29.

¹⁶⁰ Nordman, *De Sculptura*, 111.

¹⁶¹ Butterfield, 272; Thomas also photographed the work of many Los Angeles artists associated in some way with the Light and Space Movement: Barbara Munger, Robert Irwin, Doug Wheeler, Bruce Nauman, DeWain Valentine.

¹⁶² Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 120.

¹⁶³ Nordman, *De Musica*, 150.

¹⁶⁴ Peter Plagens “Maria Nordman,” *Artforum* (February 1974), 40; Nordman, *De Musica*, 45; Goldstein and Rorimer, 185; Panza di Biumo, Giuseppe and Germano Celant, *Venice/Venezia: California Art from The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000), 69. On the subject of the Panza collection Celant also published, *Das Bild einer Geschichte 1956/1976: Die Sammlung Panza di Biumo* (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Kunstmuseum and Kunstahalle; Milan: Electa, 1980). In “Arte Ambientale in California: Asher, Nauman, Irwin, Orr, Turrell, Nordman, Wheeler,” *Domus*, (June 1975), 52–53, Celant wrote more generally about “ambient art” a term which would come to title his exhibition at the 1976 Venice Biennale. For a popular account of visiting the Panza collections see Milton Gendel, “If One Hasn’t Visited Count Panza’s Villa, One Doesn’t Really Know What Collecting Is All About.” *Artnews* (December 1979), 44–49.

being disingenuous or that photos like the ones of *Newport Beach* had someone else behind the camera:

JB: Are you a photographer?

MN: *No.*

JB: What's the use of rather than the doing of it?

MN: *Well I don't use it much.*

JB: Have you taken any of your own photographs?

MN: *Only maybe three, not too many.*

JB: But you can take your own photographs?

MN: *But I like to see how someone else does it.*¹⁶⁵

Self-publishing

Given these issues around photography, ownership, concept, reproduction, editing, reception, and personal details and relationships, it makes sense that beginning with *De Musica*, Nordman sought sole control over the cataloguing of her work. And because, as we have seen, even if she did not take the photographs herself, the details of reproduction very much matter to the concept and reception of her work, it is worth returning to *Gardens of Smokeless Fire* to consider the way in which they appear in two separate books. In *De Sculptura II*, the image taken by John Friedman of the Mojave version of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* is a two-page color layout, bled from top to bottom but within an inch of the left and right edges; in a white margin, float the page numbers: 20 and 21. (Fig. 8) Inset toward the lower left corner, flush with the white margin, but not quite to the book's edge, is a smaller, inverted version of the entire spread. The aspect ratios (roughly 1:1.3), overall grainy resolution, and unblurry quality of both the host and embedded images suggest that a 35mm single lens reflex camera was used. Its uniform depth-of-field indicates that the lens was stopped way down, which in turn required—in order to have enough light at daybreak—a slower shutter speed, evidenced in the slight blur of the flames in the foreground. That they are not more blurred, along with the formal composition of the image, hints that a tripod may have been used.¹⁶⁶ The miniature inversion is, of course, how the camera “saw” the image before it was “righted” (horizontally) by its internal reflex mirror and “rectified” (vertically) by its pentaprism to project a more “sensible” image for the photographer—one that gives the illusion of looking straight through the camera onto the world.

The size differential between the twin images of the Mojave version of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* suggests that the smaller image may in fact have been a contact print embedded

¹⁶⁵ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield.

¹⁶⁶ For a basic introduction to the technical aspects of analogue photography see, Ansel Adams, *The Camera* (New York: New York Graphic Society and Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

within an enlargement. Through this collocation Nordman makes manifest the apparatus—the film and the camera—by which it was made. In other words, rather than producing images that pretend to transparency and objectivity and natural vision Nordman’s layout and composition not only capture a moment of her Fire Performances, but document the very process of the photographer’s own making and the culturally constructed system of seeing that it would be viewed. In the reduced version, the central form in the image—the burning *Garden of Smokeless Fire*—is roughly the size of the tessellations of sunbaked mud in the larger image within which it is situated on the page. By virtue of this visual echo anchored in the all-over pattern of the foreground and the limited neutral chromatic range of the image as whole, the image-within-an-image is in fact easy to miss. This camouflage, or difficulty to discern, again suggests the way in which photographic vision has become naturalized and thought to be a faithful handmaiden to human vision. By calling upon and then shifting relations between scale, sight, and site, Nordman disrupts this collusion and renders visible the machinic system of vision—the camera as McLuhanian extension—and the ideology behind it.¹⁶⁷ And if the camera extends and politically shapes ways of seeing, Nordman’s disrupting this transparency also depends on her media as being part of the message.

This tactic is continued but then multiply complicated across and within the image of the other version of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* that took place at the edge of Trona. Here, appearing on the very next page in the same book, *De Sculptura II*, the vertical image is bled to the page edge, but a white one-inch margin buffers it from the seam. (Fig. 21) Rather than vertically mirroring the preceding right-hand page layout as conventional book design would dictate, this left-hand page directly mimics it, down to the page number which risks slipping into the crevasse of the book’s binding. And like the horizontal two-page spread, this image also contains its miniature visually buried within its topography. However, Nordman continues to disrupt our expectations and cultural norms of reflection, representation, orientation, and scale by inverting the larger image, while the inset is right side up. This is not immediately apparent because the composition itself is partial, tightly cropped, and slightly off-kilter, which throws the reader’s visual bearings: An arc of fire appears in the upper third of the page, its line rippling out into the horizon of the lake bed and the silhouette of darker mountains; the jagged flames and peaks themselves repeat the texture in the craggy earth that appears in close-up in the foreground. But for the bright orange fire, the overall gray scale of the image adds to the indeterminate orientation of the composition. Again, the instability of our reading makes visible the slippage between what the machine records and how we see the world. The tilted angle and dramatic cropping lend the Trona image a dynamism and spontaneity associated with “street photography”—then popularized by Robert Frank’s quasi-documentary *The Americans* (1958)—and a new kind of photojournalism demanded by the Vietnam war—both made possible by the small size, quick shutter speed, and general facility of the 35mm single lens reflex camera. By contrast then, and as a continuation of the Found Room photos, the seemingly documentary and conventionally composed, double-page Mojave spread can be aligned with conceptual photography, specifically the then-emerging “new topographics” which shared with the “new documentary” spirit a, “determination not to ‘talk too much.’”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Following the publication of *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), Marshall McLuhan’s idea that the “medium is the message” became widespread.

¹⁶⁸ Colin Westerbeck, “On the Road and in the Street,” in *The New History of Photography*, ed. Michel Frizot and trans. Helen Atkins (Cologne: Könemann, 1998), 643.

Like the photographs of Lewis Baltz and Stephen Shore, the pictures of Nordman's work were stripped of artistic frills and reduced to an essentially topographic state, conveying substantial amounts of visual information but eschewing entirely the aspects of beauty, emotion and opinion."¹⁶⁹ Also, just as the New Topographics purport to eschew opinion but their portrayals of suburban America all but come off as critique, so too can one read meaning in Nordman's seemingly anodyne locations and positioning of her images. However, an important difference lies in the fact that the photo-fragments of Nordman's work capture not just the landscape but her own interventions on it. Furthermore, she also intervenes on the images themselves during post-production, and in the ways in which the images were distributed.

The partiality—both in terms of its completeness and Nordman's preference—of the Trona image of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* is a form of fragmentation. By emphasizing this unwholeness and combining it with its kindred operations of refraction and mirroring, Nordman complicates our reading of image and landscape, and vision itself. Such inversion on the horizontal axis represents the mechanics of the eye and the camera, both of which are equipped with lenses that produce upside down images; the brain rights our sight and, for our viewing sake, the image in the "site/sight" of a camera is righted through a mirror. Once the negative itself has been developed, the inversion is fixed by simply physically rotating it—or the resulting print—180 degrees. Similarly, flipping the negative over creates inversion on the vertical axis (where left becomes right and vice versa)—as seen in Nordman's page layout—and mimics the physics of reflection and the logic of mechanical reproduction. In the camera beforehand, the view had been righted vertically through the pentaprism. The relationship between these two modalities of reversal is further underscored by Nordman's siting the very similar images of two different instances of the same work in close visual proximity within the book. Furthermore, where the vertical axis is associated with beauty, the "plane of the horizontal," according to Rosalind Krauss, "is desublimatory, associated with 'base materialism.'"¹⁷⁰ Thus, the two-page spread underscores the facticity of place—it presents a seemingly more "objective" perspective of the work than the vertical version whose pleasing aesthetics—its greater "hanging together or coherence of form"—is underscored by its glowing color.¹⁷¹

However, a second image of the Trona version of *Gardens of Smokeless Fire* appears in *De Musica* and resembles the composition of the image of the Mojave iteration.¹⁷² (Fig. 22) It too is a double-page spread with the work's line of fire centered in the foreground. It also has an inset small-scale duplication. However, unlike the two pictures in *De Sculptura II*, here both the large and small-scale versions of the image are right-side up. Yet, placed as it is down in the right hand corner of the right-hand page, even rightly oriented, the miniature could be mistaken for another patch of fire within the overall "action" of the work and the full bleed of its image. This view which occurred "eight minutes before sunup" appears to be taken earlier in the morning than the shot in *De Sculptura II*, as the vista is darker which amplifies the brightness of the fire which itself is echoed in a constellation of pinpricks of light that define the town of Trona far off in the distance along the edge of the dry lake bed. Similarly, the cumulostratus clouds in the crepuscular sky above mirror the inflammable cottony gypsum surface of the dry lake in the foreground. Indeed, Nordman describes the time of day chosen for its "certain luminosity in the sky related to a possible luminosity produced on the ground"—conditions that

¹⁶⁹ William Jenkins, *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man Altered Landscape* (Rochester, NY: International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House, 1975), 5.

¹⁷⁰ Rosalind Krauss, *Cindy Sherman, 1975–1993* (New York and London: Rizzoli, 1993), 93–94.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 22; Nordman, *De Musica*, 26–27.

would also necessitate a long exposure time and at tripod to minimize blurriness in the photograph.¹⁷³ The long duration of the open shutter also captures the smears of contingent conditions like a breeze that swept the flames to the left.¹⁷⁴

What might be mistaken for a fourth image of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* in fact depicts a different work entirely: *City of the Clouds*. (Fig. 15) In this scene, which appears in *De Sculptura II*, a baked ochre lakebed, its parched surface riven with cracks, backs into the distance. The desiccated shore meets the darker, rocky desert, rising up into mountains. The sky above is as bleached out as the fissured foreground, itself further scarred by a charred circle. A wan puff of smoke hovers, echoing the shape below. But, importantly, this smoke did not result from the fiery cicatrix. Rather, the scorched lines in the lakebed correspond to those seen in the roadside version of *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]*; the low, white gaseous cloud is fake, belched from a movie smoke machine. This suggests that the artist overlaid the performance of one work over the residue of an earlier one in such a way that it is easy to mistakenly conflate the two and interpret the smoke as emanating from the charred outline beneath. As noted earlier, overlaying these two Fire Performances tempts us to draw a cause-and-effect relationship—the very hallmark of historical materialism—between the burn marks and smoke. Close attention to visual details uncovers such a direct connection to be untrue, and instead reveals the works/actions are bound by concept rather than strict causality. The waterlines and the scorchings Nordman imposed upon them are the fossilized ruins or traces—Benjamin’s “ur-phenomena,” the abstract rather than causal traces from which he believes history might be constructed.¹⁷⁵

That both instantiations of *Garden of Smokeless Fire*—despite occurring months apart in different lake beds within the Mojave—are identically titled and dated anticipates the a priori approach with which most images are read: viewers are likely to accommodate their reading of an image so that it fits the given title. (Figs. 8, 14) Without close visual analysis of Nordman’s photographs, we are liable to conflate the images as documentation of a single performance. Closer inspection of the photographs not only reveals the discretion of the two iterations, but again reinforces the notion that all sight is partial and skewed, and all images as deeply constructed, by both the artist and culture; those that fly under the flag of documentation are especially suspect. If the notion of a whole work is untrue, then as fragments of these fragments their representations are inversely proportional in their falsity. Like Benjamin’s, “experiments with an alternative hermeneutic strategy,” Nordman’s strategies too offers a “dialectics of seeing,” one that, relies, rather, on the interpretive power of images that make conceptual points concretely, with reference to the world outside the text.”¹⁷⁶ Nordman’s work requires an active rather than passive viewer whose agency draws connections among the fragments and accretes in a dynamic and dialectical understanding of the work. Such contingency at the level of reception is preceded by earlier elements of chance in her images—the shutter captures but doesn’t control what is seen. We might think then of Nordman’s “photo-fragments” of her Fire Performances and Found Room photographs as stills. But not so much as static views of a real-time film or place, but as fragments that are “still here.”

Furthermore, the relationship between the works and their images challenge two possibilities for reproducibility. On the one hand, as we have already seen, the works are absolutely and endlessly reproducible in the sense of being but a single instance or performance

¹⁷³ Nordman, *De Musica*, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ For a discussion of Benjamin and Goethe’s concept of ur-phenomena see, Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 6.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

of a conceptual, portable idea or a score. Yet as time-based and space-bound ephemeral experiences, they are not reproducible at the level of representation—whether in a photograph or textual description. Any attempt to represent or re-present the work can only be a fragment. But still, some of those fragments—the photographs—are themselves theoretically endlessly reproducible. Since its inception, photography was used to reproduce artworks and, in doing so, revolutionized and democratized the ability to “see” and study art. Not only did photographic reproductions disseminate images of paintings and sculpture, but the time-based arts—dance, theater, and performance—now could be visually captured for those who could not attend the performance.¹⁷⁷

Markings on the land also risk being mistaken for the work itself rather than as evidence of the primary work of the performance. This, in tandem with their dispersed sites in the American West and all that it brings to the imagination, draw likenesses at the level of the image at least between Nordman’s performances and Earthworks and the challenges they face for the ways in which photographic reproduction distorted and flattened their terms. While generally understood to be the material consequence of artistic labor—the piles of moved dirt—Earthworks certainly have a performative aspect, especially when, like Robert Smithson’s spectacular movie *Spiral Jetty* (1970), the process of their making is documented in a film itself given the same title as the sculpture.

There are also the ways in which photography problematically collapses space visually and politically. The first happens as a result of both the camera’s field of vision as well as its scale.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, because of their flattened spatial dimensions and chromatic range, images of Michael Heizer’s *Rift I* (1968), completed in the Nevada desert the same year as Nordman’s Fire Performances, bear a superficial resemblance and temporal proximity—scars on sunbaked lake beds, mountain rings in the distance—to Nordman’s *Gardens of Smokeless* Fire. Though visual false cognates, these images validate the artists’—as well as others, most notably Walter De Maria’s—apprehensions about having their work photographed. Furthermore, the point of many of these works was at least in part to escape the artworld—to lay beyond reach and elude the market and its centers. It isn’t just that images fragment and misrepresent, but that they can become, as they have with *Spiral Jetty*, one of the most recognizable but least seen artworks in the world, anemic paper stand-ins for the work that evidence the complexities and inevitability of systemic cooption.

Fragmentation

¹⁷⁷ For two perspectives on documentation of performances see Amelia Jones, “Live Art in Art History,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Tracy C. Davis. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Kathy O’Dell, “Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s.” *Performance Research*, (Spring 1997), 85–95.

¹⁷⁸ For a discussion of the role of photography in the reception of Earthworks see Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002). For excellent insight into the ways media extends and complicates Earthworks and the issues around ownership of its images see, Tom Holert, “Land Art’s Multiple Sites,” in *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, ed. Phillip Kaiser and Miwon Kwon (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art; Munich: Haus der Kunst, 2012), 97–123. To wit: De Maria and Heizer did not participate in this exhibition because they felt it—no exhibition—could properly represent their work. However, Nordman did contribute a piece, *Untitled*, 1973/1995/2000/2008/2012, a site-specific re-creation of *Newport Beach* (1973) at MOCA Geffen; it is illustrated in the catalogue not with a photograph, but an architectural plan. This work is discussed at length in Chapter Three.

Nordman's photographs are not just fragments in a practical and material sense, they make manifest her use of "fragment" as a verb, noun, metaphor, concept, and organizing principle. The word also appears on her photographs in the most literal sense. As matte ink letters on glossy paper, "FRAGMENT," is meant to suspend the status of the work as whole. (Figs. 8, 15, 16, 21, 22) Yet, the stamp also suspends our gaze on each picture's surface. One can imagine this effect to be particularly remarkable on an actual photograph where the black matte ink would be in material contrast with the glossy paper. But even in reproduction in Nordman's books, the letters are effective in announcing photograph as interface. FRAGMENT, then, calls out the way in which, according to Benjamin, "[technological reproduction] enables the original to meet the recipient half way."¹⁷⁹ We are no longer looking through the image to the work in the landscape; instead, the photograph is now fixed as an object in its own right. Paradoxically, in its repetition across several prints of distinct works, Nordman's stamp visually unites them into a series. And if photography, for Benjamin, represents art in the age of reproducibility, the camera and printing press were preceded, he argues, by the stamp—along with the cast—as the only two ways the Greeks had of "technologically reproducing works of art."¹⁸⁰ Moreover, in layering ancient technology atop the modern, the photograph is suddenly granted the status of a new original. In other words, in stamping "FRAGMENT" on the photograph, it is no longer just a reproduction, but now bears a unique mark—the imprimatur—of the artist's hand. The reproduction is at once the fragment of the idea and a discrete object.

In this move and in tightly controlling the negatives, prints, rights, and reproductions for all her work, Nordman avoids a pitfall of reproducibility: "By replicating the work many times over," Benjamin warns, "it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her situation it actualizes that which is reproduced."¹⁸¹ This actualization is further ensured by Nordman's manipulation of the photographic negatives and prints, and the book printing process. As we have already seen, these strategies include enlargement, reduction, inversion, embedding, as well as printing them as film strips, collaging images together, and montaging them into books. (Figs. 1, 8, 10, 13, 18) As modes of "fragmentation, mutilation and destruction," Nordman's strategies draw on what Linda Nochlin describes as the, "founding tropes of the visual rhetoric [of revolutionary ideology]."¹⁸² Furthermore, in combining them with techniques of reproducibility, Nordman frustrates, "the desire of the present-day masses to 'get closer' to things spatially and humanly, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing's uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction."¹⁸³ From the "loss [of the whole] is constructed the Modern: in which the "cropped view" constitute[s] the essence of representational modernism."¹⁸⁴

Indeed, I will follow Nochlin's argument for the possible opposing interpretations of the significance of the cutting or cropping of pictorial space, as manifesting either total "contingency" or total "determination." The analysis of Nordman's photographs thus far would seem to fall in line with the latter, in which the image is, "understood to be cropped, cut off, deliberately, as a function of the artist's will and aesthetic decision. The cut or the crop must be read as a strategy of that 'laying bare of the device' central to modernist creation. I am forced to

¹⁷⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Works of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 254.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹⁸² Linda Nochlin, *The Body in Pieces: The Fragment as a Metaphor for Modernity* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 9.

¹⁸³ Benjamin, "Works of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)," 255.

¹⁸⁴ Nochlin, 8.

pay attention to the formal organization of the picture surface, which becomes the realm of the pictorial *signifier*, only a simulacrum of reality, however modern.”¹⁸⁵ And as we have seen, the “modern vision” is stripped further bare by Nordman’s stamping of “FRAGMENT” on the surface as well as by literally cutting her own photographs and collaging in ways that seem to attempt to differently document the work as experience in ways not possible in a single “representative” documentary image. For example, by presenting filmstrips of *Jemez en masse* as a single contact sheet, Nordman complicates the notion of filmic time measure as one frame after another. (Fig. 13) And as discussed in Chapter Three in later images of her room works like *Saddleback Mountain* and *Venezia*, she repeats images of the same figure within the space; this adjacency implies both a multiplicity of positions within the work and a variety of experiences participants might have of it over time. (Figs. 23 and 24) By superseding verbal description of the work with visual demonstration of it, Nordman’s method resembles Benjamin’s method of “literary montage” in which he—like the reticent “new documentary” photographers—“needn’t say anything. Merely show.”¹⁸⁶ Just as Benjamin allows historical details to “come into their own” by “making use of them,” Nordman too takes the traces of her performances—the photographic ur-phenomena—and repurposes them as visual propositions.¹⁸⁷

Yet, though Nordman’s manipulation of the photographs, both as they were being taken and as well in “post-production” is clearly evident, the artist in fact had only limited control of her media—fire and smoke—and environmental factors like the wind seen in the dawn image of Trona. (Fig. 16) A final image of *City of the Clouds* testifies to the contingent nature of the Fire Performances, both in terms of the cropped image and its representation of a fragmented human body—the only one to appear in the entire suite of photographs. (Fig. 25) Here, a horizontal composition was shot, not at a distance like the other images, but from within the lake: We see the smooth rising transition from its bed to the rampart of its shore, which abuts the image’s left edge. The entire lower right diagonal half of the scene is veiled in white smoke, making mysterious the rocky ruins of a once underwater world; it is visually offset by the high, cirrus clouds in the sky. At center, partially enshrouded is a bush, its dark lacey outline an echo of the silhouette of trees in the deep distance. Against that ridge, a man, visible in outline only, runs away from the lake toward the image’s upper left edge. Though the figure is whole, its lack of specificity renders it incomplete—it is but a shadow fragment of a person. Such visual adumbration can be read at the psychological level to refuse the conventional emotional connection that usually occurs when we see details of visage and expression; as a dark blank, the figure is both no one and a place for everyone to project themselves, a nether status that runs the risk of being read in the default category of male.

Nordman’s decision here—whether it was an accident she chose to preserve or one she activated by trimming the print—is in line with Nochlin’s third possibility, a dialectic alternative in which cropped borders are read as, “a kind of designation of image-making as *play*; play with habitual boundaries, of all sorts, an oscillation between contingency and determination.”¹⁸⁸ This reading is underscored by the word “FRAGMENT”, stamped atop the lakebed’s bleached surface, its letters slightly smudged, but precisely parallel to the image’s horizontal plane.

The figure’s brisk clip, suggests that—following Nordman’s directive that the “walls of clouds” move over the desert floor at the speed of a walking person—the day was breezy. Under

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸⁶ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002), 460.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Nochlin, 37–38.

more still conditions, we might imagine the participant to stroll, a *flâneur* in the desert who stands in for the “passersby” for whom Nordman conceived the Found Rooms and constructed her urban rooms. In this context, we might also see these clouds also to instantiate a different kind of fragmentation: the atomization of water into the air, which dissipates according to the laws of thermodynamics and entropy—ideas that were very much in currency in the art world in 1967. Of particular interest here is Robert Smithson’s “Entropy and the New Monuments,” which appeared in *Artforum*, then still published in Los Angeles, in June 1966—the summer between Nordman’s first and second years of graduate studies at UCLA. “Recently,” Smithson reflects, “there has been an attempt to formulate an analog between ‘communication theory’ and the ideas of physics in terms of entropy. As A.J. Ayer has pointed out, not only do we communicate what is true, but also what is false.”¹⁸⁹ Where for Theodor Adorno falseness is associated with wholeness—“Das Ganze ist das Unwahre”—for Smithson it takes on the more urgent epistemological terms of scientific positivism, inversely equating falseness with truth: “Often the false has a greater ‘reality’ than the true. Therefore, it seems that all information, and that includes anything that is visible, has its entropic side. Falseness, as an ultimate, is inextricably a part of entropy, and this falseness is devoid of moral implications.”¹⁹⁰

In thinking Smithson alongside Nordman’s work, the clouds, in their constant dissipation, visibly manifest the concept of entropy and the impossibility of wholeness and the greater truth of the fragment. These nebulae and remarks symbolically manifest Baudelaire’s, “concepts of fluidity—‘floating existences’—and gaseousness (which ‘envelops and soaks us like an atmosphere’),” themselves, Marshall Berman argues, an extension of Marx’s understanding of the entropic disintegration inherent in capitalism in which, “all that is solid melts into air.”¹⁹¹

Ephemeral Art and Objecthood

If Benjamin’s notion of “ritual” was the basis—the use value—for all “authentic” work of art, might Nordman’s work—the performance or action carried out by people in the desert—constitute a ritual of sorts? It is not the “secularized ritual” that “gave rise to the negative theology, in the form of an idea of ‘pure’ art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of representational content.”¹⁹² At the level of performance, Nordman’s work maintains the authenticity of ritual, but, equally importantly, its reproductions—the photographs—also represent content that is both political and as such carry out a social function, that of disruption. In the late 1960s, this conceptual confusion between discrete works and disciplines would have particular theoretical and political implications and can be understood to undermine and fragment another kind of “totalization,” one specific to the art world. “Modernism,” as previously noted, had already been established at the beginning of the decade by Clement Greenberg to characterize art that in its formal and material self-reflexivity could achieve a kind of transcendent purity.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” *Artforum* (June 1966), 26–31, reprinted in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 17.

¹⁹⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* [1951], (London: Verso, 2005), 50; Smithson, 17–18.

¹⁹¹ This is Nochlin’s use of Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) and Karl Marx as quoted in Berman, in Nochlin, 24.

¹⁹² Benjamin, “Works of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version),” 256.

¹⁹³ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vols. 1–4, ed. J. O’Brian. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

This notion was later extended into what Michael Fried described as “presentness,” a quality which he felt that Minimalism lacked as a result of its blurring of media. Surely, as a then-graduate student in sculpture, Nordman would have been aware of Fried’s controversial essay, “Art and Objecthood,” which appeared—exactly one year after Smithson’s entropic manifesto—in the June 1967 issue of *Artforum*.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, Nordman’s Fire Performances, which took place that same year, were not only “theatrical” in Fried’s sense of creating in the viewer a self-conscious awareness of their body, they were theatrical in the more literal—and Brechtian—sense of involving and depending on audience/“participants” for their realization. Ironically, it is the very lack of these bodies in most of Nordman’s photographs that have given the impression that her works with their Earthwork-like sitings and simple geometric shapes are driven primarily by the formal, Minimalist aesthetics associated with the Light and Space artists rather than a collaborative and performative ethos.

Though Fried took aim at Minimalist sculpture, conceptual art was then also in full swing, knocking not just the object from its pedestal, but reducing art to mere photographic representations. Within this “deskilling” of both actions and the images that record them evolved—counterintuitively—what Benjamin Buchloh called an “Aesthetic of Administration” which flourished between 1962 and 1969 and of which Nordman’s use of stamping and her choice of administrative sans serif font and all-caps delivery are an excellent example.¹⁹⁵ As explored in Chapter One, the many institutional and instructional strategies adopted by conceptual artists then resulted in what were considered by many as anti-aesthetic—“boring”—visual objects like lists, letters, uncomposed photographs. And within many of these dry documents, is, returning to Nochlin, a wry and ironic sense of play with the “habitual boundaries” as the “external surface of unconscious events” to challenge concepts of art, aesthetics, and epistemology.¹⁹⁶ If through its documentation in her images and books, we understand Nordman’s work to be an implicit and ever-changing part and critique of an impossible whole—terms in an undefined series without habitual boundary—then how does fragmentation play out within these specific iterations or the work itself?

Though they are situated in the desert, the Fire Performances are as much about the city and civilization as her urban room works. The very titles, “gardens” and “city,” and Nordman’s use of artificial fire and smoke, parody the human attempt to domesticate and re-create nature. And, just as Benjamin saw the arcades as the interface of production relations, Nordman’s work can too be seen to explore the means and ends of material production, between site/source and use value—geographic zones in which utopic and politic conceptions of nature, resources, ownership, and power run deeply beneath seemingly barren surfaces. I can say this because, whether in Los Angeles or the Mojave, the artist is, as we have seen in her Film Rooms, explicit about the work’s site location both in her planning and description of it. In each case, there is a deliberate intersection between nature and culture, so as to trouble the binary relation into which they are so often placed. For example, rather than crop out the city lights, Nordman’s

¹⁹⁴ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5 (June 1967): 12–23. The marked ideological and rhetorical difference between the essays by Smithson and Fried reflect the political fragmentation of the art world, as well as the magazine shifting politics that came with its move to New York in the summer of 1967. For an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the marked “contradiction and differences in the art world’s responses to Vietnam, to Civil Rights and to the early stages of the women’s movement,” played out in the pages of *Artforum* and at large, see Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and Dissent: Aspects of the Art Left in Sixties America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).

¹⁹⁵ Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, “Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions,” *October*, 55 (Winter 1990), 105–43. For a broader discussion of deskilling see, John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art after the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 106.

photographs and descriptions draw them in, creating a context for the work, posing the question of the work and the place: What are its physical and conceptual limits and boundaries?

Furthermore, if we take the modern notion of garden as idealized space, in Nordman's work is can be seen not as a form of utopia, but as a space relocated to the desert where cultivation is challenged, it becomes a site of social and cultural contestation. By burning lines that echo the borders between planted beds, aspects essential to the garden—control, order, growth, beauty, display—are redeployed, not in the design and maintenance of an isolated, cultivated bourgeois or civic enclave for contemplation, but as scorch marks on the earth. Yet, these are not wildfires, but controlled burns conceived, ignited and curated by way of chemicals.

Material Histories

The particularity of that desert—the Mojave—and town—Trona—suggests that Nordman may have been thinking about the relationship between nature and culture/city in another, more specific way. “In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject.”¹⁹⁷ While Benjamin was musing about how photography is not privy to the work's physical history as manifest in patina and provenance, for Nordman's work, the case is more complicated. Indeed, as I have already argued, “Its whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and, of course, not only technological—reproducibility.”¹⁹⁸ Yet, it is in the photographs of the work—in their representation and reproduction by technological means—that attests to the “unique existence” of that particular iteration. In this way, “technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain.”¹⁹⁹ And those images, “bear the mark of the history”—but not the “history to which the work has been subject” but the history *from* which the work makes its subject.²⁰⁰

Unlike Bochner's portable ideas, which were site indiscriminate—they could conform to any place—the specific location of Nordman's Fire Performances were crucial to their meaning. These sites were chosen for very particular reasons, which, along with the series' performative ethos, accentuate the work's “cult value” and visibly manifest the conditions of their production.²⁰¹ Meant primarily in the service of ritual, art defined by its cult value is less visible, and is in opposition to modern practices that sought to maximize their “exhibition value” through works that could be shown anywhere regardless of context. Again, in her tight rein over and her repurposing of the images of her work, Nordman seems acutely aware of the ways in which photography—with its possibility for endless reproducibility and reach and recontextualization—can catapult a work from its cult beginnings to the logical extreme of exhibition value.

Mining History

¹⁹⁷ Benjamin, “Works of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version),” 253.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 254.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

Located on the edge of dry Searles Lake, the world's richest deposits of chemicals including ninety-eight of the 104 known naturally occurring chemical elements, Trona was established in 1913 as a company town for mining concerns interested in extracting borax and gypsum, the primary material in the production of not only plaster of Paris and drywall. Nordman's choice of a gypsum lake bed as the site for the Fire Performances and her later use of drywall to construct her room works, invite a reading of her work vis-à-vis the role of this mineral in social and art history. Since antiquity, plaster of Paris has been used to cast metal sculptures into reproductions for academic art training.²⁰² Thus, gypsum gave rise to reproducibility at the level of material—the replica—and at the level of skill—the ability to replicate. The interplay between negative and positive in the sculptural casting process is essentially the same—albeit in two rather than three dimensions—in photography which casts shadows rather than molten metals or a slurry of gypsum. And this analogous reproductive relationship gives interesting depth to Nordman's photographs of the gypsum, for these image “fragments” depict the mineral in a raw state.

Equally significant is gypsum's more recent central role in replicating architecture. Rolled and pressed between thick layers of paper, gypsum board is a prefabricated wall unit developed in the 1910s that replaced the labor-intensive and expensive lathe and plaster techniques and revolutionized building technology. Cheaply made, widely available, and infinitely easier to install, gypsum board, which has come to be known as “drywall” or its genericized trademark “sheetrock,” facilitated the postwar building boom epitomized by Levittown, New York in the late 1940s, and, which, by 1968, had filled the greater Los Angeles Basin.²⁰³ This general and allusive connection between Nordman's desert works and late-capitalist construction, becomes more concrete if we know that she describes her subsequent room works, like *Moveable Walls* (1969) as “made of prefabricated gesso panels nailed to a frame of wood.”²⁰⁴ If, as we have seen, *Garden of Smokeless Fire*'s ovoid traces in the gypsum lake—made in that same year—can be seen to circumscribe the millions of square feet of drywall in the Los Angeles Basin, then the hanging plaster and lathe seen in her photograph *Found Room: Venice*, describes an earlier construction—and its destruction. (Fig. 1) Thus, in a strange way, gypsum—and Nordman's practice—connects the histories of traditional European academic art training and the post-War American suburban expansion.²⁰⁵

As Susan Buck-Morss sums up, Benjamin used historical material itself as the “‘ur-phenomena’ of modernity;” Nordman too combines the basest materials defined by only by their use value—like gypsum, a fossilized chemical in its natural state—with cultural phenomena defined by its representational value—movie cloud machines—from the highest reaches of Maslow's pyramid.²⁰⁶ This connection brings to bear Marx's principle in which natural resources dictate economic superstructure. Indeed, nowhere is this more evident than in Los Angeles, whose bountiful year-round sunshine, cheap land, and diverse topography were the

²⁰² Rune Frederiksen and Eckard Marchand, eds., *Plaster Casts: Making Collecting and Displaying from Classical Antiquity to the Present*, vol. 18, *Transformationen der Antike* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

²⁰³ For overviews and analyses of this growth, see Edward W. Soja, “It All Comes Together in Los Angeles,” in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989) and Mike Davis, “How Eden Lost Its Garden: A Political History of the Los Angeles Landscape,” in *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996).

²⁰⁴ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 15.

²⁰⁵ A similar argument can be made for the work of Michael Asher who used drywall to create architectural works that enact “situation aesthetics” and “institutional critique.” See Kirsti Peltomäki, *Situation Aesthetics: The Work of Michael Asher* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010).

²⁰⁶ Buck-Morss, 3, 211.

prime reasons that early cinema made its way to Hollywood and rapidly grew into the region's main economy.²⁰⁷ The reproductive possibilities intimated by gypsum reverberate visually and technologically with the “city of the clouds.” Just as the gypsum mine and manufacturing plant makes possible distant cities of houses, so too does the movie industry churn out prefab products—often with the help of special effects machines. In a way, both industries—Hollywood and housing developers—manufacture middle-class dreams, whose promise of tidy, happy endings are dependent on readily available materials, malleable minds and bodies, and repeatable processes.

Bombs and Fragments

In 1967 America, Nordman's specific and graphic overlay of the word “FRAGMENT” on images of the Mojave Desert was likely to have had another connotation. Nordman may have chosen Trona not just because it is a source of building materials, a symbol of geologic time, and is at a distance from the movie and art worlds, but also perhaps because it is squeezed between two major, massive military installations. Lying to the east is Bicycle Army Airfield, a 642,000 acre National Training Center and to the west is the 1.1 million acre Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, “the high desert home of the Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division... where the Navy and Marine Corps have [since 1943] developed or tested nearly every significant airborne weapon system in the past five decades.”²⁰⁸ In the 1960s China Lake was a “Naval Ordnance Testing Station” developed the next generation of cluster weapons, night attack systems, and “smart” bombs. Most significant in this last category were the “eye” series of free-fall weapons which deployed napalm and were essential to Operation Rolling Thunder, the first sustained American assault on North Vietnamese territory from March 1965 until October 1968.²⁰⁹ Dropped by bomb, napalm's burning jelly-like gasoline mixture disperses, clings and spreads an intense hot fire that consumes so much oxygen as to suffocate every living thing in the immediate area.²¹⁰ In a handheld flame thrower—like the one Nordman describes using in *Gardens of Smokeless Fire*—Napalm is forced out under pressure and ignited, incinerating bunkers and troops and vegetation at close range.

From 1965 to 1969, Dow Chemical Company manufactured napalm B for the American armed forces, and, after news reports of napalm B's deadly and disfiguring effects were published, the corporation experienced boycotts of its products. In similar protest, on October 17, 1966, UCLA students demonstrated in front of the College Placement Center where Dow Chemical was holding interviews for graduate students in chemistry and engineering.²¹¹ Nordman's use of a flamethrower to ignite land associated with the military is another form of protest. And the work's framing as “garden” makes it an important precedent for the more widely known work, Terry Fox's *Defoliation* (1970). Using a flamethrower of the, “type the U.S.

²⁰⁷ This meant that movies could be made more easily and more cheaply at a time when electricity and travel were still a luxury. See Chapter Four for a full discussion of the relationship between location and Hollywood.

²⁰⁸ “Military Facilities: Navy Ranges: China Lake,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/china-lake.htm>

²⁰⁹ “From the Desert to the Sea: A Brief Overview of the History of China Lake,” (originally prepared for the 50th anniversary issue (November 4, 1993) of *The Rocketeer*, China Lake's in-house newspaper.; Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, vol. 2, (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 617–20.

²¹⁰ S.F. Tomajczyk, *Dictionary of the Modern United States Military* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1996), 399.

²¹¹ Andy Reichline, “Dow Corp. Picketed While Holding Interviews,” *UCLA Daily Bruin*, October 18, 1966: 1. For an incisive history of the compound see Robert M. Neer, *Napalm: An American Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2013).

Military used to destroy vegetation in Vietnam,” for this public performance piece, Fox burned triangular area in the bed of jasmine plants outside of Berkeley’s University Art Museum’s temporary building.²¹² “This was my first political work,” recalled Fox. “By burning a perfect triangle right in the middle, it would look as though someone had destroyed the plants on purpose. It was also a theatrical piece. Everyone likes to watch fires...”²¹³ Where Fox’s denuded public shape and aggressive public action were meant to protest an egregious manmade situation, Nordman’s circular outlines in the desert mark an already stark uninhabited garden to record deep time and the brevity of human history at time when nuclear annihilation seemed imminent.

To Ask

Fragmentation splinters out into yet more meaning across time and place. Another major military strategy in the Vietnam War was the use of fragmentation grenades and bombs whose “lethal mechanism” is not the explosive material itself, but the high-velocity hail of metal that results from the shattering of its casing—often inaccurately referred to as “shrapnel.”²¹⁴ To increase the volume of deadly fragments intended to rip through everyone and everything in close range, the bombs are augmented with an extra metal band—a “fragmentation sleeve.” Where colloquially, the noun “frag” refers to both the fragmentation grenade itself as well as the fragments it disperses, the euphemistic verb “to frag” or “fragging” is a term that originated with the Vietnam War.²¹⁵ It refers to the use of grenades by American soldiers to murder their own unpopular commanding officers or fellow soldiers with the goal that the deaths would appear accidental. While fragging, “was practically unheard of in the early days of U.S. involvement in ground combat,” in Vietnam, it increased as leadership and discipline declined, and “rapid turnover caused by the one-year rotation policy weakened unit cohesion.”²¹⁶

Another contributing factor to such mutiny and homicide among U.S. troops was the “withdrawal of public support” of the war, which “led to a questioning of purpose on the battlefield.”²¹⁷ Indeed this “questioning of purpose” may be at the root of the colloquial American “fragging” as an act of desperate wartime psychological pressure, as well as at the root of the German “asking.” Applied by Nordman to the surface of her photographs, “frag” is a homophone—a visual and cultural portmanteau—that recalls her first language, summons current events, and calls out her formal use of the fragment as a mode and metaphor of political resistance. Nordman’s choice to use a smoldering fire dispersed by a flame thrower and documented in “photo-fragments” would seem to echo not only the day’s newspapers, whose headlines and images—often also taken with 35mm cameras—included both the physical conflict in Vietnam, as well as the local, political and personal response to those events.²¹⁸ Thus, in using frag and fragments as part of both her visual vocabulary and technical practice,

²¹² Constance Lewallen, “A Larger Stage,” in Lewallen and Moss, eds., *State of Mind: New California Art Circa 1970*, 34.

²¹³ Terry Fox in Constance M. Lewallen, *Terry Fox: Articulations* (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art and Design, 1992), 15–16.

²¹⁴ Tomajczyk, 400.

²¹⁵ Arthur T. Frame, “Fragging,” in Tucker, *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, vol. 1, 382–83.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Between January 1966 and January 1967 there were 649 front-page articles related to the Vietnam conflict in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Nordman is not so much making a specific political statement, but, more radically still, questioning the nature, limits, and effects of knowledge and state power.

Peace Tower

Given that the correspondences between bomb and body fragments and photo fragments, and between throwing cinematic flames and burning villages reside at the level symbolic allegory and reception, we might understand Nordman's combination of allusion and formalism as an attempt to reconcile the then ongoing debates about the role of art vis-à-vis politics in general and in particular response to the *Artists' Tower of Protest* (also called the *Peace Tower*) that had been erected in Los Angeles in early 1966.²¹⁹ In June of the following year, Ad Reinhardt, an early supporter of the *Peace Tower*, changed tack and insisted on a radio broadcast that, "there are no good images or good ideas that one can make [in protest]. There are no effective paintings or objects that one can make against the war. There's been a complete exhaustion of images. A broken doll with red paint poured over it or a piece of barbed wire may seem to be a symbol or something like that, but that's not the realm of the fine artist anyway."²²⁰ Because the Fire Performances' valence is loaded in their materials and location rather than in a representation, they appear formally to maintain the minimalist aesthetics of "fine art." This choice may suggest that Nordman agreed with Reinhardt that there had been a "complete exhaustion of images." Or put differently by Julia Bryan-Wilson in her discussion of the *Peace Tower*, "Shifting conceptions of activism and artistic labor spawned an investment in emerging, possibly political, form of art—forms not legibly antiwar in any conventional way."²²¹

Indeed not legibly antiwar, the Fire Performances' ephemerality, materials and location in the site where gypsum is extracted and bombs are tested, instead draws into relation three technologies—movies, construction, and military—at the heart of Los Angeles's economic growth, and by virtue of such visibility offers a social critique. Though two are locally additive—walls and stories are constructed—and one is subtractive—walls are bombed over there—they are brought together in what Benjamin calls "dreamhouses of the collective"—the suburban tract home, the newspaper, the movie theater, the television, the museum—which simultaneously heightened political awareness and inured reaction.²²² By invoking this phantasmagoria through a constellation of allusion, allegory, and correspondence rather than representation or narrative, Nordman's work defies Reinhardt's assertion that there are no "good ideas" that can register both as protest and art.

Trench Work

As if to protest the very dependence on images for the legibility of her work, Nordman, as we have seen, created two other works in the desert, one at Panamint and one at Amboy. Lying in the shadow of Amboy Crater and the Granite, Providence and Bullion Mountains, the trenches that Nordman filled with fire, were in fact dry brining ponds on Bristol Dry Lake dug by the American Chloride Company, the main industry in Amboy. The purpose of these ponds is to

²¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion of the Artist Protest Tower see Frascina, *Art Politics and Dissent*.

²²⁰ Ad Reinhardt in, "Ad Reinhardt: Art as Art," an interview with Jeanne Seigel, broad cast on WBAI, Manhattan, New York on August 10, 1967 and reprinted in Seigel, *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s*, 105.

²²¹ Bryan-Wilson, 8.

²²² Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 405.

extract calcium chloride, a compound cousin to table salt that is uncommonly found in nature and is used for de-icing and road stabilization, dust control, concrete curing, oil well drilling, and other various industrial uses. Historically, salt—in its various forms—also played a significant role in mining: As many fortunes were made from the salt used to extract the Comstock Lode as from the silver itself.²²³ The calcium chloride in Bristol Lake sits in deposits beneath the gypsum surface and are accessed through deep wells and pumped to the surface into the massive trenches where the water evaporates leaving a thick crusty mineral deposit to be easily harvested.²²⁴ Similarly, though not easily harvested, Nordman's trenches in Amboy can be seen as deposits of ideas: the history of mining both minerals and metals and their complex crystallization political, environmental and social issues.

Site Unseen

Relative to the isolation of the Fire Performances, and to the Amboy and Panamint works in particular, Nordman discusses with Butterfield the conceptual requirement of an observer for her work to exist:

MN: *Yes, some pieces no one knows that I have done them. There is no record. There is no special invitation. They don't get described. I just do them.*

JB: But you do consider them pieces.

MN: *Yeah.*

JB: They are not drawings or studies for...

MN: *No.*

JB: And the fact that nobody sees those pieces...

MN: *Well somebody must see them, but they may not identify them. It's no problem. I am not there to judge it.*

JB: Alright. It gets to be a very interesting rhetorical question. That piece that Chris Burden did—the *Dos Equis* piece—the big burning crosses that he just did for one person. He really did it for one person driving along that road who may or may not have come. And if nobody came, does that change the piece?

²²³ Mark Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

²²⁴ Donald E. Garrett, *Handbook of Lithium and Natural Calcium Chloride: Their Deposits, Processing, Uses, and Properties* (Amsterdam and Boston: Elsevier Academic Press, 2004), 346–55.

- MN: *In my case, it does change it. If nobody came, the work wouldn't be there.*
- JB: But you don't know whether or not somebody came to some of them...
- MN: *Well, some things I do, in the city.*
- JB: So, they are in such a place that you know someone has to participate.
- MN: *Yes. All of the works are collaborative. They are in the process of being made by an observer.*
- JB: So it's not so much a case of doing a piece just for one person or not being concerned about whether anyone sees it. It's the case that there is such a locale that someone would have to.
- MN: *Yes. It actually doesn't exist if no one is there. It's not enough for me to do a work and not to have an observer to activate it. It's an established thing—a triangular relationship.*²²⁵

The status of a work's existence as a condition of being seen and recognized by a human viewer concerned other artists, and, for many, fire was the ideal medium to manifest the ontology of the ephemeral.²²⁶ For example, Nordman's trench Fire Performances preceded by four or more years Chris Burden's more visible works with fire—*Match Piece* (1972), *Deadman, Fire Roll* (1973), *Doorway to Heaven* (1973), *Icarus, Oh Dracula, Dreamy Nights* (1974) *Dos Equis* (1972), to name a few—the last of which Butterfield summons in comparison to Nordman's not just for its use of fire, but for the way in which the work frames the role of the observer in its existence. In speaking of *Dos Equis*, a pair of gasoline soaked wood beams that Burden erected and ignited on Laguna Canyon Road, Butterfield emphasizes that, "He really did it for one person driving along that road who may or may not have come."²²⁷ Burden has this to say about the work:

Dos Equis was just for one person. I don't know who or anything. He was just the first one to come upon those big XX's burning in the road. In the classical or traditional sense of going to a museum

²²⁵ Nordman and Butterfield, Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Archives of American Art.

²²⁶ To explore this further see Ronald J. Onorato, Being there: Context, Perception, and Art in the Conditional Tense. *In Individuals: A selected history of contemporary art 1945-1986*, ed. Howard Singerman (New York: Abbeville, 1986), 194–211. The year before the publication of this essay, Onorato curated an exhibition of Nordman's work at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art from February 12 to March 17, 1985. It was accompanied by the catalogue, Ronald J. Onorato, *Maria Nordman: Trabajos en la Ciudad de Ondas* (La Jolla, CA: La Jolla Museum of Art, 1985).

²²⁷ Burden describes the work: "On the evening of October 16, I placed two XX's constructed of sixteen foot beams in an upright position blocking both lanes of the Laguna Canyon road. The timber had been soaked in gasoline for several days. I set the XXs on fire and left the area." Chris Burden in Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, second edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 902.

or gallery to view something maybe it wasn't art, not by that definition, but to me it was. For whoever saw it, it was a kind of really unforgettable experience. Those fiery crosses must really have burned into that guy's mind. Sometimes I choose to limit the number of people who see the piece, because I want those people to have a really strong experience. I did this with the *Icarus* piece in my studio as well. It is always a toss-up whether or not it is better for a hundred people to see it casually or two people to receive it really strong.²²⁸

In response to Butterfield's comment, Nordman says that, unlike Burden's work which would exist whether seen by any one or not, "In my case, it does change it. If nobody came." She insists: "the work wouldn't be there."²²⁹ When Butterfield presses the issue—"But you don't know whether or not somebody came to some of them..."—Nordman expands the discussion to include her works in the city, which are, "in such a place that you know someone has to participate."²³⁰ And though the locale determines that the works would be seen, they don't just exist because they are seen. This being seeing, crucially for Nordman, constitutes the work. "All of the works are collaborative," she maintains, "They are in the process of being made by an observer... It actually doesn't exist if no one is there. It's not enough for me to do a work and not to have an observer to activate it. It's an established thing—a triangular relationship."²³¹ Though *Dos Equis* may not have required a viewer to complete it, many of Burden's works very much required this kind of "triangular relationship."

Just as Kristine Stiles argues elsewhere for Burden's work, so too light for Nordman, "bears a singular task... to manifest and communicate the ancient concepts and qualities of *lux* (symbolizing the 'light of ideas, speculations, inference, revelation and divine illumination') and *lumen* (related to knowledge gained from empirical evidence in the observable dimensions of light)."²³² These two binaries themselves are gendered—the ineffable feminine *lux* in contrast to the quantifiably masculine *lumen* and these "qualities" of light can also be extended into their very sources. However, Nordman's work calls upon both accounts of light in such a way that offers an alternative exegesis—one that exceeds gender to assume the personal and the political.

Likewise, Nordman's work with light of all kinds—fire, lasers, sun—suggests that she shared with Burden a "fascination with the capacity of light to elucidate aspects of human experience and consciousness... [and as] a multifaceted signifier for a wide range of meanings and subjects in his work, including myths and metaphors for knowledge; the authority of institutional practices, especially those of science and technology; the politics of social space and war; the mysterious energies of natural forces; and questions of morality, ethics and the obverse, as darkness partners equality with light."²³³ But where Burden's use of light—and fire in particular—remained heavily metaphoric throughout his works in the early 1970s, after her works in the Mojave Desert in 1968, Nordman never used fire again; "I don't feel any need to,"

²²⁸ Burden in Stiles and Selz, 902.

²²⁹ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²³⁰ Butterfield in Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²³¹ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²³² Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 129 as quoted in Kristine Stiles, "Burden of Light," in *Chris Burden*, coordinated by Fred Hoffman in association with Gagosian Gallery (Newcastle upon Tyne: Locust+, 2007), 22.

²³³ *Ibid.*

she said in 1979. Instead, since 1969 she has depended on a single kind of light—sunlight—as a medium in and of itself. In doing so, the metaphoric load of light, I will argue, became sublimated into a condition of the work, one that manifested a set of precise physical relations—the location of the place, the position of the walls, the participation of the person—while literally remained connected to its solar source.

Chicago Smoke

If Nordman's use of fire is an important precedent for Burden's burning works and post-studio performance in general, her deployment of smoke is curiously tied to and offers insight into her relationship to another movement then-nascent in the Los Angeles area: feminism. In 1967, Judy Chicago, in the beginning steps away from her echt-minimalist sculptures, worked with fellow artists Lloyd Hamrol (who was then also her husband) and Eric Orr to produce *Dry Ice Environment*.²³⁴ Though the vapors generated by the ton-block ziggurats of dry ice was actually the result of the carbon dioxide morphing, or "sublimating," directly from its solid form into a gas (skipping the fluid state), the visual effect—especially in photographs—was consistent with more conventional carbon "smoke" or steam.²³⁵ Situated in the shopping area of the newly minted Century City, *Dry Ice Environment*, Chicago "aimed to expose the ephemerality of the commodity form around which such structures were built," a reading in line with my earlier analysis of Nordman's *City of the Clouds* vis-à-vis Nochlin and Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*.²³⁶ Chicago's "exposure" was achieved through the nighttime use of road flares that accentuated and played off of the smoke's evanescent and ever-changing mist. Like the dry ice, the flares created the effect of a conventional fire through the use of other chemical compounds and processes. The flares also fueled Chicago's interest in pyrotechnics—in which the flame assumes center stage and smoke is necessarily minimized—which would lead her (and Hamrol) to take a pyrotechnics course and to produce the *Atmospheres*. The first in this series—*White Atmosphere*—took place in 1968 at Brookside Park, Pasadena as part of the exhibition *Easter Sunday* organized by Hamrol, Chicago, and her sculpture professor from UCLA, Oliver Andrews, with whom Nordman also studied.²³⁷ Subsequent *Atmospheres* followed in courtyard of the Pasadena Museum of Art, as part of Chicago's first solo museum exhibition there from April 28 to June 1, 1969. For these performances, the artist unleashed tinted smoke from a smoke machine above the reflecting pools.

The *Atmospheres* were central to Chicago's solo exhibition at California State University, Fullerton, in 1971, the same year in which Nordman participated in her first museum group show, *15 Los Angeles Artists*, at the Pasadena Museum of Art. Where Chicago was still using

²³⁴ In his excellent article, "Like Smoke: Los Angeles and the Vaporous Origins of Contemporary Art," *X-tra* (Summer 2012), 5–17, Jon Leaver makes a connection between Nordman's Film Room: *Smoke* and Chicago's *Atmospheres* by way of the smoke as a metaphor for Los Angeles's urban transience.

²³⁵ Allan Kaprow's *Fluids*, took place in Los Angeles of that same year (October 10–12, 1967) and were an extension of his exhibition at the Pasadena Art Museum (September 15–October 22, 1967). The artist describes this Happening: "During three days, about twenty rectangular enclosures of ice blocks (measuring about 30 feet long, 10 wide and 8 high) are built throughout the city. Their walls are unbroken. They are left to melt." Because this was conventional as opposed to dry ice, the effect was one of liquidity rather than gaseousness. Kaprow's intermedial environments and everyday locations were important precedents he writes extensively about them in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Allan Kaprow, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Abrams, 1966).

²³⁶ Leaver, 14; Nochlin, 24.

²³⁷ Other works included a skywriting piece by James Turrell and Sam Francis. See Willoughby Sharp, "Rumbles," *Avalanche I* (Fall 1970) and Craig E. Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 3.

chemical light and smoke outdoors to create what critic Thomas Garver called, “perceptual and spatial experiences of momentary nature but with a powerful impact” in which “reality” is disturbed and then “restored,” Nordman had already left fire and artificial light behind and had turned to the exclusive use sunlight and architecture to create her own kind of perceptual experiments.²³⁸

Feminisms

Tracking this history is important for several reasons. First, it sets a stage in which Chicago and Nordman were studying and working proximately throughout the 1960s. Indeed, Chicago was just a year away from earning her BFA at UCLA when Nordman arrived there in 1961. Both worked with professor Oliver Andrews, and Chicago served as his teaching assistant before finishing her MA in sculpture in 1964. Their practices shared the use of smoke and fire at the end of the decade before each turned toward the works and practices that would, for better or worse, come to define them. Nordman’s room works which began in 1969 quickly landed her among the predominantly male Light and Space artists, while Chicago’s established the Feminist Art Program at California State University, Fresno in 1971.²³⁹ For Chicago, colored smoke was a way to “soften and feminize” the environment and, in the collaborative work in the desert with students, *Woman/Atmosphere* (1971), had come to include painted women as part of the performance. In this work with goddesses which would evolve into the *Smoke/Goddess* series, *Womanhouse* (1972), and eventually into *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), Leaver suggests that Chicago had come “to regard smoke as an important expression for the female body...[and] could be seen as an attempt to link the spirit or inner life with the sensuous body and surrounding landscape.”²⁴⁰ If materially, Chicago’s use of smoke was a way of manipulating light and space—and perception—in ways that, problematically, allegorized the female body and spirit, how might Nordman’s use of light and space in her room works, be seen to constitute its own feminism, one not figured by the feminine, but of a different kind of “consciousness raising,” one that, in Chapters Three and Four, we will see manifested the political relations borne between any body and the urban environment.

