



Between Illusion and Theatricality: Rosalind Krauss, Michael Fried and Minimalism

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ABSTRACT – Between Illusion and Theatricality: Rosalind Krauss, Michael Fried and Minimalism – The article investigates Minimalism's theatricality from the standpoint of Michael Fried's and Rosalind Krauss' critical readings. On the one hand, Krauss, from the very first moment in which she reflects on the works of Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, evidences their fundamental contradiction: the presence of the illusion, despite its rejection by the artists. On the other hand, Fried focuses on the alleged literalism of those projects, calling them theatricality. In the text, the two approaches will be confronted in order to explore the authors' different views on the notion of theatricality.

Keywords: **Minimalism. Rosalind Krauss. Michael Fried. Art Criticism. Theatricality.**

RÉSUMÉ – Entre Illusion et Théâtralité: Rosalind Krauss, Michael Fried et Minimalisme – Le document examine la question de la théâtralité minimaliste à partir des lectures critiques produites par Michael Fried et Rosalind Krauss. On observe que, si Krauss, dès le premier moment qui reflète sur les travaux de Donald Judd et Dan Flavin, montre sa contradiction fondamentale – la présence de l'illusion, en dépit de son rejet par les artistes – Fried met l'accent sur le littéralisme présumé de ces propositions, baptisant la théâtralité. Dans le texte, les deux approches seront confrontées en les extrayant les vues des auteurs à la notion de théâtralité.

Mots-clés: **Minimalisme. Rosalind Krauss. Michael Fried. Critique d'Art. Théâtralité.**

RESUMO – Entre a Ilusão e a Teatralidade: Rosalind Krauss, Michael Fried e o Minimalismo – O artigo investiga a questão da teatralidade do Minimalismo a partir das leituras críticas elaboradas por Michael Fried e Rosalind Krauss. Enquanto Krauss, desde o primeiro momento em que reflete sobre obras de Donald Judd e Dan Flavin, evidencia sua contradição fundamental – a presença da ilusão, a despeito de sua rejeição pelos artistas –, Fried atém-se ao pretenso literalismo dessas propostas, denominando-o de teatralidade. No texto, as duas abordagens serão confrontadas, extraindo-se delas os pontos de vista dos autores para a noção de teatralidade.

Palavras-chave: **Minimalismo. Rosalind Krauss. Michael Fried. Crítica de Arte. Teatralidade.**

Introduction

In their writings, Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss contemporarily analyze the production associated with Minimal Art in a direct confronting with the Greenbergian perspective. While until then the authors' perspectives were mutually confirmed to the benefit of the specificity of the medium, they follow distinct paths from then on. The divergence is illustrated by each authors' respective approaches on the minimalist project. While Krauss, from the very first time she reflects on works of Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, evidences their basic contradiction – the presence of illusion, despite its rejection by the artists –, Fried turns to the alleged literalism of such proposals, calling it theatricality. In the following paragraphs, the two approaches will be confronted, extracting from them the authors' points of view for the notion of theatricality.

Rosalind Krauss and the Minimalist Illusion

Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd is one of the first essays published by Krauss in *Artforum*, in May 1966. The heading immediately imposes its analytical bias, by which the author observes the inadequacy between Judd's theoretical arguments – proclaiming a lack of allusion and illusion in favor of the object's materiality – and his works. Identified as a mere object, the work of art would not refer to anything that escaped from its visible concreteness: it would not allude to anything that is external to it, much less would it produce any types of illusory effects.

For Judd, his work “rather than inducing idealization and generalization and being allusive, it excludes. The work asserts its own existence, form and power. It becomes an object in its own right” (Judd apud Krauss, 2010, p. 91). However, for Krauss, these works explore certain visual premises with the direct purpose of questioning them. Thus, these specific objects, in all their materiality, assume geometric and architectural premises, mixing them up: the works do not confirm preset mathematical theorems anymore. There is an illusory effect in the minimalist works, since what is assumed at first sight as a perceptive truth, will be denied in a new visual apprehension.

