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Snyder, Benjamin Andrews

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Robert Morris: From A Crisis in Vision to a Vision of Crisis

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Art History, Theory and Criticism

by

Benjamin Andrews Snyder

Committee in charge:

Professor Norman Bryson, Chair
Professor Grant Kester
Professor Mariana Wardwell
Professor Lisa Cartwright

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Robert Morris: From a Crisis in Vision to a Vision of Crisis

by

Benjamin Andrews Snyder

Master of Arts in Art History, Theory and Criticism

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Professor Norman Bryson, Chair

This thesis examines the art of Robert Morris in the aesthetic and politico-cultural contexts of postwar America. It begins by staking out a position of Morris's early conceptualization of "blank form" as rooted in an allegorical mode that relates to a particular time and place in history: New York City, 1961-63. A close reading of artworks, letters, and other archival material from this time reveals how Morris's forming notions of blankness, deprivation and viewer reception were

informed early on by themes specific to America's political and techno-scientific history since the end of WWII, including the legacies and consequences of nuclear weapons. The thesis then uses this position as a means of rethinking movements of Morris's later career, showing how this important postwar artist maintained a critical relationship to the crises of his time.

Introduction

“Blank Form,” wrote Robert Morris sometime in 1961, “slowly waves a large gray flag and laughs about how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics.”¹ The line concluded a short text called “Blank Form” that, for reasons this thesis explores, was not published until 1984. In this early, cryptic statement Morris manages to connect notions of neo-avant-garde aesthetics (“blank form”) and politico-cultural discourse (a laughing “large gray flag”²) on the one hand, with, on the other, an entropic techno-scientific world (“second law of thermodynamics”) that was, at the beginning of the 1960s, a cause of great public concern. This thesis investigates Morris’s art in the context of this tripartite relationship, focusing specifically on the themes of a postwar, post-atomic American landscape that is perennially present within the imagery and discourse of Morris’s practice. The goal is to provide an alternative blueprint for a cohesive reading of his otherwise diverse and wide ranging body of work.

While placing him squarely in an American postwar context, my working premise begins with the contention that Morris’s conceptualization of “blank form” marks a radical departure from

both the earlier dominant models of postwar abstraction (such as New York School painting) as well as from other important precedents in avant-garde reduction (as represented at the time, for example, by Morris's professor at Hunter College Ad Reinhardt). In search of an alternative to what it means to be a *postwar* (that is post-WWII) artist, the work of Robert Morris presents itself as a compelling example. For one, perhaps more so than his peers at the beginning of the sixties in New York—and more than his immediate predecessors—Morris seems to allow his work to occupy a critical position. It grapples as much with the new political and economic situation of postwar America as it does with art world debates, often indeed collapsing the two.

The possibilities of such a critical position had expanded since the late forties. It matters that Morris came to New York when he did, a full fifteen years into the “postwar,” when the shock-and-awe of not only the war's end but also of, say, Jackson Pollock had for many come and gone. The new postwar (visual and political) culture had begun to show its real contours. With the benefit of those fifteen years, one could see better what the cultural landscape of the Cold War in America would really give, and thus begin to form of it a more sensitive critique. This new perspective would involve, for

Morris, a rejection of the dogmas initially formulated in and by the immediate American postwar landscape, notions of a heroic alienation, for example, which came to prop up an ideology of individualism that abstract expressionism served so well.³

This thesis forms part of a larger argument that aims to reconsider dominant narratives of the postwar as they relate to avant-garde art in America by refocusing attention on the legacies of the end of WWII and, specifically, the formation of atomic and cold war discourses in America that began in 1945. This argument seeks to restore that which is embedded in the name “postwar” by looking at how the art of this period, including art after 1960, related to the fallout of the Second World War.⁴

Actors of the American avant-garde toward the end of the fifties began putting to work themes of an atomic and, more generally, cold war landscape from a more nuanced and explicit perspective than the abstract styles that emerged immediately after the war. To investigate these shifts, Morris emerges as one example, and a particularly strong one, not only because he repeatedly returns to such themes in his work, or, although less important to my study, for certain little heeded yet perhaps relevant biographical details. More than this, his example is valuable because he is a figure

on the back of which many of the dominant narratives of “postwar” art history have been formed without always asking precisely why they are *post-war*. I hope to provide an alternative perspective to these narratives by exploring an occupation with (atomic) war that seems as persistent in Morris’s work as it does overlooked in the literature on him.

Background

Born in 1931, Robert Morris grew up in Kansas City, Missouri during the interwar years. From 1951-52 he served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers where, in Korea, his unit was tasked with building airfields. He served additionally in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. He has said that, as part of his duty as a prisoner escort guard, he had the opportunity "to travel around a great deal" and that he "went to various places in Japan."⁵ After the service he attended art schools and studied philosophy and psychology at universities in Kansas, Portland and San Francisco. He lived in California for some five years before moving to New York at the end of the fifties where, before and in addition to making the so-called minimalist work for which he is today perhaps best known, his practice began to grapple with themes specific to a post-WWII American landscape.

At the same time as he was formulating his ideas about blank form, for example, he made work about the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and he choreographed and performed *War* at the Judson Memorial Church (January, 1963). Toward the end of the sixties, he began to work with tools explicitly taken from the military-industrial

complex in works such as his steam pieces (1968). In 1970 he designed war memorials, including the *War Memorial: Scattered Atomic Waste* (1970), and would later propose, for a Florida VA hospital plaza, a memorial using the original atomic bomb casings from Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁶ These works speak explicitly, if in different ways, to his occupation with blank form and with the negative, with (nuclear) war and with an excessive postwar culture in crisis. Together they lay the grounds for a significant reevaluation of what the priorities and commitments of a postwar American art practice could or should be. Morris's work embodies a rejection of the initial, dominant iteration of postwar American art, represented most powerfully by New York School painting, where the emphasis seemed to orbit a sense of (1) politicized apoliticism, (2) a co-opted individualism that was part and parcel of a mainstream political shift in America to the right, and (3) an adherence to traditional forms of artistic production (painting) that maintained its distance from every day life. Departing radically from these positions, Morris worked toward the formation of a different kind of postwar avant-garde, one that reconnected itself to the circumstances of the politico-cultural crisis around it. By pursuing dramatically different possibilities

for what an experimental American art practice could be, Morris played a role in opening up a new chapter of *postwar* art, one that broke with precedent to offer a critical and more authentic, if also often ironic or ambiguous, perspective of real world 'post-war' circumstances.