²³⁸ Thomas Garver, “Los Angeles: Judy Chicago” *Artforum* (January 1971), 92–93.

²³⁹ The exhibition for which the Light and Space Movement is named, “Transparency, Reflection, Light, Space, Four Artists: Peter Alexander, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman,” was organized by Frederick S. Wight and took place in January 1971 at the UCLA Art Galleries. For an in-depth look at feminism in art during this period see, Norma Broude, Mary D. Garrard, Judith Brodsky, Judy Chicago, Laura Cottingham., eds. *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Abrams, 1994); Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, eds., *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women’s Movement 1970–1985* (London: Pandora; New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Burgess and Salvioni, *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections, 1950-2000*; and Lisa Gabrielle Mark, ed., *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007).

²⁴⁰ Leaver, 14.

Chapter Three: *Beams and Walls*

Thus far, bodies have been variously figured in Nordman's work: As vanished co-authors and self-portraits manqués in the Found Room photographs; as pro-filmic and narrative subjects and projective participants in the Film Rooms; as necessary, if fleeing and fleeting, witnesses to the Fire Performances. The exhibition and documentation of these works is also produced by the semitransparent bodies of curators, fabricators, critics, and, especially, professional art photographers. This chapter will continue to follow in Nordman's work, the body as an ever-moving cipher—a screen, an after-image—projected and circumscribed by the limits of epistemological models and social mobility. But where technology has so far subtended analysis of specific works, here it will become more explicit and historically specific in order to explore the ways in which the body in the late 1960s was bounded by inner, outer, and geopolitical spaces. Doing so will both permit returning to certain works to reconsider them by different lights, while illuminating some sense of Nordman's subsequent and exclusive turn towards the sun and the built environment in the construction of her Room Works.

Space Race

In the spring preceding Nordman's matriculation to UCLA in 1961, President John F. Kennedy, in a special address to Congress, proposed putting a man on the moon by decade's end, an achievement that would "symbolize the technological power and organizing capacity of a nation. Our attainments are a major element in the international competition between the Soviet system and our own... Lunar and planetary exploration are, in this sense, part of the battle along the fluid front of the cold war."²⁴² This inauguration of the Space Race, and the Cold War in general, would seem to hold a special kind of tension for Nordman whose family had emigrated from a Soviet bloc country just three years before. But as we will see, the stakes and interest for Nordman does not manifest in overt representations of identity, or of any kind for that matter. Instead, her work adopts technologies and materials and volumes that can be seen to stand in for people caught in the crosshairs and grids of geo-politics—in-between places—at both an international and local scale.

The decade that followed JFK's famous call, saw great success in the Mercury and Gemini missions, each sending men into space for increasingly longer durations, including the first U.S. spacewalk in June 1965.²⁴³ But despite its insistent narrative of rapid forward progress made possible by a boom in the military industrial complex, the Space Race was not without its setbacks. As briefly discussed in my analysis of *Garden of Smokeless Fire* in Chapter Two, during training for the first Apollo mission in January 1967 three astronauts died when their spacecraft caught fire on the launchpad. As a result, the Apollo spacecraft had to be redesigned and it was two years before U.S. manned flights resumed.²⁴⁴ In December 1968, the first

²⁴² President John F. Kennedy, "Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs," May 25, 1961, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/JFK-Speeches/Special-Message-to-the-Congress-on-Urgent-National-Needs-May-25-1961.aspx>; Martin J. Collins, *Space Race: The U.S.–U.S.S.R. Competition to Reach the Moon*, 9.

²⁴³ "Early U.S. manned spaceflights were spectacularly successful. In May 1961, American astronaut Alan Shepard went briefly into space (though not into orbit) on the Mercury 3 mission. In February 1962, John Glenn spent five hours in orbit on Mercury 6. In June 1965, Gemini IV astronaut Edward White made the first U.S. spacewalk." Martin J. Collins, *Space Race: The U.S.–U.S.S.R. Competition to Reach the Moon* (San Francisco: Pomegranate and Washington, D.C.: National Air and Space Museum, The Smithsonian Institution, 1999), 59.

²⁴⁴ The astronauts were Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Edward White, and Roger Chaffee. (Collins, 84.)

manned Saturn V rocket sent the Apollo 8 astronauts into orbit around the moon. Among many things, from this mission came “earthrise,” the iconic, if inverted, image of our planet that captured the imaginations of the American people. Seven months later on July 20, 1969, as millions around the world watched on television, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped on the moon. These highly mediated images in the media promoted a deterministic causal relationship between democratic values and technological triumph.

If Mission Apollo’s lunar landing, with its telegenic flex of technological superiority was a most visible and public objective, Project Corona’s reconnaissance was spaceflight’s éminence grise, operating as the long, less charismatic arm of democracy. In its over 100 classified missions between 1960 to 1972, Corona took more than 800,000 photographs, mostly of the U.S.S.R., from space, yet by definition (spying is, after all, secret) its images, successes, and failures remain largely unknown.²⁴⁵ Despite being invisible to the common person, these photographs offered new ways of seeing, ones that resonate with Nordman’s own documentary practices, their administrative affect, and their challenge to purported objectivity. Importantly, the images gained from U2 spy planes in the stratosphere were taken by machines, adding a new force of facticity to photography’s truth-telling claims. Furthermore, reconnaissance raised important issues relative to international law and the occupation of space: “Was space free to all, like the open seas, or was it part of a nation’s sovereign territory, like airspace?”²⁴⁶ These were theoretical questions that tapped into multiple historical precedents, and loomed with mortal implication throughout the 1960s. At the same time that expansive “freedom” was being sought for outer space—itself a deeply political rhetorical move—the necessary variable to its access, time, was being ever constricted. Indeed, all space exploration requires sub-atomic temporal precision, and the history that subtends this development—the Western thread of timekeeping—has always too been shaped by dimensions of economics and politics.²⁴⁷

Indeed, the Space Age echoes back to the Age of Exploration not only in their shared thrust for celestial and global domination, respectively, but in the continued inextricability between space and time, and the essentiality of clocks in navigating and conquering those worlds. This continuum is most tidily summed up by the anecdote in which Neil Armstrong, after becoming the first man to land on the moon in 1969, gave a toast to none other than John Harrison who in the 1760s developed the marine chronometer, the instrument that revolutionized global sea travel.²⁴⁸ Their pioneering pursuits of “final frontiers” are also linked by a trajectory of increasing precision, while decreasing the intervals, in measuring time. If marine chronometers needed to be accurate to within ten seconds to remain on course, the risks of space travel demanded an exponentially smaller measurement.²⁴⁹ Put differently and to dramatic effect, “In electronic navigation, a time error of a millionth of a second can produce a position error of about a quarter of a mile. Get your celestial timing wrong and spacecraft will sail past planets, missiles can fall in the wrong places, and jets can land short of the runway.”²⁵⁰ An overview of

²⁴⁵ Collins, 90.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 91.

²⁴⁷ For a useful introduction to this history, see Jo Ellen Barnett, *Time’s Pendulum* (New York: Plenum, 1998).

²⁴⁸ Barnett, 113.

²⁴⁹ Greater accuracy had already been discovered in the late-nineteenth century with quartz-crystal technology which, when applied with a steady alternating electrical current, vibrates constantly, endlessly, and with a frequency of up to a million times a second.²⁴⁹ Having already proved itself a useful technology to sonar during the First World War—which also brought about the wristwatch—the quartz-crystal radio and clock appeared in 1926 and 1927, respectively. Yet, for the large-scale, high-risk operations like power grids, navigational and communication systems of the twentieth century, even the quartz-crystal was not precise enough, for they required accuracy to one-billionth of a second.

²⁵⁰ Bill Klepczynski, as quoted in G.S. Cleere, “Making Time,” *Natural History* (June 1994), 86.

this history is important here as it gives a foundation and framework that allows us to track and make some sense of the radical shift between Nordman's use of light and time in her films and photographs, and in her room works.

In 1955, just as the Cold War was hitting its stride, Louis Essen constructed the first successful atomic clock, which was driven by an isotope of cesium (cesium-133) and is almost ten billion times more accurate than the Age of Exploration's finest pendulum clock.²⁵¹ The result of these increases in temporal and universal accuracy was that official time no longer had any direct correspondence to the natural day. In other words, as time became more closely defined scientifically, it distanced itself from the lived and philosophical experience of it. This discrepancy between dividing the earth's rotation and counting atomic vibrations required that the new atomic second somehow be retrofitted to match up with the rising and setting sun; this was achieved in 1972 with the concept of a "leap second."²⁵²

Quantum mechanics also had a paradoxical effect on the understanding of space. While Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity gave us a new model whose space-time manifold inextricably linked time and space, it is—like atomic time—so abstract as to be irrelevant to our everyday conceptions of duration and place.²⁵³ But what have never been abstract are the visible manifestations and practical effects of these scientific and technological developments, especially those projects funded and disseminated by economics and politics. For example, the effect of Harrison's marine chronometer was, among many things, widespread immigration. The nineteenth-century saw similar unprecedented movements of peoples on land by railroad. Unlike longitude at sea which *required* for its calculation the *difference* between two local times, the railroad sought to *eliminate* local time in order to develop coherent schedules across space. This equalization was a function of speed and capitalism.²⁵⁴ Thus, a political precedent was set for the unifying—or, rather, distorting—of natural time across space in the interest of economics. Just as quantum mechanics made it possible to harness the atom into the temporal precision necessary for such exploration, it also enabled other "fluid fronts" such as a new generation of remote-controlled atomic missiles, which themselves depended on atomic time for precision bombing. But though atomic technology shaped time—and the times—in incredibly significant ways, the ticking of time in everyday life remained seemingly constant and, more importantly, politically invisible.²⁵⁵ It is in exploring these interstices between different spaces and time, which

²⁵¹ It was constructed by Louis Essen at the National Physics Laboratory, England. Where the frequency of the one-meter pendulum clock (different pendulum lengths offer different frequency intervals) divided time into fractions of the solar day (one second=1/86,440 of a solar day), the atomic clock—by virtue of the 13th General Conference of Weight and Measures in 1967—defined the second as an aggregate of 9,192,61,770 "periods of radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of cesium's ground state." (Barnett, 157.)

²⁵² This was achieved in 1972 with the concept of a "leap second" which can be added or subtracted from International Atomic Time (TAI) when it deviates by more than nine-tenths of a second from the rotating earth. (Barnett, 159–60)

²⁵³ Albert Einstein, Hendrik Lorentz, Hermann Minkowski, *The Principle of Relativity: A Collection of Original Memoirs on the Special and General Theory of Relativity* (New York: Dover, 1924).

²⁵⁴ As a result, in 1883 the business of railroad demanded—and conceived and implemented—the five American Standard Time zones in order to synchronize its arrivals and departures. because the railroad moved so quickly across space, the local time from the point of departure was often significantly different from the local time at the destination; negotiating multiple local times made it difficult to establish coherent schedules. For a full account see, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

²⁵⁵ Indeed, GMT continues in use to this day for it is interchangeable with UTC where sub-second precision is not necessary. But the difference between it and atomic time bears emphasis: where time according to GMT, though fundamentally arbitrary, remains determined by the earth's rotation and our relationship to the sun. By contrast, UTC is driven by a periodicity—the vibration frequency of the cesium atom—that has no relationship to the solar day or year, but is adjusted to mimic the natural cycles of the earth. This double action between "natural" and "official" time has economic dimensions that are both similar and inversely related to those of the railroad. For while scientific research and development may always be seeking more accurate and faster time technologies (e.g., the nanosecond), everyday timekeeping's need to maintain a relationship with the sun did not

Nordman's works address the disjuncture between lived experience—a body in space and time—and quantified science, or space and time without bodies.

Lunar Retroreflectors

Iconic photographs were not the only lasting things reflected back from the moon in 1969, and the American flag was not the only thing planted by Mission Apollo. Of particular interest to Nordman was the Lunar Laser Ranging Experiment, about which she says: “Well they did do something very interesting with [laser technology]. They made a beam go from here to the moon and bounce back. So think about it. NASA did that.”²⁵⁶ Set up to study the Earth-Moon system and still functioning today, the Lunar Laser Ranging Experiment consists of a reflector on the moon's surface, designed to reflect laser light fired from the Earth.²⁵⁷ The idea was to determine the round-trip travel time of a laser pulse from the Earth to the Moon and back again, thereby calculating the variable distance between the two bodies to unprecedented accuracy. In a tidy circle of technological self-perpetuation, the precision timekeeping was both essential to get Mission Apollo and this experiment to the moon, where it made possible proof of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, while the retroreflectors continue to collect data needed for further manned and robotic missions into space.

Laser Rooms

In the same year, 1968, that she was out setting fires in the vast expanse of the Mojave Desert, Nordman was also performing in a distinctly more constricted, instrumental, and strategic mode and location. Beginning at UCLA, and then during a residency at the Max Planck Institute in Stuttgart, Germany, she carried out the positivist choreography of scientific experimentation, specifically with lasers.²⁵⁸ Laser, an acronym for Light Amplification by the

obviate earlier clocks. In fact, the decade-and-a-half following the invention of the atomic clock, whose shrinking of time's interval significantly boosted the space race, also saw the commercial race to shrink not the interval of time, but the physical size of the tools that keep it. Thus, the quartz-crystal wristwatch universalized time in another important way. Because it was affordable and therefore widely distributed, and because it was synchronized with UTC, the Seiko Quartz-Astron 35SQ, put atomic time on everywoman's wrist.²⁵⁵ Indeed, it seems that Seiko, in releasing the watch in the eleventh hour of 1969 (December 25), sought to both echo and make true on Kennedy's schedule—to have a watch on every wrist by 1970—while capitalizing on the Space Race's rhetoric of technology. That most people today do not have the remotest sense of how this tool works internally or in relationship to the solar day, yet run their lives entirely by it, evidences its continuing—and gaining—power as an extension, an idea which, in its cybernetic implications returns us ironically—and recursively—to the shared mechanical genealogy of clocks and computers. See “Clocks” in McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

²⁵⁶ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²⁵⁷ “The Apollo 11 laser reflector consists of 100 fused silica half cubes, called corner cubes, mounted in a 46-centimeter (18-inch) square aluminum panel. Each corner cube is 3.8 centimeters (1.5 inches) in diameter. Corner cubes reflect a beam of light directly back toward its point of origin; it is this fact that also makes them so useful in Earth surveying. Three more reflectors have since been left on the Moon, including two by later Apollo 14 and 15 missions and one (built by the French) on the unmanned Soviet Lunokhod 2 rover. Each of the reflectors rests on the lunar surface in such a way that its flat face points toward the Earth. The McDonald Observatory in Western Texas and a second observatory near the city of Grasse in southern France regularly send a laser beam through an optical telescope to hit one of the reflectors. The reflectors are too small to be seen from Earth, so even when the beam is correctly aligned in the telescope, actually hitting a lunar reflector is quite challenging. At the Moon's surface, the beam is a few kilometers or miles wide and scientists liken the task of properly aiming the beam to using a rifle to hit a moving dime 3.2 kilometers (two miles) away.” David C. Morrison, “An Unsung Legacy of the First Lunar Landing,” *Science* (October 27, 1989), 447–48

²⁵⁸ “Chronology,” in Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*, u.p.

Stimulated Emission of Radiation, refers to a process using a power source, reflection, and a “gain medium”—like argon, ruby, xenon or Krypton—to amplify the visible spectrum into a beam of focused light.²⁵⁹ Practically speaking, this means that a particular material is put into a reflective chamber, a power source is applied, exciting the electrons and causing them to amplify into visible light. The illumination bounces between the reflective surface with increasing intensity and then exits as a beam through an aperture in one side. Though originally theorized by Albert Einstein in 1917, the first successful optical or light laser, the ruby laser, which emitted short pulses of light, was not developed until 1960.²⁶⁰ Lasers are useful because of their sustained intensity across great distance; this “spatial coherence” means that their light does not dissipate, but instead projects in a continuous beam which has many practical applications, especially, as we have seen, in the aerospace industry.

Though never realized as final works of art, Nordman’s laser experiments explored the possibility of using argon light in a black room to create “selective planes of light” and “rooms of coherent slabs.”²⁶¹ (Figs. 26, 27) For example, the bluish planes of light in *Double Planar Selection and One Observer* (1968) would have, “interacted on an equal basis with the walls of its container.”²⁶² (Fig. 26) This is significant, according to art historian Anne Rorimer, because the luminous planar projections both on and in lieu of walls would have replaced the hieratically distance object or image.²⁶³ In other words, rather than looking at the art, the visitor would be within it. Though the Film Rooms were also an immersive experience, and the set up of their projected images disrupted viewing conventions, they still were directed images to behold. The Laser Rooms, by contrast, would create situations in which viewing is dispersed; what is to be seen is everywhere. Like the role of the participant in the Film Rooms, “the person” walking through the Laser Room, also interacts with the projected light, but in this case, rather than becoming screens for a narrative projection, bodies within the argon beams would cause the planes of illumination to disappear.²⁶⁴ Further, the shadows within the Film Room—the indexical evidence of the body’s presence, are only possible with the conical throw of incandescent light of a film projector. Because of their concentrated beams, which cannot diffuse around objects, lasers are blocked entirely by any thing—anyone—that stands before it.

In contrast to her poetic and expansive language elsewhere, Nordman’s annotations for another Laser Room, *Coherent illumination layers in a black room* (1967), are appropriately precise and objective:

Plans: films 39 x 25 cm. Research into room construction. 1967–68
Decision not to be exhibited. (1969) Researched material: coherent
illumination of argon ion lasers. Some planes of illumination form
the room. Argon ion sheets, over the ground. Luminous state
evidenced through particles in the air. The person walks into the

²⁵⁹ For a full history of the development and functionality and application of lasers see, Jeff Hecht, *Beam: The Race to Make the Laser* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Nordman cites these four kinds of lasers in Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²⁶⁰ Charles Townes and Gordon Gould and Arthur Schawlow were all instrumental in its realization.

²⁶¹ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.. Nordman also says that, “in 1967 I was talking to some physicists like Dr. Jacobsen.”

²⁶² Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222. Where Nordman refers to the two sketches of her laser works as, *Coherent Illumination Layers in a Black Room* (1967). Regardless of whether these in fact refer to the same sketch, the scientific and conceptual premises remain the same.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ *De Sculptura II*, 8.

room, and most of the room has no illumination, with the exception of the planes selected. During the walk these sheets disappear. A decision is made after a two-year study, that these projects are not be shown or realized in any context of time. A lack of neutrality is found in this medium of electric illumination in relation to the person. (Fig. 27)

But Nordman's ambition for these works, it seems, exceeded the available technology: "The only light that was in the room was the coherent light. That was usually done with argon light, which is blue-white and I was working toward pure white. A new kind of laser that wasn't ready at the time."²⁶⁵

Representing Space

Though Nordman's work with lasers and her subsequent abandonment of them preceded the actual implementation of the NASA lunar retroreflectors by a year, lasers were being used successfully by other artists. Technology in general had become both material and subject for artists working in every medium, and, in the effort to keep pace, were addressed by institutional exhibitions like the Museum of Modern Art's *The Machine As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* (1969) and *Information* (1970).²⁶⁶ But if museums were interested in reflecting technology as a theme or gestalt, other organizing bodies saw art as a way of promoting technological determinism, particularly those technologies with a pointedly political program. Not surprisingly then, the visual arts were not just documentary, but a strategy to illustrate, justify, glorify, and marshal public support for the Space Race.

Following earlier MoMA exhibitions like *The New American Painting*, organized in conjunction with the state department's Congress of Cultural Freedom to tour Europe in 1958–59, which used Abstract Expressionism as a bid for, and a purported demonstration of, democratic values, initiatives like the Art Program of the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (1963 to 1969) and its subsequent exhibition and sumptuous catalogue, *Eyewitness to Space*, were developed for similar but domestic consumption and consensus.²⁶⁷ Here, NASA and the National Gallery of Art commissioned and called on "258 Paintings, Drawings, and Prints by 47 of American's Great Artists" to, "supplement the record after reviewing the documentation of the first few years of the space age," while, if only rhetorically, aligning the "frontiers of the imagination" with the frontiers of space.²⁶⁸ Though there was no limit on what the artists could create, the works that resulted from the government-sponsored NASA Art Program which ran from 1963 to 1969, were packaged in books and exhibitions that celebrated the Space Race, and by extension, American power, and expansionism. As

²⁶⁵ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²⁶⁶ Curated by Kynaston McShine, *Information* ran from July 2 to September 22, 1970 and included Vito Acconci, Art & Language, Jan Dibbets, Eva Hesse, Ed Ruscha, Robert Smithson, Jeff Wall, and Dennis Oppenheim.

²⁶⁷ For a full discussion of the arguments for and rebuttals against this notion see Francis Francina, *Pollock and After: The Critical Debates* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Hereward Lester Cooke, *Eyewitness to Space* (New York: Abrams, 1972).

²⁶⁸ Cooke, front cover; Cooke and James D. Dean, "Eyewitness to Space," in Cooke, 11.

distributable, digestible representations and reifications of American supremacy, the program can be seen as overt display of cultural and technological imperialism.²⁶⁹

LACMA Art and Technology Program

Given their preference for discrete representational objects that gave clear, comprehensible visibility to their mission and Missions, it is not surprising that Nordman's immersive, theoretically-laden laser environments did not become a part of the NASA Art Program. What is surprising is, that despite Nordman's presence in Los Angeles, the timing, and collaborative nature of her Laser Room experiments—as well as her earlier forays in an anechoic chamber—that she did not participate in the local and then recently-emerged Art and Technology Program (A&T) at the new Los Angeles County Museum of Art.²⁷⁰ Conceived in 1966 by Maurice Tuchman, head curator of the Department of Modern Art, A&T was inspired by the ideas and intersections between art and industry by early twentieth-century avant-gardes such as the Italian Futurists, Russian Constructivists, and Bauhaus artists.²⁷¹ To that end, the program's goal was to find corporate settings in which artists could establish fruitful collaborations with engineers and other technical professionals that might lead to new artistic directions.²⁷² The extensive machinations with corporations and artists were documented in detail in the catalogue, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program at the Los Angeles Museum of Art; 1967–1971*, published in conjunction with the museum's exhibition in 1971.²⁷³

Working with fellow curators Jane Livingston and Hal Glicksman, and Marilyn “Missy” Chandler, the well-connected wife of Los Angeles Times Publisher Otis Chandler, Tuchman eventually garnered the support of nearly forty corporations willing to supply funds and materials to sponsor an artist-in-residence. At a time of social upheaval and widespread suspicions over corporate interests—especially those affiliated with the military industrial complex, as many of A&T sponsors like Lockheed Aircraft, Garrett Aerospace, General Electric, Ampex Corporation were, over fifty of the sixty-four artists the curatorial team approached, according to Tuchman, “wished to collaborate.”²⁷⁴ Furthermore, Livingston in her own essay in the catalogue emphasizes that, “despite a certain amount of reluctance...to participate with ‘war-oriented’ industries for reasons of moral objection, there were no final refusals to participate in the program on this ground alone.”²⁷⁵ Tuchman also takes pains to elaborate the personal, not political, reasons why three well-known artists were from the outset, “categorically opposed to association” with the program: “Frank Stella simply couldn't abide even the idea of working in an industrial plant. Jasper Johns felt similarly; the possibility of moving in a *social* situation to make art was unthinkable. Ed Kienholz, on the other hand, though not opposed to the idea in

²⁶⁹ Just four years after NASA inception, the Art Program was founded in 1962 by administrator James Webb and artist James Dean.

²⁷⁰ Rorimer, Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222. Nothing else has been written about the origins, location, details, duration, or extent of Nordman's work at the Planck Insitut. In 1973, Nordman said, “I used to go into an anechoic chamber a few years back, where I discovered that I was emitting everything myself into a black and soundless space. My eyes were projecting white onto the void, my ears were playing my body sounds.” (Nordman, interview by Haskell and Glicksman in Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*, u.p., ; Maurice Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles Museum of Art: 1967-1971* (Los Angeles: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971).

²⁷¹ Tuchman, 9.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Tuchman.

²⁷⁴ Tuchman, 21.

²⁷⁵ Jane Livingston, “Thoughts on Art and Technology,” in Tuchman, 43.

principle, could not imagine what industry could do for him that he couldn't do for himself."²⁷⁶ After an ongoing and rolling process, by the end of the program in 1970 there were a total of twenty-three artists who were both invited and willing to participate; these included John Chamberlain, Newton Harrison, Rockne Krebs, Robert Irwin, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Tony Smith, James Turrell, and Andy Warhol.

From the beginning, any artwork that resulted from the corporation/artist pairings was considered a fortunate by-product of the collaborative experience. The emphasis was to be on experimentation and exploration and artists were under no pressure to produce exhibitable objects. Indeed, despite having produced no final artwork from their collaboration, Irwin and Turrell's work with Edward Wortz at The Garrett Corporation was hailed in the *Report* as a "preeminent example" of the program's success.²⁷⁷ While such unproductive successes were extensively documented in the A&T catalogue, its attendant exhibitions remained in service to the few discrete artworks that were made. In 1970, eight works—Warhol's *Rain Machine*, Oldenburg's *Giant Icebag*, and Krebs's laser installation among them—were shown as part of the *New Arts* exhibition in the United States Pavilion at Expo '70, the world's fair held in Osaka, Japan.²⁷⁸ In the year following, from May 16 to August 29, 1971, seven more works were added to comprise *The Art and Technology Program* exhibition back at LACMA.²⁷⁹

Importantly, between 1967 and 1970, while still in full swing, the program also received seventy-eight unsolicited proposals, including one from Nordman.²⁸⁰ "I had wanted to be part of the Art and Technology show in 1968," she recounts, "I made the proposal to make a room with laser light, but they couldn't realize it."²⁸¹ In fact, every one of the unsolicited proposals were rejected because, according to Tuchman,

Many involved...the areas of transduction; of plastics used in a variety of ways; of computers; and of lasers and holography. Many artists wanted to make total, elaborate and integrated environmental situations. Generally, the unsolicited proposals were made by relatively unknown artists... There was also a high proportion of women artists... We were usually reluctant to follow through on proposals which seemed to completely designed, or thought out in advance, so that the corporation's role would simply be a question so executing a previously conceived plan, rather than

²⁷⁶ Tuchman, 17.

²⁷⁷ Livingston in Tuchman, 46.

²⁷⁸ The number of works was set by the eight rooms of the Pavilion and participation was limited to American artists and included Newton Harrison, Roy Lichtenstein, Boyd Mefferd, Tony Smith, Robert Whitman. Tuchman describes the shared "certain singular characteristics were shared by the eight artists... and emphasis on transient images and evanescent phenomena... as the artists de-emphasized the look of the machine, they were able to maximize a sense of penetrating psychological immediacy." (Tuchman, 26 and 29)

²⁷⁹ Of the eight works shown in Osaka, only Oldenburg's would remain the same for the LACMA exhibition; the other seven were reconfigured according to the difference in space. (Tuchman, 29)

²⁸⁰ Tuchman, 19. There was no official broad or public invitation to artists to submit proposals, but following the program's official announcement in October 1968 there was press coverage in the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. (Tuchman, 12). None of the unsolicited proposals are included in the archive of the Art and Technology Program whose meagerness is likely due to the loss of undocumented archival materials from a fire at one of LACMA's offsite storage sites during the Rodney King riots in 1992. Modern Art Department Art and Technology records, 1967–2007, Bulk 1967–1971, Balch Library, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

²⁸¹ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

collaborating actively in both the conception and execution of an idea.²⁸²

Though Tuchman's evidence is specific, it is somewhat contradictory and counterintuitive. Not only did several of the successful collaborations actually use the very materials he lists, one the most celebrated, and one of the very few artworks actually generated by the program, was an explicit a priori plan for a laser work: "[Rockne] Krebs sent us a carefully drawn up proposal...he arrived at Hewlett-Packard with this [laser] project in mind."²⁸³ Though, ultimately, Krebs's original idea would change to accommodate technological issues as well as the physical configuration of its exhibition sites at Osaka '70 and at LACMA the following year, his work *Day Passage* (1971) was similar enough in its use of lasers and mirrors, but, I would argue, not nearly as compelling conceptually as Nordman's. Where she proposed a contained space that would create distinct planes of light with which the viewer would interact, the emphasis of Krebs's flashing beams remained a kind of kinetic sculpture, something to be stood apart from and viewed objectively. In other words, Krebs was using a new material to reanimate and reconfigure a traditional medium while Nordman was pushing beyond formal deployment of new material to create conceptually and experientially integrated environments.

Her rejection from A&T is worth exploring for two more reasons. Though Nordman's proposal may have been unsolicited, her work was not unknown or without support. John McCracken, the artist and UCLA colleague "actor" in Nordman's film *Jemez* in 1968, was close to Tuchman, who had included his *Untitled (Blue Column)* (1967) in the exhibition *American Sculpture of the Sixties* at LACMA in 1967, and then had subsequently acquired the work for the permanent collection.²⁸⁴ McCracken was, from the beginning, on the shortlist of artists tapped for A&T, but after touring Litton Industries, Philco-Ford, and Norris Industries he remained uninspired to produce a project "using electronics" and ultimately did not participate, though he does appear in the catalogue.²⁸⁵ However, while he was still making his decision about the program, McCracken wrote to Tuchman on January 20, 1969 and in this letter mentions Nordman as a possible participant:

Incidentally, while I was in L.A. Maria Nordman came by to see me and showed me something of what she was doing, or trying to do— art, that is. She wanted me to mention her to you, and I said I would, although not just because I know her; she's fooling around with lasers, and her ideas seem interesting enough to deserve mention—she wants into the industry [Art and Technology] program of course. But she is young and unshown, and after finding out a little more about the program I don't know how appropriate it would be to include someone like her in it amongst a bunch of pretty-well established artists.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Tuchman, 19.

²⁸³ Tuchman, 163. Another pertinent example is Ron Cooper's proposal for two fully conceived "environmental" art works one of which "involved projecting variously colored light from several points around the perimeter of a room so that the respective shafts would converge in the center, forming a white, cube-shaped configuration. (Tuchman, 78–79)

²⁸⁴ The exhibition ran from April 28 to June 25, 1967.

²⁸⁵ McCracken did express interest in working with Kaiser Steel, but they had already begun collaborating with Richard Serra.

²⁸⁶ Handwritten letter from John McCracken to Maurice Tuchman, January 20, 1969. Modern Art Department Art and Technology records, 1967–2007, Bulk 1967–1971, Balch Library, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A different excerpt of this letter was included in McCracken's entry in the "Participating Artists" section in A&T catalogue; "participating" here meant

Tuchman's brief note back to McCracken makes no acknowledgement of Nordman, and, given some of his later comments, his lack of interest may have been less driven by a concern for the maturity of her practice than her being a woman. Indeed, no women at all were placed in collaboration with corporations despite the misleading inclusion of Channa Davis and Aleksandra Kasuba among the catalogue's "Participating Artists," the criteria for which apparently was simply the submission of a proposal, though, as in Nordman's case, not all submissions made it into print.²⁸⁷ Davis, now Horwitz, insists that her project was included only because Tuchman, "thought [my drawing] looked pretty."²⁸⁸ Also, according to Horwitz, Tuchman, "did not feel that it was appropriate for a woman to discuss an engineering project with the male industrial scientists involved with the show. My proposal was not allowed to be seen by anyone in the industry."²⁸⁹

Tuchman would go on to face great criticism for A&T's exclusion of women as made manifest in the catalogue's much reviled cover tiled with photos of the male-only artists and corporation executives. The protests culminated with the denunciation of the program by the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists during the LACMA exhibition in the summer of 1971. Horwitz recalls that when asked in a public forum in the museum's auditorium, "why Channa Davis was not asked to talk to any one in industry," Tuchman answered, "I would never allow a woman to work in industry for the Art and Technology show."²⁹⁰

E.A.T.

If Krebs's work at Expo 70 in Osaka relates retroactively, at least grossly, to Nordman's 1968 Laser Rooms, another work there brought together many of her more enduring the interests as well as the strategies seen in her Film Rooms and the rooms she had just begun constructing in 1969.²⁹¹ Considered to be Experimental Art and Technology's project ne plus ultra, and the Expo 70's greatest draw, the Pepsi Pavilion was an immersive geodesic dome full of echoes of Buckminster Fuller's utopic design and photogenic structure at Expo 67 in Montreal.²⁹² The exterior of the Pepsi Pavilion was shrouded by Fujiko Nakaya's *Fog Sculpture* (1970), which recalled the technology and special effects of Nordman's *City of the Clouds* (1968) performance in the Mojave Desert. The Pavilion's interior ceiling was clad with flexible Mylar mirrors that reflected, to hologram effect, the intermingling of visitors. The project as a whole was a collaboration between over seventy-five artists and engineers from the United States and Japan.²⁹³

a selection of the artists with whom LACMA had been in contact about the program, whether such contact went beyond correspondence or not.

²⁸⁷ Tuchman, 81; 144–45. It remains unclear whether any of the "Participating Artists" represented solely by proposals were unsolicited.

²⁸⁸ Channa Horwitz, "Statement," April 21, 2007. This document was displayed as part of her exhibition at SolwayJones from March 24 to April 21, 2007; Modern Art Department Art and Technology Records, 1967–2007, Bulk 1967–1971, Balch Library, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ In another project, Krebs beamed lasers across the eight miles between the Mount Wilson Observatory and the California Institute of Technology.

²⁹² The architect was John Pearce.

²⁹³ In addition to Kluver and Whitman, these included Frosty Myers, David Tudor, and Robert Breer whose seven six-foot, kinetic sculptural *Floats* (1970) moved around the Pavilion's outside terrace.

Founded in New York in 1966 by engineers Billy Klüver and Fred Waldhauer, and artists Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman, E.A.T. and its many local chapters across the United States, was an important model for—and arguably more generative than—Tuchman’s Art and Technology Program in Los Angeles.²⁹⁴ An important difference between the programs was E.A.T.’s social agenda. Where A&T seemed biased toward in the positivist and formal—the modernist—modes, effects, and objects of collaborations between scientists/engineers and artists, E.A.T.’s essential ethos was performative, and its mission—to expand the role in the social developments related to new technologies—was post-modern.

So if Nordman appealed to and was rejected by A&T, why did she not participate in E.A.T. whose fundamental spirit and approach would seem more in line with her politics and strategies anyway? One possibility is, as we have already seen with the photographs of her work, that despite all of the collaborative rhetoric of her work, she ultimately preferred to work, at least on a conceptual level, alone. Collaboration for her might be conceived of as not so much in the intellectual production of a work, as is the premise of E.A.T., as it is in its execution and reception. She says that following the collaborative efforts with Dr. Jacobsen and the unrealized Laser Rooms, “I wanted to work alone for a few years... At that time I was thinking I needed to consider everything.”²⁹⁵

Availability

This decision to withdraw and regroup was based on not only the significant safety issues of working with argon—“The danger level interfered,” says Nordman—but another “major drawback” of the laser rooms: “the fact that they were ultimately exclusive and not randomly available to any person at any time and at any place.”²⁹⁶ So while the inherent properties of the laser afforded and achieved certain desirable physical dimensions of her work—its coherence—the conditions required by those same inherent qualities constrained it conceptually. In other words, the dangerous nature of argon, and the effects it produced depended—like certain Light and Space works, Turrell’s in particular—on access and containment, which, Nordman felt, would result in a, “static quality... unrelated to the person who could be there.”²⁹⁷ Because the laser rooms would have to take place largely in sealed institutional settings, the “success” as visual and perceptual experiences and strategies, would come at the expense of any tactical social dimension and democratic access. For Nordman, it was impossible to trade off the necessary conceptual diffusion for material coherence.

Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present

Even film, with its bulb and plug, it seems had become limited and limiting in Nordman’s mind. Though, as we have seen in her Film Rooms, the production and projection of film can be socially generative and spatially interactive in its “interact[ion] with the walls of [and participants in] its container,” they remained constrained. Like social geography, these

²⁹⁴ Stewart Kranz, *Science & Technology in the Arts: A Tour through the Realm of Science/Art* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1974), 110–25.

²⁹⁵ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

²⁹⁶ Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222.

²⁹⁷ Nordman in Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 222.

constraints echo those described by social geography: economic and geographic access—both in terms of producing and viewing the work—to access (to places, to technology); mobility; visibility).

Importantly, in addition to the Fire Performances, Film Rooms, and Laser Rooms she was making in 1967 and 68, Nordman was also experimenting with a variety of other materials, propositions, and relations between space, volume, time, and bodies. One of these seeming one-off works, *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present* (1967), consolidates the space and politics of interpersonal exchange more concretely through the use of fabric. (Fig. 28) Preceding the first constructed walls in Film Rooms by a year, it pushes the possibilities of what materials, scale can constitute a basic shelter.²⁹⁸ Here, Nordman constructed from white cotton a simple poncho, a “Multiple for three persons to give housing to each other.”²⁹⁹ She also describes it as “Gewandthaus,” a German neologism, a portmanteau, that fuses the homophones *gewand*—garment—with *gewandt*—dexterous—and sews it onto *Haus*. Dexterous here can be seen to refer to both the flexibility of their fabric and use, as well as the ingenuity, efficiency, and nimbleness of their design. And as handmade objects, the houses are dexterously executed and their everyday construction and association tactics that resist the strategies of traditional fine art techniques.

On June 22, 1967 these dexterous garment houses, were given to sweatshop workers on Windward Street in Venice California.³⁰⁰ The handing over of carefully handmade fabric shelters to garment workers whose daily life consist of mass producing in poor conditions, products from which they are alienated, seems to be a gesture of gift exchange and reconciliation. The fact that Nordman planned this first presentation to take place at “solar zenith time” on the June 22, 1967—summer solstice—suggests that, like the ways in which her rooms resuture and recalibrate natural and clock time, that the cloaking of disenfranchised workers in white cotton might also be seen to function as some kind of reconciliatory gesture or ritual.

Subsequent editions of the work, at the Folkwang Museum Essen in Germany 1997 and at the Christine Burgin Gallery in New York in 2003, traded the white cotton for red, green, and blue felt. If we recall that the original *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present* in 1967 coincided with her beginning experiments with lasers, it is possible to propose a connection between the white and tri-colored versions. As we have seen, Nordman clearly states the colors of lasers with which she worked: “The light was blue green...If you put a ruby laser in this room it wouldn’t be as intense as if there were no light in the room.”³⁰¹ But those were not adequate, as she emphasizes: “I wanted white. And they at the time hadn’t developed it where they could have light mixing all three colors.”³⁰² Thus the originally enveloping material for all of the ponchos in the 1967 instantiation of *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present* were white, but in subsequent versions were refracted into white light’s three distinct chromatic threads—blue, red, and green.

The capes can also be seen to turn inside out the historical relationship between body and

²⁹⁸ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 7, 29; this work has been more commonly referred to as *Cloth-House, 1967–present* and was remade for her exhibition at Museum Folkwang Essen in February 1997. It was also “published” by Christine Burgin Gallery in 2004 (http://www.christineburgin.com/projects/pp_nordman.html); the exhibition was reviewed by Edward Leffingwell, “The New City Begins with a Guesthouse . . . Maria Nordman at Christine Burgin,” *Art in America* (October 2004): 159-60.

²⁹⁹ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 7.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

architecture. “The history of the bodily analogy in architecture, from Vitruvius to the present,” according to Anthony Vidler, “might be described in one sense as the progressive distancing of the body from the building, a gradual extension of the anthropomorphic analogy into wider and wider domains leading insensibly but inexorably to the final ‘loss’ of the body as an authoritative foundation for architecture.”³⁰³ As houses to be worn against the body, Nordman’s work would seem to collapse that distance and reclaim the authority of the body as the absolute foundation for the built—whether by bricks or bolts—environment.

As politically-inflected spaces and personal shelters for people, namely minorities and women, who inhabit space but likely do not have the security of property ownership, the *Ongoing Worn Houses* relate to other socially motivated works from the late 1960s like Helio Oiticica’s *Penetravais (Penetrables)* or his earlier *Parangolés* (1964–79). Like the *Parangolés* which included capes created for the inhabitants of a particular favela community of Rio, the flexible walls of *Ongoing Worn Houses* wrapped space around marginal peoples and, in their multiples, built community between them. If, as Claire Bishop argues, “it is impossible to regard the drive towards interactivity and sensuous bodily perception in Brazilian art during the 1960s as other than a political and ethical exigency in the face of state repression,” a similar claim might be made for an East German-immigrant working with a marginalized urban community in Los Angeles.³⁰⁴

As garments that reclaim a place for and protect the body within spaces of social inequity, the *Ongoing Worn Houses* strangely can be seen as inner city spacesuits, an earthly redress to the much publicized white outer space suits developed for the Apollo Mission. Like the white capes Nordman made for garment workers, the A7L suit was produced by garment workers, though presumably Playtex Company’s complicated contract with the military industrial complex would guarantee its seamstresses better conditions than the sweatshop on Windward Street.³⁰⁵ The spacesuit, undergirded by latex, and cut to spec, came to stand in for and to offer a visual representation of the Space Race’s most intimate interaction and intersection—the cohabitation—between humans and technology.³⁰⁶ As Nicholas de Monchaux points out, “The ILC A7L spacesuit would not have been possible at all if not for ILC’s [Playtex’s parent company] patents and expertise in latex molding and manufacturing. These innovations had their true roots in the vanities and prejudices of postwar fashion, in particular the distortion and deformation of women’s bodies in the tight rubber girdles expertly marketed by ILC’s founder.”³⁰⁷ What was deforming in a girdle was live-saving in a spacesuit that require constriction to offset changes in air pressure. As Monchaux says, “Each piece of clothing—girdle and pressure garment—prepared its occupant for an extreme space, and extreme midcentury atmosphere. Each used the material pliability of rubber to both adapt to the moving complex reality of the body and allow the body to adapt to its environment.”³⁰⁸ Just as the latex spacesuit’s success lay in its “simultaneous flexibility and precision” so too do Nordman’s works depend on specificity and contingency; in the case of *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present*, the specificity of a pattern cut and sewn and the contingency of its being worn and understood in the world.³⁰⁹

³⁰³ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 70.

³⁰⁴ Bishop, 63.

³⁰⁵ Nicholas de Monchaux, *Spacesuit: Fashioning Apollo* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 130, 214–15.

³⁰⁶ de Monchaux, 117.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ de Monchaux, 127.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

The visually curious and compelling spacesuits themselves were topics of many articles, and the subject of many artworks in the NASA Art Program like Paul Calle's *Suiting Up, Testing the Spacesuit* and *Knight's Armor*, which celebrated in traditional ink and oil portraits, astronauts in their work clothes. By contrast, Robert Rauschenberg's *TRUST ZONE* (1969), from his Stoned Moon series of lithographs, famously overlays a map of Cape Canaveral with a "linework illustration of the [A7L] suit's outer Thermal Micrometeoroid Garment from ILC's suit drawings"; layered atop both is an image of Orville Wright's first powered flight at Kitty Hawk.³¹⁰ Made at a time when spacesuits floated throughout the American popular imagination, Nordman's capes with flowing dexterity and medieval or tribal associations can be seen as both a rebuttal to the constriction of girdles and spacesuits, and a more earthly version of self-contained shelter and collaborative housing.

Light and Volume

As we saw in Chapter One, Nordman's interest in architectural spaces is clearly articulated in her Found Room photographs from 1966–67, the framing of which have a particular sensitivity to the details and volumes of space. Nordman plays with the collapse of space, both within the image's conception through tight compositions that abstract spaces into flat planes of color—all the more effective when those surfaces were either transparent or reflective. The Found Rooms, through the photographic operation, captured light within two rooms: the camera and the architectural space. The light and architecture are mutually defining. The light is various. Sunlight, electric bulbs, headlights, flashes illuminate the architecture to different effect. The filtered light in Found Room: *Venice*, makes visible the room's details, without drawing attention to the light itself. Where the interior light bulb and exterior flash in *Found Room: Venice Boulevard* collide to collapse the interstitial space, the raking, diffuse, blinding sunlight fills *Mountain Air, New Mexico*. In each case, the quality of both light and architecture are mutually defining; the architecture contains and reveals the light; its material spatial boundaries contribute to the ways in which we see are made aware of the light.

Nordman was still then experimenting with sunlight and artificial light, interactions between different kinds of light, and, crucially, their effects at different times of day. Found Room: *New Mexico* and Found Room: *Venice* both take place in daylight, but the quality of the light, and its effects on how we see the space are very different. This has to do with the exact time of day, the time of year, and the location of those places. This is because all of these factors affect the angle of the sunlight, and that angle of incidence results in very different experiences of light—the long shadows of winter versus the beating noonday summer sun. But, importantly, the light itself is not changing; sunlight is inherently constant. The varied experience of light results from the changing temporal and geographic coordinates of its reception.

The Found Rooms also explore the multiplicities of artificial light. The staged effect of Found Room: *West Los Angeles* (1966) is also the result of the position of the light that emanates brightly from the beam directly overhead. (Fig. 9) However, there seems to be another light source at play: there is a brightness to the space above the beam that would suggest some kind of light from above. However, though they may seem identical, because the machine remains constant and immobile in both, the stacked images, are in fact slightly different: the top one is darker. But because there are no other indicators of time—nothing has moved in the space—it is

³¹⁰ Cooke, 12, and Plates 76–77, 12; Monchaux, 219–21.

almost impossible to determine whether the difference in the images is temporal or tonal. In other words, the scene could have been shot at different times of day or it could result from different handling in the darkroom: the photo negative could have been exposed for more or less time, or the print could have been left in the chemical bath for more or less time. Regardless, in any of these scenarios time is the primary variable.

Spatial Mobility

But, there is a possibility that a differential in space could have been the primary variable in the difference between the images. How could this be if the space seems to be the same? While the boxed space and the camera's position in it are the same, it is possible that the space itself has moved. Indeed, I believe this could very well be the case if we know the boxed space is actually an elevator, and the images correspond to its different heights in the skylighted industrial shaft: the bottom image with slightly less brightness ringing the ceiling indicates a lower floor; the brighter top image suggests the elevator to be closer to the sun. The challenge to our conditioned ideas of space as being anchored and immobile has conceptual implications in that it speaks to the possibility that that which seems immutable may itself be able to change. This also has a corollary with not only space ships and spatial mobility, but with social mobility, if we recall that the elevator is in fact a service elevator, a space of self-generated upward mobility.

This matters, as we will see because these coordinates then are what shape the physical spaces, the long for sunlight is inherently constant. The photographs illustrate different possibilities for the interaction of light and space. The position and integrity of walls—the shape of the space and its apertures—and the materials from which they are constructed—adobe, glass, metal, in concert with whether natural or artificial which it makes its raking or diffuse quality. The light artificial and natural—raking sunlight or diffuse daylight, shines on the walls, through the doors, bounces off the windows makes the architecture visible. The four walls in the Laser Rooms, are essential to containment, planes which to intersect the cohesive light, the middle wall of the Film Room was meant to intersect and sense of cohesive viewing.

Spaces In Between

This interest in the relationship between volumes, specifically, is explicit in a purely conceptual work from the same time. Where the Found Room depended on constructed internal walls for containment and photography for visibility, *Unnamed, 1967–present* (1967) looked to the relations between structures and people for its definition. (Fig. 29) A purely conceptual work, it consists of “the open—unnamed—place between two buildings in any city.”³¹¹ Begun in 1967 in Los Angeles, “the construction of this work continues to be made between any person and myself or any person with another with its initial proposal being given verbally to the passerby at the site of chosen location.”³¹² And “depending on the clarity and intention of the presentation” these three-dimensional interstices “could become sculpture.”³¹³ Relative to her other series,

³¹¹ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 117.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

Unnamed might be thought of as “Found Space Sculptures.” As we heard her speak of the necessity of her works being seen—“Well somebody must see them, but they may not identify them...If nobody came, the work wouldn’t be there,”—it makes sense that this work was specified for a densely populated situation.³¹⁴ Where the Found Room photographs simply required individual attention to and nomination of the site as art, here the work requires the additional condition of interpersonal communication. Moreover, the shared experience of that communication, the “personal-interpersonal memory,” constitutes “the (specific) nature of the continuity of the work.”³¹⁵ In other words, its status as a “continuous collaborative work” does not arise solely from the perpetual possibility for any “unnamed unused site” to be “presented” by one person to another as an artwork, but that the continuity of work lies in the ongoing memory of that exchange.³¹⁶ Significantly, unlike the Found Room photos, in *Unnamed* the changing backdrop of the sky seen between buildings exists as a visual fact without being fixed, as opposed to the way it would be in a photograph. “These unlabeled volumes between edifices—which cannot be dislodged from the overall experience of city, sky, light, or atmosphere—partake of a mutable totality. They contribute to the idea, furthermore, that art need not only be an object of one author’s invention nor one made solely for placement within institutionally designated exhibition spaces.”³¹⁷

Neutra

If in *Unnamed* the spaces between the buildings were sculptural and inherited a conceptual sociality born from shared experience and memory, such qualities can be found in actual buildings themselves. Given her interest in space, walls, shelters, as well as access, exchange, community, and space, it makes sense that Nordman appreciated the work of the well-known architect Richard Neutra. Her work for him as an editorial assistant from 1969 to 1970 is often mentioned, but never elaborated in ways that acknowledge his lasting influence.³¹⁸ Neutra’s architecture, according to Thomas Hines, “above all...emphasized the interpenetration of inner and outer space.”³¹⁹ Nordman says that the architect’s use of “primal elements” was “so important to me...all his life he brought his habitants into direct contact with nature.”³²⁰ Neutra’s “basic architectural structure was the simple, timeless post and beam, with cantilevered roof slabs expending into space. His favorite materials were steel, concrete, stucco, wood, and glass, which he valued for both its transparent and reflecting qualities.”³²¹ His innovative style of architecture and choice of materials were—much like film—made possible by Southern California’s diverse geography and favorable climate. What’s more, unlike many imperious modernist architects, Neutra “tolerated and encouraged the client’s own vision and creativity” and studied their needs, adapting his own ideas to those requirements.³²² He was especially

³¹⁴ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

³¹⁵ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 117.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Nordman in Rorimer, “Reality in Early Works by Maria Nordman,” u.p.

³¹⁸ Haskell, *Saddleback Mountain*, u.p.

³¹⁹ Thomas S. Hines, *Richard Neutra and the Search for Modern Architecture: A Biography and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 6.

³²⁰ Nordman, in Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*, u.p.

³²¹ Hines, 6.

³²² Ibid.

concerned,” Hines continues, “that good design be available to people of modest means and that even his most expensive architecture be translatable into less costly forms.”³²³

Not only did Neutra’s democratic values regarding access foreshadow Nordman’s, but he too had an abiding interest in science of all kinds: “Of all twentieth-century architects, he was the one most interested in and most knowledgeable about the biological and behavioral sciences. He wrote and lectured extensively on the psychological, physiological, and ecological dimensions of architecture.”³²⁴ And, it would seem that as a Viennese-born emigrant who came to Los Angeles in 1923 as a young man as a student of [Frank Lloyd] Wright *and* of the new architecture of Europe... was able to bridge, perhaps better than any other architect, the frequently polarized worlds of Taliesin and Bauhaus,” Neutra and his then-influential book, *Survival Through Design* (1954), served as important personal, professional, and intellectual model for Nordman’s own bridging of cultures, of media, of ideas, and of communities.³²⁵

Always conscious of the broader social obligations of architects and planners, Neutra served in the 1930s and ‘40s as a member and then as a chairman of the California State Planning Board, and as a consultant to the U.S. Housing Authority. His Channel Heights housing project for California shipyard workers of the early 1940s was an admirable and influential example of community planning. In the 1950s he and his partner Robert Alexander did planning and design work for such American cities as Sacramento and for the new island government of Guam.”³²⁶ “Ultimately,” writes Hines, “[Neutra’s] architecture became as important to California as Wright’s and [Louis] Sullivan’s had been to the middle West, and it continued through mid-century to dominate the California scene and to have a worldwide impact.”³²⁷

Given the ways in which social equity, personal experience and contingency shapes both Neutra’s buildings and Nordman’s works, it is fitting that their paths came to intersect as purely a matter of chance. In her interview with Nordman, Butterfield asks after the details of their meeting. “Well I had to have a job,” recalled the artist, “I said I want to work with someone whom I can really respect and there is only one architect in this town that I really know something about.” She continues, “And [Neutra] at that time was retired. So I said, well I won’t apply. But I looked in the newspaper one day and his name was there and he needed an editorial assistant... So we had a conversation and we were able to do it even though I didn’t do much work [laughs]. It was fantastic.”³²⁸

The intellectual affinity Nordman felt with Neutra is reflected in both her impression of their first meeting at his home in Silverlake in November 1969: “[When I] came into his house I didn’t feel any break at all. He was dealing with planes applied too in a different way,” and in the form and content of her subsequent expansive and poetic reflections.³²⁹ Titled, “Notes 69 RJN” and included in a letter she wrote to his son, Raymond, the next summer, following the architect’s death on April 16, Nordman reflects on Neutra as a person and shares her opinion about possible changes to the architect’s ultimately unpublished manuscript, “Man in the Middle is the Measure,” which she had been hired earlier that year to edit.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid. Born in 1892 into an elite Viennese social circle that included Sigmund Freud, Neutra studied with Adolf Loos and worked with architect Gustav Gullmann before joining the offices of Erich Mendelsohn in Berlin in 1921. He emigrated to the United States in 1923 and, the following year, worked with Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin. With the encouragement of Rudolph Schindler, a schoolmate from Vienna and Wright’s former associate, Neutra moved to Los Angeles.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art.

³²⁹ Ibid.

In the dusk-electrically lit, November-evening-reflecting Silver Lake house, I meet Neutra for the first time.

He asks to see something I have written, and takes a paper I wrote while teaching at the Univ. of New Mexico, a proposal for an inter-departmental graduate course for sculptors.

He reads it, lays it down, and asks if I would like to walk around the block.

*In case this is my only ten-minute walk with Neutra, I ask him a question coming from my paper:
“In the context of present ideas of space and time that can now be concretely felt in the moon trip, what do you think might happen to architecture and sculpture?”*

Neutra: —I think that in the present state of mathematics and physics, the observer is left out of the picture. Even in talking with Einstein, I saw that also his observer is an abstraction. I think that in whatever happens, the observer will have to be put back in, as an individual with a long specific evolutionary past and make-up.—

*As we pass other November-evening-Neutra houses, I realize that his answer has shocked me;
It’s now what I seemed to have expected.—
(Do questions contain their answers?)*

We stand facing the back yard of a Neutra house, Flooded in green light, as he tells me of the multiplicity of human sensing: the millions of sensors that have their order in time of impact on receiving brain-neurons: motion happens before color perception...

Still walking past Neutra houses while listening to him, I realize I am bathed in a tight system of concrete ideas which connect the images of Neutra’s words to his houses, to his way of walking. Neutra deals with concreteness.

Having decided to work with the individual, he began by using materials drawn out of the in-time developing context: the panes of glass, from particles of sand, wooden panels from forests, steel from rocks, and so on.