Krauss provides two examples, both based on a work from the series *Progressions* (1965). This minimalist object is formed by two juxtaposed horizontal bars fixed to the wall, differing from each other in two aspects: the

color and the empty spaces that partition the lower bar in ten pieces spaced throughout the upper continuous beam. The gaps and fragments that compose the lower element are structured from numerical sequences – a recurrent structural strategy in Judd's *series of series*¹ – so that simple mathematical formulas are translated into visually complex volumes. Several spatial possibilities result from this strategy, each of them investigating specific relations between length and proportion.

The frontal sight of one *Progression* launches the hypothesis of the fragments being imprisoned in the metallic lane above it, a conjecture immediately refuted when the frontal sight is replaced by the lateral one: the upper bar is hollow, and the lower lane is L-shaped, supporting the first one. Occupying this oblique position, one also observes an allusion of the work to the perspective projective system, as the intervals of Judd's work, structured from mathematical series, refer to the regular geometric space without, however, confirming it. Thus, the variations of size between each segment impose a visual short circuit to the monocular space.

These short circuits suggest, then, both illusion and allusion in Judd's sculptures. The works' concreteness presents false visual hints: the objects, structured by mathematical series, do not confirm universal geometric principles. "The work", claims Krauss, "plays off the illusory quality of the thing itself as it presents itself to vision alone" (Krauss, 2010, p. 98). Whether this is so, Judd's creations do not refrain from the experience. Instead, they aim at the immediate perception so that certain absolute visual premises are put out of perspective, that is, the works do not confirm preceding information, but question them: "the work itself exploits and confounds previous knowledge to project its own meaning" (Krauss, 2010, p. 97). They are not objects of knowledge, things translucent to an omniscient vision that circumscribes them, but objects of perception, as they put to the test of experience truths that were previously established.

For all of this, Judd's work – following the historiographic logic proposed by Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, which professes the necessary critical confrontation of the artist in relation to the tradition that precedes him – establishes a counterpoint to that one developed by the sculptor David Smith. Krauss' thesis is that some sculptural possibilities not accomplished by Smith would be present in Judd's creations. In *Cubi*, one of his last series, Smith assumes the pictorial frame and produces cursive sculp-

tures that offer a pure optical sensation, swerving from traditional sculptural values, such as mass and volume. However, in these works, which for Robert Morris are “one of the few to confront sculptural surfaces in terms of light” (Morris, 1968, p. 225), the sculptor uses a compositive constructive principle, relating the parts in order to compose a whole. In turn, Judd alludes to the constructive principles only to question them. Thus, his works involve the viewer in an experience “which is on the one hand more illusive than that of either a normal easel painting or an easily cohesive sculptural form, and on the other hand more immediate than both” (Krauss, 2010, p. 100). For addressing solely to the vision, strengthening the anti-idealist character of the visual perception, Judd’s sculptures critically relate with David Smith’s work, having the minimalist artist outdone some expressive limitations of his predecessor, especially the overcoming of the pictorial illusion towards a live, purely optical illusion.

In this essay, one of her earliest, Krauss already uses the opposite pair, knowledge *versus* perception, to analyze Judd’s work. This dichotomy is basic to understand the distinction between the European sculptural production of that one that arose in the United States. Associated with this, there is the tactile-visual binomial, based on an appropriation of Alois Riegl by Greenberg and that will be explored recurrently both by Fried and Krauss. The association between the two pairs runs basically as follows: the omniscient vision that assumes an object of knowledge is linked with the tactile ownership of this very object. On the other hand, an object of perception offers itself in all its visuality, requiring a good deal of experience to be apprehended. Moreover, following the Greenbergian narrative, Krauss inserts Donald Judd in the same sculptural tradition of David Smith, remarkably American and modernist. Consequently, Rosalind Krauss’ interest for the sculptural *medium* is manifest as early as in 1966, and the essay may prove the extension of her concern with the headings of modern sculpture.

In 1971, Krauss reiterates her mistrust towards Minimalism, glimpsing an idealism in the supposed literalness of Donald Judd’s and Robert Morris’s works. Referring to the works of these two artists as literalist sculptures (echoing Fried’s term), Krauss questions the necessary copresence between the work and the viewer:

The moves that Morris and Judd make are still located on grounds of illusionism, if only because it is that issue that they want to overcome. And it is because of that that I feel illusionist, and ultimately idealist, questions are continually raised by their works (Krauss, 1971, p. 70).