As Morris's career moves into the seventies, these issues persist in his work into a vexed visualization of the crisis. In 1973, Morris began, more quietly, a series of works known as the *Blind Time Drawings*, which ended up a some thirty-year meditation on the relationship between vision, negation, memory, the body, temporality, trace and experimental artistic production, all qualities that have strong affinity with what others have identified as an atomic visuality.⁷ Later works, from the *Atomic Sleeper/Restless Shroud* (Philadelphia, 1981), the *Psychomachia*, *Firestorm* and *Hydrocal* works, all begun around 1982, to the *Tar Babies of the New World Order* (1997) and *House and Bombs* (2004) shore up these occupations and channel Morris's output towards bleak figuration. Seen as a whole, the perennial and often explicit—if overlooked—presence of the themes of (atomic) war and its (aesthetic, economic, political) fallout throughout the work of one of the most

influential artists in the post-1945 American avant-garde provides a compelling opportunity to rethink the motivations and significance of an important postwar artist while possibly disrupting the traditional art-historical narratives of how this work developed. In examining these movements of Morris's output, my argument seeks to reveal an arc of his career in relation to what it means to be *postwar*, an arc that moves from his early conceptions of blankness as formed within a postwar crisis in art, culture and vision to, later, an explicitly articulated vision of that crisis.

1. A Crisis in Vision

Let us return to the citation at the top of this essay, in which Morris writes elliptically that “Blank Form slowly waves a large gray flag and laughs about how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics.” This line, forming its own stand-alone paragraph, is the conclusion of the main part of a short text called “Blank Form.” It was one of roughly four texts that were originally slated to make up Morris's contribution to La Monte Young's radical sampling of neo-avant-garde practice at the beginning of the 1960s known as *An Anthology of Chance Operations*. The circumstances of the publication of *An Anthology* make for something of a convoluted tale, and those of Morris's contribution are even more obscure. But the text, read in conjunction with other writing and work before ever having a New York solo show, is crucial in mapping some of Morris's earliest commitments and priorities.

Assembled in 1961, the production of *An Anthology* was delayed due to a lack of funding, and it was first published in 1963. (The event at which Morris performed his notorious *Column* piece at the Living Theater in New York doubled as a fundraiser for *An Anthology*.) When the book finally appeared, Morris' name was

listed at the beginning among all the other contributors. However, after his personal title page in the body of the book, in the place where his texts were originally placed, all that appeared was a single blank page.

This was not the original plan. As one account goes, sometime around 1962, La Monte Young asked Morris, then his neighbor at 275 Church St. in lower Manhattan, to store in his apartment roughly one thousand unbound copies of the publication, to which Morris agreed.⁸ For reasons hard to know with certainty, Morris, apparently either unsatisfied with his contribution or with the publication as a whole, or for the sake of some other gesture, removed his original contribution—a series of short texts including “Blank Form” (fig. 2)—from all the unbound copies, leaving in its place a single blank page.

If there was a conscious gesture here, the details of the “Blank Form” text might inform it. “From the subjective point of view,” Morris writes at the beginning, “there is no such thing as nothing—Blank Form shows this, as well as might any other situation of deprivation.” Morris’s idea of blank form here is positive and active—never “nothing”—forming one possible manifestation of a more general “situation of deprivation.” It is worth noting that Morris elsewhere

iterated similar sentiments of an 'active nothing' during this time; for example in a letter to John Cage in 1962 (near the time he removed his contribution from *An Anthology*), he wrote that he "cannot conceive of nothing happening" and that "some of us really are trying to say nothing in an elegant manner."⁹ (I note now in passing the collective tone—"some of us"—present in this early rhetoric.)

If there is "no such thing as nothing" and if "nothing happening" cannot be imagined as such, are we not compelled to see the blank page in *An Anthology* itself as an active gesture, as itself some kind of positive 'essay' and/or 'composition' as the title page would seem to have it? Can we not moreover understand Morris's appearance in *An Anthology*, today anyway, as a "situation of deprivation?" Morris goes to some length in these early writings to assert that perceived presence as such always constitutes something, some trace of being or meaning, even when that something is evacuated of intention or inflection, or made inert or non-vital. Containing no apparent signs of life, *nothing* perceived now signifies *something*.

But what about this "something," a 'something' generated in the perception of absence? How is it determined and what is its particular significance for Morris? What might the blank page in *An*

Anthology 'mean'? First, from his writing it seems clear that the active nothing is contingent on (or determined by) not so much absence as such, but on the subjective perception of an absence of some thing. As we've seen, the blank page in *An Anthology* in fact gives both: absolute absence (as nothing appears) and, with knowledge of the act of removal, the absence of his texts (on blankness). An original of the unbound manuscript survives in the papers of Jean Brown in the Getty Research Institute's special collections, solidifying this knowledge if only, as it happens, retroactively.

It is important, moreover, that the 'something' is connected precisely to a "situation of deprivation." We can imagine this as different from, say, a 'situation of reduction' in that it implies that the perceived absence is a result of an active removal or denial of a thing. In other words, to be "deprived" is to be deprived of *something*. This quality of any "situation of deprivation" provides an important kind of platform for Morris, one on which he enacts his work. It is one that for him seems to exist both on a micro level (the encounter of the absence, say, in *An Anthology*) as well as on a macro level (a larger deprivation present in postwar culture), with each level reflecting back onto the other.

An implicit yet strong emphasis on the viewer forms another crucial pillar of “Blank Form.” It comes through Morris’s contention that signification in (and subjective reaction to) “the form (in the broadest possible sense: the situation)” depends solely on that form’s perceptibility: there is no such thing as nothing “so long as it is *not reduced beyond perception*” or “so long as it perpetuates and upholds itself as being object *in the subject’s field of perception.*” (emphasis added) From this we can gather that if (material) perceptibility is the only basic prerequisite for form to have meaning, Morris’s gesture collapses the object into the situation, and thus by extension elevates the role of the viewer as an actor *within* that situation—within the confrontation of the blank form. The activation of the blank form’s meaning then depends on the viewer’s perception of a deprivation. It is for Morris a basic precondition that the form is “not reduced beyond perception,” and this perception is only sensibly understood as the perception of a viewing “subject.” This collapse, enacted here in a more textual context, provides an early blueprint for understanding aspects of his practice as it unfolded in the 1960s.