*...What separates his work from that of, say,
most other buildings in L.A., is that he doesn't
seem to cheapen this transformation.
My often-felt desire to be suddenly in midst of man-unaltered places
Never seems to appear while being in the Silver Lake house.
Perhaps it has something to do with the SPECIFICNESS
With which materials are used here.*

*Glass, like sand, traps light and holds it,
Light information is constantly passing through.
(Even the Egyptians knew this: the polished white sandstone of the pyramids
must have made them impossible to look at during high noon.)
At Silver Lake the glass and mirrors make one live
In the midst of an Ozu movie:*

*A friend is suddenly seated in an accidental vertical composition
created by a mirror's edges.
Leaves move slowly back and forth, behind him.
A horizontal water mirror is rhythmically disturbed
in its smoothness, by the constant water drops,
that compensate evaporation.*

*East-west, sun-moon rising and setting are
on the axis of the house.*

*To develop the drama, it may be necessary
to walk slowly through the house, to sit
down, to stop, sleep, sing or eat.³³⁰*

It was at this point, in 1969, following the unresolved Laser Rooms and her pausing to “considering everything” and the chance meeting with Neutra that Nordman turned away from technologies of projected light, to construct discrete architectural spaces given shape by the widely and randomly available material of sunlight. She describes her first rooms in 1969, the year before Neutra’s death at seventy-eight, as carrying “only one plane of the person’s presence, or two planes, and I was thinking about that all the time.”³³¹ Like Neutra’s buildings, her works *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]*, depended on clean lines and plate glass windows, which brought the outside in and the inside out which as planes of reflection and transparency, both brought the outside in and the inside out, sometimes protecting, alternately obscuring and exposing, the bodies within and bodies without. (Figs. 30, 31)

³³⁰ Maria Nordman, “RJN Notes 1969,” included as an attachment to a letter from Nordman to Raymond Neutra dated July 22, 1970. Richard Neutra Papers, Special Collections, Young Library, University of California, Los Angeles. The Silverlake area in which they walk is the site of not just Neutra’s personal home, but where of several neighboring houses which he designed.

³³¹ Ibid.

Chapter Four: *On and In Location: The Room Works*

*Well, I would say for myself that instead of using the word “space,” actually the word “place” is more applicable. Platz is a German word. Or Raum. This is a fantastic word. It covers a whole spectrum of meanings from space to room, actual room, to time and space—Raum und Zeit. It’s a larger word and it also applies to “this room.” It’s a better word actually than space or room because it includes both.*³³²

—Maria Nordman

Between 1969 and 1979, Maria Nordman created more than a dozen important room works in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, Italy, and Germany. For these spaces, the artist manipulated architecture to train sunshine into specific spatial effects. (Figs. 1, 7, 18–20, 23, 24, 32–87) In her darkened rooms, diminished visibility trips in the visitor an initial psychological discomfort, followed by intense self-awareness and, finally, by the “revelation” of “walls” of subtle light. And although the physical traces of “light and space” dominate images of Nordman’s room, they are but one aspect of rich somatic and time-based works.

In contrast to Light and Space artists like James Turrell and Robert Irwin—a movement into which Nordman continues to be misplaced—who devised installations that, like scientific experiments, were often designed to achieve certain repeatable perceptual effects, Nordman’s early works were unique events that sought to exceed the initial psychological and phenomenological rush of “seeing yourself seeing.”³³³ The fact that because of our highly adaptive neurological systems, this dramatic experience, “only happens the first time someone views the piece,” is not, for Nordman, a weakness, but a strength, because she is far more “interested in all of the overlaps that happen later.”³³⁴ Indeed, these works—which Nordman often refers to as “situations” and “contexts” but never as “installations”—how do you “install the sun”? she quips—were specifically sited such that, in addition to space and natural light—which Nordman chooses over artificial light because of its accessibility and mutability—they were also designed to amplify ambient noise and views.

These rooms were placed in museums, in her studio, and in other storefronts in the working-class neighborhoods of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and throughout Italy and Germany. From its site, chosen for its, “context of the persons present in the city,” each work gains certain general conceptual gravitas and individual characteristics.³³⁵

In Situ

³³² Nordman, Interview by Jan Butterfield, Butterfield Papers, Archives of American Art. .

³³³ Haskell, *Saddleback Mountain*, u.p. As Melinda Wortz points out, “because of the close interaction among these artists, it is virtually impossible to point to any one of them as the forerunner of the ‘light and space installations,’ although Irwin has certainly been the most prolific in the *realization* of this type of project. What is remarkable is that so many artists in southern California have worked with light and space per se for more than a decade and that this form of art is exciting and important in establishing the artistic identity of Los Angeles as something other than what Barbara Rose has referred to as ‘The Second City.’” (Melinda Wortz, “Architects of Emptiness,” in *Architectural Sculpture* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, 1980), 29. For a retrospective of Irwin’s work see, *Robert Irwin: Primaries and Secondaries*, ed. Sherri Schottlaender (San Diego: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2008).

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 9.

It makes sense then that, the room works—unlike *Film Room: Smoke* which could be installed in any gallery—were defined and circumscribed, as were the Fire Performances, by the site which co-located both their production and consumption. In doing so, the rooms not only allegorized, picking up David E. James again, the conditions of their production, they were a particular experience of that location rather than the visual representation of it: being there, rather than seeing there. The structure of the rooms is also political for the way it disrupts conventional conditions of causality. Just as the smokeless fires and fireless smoke of the Fire Performances abrogated the links between fire and smoke, Nordman's use of space and light in her rooms expose the contrived relationship between natural periodicity and timekeeping. As discussed in Chapter One, this disruption has a political charge for the way in which it undoes a basic tenet—causality—of rational epistemology and scientific positivism. In her rooms natural time (sunlight) and constructed time (watch time) seem—as they do in everyday life—to be of a piece. However, as we saw in detail in Chapter Three, the necessary precision and terms of her works (their science) also point to the ways in which natural and clock time are actually artificially reconciled—to the ways in which science, and its revealing of the natural world, the causality between the two, is often a fiction. When taken as a transparent and seemingly self-evident or invisible “truth” (much like photography), the connection between the location of the sun in the sky and the time on your wrist, becomes naturalized. Furthermore, it shows how such naturalization between non-causally related natural phenomena and positivist technology often begins as a specific politically and economically motivated action, which is then reinforced and made invisible through precedent, institutional mandate, cultural convention, and everyday habit. Finally, this then arbitrary relationship between clock time and the sun, is another form of an overarching, naturalized hegemonic procedure: nomination and naming. Just as word and categories become indelible stand-ins for the things themselves and in doing so, occlude the ability to see each thing as it really is, so too do hour and minute hands and their digits *tell* us the time, and in doing so point us away from seeing the natural rhythms of the world.

[An]installation

A crucial aspect to the experience of installation art is the circulation of the visitor *in* it—they must move inside and through the work. And because such “decentering” and “activating” of the viewer undermines the hierarchical relationship in which Cartesian self-reflexivity (I think, therefore I am), Comtean epistemology, and Renaissance perspective place the (male) subject at the center of the viewing world and those technological systems of vision, installation art has historically been understood to be implicitly political.³³⁶ Furthermore, because it is not-object based and is often ephemeral—therefore not easily bought and sold—installation art has

³³⁶ For an overview of this argument see Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*. London: Routledge, 2005. For other general histories of installation art see: Nicholas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry, eds., *Installation Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994); Julie Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999); *Oxford Art Journal* (Special issue on Installation), 2001; Mark Rosenthal, *Understanding Installation Art: From Duchamp to Holzer* (Prestel, 2003); Erika Suderburg, ed., *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). For a tracing of installation art vis-à-vis science and technology see, Fay Ran, *A History of Installation Art and the Development of New Art Forms: Technology and the Hermeneutics of Time and Space in Modern and Postmodern Art from Cubism to Installation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

been positioned as a reaction against the art market and capitalism in general. Similarly, as seen in Chapter One, in avant-garde film, the activation of the spectator has been seen to counter the “ideology of the apparatus” which too arose from Western models of subjectivity and visuality. And by showing their work in venues outside of normal film distribution—like empty lofts and punk bars—Structural Film and Expanded Cinema, like installation art, were charged with carrying a political valence.

However, a critical difference between installation art and avant-garde film, and Structural Cinema in particular, is the ways in which the works responded to—and were seen to respond—directly to the site in which they were located. While for most avant-garde filmmakers, the space in which they showed their work remained somewhat arbitrary, for many installation artists, the space was a “place”—replete with history, social function, and ideological preconditions—with which their works were in dialogue, or formally and/or conceptually “site specific.” Some artists—like Michael Asher—directly engaged with the space of the gallery and museum to launch an “institutional critique;” others—like Earthworks artists—did so at a distance by siting their works far from the conventional viewing places of art.³³⁷

Portable Sites, Scores, and Plans

Miwon Kwon argues that by the 1990s, “the inherited conception of site-specific art as a grounded, fixed (even if ephemeral), singular event,” had evolved to define a “site,” not just as a physical or geographic place but as a, “predominantly an intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation.”³³⁸ This distinction between, what James Meyer calls, “literal” and the “functional” sites, resulted from the increased globalization of the late-capitalist art market which now located the value of the ephemeral and site-specific installation not in the works itself but in the presence of the artist as producer.³³⁹ We have already explored Nordman’s role as producer vis-à-vis her “co-authorship” and collaborations with “participants” and her use of photographs and books as functional sites. This chapter will continue thinking about her rooms as “portable ideas” and, like the multiple Fire Performances, their reiterations as simultaneous, literal and functional sites. I use “reiterate” here to suggest the mobility and possibility of each repetition of a room work as an equal, though not morphologically identical, instantiation that is part of a conceptual continuum. Unlike the discrete portable object or even the site-specific work, which can only exist in one place at a time, Bochner’s portable idea can exist anywhere and simultaneously, “as long as the internal relationships of measurements and materials remain constant it’s the same work no matter where it is. Physical location is merely a minor variable.”³⁴⁰ Indeed, Nordman refers to many of her room works as a “first use,” and they are first conceived of as “plans.” Like buildings sprung from architectural schema, and music conjured from scores—her room works can be reiterated across time—as we will see with *Newport Beach* and *Saddleback Mountain*—but remain conceptually contingent on this

³³⁷ Of course, as already mentioned, the great physical distance of a work like Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) did not keep it from becoming one of the most recognizable artworks, but its accessibility was thoroughly mediated by the art “system” in the form of photography, film and the support of his dealer, Virginia Dwan.

³³⁸ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 160.

³³⁹ James Meyer, “The Functional Site, or, The Transformation of Site Specificity,” in Suderburg, 23–38.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

reproducibility in which each aspect—whether plan, notes, photos, documents, or the room itself—is a part of the work’s functional site and parcel of its literal site.

Following Nelson Goodman, the portability of the ideas—their very functionality and legibility—is therefore dependent on a consistent system of notation.³⁴¹ The durability of the work depends on the integrity and legibility of its notation. Theoretically, notational systems should be legible to every reader conversant in that language: any sight-reading musician should be able to play a new musical piece. And while Nordman’s architectural plans deploy certain notational systems such as view, scale, and architecturally-specific markings, the actual execution of these works—their translation from idea to experience seem to require more than a two-dimensional plan. Unlike, building drawings that can be built to spec by any skilled engineer and construction company, Nordman’s works depend on absorbing certain contingencies of the site in order to be complete. These contingencies are not, as in the construction worlds, to be worked around, nor are they constraints on the work; they are affordances: that which transmutes the work from a space to a place. From room to *Raum*.

So, though they may formally resemble the paired down aesthetic, medium specificity, and portability of much Structural Film or Expanded Cinema—and Light and Space installations—many of Nordman’s room works are shaped as much by place as space. In other words, not only is their physical presence a response to the dimensions of particular architecture, they also conceptually call out their location relative to other physical, practical, social, and political spaces, in many cases of Hollywood, and make manifest—subconsciously and tactically—the terms by which they exist in relation to the dominant institutional modes and strategies. But in addition to the typical cinematic avant-gardes like Structural Film, Fluxfilms, and Expanded Cinema, Nordman’s work is perhaps better understood as “post-filmic” for the ways in which it shares and exceeds the formal and conceptual strategies of all three.

Post-film/Post-studio

The term “post-filmic” also links Nordman’s rooms to the dematerialized, conceptual art practices then emerging in Southern California—the “Post-studio” movement—named for the radical and highly influential course that John Baldessari began teaching at California Institute of the Arts in 1970. Unlike object-based works like painting and sculpture which were produced in the artist’s studio, post-studio art was conceptual, often consisting of ephemeral rule-based actions that challenged systems of knowledge, and that were documented in photography. The studio was already then—in the late 1960s—critiqued to be as much a part of the market system as the museum and the gallery works and in eschewing it as well traditional media, and skill, post-studio practices were seen—like Environments, Earthworks, and Installation and performance Art—as being inherently political.

Indeed, Nordman’s very earliest room works in 1969 shared many of these tactics of resistance, but paradoxically, their conceptualism depended on their taking literal place in her studio, a storefront space at 1014 Pico Boulevard in a cross-cultural, working class neighborhood of Los Angeles. They were Post-studio in the sense that she was not creating discrete objects in the studio to be sent out into the world, while also being what we might call, following Daniel Buren, “In Situ-studio” for the ways in which they co-located their site of production and

³⁴¹ Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976).

reception.³⁴² And, if we maintain that Nordman's studio room works are a form of Expanded Cinema, then this collocation must also be read vis-à-vis the sites of production and reception of film. Taking place at a distance from the financial lots and filming lots of Paramount, MGM, et al. they can be understood as Post-studios. Yet, from a production standpoint, this distance also results in a collapse, a consolidation of the various production roles that were made distinct and efficient through the rise of the highly bureaucratic classic studio system. But if we understand Hollywood's efficiency and bureaucracy—achieved through the standardization of systems and products, ownership of equipment, and tight control over labor—to be akin to industrial manufacture or the centralized imperial state form, both hallmarks of modernity, then Nordman's messier, solo, dispersed, experimental practice reflect pre-classical and post-modern forms, and functions as a critique of modern hegemony.³⁴³

Furthermore, her re-entrenchment in the studio stands in contrast to the widespread “collapse of the studio” among artists in the 1960s. As Caroline A. Jones notes, this response to art being, “jobbed out by blueprint or ordered by phone,” was “not inevitable, but it was supremely logical, once the machine became the mode, as well as the emblem, of artistic change.”³⁴⁴ In other words, the move of Nordman's cinematic works into her studio, can be seen as a move both contra classical studio movie production and all that hegemony implies, as well as in contradistinction to the outsourcing of artistic production seen in other contemporaneous practices of the 1960s, like Minimalism. Importantly, Nordman was not alone in Los Angeles at that time in using her studio as the site, subject, and material. Between 1969 and 1973, James Turrell transformed his studio in the former Mendota Hotel in Santa Monica into a series of art works. For these *Mendota Stoppages*, Turrell installed specially ground optical glass into the windows and covered them with adjustable shades. By altering the apertures of the windows, Turrell could control the amount and shape of incoming light, which then took on additional transformation as it interacted with the existing interior architecture.³⁴⁵

Just as machinic echoes in the form of the optical glass remained in Turrell's studio, so too did aspects of the camera remain in Nordman's room works. Strangely then, these works are both post-studio and proto-cinematic—and avant-garde—for the ways in which they relate to pre-filmic technologies. As we have seen, all technologies that mediate vision and representation can be seen to augur particular scopic regimes and their attendant political interests. Of particular relevance to Nordman's work is not just the camera obscura, discussed in the Introduction, but the panorama.³⁴⁶ As film later would, the panorama offered an immersive, time-based experience that brought representations from faraway lands. The panoramas of the mid-nineteenth century also had a political purpose: by integrating the viewer, and reconfiguring their sense of self into the representation of places under geo-political contestation, they became zones of imperial

³⁴² Daniel Buren, “The Function of the Studio,” *October* (Autumn 1979), 51–58.

³⁴³ For an in-depth look at the history of production practices and their relation to the development of the American film industry see David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

³⁴⁴ Caroline A. Jones, “Post-Studio/Postmodern/Postmortem,” in *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 286. For Jones's expanded political perspective on the role of the studio see her *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For a collection of writings on the movement from studio to post-studio see, Claire Doherty, ed. *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004).

³⁴⁵ For a full discussion of these and Turrell's work see, Craig E. Adcock, *James Turrell: The Art of Light and Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

³⁴⁶ For a case history of the panorama and its role in representing and shaping modernity in Egypt, see Timothy Mitchell, “Egypt at the Exhibition,” *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 1–33.

contact and propaganda. Subjects colonized and visually consumed the passive dioramas much as military and economic structures infiltrated and fixed the lands themselves.

While Nordman's rooms are also absorptive, to some degree directive, and by many testimonies, reconfigure the sense of self, they function very differently politically. First, they invite contact with zones that are unfixed and mixed. In the civic and bureaucratic sense, they exist in literal "mixed zones" that permit both residential and commercial use. Second, by her description, these zones are also very racially mixed. As Hal Foster argues, "the local and the everyday are thought to resist economic development, yet they can also attract it, for such development needs the local and the everyday even as it erodes these qualities, renders them siteless."³⁴⁷ By "instating" her work in unconventional, commercial spaces, Nordman's makes these, "nonspaces seem specific again, to redress them as grounded places, not abstract spaces, in historical and/or cultural terms."³⁴⁸ Finally, as intermedia, Nordman's work itself mixes media (art, film, performance) and, recalling that visitors to these rooms are never viewers, and always participants, mixes up the roles of production and reception. In their free admittance and admixture of peoples who actively participate in their production, the works collapse the distance that defines the commodity to become zones of exchange more akin to the gift than the commodity.³⁴⁹

Nordman also collapses other traditional zones and distinctions, namely between art and life: she lived in her studio.³⁵⁰ More specifically it seems, the functional aspects of life, were incorporated into the space that was also occupied by her works. As neighboring artist Dorit Cypis, recalls, perhaps somewhat apocryphally,

My studio was next door to Maria Nordman's studio. She had a large space and would never let anybody in. I became very curious about how she lived. After four years, I knocked on her door. She opened it and in her small voice said, "Come in." There was nothing in her studio. It was blank. The only feature that stuck out was a gorgeous wooden floor that was higher than the entrance level; you had to step up to it. There was Maria and the floor. I'm thinking to myself, 'I don't get it. How does she do it? My space is filled with my living stuff.' She opened a trap door in the floor and there was her kitchen. She opened another trap door in the floor and there was her bed. All of her stuff was under the floor. It was like a bunker, like living during a war. I will never forget Maria's living space. It was stunning.³⁵¹

The elegant austerity, the blankness Cypis describes, was not blank or for lack, but a black box, a set of conditions with endless possibilities. For example, *Moveable Walls* (1969), was a space created within her studio by positioning six eight-by-eight-foot black walls on omni-

³⁴⁷ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 197.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ For a history and discussion of gift economies and creativity as a form of gift exchange, see Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 1979) and, more recently, Ted Purves, *What We Want is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art* (New York: SUNY, 2004).

³⁵⁰ See Brian Winkeweder, "The Kitchen as Art Studio: Gender, Performance, and Domestic Aesthetics" in *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Michelle Grabner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 239–50.

³⁵¹ Dorit Cypis in Richard Hertz, *The Beat and the Buzz: Inside the L.A. Art World* (Minneapolis: Press, 2009), 117.

directional wheels. (Fig. 32–34) “On different days,” Nordman writes in typical gnostic fashion, “I choose the position of the walls in relation to the person and the incoming sun. The dialogue between the cast shadow, the density of unilluminated walls, and the incoming sun determines the nature of the building, as made by each person who is present.”³⁵² This interiority and simultaneous suspension and self-conscious acknowledgement of rational thought also proposes *Moveable Walls* as a camera whose black bellows were meant to incite looking *in* rather than looking *out*. Like Brechtian theater, and akin to her earlier Film Rooms, Nordman, creates here a defamiliarized situation that makes plain its—and all reality’s—constructedness and in doing so reveals the political possibility for change on both a personal and public scale.³⁵³

The mobility of the panels and the desire to create a direct experience between viewer and work, have an even more specific historical precedents in Europe. The 1931 Bauhaus exhibition at the Bauausstellung in Berlin, sought “not so much to exhibit as to demonstrate: the artists were aiming at explaining and making comprehensible to all an alternative to the traditional way of living...utilizing all of the means of representation that the modern movement had elaborated...These means were described as follows by Moholy-Nagy in 1928: ‘Moveable walls lettered with new slogans, rotating colour filters, light projectors, signal demonstrations and reflectors: transparency, light and movement all in the service of the public. Everything so arranged that it can be handled and understood by the simplest individual.’”³⁵⁴ In addition to moveable walls, so too does Nordman use many of the same means—projectors, colored filters, reflectors, transparency, light—to offer participants in her work a new way of seeing. Indeed, the shift in revoluted perspective, and a call to quiet interior attention, self-reflection, and political agency developed in *Moveable Walls*, would continue to inform other works even after their walls became fixed.

Pico I and II

Pico I [workroom] (1970) was just such a fixed space in the entry way: a small “interior vertical room with one chair that stays close to the entrance...wide enough for one person to be seated...sunlight enters through a glass window in the door, at eye level with street sounds. All surfaces are painted black. Below eye level, the room is never revealed.”³⁵⁵ (Fig. 35) In the space adjacent to this “workroom” in the entryway, was another work, also called *Pico I*, which Nordman counterintuitively calls the “anteroom.” But perhaps this is because this description refers not to its relative location architecturally, but to its placement “before” as in, “in front of” the window, facing the street. But rather than the strict self-reflexivity afforded by the pure light entering *Pico I [workroom]* or *Moveable Walls*, *Pico I [anteroom]* traded on seeing the interplay between inside and outside, and turned on the double-play of reflection as an interior process and as a superficial exterior representation. (Figs. 30, 36) Outside, *Pico I [anteroom]* used a reflective film to transform its large window into a one-way mirror, and inside she built a seating area. (Fig. 19) During the day, visitors could—without being seen—watch the flow and small dramas of everyday neighborhood activity, while those being observed could only see their own reflections in the glass as they passed by. When she moved her studio into the space next door in

³⁵² Nordman, *De Sculptura*, 15.

³⁵³ John Willett, ed. and trans., *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

³⁵⁴ Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977), 489–90.

³⁵⁵ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 10.

1972, Nordman also transposed the work, which now had a larger window—78 x 52 inches—and called it *Pico II [workroom]*.³⁵⁶ (Fig. 37–39)

Though it is easy to think of *Pico II [workroom]* as a recreation of *Pico I [anteroom]*, necessitated by Nordman’s moving her studio to the adjacent space next door, its construction was different in important ways. Indeed, it is much less constructed: gone is the receding sill and the “gorgeous wooden floor” described by Cypis was elevated such that the viewer sat at the same level as the bottom of the window frame. (Fig. 31, 40–43) Called a picture window, such a large glass is meant to provide unimpeded viewing. I intentionally use “large glass” here to evoke Marcel Duchamp’s work that has visibility as a core concern. Indeed, Nordman’s picture window refracts not just material histories of film, but of art history and vision itself.

Photographs of the abundantly documented *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]* composed as they are, accentuate the large window as its defining feature, and underscore it as conceptual framing device. Originally storefront windows whose expanse of glass was intended to maximize the visibility of their displays, Nordman here complicated the relationship between viewer and viewed. *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]* were not just viewing areas, but carefully constructed observatories. In *Pico I [anteroom]* the four walls were angled in creating a deep frame so as to draw the body and eye toward the window. (Figs. 30, 36) Given Nordman’s interest in the viewing conditions specific to cinema seen in her Film Rooms, the angled walls here might be thought of as an inversion of the “throw” of a projection. Where in film the throw would be defined by the expanding conical light emanating from the projector at the back of the room and intersected by its receiving screen to culminate in a horizontal image, in *Pico I [anteroom]* the vertical image begins with the window—its screen—and expands inward toward the viewer. The direction of expansion from screen to viewer is made explicit by Nordman’s angled walls and, along with its single viewer and lack of rear projection, suggests earlier private viewing film technologies like the kinoscope and its revelation of everyday activities recalls the nonfiction *actualités* seen in the Lumière Brothers’ first projected films.³⁵⁷

Moreover, the way in which both *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]* image the “real world”—the way in which they are “on location”—also suggests a later development in movie-making: the rear projection. Confusingly, this term, also called “back projection,” refers not to the projection of a film from a projector in the rear of the room, but to a special effect in which an image shot earlier is projected onto the back of a screen to create a moving backdrop for a subsequently filmed scene. For example, “in most scenes in which characters ride in cars,” film historians Kristin Bordwell and David Thompson explain, “the vehicle is filmed in a studio while the background landscape passes on a screen.”³⁵⁸ Back projection they continue, “saved money, since actors and crew did not have to go on location.”³⁵⁹ Rear projection then permits—and economics encourage—a double dislocation. Scenes purported to represent one place—say, again, the Sahara—were not only not shot in the Sahara, but were empty landscapes taken “on location” in Southern California, and then rear-projected onto a screen on a soundstage scene in Hollywood for the final filming.

Furthermore, the screen onto which the backdrop image is projected is called the “plate” which, like the plate-glass window in Nordman’s studio is the membrane that mediates between

³⁵⁶ It is also referred to as *Untitled: 1014 Pico* (1969) (Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 223).

³⁵⁷ Thomas Edison’s development of the private-viewing kinoscope, which was invented 1891 and premiered in England in 1894, paralleled—and was eventually superseded by—the Lumière Brothers’ invention of the Cinématographe in 1894 which projected films onto a large screen.

³⁵⁸ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History* (New York: McGraw Hill), 221–22.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

the image and place, between frame and context. As Anne Friedberg points out, “Just as the mirror emerged in a conceptual system that lay the foundation for the ‘humanist’ epistemologies of the seventeenth century, the plate glass window suggests an equivalent—but opposite—epistemological reconfiguration. If the plane mirror and its reflection was an optical illusion, a *trompe l’oeil*, in the manner of mimesis and the simulacrum, the plate glass window and its transparency suggests its contrary—an optical veracity, an unmediated (yet still framed) view of the world.”³⁶⁰ Given that the industrial production of rolled glass was developed in the same year as filmic projection, *Pico II [workroom]* can be understood to agglomerate multiple viewing technologies that transformed the way in which the world was seen. In a photo-collage Nordman further complicates the interplay between internal and external conditions and implications of visibility in the *Pico* works. (Fig. 39) Taken at night from the street, one photograph shows the darkened studio whose windows reflect the camera and the scene behind. In the second photograph, the interior lights of the studio are on; instead of a reflection, we can see deep into the space. Such transparency, writes Gyorgy Kepes, “means simultaneous perception of different spatial locations,” that results from the technologies of glass, along with photography and motion pictures, which “unchains” vision from linear perspective into a new language.³⁶¹ The transparency of Nordman’s studio window—and its inherent reflective property—permits just such synchronous looking in and looking at. And as with Found Room: *Venice Boulevard*, her play with lighting, and play on doubling results in not an image of verisimilitude but a collage of concatenated flat and dislocated planes.

Reflection also played another role reversal in *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]*. Nordman’s application of a reflective film to the outside of the picture windows resulted in two important effects. First, it made the viewer sitting inside invisible to the passersby. Second, it made the passersby visible to themselves. As they walked by, the unsuspecting pedestrian would see—and often be surprised by—their own reflections, but would not be aware that they were being observed. (Fig. 43) Inside, the viewer experienced a kind of real-time movie of the neighborhood in which the window was at once camera, projector, and screen. The diminished light within the chamber (the reflective film reduces incoming light) encourages the reading of this chamber as both camera and black box. Sitting within the apparatus, viewers might become aware of socio-anthropological implications, surveillance—as well as the ideology that subtends it. But in addition to suggesting subject positions, *Pico II [anteroom]* also speaks of the relations between individual and society: “A person may commune with the work in the company of his/her own thoughts,” explains Rorimer, “yet be connected with the community at large.”³⁶²

Where *Pico I [anteroom]* and *Pico II [workroom]* were both inward and outward looking and used glass and mirrors to channel and challenge vision and visibility, Nordman also continued conceptualizing darkened spaces that, like *Moveable Walls*, depended on mediated rather than diffuse daylight. Her artist notes describe the unrealized *Black Room with Partial White Light* (1971): “A participant walks into a vertical voidal space for the scale of one person. After some time has passed, the room is a horizontal white space which begins at eye level and decreases at a constant rate as it moves above eye level. Below, the space remains voidal black.

³⁶⁰ Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), 109.

³⁶¹ Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision* (Chicago: P. Theobald, 1944), 77.

³⁶² Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 223. For a nuanced argument that challenges simplistic notions of community see Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Miniature for one person.”³⁶³ (Fig. 44) This work, along with *Pico I [workroom]*, with their spaces vertically bifurcated by the sun were working hypotheses, “related to a work [Colorado and Orange Grove] shown in the Pasadena Museum,” the following year in 1972, as well as another work in her studio.³⁶⁴

Similar to the relationship between *Pico I [workroom]* and *Pico I [anteroom]*, *Pico II [untitled]* and *Pico II [workroom]*, the formers created a space for interior reflection while the latter presented views of the outside world. (Figs. 40, 41) But where the *Pico I* works were adjacent and contemporaneous, the *Pico II* works were located in the exact same space, and because their requirements for light were completely different, they could not be experienced at the same time. Where *Pico II [workroom]* depended a window’s worth of diffuse day or night light; *Pico II [untitled]* used, “an 8 foot wall expanding to a 16 foot wall which trained the sun to enter at the level of the floor.”³⁶⁵ (Figs. 45–46) Visitors would enter the white space at, “the level of the sunlight on hands on feet.”³⁶⁶ Both part of the *Pico II [workroom]*, yet distinctly its own work with very different effects, *Pico II [untitled]* existed until 1985.³⁶⁷

Colorado and Orange Grove

In February 1972, three years after making her first room work, Nordman was included in her first museum exhibition. *Fifteen Los Angeles Artists* was showcase of diverse emerging talent at the Pasadena Art Museum and included, among others, Mary Corse, Allan McCollum, and William Wegman.³⁶⁸ Here, Nordman constructed *Colorado and Orange Grove*, her first public room work in which visitors—one at a time—were to remain for at least fifteen minutes. It was a carpeted, “narrow, black chamber (built into the curve of the big cupola),” “closed off from the outside world save for a light slit in the door and the filtering sounds of Colorado and Orange Grove traffic.”³⁶⁹

Like Duchamp and *Pico II [workroom]*’s large glasses, *Colorado and Orange Grove* also challenged the conventions and limits of sight and art history. But the chamber achieved its effect in darkness, and whose structure can be seen as an inversion of the lasers used in her Laser Rooms. Here, rather than an electrified reflective interior projecting a beam of coherent light out,

³⁶³ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 8, 48.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8, 10.

³⁶⁵ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 9.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ The exhibition, which ran from February 22 to March 29, 1972, also included Charles Arnoldi, Karen Hansen Carson, James Ganzer, Lloyd Hamrol, Richard Jackson, Allan McCollum, Ann McCoy, Barbara Munger, Thomas Seidel, John White, Tom Wudle, and Connie Zehr and was accompanied by the exhibition catalogue, Haskell, *Fifteen Los Angeles Artists*.

³⁶⁹ Peter Plagens, “The Decline and Rise of Younger Los Angeles Art,” *Artforum*, May 1972, 79. Plagens would later publish the popular account of California postwar art, *Sunshine Muse: Art on the West Coast 1945–1970*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), which prominently featured the “Light and Space” movement. Other similar such surveys and catalogues include Henry T. Hopkins, *Painting and Sculpture in California: The Modern Era* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1977); Lars Nittve and Helle Crenzien, eds., *Sunshine & Noir: Art in L.A. 1960–1997*, (Humblebaek, Denmark: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 1997); Grenier, *Catalog L.A.: Birth of an Art Capital, 1955–1985*; Fuller and Salvioni, *Art/Women/California: Parallels and Intersections, 1950–2000*; Rebecca Peabody and Lucy Bradnock, eds., *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art 1945–1980* (Los Angeles : Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011).

the slit admits a ray of sunlight in, its intensity in proportion with the width and angle of the aperture, the time of year and the work's location—which is made explicit in its title. The scale and remove of *Colorado and Orange Grove* also recall the first manned missions to outer space, as well as the “other country” of prisons and their inner spaces of boxed isolation. At a time, in 1972, when the conflicts personal rights, political freedom, and state power, were on tense display both domestically and internationally, solitary capsules and confinement represented sites in which both space and the body were subjugated to the imperatives of American “democracy,” truths made all the more uncomfortable by their location in the affluent community of Pasadena.³⁷⁰

Though no plans, sketches or photographs exist of *Colorado and Orange Grove*, it was seen in a different way: through critical press. In his first review of Nordman's work, Peter Plagens acknowledges the Duchamp connection explicitly, but the disproportionate tone and bite of his reaction seem to suggest that a particularly deeply held belief about autonomy might have been, if only unconsciously, struck. “Nobody else, except Duchamp—‘close to, with one eye, for almost an hour’—tells you how to run your life,” writes the critic in response to Nordman's instructions. “I didn't stay the whole ‘for at least 15 minutes’ as commanded by the title,” he continues, “probably because I resent the demure, latent Fascism in demi-mystical pieces which substitute time-governing instructions for quality... The smell of darkness, the feel of the carpet, and the solitude are pleasant enough, but they don't compensate for the ordinariness of Nordman's premise that we'll perceive some truth isolated in that little room.”³⁷¹ Contrary to the critic's seemingly chauvinistic and—given Nordman's German descent—xenophobic—reaction, Nordman was not trying to “tell you how to run your life” for the sake of some demi-mystical perception of truth. She was creating a context in which to draw awareness of the contingent and mundane details that shape experience across place and time and within the body.

But Plagens's reaction is not surprising given that at the time, “formalism was its sanctioned method and *Artforum*'s most potent legacy, leaving scars on many artists.”³⁷² Though, not to a person, its writers still favored Greenbergian modernism and, “whole approaches to art-making were slighted... and some were barely noticed at all. Performance, art, body art, and John Cage's interdisciplinary influence were not acknowledged until relatively late.”³⁷³ In time, as the magazine grew and, ironically, as the artworld became more institutionalized, *Artforum* would become more open to intermedial practices, and Plagens would come to admit in another review in 1972 that Nordman's use of the works' premises to foreground ordinary light and sound was indeed an extraordinary premise.³⁷⁴

Regardless of this initial pan, it was still press from an influential publication, and it did give *Colorado and Orange Grove* visibility. This along with the more positive impressions it made on others which spread through word-of-mouth, were forms of documentation, that, as Miwon Kwon traces, take on, “another life within the art world's publicity circuit, which will in turn alert another institution for another commission.”³⁷⁵ This was certainly the case for

³⁷⁰ For a history and phenomenological critique of solitary confinement, see Lisa Guenther, *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2013).

³⁷¹ Plagens, “The Decline and Rise of Younger Los Angeles Art,” 79.

³⁷² Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962–1974* (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 7.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ I refer here to Plagens's review of her 1974 exhibition, *Saddleback Mountain*, at University of California, Irvine which is discussed later in this chapter; Plagens, “Maria Nordman,” 40–41.

³⁷⁵ Miwon Kwon, “One Place After Another: Notes on s,” in Suderburg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, 52. For a related conversation see, “On Site-Specificity,” *Documents* 4–5 (Spring 1994), 11–22. Roundtable discussion between Hal

Nordman: A year almost to the day after the Pasadena Museum show opened, the artist appeared in her second group exhibition, *What Time Is It?*, in February 1973 at the Newport Harbor Museum of Art.

Newport Beach

What Time Is It? was both a survey of historical time-keeping devices—from a Chinese incense-burning clock to an atomic clock—as well as a sample of contemporary artists (including Chris Burden and Newton Harrison) brought together by their shared preoccupation with what curator Betty Turnbull calls, “transition.”³⁷⁶ About her contribution, *Newport Beach* (1973), Nordman—the only woman in the exhibition—writes simply, “a door and a time are chosen.”³⁷⁷ (Figs. 20, 47)

More specifically, a door from which one could exit the galleries into a back alley, a “walkway to the ocean” where the “museum deposits its trash.”³⁷⁸ Working with the full height and double-width of the door, the artist constructed from wood and drywall a finished wedge-like alcove that was only accessible from the alley, but whose unfinished armature protruded visibly into the gallery. “A person could go into the museum,” Nordman notes, “and find the outside of the construction, or leave the museum and go into the alley and find the work.”³⁷⁹ In order to facilitate visitors’ arrival at the piece, the artist arranged for a host to guide them there.³⁸⁰ Outside, in broad daylight, the convex white space was designed such that once a day, it would reflect the sun so intensely as to be blinding, perhaps, as she had written in her Neutra notes, “the polished white sandstone of the pyramids [that] must have made them impossible to look at during high noon.”³⁸¹ Indeed, Nordman planned the work such that this effect would occur precisely at 12:30 p.m. on the day the exhibition opened—the last day of February on a non-leap year. Because of the ever-changing relationship between the sun and the earth is constantly changing, the time at which the sun reached its peak and transformed *Newport Beach* from a simple architectural construction into an unarticulated screen of light was slightly different every day.

In addition to marking the relationship between the rotational patterns of earth and sun, *Newport Beach*’s position in the alley also drew attention to the relationship between the museum as pristine exhibition space and its literal presence in the neighborhood. The service entrance and the dumpster highlighted the normally invisible labor necessary to its functioning. Curator and scholar Germano Celant would later point out that *Newport Beach* work was different from the artist’s other works in that it, “applied a process of esthetic occupation of a *public* boundary—the street frequented by everyone, at every hour of the day. Nordman’s

Foster, Renee Green, Kane, Miwon Kwon, John Lindell, and Helen Molesworth. For a more geopolitically inflected analysis see Judith Rugg, *Exploring Site-Specific Art: Issues of Space and Internationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

³⁷⁶ The Newport Harbor Museum of Art is now the Orange County Museum of Art. The exhibition, curated by Betty Turnbull, was on view February 28 through April 8, 1973 and included Sam Apple, Bill Bergenthal, Jerry Bowen, Chris Burden, Christopher Cook, Roger Genser, Newton Harrison, Ron Hartgrove, Tom Hartman, George Ketterl, and Stephen Walsh. Though elsewhere Nordman has referred to the work as *Newport Harbor* and *Untitled: Newport* the exhibition brochure lists it as *Negative Light Extensions: or, There are no Ocean Streets*.

³⁷⁷ Betty Turnbull, *What Time Is It?* (Newport Beach: Newport Harbor Museum of Art, 1973).

³⁷⁸ Nordman, *De Musica*, 32.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 224.

³⁸¹ Nordman letter to Raymond Neutra.

participation then is, then, tied to the *open space* where the artistic property is shared—physically and culturally—by anyone.”³⁸² “Moreover,” continues Celant, “its open legibility places a hierarchical sequence between primary and secondary space: in a culture of equality these don’t exist and, even less are they equivalent.”³⁸³

What was also conceptually equivalent, even if they looked completely different, was a subsequent iteration of *Newport Beach* which was part of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art’s exhibition, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, curated by Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer.³⁸⁴ The title of Nordman’s piece, *Untitled (1973–)* (1995), and its location outside the museum in a service area recalled its first use in Newport Beach. Nordman describes the later version, sited at MOCA’s satellite venue, the Temporary Contemporary at 195 S. Alameda as, “a loading door onto a sidewalk used by persons working in the center of Los Angeles of going to the trains station south of Temple on the warehouse side of the Temporary Contemporary that has never been used for a work of art or as an entrance.”³⁸⁵ These notions of labor, public, democratic access, social hierarchy, and visibility begun in *Newport Beach* lay the conceptual foundation for all of its subsequent iterations, and can be seen throughout most of Nordman’s works.

12 South Raymond Street

It was also following her first museum work, that Nordman made her first work in a vernacular, non-art space outside her studio. During the *Fifteen Los Angeles Artists*, Pasadena Art Museum curator Barbara Haskell, invited Nordman to create another work nearby on the second floor of a nearby warehouse. Like *Colorado and Orange Grove*, *12 South Raymond Street* (1972), was meant to be experienced by one person at a time and included ambient sound. But its duration and access was longer and broader for it was open for one month between July and August. Located on the second floor of a commercial space in downtown Pasadena, the sixteen-by-twenty-foot room was painted and carpeted in black. A one-and-a-half-inch wide slit was incised across the roof above—a year before Gordon Matta-Clark’s first building cuts—which divided the room into two “distinct bodies of light—one of changing luminosity and other of unchanging darkness—with a common plane of illumination between them.”³⁸⁶ Nordman’s plan instructs that, “on entering, a person is surrounded by a space which defines itself only as a void. The sound of the surrounding landscape. A part of the room gradually describes itself by solar light. But the larger section remains a constant void. A place for one person; for 15–30 minutes. 1. The whole room is painted matte black 2. The larger section contains sound insulation in the walls 3. The floor of this section is covered with a black industrial carpet 4. light and sound enter through a skylight.”³⁸⁷ (Fig. 48)

On Location

³⁸² Germano, “Urban Nature: The Work of Maria Nordman,” *Artforum*, March 1980, 63.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ This landmark survey of conceptual art was on view October 15, 1995 to February 4, 1996.

³⁸⁵ Goldstein and Rorimer, 332. For a review of exhibition see Melinda Wertz, “Maria Nordman: 315 N. Alameda/166 N. Central, Los Angeles,” *Artforum* (October 1983), 82.

³⁸⁶ Rorimer, *New Art of the 60s and 70s*, 224.

³⁸⁷ This is written on the plan for the work.

I used the term “on location” earlier in reference to the filming of *Smoke* on the beach in Malibu and I invoke it again now as a way of framing these institutionally-sponsored warehouse and storefront works relative to those literally sited on the museum grounds. If to be “on location” in Hollywood means to be filming in the “real world” outside of the artificial movie studio sets, soundstages, and backlots, then we might also think of institutionally-sponsored but geographically discrete and distant works like *12 S. Raymond Street* and another work explored later in this chapter, *Washington and Beethoven*, located in a former barbershop to take place “on location.” (Fig. 2) Yet, though films may be shot in the real world, they are usually projected in the institutional space of the theater. Importantly, Nordman’s on-location room works are both produced and consumed in the same place. And though this is as true for her works in Europe as in America, the complex relation between the actual place, projected representations of space, takes on additional historical dimension for the works sited in Los Angeles.

In 1909, the first permanent film studio—Selig Polyscope Company—relocated from Chicago to Los Angeles, whose particular geography—with its abundant land, diverse topography, and mild year-round climate—meant that movies could be made more easily and more cheaply. Given that electricity was still a luxury, better weather meant more natural light for shooting both interior stage scenes as well as backlot exteriors. The “350 days of sunshine,” boasted by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce” sped up filming schedules and inexpensive real estate offered studios the chance to build elaborate sets that could be reused in various productions. Even more economically appealing was the fact that the geography of the greater Los Angeles area is so varied—beach, mountain, desert, city—that it could, according to Paramount Studios, visually simulate all other parts of the world. Portraying the Sahara on film did not require sending a film crew around the world; they merely had to drive down the coast. Thus, though shooting “on location” may happen outside of the studio, in “the real world,” often what we see on the screen is merely a stand-in for, a visual and psychological and cultural projection of a place rather than the place itself. This tension and its history in filmmaking is evident in Nordman’s description of her early film *Jemez*, as being shot in, “a[n outdoor] place where westerns are often filmed,” and in her locating *Filmroom: SMOKE* on the beach in Malibu, a site where many Hollywood classic films were shot, and where she considered the sunlight and the ocean to be “actors.”³⁸⁸

With her first room works, Nordman shifted the relations of place from one of simulation to one of actuality. Like antidotes to Jean Baudrillard’s simulacra, they no longer overtly projected or alluded to the idea of Hollywood—or anywhere else—but rather existed in Los Angeles proper, as a real place, lived in by real, diverse people.³⁸⁹ It is important though that even absent overt reference to the movies, its industry is so dominant that it nevertheless suffuses the social fabric throughout the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area and the room works can be seen in relation to the specific physical architecture and these social and political realities of its geographic location. Nordman’s locations were often in vacant commercial spaces—storefronts, a delicatessen, a hotel—places she describes as having “wide usership.”³⁹⁰ Her

³⁸⁸ Nordman, *De Sculptura*, 15. Nordman studied with Llyn Foulkes at UCLA and her 35 mm film clips include him, John McCracken, and Will Reigle.

³⁸⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

³⁹⁰ For the history of urban planning and zoning in Los Angeles, see Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) and Becky M. Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

writing often emphasizes the mixed-use, multicultural character of the place, and her accent here on mobility and immigration likely shaped by her own experience as an émigré. This is particularly evident in her choice of locating her studio on Pico Boulevard which she describes as, “stretch[ing] from the Pacific Ocean of Santa Monica to the center of Los Angeles, and travers[ing] the following main languages: English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese and Japanese, and languages from the continent of Africa.”³⁹¹

Twentieth and Idaho

While dispersing her works among ground-level stores and apartment dwellings in peripheral neighborhoods made them more accessible to the general public, they courted invisibility in the artworld. Created in 1972, just after her two works in Pasadena, *Twentieth and Idaho* was located in an empty storefront in a mixed-use, working class neighborhood about ten minutes north of 1014 Pico. (Fig. 49) Like the studio works and *12 S. Raymond*, during its month-long tenure, this room for one person was, “in the context of the persons present in the city. When opened, the work has its door ajar, with no signs or names attached.”³⁹² They were created not as artworld destinations but to be discovered by the curious neighbor or “passerby.” Though the discovery of the work may be serendipitous, this “openness” and accessibility is a fundamental conceptual dimension written into its physical parameters: the rooms are always located on the street level and contain a door with “no signs or names attached” that is ajar or open—sometimes all day and night—to “whomever passes by chance.”³⁹³ In other words, it existed for everyone, without announcement, and without artworld visibility.

Saddleback Mountain

In September 1972, just a few months after *Newport Beach*, Nordman inaugurated another institutionally-sited work at the Art Gallery at the University of California, Irvine, which, under the aegis of its Director, Hal Glicksman, had become known for its exhibitions of conceptual works that challenged the conventions of space and materials.³⁹⁴ Curated, again, by Barbara Haskell, and described here by a contrite critic Plagens, *Saddleback Mountain* (1973) was,

quite simply, a room and entry hall with a mirror at the joining. But the passageway in is at a slant (on the floor plan), widens as it goes, curves at one corner as it meets the far end of the chamber and possesses a vertical mirror... which provides a tall, stratified reflection of the entrance, behind which is Saddleback Mountain, the namesake. The room, because of the passageway’s disposition, is sliced diagonally by a line of light (from the mirror) which

³⁹¹ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 10.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁴ *Saddleback Mountain* was on view from September 25 to October 28, 1973. Other exhibitions at UC Irvine in 1973 included Vito Acconci, Larry Bell, Robert Cumming, Lowell Darling, and Doug Orr.

crosses the floor, climbs the opposite corner seam, and traverses the ceiling back to its source.³⁹⁵ (Figs. 7, 23, 51–52)

What Plagens and the floorplan for the work do not reveal is the double-height of the doorway and mirror and the fact that the work was also, as Nordman details, “filled with the sounds ‘selected’ by the channel entrance, like a bird a block away, a passing jet, or tree sounds.”³⁹⁶ The effects and importance of sound and time, however, were not lost on Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo:

When I visited it, the gallery was empty, there were no other visitors, and I was able to stay there a long time. Time is necessary, as only then will the experience penetrate and reawaken dormant instincts submerged by the noise of the everyday. The entrance to her piece, called *Saddleback Mountain*—which was similar to the work she later created for my home in Biumo—was turned outward, toward the tree-studded university green, and was like a corridor that pressed inward at the end. There, it opened up into a rather large room, and a mirror positioned at the threshold reflected the daylight that entered the corridor from outside, dividing the room into two parts, one in shadow, one illuminated. It was a work of extreme simplicity, which accentuated the quality and beauty of the light. The narrowing corridor concentrated the slight rustling of the wind amid the trees, which, though unseen, remained a remote presence. The light brought the presence future, in all its variations during the day, into the constructed space. Light. The most beautiful thing that exists in nature. The origin of life. The origin of knowing. It is the beginning, the moment in time when everything is perfect, the original state of happiness and joy, without end or limitation, before the arrival of a reality that limits, distances, reduces, constrains, in a world made of shadows and scant light. Light reawakens our insuppressible desire for beauty. It is an ancestral instinct, dating back to the origins of human existence. If there had been no light, man would never have been able to become what he is.³⁹⁷

Panza would go on to purchase works related to both *Saddleback Mountain* and *Newport Beach* another iteration of which appeared as part of *Venice/Venezia*, one of several exhibitions of his collection which he gifted to the Guggenheim Museum. Nordman worked on plans for a semi-subterranean room in Milan that would descend into the earth at the angle of the sun. (Figs. 53–54) Her correspondence with Panza indicates that it may have been a version of *Saddleback Mountain*: “The Irvine piece,” Nordman writes to Panza from Germany on April 17, 1977,

³⁹⁵ Plagens, “Maria Nordman,” 40–41. The exhibition was also reviewed by Melinda Terbell, “Review of [Maria Nordman: *Saddleback Mountain*],” *Artnews* (December 1973), 72–73.

³⁹⁶ Willoughby Sharp, “Maria Nordman at Irvine,” *Avalanche* 8 (Summer 1973), 68.

³⁹⁷ Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, “Environmental Art in Los Angeles,” in *Venice/Venezia: California Art from The Panza Collection at the Guggenheim Museum* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2000), 19.

“needs to go directly into the landscape.”³⁹⁸ By becoming a part of the earth, the unrealized sunken room would have become, as the neighborhood works did, embedded in rather than superficially reflecting their subject.

Where *Newport Beach* intensified sunlight by aggregating it within a white, convex exterior space, *Saddleback Mountain*'s effect of a sheet of light was achieved by reflection. Here the light enters the main corridor and bounces off a tall mirror at its terminus. The angle and location of the mirror are such that some of the light is reflected into a second adjoining room. Because the light is reflected at a precise angle, it only spans a section of the room and results in the illusion of two rooms divided by light. In other words, the mirror takes diffuse light and makes it coherent, reflecting into a space where it then again dissipates to create the illusion of walls of light and illusive spaces.

Reflection, as discussed with regard to Nordman's *Double Planar Selection and One Observer* (1968), is an essential aspect in creating the highly coherent light of a laser. So, paradoxically, where *Moveable Walls* sought to channel coherent light without reflection, *Saddleback Mountain* used mirrors for the opposite effect, diffusion. Indeed, its less crisp light creates a sense more of fog, or smog, than the illusion of walls. Instead of precise cuts and constructed walls whose placement and angles were specifically coordinated with the sun, as in *Newport Harbor* or the plans for *I Giardini Pubblici* (1974) in Milan, diffusion could be obtained, as it was in *Saddleback Mountain* and *Porta Soprana* (1976) in Genoa through larger apertures like entire doorways or windows. (Figs. 55–59) Importantly, diffusion permits the work to exist over a longer period of time: Because it is a less precise effect than coherence and does not depend on a specific angle of incidence of the sun, diffuse light in a work can be achieved over a longer period of time—though as we see with many of Nordman's temporal limits on the works—usually one month. Another major difference is that when the aperture opens up, it not only lets light and sound in, but, importantly, it permits the viewer to see out. The work's success is no longer a function of the opening's ability to constrain light, but depends on its literal openness. Rather than a training device, it becomes a framing device, and this shift from coherence to dispersion, can be seen to correspond to different models of subjectivity, themselves coherent or diffuse. Where the solitude, dark rooms and precise lighting of *Moveable Walls* and *Orange Grove and Colorado* activate perception and consciousness in a phenomenological, but ultimately self-reflexive feedback loop, the soft light of *Saddleback Mountain*, invites an experience of heightened but outward looking in a space shared with other people.

But whether it depends on coherent or diffuse light, the effects of Nordman's works require that the light be concentrated and enter the building at a very specific angle. The angle at which the sun's rays hit the earth is different in every place at every time. Works like *Saddleback Mountain* and the unrealized sunken room, then, are site specific not just in terms of its context within a neighborhood, but its very construction—the angles of the walls, the location of the cuts and mirrors—is contingent on its location and time on the planet. This creates a double variable for which Nordman's works account. In order to achieve her effects, the works depend on the sun being in a certain position and her plans make this explicit. For example, the back wall of *Newport Beach* sloped downward at the same angle of incidence of the sunlight (37.5 degrees) projected for 12:30 pm at that particular location on that particular day, February 28, when the exhibition opened. Thus the work's location—its longitude and latitude—becomes inscribed in its walls—their placement, the angles, the length and site of the cuts. If we recall from Chapter

³⁹⁸ Letter from Nordman to Panza, April 17, 1977, Panza Papers, Getty Research Institute.

One that the angle of incidence in parallax vision affects the depth of field with which things are seen and its absence accounts for the flatness of photographs, the sunlight here both makes the work possible materially, but also, as it does all things, makes it visible in the first place. But by making the sunlight coherent and intense to the point of near blinding almost, Nordman obliterates all lines of sight, all perspective, to achieve an experience which doesn't illuminate but rather embodies pure luminescence.

Handwritten notes on a sketch of *Saddleback Mountain* dated January 1973 describe the work as, "a room determined by one instant of light from the relative orbit of earth and sun. The light passes through the space each day and twice a year it is lit from the same angle."³⁹⁹ (Fig. 60) Nordman also includes angle of incidence of the sun and the azimuth. To recontextualize a description used elsewhere by Nordman, these works might be thought of as "spatially coherent" in terms of geography rather than luminosity.

Fourth and Howard

If we have come to understand Nordman's institutionally-supported works as being "on location," and the works in her studio proper as being "in situ," then it follows that those that took place at a distance from both are "in location." The "in" here also suggests an integration with the landscape, rather than a superficial occupation implicit in "on." Ironically, such works like *Twentieth & Idaho* were so successful in offering "itself *without* insignia, that is, without pedestal or container cut out from the quotidian real," it received no press coverage and has had no critical attention.⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, *Twentieth & Idaho* could be considered—from a conceptual standpoint—to be Nordman's most successful—and utopic—intervention.

Word did however get out in 1975 about another similarly embedded work in San Francisco, *Fourth and Howard*, and, in an effort to preserve its authenticity Nordman made the critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle* withhold the work's location from his review.⁴⁰¹ (Figs. 61–63) Another critic and art historian writes of the work: "At first sight, the room appeared totally black, with a solid wall of light along one side, like a large movie screen. Gradually," continues Thomas Albright,

One realized that this "wall" was in fact another space, equal in dimensions to the darker half of the room but painted white and bathed in a virtually palpable luminosity, through which the corners of the walls and ceiling traced dim outlines; subdued sounds, resembling the muted roar or distant ocean waves and emanating from overhead, helped further to define the actual dimensions of the surroundings. And then, again gradually, the space of the entire room became transformed into an almost solid substance as the light filling the white half of the interior invaded

³⁹⁹ Nordman, sketch of "N.P.B", 1/73.

⁴⁰⁰ Celant, "Urban Nature," 63.