Without referring specifically to any of Judd's work, Krauss claims that his work offers perceptive experiences submitted to a cognitive recognition, being the first sphere submitted to the second one. When analyzing Robert Morris' *Mirrored Boxes* (1965-71), Krauss also questions the presence of the cubes that form the work. No matter how hard they dissolve their own formal appearance due to the reflection of the surrounding space, the recognition of the cubical forms is still associated with an idealistic rationalism that tensions, in turn, the copresence demanded by the literalist work:

This notion of grasping three dimensionality through an intuition of the internal reciprocity or interdependence of its surface is symbolized for us in the mutual reflectivity that occurs in real space among the four cubes. Morris may talk about *Gestalts*, but his sculpture from this period comes across with a kind of hard edged idealism (Krauss, 1971, p. 70).

Originally, the term *hard edged* was conceived by Jules Langsner in 1959 on the occasion of the exhibition *Four Abstract Classicists*, having been also used in reference to the minimalist works even before their baptizing, a few years later, by Richard Wolheim. When using it to describe *Mirrored Boxes*, Krauss implicitly links Morris' work to this set of American abstract paintings, based on geometric forms circumscribed by accurate contours. Actually, such approximation highlights the pictorial character (translated by some aspects, especially the formal economy, the chromatic plenitude and the neatness of the surfaces) of the minimalist work. It also endorses Krauss' critical position, also found in her considerations on the works of Robert Irwin and Dan Flavin.

The tension between a tactile illusion and an optical illusion also bases Krauss' considerations regarding Irwin's and Flavin's works. While Judd's *Progressions* are based on a conflict between the immediate character of the experience and its illusory components, Irwin's and Flavin's works, in turn, still keep traditional pictorial traces when offering steady illusions. Such distinction between the two types of illusion proposed by the minimalist artists is of fundamental importance. If one does not have in mind the distinct natures of illusion between the respective works of Judd and Flavin,

for instance, it can be mistakenly assumed that the illusionism in Judd would be the one attached to the rationalist idealism in its desire to apprehend the objects globally. In Judd's case, however, there is only illusion and allusion through a negative way. Yet, it must be registered here the fact that Krauss does not advocate the poetics of the artist, even when interpreting it from a phenomenological point of view. What she does is to identify in Donald Judd's work a certain pictorialism², not having a change in her point of view throughout the decades, as it is proved by her blunt comment at a round table among *October's* editors:

It never occurred to me that Flavin and Judd were painters. Yet now I perceive that not only did they begin as painters, they continued to be such. So that even though Judd is the author of a famous essay arguing that painting should lose its virtual dimensions to become a 'specific object', he remains a painter – totally involved with questions of illusion [...]. Think of Flavin as well, with his recurrent use of frames made of fluorescent fixtures set in the corners of rooms, their lights directed inward at the converging walls. Not only this generates an incredible sense of virtuality, but since this transformed and sublated architectural resonances with three dimensionality made to glow with Trinitarian connotations. And on this retrospectively formed horizon what's come into focus is the term 'academicism', because I think there's something deeply academic in Flavin's or Judd's practice, something not shared by other minimalists (Buchloh et al., 2013, p. 120-121).

The long interval between the early analyses of Flavin's and Judd's works and the debate among the editors of *October* did not lead Krauss to change her opinion regarding these artists. Choosing as a motto "pictorial makes academic", she observes in the minimalist illusion a persistence of the traditional pictorial values, especially the emphasis on the autonomy of the artwork and also the split between the internal space of the work and the observer's field of action. Concerning this, in a review published in December 1969, the critic claims that Robert Irwin does not have a critical conscience of the illusory effect promoted by his works, as,

Irwin [...] continues to take the picture's relationship to the wall as one which automatically guarantees illusion. Therefore, although his work is no longer physically framed nor portable in the old sense, it settles itself comfortably within the traditional notion of easel painting (Krauss, 1969b, p. 69).