To dig deeper into this contingent “nothing” and its relationship to the viewer, we might turn again to the crucial

passage from Morris's 1962 letter to John Cage, where he writes:

In your letter of July sent in response to my sending you the first draft of the Ensemble you said I left no room for nothing to happen. Now the changing of the 3rd movement is not conceived by me as "nothing happening" but rather the change was motivated by my increasing concern to achieve an allegorical function in my work. Actually, I can not conceive of nothing happening - I'm not trying to make a logical statement. In fact, a kind of "nothing" image is very important to me and I have even said that I want to arrive at zero, although going toward it is like successive divisions of a line - for the arrival one must go outside the process. For the time being I am involved in a kind of reducing process of attempting to find images that are closer and closer to the limit. ... You mentioned in your letter of July that "most of what happens never was in anybody's mind"; I feel that all of what does happen is in everybody's mind - the statements are not exclusive of one another, I guess it is more a matter of focus. I feel that by reducing the stimulus to next to nothing (some of us really are trying to say nothing in an elegant manner) one turns the focus on the individual, as if to say, "whatever you got in the past you brought along anyway, so now really work at it." [sic]¹⁰

The crux of Morris's pushing back against Cage's criticism that a work of his "left no room for nothing to happen" seems to hinge, however paradoxically, on the substance of that "nothing." That is, the "nothing" is now "allegorical." The question becomes: an allegory of what? The end of the above citation provides a way to begin to unpack this question in the way it speaks to an aspect of

Morris's conceptualization of blank form that depends on the viewer's mobilization of their own circumstances, their own "past," in the act of viewing. What is more, Morris elides the individual's memory with a collective cultural memory when he maintains: "I feel that all of what does happen is in everybody's mind."

This, in 1962, is Morris's "focus."¹¹ Blankness is becoming allegorical and the viewer is no longer conceived in the abstract.¹² Instead, Morris's language seems to presuppose a historically situated viewer in crisis, a viewer with 'baggage' that needs to be 'worked through,' a working through that is activated in the confrontation of a "situation of deprivation." It is as if what is potent about enacting such a situation at that historical moment is that it allows viewers to draw on their own position in order to see how that situation reflects the one in which they are already submerged. It is then that the viewer, faced with her own situation of deprivation, is able to ascribe meaning to the absence, to fill the 'nothing' with 'something'. This should not be mistaken as Morris aiming to provide his viewers with a moment of catharsis. His work does not take its positivity that far, if it ever had any in the first place. Nevertheless, Morris's letter to Cage illustrates the desire in 1962 to compel his viewers, in their act of confronting a situation of deprivation, to be

attuned to their *own* situation, their own environment, and their own past. When we combine that with the elision he makes from the individual's memory and situation to the collective's, so that we are hard put to imagine a viewer able to escape the situation, the result is a convincing means of reading his early position as actively addressing a specific set of American postwar cultural circumstances whose dominant logic is one of absence. This becomes the tenuous object of the allegory. The viewer, caught between the encounter of the blank form and the specific culture that that blankness reflects, has an opportunity to notice the nature of the situation that surrounds them and to ask themselves not only about what is missing but also about the agent of the absence.

With Morris's profession to Cage of his "increasing concern to achieve an allegorical function" in his work properly contextualized, doubts that these early gestures were meant to exceed their own frame and spill out into the larger politico-cultural situation can be put aside. And indeed, the sense of urgency in this statement finds substantiation in the geopolitical situation of 1962, when cold war anxieties about a global nuclear holocaust came to a head during the Cuban Missile Crisis that October.

To solidify this reading we can turn to a lesser-known series of

works Morris executed precisely at this time in which he explicitly engages the dramatic tensions that were playing out between the United States and the Soviet Union over nuclear weapons in Cuba. In these works, Morris adopts a language reminiscent of Jasper Johns's flag paintings and Robert Rauschenberg's transfer drawings of the preceding years, appropriating sheets of newspaper and obscuring them with gray paint. But where, for example, Johns's approach was to suppress the newspaper's "denotative function,"¹³ Morris's gesture is made whole only by the viewer's comprehension that what is being blanked out is an non-fragmented front page news announcement of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Read in conjunction with both his contemporaneous "Blank Form" text and his letter to Cage, what we see in Morris's *Crisis* work is a kind of visualization of the "large gray flag that laughs about how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics." It is precisely the obfuscation our vision of the news of the missile crisis that generates this visualization. In these paintings Morris drapes blank form over a media-driven discourse of cold war culture that had come to dominate public imagination and political discourse since the end of the WWII. In the fall of 1962, this discourse reached a pinnacle in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Morris engages it directly.

If during this same year Morris was writing to Cage about the “increasing need to achieve an allegorical function” in his work, these paintings would seem to further inform the object of this allegory.

But as one important critic once wrote, “allegory is not hermeneutics.”¹⁴ It is not enough to say that Morris is offering an interpretation of the day’s news. Instead, what we get is something more like a site-specific intervention where the site is the public’s interaction with the news media’s coverage of a postwar culture in crisis, a crisis still threatening to wipe that public out. More than a mere interpretation of the days news, the gesture of the *Crisis* painting, in its overlay of “Blank Form” onto postwar news, generates a new allegorical object in the midst of a new postwar landscape. It *détournes* the news, empties it out, collapses the real threat with the perception of the threat. And in the process it creates a new object, a dreary critique of both state power and postwar media culture wrapped up in a “situation of deprivation” that the viewer is now in a position to “work at.”

In 1961, American historian Daniel Boorstin would describe an American media landscape that was increasingly obsessed with driving news with what he called “pseudo-events.”¹⁵ Such impulses

swirled around the news of the Cold War that had been, by the early sixties, a dominant staple of postwar public discourse for some time. Indeed, Boorstin's book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, first published in 1961, gives perhaps the first full-throated account, albeit more historical than critical, of a media culture of spectacle that Guy Debord would make famous some five years later in his *Society of the Spectacle*. In its proper context, Morris's *Crisis* painting is itself a powerful and early iteration of a similar position. It gives voice, on the one hand, to the "real" public fears of nuclear war through the trace legibility of the front page news while, on the other, in the act of blanking the news out, it speaks to what we could call the crisis of the pseudo-event, of the spectacle that more and more becomes the other side of the postwar crisis that would only increase after the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Jean-Pierre Chirqui, a curator of Morris's work, has compared the *Crisis* paintings to the artist's better-known *Card File* work of the same year:

A bachelor machine of limited effectiveness, a maker only of disappointment, *Card File* gives a very deadpan take on the tedium of administration, its repetitious chores and approximate rationality, the blocked prospects it affords its agents. It is this quotidian grey that covers the pages of newsprint used that same year in Morris's *Crisis* series. The color hides from our sight

more than it reveals, allowing only a few words or images to come to the surface here and there, like signs of a possibly imminent catastrophe.¹⁶