⁴⁰¹ For a sample of other contemporaneous conceptual work in San Francisco see, Suzanne Foley, *Space, Time, Sound: Conceptual Art in the San Francisco Bay Area: The 70s* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981). Coincidentally, from the time it was founded in 1962 until its move to Los Angeles in 1965, *Artforum*'s offices in San Francisco were on Howard Street; the magazine moved to New York in 1967.

the darker area, until the entire space seemed to dematerialize and one stood suspended in an enveloping atmosphere.⁴⁰²

Though the description focuses on the interior effects of the space and the interior perceptual experience of the viewer, it remains very much in tension with its exterior circumstances and context. For all of the mystical qualities Albright and others ascribe its effect, the actual physical circumstances of *Fourth and Howard* were far from elevated. It was located in the Mars Hotel, “a decrepit building slated for demolition to make room for the new convention center,” which Nordman chose because it is where, “people come to park their cars and walk to work. The street is used by office workers and also people who are living under the sidewalk.”⁴⁰³ The work was announced in two ways. Passersby were invited in by way of “its door ajar, with no signs attached.”⁴⁰⁴ Others received an announcement card that simply state the work’s “time: open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. between October 18 and November 18, 1975” and, “place: San Francisco: 806 Howard Street at Fourth.”⁴⁰⁵ Count Panza’s card was embellished with a sketchy map in penned in Nordman’s hand, a nice collocation of different modes of description and communication. (Fig. 63)

While these “in location” works seem the most overtly political in their disavowal of the artworld system, their true power lies not simply in the ways in which they attempt to escape the institution or elude commodification, or even in the ways they challenge modernist media specificity to decenter and activate the viewer. Rather, Nordman’s extradiegetic—to draw on another filmic term—details, like the serendipitous or dissonant sounds and smells from the neighborhood, introduce a radical contingency not seen in a hermetically and institutionally sealed Light and Space art or Structural Film, whose directive is largely visual and whose perceptual effects and intellectual critiques are highly predictable. By contrast, in Nordman’s systems, “the information is not coming in only visually. I am interested in a range of experience that happens with one’s whole body sensing and conversing over a period of time.”⁴⁰⁶

Interdisciplines

The objective/scientific/visual nature of Light and Space works—and the implicit claims of their transparency to exhaustive knowledge—echo what feminist geographer Gillian Rose describes as the objective masculinism of time-space geography. Time-space geography, developed by the Swedish geographer Törsten Hägerstrand, uses three-dimensional time-space diagram to maps the movements of individuals as they perform the tasks of daily life. Hägerstrand argued that interpreting these diagrams required an understanding of the “constraints” each individual faced in terms of their mobility. These included capability constraints, “which concern the physical limits of movement, including the inability to be in two places at once, the need to sleep and eat, and the type of transport available; coupling constraints, which compel people to come together at certain times and in locations such as factories or schools; and authority constraints, which are social rules banning or encouraging certain temporospatial behaviors, such

⁴⁰² Thomas Albright, “Sealed Rooms and Open Studios,” *Artnews*, January 1976, 60.

⁴⁰³ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 10–11.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Maria Nordman, announcement card for *Fourth and Howard*, Panza Collection, Getty Research Institute.

⁴⁰⁶ Nordman, interview by Haskell and Glicksman in Haskell, *Maria Nordman: Saddleback Mountain*, u.p.

as laws forbidding those under a certain age to enter bars.”⁴⁰⁷ While the time-space diagrams were seen to reveal how, “the details of social reproduction, individual socialization, and structuration are constantly spelled out by the intersection of particular individual paths with particular institutional projects occurring at specific temporal and spatial locations,” feminist geographers, like Rose, use time-geography to not only track the restrictions that women and other minorities face on their mobility, but to reveal, “masculinism itself as an unnatural constraint.”⁴⁰⁸

And while the actual experience of Light and Space works—the viewer activated and immersed in the space, its highly subjective, personal experience—seem to undermine the objectifying “master gaze,” of both modernist painting and time-space geography, these phenomenological effects can be compared to humanist geography, in their dependence on a concept of place that is fundamentally structured around the masculine Same (the mappable space of the works physical contours) and the feminine Other (the ineffable experience of place that lies beyond description). In other words, while humanist geography attempts to address the sociality of space, its terms are still dependent on the structure and hierarchy of binaries; Rose calls this “aesthetic masculinism.”⁴⁰⁹

Indeed, in art history a similar argument is made not only by way of the Minimalist artists’ assumptions about phenomenology and embodiment which assume a white, male experience, but also in terms essential feminism which gained its ground in Los Angeles at the time of Nordman’s first room works. The Feminist Art Program, founded by Judy Chicago at California State University, Fresno (then Fresno State College) in 1970, moved in 1971 to the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia where it was co-directed by Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. The feminism espoused by Chicago and Schapiro came under fire from subsequent theoretical feminists who claimed that, in its celebration of the biological female body—Woman—it sought to reverse the terms of the binary, but in doing so only perpetuated the hegemony of its structure of Same and Other while continuing to exclude the spectrum of difference that would accommodate all women. A true and lasting resistance to masculinist discourse cannot simply replace the Same (understood as rationality, progress, public, center, visible, transparent, space, culture, city) with the Other (understood as emotion, maintenance, private, margin, invisibility, opaque, place, nature) but must displace the dualism altogether.

As we have seen in previous chapters, while it may be tempting to read Nordman and her choices as a pure inversion of the male/female, center/margin, public/private binaries that haunt both geography and art history, to do so would—like essential feminism and phenomenology—render a shallow reading that follows the same logic and power structure of patriarchy. Instead, the argument of Nordman’s works lies in the many ways they oscillate between the poles to complicate and frustrate gendered discourse and draw out the instabilities and contradictions at the core of identity itself. Her rooms—as we see in her carefully drawn plans and precise constructions—are highly rational at the level of both conception and execution. Yet the experience of them is highly contingent and personal. Some appear in highly visible, public, institutional spaces; others are hidden away in working-class neighborhoods. Those I have described as being on-location trouble these distinction even further: though embedded in the neighborhood, they remained distinctly visible to the artworld audience by virtue of institutional

⁴⁰⁷ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography and the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 22.

⁴⁰⁸ Rose, 30.

⁴⁰⁹ Rose, 61.

catalogues, maps, press releases, and the greatest artworld commodity: word-of-mouth. Each use nature—sunshine—and culture—architecture, and all are a function of context or the relation between interior and exterior. In addition refusing such binaries, in the 1970s they resisted the status quo in obvious ways that has made Nordman an important influence on artists of subsequent generations. That her unique synthesis of film, sculpture and architecture, of conceptualism and formalism, of abstraction and specificity, of aesthetic and politics, has made her work difficult to categorize and often impossible to see, is both its greatest liability and its greatest strength.

Varese

As we have already seen, *Saddleback Mountain* caught the attention of the Italian Count Giuseppe Panza di Biumo, whose extensive collection of American minimalist art housed in his Villa in Varese just north of Milan already included site-specific installations by Irwin, Turrell, Bruce Nauman, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Sol Lewitt. Nordman visited Panza and his wife Giovanna at Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza in 1974, and agreed to make a work in the former stables there.⁴¹⁰ *Varese* (1975), Nordman insists, is the only room she has ever made for a private residence—and she did so with the explicit understanding that the whole building was intended to become a museum (which it has since). (Figs. 64–66) But it was not enough that the work would eventually be available to the public as part of a museum. As part of her utopic vision that her works be accessible to a wide-usership, Nordman negotiated with Panza that, “in the time that [Villa Varese] was still a personal dwelling, it was possible for any person to make an appointment to visit.”⁴¹¹ Even when attending to the material reality and conservation of the work, Nordman maintains an attention to time and space in her “maintenance request” to Panza: “Once a year repaint floors and scuff-marks on walls, each year on June 20.”⁴¹² (Fig. 67) While her request might seem purely symbolic, the necessity of fresh paint for the success of her works is not to be underestimated. And if the work is repainted on the same day when the sun is strongest, suggests that it restored all at once to its maximum effect.

Paradoxically, what was initially deemed by Nordman to be a conceptual constraint—Varese as a private site—has actually afforded more access to her work as it remains the only extant room work from Nordman’s early career. “No still image can convey the effect of this work,” says curator and scholar Kirk Varnedoe of *Varese*. He continues:

From the stable of Panza’s villa, I was admitted into a dark antechamber, which led into an utterly dark room. I sat and sat and sat, watching absolute darkness, trying to figure out what was going on. I had no idea of the dimensions of the room. After three or four minutes, when my eyes had adjusted to the darkness, I became aware of a wall at the far end of the room. Now that I understood the parameters of my situation, I felt more comfortable. But when I walked toward the wall, it completely dissolved. I

⁴¹⁰ For an overview of Panza’s collecting goals and interaction with artists, see Christopher Knight, *Art of the Sixties and Seventies: The Panza Collection* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988).

⁴¹¹ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 10.

⁴¹² Maria Nordman, “Maintenance Request for Varese,” Panza Papers, Getty Research Institute.

suddenly realized that what I had taken to be a wall was nothing more than a thin sliver of light introduced through a slot in the side wall, daylight falling across the side of the room and hitting the dust motes suspended in the air. Once this “wall” dissolved, I could see into the far end of a room, which was much deeper than it had appeared a few seconds earlier...what seemed like a solid plane turned out to be empty space.⁴¹³

Via Melzo

While working out the plans for the work at Villa Varese, Nordman created another work in Milan. (Fig. 68) For a about a month *Via Melzo* (1974) occupied Galleria Toselli which, since moving to 34 Via Melzo in 1971, was dedicated to showing work by both Italian Arte Povera as well as conceptual artists from New York and Los Angeles. Its exhibitions in the early 1970s included Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth, Lawrence Weiner, Hanne Darboven, Jan Dibbets, Joan Jonas, Richard Serra, Dan Graham, Michael Asher, Trisha Brown, Gordon Matta-Clark, John Baldessari, On Kawara, Daniel Buren, and Richard Tuttle.

But because the gallery was located on a non-descript block in a working-class neighborhood, *Via Melzo* echoed the earlier works in Nordman’s own studio space in Santa Monica. As such, its siting within the gallery makes it institutionally framed, but it avoids the overdetermination usually associated with viewing art in the “white cube” because the gallery itself, unmarked and embedded in the neighborhood, was barely visible as a space of art. But unlike other works that created a coevalness between gallery and work—like Michael Asher’s intervention at the Claire Copley Gallery, or earlier, Yves Klein’s *Le Vide*—*Via Melzo* elicited a distinct effect other than bafflement. Open daily between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. for exactly five weeks beginning on September 25, 1974, it was single room, approximately fourteen-by-ten meters, divided by two five-meter gesso walls that extended from floor to ceiling to create three distinct but connected rooms that flowed into each other in a counterclockwise direction. One entered the first, smallest room through a self-sealing, light-tight door and then proceeded through an opening on the left into the largest chamber. Here, a beam of light emanating from the third room which was adjacent to the first, transected the second room to give the illusion that it was smaller. As art critic Corinna Ferrari describes it,

The plan of the gallery has been divided into three areas: a completely dark room at the entrance of the gallery, an adjacent room, separated by a partition wall, lit by window light that is reflected on the white walls of the room, and a third space, which leads the other two, which I direct and indirect light creates two areas of different light intensity, the radius of light projecting from the window on the cutting wall-screen acts as a boundary between these two intangible but significant highlights. The exclusive use

⁴¹³ Kirk Varnedoe, *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art Since Pollock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 120.

of sunlight in the work introduces the element of the event, such as duration marked by the rhythm of a story naturally.⁴¹⁴

When the work closed on October 20, 1974, Panza not only purchased the piece for 250,000 lira, but he also paid the bill for its construction which, at 490,680 lira, cost almost double the price of the artwork.⁴¹⁵

This purchase was followed a few days later by a contract, apparently drafted by Nordman, dated October 24, 1974, which stipulates—somewhat ambiguously—that “Dr. Panza di Biumo agrees to buy the right to build ___ works at a cost of \$3000 each from Maria Nordman. Payments are to be in \$500 monthly segments, beginning November 1974. Maria Nordman will be consulted in the placement of the works and will supervise the construction for the cost of travel and personal expenses.”⁴¹⁶ Whether this contract retroactively included *Via Melzo*, *Saddleback Mountain*, and *Newport Beach*, is unclear, because over the next three years Nordman and Panza would correspond about several other possible works. In 1974, while still working out the plans for *Varese*, Nordman and Panza discussed another proposal for a work in Milan, which we have seen depended on specific angles of light to achieve its effects. Though ultimately unrealized, the artist envisioned the previously mentioned *I Giardini Pubblici*, to be, “for the presence of at least two people: There can exist two simultaneous rooms, in which each refers to the other as its constant.”⁴¹⁷ (Figs. 55, 56) However, Nordman would, the following year, create a work for a different Giardini—in Venice.

Venezia

Varese was completed in 1975 and was followed in 1976 with Nordman’s participation in the Venice Biennale which opened on July 18, 1976.⁴¹⁸ Her *Venezia* was included in Germano Celant’s ambitious *Arte Ambiente* (Ambient/Art) exhibition in the Padiglione central Giardini di Castello at the Biennale.⁴¹⁹ (Fig. 69) The first six galleries of this ambitious exhibition, designed by Gino Valle, sampled historical works from across the avant-garde—from Kandinsky to Carolee Schneemann by way of Duchamp, Rodchenko, Kurt Schwitters, Louise Nevelson, Allan Kaprow, and Warhol, among many others. The remaining eight galleries were each dedicated to a single contemporary artist and included, in sequence, Blinky Palermo, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Joseph Beuys, Sol LeWitt, Mario Merz, Bruce Nauman, Jannis Kounellis, Vito Acconci, Robert Irwin, Maria Nordman, Douglas Wheeler, and Michael Asher. Though Nordman’s work remained physically adjacent here to artists associated with the Light and Space group, overall the roster was radically heterogeneous and this provocative mix made it more

⁴¹⁴ Corinna Ferrari, “Arte e mostre: Maria Nordman, galleria Toselli, Milano, ottobre 1974,” *Casabella*, (April 1975), 15; my translation. The exhibition was also covered stateside; see, Willoughby Sharp, “Maria Nordman: Galleria Toselli,” *Avalanche* (December 1974), 14.

⁴¹⁵ Receipt of sale from Toselli Gallery dated October 27, 1974 and invoice for labor and materials from Impresa Castelli/Costruzioni Edilizie, Milan dated December 30, 1974. Presumably Nordman received only part of what Panza paid Tosselli for the work. Panza Papers, Getty Research Institute. An image of her work *Saddleback Mountain* (1973) also appeared in the Italian magazine *Casabella*, which had reviewed her work at Galerie Toselli in its April 1975 issue.

⁴¹⁶ Panza Papers, Getty Research Institute.

⁴¹⁷ Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 86.

⁴¹⁸ Germano Celant, “Ambient/Art,” in *La biennale di Venezia, Section of Visual Arts and Architecture, General Catalogue, First Volume*. (Venice: Alfieri Edizioni d’Arte, 1976), 187–201.

⁴¹⁹ Nordman was also included in the 1997 Venice Biennale.

possible to think of her “empty interiors” vis-à-vis other practices like Arte Povera—a term coined and group championed by Celant in the late 1960s. Like Minimalism and Light and Space, Arte Povera—in its reduced materiality—was devoid of specific content and because it isn’t “about” anything it can offer no fixed meaning.

Unlike the rest of the galleries in *Arte Ambiente* that flowed into each other, *Venezia* was an octagonal space accessible only from outside the building. (Figs. 70, 71) As with *Newport Beach*, visitors had to exit the building and follow a map to Nordman’s work which here too used an existing door. But where *Newport Beach* was a blindingly white open alcove, *Venezia* was a closed dark room transected by a veil of light from a slot in the door. The effect was, a critic effuses, one of, “extreme peace, coolness and tranquility so as to induce an intensely calm meditational state in the spectator...Its use of light makes is specifically reminiscent of Brancusi’s temple for an Indian Maharajah.”⁴²⁰ While this writer’s highly subjective experience of *Venezia* fixes it as a space of aestheticized perception akin to the pared-down physicality and subject-oriented tenets of Minimalist sculpture and Light and Space environments, Nordman’s work includes other dimensions more simpatico with Arte Povera’s inclusion of, “information of varying kinds, and it is this information *circulating in the open field of social relations* that in its turn generates possible meanings.”⁴²¹

Nordman’s interest in the circulation, exchange, intermingling, and suggestive reframing of both information and people is all the more evident in the images of *Venezia*. An unpublished photograph captures the stillness and cascading sheets of light across the interior darkness. (Fig. 72) Two others are centered around the square porthole in the work’s door; the first looks out to frame the leaves of a nearby tree, the second, appears to also look out at a photographer looking in. (Figs. 73, 74) But closer inspection reveals that the person with the camera in fact took the picture from the outside, his image the result of a reflective film or glass. This tactical use of reflection and the human subject both within the work, its documentation, and subsequent reformulating of its documentation into a collage, recalls some of Nordman’s rooms and photographs: Found Room: *Lincoln Boulevard* and *Pico II [workroom]* and continues the thread of inquiry into modes of perception and strategies of vision. (Figs. 4, 24, 43)

Porta Soprana

With the Biennale installed, Nordman travelled south to Genoa where she worked on another neighborhood project. Like *Via Melzo*’s patronage by Toselli Gallery in Milan, *Porta Soprana* (1976) was supported by the local Saman Gallery which facilitated her construction of an all-black room in a space below apartments, “on a Medieval walkway” the heart of the city.⁴²² (Figs. 57–59) Named for the most significant gate along the famously extensive walls of Genoa, the title reinforces the singular importance of the work’s doorway and symbolically extends Nordman’s ongoing interest in walls and histories. As recently elaborated, the door is essential to diffusing the light that gives the work its shape inside, and like *Pico II [workroom]* offers a viewing egress onto the everyday activity of the neighborhood. The double function as both gate

⁴²⁰ Simon Wilson, “The Venice Biennale,” *The Burlington Magazine*, October 1976, 724.

⁴²¹ Michael Archer, “Towards Installation,” in *Installation Art*, ed. Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 26. My emphasis.

⁴²² The exhibition was reviewed by Corinna Ferrari, “Maria Nordman: Lux Lucus: progetti per uno spazio aperto in un contesto urbano Saman gallery, Genova,” *Domus* (April 1979).

and frame has a corollary in the use of the space as well. Just as her studio on Pico Boulevard was located in a former commercial retail space, the Genoa site had also been a shop. Furthermore, the Italian word for both shop and studio is *bottega*, a rhetorical colloquialism that adds emphasis to the physical collocation of its two uses. It also draws attention to the often-downplayed commercial aspect of the artworld, a topic of institutional critique like Michael Asher's *Untitled* (1974), which, in removing the wall between the exhibition and business space, laid bare the gallery as art shop.

Porta Soprana's wide doorway, painted white on the outside, was divided longitudinally and half was occluded with a panel while the other half was left open during daylight hours for the month of September. Where reflective film on the outside of the window prevented viewers in Nordman's Santa Monica studio from being seen, in Genoa it was the darkness within the space that obscured the observer. Another important difference is that without a pane of glass, especially one that was fixed, the Genoa space was permeable not just to passersby, but also readily admitted sound, temperature—the openness of its system is literal rather than conceptual. Celant notes that this openness, “is obtained by Nordman by applying experiences which drive from a prolonged study of the reaction of the organized community to the presence of a traveller from a far-off country. So in the medieval seaport of Genoa, the attitude towards living the relationship between internal and external, space on the edge, is resolved with the abolition of the door.”⁴²³

Simultaneous Entrances

Doorways had already been an important structure in many of Nordman's rooms. For *Pico I [workroom]*, the door admitted light at eye level, and in *Venezia*, it provided a readymade frame in which to construct a slot through which light would come in. Persons entered the work through the door and once inside with it shut, it remained the entrance for the coherent beam of light. This effect was doubled by *Varese*'s two entrances and pitch interior. The following year, Nordman would continue working with multiple entryways, but these works depended on diffuse light for their effects. Having more than one door not only allowed a larger volume of light to penetrate differently and from more than one origin, it also encouraged viewers to circulate within the space.

Late in 1976, Nordman and Panza were also in discussion about another work in Milan, at the Villa Scheibler, which would use multiple doors and windows. (Fig. 75) Included on a schematized version of the architectural plans Nordman wrote: “a given room—*Villa Scheibler*—with its change of name and its change of use. The convergence of the Italian “Villa” with the German “Scheibler” would seem to offer a serendipitous, nominative collocation of Nordman's heritage and contemporaneous place. The room with its eight windows open to south. The room with eight windows open to north. With two doors for west. With two doors for east. The place of passage of every person in the building toward every other person in the building + (every other room).”⁴²⁴ Though after sending a second proposal to Panza in April 1977, *Villa Scheibler* remained unrealized, several of its key elements appear in two other works.

It was preceded by *Simultaneous Entrances from Opposite Directions of Any Two People* (1977), a drawing of which Nordman includes in *De Sculptura II* with the note, “Los Angeles

⁴²³ Celant, “Urban Nature,” 63.

⁴²⁴ Nordman plan for Villa Scheibler, 11/76, Panza Papers, Getty.

1/1977.”⁴²⁵ (Fig. 76) It is unclear whether this location and date refer to a room that was actually constructed or simply to the date of the drawing. Though it does not appear anywhere in the literature, it is entirely possible that it was realized but not seen or seen and not publicized. Though designed with angled walls along the lines of *Saddleback Mountain*, the general concept as laid out in the title would inform two works that were subsequently constructed much seen and discussed. Nordman was in Germany at the invitation of the influential dealer Konrad Fischer. Supported by his gallery, and in anticipation of her participation in Documenta 6 a few months later, Nordman created a work in Düsseldorf.

Like so many of her works in Italy and Los Angeles, *Neubrücke* (1977), was located within a residential area of town. (Fig. 77) The black-and-white panels of the door facing the titular street recall the works of Daniel Buren who used stripes as a “visual tool” to call attention to the site in which they appear.⁴²⁶ More specifically, they echo the French artist’s *Closed Show* (1968) in which the French artist placed the stripes directly on the similarly large, arched entryway of Galerie Apollinaire in Milan which remained, as the work demanded, closed for the duration of his exhibition. But where Buren’s superficial vertical striping both called out the site but barred entry to it symbolically, and his concept barred it literally, Nordman’s horizontal bands function differently. To begin with, they covered only one vertical half of the entrance; the actual door was all black which created the effect of the open door seen in *Porta Soprana*. Furthermore, there were two entryways. (Figs. 78, 79) Almost identical in images, Nordman seems to capitalize on the possibility of conflating entry and exit by cropping the photographs so as to eliminate as much contextual clues and differentiating detail. Most obviously, the door in each is on different sides. Though such a mirror image could have been achieved by flipping the negative in the printing process, close looking reveals enough inconsistencies in another kind of mirroring: the reflections from the two-way reflective film on the glass, and in other details like the outside ground, and an automatic door hinge on only one door. By comparing the images of the doors to the wider neighborhood shot, it is clear that the entry with the door on the right is on *Neubrücke* proper; we know this larger image is not inverted because the lettering on the building façade is correct. This is all in accord with the plan which is symmetrical and accessible along the north-south axis. (Fig. 80) This conceptual architectural mirroring then requires that the doors also be reversals of, rather than identical to, each other.

This interest and attention to doubling, inversion, dislocation, and the productive wandering—a kind of the *détournement*—continues inside. (Fig. 81) Here, unlike the acute/oblique angles of *Simultaneous Entrances from Opposite Directions of Any Two People*, for *Neubrücke*, Nordman erected two walls, each perpendicular to the door, but parallel to each other. Located in a narrow room with an east-west orientation, the walls created three equal-sized rooms. Regardless from which entry, visitors moved diagonally from the glass door past the first wall into the darker center room where abundant diffuse light from the glass doors distorted its spatial volume. Though the sense of the middle room as an inner sanctum was accentuated by the fact that viewers could neither look in nor out; it was not a destination of solitary contemplation but rather, as the double entrance/exit evidence, a throughway of circulation.

⁴²⁵ Nordman, *De Sculptura*, 11.

⁴²⁶ For a discussion of the political dimension of Buren’s work see, Daniel Buren, *Les couleurs: sculptures/Les forms: peintures*, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Halifax: NADCAD with Paris: Musée national d’art modern, Centre Pompidou, 1981).

To wit, the artist envisioned two viewers—or even better, passersby—entering at a time, preferably one from each entrance to encounter each other within Nordman’s architectural détournement.⁴²⁷ That the space sought to dislocate or passersby from their habitual routines and complacent encounters with the world is evident in Nordman’s photocollages of the work’s interior and exterior. (Fig. 82) If the different doors were difficult to disambiguate, the consistent white walls throughout the interiors made them, if not physically, then experientially and virtually identical—all the more so when the images are inverted. Here, the tactics seen in the photo-fragments of the Fire Performances are taken one step further: because the walls extend from floor to ceiling, they are symmetrical and so inverting them vertically results in their being read as a right-side up image of the opposite entry. Complicating the relations between inside and outside, Nordman inset miniature images of the doors within the images of the walls, suggesting that that particular interior view is just inside the door pictured. As determined in the analysis of the orientation of the doors, the smaller embedded, rotated images are the correctly corresponding exteriors. And yet, adding to the visual riddle is the possibility that any of the negatives of the photographs were flipped.

However, without definitive indicators of conventional architecture like baseboards, or methodical close-looking—the science of art history—the images, for the average reader, float in a state of indeterminacy. Where such neutrality was the goal in the modernist development of the gallery as “white cube,” here in pushing contextless to its logical conclusion, Nordman reinvests neutrality with a politics.⁴²⁸ As the corollary for, and along with the dislocating experience within the work, the suspended state and ambiguity of *Neubrücke* along with its democratic access and equity of axis can be read as a tactical resistance to strategies of planning and their implicit hierarchies of power—exhibition, architectural, urban and otherwise. A final collage makes explicit these multiple collapses, inversion and reversals: an identical print of the single view of the entryway seen earlier has overlaid on the wall just in front of the door, a floorplan of the work. (Fig. 83) By inscribing the photograph of the physical space with its architectural drawing, Nordman makes plain her conceptual plan.

Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse

Like *Venezia* at the Biennale, Nordman’s work for Documenta 6 also inspired comparisons to the high churches of modernism. For *Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse* (1977), “she chose a store[front space] away from the park in Kassel to create a little chapel in which one becomes attentive to the way she controls light and shadow. This is a Ronchamp...”⁴²⁹ (Fig. 84) This comparison is at once apt, given, as we have seen, Richard Neutra’s significant influence on Nordman. Yet, like most contemporary critical takes, it does not acknowledge the conceptual dimensions of the work’s location and openness. *Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse* continues the model of a room with two entrances. (Fig. 85) What the writer takes as a withdrawal for the sake of contemplation is as much a withdrawal from the usual systems of artworld reification and exchange. More importantly, the significance of Nordman’s reorientation of her work—and its audience—from exhibition center to margin, is not just a gesture of institutional or ideological

⁴²⁷ See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* [1967] (New York: Zone, 1995).

⁴²⁸ See Brian O’Doherty. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.)

⁴²⁹ David Shapiro, “A View of Kassel,” *Artforum*, September 1977, 59; Nordman was also included in Documenta 7 (1982) and Documenta 8 (1987).

critique, but a move on which its conceptual meaning as, “a chance entry place for any two persons and the light and sound from two doors,” literally depends.⁴³⁰ Indeed, without the context and contingency of its location in the mid-sized, middleclass city of Kassel, titled after a street itself named for another German city, the work would indeed be reduced to an aesthetic Ronchamp or a purely perceptual Ganzfeld. And yet, despite their distance and conceptual persistence, these works, and others like *12 S. Raymond Street* in Pasadena, remain, by way of the networks of publicity, publication, and shared publics, discursive institutional sites.

A significant difference between *Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse*, *Neubrücke*, and *Simultaneous Entrances from Opposite Directions of Any Two People*, was that its two entries were on the same side of the building rather than at opposing ends. In order to channel the light from the doors, which abutted the exterior perimeters of the building, Nordman constructed an interior wall perpendicular to each entryway. This simple gesture resulted in corridors that led viewers and sunshine into a single large room, transforming the place both spatially and socially.

5 Public Proposals for an Open Place

The following year, the exhibition, *5 Public Proposals for an Open Place* at Rosamund Felsen Gallery in Los Angeles from October 14 to December 1, 1978 laid out Nordman’s vision for a series of works to be sited outside but still within an urban environment. (Figs. 86, 87) Each proposal consisted of a two-sided drawing—a schematized plan on the recto and its specification on the verso. Rather than architecture as a way to delimit space and light, and expand awareness, these plans describe specific geometric configurations of plantings and open space. Each work was conceived with and named for a particular tree species native to the West Coast or Southwest—*California Fan Palm*; *Mexican Fan Palm*; *Pinyon Pine*; *Coulter Pine*; *Blue Hesper Palm*—some of which Nordman cites from the environs of her studio. For example, she refers to the Coulter Pine, seen on north side of the 1200 block of San Vicente Boulevard, while the Blue Hesper Palm was sited on Maple Street from Lincoln Boulevard to 17th Street.⁴³¹ The idea of growing trees is in line with the continuity she ascribes across iterations of her works and the notions of deep space she discusses in her *Saddleback* interview with Barbara Haskell and Hal Glicksman.⁴³²

Ground Owl/Ground Squirrel Park

Though the *5 Public Proposals* were never realized, another related work was *Ground Owl/Ground Squirrel Park* is a pair of “deambulatories built of trees” which continues to grow on an expanse between the California State College, Bakersfield and the highway in central southern California. (Figs. 88, 89) The work was made possible by financial support from Stanley and Elise Grinstein, and, for its execution in 1978, Nordman worked closely with CSCB professor George Ketterl—with whom she had participated in the *What Time Is It?* exhibition at Newport Harbor Museum of Art six years earlier. In one deambulatory, two rows of Sequoiadendron Giganteum have been planted in an oval. The resulting footpath between the

⁴³¹ Email exchange with Rosamund Felsen, March 19, 2013.

⁴³² Haskell, *Saddleback Mountain*, u.p..

ovoid alley of trees is about six-feet wide. Nearby lies the second deambulatory, a similar but square planting of ginkgo bilobas whose interior dimensions run to thirty meters per side.

While the pairing seemingly sets up a series of dichotomies—movement/stasis, culture/nature, beginnings/ends, inside/outside, empty/full—the work is nothing but open-ended. “It is not only art and nature that are interrelated in a differentiated way,” notes art historian Erich Franz about Nordman’s open space works, “but also the gradations of ‘cultivated’ and ‘uncultivated nature—gradations which in turn connect up with the further gradations of nature formed by art. Here, everything—every level of the formed as well as the unformed—is contained in everything: the boundaries of ‘art’ have been dissolved.”⁴³³ It is no longer the timeless but static statue on the pedestal, but living sculpture and, as time progresses, its elements—trees, grass—and internal relations change in ways that keep the work in constant flux, never fixed formally or conceptually. Whereas time in Nordman’s room works was made visible, if abstractly, through light and in the specific physical and geographic conditions of the work, in *Ground Owl/Ground Squirrel Park* time is in more tangible evidence. Visitors can literally see the physical changes in the growth of the trees; they offer living proof of time’s passing between 1978 and the moment in which the work is encountered. And though this mutability does make the work contingent, it does so in ways different from Nordman’s interior spaces.

The room works located in the neighborhood depended on chance in two ways, one of which translates into the open space works. First, as we have seen, the room work needed to be discovered by the passerby. Second, once inside the work, because it included the ever-changing elements of sunlight and ambient sound, the experience of it was by design and definition very different for each visitor. Where this contingency was encouraged within the parameters of the individual/subjective experience—“one person at a time”—the open space works, by contrast, were designed for contingent interaction between people as much as between person and the work. Because it concerns itself with the growth of the trees and the space those trees, in forming a walking park, make possible for human engagement—visitors might “run into” each other—it brings together in dramatic contrast two notions of time: the moment, as underscored by a chance encounter, and ecological time, dramatized here by a species whose survival exceeds the human “life” time by at least one power of ten.

Public Proposals for an Open Place

The 5 *Public Proposals for an Open Place* shown at Rosamund Felsen Gallery in 1978 were subsequently included the following year in the 73rd American Exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago.⁴³⁴ In both exhibitions, the double-sided drawings were presented in flat files whose drawers could be opened by viewers. (Fig. 90) This was in contrast to the intervening exhibition of related drawings that took place in Genoa at the Saman Gallery. Here both recto and verso images were visible by virtue of their display on glass shelves. But rather than sandwich them between two panes of glass and mount them vertically, Nordman laid them flat in order to keep “their surfaces parallel to the earth’s surface.”⁴³⁵ This care and attention to the

⁴³³ Erich Franz, “Maria Nordman: De Civitate, 1991,” http://www.lwl.org/skulptur-projekte-download/muenster/97/nordma/k_e.htm

⁴³⁴ The exhibition, curated by Anne Rorimer, ran June 9 through August 5, 1979 and was accompanied by the catalogue, *73rd American Exhibition, The Art Institute of Chicago* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1979).

⁴³⁵ Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s*, 226.

relation between the position of the drawing, suggests that they have some kind of literal correspondence with the place that exceeds their function as sketches or plans. In keeping with the notion of the portable idea, the drawings can be understood as coeval conceptually the work itself, and therefore, following Nordman, should be positioned accordingly, if not in place, then in space.

In Chicago, the California drawings were joined by another, site-specific arboreal work, *Public Proposal for An Open Place* (1979), which “envisioned that the large, 150-foot long rectangular exhibition space in the [Art Institute of Chicago]’s Morton Wing be transposed as a four-sided allée of native trees. Unlike walled-in museum spaces, enclosures made by walls of trees would be open to the sky for public access on a 24-hour basis.”⁴³⁶ Not actually physically executed, Nordman’s work here was in good conceptual company. Like Germano Celant’s *Arte Ambiente* exhibition at the 1976 Venice Biennale, curator Anne Rorimer’s Chicago catalogue essay also traced a lineage of conceptual art and “environments” back to the Italian Futurists. She brought together artists from the American coasts whose diverse practices were particularly preoccupied with time and space and place. For example, “The grids of Agnes Martin,” writes Rorimer, “suggest a universal abstract mental space while Maria Nordman appropriates natural elements toward the delineation of concrete physical space.”⁴³⁷ More to the point, Nordman’s “delineation of concrete space” was predicated on inversion. Like Michael Asher’s now-iconic work in the exhibition *George Washington* which relocated a weathered, outdoor “public” sculpture from the building’s façade into a gallery of contemporaneous paintings, statues, and furniture, Nordman also proposed bringing the “outside” in. Asher’s gesture has largely been read through the lens of institutional critique, it has also been seen to re-engage with Minimalism’s theatricality. In line with this second reading of Asher’s work as an “embodied encounter,” the formal disposition of Nordman’s allée of trees would—like Robert Morris’s columns—create a heightened awareness in the viewer of their own bodies.

Through a discussion of his own work included in *73rd American Exhibition*, Dan Graham, explains the difference:

Unlike examples of ‘Minimal’ art environments, ‘West-Coast, USA’ perceptual environments using physiological effects of natural light, or post-Bauhaus architectural use of pure materials or the material elements of its construction *Public Space/Two Audiences* is not entirely abstract or materialistic. ‘Minimal’ art as well as environmental/perceptual art (of the kind built by such artists as Robert Irwin or Maria Nordman) would reduce the individual spectator’s perception of the materials, structure or sense-data to a purely phenomenological presence. Ultimately, this work depends on the construction of a privileged position for the single viewer’s perception. The difference between the two forms is that in ‘Minimal’ art the art object is objectified and factually material, while environmental art constructs the spectator as transcendently subjective. Both forms depend on perceptual

⁴³⁶ Rorimer, “Reality in Early Works by Maria Nordman,” u.p.

⁴³⁷ Rorimer, *73rd American Exhibition*, 13. The exhibition also included Dan Graham’s *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976) and works by Robert Barry, Michael Heizer, On Kawara, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Allen Ruppersberg, Ed Ruscha, Robert Ryman, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, Frank Stella, and Lawrence Weiner.

immediacy: a phenomenological consciousness which connects the perceiving subject to what is perceived.⁴³⁸

But the rest of Graham's description does not apply to Nordman's work, because like *Public Space/Two Audiences*, it—despite his misreading—is neither completely abstract nor completely materialistic: “Both ‘Minimal’ art and environmental art deny connotative, social meanings; the art experience is pure; there is no acknowledgement of social or historical mediation or temporality (especially in the case of environmental art). This is a restatement of Kantian idealism, which separates the experience of the purely aesthetic form from the socially utilitarian. In this new form of Kantian idealism the isolated spectator's ‘subjective’ consciousness-in-itself replaces the art object to be perceived-for-itself; his/her perception is the product of the art.”⁴³⁹ More obviously, the trees provoke a reconsideration of the relationship between nature and architecture, a theme that, as we have seen, defined the work that Nordman opened twelve days later at the Berkeley Art Museum in June 1979.

6/21/79 Berkeley

The piece for which Nordman is perhaps best known is *6/21/79 Berkeley*, which has already been discussed with regard to its images and catalogue production in Chapter Two. Yet another photograph illustrated the cover of *Artforum* in March 1980 and was featured inside with a lengthy article by her continuing supporter, the curator Germano Celant, who also contributed an essay to the exhibition catalogue.⁴⁴⁰ (Fig. 91) Also called *Berkeley*, and as previously mentioned, Nordman's piece was the fourth and final installment of *Andre, Buren, Irwin, Nordman: Space as Support*, a serialized exhibition of site-specific work organized by University Art Museum, Berkeley Curator Mark Rosenthal. The work by each artist responded in some way to the museum whose building is itself a high church to Art Brut designed by Mario Ciampi and completed in 1970. For her part, Nordman sought to create an “open work” that would last less than single day—from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the summer solstice of 1979, for which it is named—and would include the interactions of people, light, and sounds within the space. (Fig. 18) To demarcate and illuminate the building as context and frame—to call out its institutional strategies—Nordman emptied the museum's lower galleries and covered its expansive glass walls with translucent sheets of red, blue, green, and black acetate.

To maximize the effects of the colored sunlight—and to integrate them with the space—the floor was covered in white vinyl, and the lights in the entire building were turned off. But to emphasize the work's openness—its contingency on the interaction between inside and outside of the museum—all doors (including emergency exits) were adjusted so as to permit free access from either side. “With the day's first light,” recalls critic Robert Atkins,

⁴³⁸ Dan Graham, *Two Way Mirror Power; Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 156–57.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Celant, “Urban Nature,” 62–67. Other contemporary articles about *Berkeley* include: Robert Atkins, “Light Paints a Museum: University Art Museum, Berkeley,” *Artweek* (July 28, 1979), 1; Germano Celant, “Robert Irwin, Maria Nordman: Space in Brackets,” *Art Press International* (November 1981), 16–19; Fischer, H. “Space as Support: Work by Daniel Buren, Robert Irwin, Carl Andre, Maria Nordman,” *Artforum* (October 1979), 64–66; James Thomas Merle, “CLOSE UP: Maria Nordman's Installation Art,” *Artforum* (October 2011).

the floor began to glow an arctic, pearly white. Reflected light gradually made the upper galleries among the brightest spots in the museum. As the sun rose higher, the floor became increasing[ly] dissociated from the surrounding concrete architecture. All sorts of romantic early morning associations—frozen moats, Brueghel snowscapes—were vanquished by the bright, shadowless, midday light. The transition from light to darkness was equally dramatic and highlighted by the play of shadow, colored acetate and nearby neon signs on architectural surfaces... The natural light caused perceptual changes involving not only the museum structure and enclosed space, but the permanent collection displayed in the upper galleries, as well. Hofmann paintings grew more garish, a Bacon canvas more sinister. Simple lessons in looking—such as the reflective/absorptive relationship of light and pigment—abounded. The transformation of the museum and the ostensible absence of art profoundly affected many viewers disinhibiting some and engaging a surprising number of others.

Nordman later told me that she chose to work at the museum because she ‘wanted to work on a building where people would be at different heights in relation to each other... Here the multiple points of view compounded, rather than diminished, the intensity of the perceptual pleasures derived.

Through the most economical of means Nordman created an arena for experience with all the existential implications of such terminology. Inquiring into the relationships of the individual and her environment, the work blurred the two, typically (for Nordman) rendering reality the most subjective of propositions.⁴⁴¹

Sited as it was in a building comprised of open architecture, fanned cantilevered balconies, and many windows and doors, *Berkeley* encouraged the circulation of diffuse light and people. This expansiveness enacted the utopic inclusivity of her solitary neighborhood room works in a more intentional way. More directed in terms of the time and population, *Berkeley*, offered a social experience and made permeable the museum’s interior, connecting it directly with the exterior world. Given the flexible nature and colors of the acetate—film, and the ways in which the chromatic light would envelope those within the space, projecting light onto bodies and reinforcing a shared sociality, it’s possible to think of Berkeley as a variation of her early *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present* (1967) and *Film Rooms* (1967–68). The use of the flexible film on the windows—skins of color—seems particularly significant both for its contrast to her many preceding works constructed from rigid black or white walls, and to Ciampi’s concrete slabs. But just as Nordman’s rooms use minimal architectural vocabulary to lever openness, so too do Ciampi’s uncanny and vertiginous cantilevers challenge the grounded boundedness of modernist spaces. *Berkeley* can be seen to take up aspects of their false promise of transparency and failed utopianism.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Robert Atkins, “Sculpture on the Grand Scale,” *Studio International* (June 1982), 14.

⁴⁴² See Anthony Vidler’s chapter, “Transparency,” in *The Architectural Uncanny*.

Untitled: Salita Tre Magi

Later that year, as part of her exhibition of the *5 Public Proposals for An Open Place* at the Saman Gallery, Nordman created outside pieces in Genoa that signaled another turn in her work. Rather than planting trees as her primary materials to create outdoor pieces, for *Untitled: Salita Tre Magi* (1979) Nordman embedded the landscape with a square filled local material, a strategy seen in other works in Italy and Germany. (Fig. 92) The works transposed the proportion and shape of the gallery floorplan into an open space in the city. Comprised of shiny, white marble stones, amidst the weeds of a medieval neighborhood, the sizable square conflated two kinds of concomitantly commercial and social spheres—the private art gallery and the public market square—and drew attention visually and socially for the twenty-four hour period it existed.⁴⁴³

This shift from living, sculptural material of trees to more two-dimensional surfaces made from materials of urban construction or waste further complicates the relations between culture and nature. The square recurs throughout Nordman's practice, from the Film Rooms and floor plans to the plantings of ginkgo biloba, and the artist's particular attention to the degrees and implications of its imagined volume and flatness, can be understood within the art histories of abstraction and the avant-garde. If for Kasmir Malevich and the Suprematists, the square, with its neutral, platonic shape was a place of redirection and reduction—shifting painting from its representational agency to its purest and most immediate materiality of pigment on flat canvas—for Nordman the square's flatness became a site, not of increased isolation and detachment, but of multiple engagement.

In these park settings, the square shape may be seen to echo the function of the public square—the piazza or platz—a place of social gathering. Here the three-dimensional singular experience (“for one person alone”) has been collapsed, like modernist painting, into a two-dimensional surface, but one for meeting rather than seeing. The imagined possibility for encounter is seen in a photograph whose aerial view is equivalent to the architectural plan view and serves to both illustrate the flatness of the work and, as an equivalent to the architectural plan view, to suggest that the work also functions as a room, an open-air Raum.

Open City

Nordman's piazzas in Genoa had their cognates in a trio of platzes that same year in Düsseldorf. Working with the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, Nordman sited *Open City* (1979), a trio of works in a small meadow at the Robert-Lehr-Ufer, near the docks of the Rhine River. For the first, Nordman used pieces of milled wood to square off an area parallel to the river, and then graded it and filled it with red iron slag. (Fig. 93) Along each of the four, approximately four-meter edges within the square, she placed a white park bench. Centered and facing inward, the benches created an area in which people could easily enter and sit and converse. Depending on the direction their bench faced, participants would have direct views of the river or the meadow, or partial views of both.

In some important respects, the second work in the sequence doubles the first. Here, two squares of the same dimension were situated near a river; but rather than the Rhine, it was the

⁴⁴³ Rorimer, *New Art of the 1960s and 1970s*, 225.

Düssel. (Fig. 94) In an open area along a walk at the intersection of Grafenberger Allee and Altenbergstrasse one encountered the first: a large square mosaic made from white sandstone. (Fig. 95) The rough-hewn cobblestones were laid fifteen deep to form a wide perimeter border within which a smaller square was filled with stones set in a diagonal pattern. Further along the walk, under the chestnut trees, was a second square, identical in design, but made of black basalt. (Fig. 96)

Where the riverside bench of the first installment and the two cobblestones pieces of the second could, “remain as part of the public domain as long as the above conditions are met,” Nordman’s third installment for *Open City* was more prescribed conceptually and temporally. In this case, two squares, measuring 4.53 meters per side, were created and maintained within the Public Gardens for exactly one year beginning on September 22, 1979. (Fig. 97) After this continuous period, the work could subsequently be recreated only for one day at a time, and, again, only if Nordman’s original conditions were completely met. The first square was filled with white ash derived from black slag from the bottom of the sea, which must be raked daily from east to west. (Fig. 98) Conversely, black ash from the burning of local city trash will be raked in a north-south direction with the second square. (Fig. 99) The squares were aligned along their corners—like two diamonds—with the white on the left and the black on the right—and the texture of their raking by the Department of Streets and Gardens was exactly perpendicular. (Fig. 100) As a highly stylized and carefully considered landscape that calls attention to place and experience, the raked ash squares—especially the slag from the bottom of the sea—recalls Japanese Zen rock gardens whose whorling gravel represented the ripples of water. But unlike these walled-off places for quiet mediation, Nordman set the ash and its wooden frame flush with the surrounding grass, which, like crushed gravel paths within western gardens, made them easily walked across. Thus rather than retreats, the public squares were loci of travel and sociality, their manicured waves disrupted by foot traffic. The complex relations between nature and humans is further metaphorized by the materials. The detritus and waste of industrialization, slag and trash, have been recycled and repurposed into materials of “fine art” that points to both high modernist abstraction and anticipates gestures of social practice.

Washington and Beethoven

The *Open Proposal* deambulatories of trees in Bakersfield and Chicago, the *Open City* parkworks in Düsseldorf, and the Berkeley museum work suggest a radical shift from inside to outside, from personal experience to communal connection, from training light to diffusing it. Yet, alongside these works in the late 1970s, Nordman again returned to the discrete room in the neighborhood, and to Los Angeles in particular. In 1979, with the support of the Los Angeles Institute for Contemporary Art, she created *Washington and Beethoven*, a work that can be seen to gather many of Nordman’s strategies and concerns from the preceding years. (Figs. 1, 101) Open for regular hours from mid-May to mid-June, it remained in place through September—a span of time that overlapped with the Chicago, Düsseldorf, and Berkeley works. Like her other on- and in-location works, it was unmarked, and during regular hours its door was ajar, open to the passerby. After hours, and between June and September, the work was still accessible, but required getting the key from a delicatessen across the street. Art critic Wade Saunders describes the piece in the December 1979 issue of *Art in America*:

This summer [Nordman] had a piece at 12839 Washington Boulevard in Culver City, a neglected area of Los Angeles...Walking by Nordman's space cold, you wouldn't know how to get in. From the street her installation looked like a modish store or gallery preparing to open. A new, aluminum-framed glass wall was set about ten feet in from the front of the building; a light gray concrete floor inclined up toward the glass; the side walls and ceiling were sheetrocked and painted white. Two narrow doors were set in the center of the glass; one was covered with reflective film.

Unlocking a door I walked into an unmarked space about 15 feet deep by 11 wide by 10 high. Dots momentarily floated in front of my eyes. A narrow wall protruded from either side to demarcate a second room, longer and slightly narrower in this back the air was palpable, like radiant white smoke, like bad summer smog. Depth was hard to fix; the room felt cool with seemingly curved walls. I know the room was rectilinear but my eyes wouldn't see it that way. As my eyes adjusted to the uniform semibrightness, the back wall became flat and separate, like a giant white painting, and the upper junctures of wall and ceiling were discernible. Each surface now appeared to be a white or off-white of different value, with occasional fugitive sensations making them look pastel. My perception of the space changed depending on the light outside, and changed if the treated doors were left ajar instead of being closed.

When my eyes had adjusted I began to hear street sounds again, began to come back to the neighborhood. My body relaxed. I had the piece to myself. The space felt secure, a personal turf from which I could stare out without being noticed. It was an urban cave, like a church open daily for mediation, rest and prayer.⁴⁴⁴

The physical construction of the work with its sheetrock walls and reflective glass reaches back to the early studio works like *Pico I [anteroom]* and drawing plans for this work, "show her subtle adjustments...of reducing the storefront to a flat glass surface flush with the street and the addition of two walls that projected from the existing side walls to make the entry to a passageway."⁴⁴⁵ Included in the 2011 exhibition, *Everything Loose Will Land: 1970s Art and Architecture in Los Angeles* at the MAK Center for Art and Architecture in Los Angeles, whose curator refers to Nordman as a "conceptual architect" and avers that rather than, "seek continuity between interior and exterior, [she] appeared to make the space more accessible to the public but also darkened and visually elongated the space as if to make it perpetually out of reach."⁴⁴⁶ Such a psychologically-charged and theoretically-removed reading is at productively odds with its location in a "battered stucco storefront" next to an awning company on Washington Boulevard,

⁴⁴⁴ Wade Saunders, "Reviews: Maria Nordman on Washington Boulevard," *Art in America*, December 1979, 121.

⁴⁴⁵ Sylvia Lavin, *Everything Loose Will Land: 1970s Art and Architecture in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles and Nürnberg, Germany: MAK Center and Verlag für modern Kunst Nürnberg, 2013), 281.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

which says Saunders, “is used as a throughway to the beach. You don’t usually stop or walk along it...The accompanying illustration would be truer to experience if it showed several cars whizzing past and the sidewalk deserted...is similar to Nordman’s description of Pico as “stretch[ing] from the Pacific Ocean of Santa Monica to the center of Los Angeles.”⁴⁴⁷

What’s more, it is named for an intersection in West Los Angeles whose two streets echo the confluence of two different kinds of time that concern themselves with history and identity. Washington and Beethoven with its evocation of American and European history—and the intersection of cultures, Nordman’s to be precise—is symbolic of what Julia Kristeva calls “linear, *cursive* history.”⁴⁴⁸ In Nordman’s discursive work, cursive history is literally mapped onto a predominantly non-European neighborhood, which can be understood by way of Kristeva’s other time, “a monumental time (the nomenclature from Nietzsche) that incorporates these supranational sociocultural groupings within even larger entities.”⁴⁴⁹ This idea of monumental time reaches back to Nordman’s positioning of *Saddleback Mountain* within “deep time,” one that is prehistoric in the sense that it predates written histories, or any human quantification—naming, that is—of time or space. Indeed, by using time, space, and light to create conditions for open, continuous works “instated” in the world, she reverses the traditional terms of epistemology and art history. In her works, meaning is, like light, not, “a fixed location” but “the translator and the translocator” across time, space, languages.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Saunders, 121; Nordman, *De Sculptura II*, 10.

⁴⁴⁸ Julia Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia University Press), 352–53.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Nordman, “Discussion Details on Pico Boulevard,” *De Sculptura II*, 61.

Conclusion: The Contingency and Continuity of Memory

Each particular erases the luminous clarity of a general idea...a word is an elegy to what it signifies.

—Robert Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas”⁴⁵¹

Asked whether they have heard of Maria Nordman, the answer is often, “who?” But for those who are familiar with her work, the response is usually effusive and often includes a vague description of the work she did at the Berkeley Art Museum. This is true whether they experienced the work or not. Indeed, the subject of recent reflections, Berkeley seems to live on in both the memory of those who saw it and the imaginations of those who didn’t. It is also often asked why it has never been “recreated”, especially around the thirty-five year anniversary of the work in 2014 which came at a time when the Berkeley Art Museum was preparing to permanently leave its landmark building due to seismic safety issues. The seemingly missed opportunity to re-install a work acknowledged to have been historically significant both in the museum’s programming and in the legitimization of site-specific art, was not for Nordman’s lack of desire.⁴⁵²

And the idea of such a return raises some interesting questions, not least of which is rhetorical. Where, as we have seen with the work first instantiated as Newport Beach has appeared in three subsequent versions, each of those looked completely different. The variable morphology and conceptual consistency, were very much in line with Nordman’s ideas about continuity. Indeed, each iteration maintained fidelity to the terms of its relations, both with regard to site—all were museums—and its internal relations—the ways in which played with interiority and access and depended the specific intersection of location and time to bring about specific visual and social effects.

Constant recalibration occurs not just within the terms of Nordman’s works, but also with regard to the media used to manifest the work, and between the works themselves. That this plasticity occurs over decades reflects Nordman’s changing responses to her work and how to make it most visible in the world without conceptual compromise. For example, the 2011 iteration of Film Room: *Smoke* at LACMA had an anteroom with chairs, and vitrines of her books. While the books, as catalogues of her oeuvre, offered a context for *Smoke*, they too registered, by virtue of the white gloves with which they were to be handled, as discrete works of art. Yet, the space and objects exceeded a mere an ancillary reading room for ephemera to constitute a work itself. The stark whiteness of the walls and the chairs echoed early room works in her studio and created a milieu for watching and being watched in the performance of everyday museum going. It also functioned as a “green room” for the Film Room, a place where participants would wait their turn to enter Film Room: *Smoke*, which Nordman specified as being, ““for two person at a time,”” in which “the actors in the film [are] viewers, and viewers of the artwork [are] actors.”⁴⁵³

In line with Nordman’s continued interest in inside and outside, and her insistence on democratic access to her work, her two spaces interior to the museum were complemented and extended by an exterior work. A seemingly Minimalist, but substantial black metal sculpture, *2-Na* (2011), is a three-dimensional rendition of the floor plan for *Film Room/Projection Room*

⁴⁵¹ Robert Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas,” *Praise* (New York: Ecco Press, 1999).

⁴⁵² On more than one occasion, Nordman asked if I would approach BAM/PFA about the idea of recreating *6/21/79 Berkeley*.

⁴⁵³ Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Press Release, August 2011).

(1966). (Figs. 102, 11) Located semi-permanently in the adjacent plaza, a site Nordman chose because it is approached from Wilshire Boulevard via the Rodin Sculpture Garden, a through way, “an entry directly from the sun to the *Film Room: Smoke*— itself in part made by the sun.”⁴⁵⁴ Here, even when the museum is closed, people can walk through the walls, their outlines framing everyday gestures as part of the artwork, turning unsuspecting visitors into participants.

Occlusions and Larger Implications

Works like the recent reiteration of *Film Room: Smoke*, which may at first seem like constraints art historical methodological constraints in studying Nordman’s work, are possible affordances, opportunities to think of art historical research and production beyond the traditional modes of presenting and publishing works. Indeed the complex, interconstellated ideas in Nordman’s work and their commitment to inclusivity and inconclusivity make the linear format of writing and the singular trajectory of analysis, foreclose. Like the sun that Nordman’s architectural interventions occlude, stop down the sun so as to make certain effects visible, so too does a particular reading of those work, like this one, cast light on aspects of the work, but in doing so foreclose others. This of course is true of all histories, but it seems more pronounced, more problematic with work that was designed to be ephemeral, to escape the binds of mere and insufficient description. Following Robert Hass, all language—but especially those constrained by conventions of scholarship (the analytical essay, the documentary photograph) can only deliver somewhat moribund conclusions. Paradoxically, it is the echt-academic trope of the footnote that seems to offer the most freedom in making non-linear connection, in taking greater risks, in casting nets beyond the thread of a tightly wound argument. And yet, figures and facts are the tools of the art historical trade and in resisting and complicating them, as we have seen, Nordman has partially occluded herself from those histories.