In Dan Flavin's case, Krauss observes in January of the same year:

As Flavin deploys it, the fluorescent tube is clearly a graphic device. It possesses both the figurative density of a line, and the inherent ambiguity of its position in space. It can build images, the interiors of which are different in quality from the space outside them; it can differentiate or divide space either along a frontal surface or in depth. Finally, it can produce stable illusions, as when corners of rooms are eradicated by even lighting or skewed by contradictory cast shadows. [...] Modeling is as important to Flavin as it ever was in traditional drawing – for it is the changing value of luminous diffusion which produces the effects of Flavin’s images (Krauss, 1969, p. 53-54).

The graphic consideration of the fluorescent tubes used by Flavin makes Krauss to evidence, in a similar way to her positioning towards Irwin’s exhibition, the pictorialism of his work³. Thus, their projects have in common the investigation of the linear element and its capacity to reproduce the visual conditions. Linked with the tactile illusionism, Flavin’s work produces then the illusion of depth and its physical inaccessibility, simultaneously. The physical unapproachability of the three-dimensional space is associated with the fact that his sculptures are structured around axis and nuclei: the fluorescent tubes. The cold lamps function as backbones that hide the work’s marrow, being Flavin’s work associated with the sculptural tradition of the 19th century and with the corresponding mystery of the formal creation. This bond is also commented by Hal Foster decades later, being it a prelude of the proposals gathered under the epithet *Light Art*, to the extent that it submits the physical space to the luminous illusionism. Flavin’s minimalism would be, therefore, more *site erosive* than *site specific*, since the illusion, before being denied by the literal objects, expands to the whole surrounding space (Foster, 2005)⁴.

The Minimalist Theatricality

In his *Late Writings*, Clement Greenberg updates the dichotomy between avant-garde and *kitsch* created by him a few decades before, rebaptizing in the mid-1960s the academicism as *avant-gardism*: it is in this pole that the author locates the Minimalism. Following such update, Michael Fried also proposes a revision of the opposition, establishing an antagonism between the modernist art and what the author calls *objecthood*, or theatricality. The antagonism proposed by Fried must be read, thus, as a difference between a work of art and an ordinary object, founded on the capacity that the former would have to *compel conviction*. Such ability of the work of

art is closely related with its shape, as the author explains in *Art and Objecthood*:

What is at stake in this conflict is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects and what decides their identity as *painting* is their confronting of the demand that they hold as shape. Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects. This can be summed up by saying that modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood, and that the crucial factor in this undertaking is shape, but shape that must belong to *painting* – it must be pictorial, no, or not merely, literal. Whereas literalist art stakes everything on shape as a given property of objects, if not indeed as a kind of object in its own right. It aspires not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood as such (Fried, 1998, p. 151).

In *Art and Objecthood*, Fried resumes the debate initiated in *Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons*, attempting to solve the modernist impasse of the literalist impasse. As, ultimately, the *Greengergian* logic of valuation of the physical aspects of the painting flows into Minimalism, being the painting itself an obstacle for its full achievement. Thus, before being Clement Greenberg's bastard children, the minimalists would be his legitimate ones, insofar that they fully develop his reductionist proposal, as Georges Didi-Huberman also proposes:

It can be perceived, when reading this text of Judd ['Specific Objects'], the weird impression of a *déjà-vu* that would have turned against itself: a familiarity working in its own denial. Indeed, this is the modernist argument *par excellence*, the one of specificity – alleged in painting in the renounce to the illusion of the third dimension –, which returns here to condemn to death this painting as a practice aimed, whatever it is, to an illusionism that defines its essence and its past history. Donald Judd radicalizes, thus, the request for specificity – or 'literalness of space', as he says (*literal space*) – to the point of seeing in Rothko's pictures an 'almost three-dimensional' spatial illusionism' (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 53).

The solution of this impasse is developed by the investigation of the "viability of shape as such", having here an approach of the *shape* as *medium*, a proposal that Fried brings from the philosopher Stanley Cavell's thoughts. His approach questions the valuation of the physical and concrete aspects that found the basic minimalist vocabulary (consisting of simple geometric units, usually serially ordered; and of non-traditional industrial ma-

materials, such as plywood, aluminum, Formica, acrylic, stainless steel, among others). In face of this, he investigates the pictorial quality of the *shape*, choosing Frank Stella's work as a paradigmatic case, since the artist would have reached the literalness in his *black paintings* (analyzed by Fried from the deductive logic), having next returned to the scope of the strictly pictorial concerns in a trajectory that replaced a submission relation between the *depicted shape* and the *literal shape* by another one of continuity. It results from this the suspension of its objecthood, that is, "the condition of non-art" (Fried, 1998, p. 152).