In this citation Chirqui stops short of stating what is otherwise: that these works are not just addressing a general sense of “disappointment” or “tedium” or “imminent catastrophe” in the abstract, but instead the ways in which these notions were felt explicitly throughout American culture at that particular time and place due to a specific set of politico-cultural circumstances that were set in motion in 1945. “The color hides from our sight more than it reveals”; it speaks to a crisis in vision. Chirqui does not dwell on the *Crisis* series long enough, nor is it his objective, to make the point that these catastrophes are indeed directly related to the crisis of the end of WWII and its fallout, and thus belong to the evolving discourses of the postwar in America. The logic of Cold War culture was to move more and more in the direction of Boorstin's “pseudo-event,” (or Debord's “spectacle”), and the nuclear issue, with its dominant media presence, its centrality in political debate and public imagination, and its legacy of a spectacular testing regime, was a singular and potent locus for this momentum. In this respect, the gesture of Morris's *Crisis* series, blanking out the news of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and indeed his general conceptualization of

“Blank Form,” as a nothingness contingent on a particular situation of deprivation, seems to foreshadow by some twenty years the point by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulation and Simulacra* that

The equilibrium of terror rests on the eternal deferral of the atomic clash. The atom and the nuclear are made to be disseminated for deterrent ends, the power of catastrophe must, instead of stupidly exploding, be disseminated in homeopathic, molecular doses, in the continuous reservoirs of information. Therein lies the true contamination: never biological and radioactive, but, rather, a mental deconstruction through a mental strategy of catastrophe.¹⁷

The blanking out of this news uncannily prefigures what we might call a second phase of the atomic age to which Baudrillard here gives voice and which could be said to have concretized in earnest after both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty: the age of deterrence. Situated amidst all its complex context, in Morris's *Crisis* series we see, some two years before ever having a New York solo-show, evidence of a critical effort to work through the forming aesthetics of the neo-avant-garde within a specific cultural and political landscape of postwar America.¹⁸

Thus Morris's forming conceptualization of blankness beginning in 1961-62, as he was embarking on his now iconic so-called minimalist work, seems to behave very differently from other

(historical) forms of reduction with which it might otherwise be seen to have an affinity. We might use Ad Reinhardt, Morris's professor at Hunter College during those same years, to represent this other position. In the same year 1962, while Morris was making the work described above *and* was studying at Hunter, Reinhardt was arguing publicly that, rather than being contingent on something outside of itself, the pure reduction of abstract pictorialization to blank form was the end game of a long (d)evolutionary process of what was always, in his terms, the "one history of painting," one that began long ago with "a variety of ideas with a variety of subjects and objects" and ended with "the idea of no object and no subject and no variety at all."¹⁹ In other words, for Reinhardt, pictorial nothingness, being the inevitable telos of the "one history of painting," was universal and had always been latent in that history as it worked its way towards the idealization of the "one true painting." Morris's conceptualization of 'blank form', on the other hand, seems radically different as it appears not to be without "object," "subject," or "variety," but instead "allegorical." And indeed, while praising Reinhardt, Morris himself has conceded that "there were certain things about the way he looked at art that were not very acceptable to me" and that "He tended to break

everything down into formal categories and not be interested in *any of the context of the thing.*"²⁰ (emphasis added) The evidence for Morris seems to point the other way, that his "nothing" was very much connected to his own context, emanating out of a new situation, one contingent on a new experience of what it meant to make critical art in the specific post-WWII American landscape.

But can we extend the claims being made here about Morris's writing and work of 1961-63—that they were encoded with a specific set of postwar, even more specifically, post-nuclear, critical concerns—to his canonized practice of the mid sixties and beyond? On the surface, it is at least not an obvious connection, and certainly not one that has been in any way dominant in the literature on him. Many have indeed tried their best to place Morris's work outside of its own social and cultural circumstances, happy to see, for example, his art in the sixties as "the purest examples" of sculpture entering a "categorical no man's land."²¹ And indeed, a good deal of his most widely read writing from the sixties, such as his 'Notes on Sculpture' series published in *Artforum* from 1966-69, would seem to support such a position, written as they were in a detached philosophical language that hardly referenced the concurrent cultural condition in America. However, as I have tried to begin to

show, when under the microscope, the particular status of the postwar environment, including the specific prevalence of the atomic question throughout that environment, shows itself strongly in the development of Morris's work.

In fact, even in the "Notes on Sculpture." In a general way, the classic defense he mounts of his so-called minimalist objects reinforces the aesthetics structures that he had begun to trace in "Blank Form" and his letter to Cage. We see this in "Notes on Sculpture Part 2," when he criticizes the establishment of "internal relationships" within the artwork, something like a "rich surface" that "reduces the public, external quality of the object and tends to eliminate the viewer to the degree that these details pull him into an intimate relation with the work and out of the space in which the object exists." Not only does this reinforce the emphasis on the viewer that took shape in his letter to Cage, but the oblique reference here to "the space in which the object exists" sets the stage for the jump into the specific contexts of the world around, including its politico-cultural or economic dimensions.

And indeed this jump is made explicit in "Notes on Sculpture 4: Beyond Objects," the series' fourth and final installment. Richard Williams has shown in his book *After Modern Sculpture* (2000) that this

essay “not only asserted, through its images, the dissolution of the boundary between the art object and the world, but it made statements about the condition of the world.”²² Williams is referring to the pop culture images that appeared in the article along side reproductions of Morris's work and the work of fellow artists Robert Smithson and Carl Andre, Rafael Ferrer, Richard Serra and others. These pop culture images included the 'Varga Girl', a “pin-up used to advertise car batteries”²³ from August 1946 that, a year after Hiroshima and the end of the war, was emblematic of the initial postwar advertising boom, and a Model T Ford. The argument that Morris makes in conjunction with these images, namely that “once seen they can never be forgotten” is perhaps less instructive than their appearance alone in Morris's article which, as Williams observes, “marks the reappearance of the world in concepts of sculpture.”²⁴

More important to my argument are Morris's other references to the issues of the day in his essay. “The most startling of these,” Williams continues

returns us to the image of nuclear destruction, which I have argued is present in Smithson's work. In Morris's case, the image is present in 'Notes on Sculpture Part 4' in the form of a quotation from *Earth in Upheaval* by Immanuel Velikowsky, which demanded that 'the

past of mankind, and of the animal kingdoms too, must now be viewed in the light of the experience of Hiroshima, and no longer from the portholes of the *Beagle*'.²⁵

Morris's citation of Velikovsky's writing, which enjoyed a popular audience at the time, functions similarly to the *Crisis* paintings explored above; both instances seem to advance a two-fold commentary straddled between a contemplation of the true threat/effects of nuclear war on the one hand and, on the other, the extent to which the fears of such a war were exploited by various forces throughout American culture (Velikovsky's popularity can be attributed in part to this exploited fear). Nevertheless, through this citation Morris seems to endorse the notion that the 'past of mankind' be read in light of postwar atomic history. This echoes and provides more context to his earlier letter to Cage, in which, in addition to his concern to achieve allegory, he claimed that his work was attempting to say to the viewer: "whatever you got in the past you brought along anyway, so now really work at it." Taken together, these examples from Morris's writing provide more contextual evidence that the specifics of the postwar and post-atomic environment were very much at play, if not fundamental, in his practice through the sixties.