If conceptually Nordman’s rooms are concerned with the ways in which science, politics and cultural conventions and constructions occlude seeing and knowing, their literal construction depends on occlusion to be visible and understood. It is in occluding the sun, in blocking it, and stopping it down, that its light becomes intense enough to produce the effects seen. With sufficient intention and intensity it is then the subject of attention.

It has been my goal with this dissertation to provide sufficient intention, intensity, detail, and analysis so as to give the work of Maria Nordman the attention it deserves. What I offer here is a first attempt at bringing together a large swath of her early works. And in their chronology and description, to draw out some affinities, dissonances and to map them against their contemporaneous cultural and geopolitical situations. Given that, regardless of medium, all of Nordman's works inevitably pivot on and in location, this dissertation explores the ways in which the works are specifically sited in space and time. It has been my general conclusion that Nordman is not, and never has been a Light and Space artist. Rather, she is an artist of time and place who explores variable conditions of light as a way of revealing the epistemological and hegemonic constructions—and the attendant social implications—of time and place. Given the coherence of her ideas across multiple versions of a single work as well as across the various works, perhaps the discipline through which her work is best understood, is not art or film, but architecture. Indeed, as Sylvia Lavin suggests, she may be best, if still only partially understood

⁴⁵⁴ Tennant, <http://unframed.lacma.org/2012/04/05/conversation-with-maria-nordman>

as a “conceptual architect.”⁴⁵⁵ Rather than aimed at building permanent physical structures to shelter the body, Nordman’s plans offer moments of respite for the mind. Places, Raums, dérivés from conditioned and automatic life, from the familiar. Though the modes of arrival at her works—stumbled upon by chance or arrived at through institutional strategies—clearly has politics effects and gives rise to a different affect—they share a productive disruption of normative behaviors, cognitive experiences, and rational connections.

Mine is but one history, triangulated from a singular point and other references, trying to see in distant past. Accordingly, details, events, and significance rise up relative to the constraints and affordances of my particular vision. Those on which I insist are likely the least secure and there remains vast opportunity for other thinking and more basic groundwork. Essentially a general catalogue shaped around an argument, this dissertation offers a broad base from which to launch deeper inquiries and questions. For example, a more comprehensive exploration of Nordman’s relationship to other women’s practices could draw out the nuanced but very different ways in which feminism shaped and was shaped by film and art. And a more developed context for Nordman’s work among Los Angeles filmmakers in general would elucidate the stakes not only of her own work but would perhaps offer a case study for the generative distance of the West Coast avant-garde from New York.

In the spirit of a reluctant third way feminist, Nordman’s works oscillate between essentialized and structured binaries to complicate and frustrate gendered discourse and draw out the instabilities and contradictions at the core of identity itself. Her rooms—with their carefully drawn plans and precise constructions—are decidedly rational at the level of both conception and execution. Yet the experience of them is invariably contingent and personal. As a place of process and unfolding ideas that privileges time and what she calls “presencing,” Nordman’s studios transcend space to become portable states or places of mind that inhere and project the democratic constants of permanent flux and continuous possibility.

⁴⁵⁵ Lavin, 281.

Figures

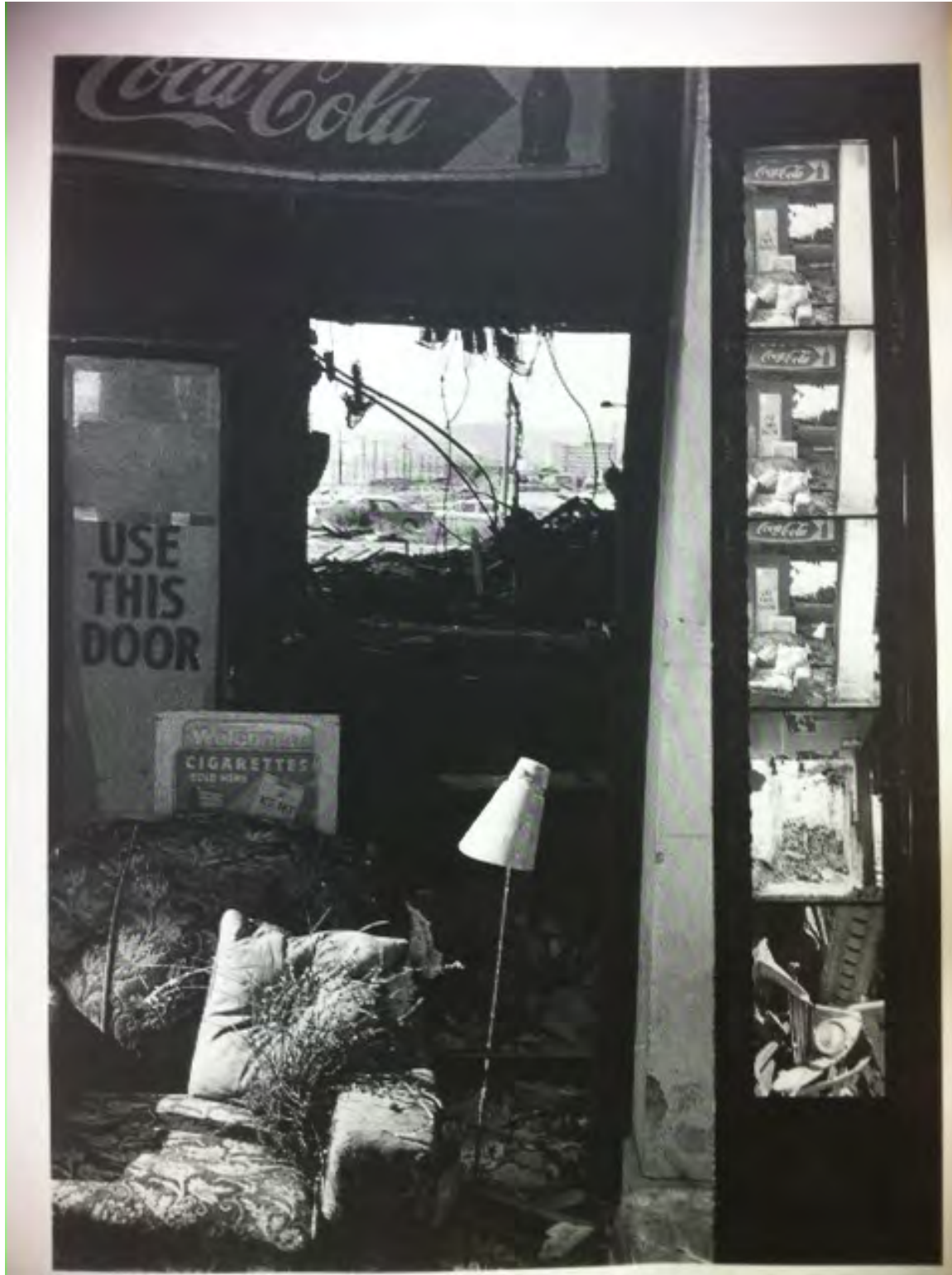


Fig. 1 Maria Nordman, Found Room: *Venice*, 1967.



Fig. 2 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Washington and Beethoven*, Los Angeles, 1979.



Fig. 3 Maria Nordman, *Found Room: New Mexico*, 1967.

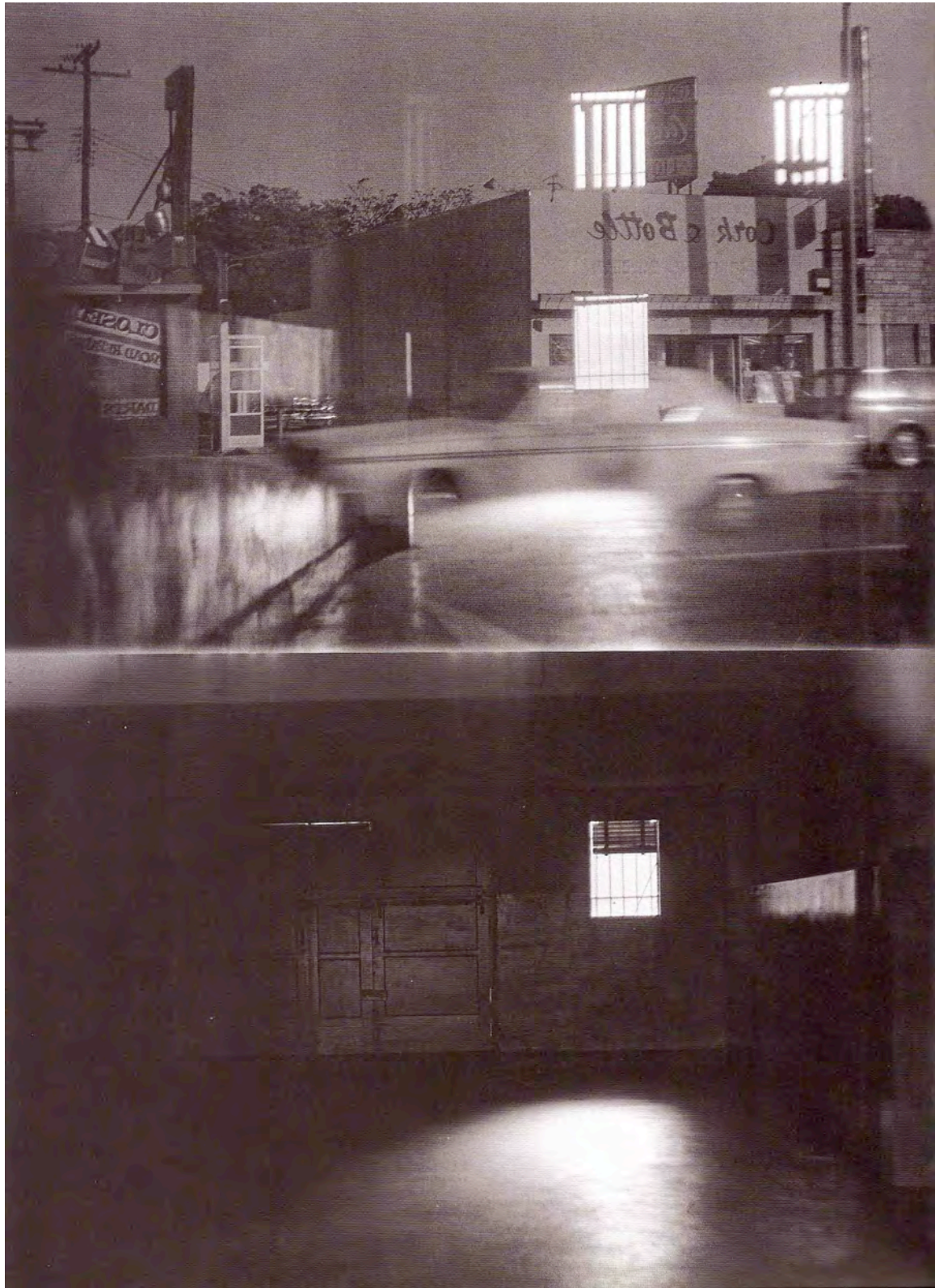


Fig. 4 Maria Nordman, Found Room: *Lincoln Boulevard, Venice*, 1966.

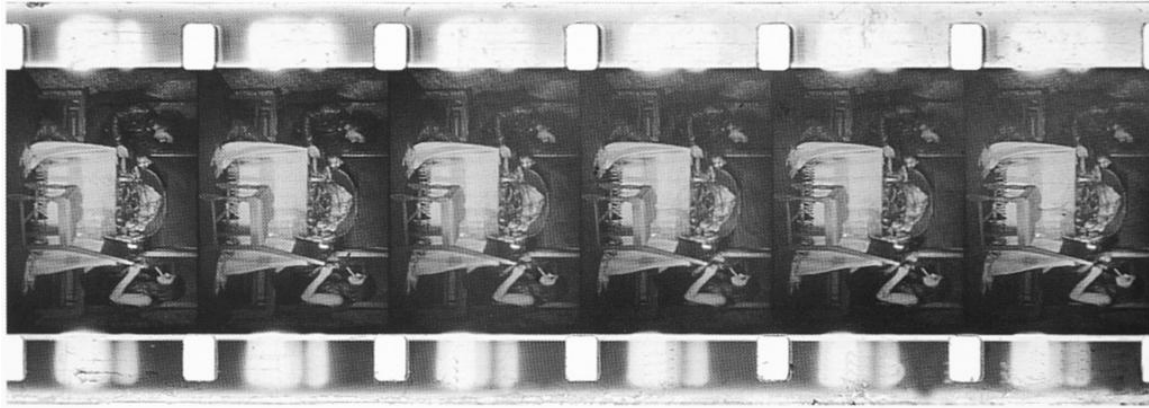


Fig. 5 Maria Nordman, filmstrip of Film Room: *Eat*, 1966.

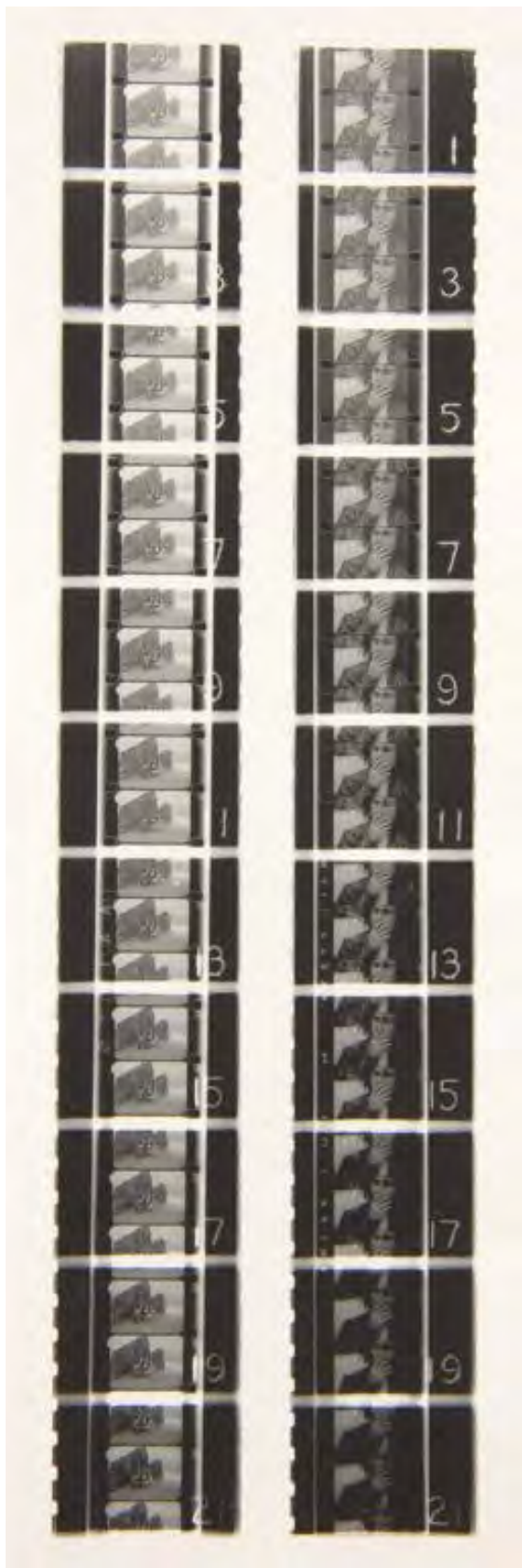


Fig. 6 Maria Nordman, filmstrips of Film Room: *Smoke*, 1967.

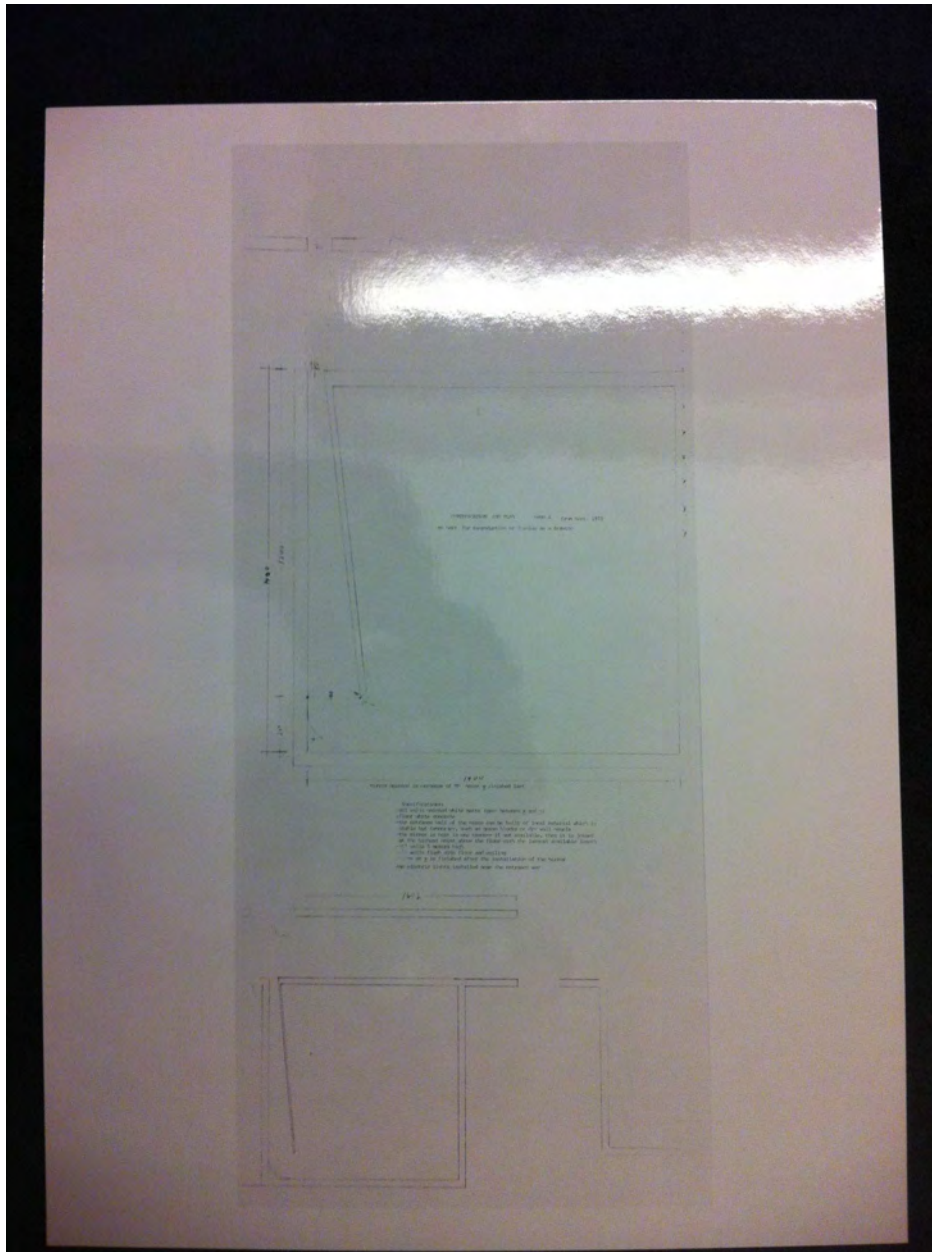


Fig. 7 Maria Nordman, architectural drawing for *Saddleback Mountain*, Irvine, California, 1973.



Fig. 8 Maria Nordman, Fire Performances: *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Mojave]*, Trona, California, 1967; pages 20 and 21 in Fig. Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

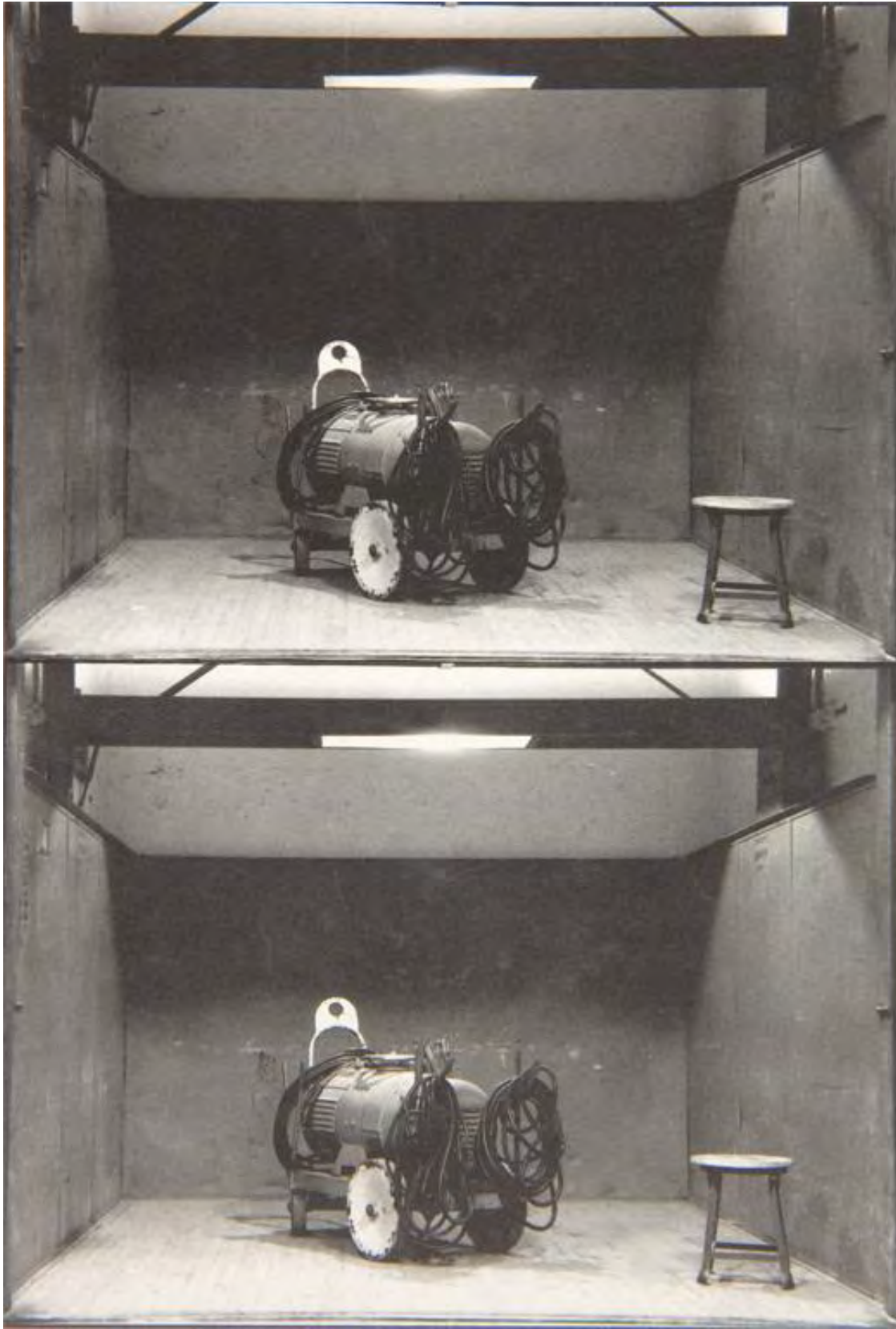


Fig. 9 Maria Nordman, Found Room: *West Los Angeles*, 1966.

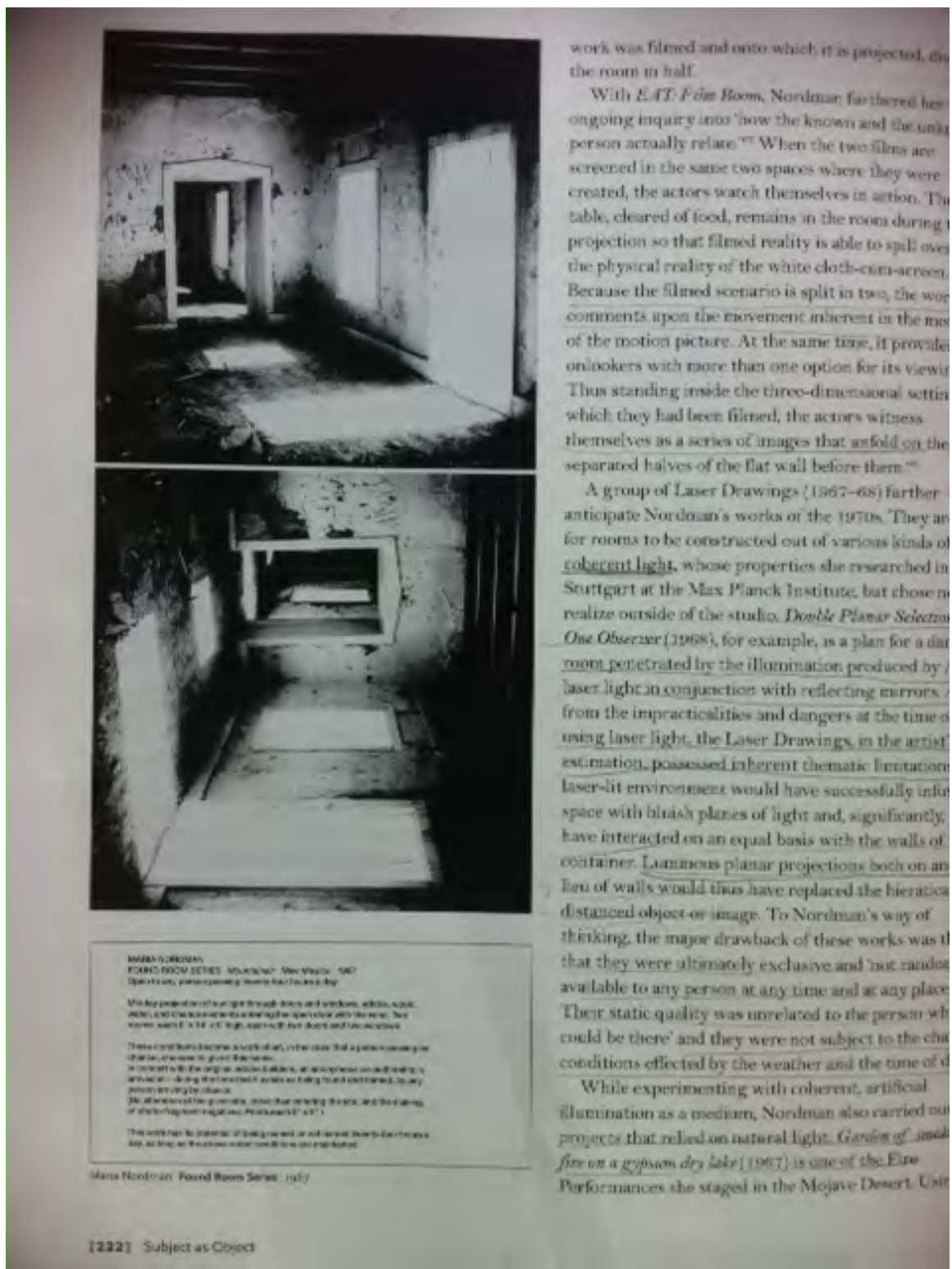


Fig. 10 Maria Nordman, Found Room: *Mountain Air, New Mexico*, 1967; page 222 in Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*.

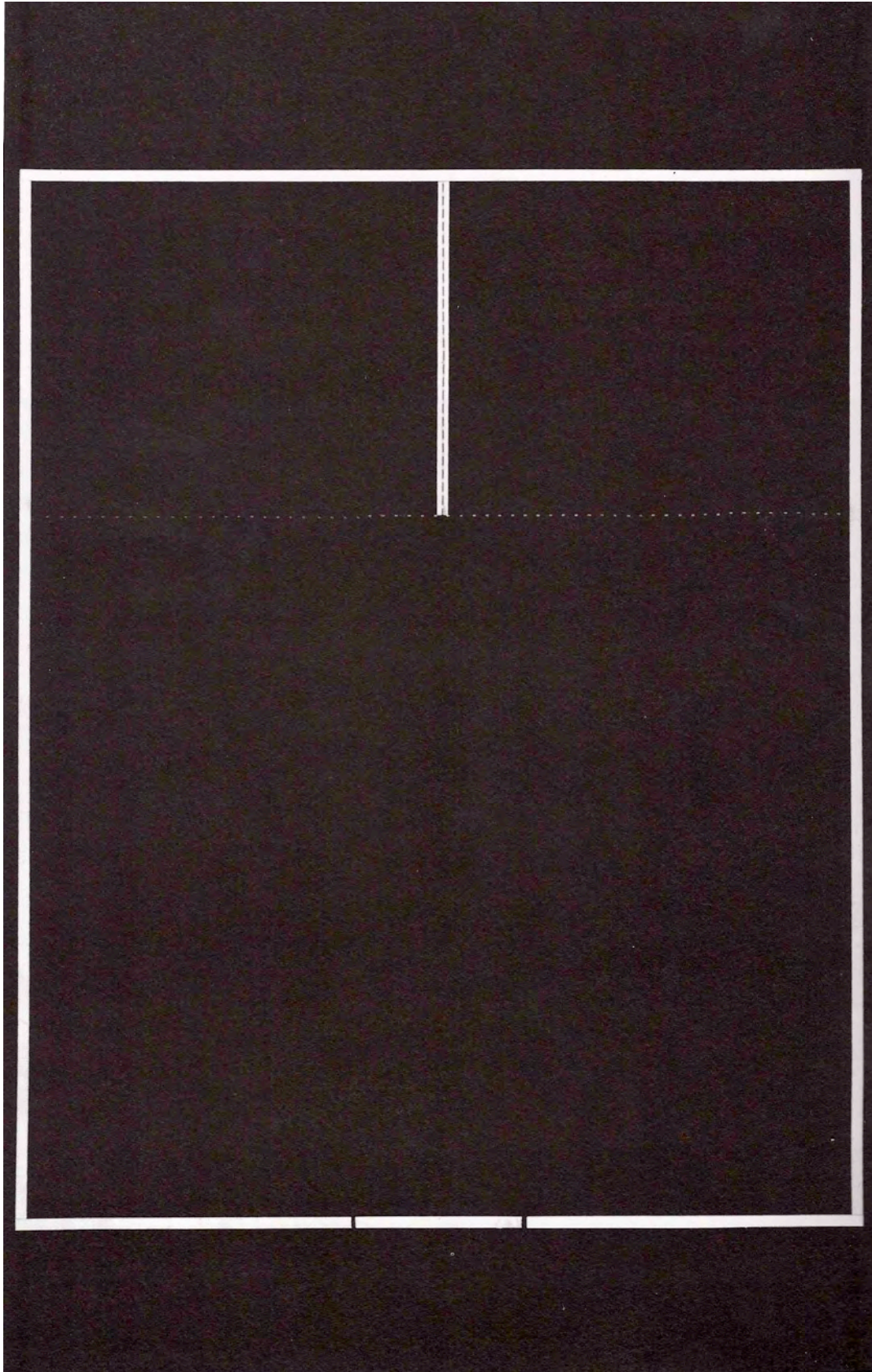


Fig. 11 Maria Nordman, plan for *Film Room/Projection Room*, 1966.



Fig. 12 Maria Nordman, installation views of Film Room: *Smoke, 1967–Present*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011.



Fig. 14 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of Fire Performances: *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Trona]*, Trona, California, 1967; pages 26–27 in Nordman, *De Musica*. Photo: Phil Melnick.



Fig. 15 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of Fire Performances: *City of the Clouds*, Mojave Desert, California, September 4, 1967; page 17 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 16 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of Fire Performances: *City of the Clouds*, Mojave Desert, California, December 19, 1967; page 28 in Nordman, *De Musica*; the same image also appears rotated ninety-degrees on page 18 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

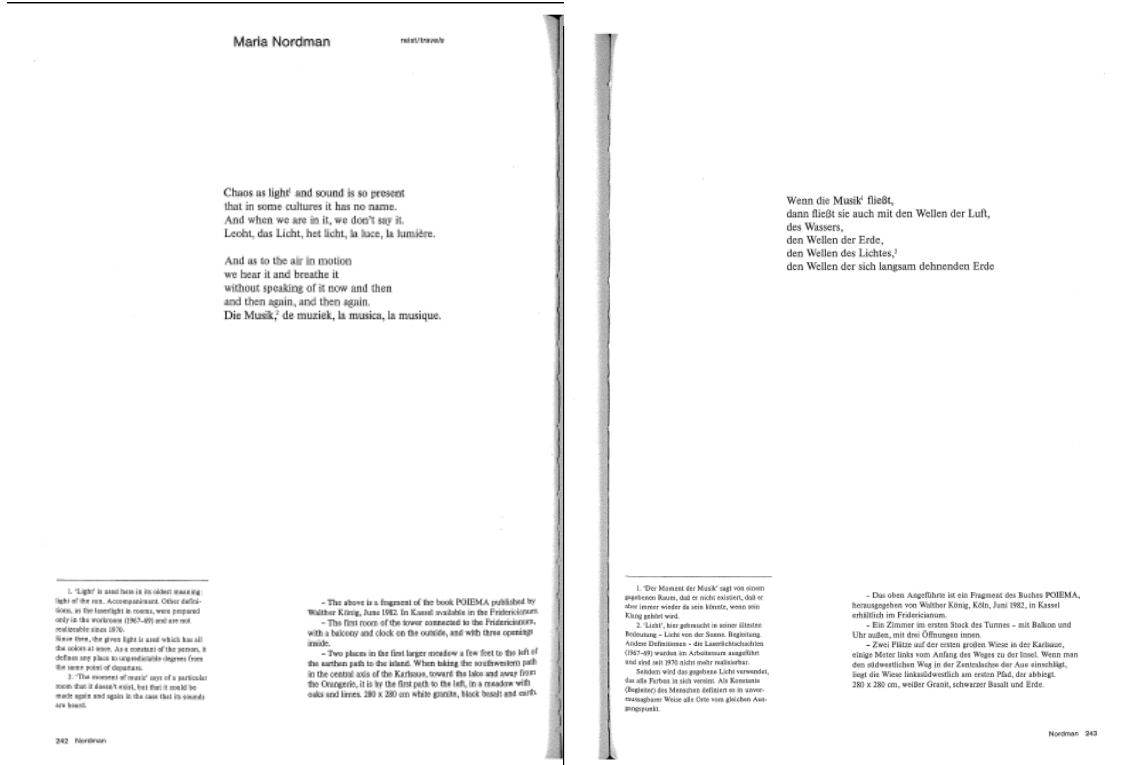


Fig. 17 Maria Nordman, "Poeima;" artist entry; pages 242–43 in *Documenta 7*, vol. 2 (Kassel: P. Dierichs, 1982), 242–43.



FRAGMENTS

Fig. 18 Maria Nordman, photo-fragments of interior views of *6/21/79 Berkeley*, UC Berkeley Art Museum, California, 1979; artist entry, page 55 in Rosenthal, *Space as Support: Buren, Andre, Irwin, Nordman*. Photos: John Friedman.



Fig. 19 Maria Nordman, exterior view of artist's studio and *Pico II* [workroom], 1014 Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1971. Photo: Frank J. Thomas.



Fig. 20 Maria Nordman, exterior view photo-fragment of *Newport Beach*, Newport Beach, California, February 28, 1973.



Fig. 21 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of Fire Performances: *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Trona]*, Mojave Desert, California, 1967; page 22 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 22 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of Fire Performances: *Garden of Smokeless Fire [Trona]*, Mojave Desert, California, 1967; pages 26–27 in Nordman, *De Musica*. Photo: Phil Melnick.

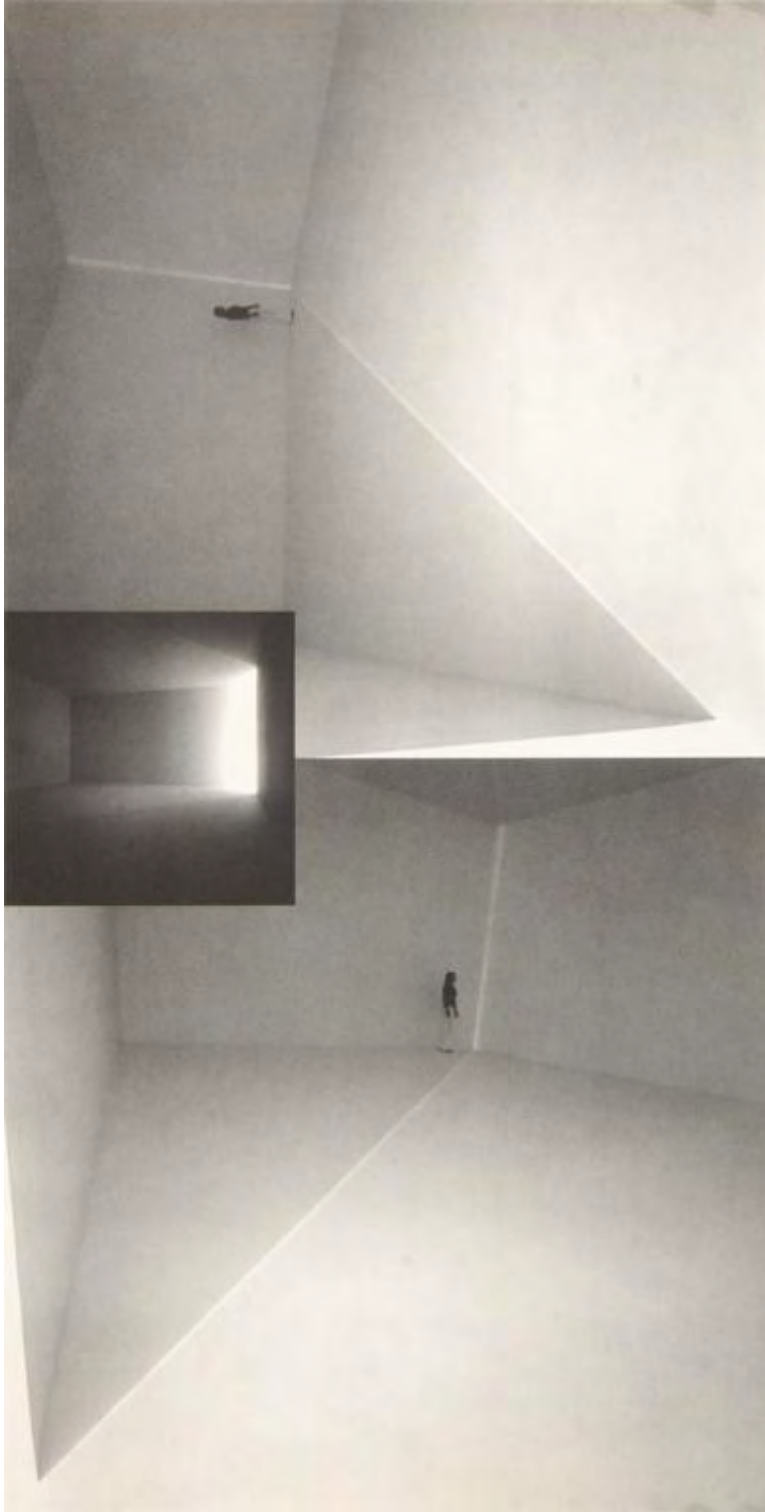


Fig. 23 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of interior views of *Saddleback Mountain*, Irvine, California, 1973; page 71 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

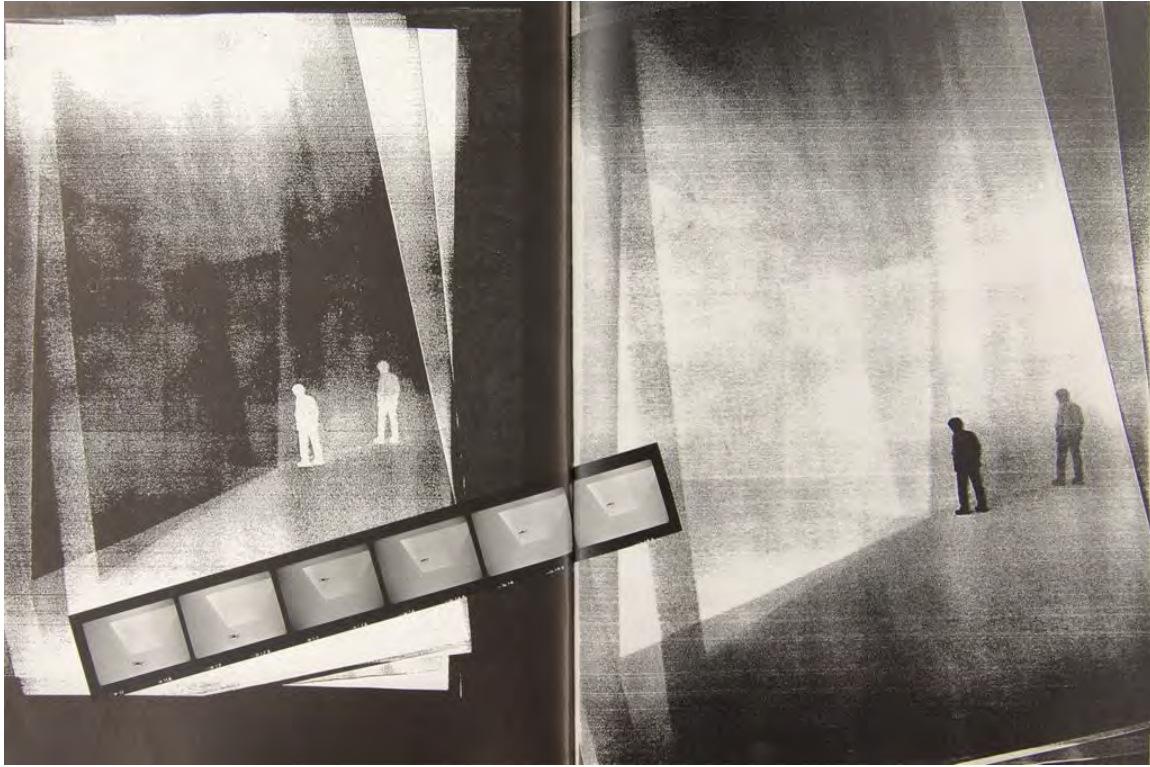


Fig. 24 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of interior views of *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976; pages 80–81 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*. Photos: Paolo Pellion.



Fig. 25 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *City of the Clouds*, Mojave Desert, California, December 19, 1967; page 28 in Nordman, *De Musica*.

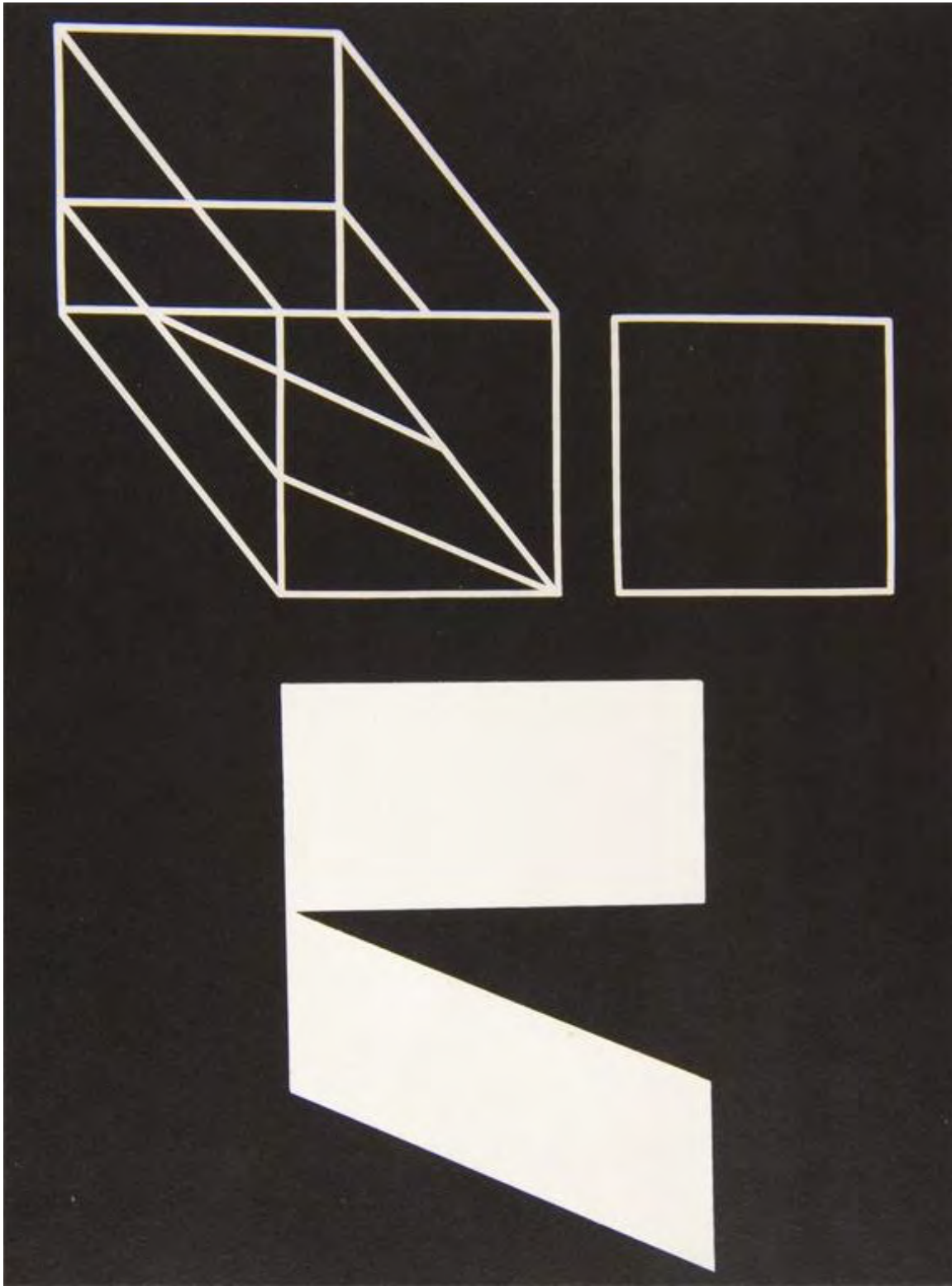


Fig. 26 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Coherent Illumination Layers in a Black Room*, 1967; page 42 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

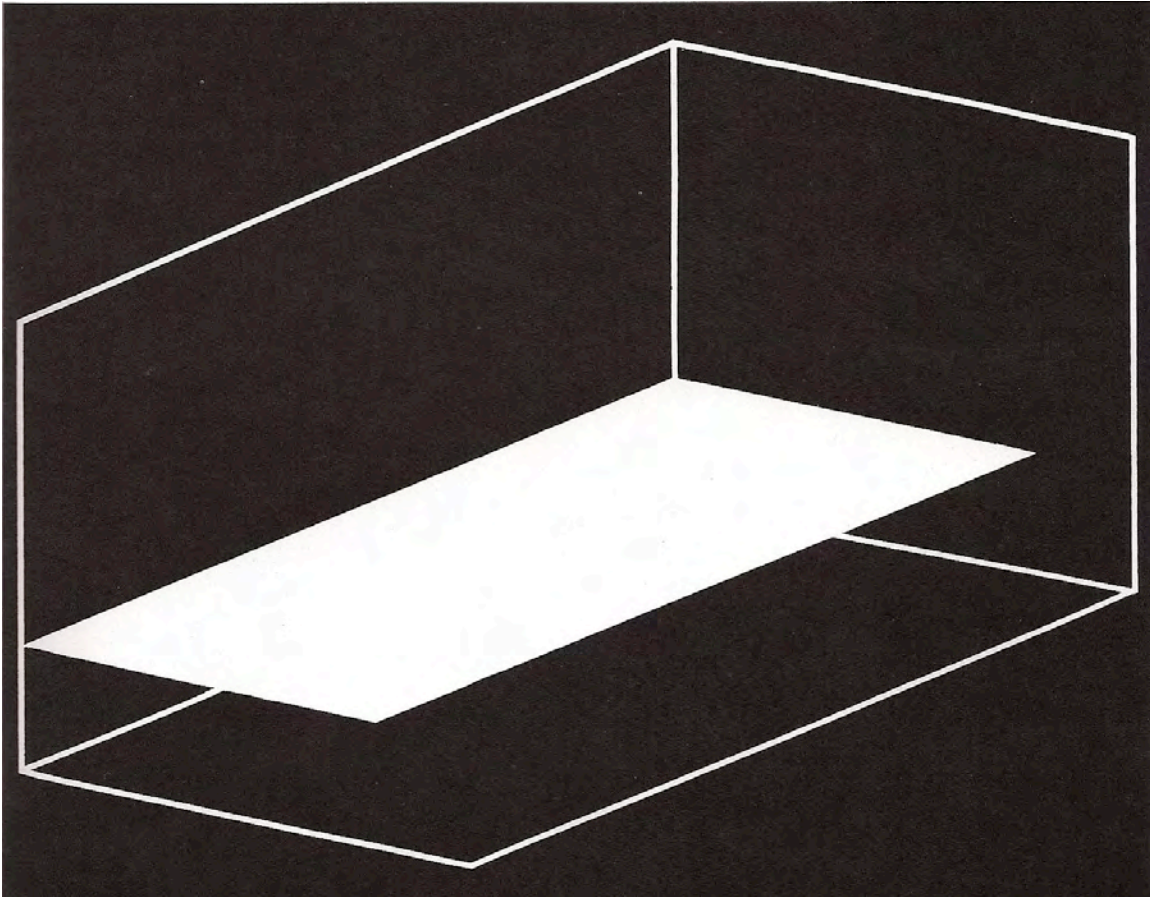


Fig. 27 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Coherent Illumination Layers in a Black Room*, 1967; page 43 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 28 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of installation view of *Ongoing Worn House for Any Person, 1967–present*, Museum Folkwang Essen, 1997.

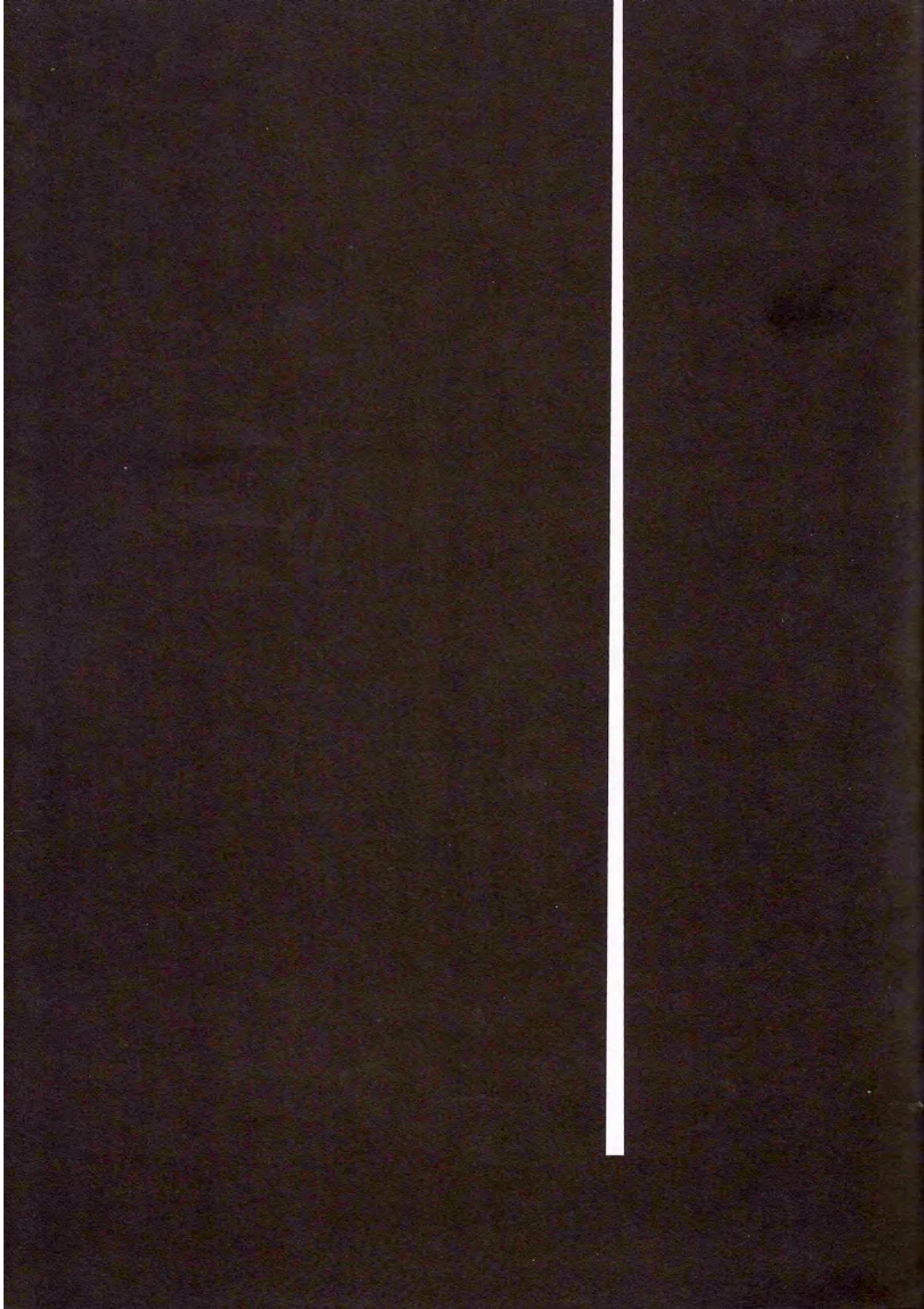


Fig. 29 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Unnamed, 1967–present* (1967); page 116 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

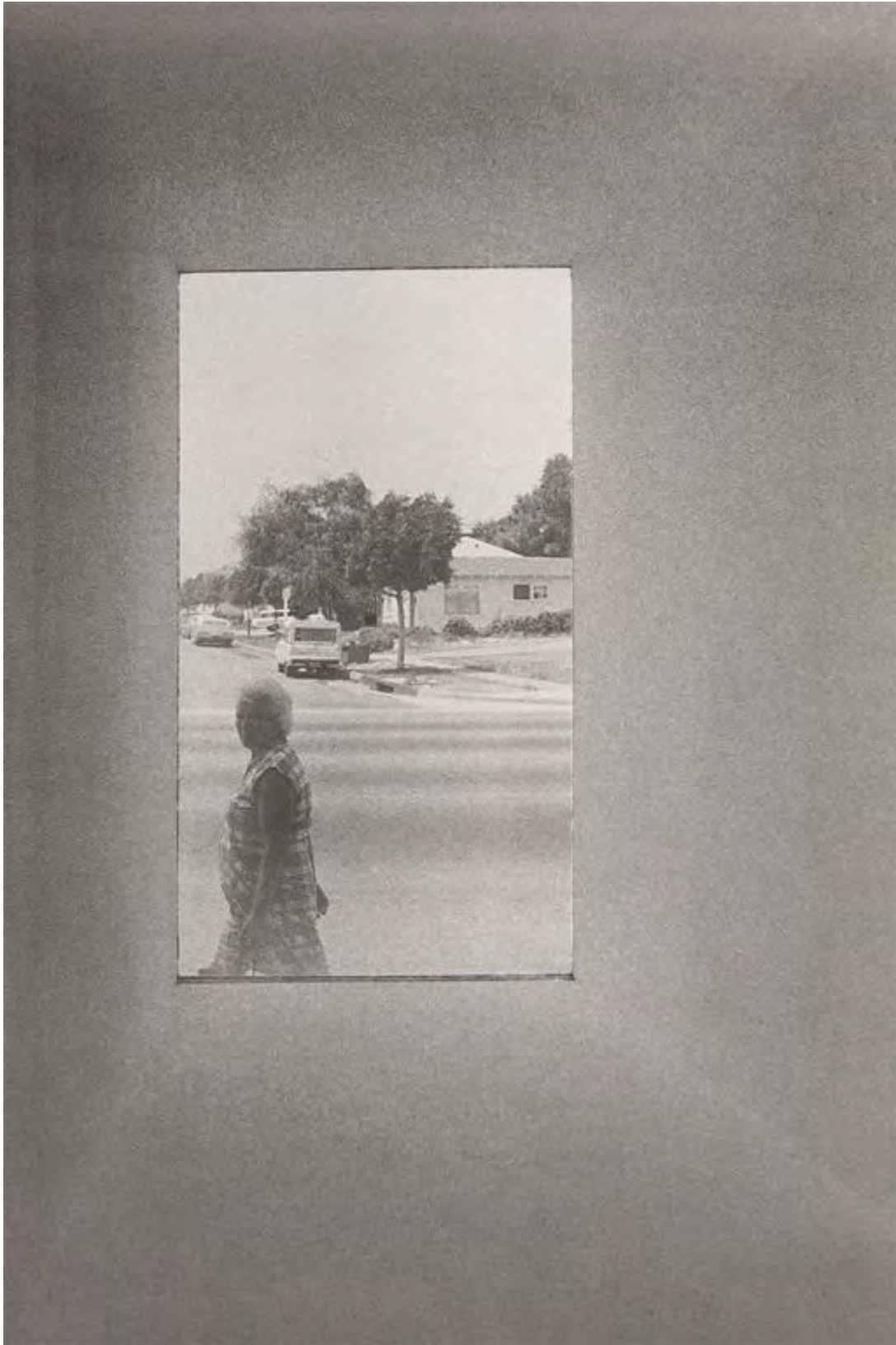


Fig. 30 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico I* [anteroom], Los Angeles, 1970.