The focus of "Art and Objecthood" – the "testament to formalist modernism", according to Hal Foster (1996, p. 52) – is the relation between the work of art and its observer. However, it is curious that great part of the argumentation is primordially based on Fried's readings⁵ of minimalist texts. Since these writings guide both Fried's and Krauss' considerations, let's resume their general lines.

The Minimalist Doxa

Notes on Sculpture is based on Robert Morris' questioning on the sculptural practice's overshadowing by modernist painting. Surprisingly, he does not oppose to Greenberg's and Fried's argument, but rather acknowledges the gradual movement of valuation of literal pictorial elements, just like the deductive structure developed by the author of *Three American Painters*. This is a "long dialogue with a limit" (Morris, 1968, p. 223), in which painting structural elements are gradually emphasized. The fact that Morris' reflection in favor of the sculpture is based on the Greenbergian logic of separation of the arts causes special surprise. "There may indeed be a general sensibility in the arts of this time", highlights Morris, "yet the histories and problems of each, indicate involvement in very separate concerns" (Morris, 1968, p. 223). The artist then resumes the tactile-optical dichotomy to claim the distinction between sculpture and painting: "Clearer distinctions between sculpture's essentially tactile nature and the optical sensibilities involved in painting need to be made" (Morris, 1968, p. 224).

The distinctions go, of course, through sculpture's anti-illusionist vocation which, in contrast to painting, has always been linked to the concrete and literal facts concerning space, lighting and materials. Developing a ge-

nealogy that dates back to the Russian sculptors Vladimir Tatlin and Naum Gabo, the artist defends the autonomy of the sculpture established on a concrete experience that rules out any imagetic allusions. For Morris, the sculptural situation should not give rise to any type of transcendence of the work's conditions and physical and material properties, as, for instance, the use of color in Jules Olitski's and Morris Louis' paintings, in an evident allusion to the Greenbergian specificity and the analysis of the painters made by Michael Fried: "This transcendence of color over shape in painting is cited here because it demonstrates that it is the most optical, immaterial, non-containable, non-tactile nature of color that is inconsistent with the physical nature of sculpture" (Morris, 1968, p. 225).

Being Morris Greenbergian in his approach of sculpture, he does so in direct confrontation with Greenberg himself. It must be kept in mind that, in *New Sculpture*, the critic proposes a suspension of his compartmentalization of arts. Rather, Greenberg suggests an illusion of modalities, through which the sculptural *medium*, when addressing solely to the vision by means of an absolute visibility, assumes the bidimensional pictorial characteristics. Morris, in contrast, revokes the suspension of the specificity: "Affirming, above all, the specificity of the medium, contesting the pictorially derived nature of its direction, he proceeded to propose, in sculptural form, the terms of a renewal" (Michelson, 2013, p. 26-27).

The renewal of which Annette Michelson speaks invariably goes through the emphasis on the material aspects of the sculptural practice, which foresees, in turn, a systemic approach in which what counts are not so much the intrinsic qualities of each property, but the relation between them. For such, the artist must invest in simple geometric units, so that the *shape*, "the most important sculptural value" (Morris, 1968, p. 232), be apprehended immediately through *Gestalt*, since "the object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetics" (Morris, 1968, p. 232). Thus, the focus shifts from the internal relation between the parts of a given composition to the external relation between the sculptural properties related with factors as space, illumination, field of vision and proportion. Such shift also results from the scale of the work, which must let go of its *quality of intimacy* resulting from the internal combinations of the parts in favor of its *quality of publicness*, in which the concrete situation proposed by a sculpture is reinforced. Thus, Morris' argument underlines the importance of the phenomemo-

logical sculptural situation, something that will be determinant for the notion of externality later developed by Krauss, being central to the new syntax of modern sculpture.