2. A Vision of Crisis

The title of this thesis proposes a movement across Morris's career in which his early art and ideas, formulated within a crisis in politics, culture and art, are channeled later into an explicit vision of that crisis. The crisis is one of a postwar American landscape, and the sub theme that continues to surface is that of a set of issues revolving around an atomic or nuclear discourse. The concerns for the historical reality of the past "experience of Hiroshima" that Morris references in 1969 begin to be pictured soon thereafter.

Take the proposed *Five War Memorials* that Morris designed in 1970 in relation, most directly, to the on-going Vietnam War.²⁶ Each of the five memorials carried its own kind of theme, usually represented by a subtitle. One was "5 War Memorial: Scattered Atomic Waste."

These early war memorials, like later memorials that Morris would propose, appear never to have been realized, though at least two were sold by Leo Castelli to the famed collector Giuseppe Panza in 1975. And reproductions of lithographs showing their designs survive. In those images, Morris stenciled the text "WAR MEMORIAL" over or within an amorphous space that reads like a

cloudscape, evocative of the menacing cloud readily associated with the nuclear threat (while at the same time disavowing the clichéd image of the mushroom cloud). The memorials each feature a different geometric shape—a triangle, a star, a symmetrical cross, a gridded square, a circular crater—all situated within an otherwise charred and barren landscape. The prints of the memorials give reason to believe that their scale is intended to be quite large, many times human scale.

Among all the designs, the unifying feature is a sense of emptiness, almost desertion, and an anti-glorification of war that increasingly became the norm for the memorialization of conflict after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In fact, blank form itself has been noted as proposed logic for the memorialization of the atomic attacks on Japan. For example, “when the people of Hiroshima were discussing plans for a memorial at the site of ground zero,” one account goes, “one survivor suggested leaving a large empty space around the place where the bomb struck, a representation of *nothingness*—‘because that is what it was’.”²⁷ Morris's memorial, and indeed much of his formation of blankness that have been previously discussed, has an uncanny kinship with this atomic bomb survivor's perspective.

The logic of an active presentation of (and meditation on) *nothing* in relation to the atomic debut, to its memorialization and its lasting fallout, can be read in parallel to the development of what has been termed an atomic aesthetics or atomic visuality. This visuality finds a voice not only in the incidental account above of the Hiroshima survivor, but also for example in the character of the Japanese architect from Alain Renais well known film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), in which he famously repeats to his French lover “You saw nothing at Hiroshima. Nothing.” Rosalyn Deutsche has, drawing on Jalal Toufic and others, identified in that line a kind of formula for an atomic visuality, one that presents an “objective nothing” which embodies “the catastrophic loss that is the withdrawal of tradition after a surpassing disaster.”²⁸

Deutsche borrows from Akira Lippit's pioneering study *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*—in which Lippit contends at one point how “there can be no authentic photography of atomic war because the bombings were themselves a form of total photography that exceeded the economies of representation”²⁹—to make the point that “only symbols can represent atomic warfare, symbols that bear witness to the avisuality, that is, the unrepresentability, of the catastrophe.”³⁰ This brings us back to Morris's never realized war

memorials, whose hollowed out geometric symbols situated in a desolate environment under a foreboding cloudscape, fit within this formulation.

The framework of this atomic visuality extends, however incidentally, to much of Morris's later work as it moves away from a crisis in vision (blank form) to a more material or filled out vision of crisis. As it progressed, again while not often noted, his work seems to have been increasingly preoccupied with a set of aesthetics that very much comes to resemble those connected to the *avisuality* outlined by Lippit and Deutsche (and prefigured by figures such as Paul Virilio before them).

The memorials themselves provide retrospective context to other of his concurrent work. Take the *Trench with Chlorine Gas* memorial (fig. 7), in which a cross-shaped trench is equipped with a steam-producing device, seemingly to recall most directly to WWI, where trench warfare was made famous and chemical warfare (including chlorine gas) was first used offensively on a mass scale. By itself, the use of steam, an already 'dematerialized' material that easily evokes either the smoke and clouds associated with the explosion of bombs or the use of chemical weapons, lends an elusive, *avisual* dimension to the 'art object.' And indeed, outside of

the war memorial, in the context of the environmental steam works Morris began to execute in the “expanded field” in the late sixties, we find this dimension even more present. In a 1968 interview, Morris described to Paul Cummings a new in-progress steam piece he was working on in Los Angeles:

I'm working with a company that produces refrigeration and heating units for missiles and aircraft ground support, computers and things that have to be cooled, huge devices. And I'll bury all these things in the ground over the distance of about a square mile in any landscape so that nothing will be visible. And the output will be wherever the heat comes out. It may be under the ground so it's radiant. It may come out of rocks or cracks. I want none of the technology to be visible. But I'll take a lot of photographs, infra-red, from the air and so forth.³¹

Working with advanced tools from the military-industrial complex, as others (particularly in California) were also doing at the time, Morris aimed to create an ephemeral work within “any landscape” whose origins were by design invisible (or ‘avisual’, i.e., “there and not there”³²) and which, in order to be viewed, required a techno-scientific vision (“infra-red”) and a technologically mediated perspective (“from the air”), both of which, to paraphrase Lippit, “exceed the economies” of human vision.

The polarities of excessive and deprived modes of visuality and production increasingly preoccupied Morris's work as it moved into the seventies. Concerned not just with pushing the limits of visual and conceptual artistic presentation, but with discovering inventive ways to picture in art contexts the crises in culture, politics, economics and aesthetics, Morris exerts efforts in many different directions. While his large sculptural-performative works, such as the staging of his Whitney biennial, or his provocative service offering via the "Peripatetic Artist Guild"—both 1970—are representative of these efforts³³, I want to turn to a lesser known but remarkably long running body of work that Morris has called the *Blind Time Drawings*.

The production of these "drawings," which were begun in 1973 but in fact executed over a span of some thirty to forty years, consists of an elaborately constructed experiment in which Morris, blindfolding himself, attempts to connect his memory, his sense of time, repetition, and his own body to a pictorial surface. The drawings stand less as finished works than as outward, evidential traces of a monumental, internalized exploration.