Fig. 31 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico II* [workroom], Los Angeles, 1972.

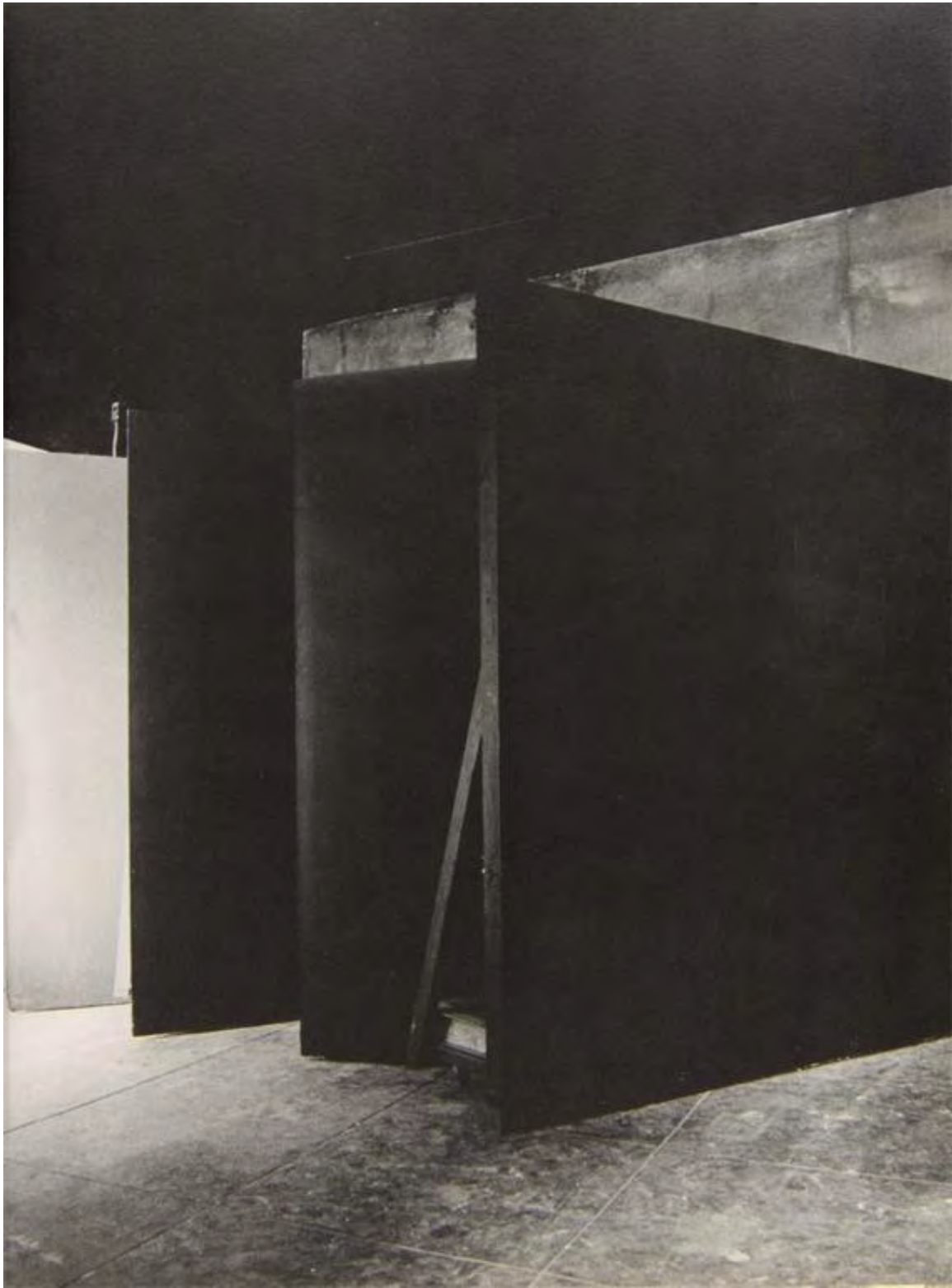


Fig. 32 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Moveable Walls*, Los Angeles, 1969.

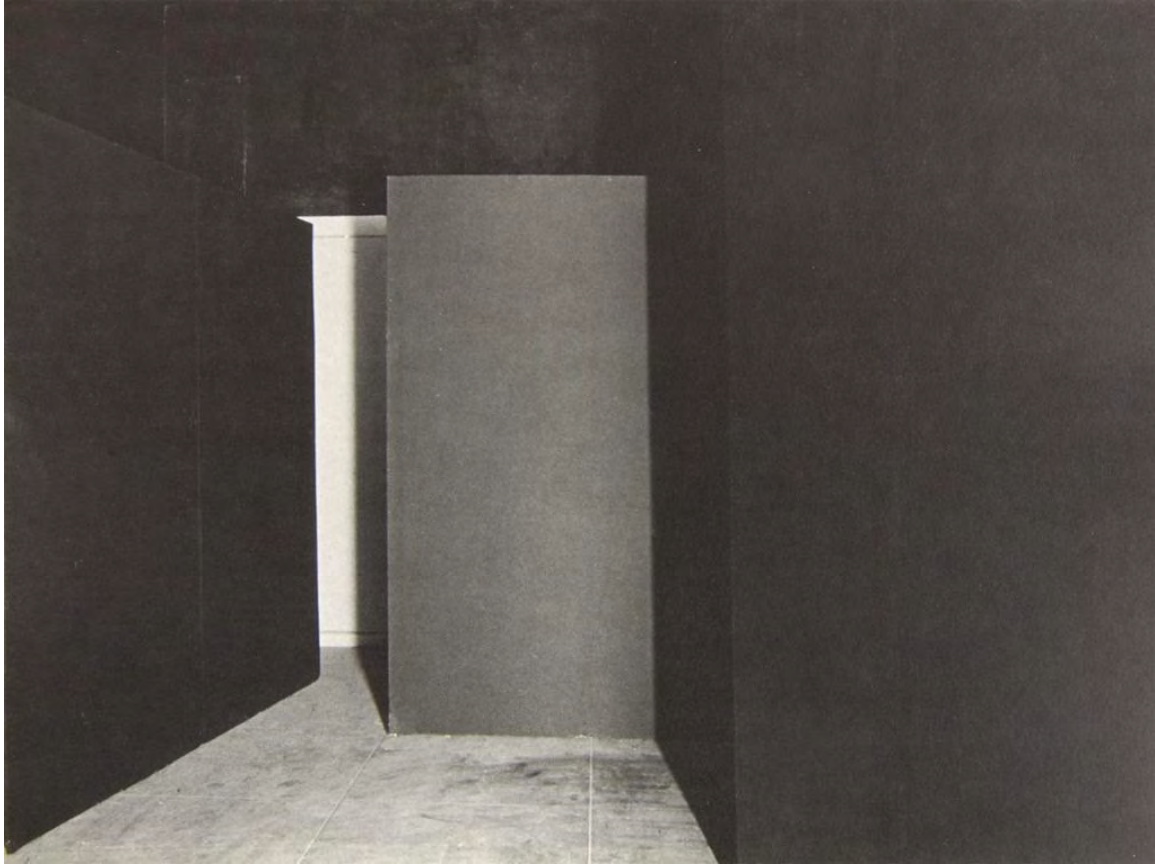


Fig. 33 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Moveable Walls*, Los Angeles, 1969.

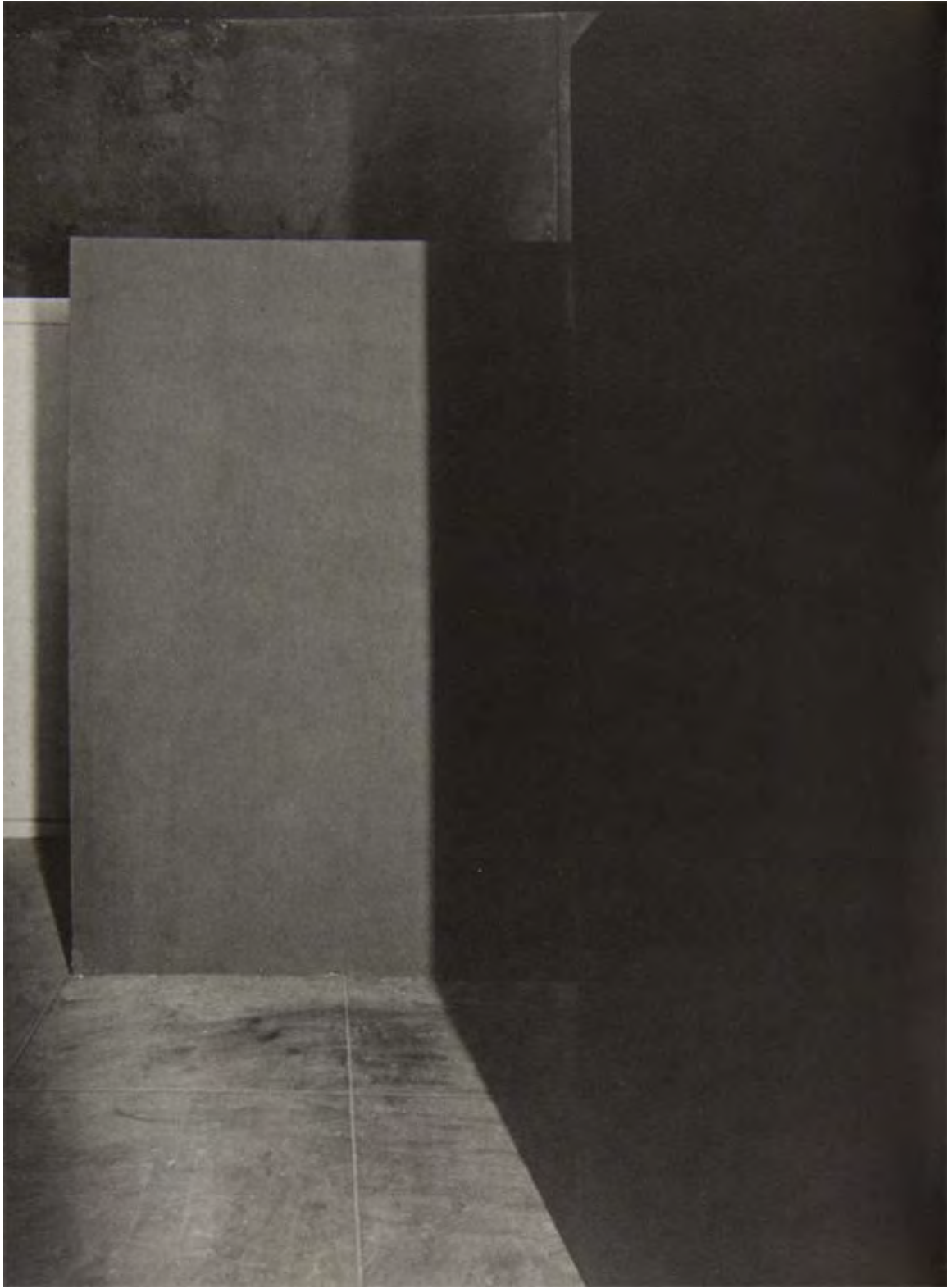


Fig. 34 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Moveable Walls*, Los Angeles, 1969.

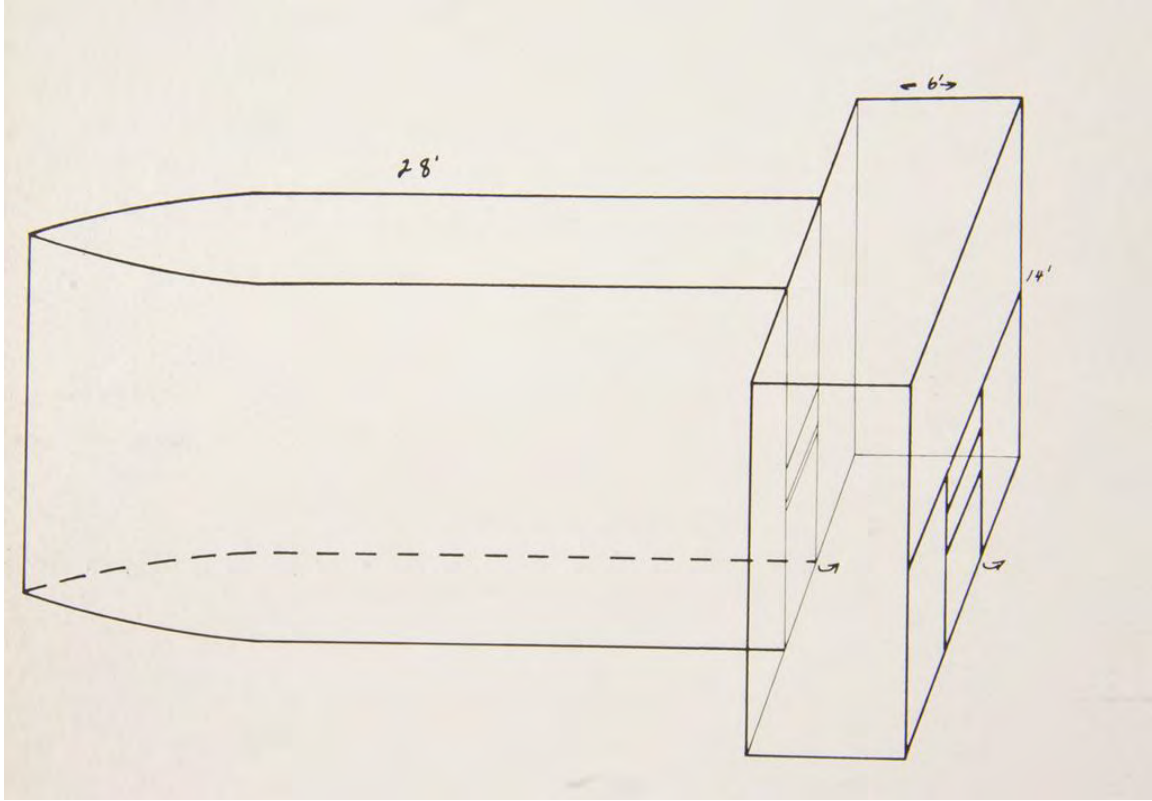


Fig. 35 Maria Nordman, sketch of *Pico I [workroom]*, Los Angeles, 1970.

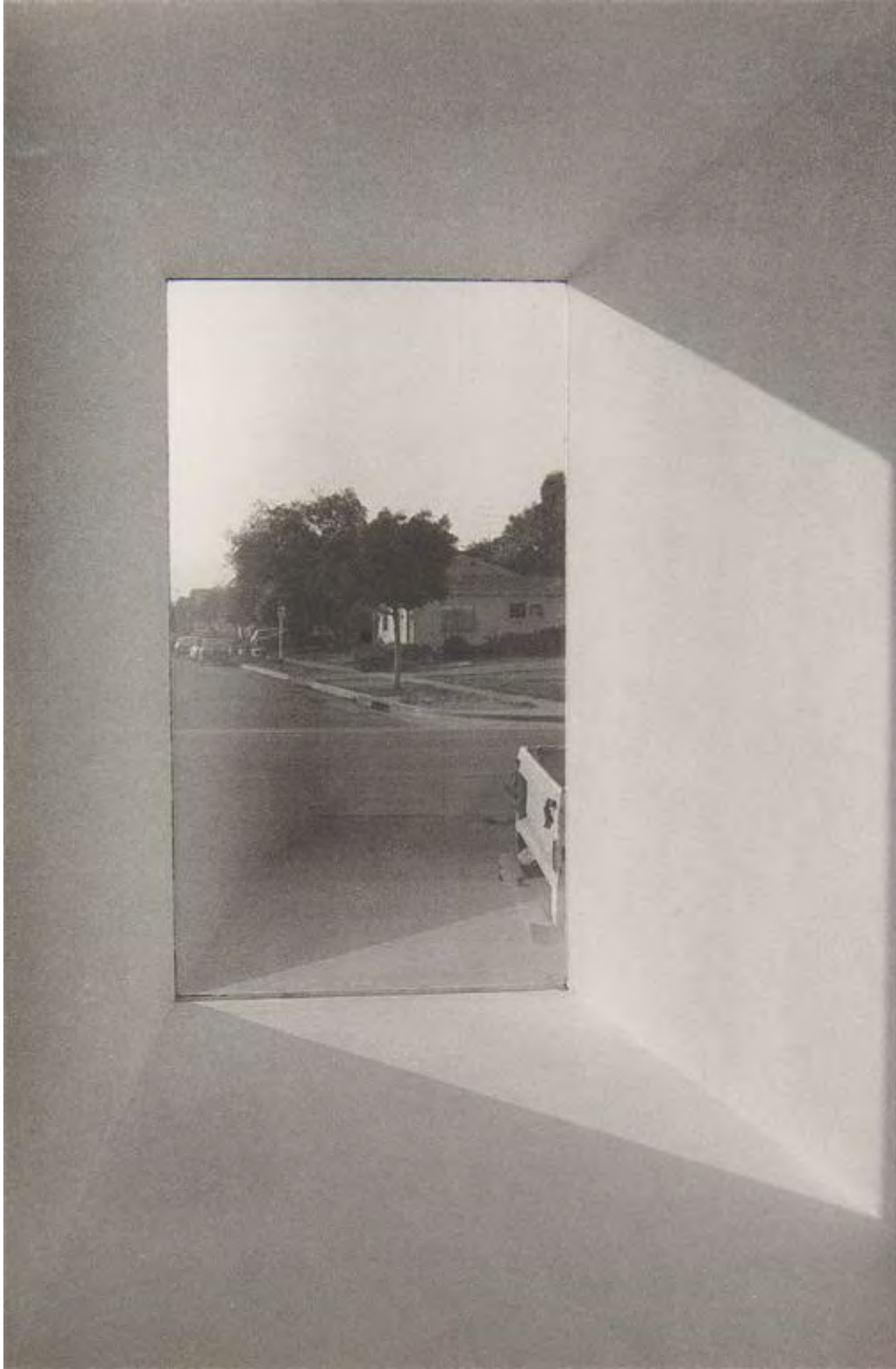


Fig. 36 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico I [anteroom]*, Los Angeles, 1970.



Fig. 37 Maria Nordman, exterior view of *Pico I* [anteroom] at Nordman's studio, 1014 Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, c. 1972.

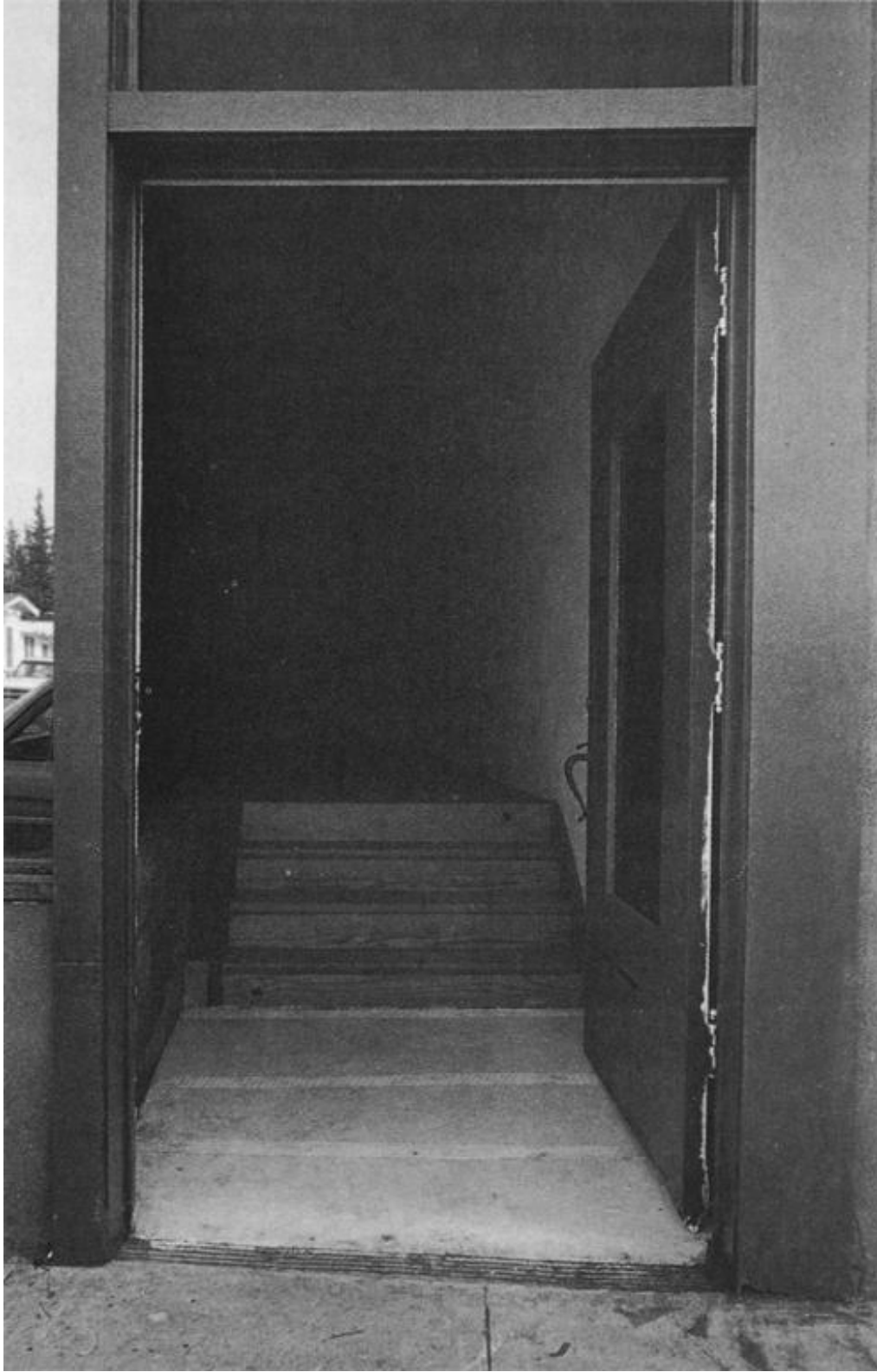


Fig. 38 Maria Nordman's studio, 1014 Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, c. 1972.

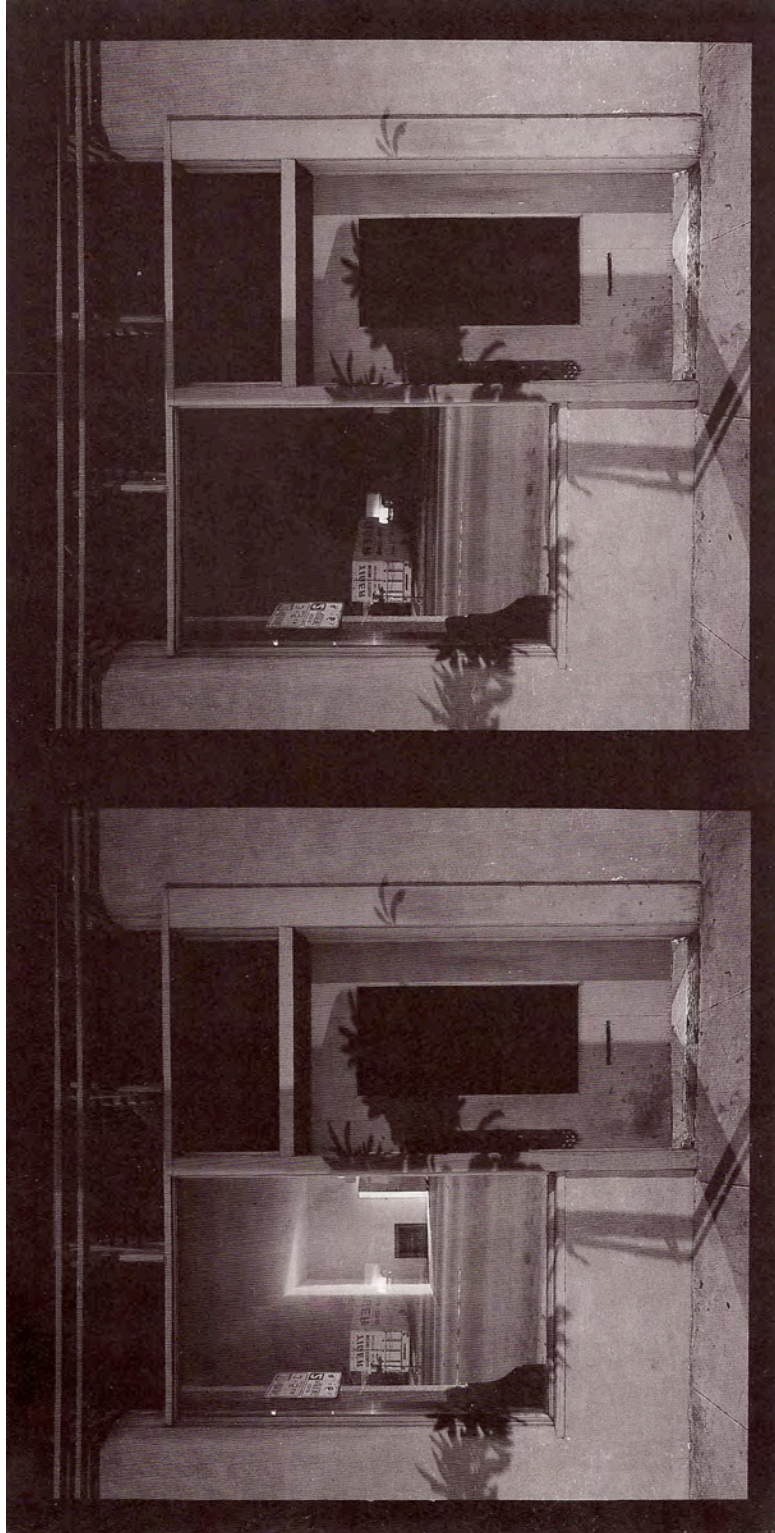


Fig. 39 Maria Nordman, collage of exterior view of *Pico I* [anteroom] at Nordman's studio, 1014 Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, 1972; page 69 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 40 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico II* [workroom], Los Angeles, 1972.



Fig. 41 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico II* [workroom], Los Angeles, 1972.



Fig. 42 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico II [workroom]*, Los Angeles, 1972.



Fig. 43 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Pico II [workroom]*, Los Angeles, 1972.

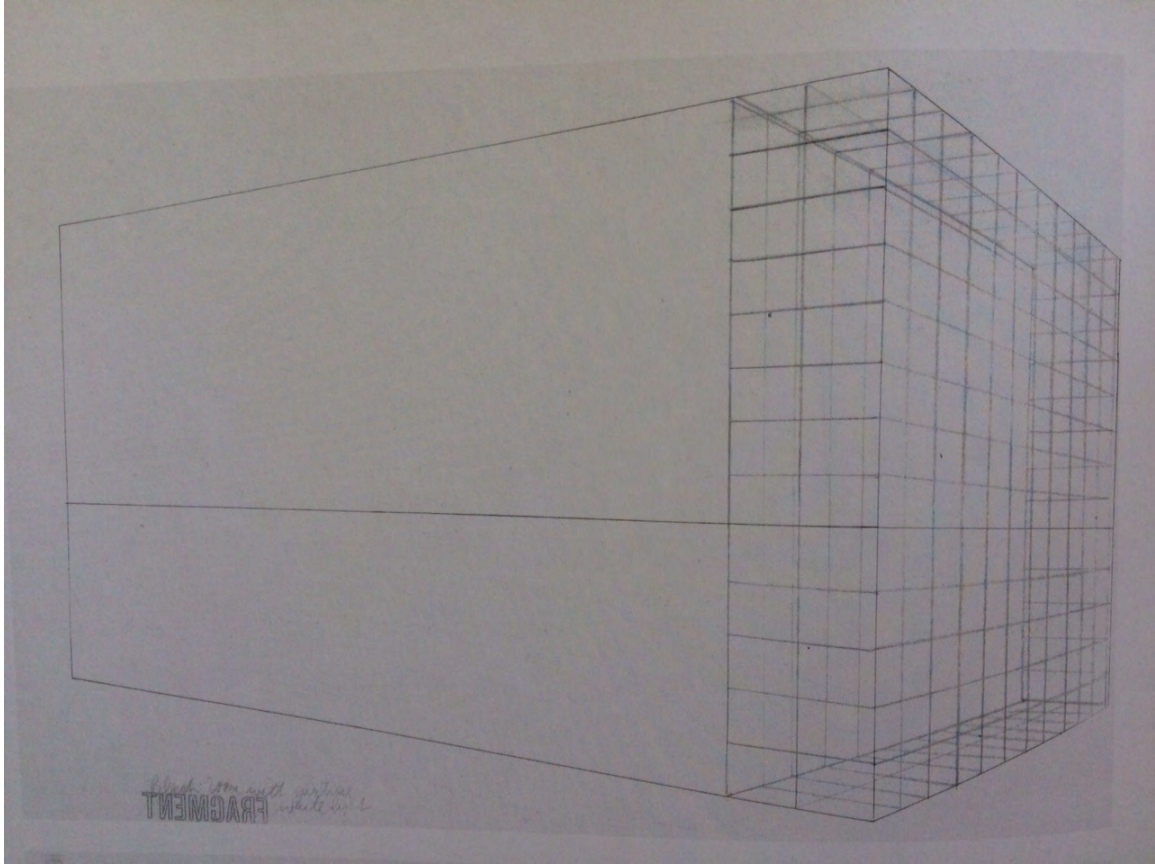


Fig. 44 Maria Nordman, sketch of *Black Room with Partial White Light* , 1971.

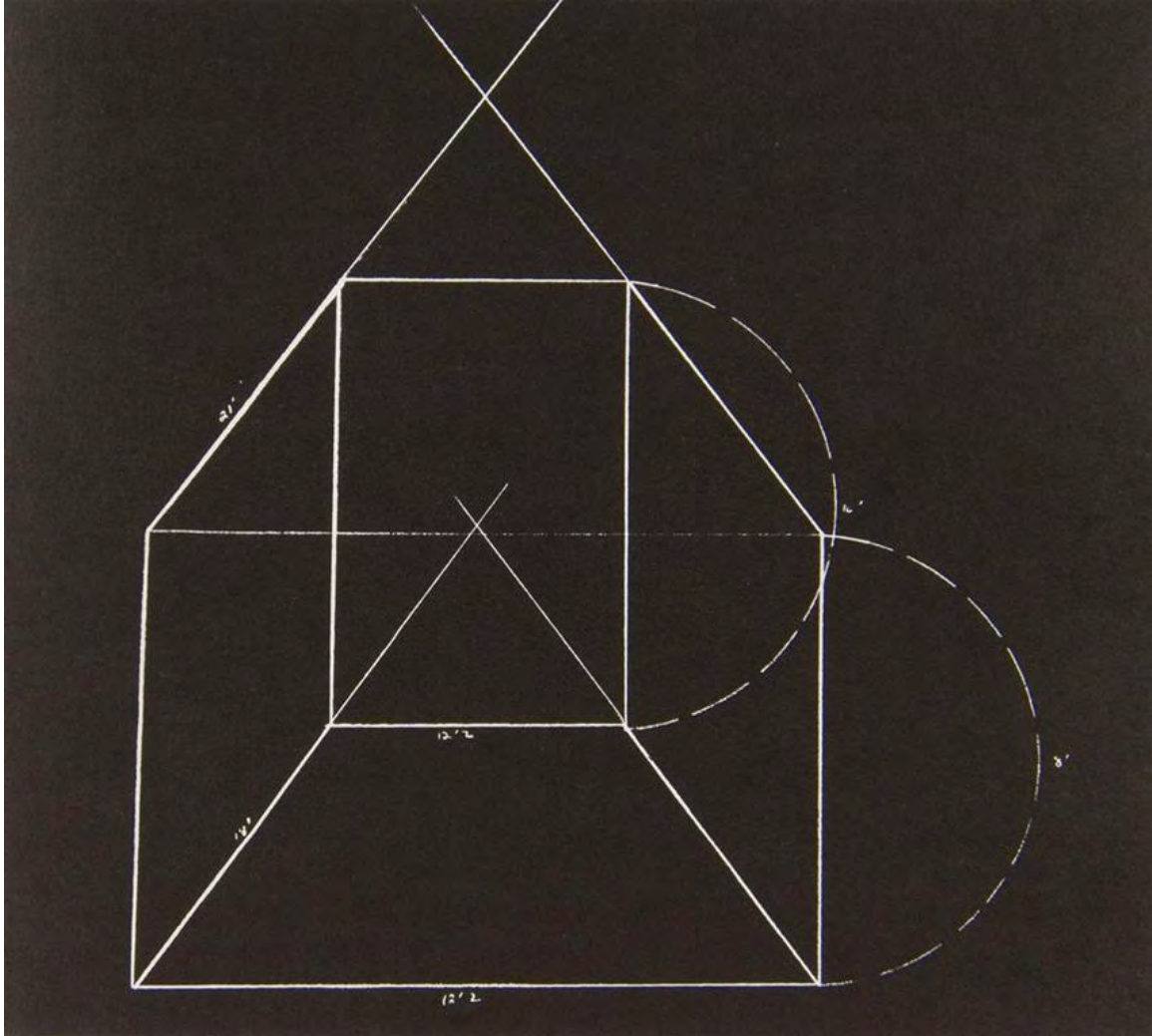


Fig. 45 Maria Nordman, plan for *Pico II* [untitled], 1973.

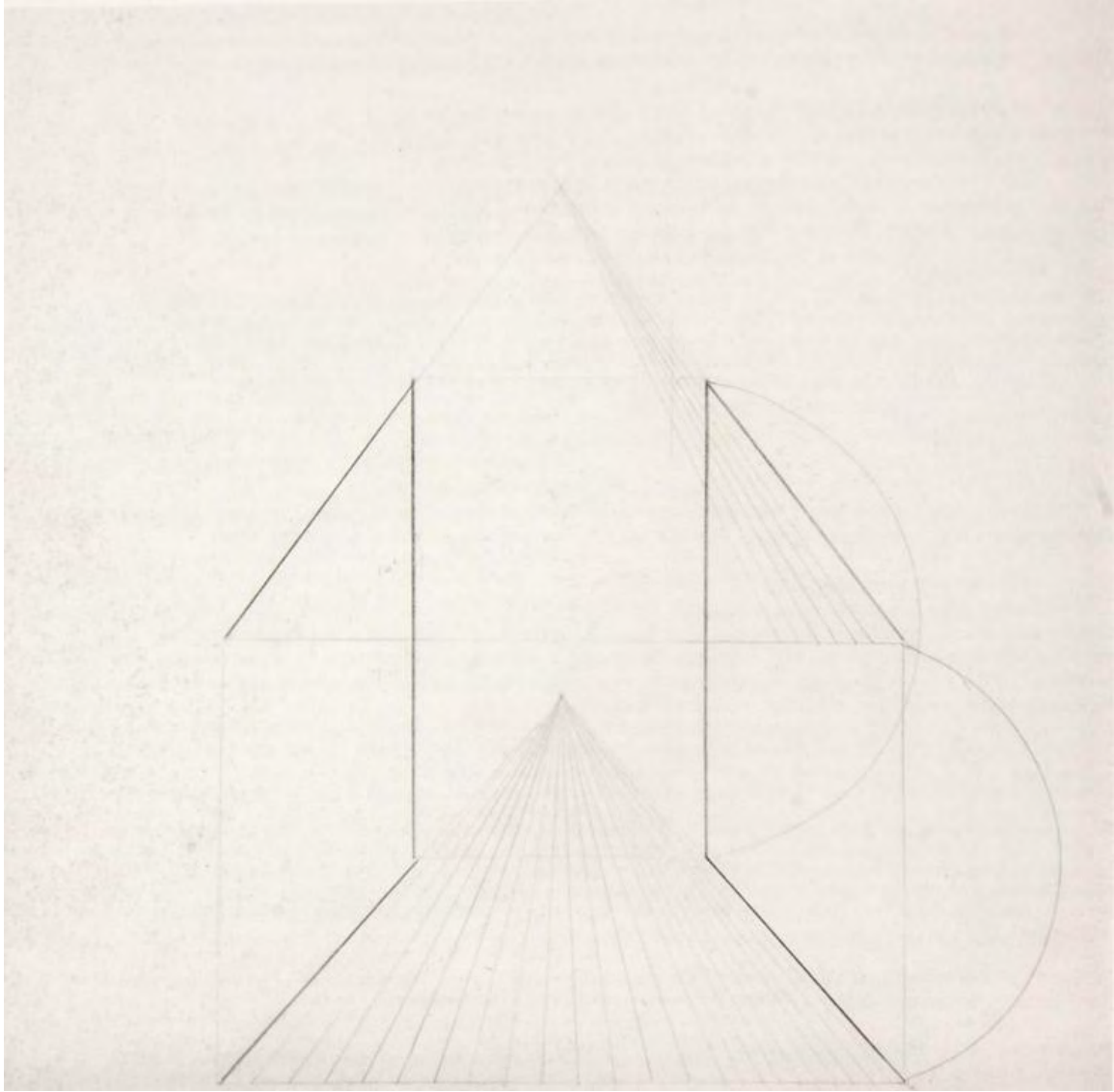


Fig. 46 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Pico II [untitled]*, Los Angeles, 1973.

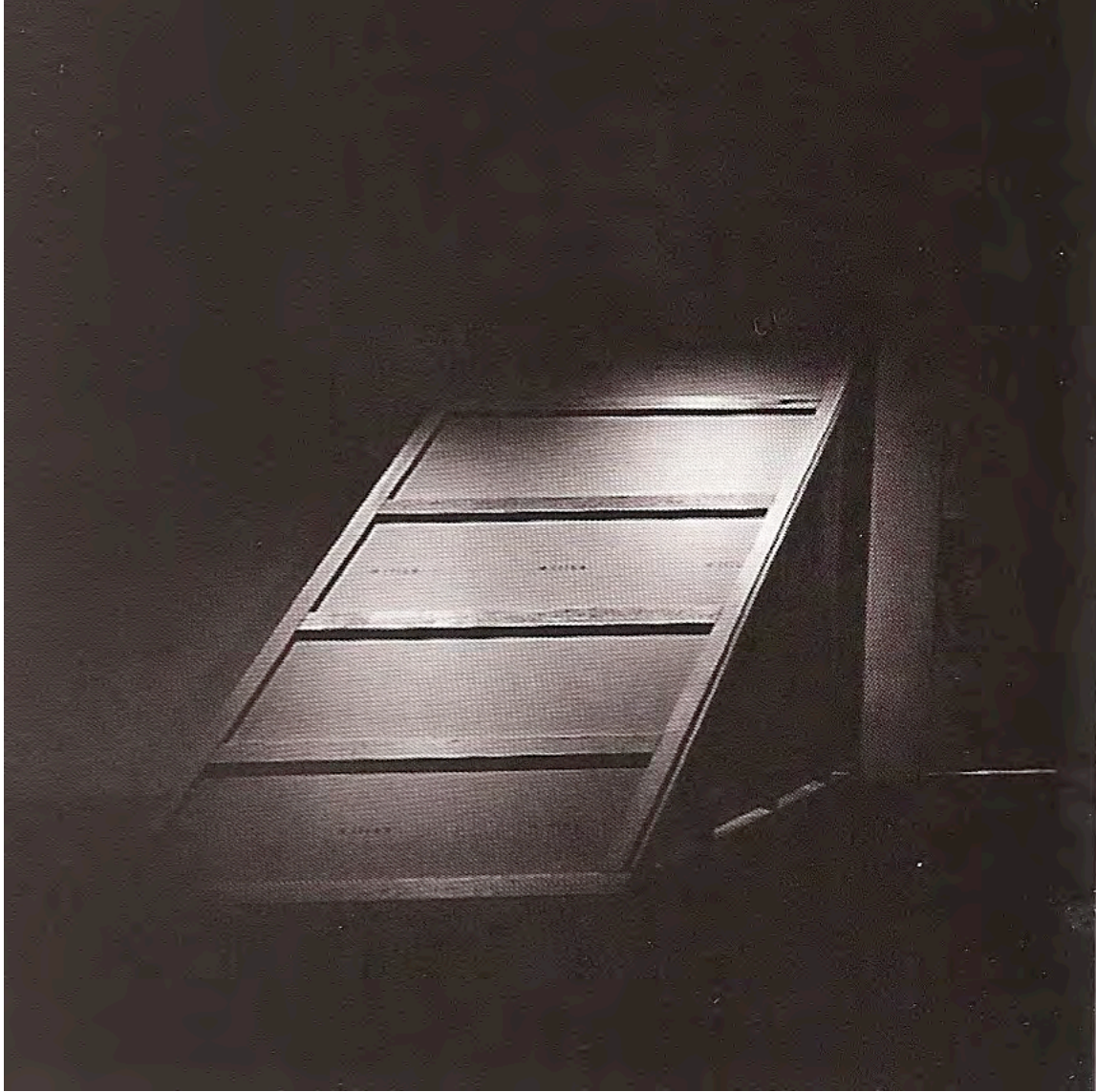


Fig. 47 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Newport Beach*, Newport Beach, California, 1973.

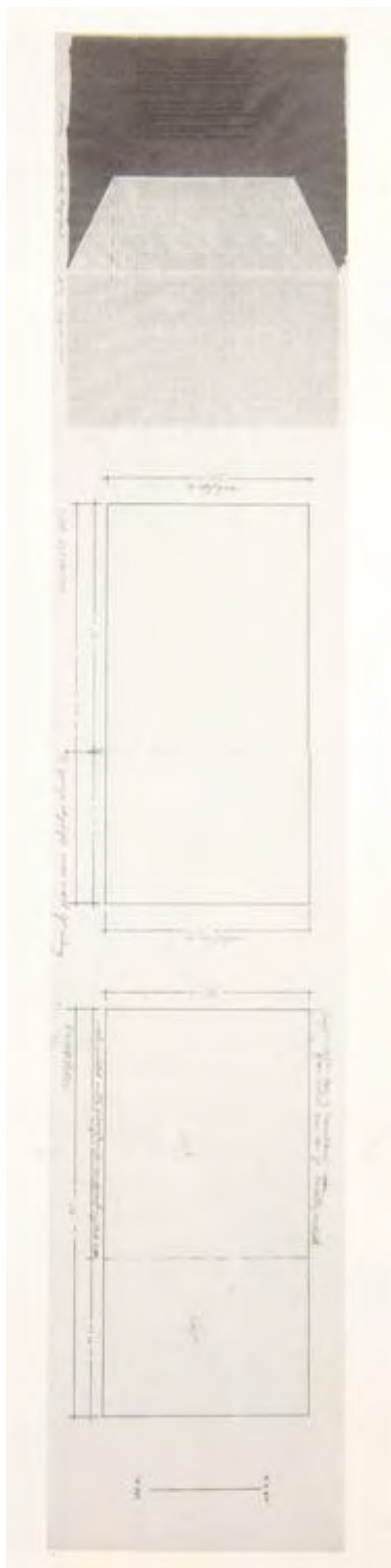


Fig. 48 Maria Nordman, sketch of *12 South Raymond Street*, Pasadena, California, 1972.

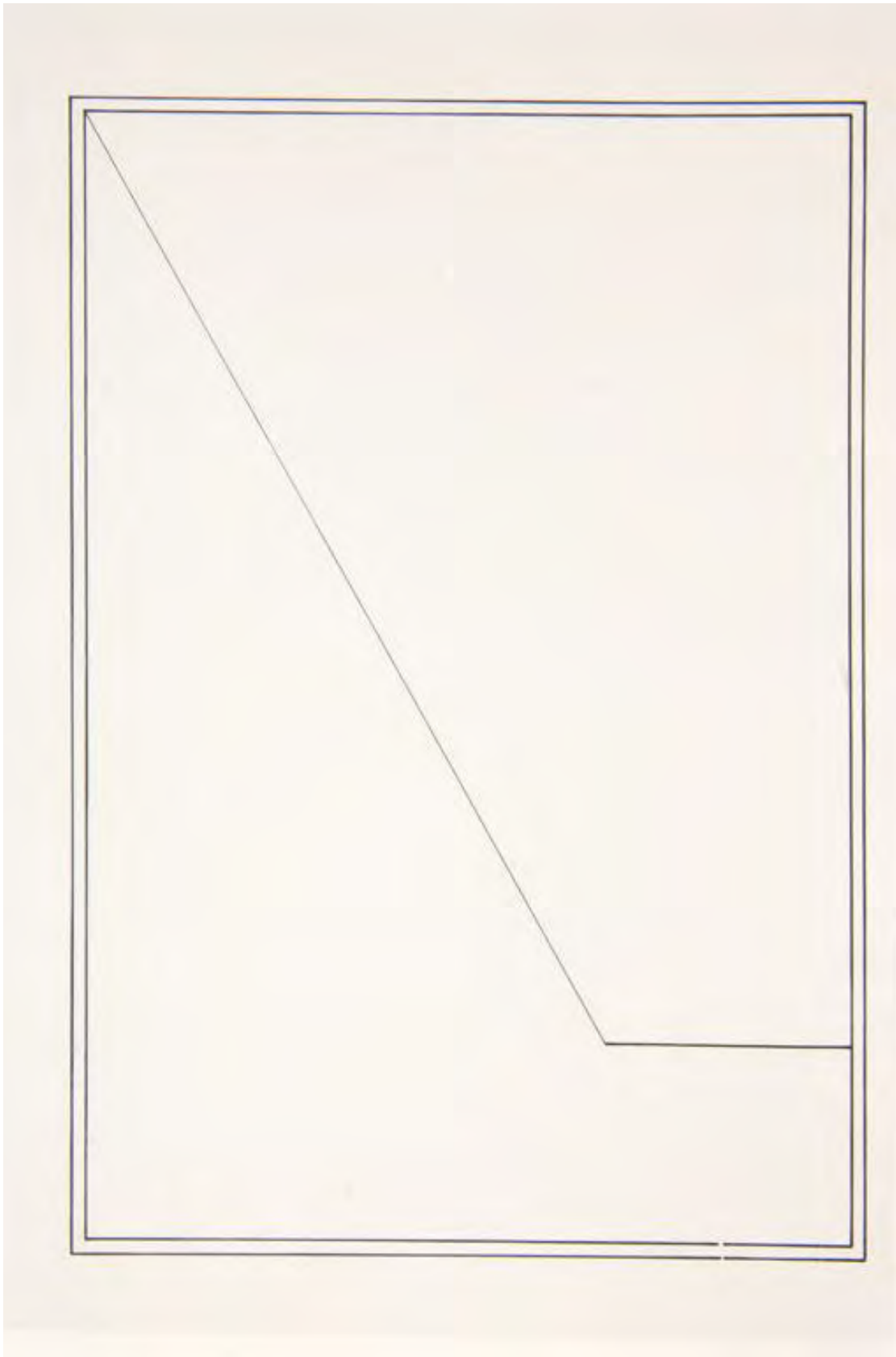


Fig. 49 Maria Nordman, plan for *Twentieth and Idaho*, Los Angeles, 1972.

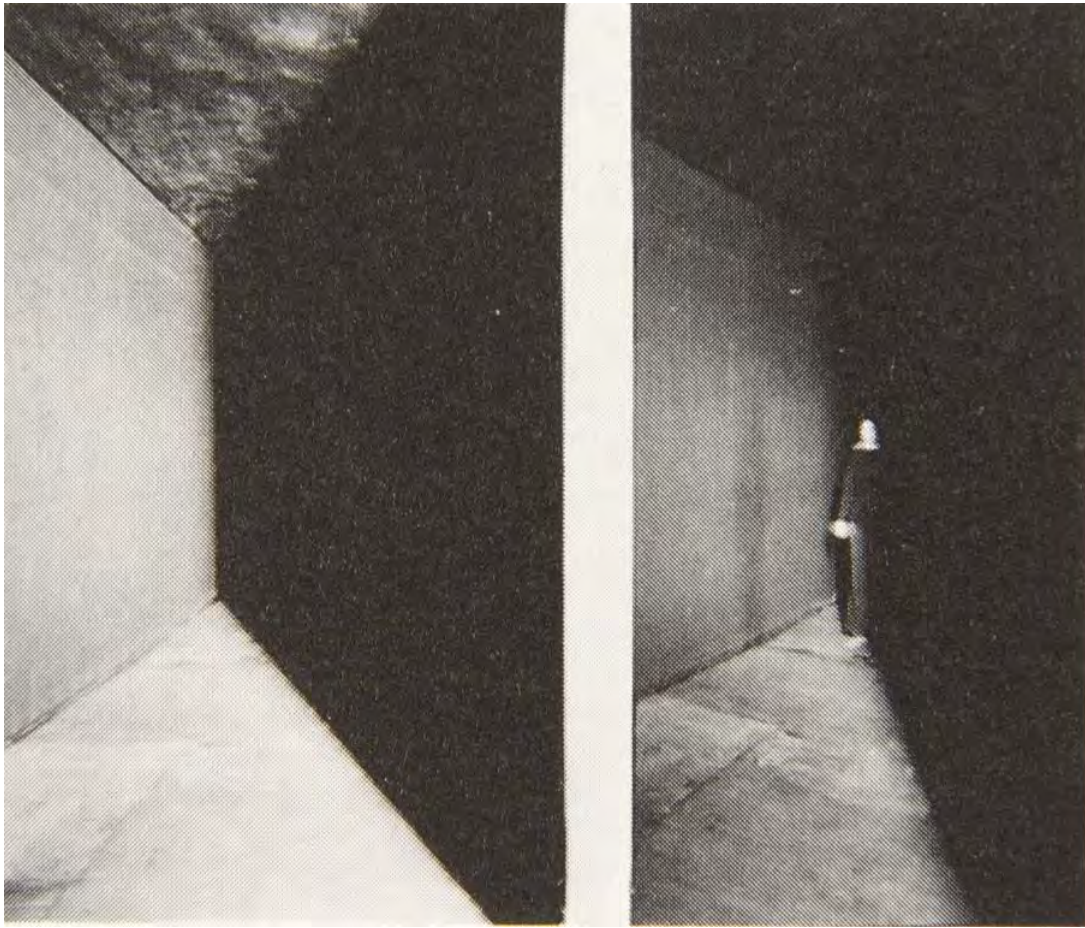


Fig. 50 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of interior views of *Twentieth and Idaho*, Los Angeles, 1972.

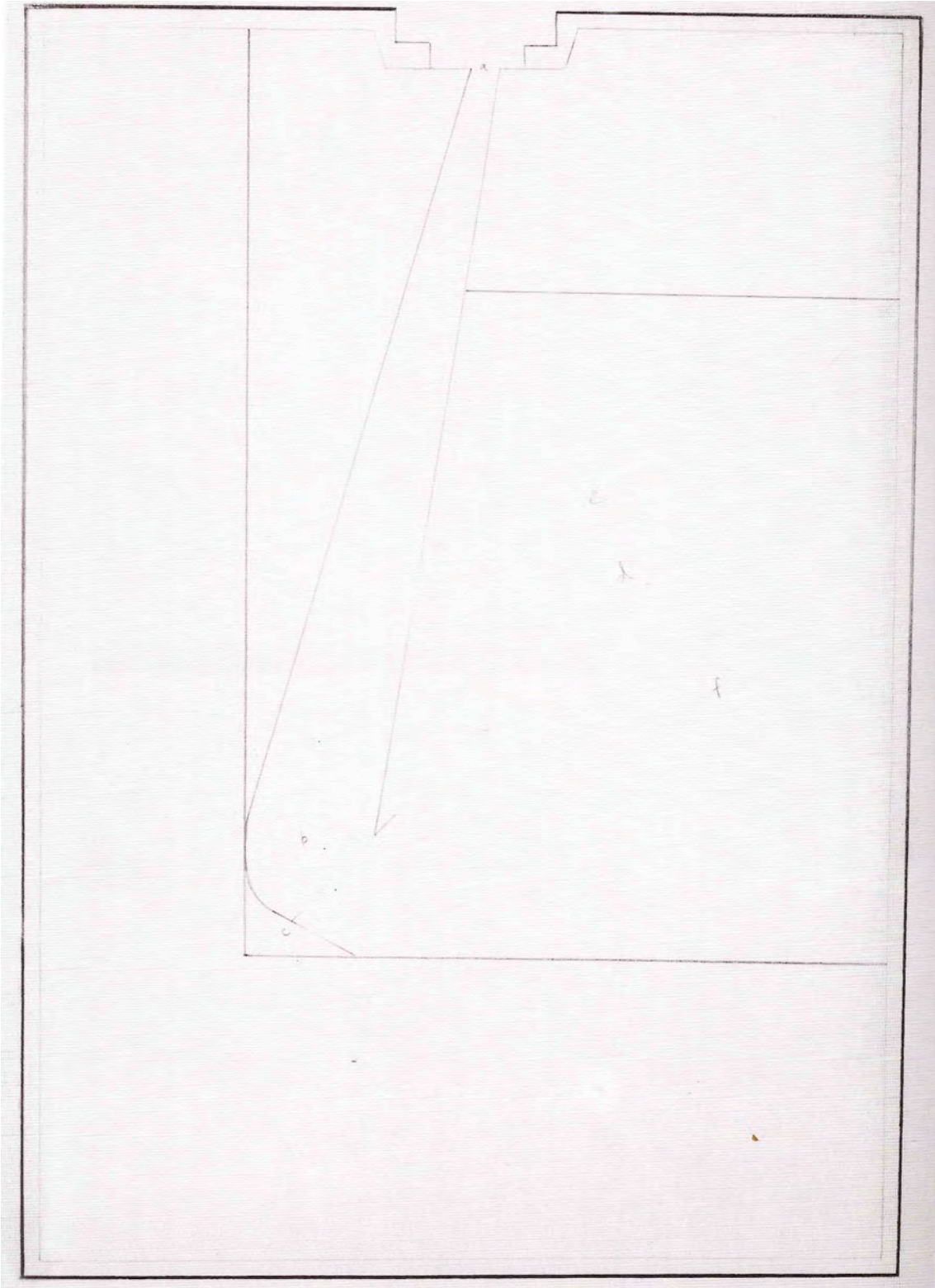


Fig. 51 Maria Nordman, plan for *Saddleback Mountain*, Irvine, California, 1973.