While the Greenbergian framing is appropriated by Morris, Donald Judd initiates his *Specific Objects* in a Greenbergian⁶ tone, claiming that “half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture” (Judd, 1975, p. 181). For him, the three-dimensional practices are not gathered around normative principles, in order to form a cohesive group that results in a movement, a style or a school. Consequently, this essay’s structure resembles a compilation of characteristics closely linked with each artist’s respective poetics, echoing the “simply order, like that of continuity, one thing after another” (Judd, 1975, p. 184) that the author realizes in Frank Stella’s work.

Given its spatial character, there is a large playing field of three-dimensional works, in contrast to the narrow fields of painting and sculpture. Among the diverse possibilities, Judd mentions the manipulation of all types of materials and colors; the investigation of industrial techniques and materials, as exemplify Dan Flavin’s fluorescent tubes; the revocation of anthropometric premises; the bond with ordinary objects; and, finally, and closely to Robert Morris, the valuation of the sculptural situation in detriment both of its external references and the spatial separation of the traditional painting:

Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problems of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors – which is ridance of one of the salient and most objectionable relics of European art. The several limits of painting are no longer present. A work can be as powerful as it can be thought to be. Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be of any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted (Judd, 1975, p. 184).

In an interview to Bruce Glaser, he reaffirms his mistrust regarding the traditional compositive pictorial arrangements, linking them to the preceding European constructive trends. Despite the formal economy that approximates Stella’s and Judd’s works to the works of Malevich, Constructivism, Mondrian, Neoplasticism and De Stijl, the North-American artists

establish a discontinuity among them. The distance to the European tradition is based, to a large extent, in the mistrust that both of the artists nurture in relation to two of the artworks' underlying principles: the compositive balance and the rationalism. Formed basically by *relational paintings*⁷, the European constructive trends are distinct from the North-American *structural*⁸ proposal, which, in turn, makes use of symmetry as a way to prevent past compositive effects. In some other way, Judd and Stella emphasize the totalizing character of their works, in detriment of the valuation of their parts, what, in the perspective of the latter, would mutilate and destroy the work itself⁹. Besides, the impersonal and anti-illusionist aspect is also highlighted, leading Stella to his famous tautological commentary:

My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen there *is* there. It really is an object. Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough is this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever it is that he's doing. He's making a thing. [...] All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that you can see the whole idea without any confusion... What you see is what you see (Glaser, 1968, p. 158).

For Judd, the European principles engender a type of pictorial production that submits the execution to the ideation. In his words, “[...] all that art is based on systems built beforehand, *a priori* systems; they express a certain type of thinking and logic that is pretty much discredited now as a way of finding out what the world's like” (Glaser, 1968, p. 151). However, there are some contradictions in this disapproval of the presence of preconceived orders and ideas, as Judd's and Stella's proposals are also based on compositive and structural elements defined beforehand (like the mathematical series in *Progressions*). Concerning this, Judd, echoing both Morris and Smith, clarifies that the order and the formal principles found in his works present such economy to the point of not being able to transform themselves into a dominant quality of the work. Having or not divergences concerning the prevalence of the compositive orders in relation to the execution, one fact is undeniable: the declared rejection of the European tradition. While Stella claims that “it's not continuous” (Glaser, 1968, p. 155), Judd, on his turn, reinforces the opinion when he says that there is “an enormous break” (Glaser, 1968, p. 149), being him “[...] more interested in Neo Plasticism and Constructivism than I was before, perhaps, but I was never

influenced by it, and I'm certainly influenced by what happens in the United States rather than by anything like that" (Glaser, 1968, p. 155).

The last text commented by Michael Fried in *Art and Objecthood* refers to the conversation that the North-American architect and sculptor Tony Smith¹⁰ had with Samuel Wagstaff, Jr. It is a short informal talk, transcribed in two parts. While the first section of the text offers some reading keys to his work, the second part is the focus of Michael Fried's critique. In it, Smith recollects an experience in a highway under construction in New Jersey. In the company of three students, the artist was driving at night along this road, being this nocturnal experience in a semi abandoned place quite revealing. This situation announced the end of the art, insofar that Smith's most remarkable experience would have happened by means of abandoned urban structures, stripped of functionality. Art then lacks sufficiency, because situations external to its circuit could be as much as, or more, aesthetically revealing than a certain artwork.