Almost all of the drawings, and there are hundreds, contain on them the written record of the parameters or guidelines, at times rather complex, that were predetermined by Morris for the

production of the work. Each set of instructions is different. One of the earliest iterations, from 1973, contains in the lower right the following text in Morris's tidy handwriting:

With graphite on the hands and eyes closed and estimating a lapse time of 60 seconds, the left hand serves as guide for the right's attempt to blacken a square. The figure on the upper right hand side shows the attempt to remember and reproduce, motion for motion, the construction of the initial upper left hand figure. A one second exposure to the eyes of this upper left hand figure is experienced, followed by a 60 second attempt with eyes open to reproduce it in the lower left hand side. The lower right hand figure demonstrates how the upper two would have looked had the memory and skill been sufficient. Time estimation of the two upper figures: 0 seconds.

The drawing shows four attempts of what at first seems to be essentially the same goal—to have one hand guide the other in blackening a square without any aid of the eyes. It ought not be lost on the reader that the appearance of a black square is likely anything but random, that Morris would be all too familiar with this form's resonance as the symbol par excellence of intersection between the historical avant-garde, pictorial reduction, and a crisis in political economy.³⁴ The movement of the drawing is such that the upper left is the first attempt to complete the goal. The second form (upper right) is not so much an attempt to fulfill the original goal as it

is an attempt to reproduce, through a kind of tactile memory (the eyes have not been open yet), “motion for motion” the first attempt. In that sense, it is quite successful, and oddly the result is more successful than the first in regard to the original goal. Morris then flashes the original attempt to his eyes for “one second,” attempting then to reproduce this afterimage over the same original amount of time in the bottom left. The bottom right is presumably done with his eyes open, showing the blackened trace of his hand intact alongside a relatively neatly filled in square.

Morris would continue similar experiments over the next thirty years, almost always applying his hands directly onto the surface in a monochromatic palette, and very often employing a method of memory-based repetition in the production of the “drawings.” The often recognizability of the artist’s hand and body and gesture serves as a trace signifier of the artist’s presence, giving the work a strong yet uncanny sense of immediacy through absence in its indexicality of Morris’s particular presence. This echoes the effects of the shadowed imprints on city surfaces of atomic bomb survivors at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and continues a trope that recurs often in postwar art, from Yves Klein’s *Anthropometries*—including *Hiroshima*

(1959)–to Anna Mendieta's *Silhouetta* works to the photography of Francesca Woodman and many others.

The *Blind Time Drawings* collapse interiority and exteriority as they present outward, silhouetted traces of forms and gestures generated by the body through the concentration of 'internalized' textual guidelines enacted in a situation deprived of vision. As noted earlier, they are not so much 'works' in themselves as records of an elaborate, and, for Morris, unusually private performative act where he explicitly sets out to inscribe, recall and draw upon either his own memories³⁵ or a collective, historical memory, often related to various intersections of art and war, such as an account of "the Stuka that crashed in a snowstorm somewhere in the wastes of the Russian steppe in 1943, and from which the pilot, Joseph Beuys, was pulled by Tartar tribesmen..."³⁶

From today's vantage point, taking a bird's eye view of Morris's career, the *Blind Time Drawings* are a kind of crack in the whole, both in terms of the intrinsic relationship to his other work as well as the ways in which they are viewed by the public (and by the literature). They are, contrary to the work that made him famous, affective, private and pictorial. What's more, relatively speaking, they are not well known or much discussed. The provocative

advertisement poster for the earliest public exhibition of Morris's 'Blind Time' experiment in 1974 has earned more public and scholarly attention than the work in that show.³⁷ And unlike much of his other practice, which in many ways depended on the viewer or was activated by the conditions of its (public) display, the *Blind Time Drawings* were a much more inwardly pointed, textual, and intimate affair. And yet, they represent the longest running, and in many evident ways the most conceptually elaborate experimentation of his career, evolving over thirty years while at the same time remaining consistent in its general method of production and aesthetico-conceptual aims.

In his book *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, Akira Lippit discusses Gilles Deleuze's formulation of the 'crack' as something that is "neither a sign nor a mark, not even material, but energetic; a movement that establishes a secret opening, temporary and irregular, between inside and outside."³⁸ This "secret opening" seems to me a strong conceptual space in which to situate Morris's *Blind Time Drawings*, both in the context of each individual work—with their oscillation between text and image, symbol and gesture, absence and presence—as well as within Morris's work as a whole.

To the latter point, it is possible to connect Morris's long running, relatively 'unnoticed', occupations throughout the *Blind Time Drawings*—occupations of (the negation of) vision and visuality, personal and historical memory (and forgetting), trace, materiality, temporality, energy, the body—with the perennial recurrence of atomic themes throughout his other works, some of which this essay has discussed. As the experiment progresses, the content of the *Blind Time Drawings* seems indeed to become more topical and reflective, so that as recent as 2000 Morris writes on one, entitled *Blind Time VI, Moral Blinds. Moral Void*: "As I work I think of this monstrous, self-congratulatory age, so free of moral doubt, so assured in its fatuous, self-centered distractions, so avid for and transfixed by its public inanities, so full of faith in the endless flow of its marketable drivel, so obese and adrift in its technological glut." It is as if what was latent and subtle in the 1962 *Crisis* series has, almost forty years later, been utterly externalized, pictured. (In a work of the same sub-series titled *Moral Amnesia* (fig. 10), he starts another paragraph: "Given the bloody record of the 20th century...") Morris channels the series, which began in 1973 as a more oblique experimentation on vision, memory, time and artistic practice, into meditative yet explicit textual and aesthetic declarations on the

post-WWII landscape so that on the whole the result becomes a long running vision of the crisis produced, blindly, out of a crisis in vision.

In looking at the life-span of the *Blind Time Drawings*, we skip over a great deal of other developments in Morris's work. As his career progressed into the eighties, it seems to have been considered less and less relevant to critical discourse in the arts, taking turns that left many either scratching their heads or outright dismissive. Discussing, for example, the apocalyptic so-called *Hydrocal* works of the early eighties, David Antin would write at the end of an otherwise positive essay on Morris: "In 1980, he turned to metaphoric representation, a vast scale, and a hugely amplified address on a commonplace theme, in giant installations whose obvious property is magniloquence."³⁹

The work in question had much to do with (the possibility of) picturing a post-atomic landscape. Antin continues dismissively about it, suggesting that it amounts to parody, either of, as he suggests, "Anselm Keifer's large, decorative, and essentially banal paintings" or of Morris's own earlier "ambitions for a grandly scaled, representational public art" (i.e. self-parody).⁴⁰ Antin is right to observe an ironic and self-reflexive impulse in these works,

evidenced first of all in the return to expressionist pictorial tropes with which Morris had worked, and then abandoned, in the fifties (some of the works within the frame are actual old paintings of his from that time). Seen in this way, the surrounding of these naively expressive and 'autobiographical' works with massive frames that forge a frightening nuclear baroque is perhaps not without humor, the result bearing down on the viewer with hyperbole (they exceed human scale) or, as Antin puts it, "magniloquence."