Fig. 52 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Saddleback Mountain*, Irvine, California, 1973.

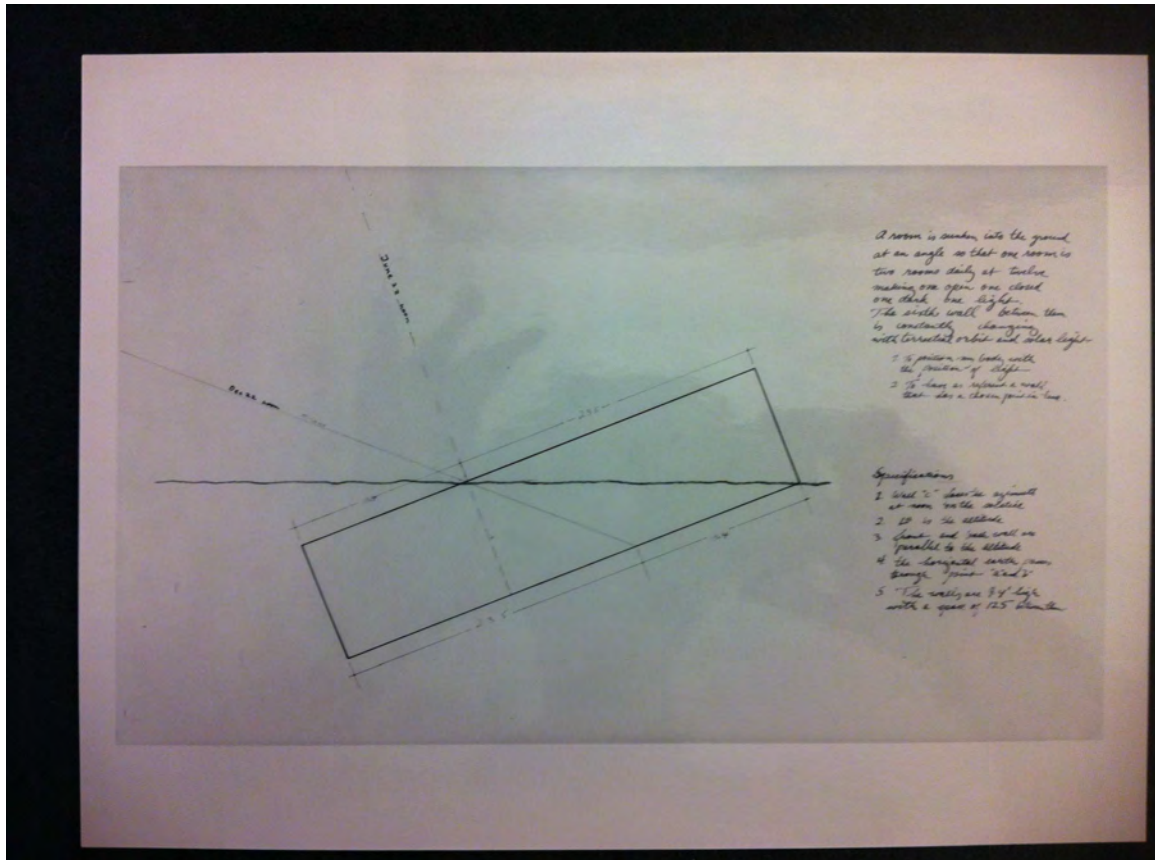


Fig. 53 Maria Nordman, plan for untitled submerged work, c. 1977.

A room is sunken into the ground
at an angle so that one room is
two rooms daily at twelve
making one open one closed
one dark one light.
The sixth wall between them
is constantly changing
with terrestrial orbit and solar light.

1. To position my body with
the position of light
2. To have as referent a wall
that has a chosen point in time.

Specifications

1. Wall "c" faces the azimuth
at noon on the solstice
2. L_a is the altitude
3. Front and back wall are
parallel to the altitude
4. the horizontal earth passes
through point "a and b"
5. The walls are 9.4' high
with a space of 12.5 between them.

Fig. 54 Maria Nordman, detail of plan for untitled submerged work, c. 1977.

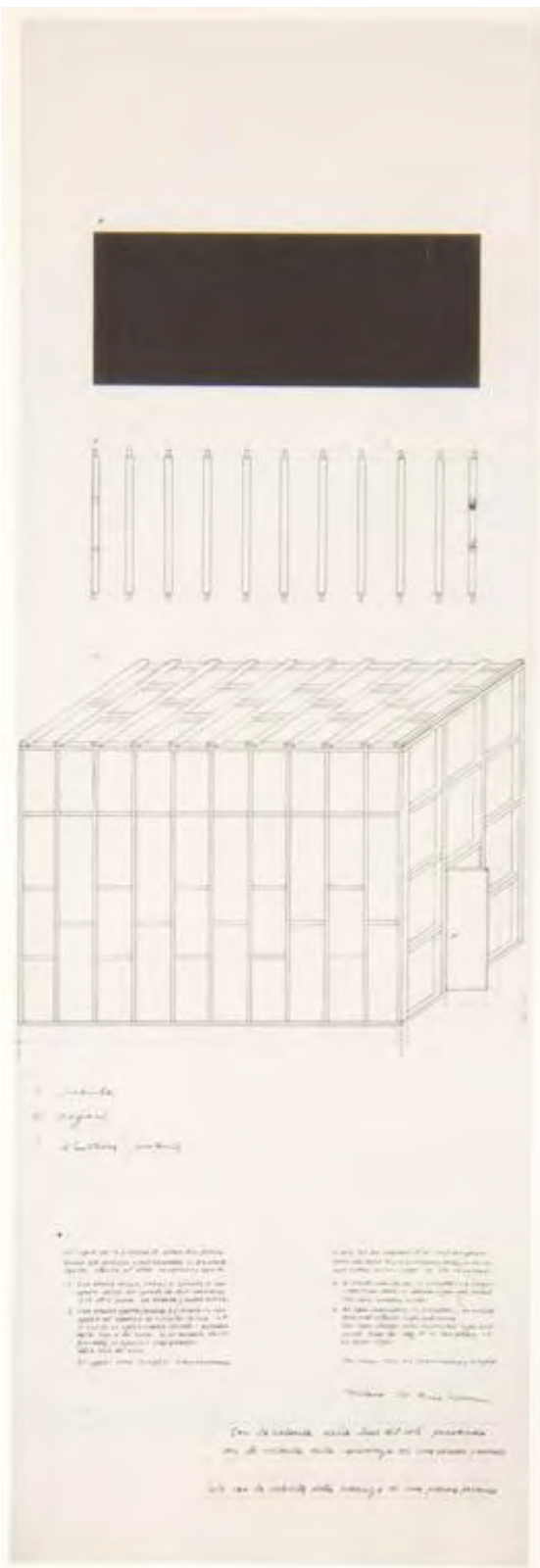


Fig. 55 Maria Nordman, plan for *I Giardini Pubblici*, Milan, Italy, 1974.

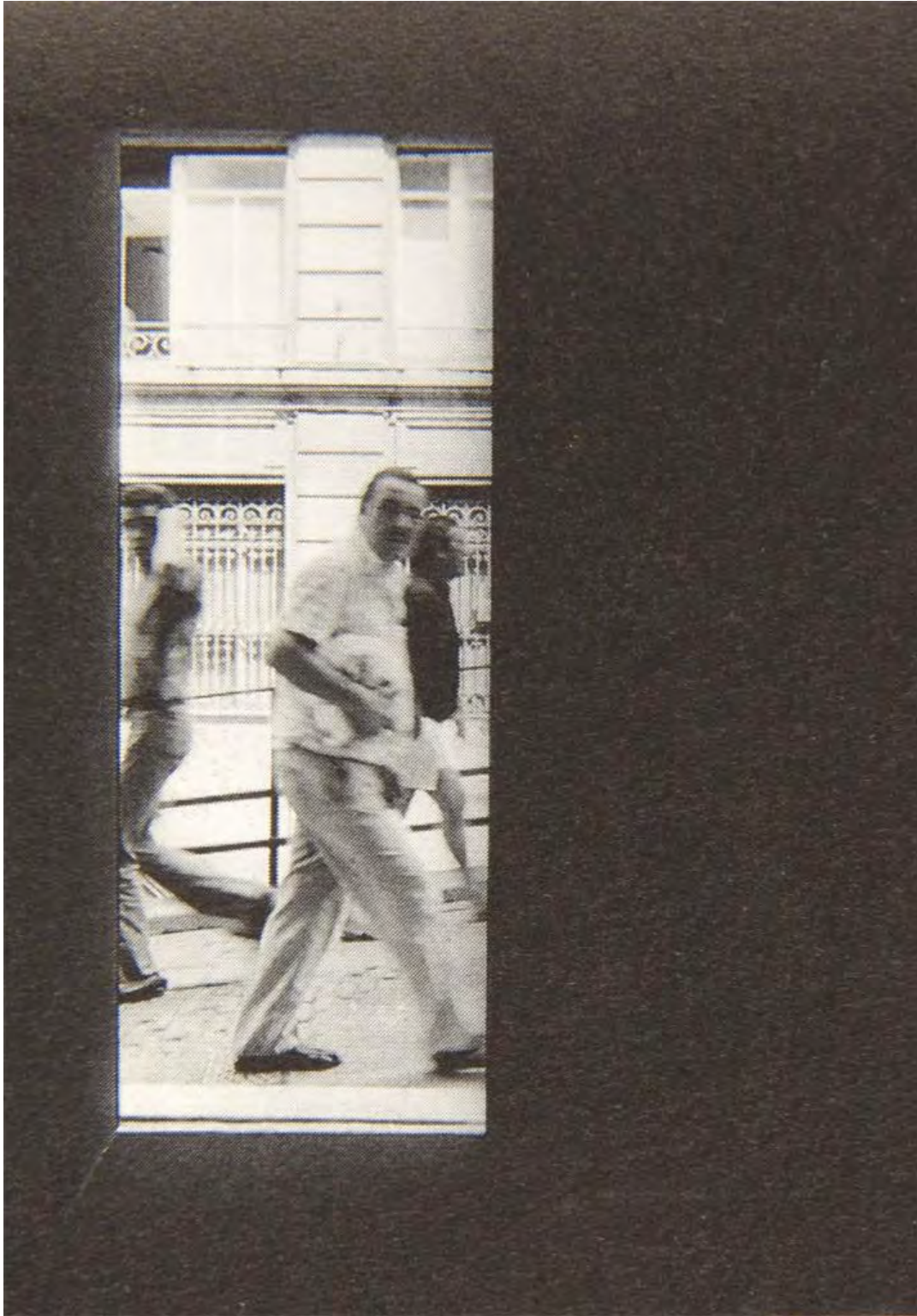


Fig. 57 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Porta Soprana*, Genoa, Italy, 1974.



Fig. 58 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Porta Soprana*, Genoa, 1974.



Fig. 59 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of exterior and interior views of *Porta Soprana*, Genoa, Italy, 1974; page 79 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

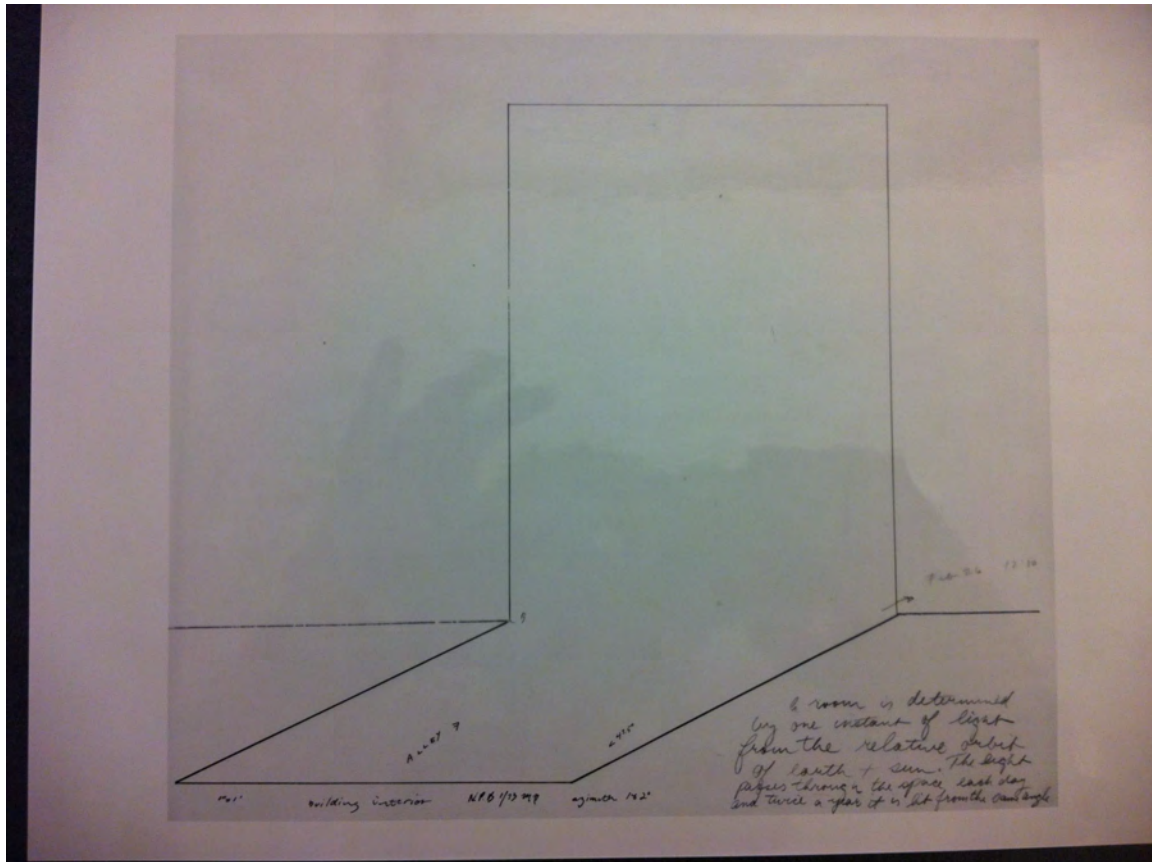


Fig. 60 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Newport Beach*, Newport Beach, California, 1974.

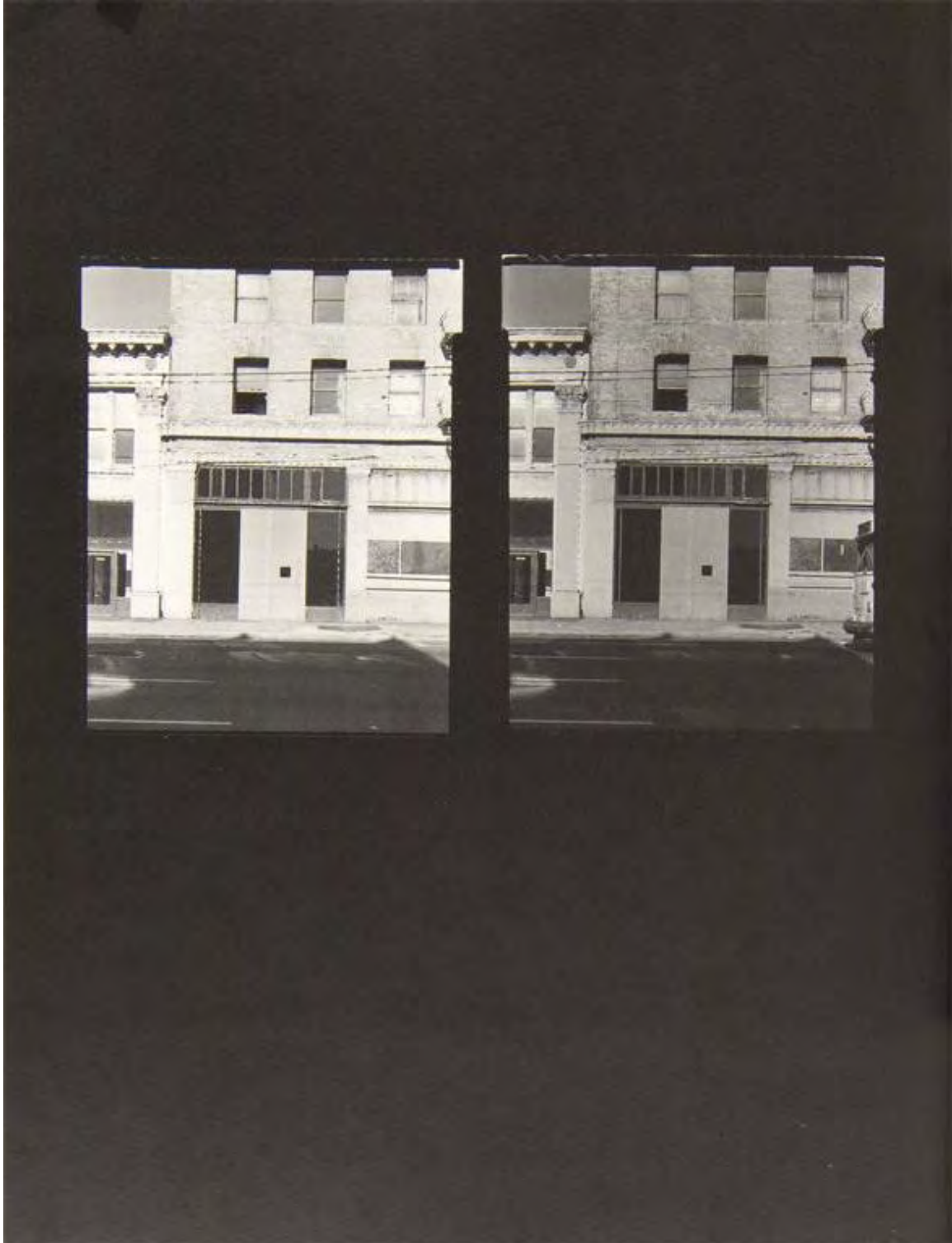


Fig. 61 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of exterior view of *Fourth and Howard*, San Francisco, 1974.

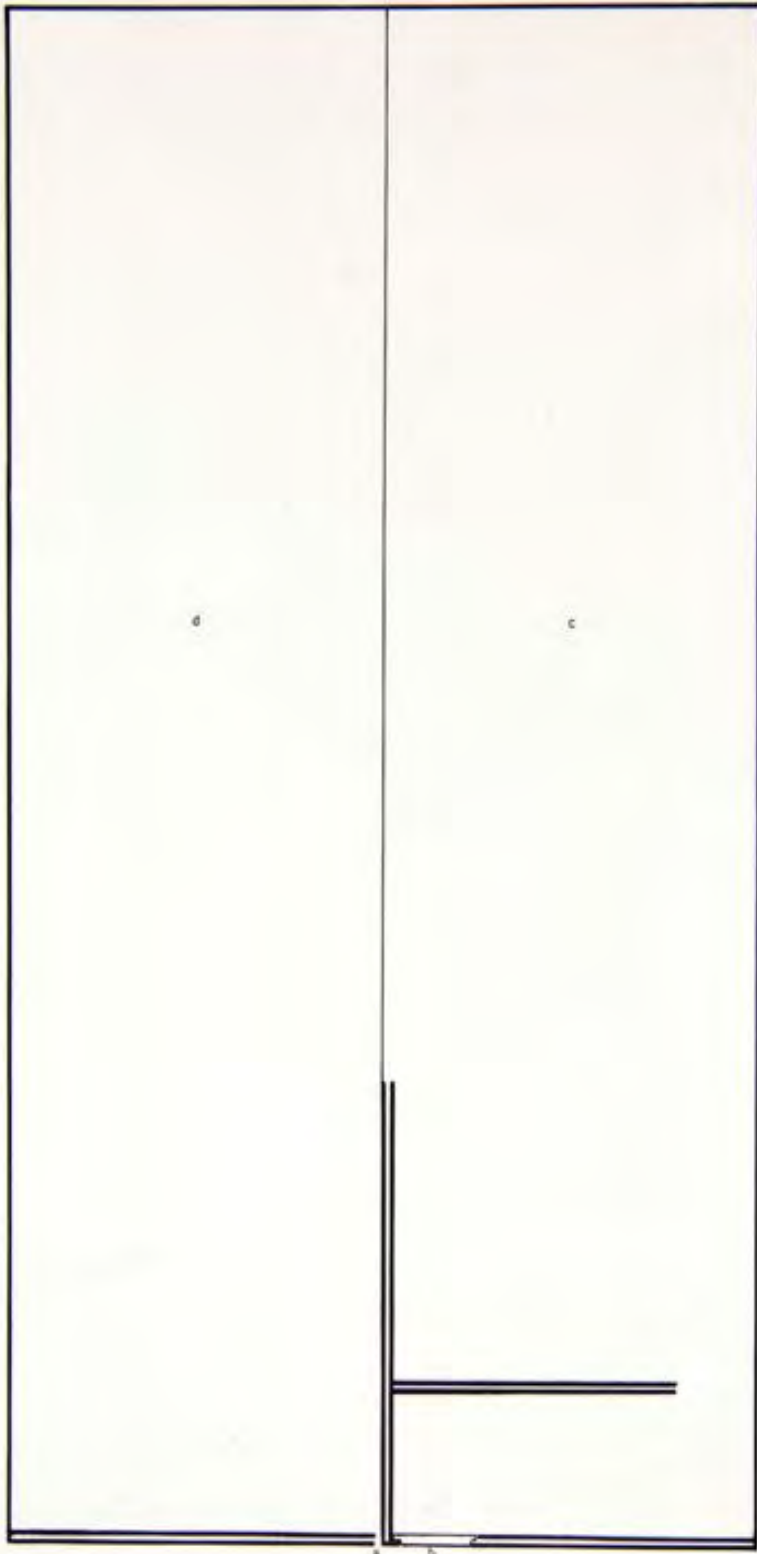


Fig. 62 Maria Nordman, plan for *Fourth and Howard*, San Francisco, 1974.

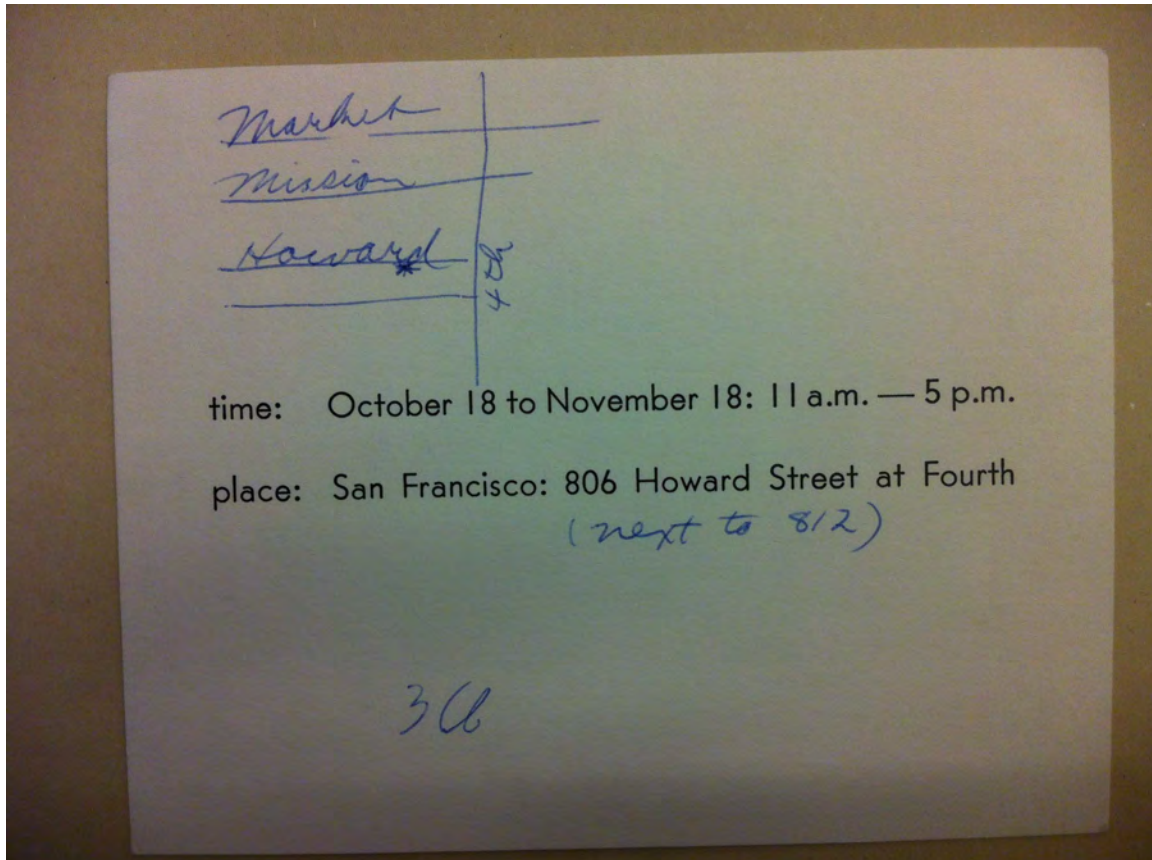


Fig. 63 Maria Nordman, announcement card with artist's notes for *Fourth and Howard*, San Francisco, 1974.



Fig. 64 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Varese*, Varese, Italy, 1975.

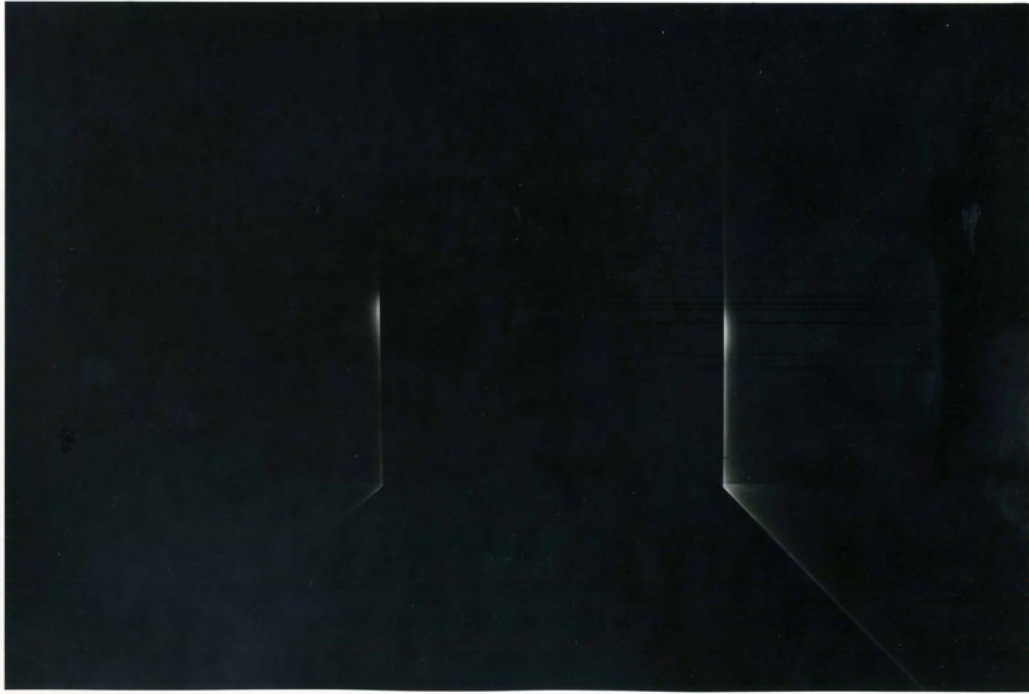


Fig. 65 Maria Nordman, interior view of *Varese*, Varese, Italy, 1975.

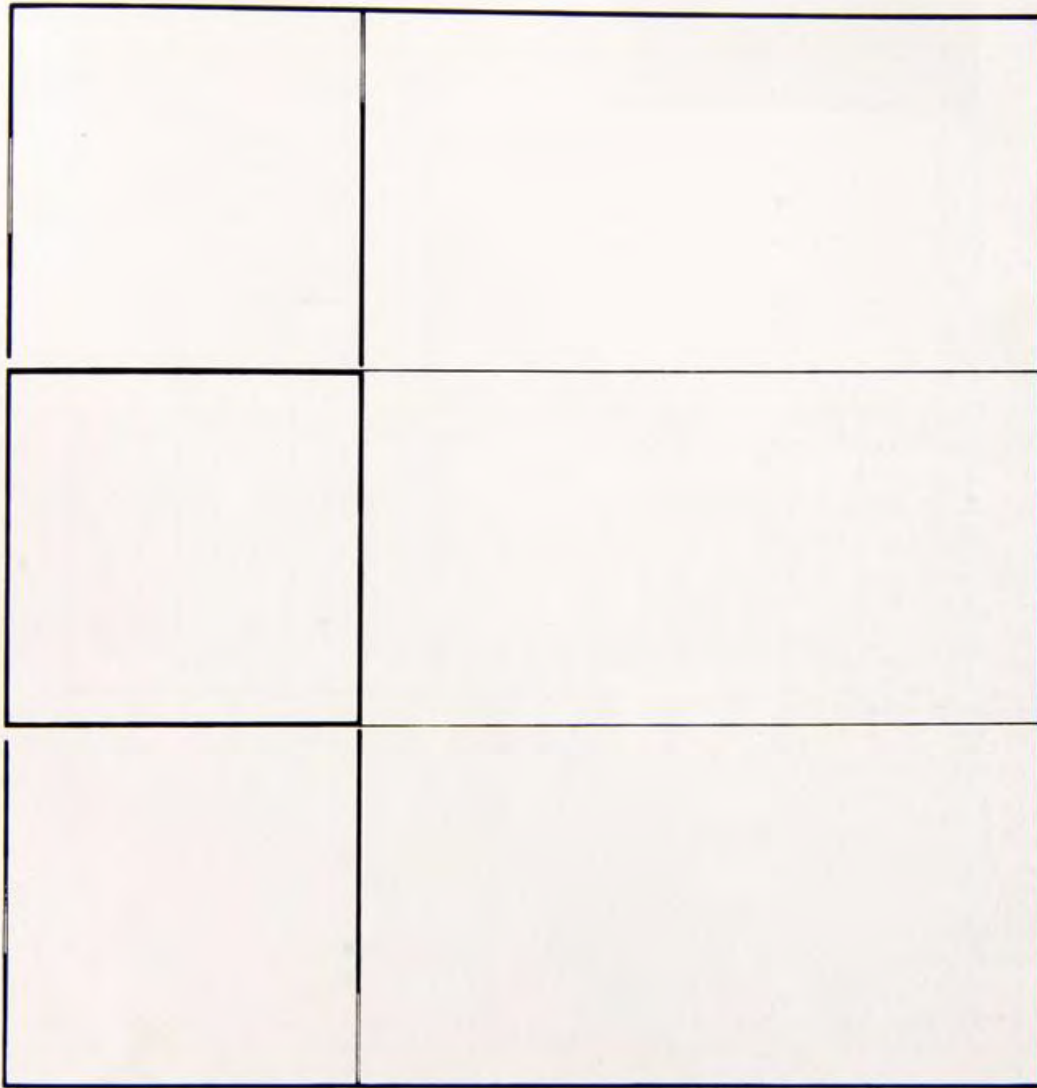


Fig. 66 Maria Nordman, plan for *Varese*, Varese, Italy, 1975.

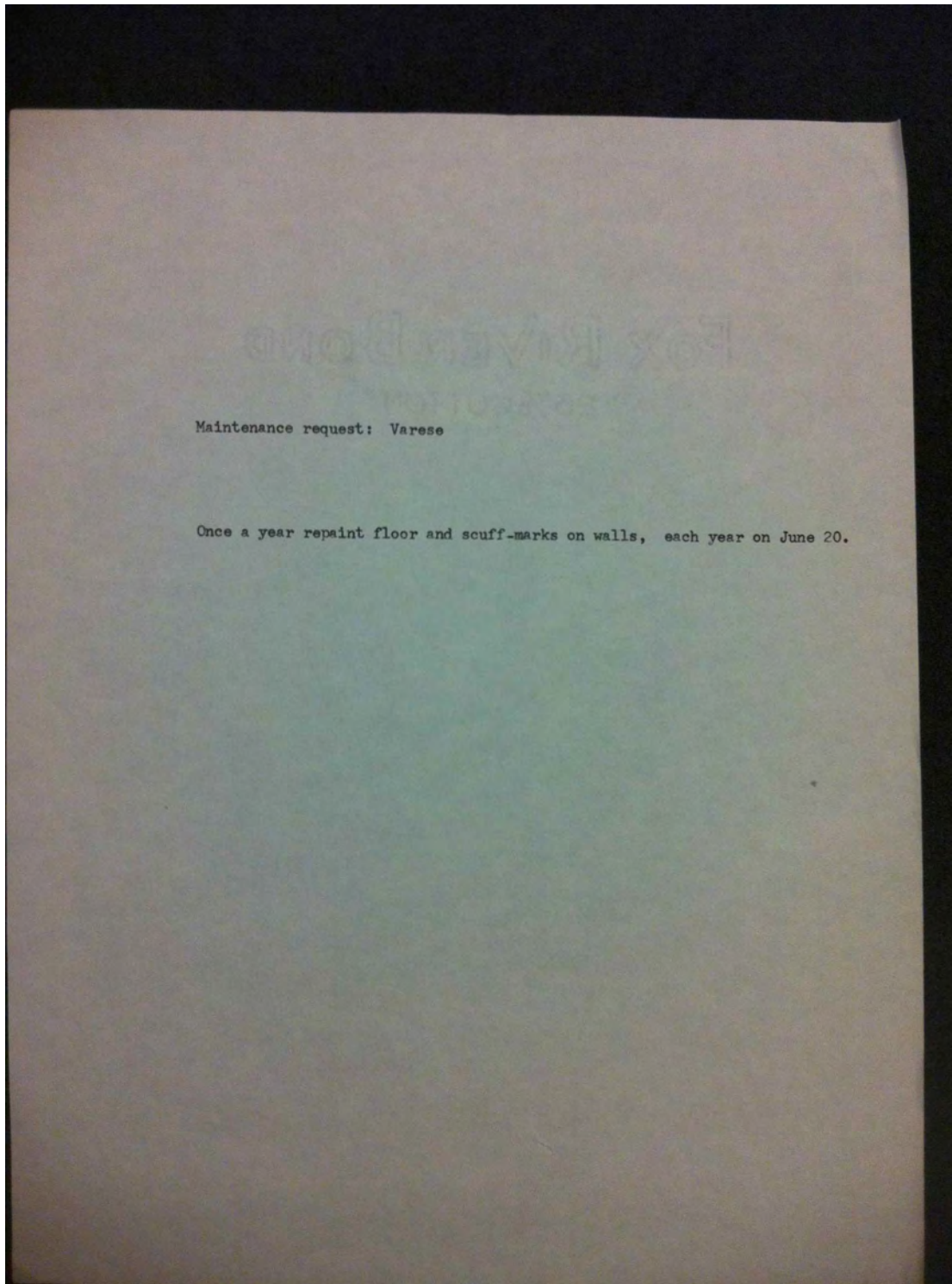


Fig. 67 Maria Nordman, "Maintenance Request" for *Varese*, Varese, Italy, 1974.



Fig. 68 Maria Nordman, plan for *Via Melzo*, Milan, Italy, 1974.

Padiglione centrale Giardini di Castello
 July 10 - October 10, 1976

Arrangement
 Germano Celant
 Design
 Gino Valle

GUIDE TO THE AMBIENTE / ART EXHIBITION

1. Ballo, Dapert, Farnetaggi, Tatti Sanguineti, Rukhovich, Poni, Lualaba De Papa
2. Kargiński, Gorka, Gajaryan, Vondemborg-Gilbert, Borchardt, Haxar, Montfort, van Doesburg, Tula-Ara, Schramm, Gotti, Wierwille
3. van Doesburg, Ossi-Mees, Duchamp, Schifano
4. Art, Raftis, Sirtori, Gotti, Duchamp, May, Korman (in collaborazione 1981/1982/1984), Pollock, Favre, Gellera, Klein, Rabinow
5. Healy, Hays, Mazzoni, Amati, Sassi, Kattow, Diderburg, Ben Wynn
6. Chirale, Dierberg, Pasini, Corvini, Jermann, Anand, Kowal, Pasquetti
7. Informazione 1982/1983
8. Palermo
9. Borsari
10. Graham
11. Bazza
12. LeWitt
13. Manz
14. Naunton
15. Neunke
16. Accardi
17. Irwin
18. Nordson
19. Wheeler
20. Asher



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Fig. 69 Floor plan of *Arte Ambiente* exhibition at Giardini di Castello, 1976 Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; page 188 of *La biennale di Venezia, Section of Visual Arts and Architecture, General Catalogue, First Volume* (Venice: Alfieri Edizioni d'Arte, 1976).

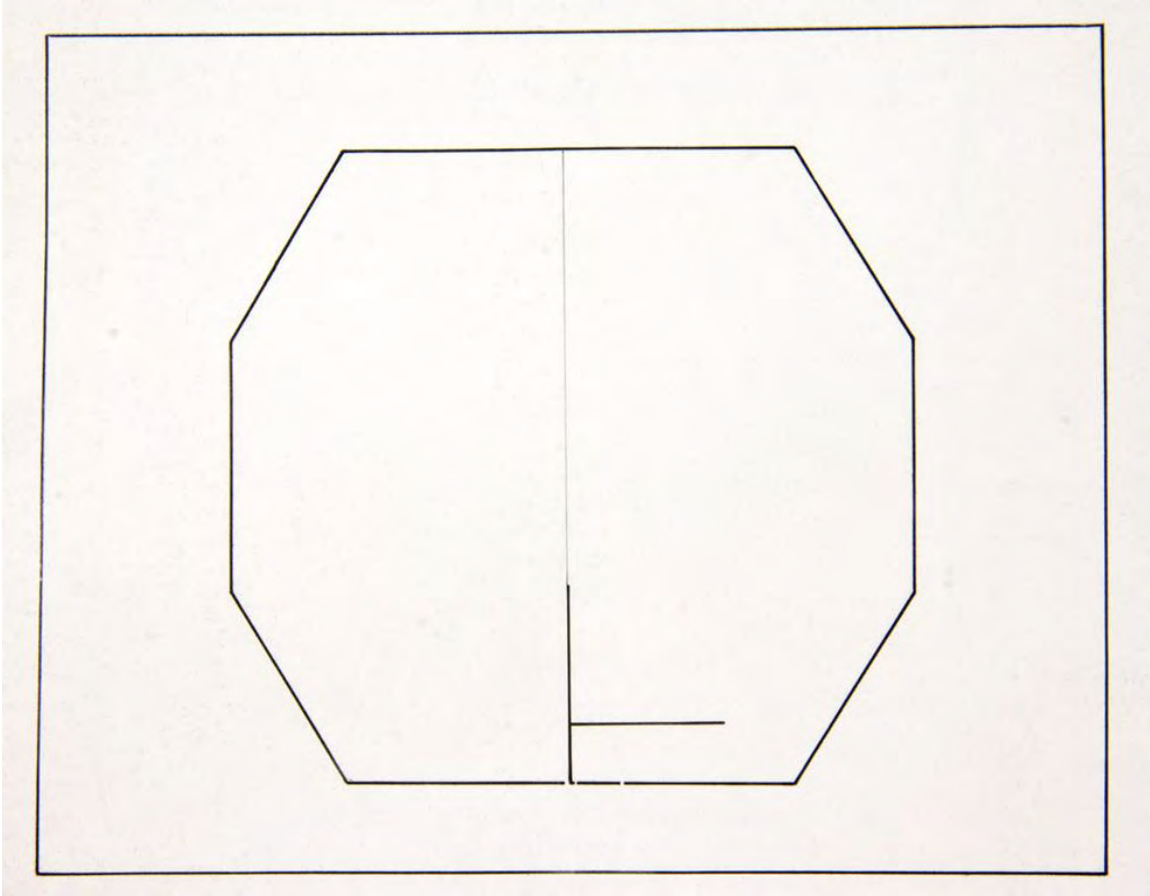


Fig. 70 Maria Nordman, plan for *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976.

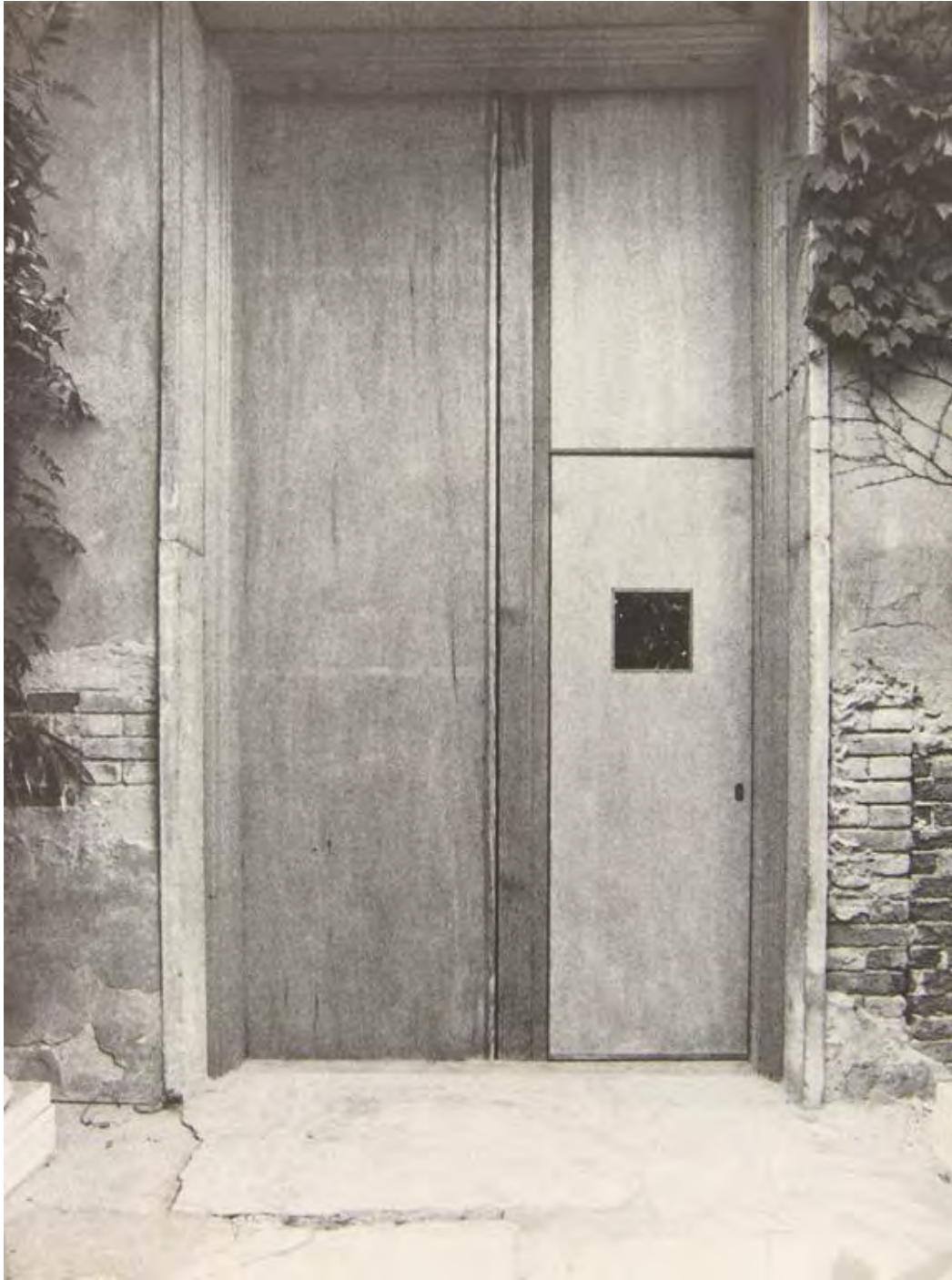


Fig. 71 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976.

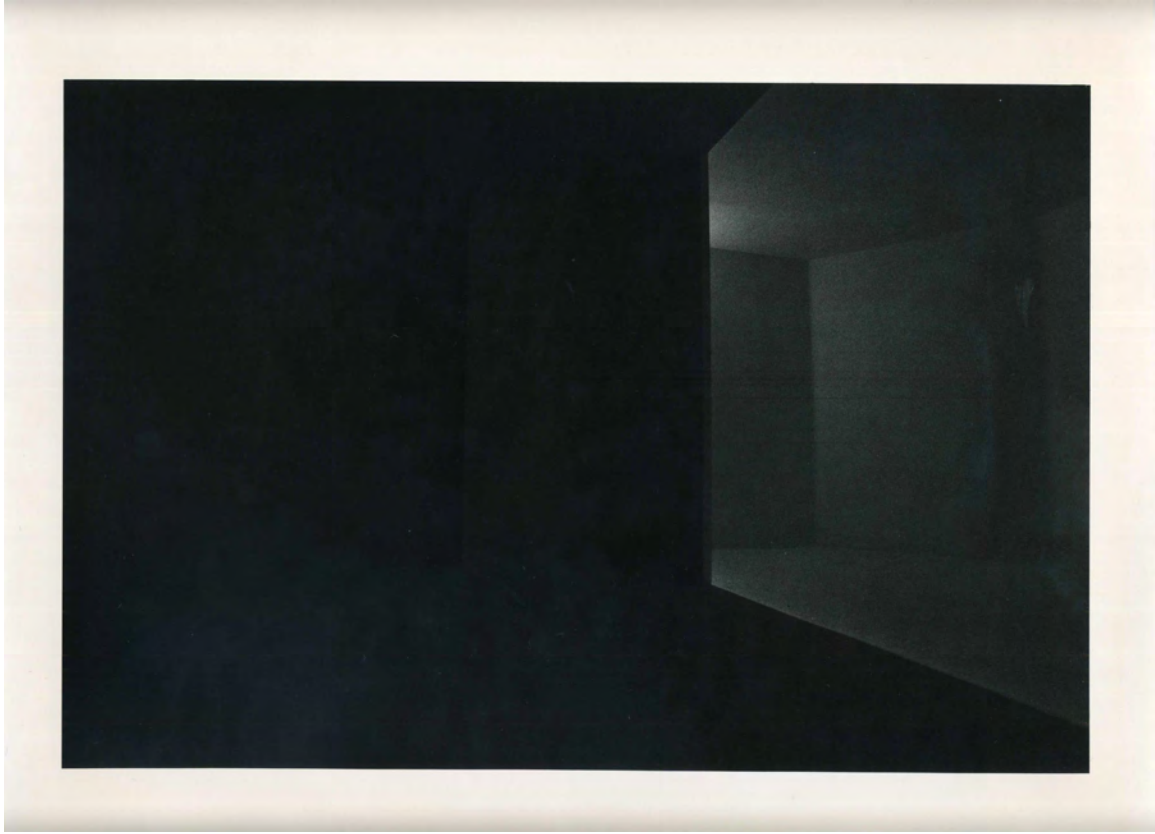


Fig. 72 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976.



Fig. 73 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976.

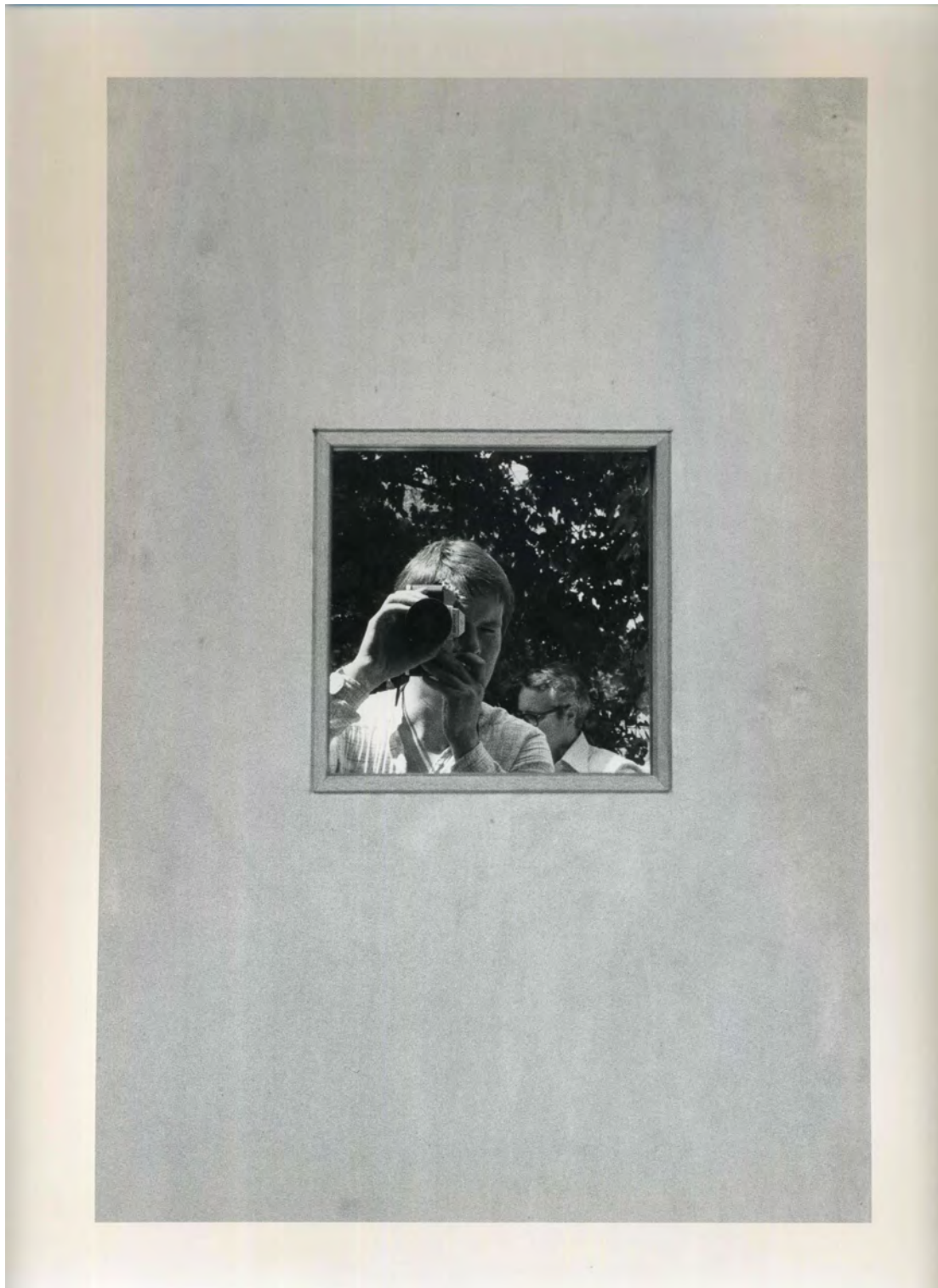


Fig. 74 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Venezia*, Venice, Italy, 1976.

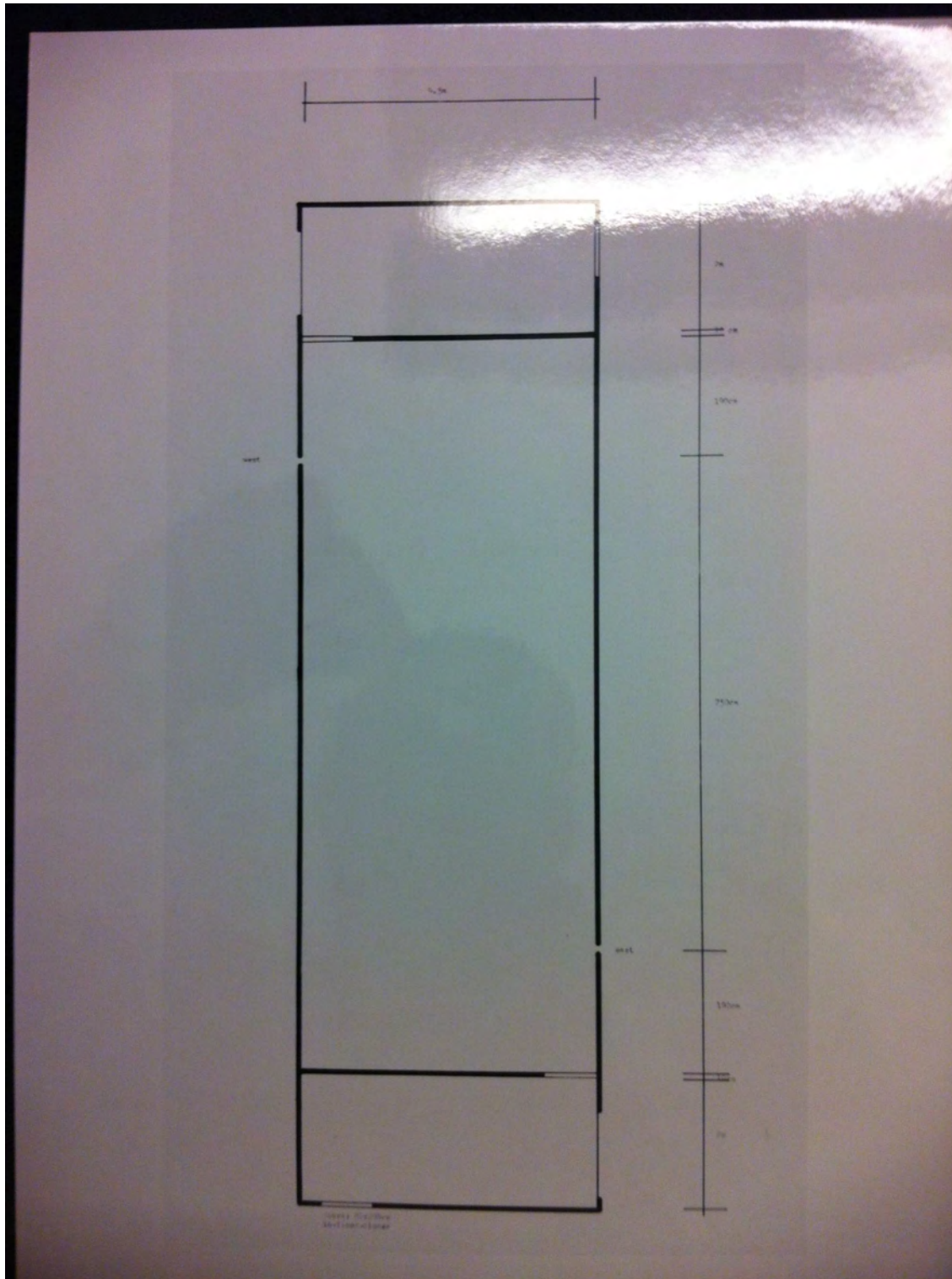


Fig. 75 Maria Nordman, plan for *Villa Scheibler*, Milan, Italy, 1977.