However, one fact should be considered: the transcription does not end in this apocalyptic way, announcing the death of art. It is, on the contrary, turned toward Smith's sculptures, specially *Generation* (1965), which the artist describes as "citized monument, as urbane and objective as possible". Therefore, it is not a manifesto, much less a theoretical text, but a talk transcribed by an interposed person (Wagstaff). This consideration is extremely important, since Smith, despite comparing his experience in the highway with an artistic event, does not seem to decree the end of his sculptural constructions. And it will be this same experience that Michael Fried classifies as theatrical, putting an end, with this, to the art¹¹.

Theatricality by Michael Fried

In *Art and Objecthood*, Fried mentions Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht as two theatrical theorists already involved with reorientations of the theatricality concept. Without lingering in their perspectives, what he wanted was merely making explicit the genealogy of his questioning. Yet, it must be questioned Fried's notion of theatricality and his mention of two of the most significant modern theatre's authors. Both authors, when investigating this concept, organize it, in general terms, according to opposite pairs¹².

Considering Fried's argument in favor of the modernist painting, theater would not be an artistic form anymore, but the end of art. In what sense must Fried's mistrust of theatricality be understood? It is evident that this notion must not be understood in the light of Brecht's distancing theatre nor Artaud's theatre of cruelty. However, theatricality in Fried seems to be close to the classic dramatic tradition, which is the target of both Brecht's and Artaud's attacks. It is quite significant that theatricality is defined as theater without text. Jean-Pierre Sarrazac, in his *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama*, clarifies that "this scenic conception of theatricality, linked to the awaken of staging in the end of the 19th century, seeks for the complete autonomy of scene in relation to the literature" (Sarrazac, 2012, p. 179). It is interesting to notice here that, if theatricality, for Sarrazac, is associated with the end of text-centrism, the text then is considered just as a scenic element among many others. Accordingly, in Morris' argumentation, the minimalist object is only one of the terms of the situation. Then, the notion of theatricality recovered by Michael Fried deals with the autonomy of theater in relation to the autonomy of painting, in their both suspicion of literature. If this is so, Fried's theatricality should be understood together with the theatrical practices rejected by Brecht and Artaud.

Nevertheless, the resources disapproved by these two theater theoreticians – representation, submission of the *logos*, hierarchy between professionals, etc. – do not reappear in the censorship of the critic. For Fried, theatricality is associated not with representation, but with the literal use of the objects, so that there is no separation between stage and audience, between the space mobilized by the work and that of the spectator's. It is a very specific notion of theatricality, to the extent that it does not consider it according to the history of its practice, although dealing with the question of the aesthetic autonomy of the stage. Having this in mind, one may question what was the reason that took Fried to the choice of the theatricality notion. Two possible answers may be sketched. On one hand, it must be kept in mind the following sentence: "What lies between the arts is theater" (Fried, 1998, p. 164). The theater, in its autonomy in relation to literature, is the opposite of the modernist compartmentalization of the arts: comprising several procedures and resources of meaning, the theatrical practice would be promiscuous and impure. The theater, despite its modern autonomy, is the *antimediam*. That means that, despite their solidary suspicion

of text and literature, modernist painting and modern theater arrive at two different territories of autonomy: medium's autonomy and *antimedium's* autonomy, respectively.

Moreover, theater is invariably anthropometric, since it always requests the copresence of the actor and the spectator (even in the poetics of Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, Tadeusz Kantor and, more recently, Heiner Goebbels, there would be a certain anthropomorphism, even when non-literal). The minimalist case is exemplary, as the situations proposed by Judd, Morris and other artists bet in formal units, ordered in simple ways and submitted to the perceptive verification according to the variations of light, space and visual field. As a consequence of the negation of modernist reduction's *abstract theater* the minimalist theatricality would give rise to an empty experience for the spectator, a situation that, keeping in mind all the due differences, leads to the passivity of the audience in the classic theatrical tradition, as described by Brecht and Artaud. Fried reflects here on the spectator's body in the minimalist situations:

My critique of the literalists address to the viewer's body was not that bodiliness as such had no place in art but rather that literalism theatricalized the body, put it endlessly on stage, made it uncanny or opaque to itself, hollowed it out, deadened its expressiveness, denied its finitude and in a sense its humanness, and so on. There is, I might have said, something vaguely *monstrous* about the body in literalism (Fried, 1998, p. 42).