However, to couch the *Hydrocal* works between parody and magniloquence is to get only half the picture, a half-critique that Morris himself tacitly mobilized *against* himself in an anonymous editorial appended to his 1981 *Art in America* article "American Quartet." There, playing the role of an anonymous critic, he attacked his own work for, as W.J.T. Mitchell has put it, the "kind of ghoulishness and gloom in his meditations on the aesthetic monumentalizing of death and destruction."⁴¹ By preempting the reaction that his new work and contemporaneous writing is simply 'ghoulish,' Morris seems to double down in a way on whatever is authentic about the gestures in the *Hydrocal* works and elsewhere.

Indeed, against a notion of parody, the viewer confronts in the *Hydrocal* work a visceral, skull-and-debris-ridden representation of a

post-nuclear holocaust landscape as the frame of a personal, expressive, pseudo-vital past. For Mitchell the “knot” of these works “arises when one realizes that this future would be one in which these paintings could never exist”—there could be no art after a nuclear holocaust—and thus “they critique a world in which, as Benjamin put it, ‘mankind...can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.’”⁴² The *Hydrocal* works, much like the later *Tar Babies of a New World Order* (Venice, 1997), where Morris suspends numerous large blackened cherub-like figures from a gallery ceiling, provide a layered *detournement* of postwar art and culture in which movements from his own past as well as the larger circumstances of postwar American art and politics oscillate between a loss of their original meaning and new meaning conditioned on that loss.

This later work might seem a long ways away from the crisis out of which, in 1961, Morris formulated the nothingness of the “blank form” that “slowly waves a large gray flag and laughs at how close it got to the second law of thermodynamics.” And yet, seen in the context of its ironic and impossible fusion of art and politics and a postwar American (war-obsessed) cultural-economy, it emerges as an almost logical vision of that crisis.

Conclusion: Morris and the Category of the “Postwar”

In 1968, Paul Cummings asked Robert Morris if he had been active in or had any interest in politics, to which Morris replied, without elaboration, “No.”⁴³ This “no” seems to resound on both sides of the traditional, early critical literatures in which Morris featured prominently. Whether it was denouncing the “theatricality” of the minimalist object or speaking of the “specific moment” of the emergence of the postmodern “expanded field,” the dominant narratives that have used Morris to prop up their arguments, particularly in addressing his work during the sixties, have largely refused see him as operating within a particular set of post-WWII circumstances that have much to do with the specific culture that arose as a result of the crisis of the end of that war. This thesis has tried to follow a persistent (though not always prominent) thread through a select reading of Morris’s work, from 1961 up through very recent years, which shows the continued importance of the atomic question to its development. As stated at the outset, this investigation serves in a way as a case study for a larger argument that wants to expand and reposition the category of the “postwar” to emphasize its under-recognized importance on a new era of avant-garde artistic

production, an importance that exceeds the 'convenience' by which this category has been consistently constrained.⁴⁴

In laying out the impetus for her influential 1979 article "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," Rosalind Krauss contended that the "critical operations that have accompanied *postwar* American art have largely worked in the service of" a manipulation in which the category of sculpture has become "infinitely malleable." (emphasis added) "In the hands of this criticism," she continued, "categories like sculpture and painting have been kneaded and stretched and twisted in an extraordinary demonstration of elasticity, a display of the way a cultural term can be extended to include just about anything."⁴⁵ In setting her sights on the traditional categories of "sculpture and painting," she passes over the new category of the "postwar," itself a "cultural term" that has by now exceeded a simple demarcation of historical time to carry with it specific, if contested, notions of style and influence. Being by now used and abused in excess of the traditional categories of "sculpture and painting," the "postwar" has become far more "malleable" than perhaps those categories ever were. It may well turn out that the "manipulation" of "sculpture and painting" by the postwar critical apparatus is itself

symptomatic of the real contours of the category of the "postwar,"
contours that are due now to be more clearly drawn out.

Notes

¹ The text is “Blank Form” which was only published in 1984 in the catalog to Barbara Haskell’s exhibition *Blam!: The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance 1958 – 1964*, (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1984). It was originally intended for La Monte Young’s *An Anthology of Chance Operations*, but was pulled by Morris from the manuscript before going to print.

² In addition to the political dimension that comes along with the notion of flag waving, the reference to blankness and flags in the same breath forms a likely allusion to Jasper Johns, who showed four gray paintings in December 1961 at the Castelli gallery, which would later represent Morris. See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-century Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007), 17. By 1961 Johns’s art world reputation was made, and flags were one of his most recognizable motifs. Thus Morris’s reference to a “large gray flag” carries with it layered dimensions of the political and cultural climate of New York at the beginning of the 1960s.

³ Morris has spoken of the influence of Pollock on his work, but it mostly manifests itself as an oppositional influence. In 1962, Robert Morris wrote a coy work titled “Methods for Painting,” the first instruction of which was: “A. Dictate them to friends,” exhibiting a radically different, almost diametrically opposed perspective from the New York School as to what the methodology of painting should be. See Robert Morris, “Letters to John Cage.” *October* 81 (Summer 1997): 75. Writing more recently, Morris had this to say about the socio-aesthetic developments that “begin with Pollock”: “Work falling under the rubric of the Wagner effect would be aimed at servicing the upper echelons of a would-be ruling class who, in their driven generosity, demand those vast and sanctified spaces of the museum as testimony to the importance of their class and self-congratulatory public service. [...] If Wagner effect can be periodized in our time it can be said to begin with Pollock.” Robert Morris, “Size Matters.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 483.

⁴ This thesis is informed, for example, by the observation that museums and universities have institutionalized the category of the “postwar” while more often than not taking for granted that for which it was named. At the beginning of my prospectus I cite art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson’s statement about how the term ‘postwar’ is often only “used in the West as a convenient marker to designate, in shorthand,

the later twentieth century” to shore up this problem. The question that has been, it seems to me, insufficiently posed is: what is the relationship between WWII, its end, and the language of the avant-gardes that followed it? Is it useful to distinguish between different phases of the postwar in America? For the reasons introduced above, this essay at present will skip over Abstract Expressionism (a first phase, say, of the postwar avant-garde); in the end the “post-atomic” reading of that art, however compelling, comes off too self-serving or over simplified. The focus here is on the new avant-gardes taking shape at the beginning of the sixties, how artists then, from a new vantage point, worked against earlier formations of the postwar avant-garde in a more sincere realization of an art of that age.

⁵ Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 1968 Mar. 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

⁶ See W. J. T Mitchell. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 264-5.

⁷ See Akira Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2005).

⁸ This account comes from Charles Curtis, student and collaborator of La Monte Young, in phone conversations, March 2012.