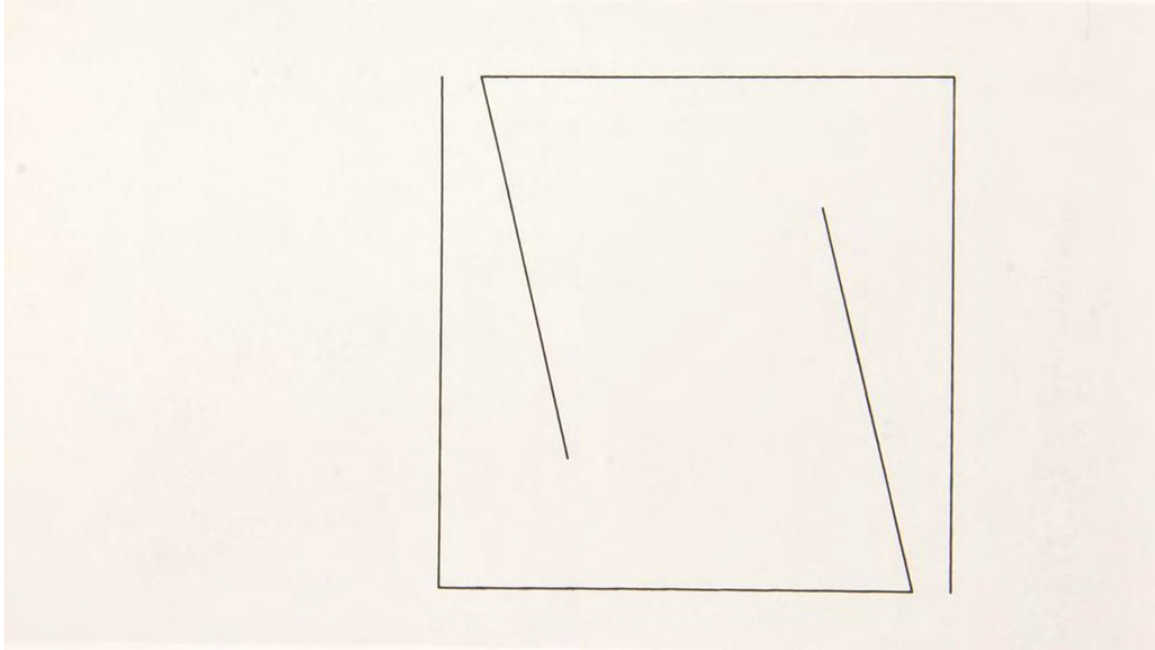


Fig. 76 Maria Nordman, plan for *Simultaneous Entrances from Opposite Directions of Any Two People*, 1977.



Fig. 77 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; pages 98–99 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 78 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; inset on page 101 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 79 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; inset on page 100 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 80 Maria Nordman, plan for *Neubrückestrasse*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; inset on page 103 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 81 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; pages 102 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

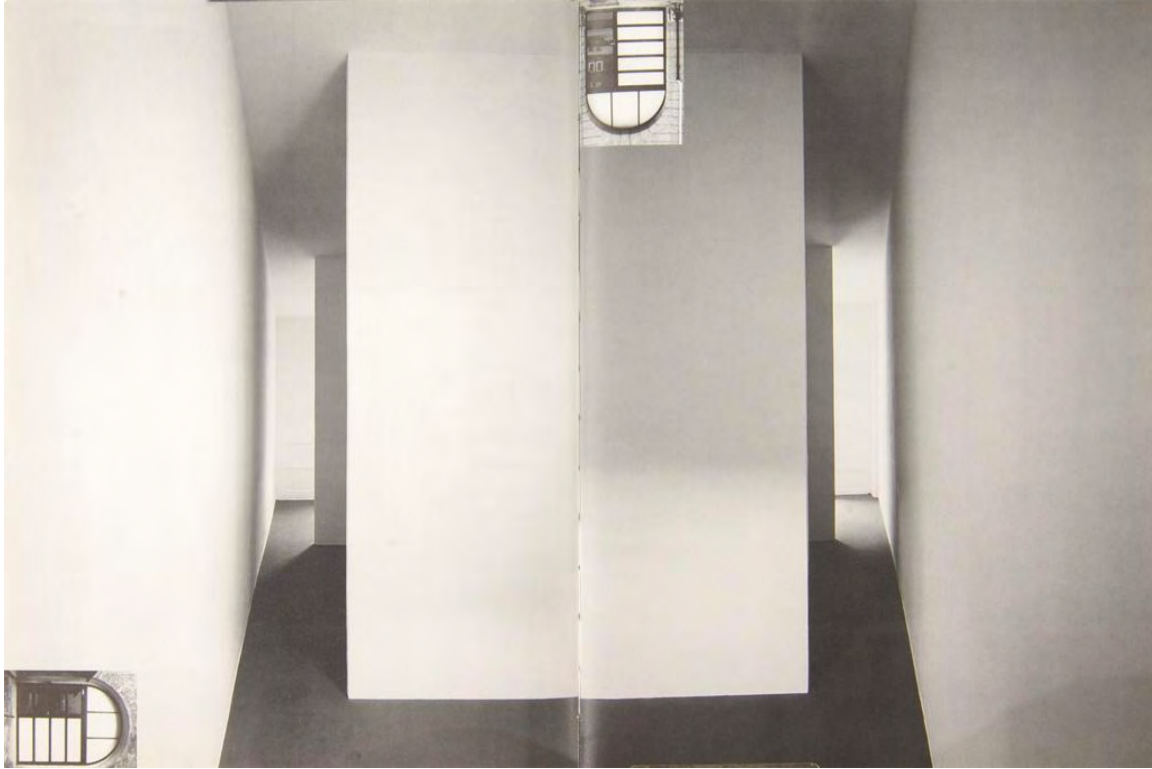


Fig. 82 Maria Nordman, collage of photo-fragments of interior and exterior views of *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; pages 100–01 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.

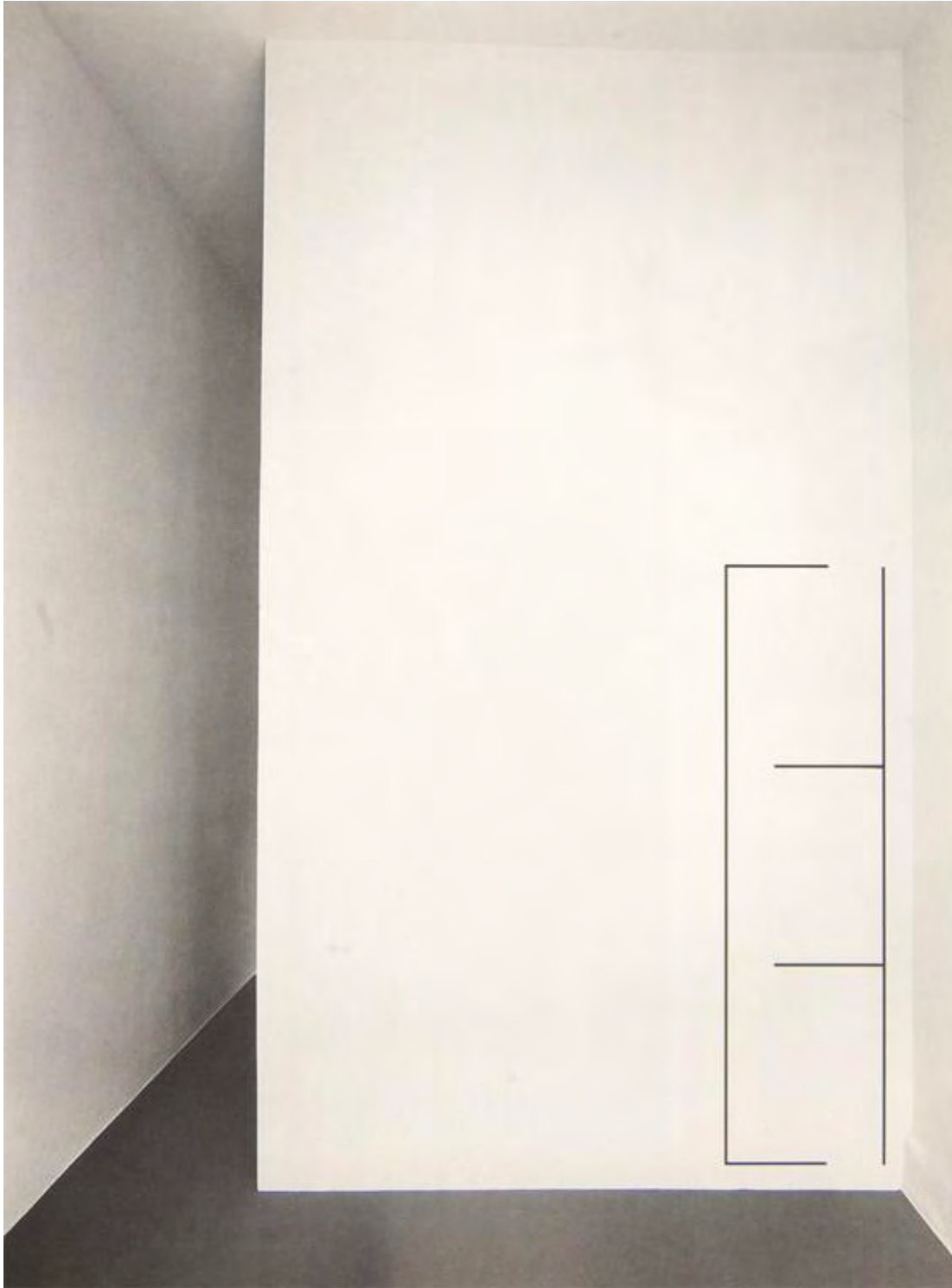


Fig. 83 Maria Nordman, collage of interior view and plan for *Neubrücke*strasse, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1977; page 104 in Nordman, *De Sculptura II*.



Fig. 84 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of exterior view of *Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse*, Kassel, Germany, 1977.

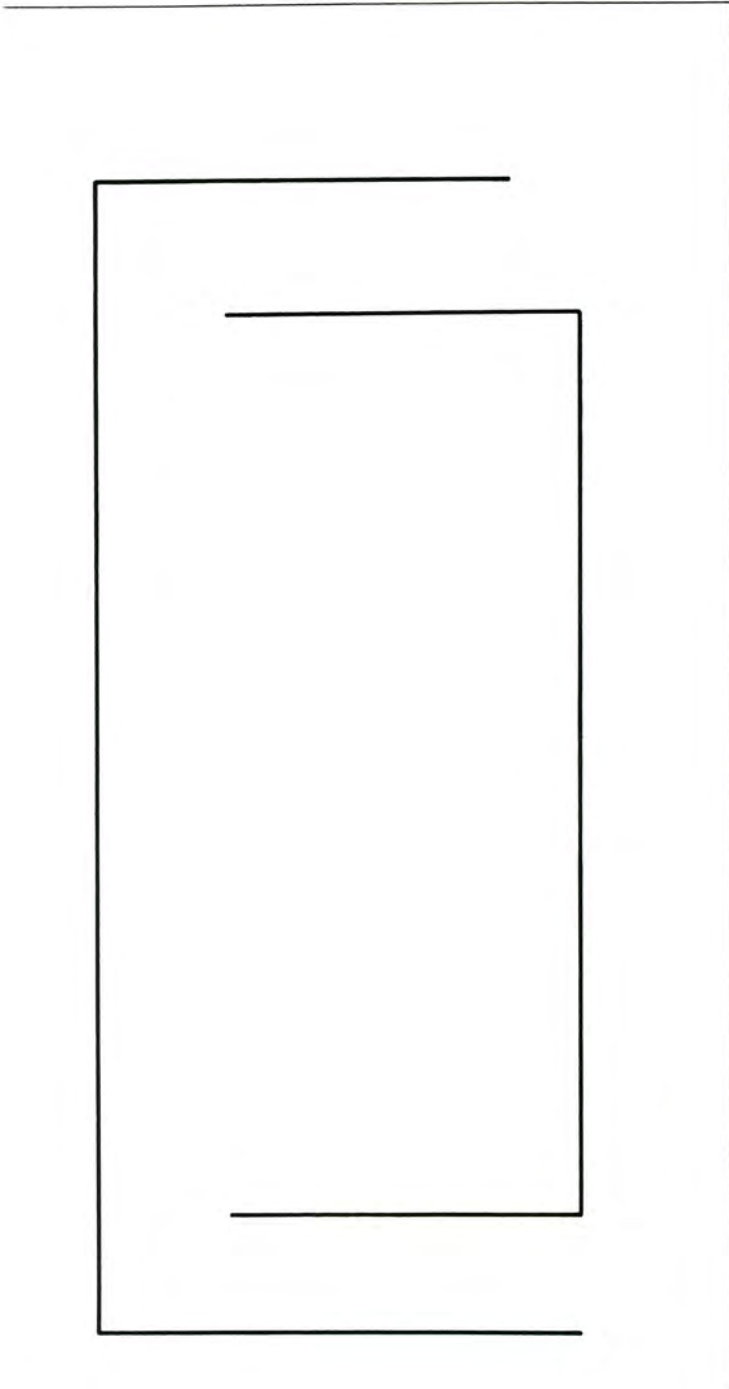


Fig. 85 Maria Nordman, plan for *Frankfurter/Heckerstrasse*, Kassel, Germany, 1977.

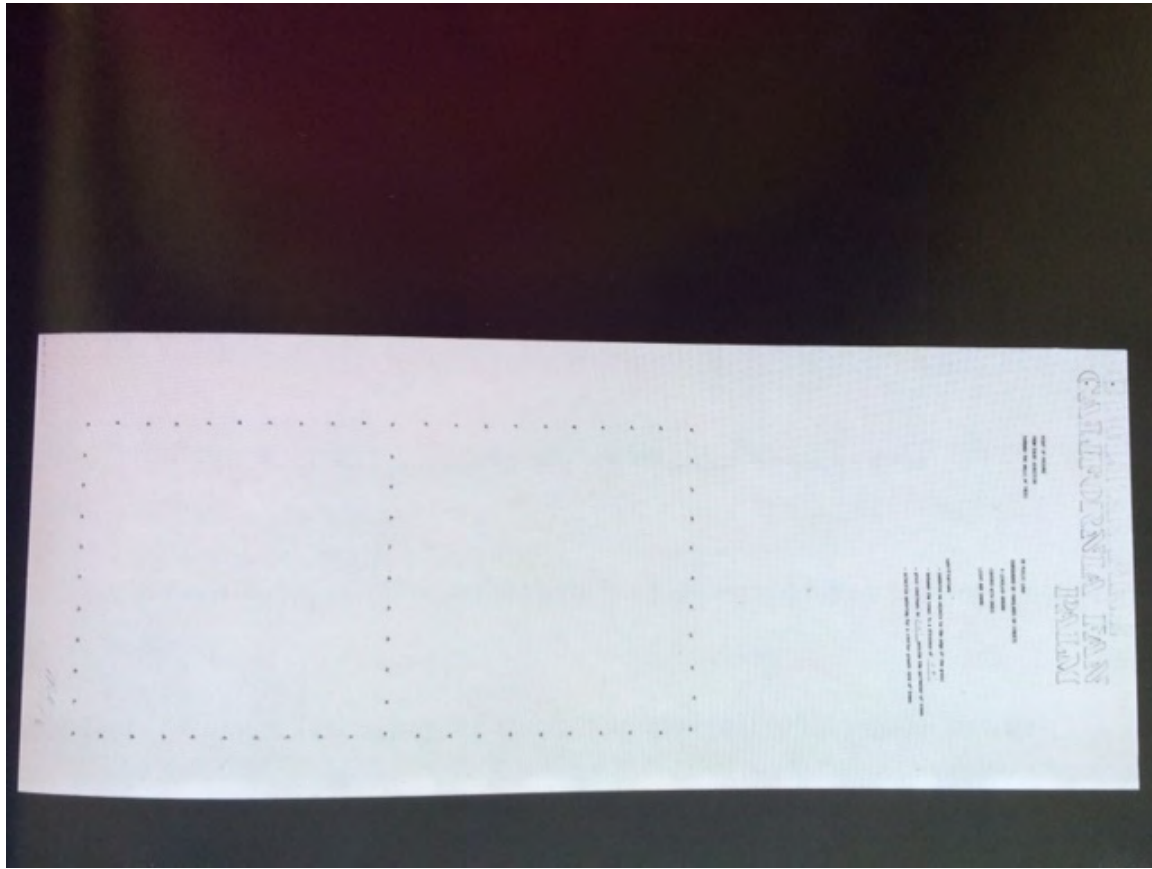


Fig. 86
Maria Nordman, recto side of plan for Public Proposals for an Open Place: *California Fan Palm*,
1977.

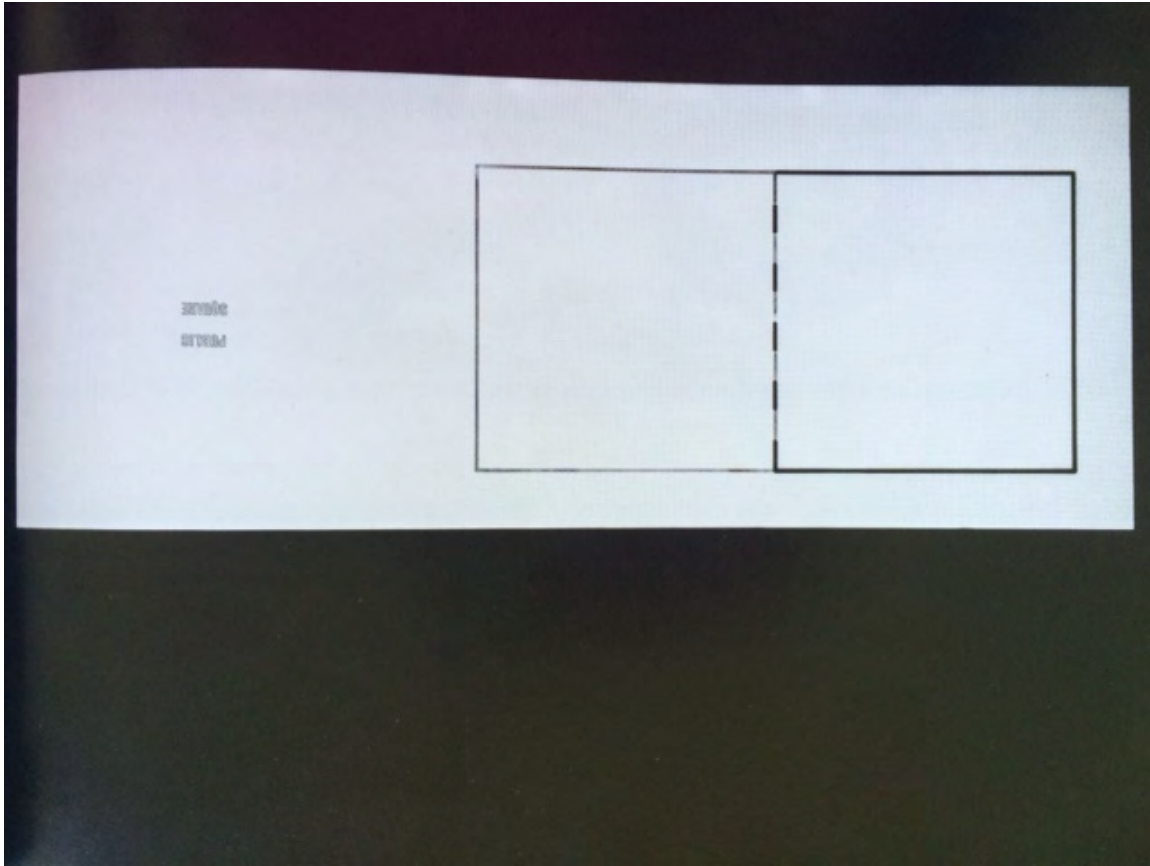


Fig. 87 Maria Nordman, verso side of plan for Public Proposal for An Open Place: *California Fan Palm*, 1977.

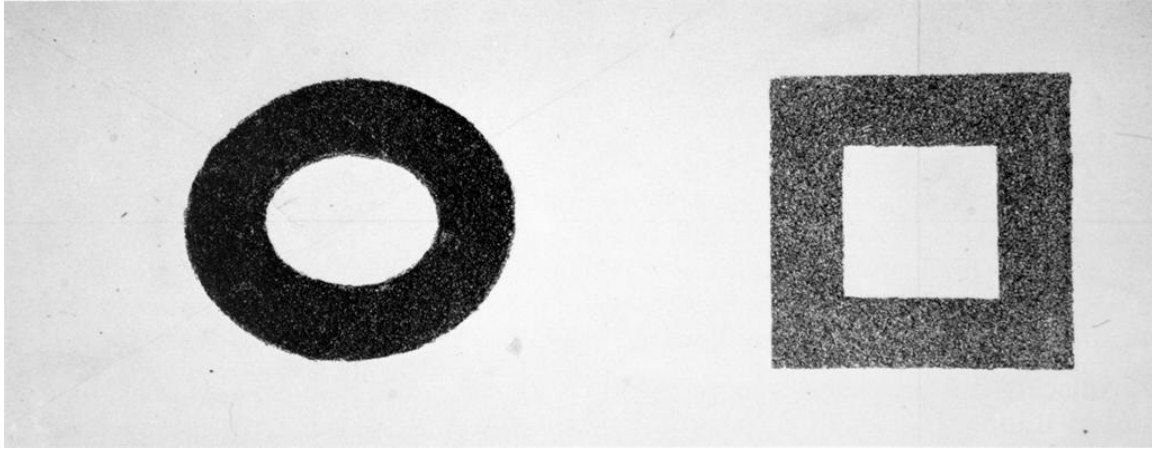


Fig. 88 Maria Nordman, recto side of plan for *Ground Owl/Ground Squirrel Park*, Bakersfield, California, 1978.

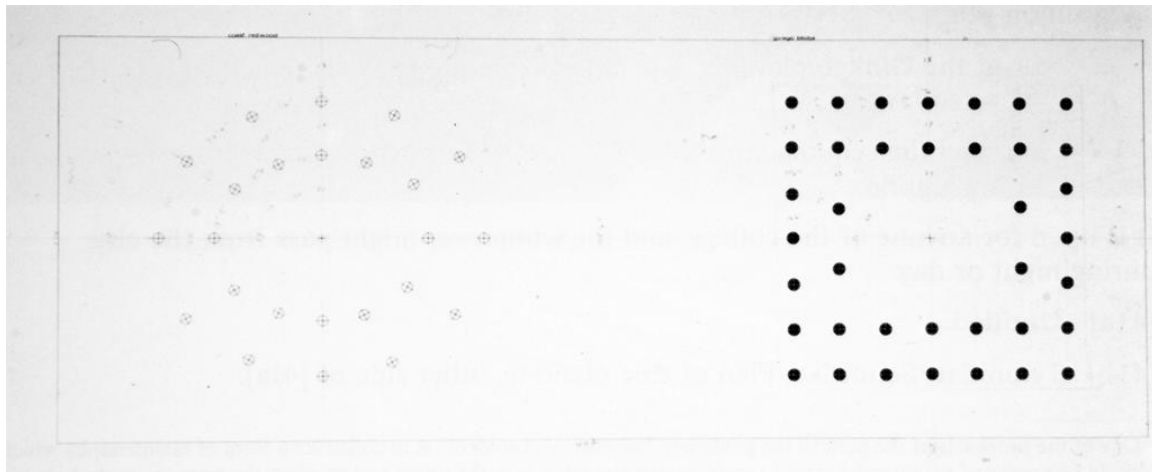


Fig. 89 Maria Nordman, verso side of plan for *Ground Owl/Ground Squirrel Park*, Bakersfield, California, 1978.

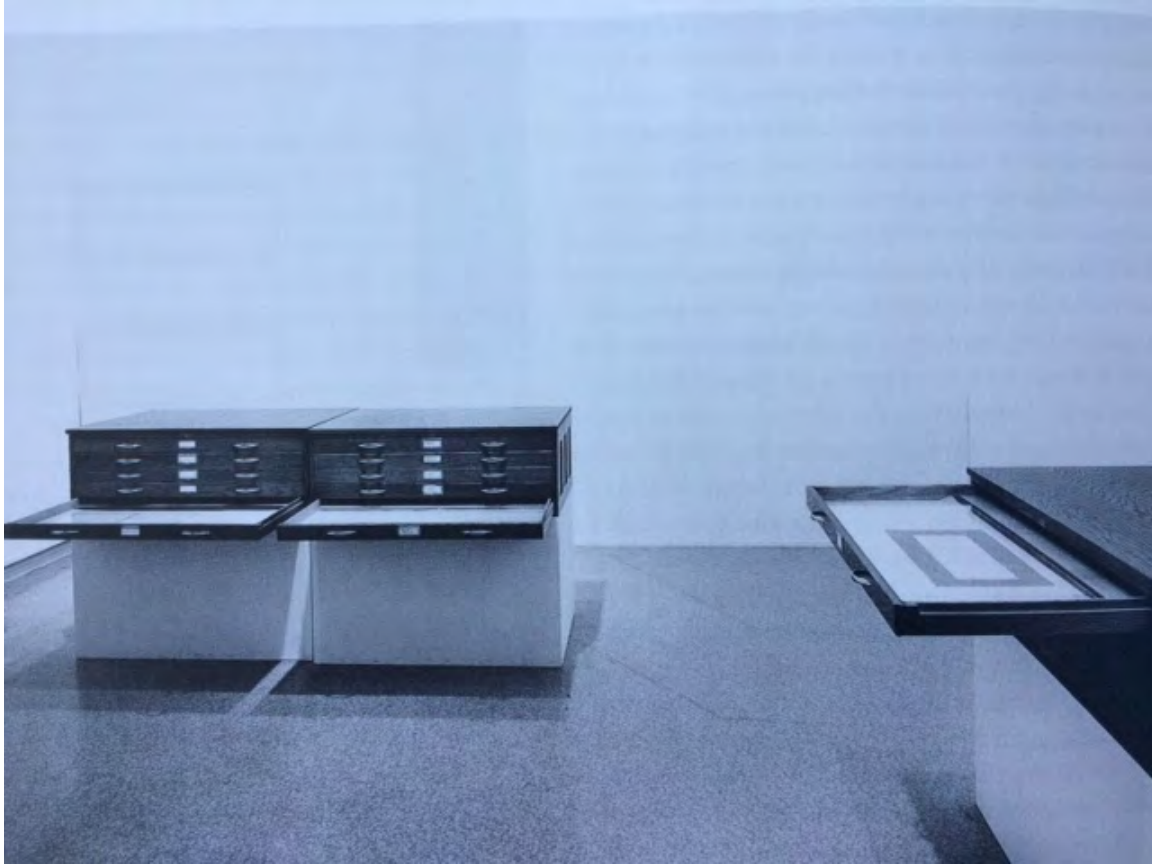


Fig. 90 Maria Nordman, installation view of *5 Public Proposals for an Open Place*, 1977, 73rd *American Exhibition*, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1978.



Fig. 91 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of interior view of *6/21/79 Berkeley*, Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California, 1979; front cover of *Artforum*, March 1980.



Fig. 92 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Untitled: Salita Tre Magi*, Genoa, Italy, 1979.

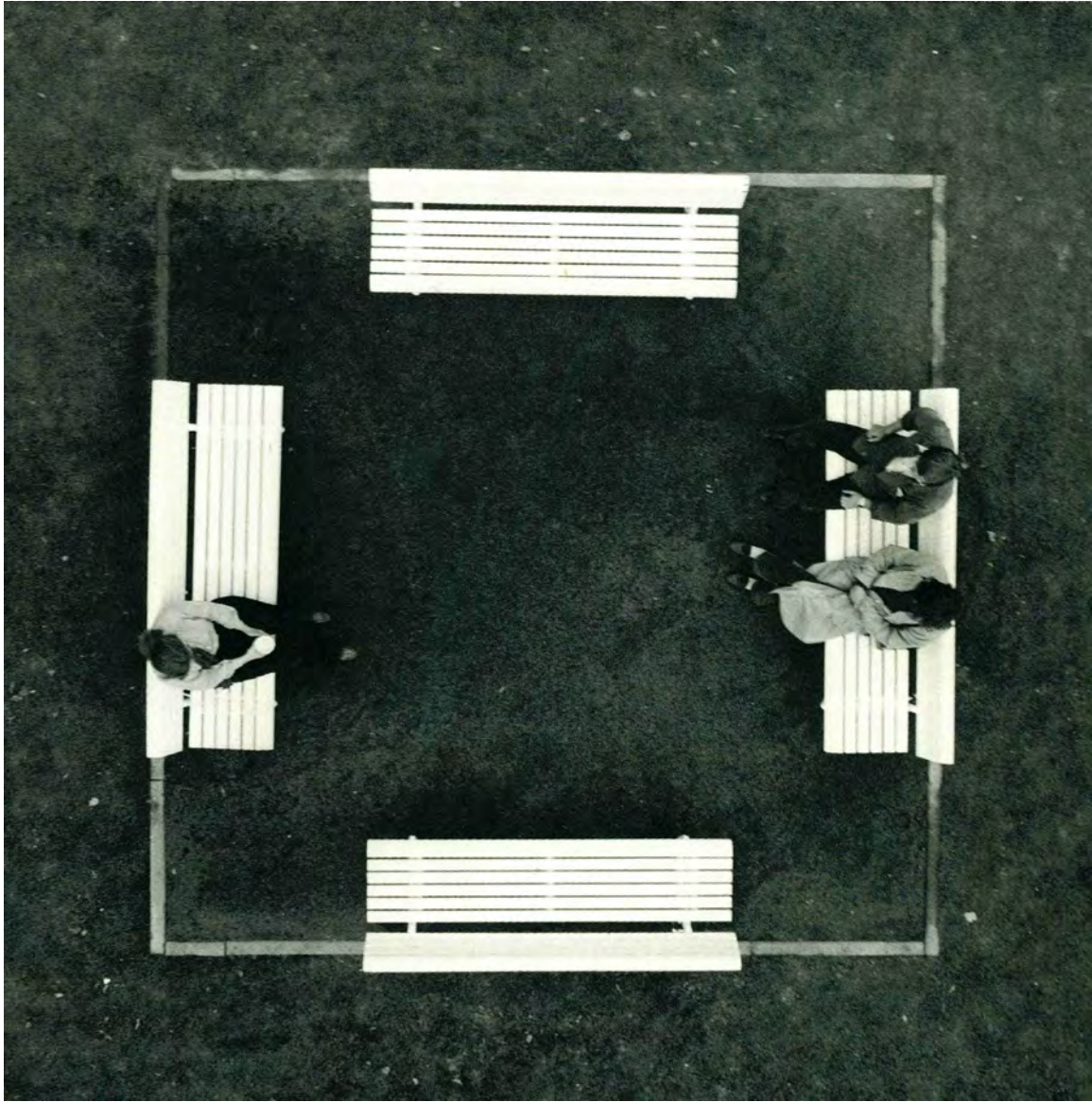


Fig. 93 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

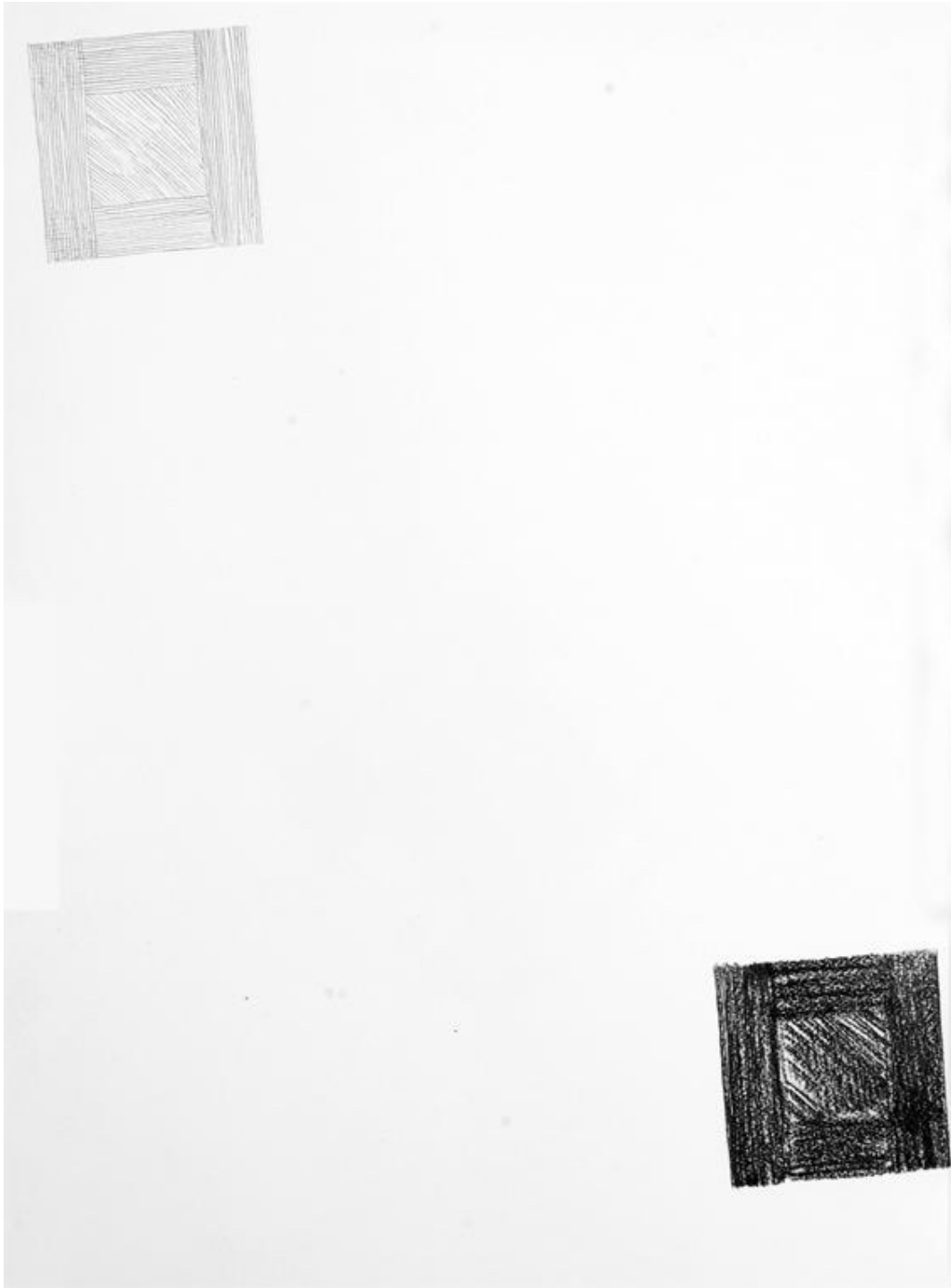


Fig. 94 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

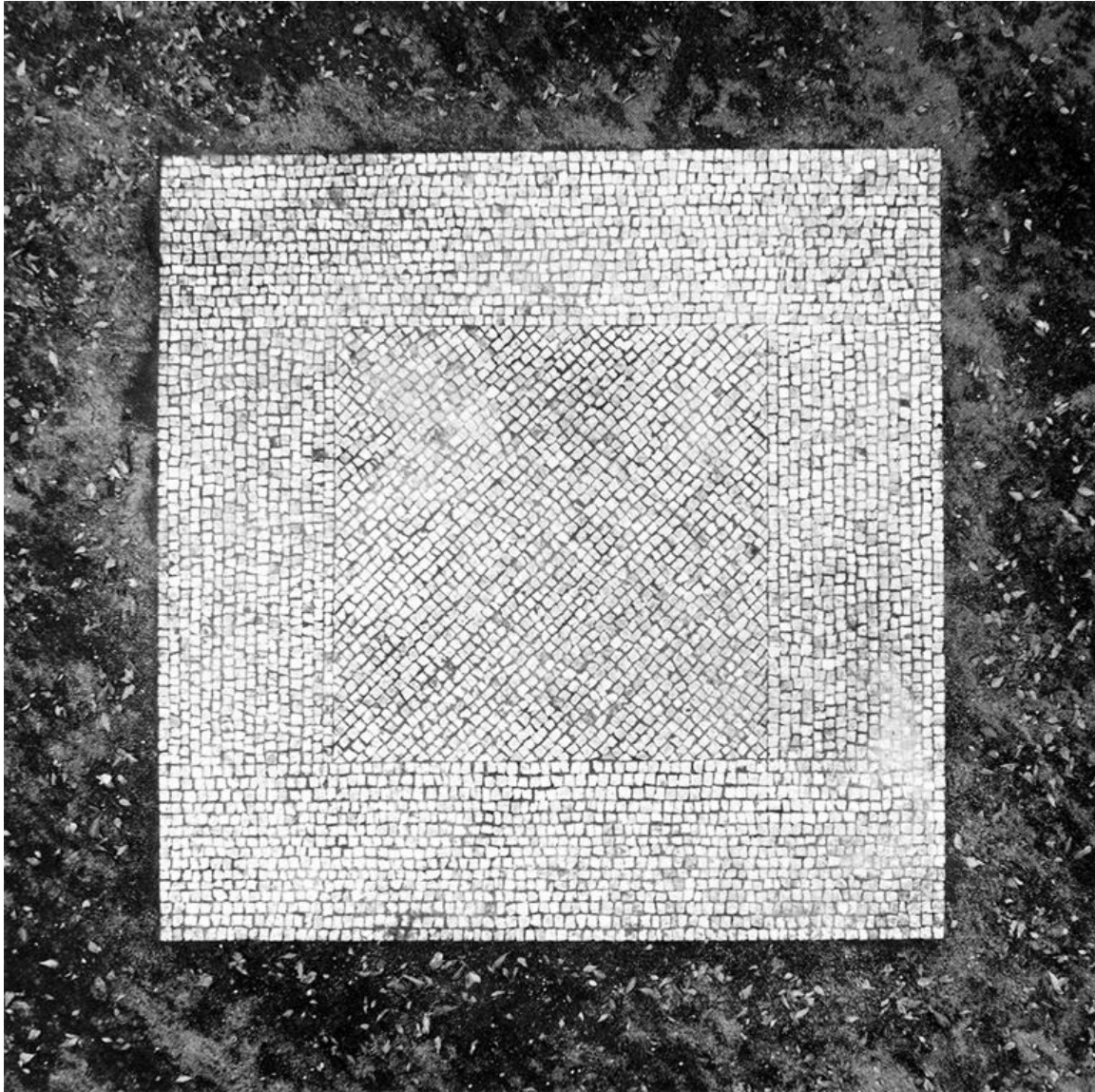


Fig. 95 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

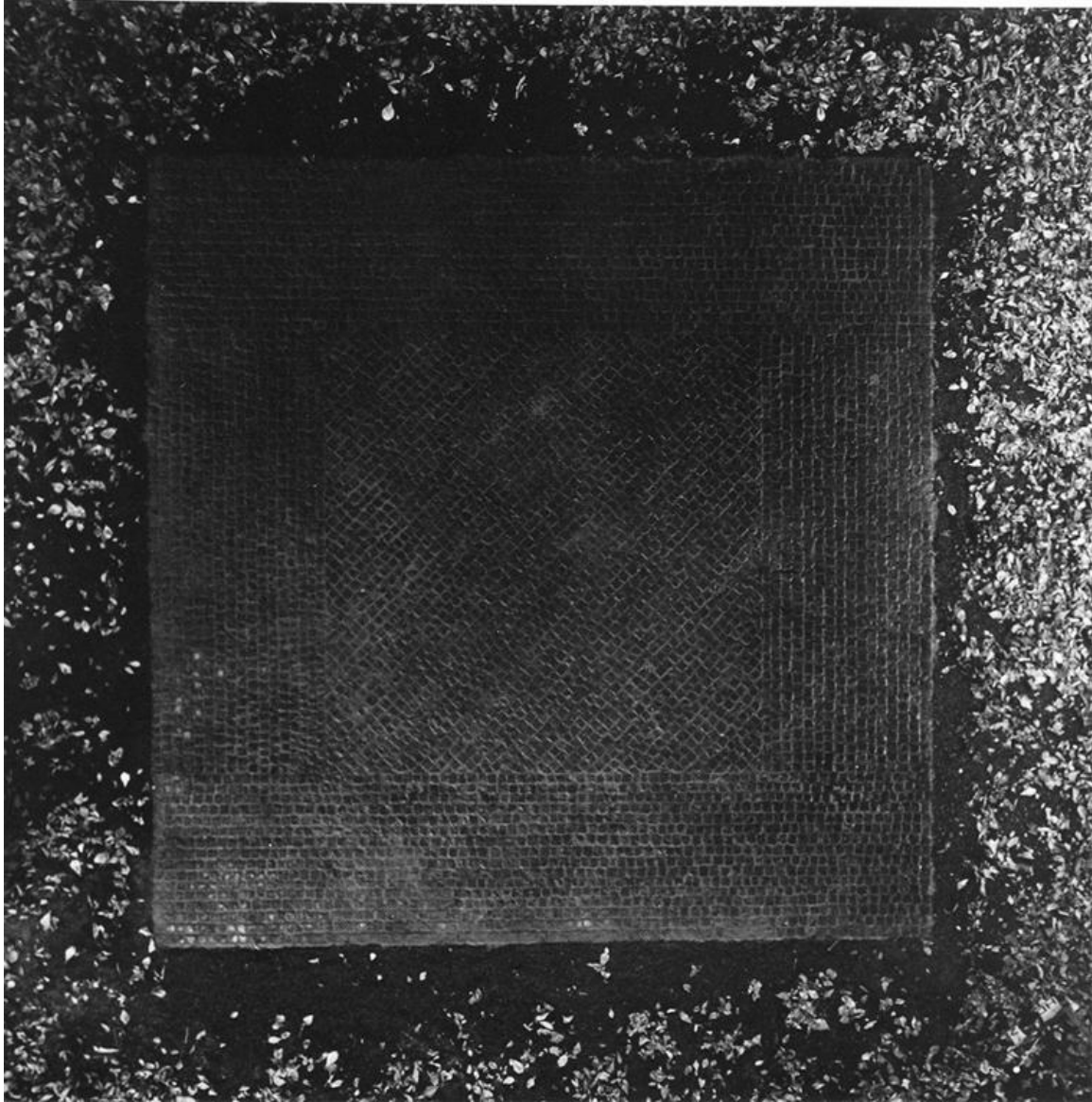


Fig. 96 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

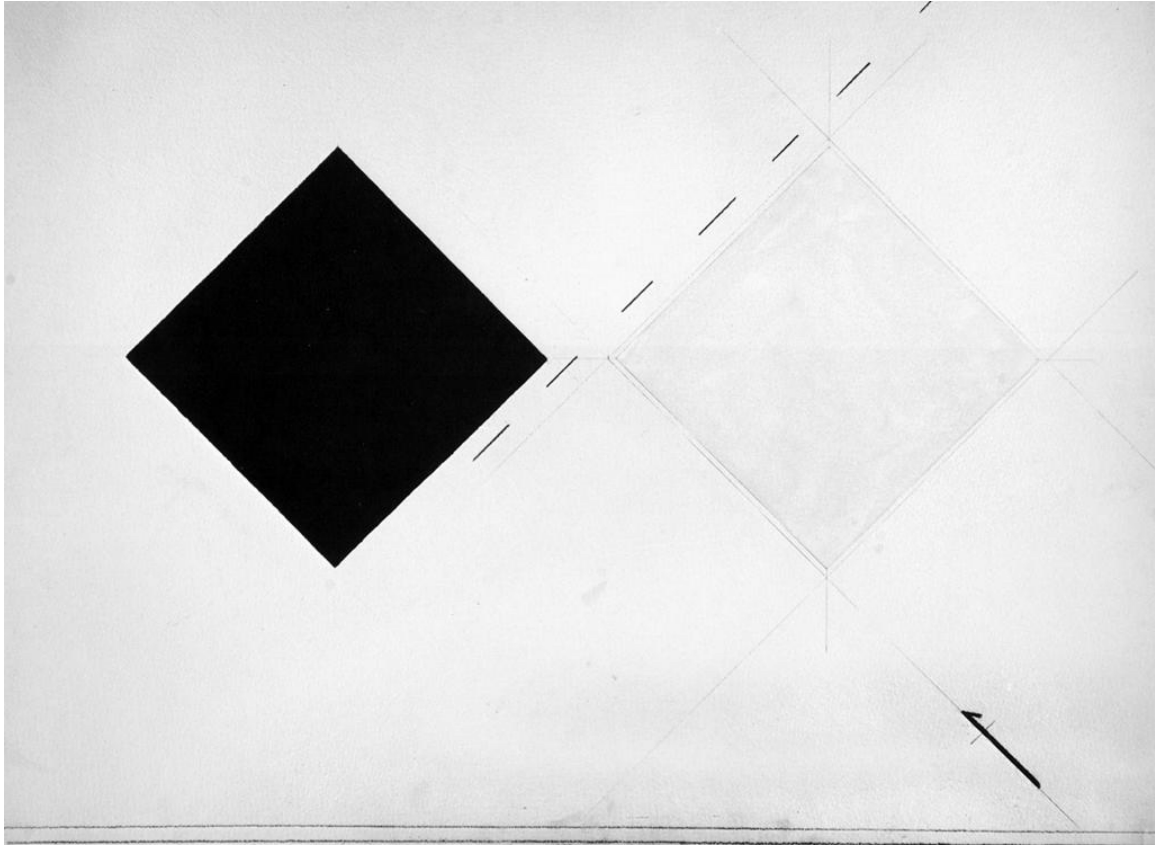


Fig. 97 Maria Nordman, sketch of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

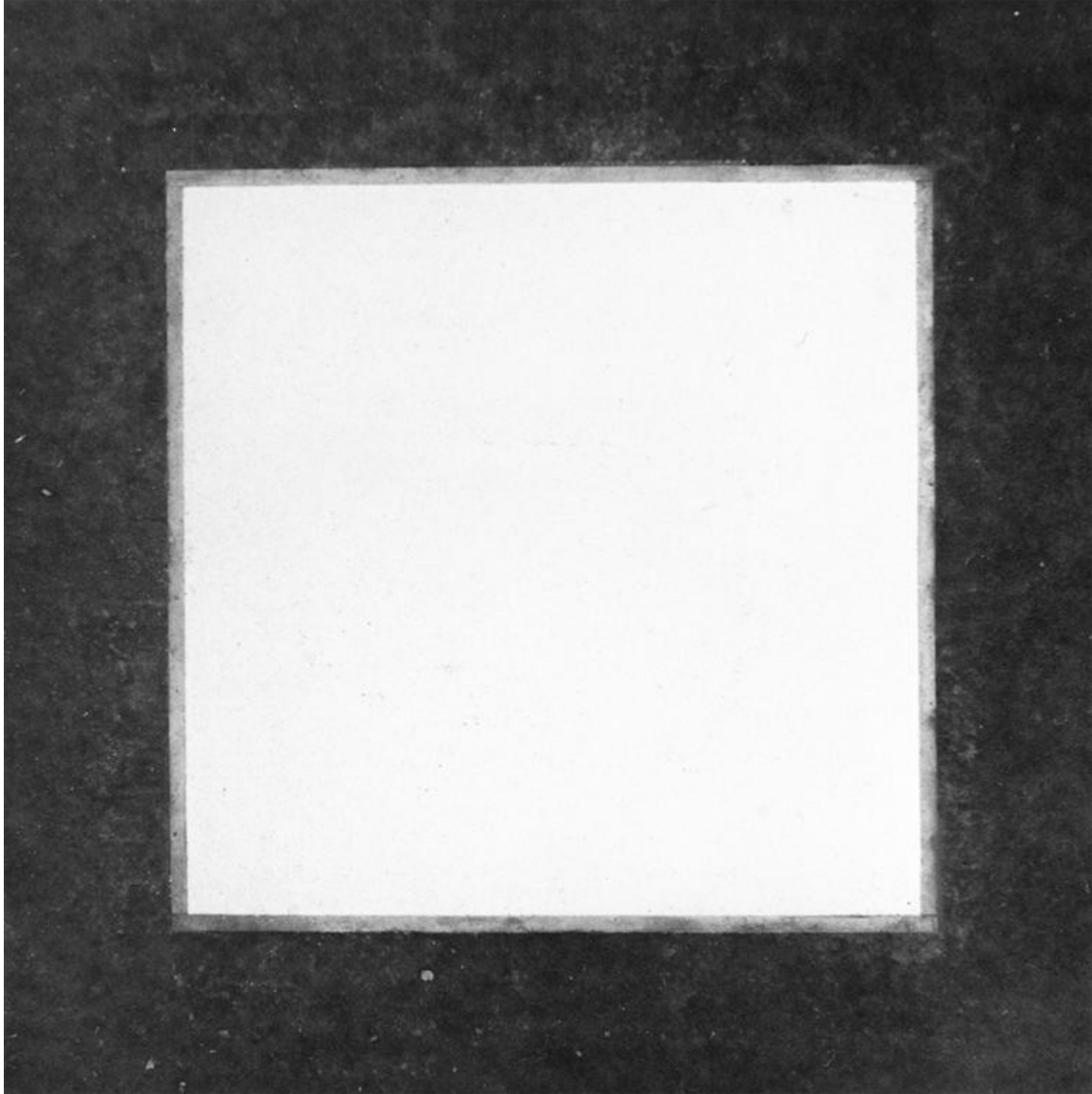


Fig. 98 Maria Nordman, sketch of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.



Fig. 99 Maria Nordman, photo-fragment of *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

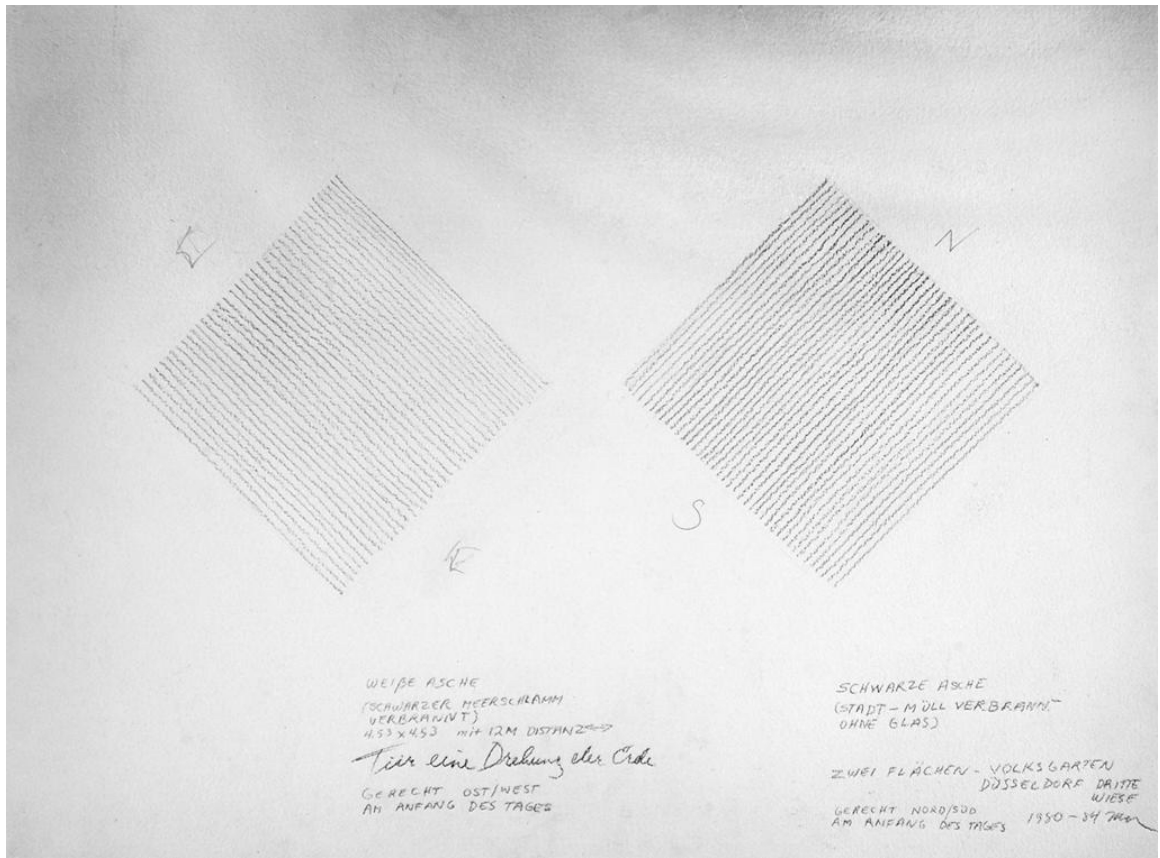


Fig. 100 Maria Nordman, sketch for *Open City*, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1979.

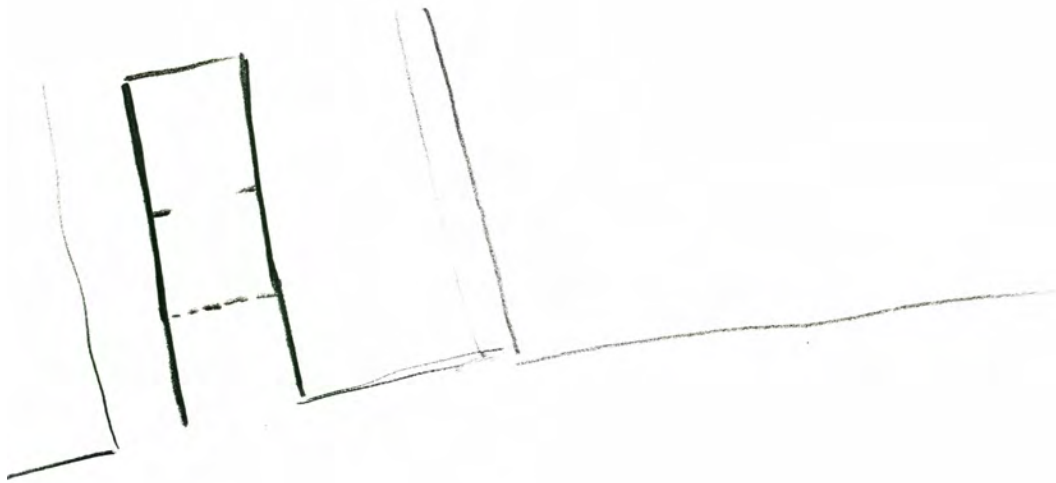


Fig. 101 Maria Nordman, collage of sketch and photo-fragments of exterior views of *Washington and Beethoven*, Los Angeles, 1979; page 107 in Nordman, *De Sculptura*.



Fig. 102 Maria Nordman, *Yang-Na*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2011.

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