⁹ “Letters to John Cage,” 72-3

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ It may not be a new claim that his work and others during this time were turning in this way—toward allegory—but this text provides an early account of how he formulated these ideas, of what was behind them. An important precedent to Morris’s concerns to achieve allegory would be Robert Rauschenberg. In addition to making a work in 1959 specifically entitled *Allegory*, Rauschenberg has been noted by scholars and critics for advancing a relationship between culture and memory by which he moves “the idea of memory...from a privileged, internal, subjective connection to the past to a space understood as external.” See Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-avant-garde*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003), 131. The difference between Rauschenberg and Morris seems to reside in the characteristics of this “past.” On the one hand, objects of Rauschenberg’s “past” are “just sort of there.” (*Ibid.*) For Morris, on the other hand, there seems to be a more pointed urgency to his “increasing concern to achieve an allegorical function,” an urgency registered in a crisis unfolding around him.

¹² It seems important to note that this citation, along with the “Blank Form” text, comes before Morris ever held a solo-show in New York, that is, before the construction and solidification of “mythical” art-

world image of Morris and his artistic priorities. A handwritten note from 1980 by Thomas Krens reprinted in the catalog of Morris's 1994 Guggenheim retrospective reads: "Ever since *Art Forum* published the first of Morris's four installments entitled 'Notes on Sculpture' just over a year after the Green Gallery show [Morris's first New York solo-show], the public persona of Robert Morris as Renaissance Man has contributed in no small way to the almost mythic aura that came to surround his work. With a writing style and message that was uncharacteristically dense for an artist-cum-writer, Morris revealed the conceptual mechanics behind relatively simple geometric plywood forms in the Green Gallery show." My emphasis on sources from Morris that predate his "almost mythical aura" represents an attempt to distill significant positions of the artist before they were in a way corrupted or clouded by the noise of the art world into the late sixties. For the Krens note see his "The Triumph of Entropy" in *Robert Morris: The Mind/body Problem : Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Guggenheim Museum Soho, January-April 1994*, (New York, NY: Guggenheim Museum Foundation, 1994): xxvi.

¹³ In the catalog of a recent Jasper Johns exhibit, we read that the artist "frequently incorporated strips of newspaper text, partially obscured by ink or encaustic, into his crosshatch work. By refusing easy access to the content of the newsprint, Johns suppressed its denotative function so that other aspects would become more conspicuous." See: Roberts, Jennifer L., and Jennifer Quick, *Jasper Johns/in Press: The Crosshatch Works and the Logic of Print*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Art Museums, 2012), 71.

¹⁴ Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*. (University of California Press, 1992), 54

¹⁵ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

¹⁶ Criqui, Jean-Pierre. *Robert Morris*. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), 12-13.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (University of Michigan Press, 1994), 57.

¹⁸ This is all worked out *against* an earlier logic of American postwar abstraction, where expressionism in the end functioned, however unwittingly, as an easily commodifiable token of a hollowed-out type, one defined alternatively through a rugged individualism or an alienating anxiety or an unprecedented affluence or a marked vitality, none of which we would apply to Morris's work at this time.

¹⁹ Ad Reinhardt, "Art as Art" (*Art International*, Lugano, VI, no. 10, December 1962).

²⁰ Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 1968 Mar. 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

²¹ Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October*, Vol. 8, (Spring, 1979): 36. Of course, there have been important voices who offer, according to the nature of their subjects, a different perspective. Anna Chave states: "In my view, Morris's 'I' is best understood as rhetorical and autobiographical, then, and certainly as evidence of a specific personality and ego." See Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography." *The Art Bulletin* 82.1 (2000):157. Julia Bryan-Wilson has also shown how Morris's work at the end of the sixties was strongly situated within a particular set of what I would call "postwar" economic and political circumstances. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Hard Hats and Art Strikes: Robert Morris in 1970." *The Art Bulletin* 89.2 (2007): 333-59. And indeed a kernel of this argument can be traced to Michael Fried's attack on the "theatricality" of Morris's sculpture and that of his peers, insofar as it describes, among other things, a situation in which the viewer (and by extension the viewer's environment) is no longer excluded from the art work's production of meaning.

²² Richard J. Williams *After Modern Sculpture: Art in the United States and Europe, 1965-1970*. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000), 70.

²³ Williams, 69.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Williams, 70

²⁶ Noted Italian collector Giuseppe Panza purchased from the Leo Castelli Gallery certain of the unrealized memorials in 1974, along with many other works by Morris, according to records in the Panza papers housed at the Getty Research Institute's Special Collections.

²⁷ Peter Schwenger, "Writing the Unthinkable." *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Autumn, 1986), 42. (emphasis added)

²⁸ Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Hiroshima after Iraq: Three Studies in Art and War*. (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 46.

²⁹ Lippit, *Atomic Light*, 95.

³⁰ Deutsche, 46.

³¹ *Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 1968 Mar. 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

³² Lippit, p. 77.

³³ For an incisive and exhaustive study of Morris's 1970 solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum, see Julia Bryan-Wilson's chapter on Robert Morris in her *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2009). The flier for the Peripatetic

Artists Guild's offering of Robert Morris is reproduced and discussed in the above, 121-123.

³⁴ That is to say, the black square of Kasimir Malevich. It is perhaps worth noting that Morris leads his "Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects" discussed above with a quote from Malevich: "...on the other hand, painterly-artistic elements were cast aside, and the materials arose from the utilitarian purpose itself, as did the form."

³⁵ "Then I push downward and drag the hands off the page as though I were releasing the pole and floating over the crossbar at 12 feet up – floating in the fragrant, balmy, 1946 Missouri April air" *Blind Time V, Melancholia*, 1999.

³⁶ *Blind Time IV (Drawing with Davidson)*, 1991.

³⁷ This was Linda Benglis's notorious photograph of Robert Morris in chains wearing sunglasses and a WWII German military helmet. For one example of how critics overlooked the work for the sake of this poster, see Donald Kuspit, "Authoritarian Abstraction," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 36.1 (1977): 25-38.

³⁸ Lippit, p. 77. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 213.

³⁹ David Antin, "Have Mind, Will Travel," in *The Mind/Body Problem*, (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1994), 45.

⁴⁰ David Antin, "Have Mind, Will Travel," p 46

⁴¹ Mitchell, W. J. T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 253.

⁴² Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, p 252

⁴³ *Oral history interview with Robert Morris, 1968 Mar. 10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.*

⁴⁴ Julia Bryan-Wilson has written, in situating Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece* in the context of a post-Hiroshima landscape, that the term 'post-war' is often only "used in the West as a convenient marker to designate, in shorthand, the later twentieth century." See Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Remembering Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*." *Oxford Art Journal* 26.1 (2003): 113.

⁴⁵ Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," p. 30.

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