It is difficult to understand objectively how the theatricalization of the spectator in a minimalist work generates a body that is monstrous, mysterious and opaque to itself. The difficulty is clearly related to a certain analytical lack on Fried's texts, which concern less with the works than with the minimalist writings (due to the fact that he considers this discussion basically ideological). A dialectic solution to this impasse is provided by Didi-Huberman, who redistributes the elements identified by Fried, especially the articulation between the opacity and the anthropomorphism¹³ inherent to the theatricality that Fried postulates in direct response to Judd's rejection of anthropomorphism.

In fact, just like Krauss, Didi-Huberman observes a mismatch between the theoretical statements of the minimalist artists, remarkably the texts of Judd, Stella and Morris. For him, while Judd and Stella give support to the discourse of the specificity of the object by means of tautological proposals,

Morris, on his turn, appeals to the formal simplicity to endorse the phenomenological character of the minimalist experience. For this phenomenological situation to happen, it is necessary that the object rips its autonomous objectuality sheltered by the tautological discourse. It should then begin to assume a condition of almost-subject, as

[...] the force of the minimalist object was conceived in unavoidably intersubjective terms. [...] The object here thought as 'specific', abrupt, strong, uncontrollable and disconcerting – insofar that it became insensibly, in front of its spectator, *a kind of subject* (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 63).

This is disclosed, for instance, in the description made by Krauss in *Passages in Modern Sculpture* for Morris's *Untitled [L-Beams]* (1965), in which it can be noticed a shift from the specificity of the objects to the specific relations of the elements in space. In this phenomenological situation, it is sheltered, therefore, the theatricality described by Fried as a complex subjective experience catalyzed by a formal simplicity. Thus, there is a dialectic game between specificity and presence, since, in minimalist objects, there is, on one hand, an attention aimed

[...] to the à formal *simplicity*, to the geometric 'literalness' of volumes *without equivocation*; on the other, its irresistible vocation for a *presence* obtained through a game – inevitably mistaken – on the dimensions of the object or its being in situation in front of the spectator (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 71).

Well, it is exactly this game of misunderstandings and meanings from the formal literalness of the minimalist works that is in the core of the argument that, as it was evidenced above, Rosalind Krauss develops in *Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd*. Fried, just like Krauss, noticed the paradoxes of the Minimalism: while she observes the illusion in counterpoint to specificity, he identifies the theatricality in contrast with literalness.

Theatricality by Rosalind Krauss

In any way, the monstrous aspect of the body (either the spectator's or the artist's), as well as the recovery of the theatricality notion are two topics that, since then, have received innumerable approaches and derivations within the scope of the visual arts¹⁴. Krauss, for instance, investigates the theatricality in *Mechanical Ballets: light, motion, theater*, the sixth chapter of *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. In it, the dichotomy between the two sculptu-

ral modalities is manifested concerning the opposition between two groups of artists from the three axes suggested in the title: light, movement and theater. Synthesizing her approach, Krauss (1981, p. 204) claims:

Now it is beyond question that a large number of postwar European and American sculptors became interested both in theater and in the extended experience of time which seemed part of the conventions of the stage. From this interest came some sculpture to be used as props in productions of dance and theater, some to function as surrogate performers, and some to act as the on stage generators of scenic effects. And if not functioning in a specifically theatrical context, certain sculpture was intended to theatricalize the space in which it was exhibited – by projecting a changing play of lights around that space, or by using such devices as audio speakers or video monitors to connect separate parts of space into an arena contrapuntally shaped by performance. In the event that the work did not attempt to transform the whole of its ambient space into a theatrical or dramatic context, it would often internalize a sense of theatricality – by projecting, as its *raison d'être*, a sense of itself as an actor, as an agent of movement. In this sense, the entire range of kinetic sculpture can be seen as tied to the concept of theatricality (Krauss, 1981, p. 204).

Theatricality is, therefore, a term that comprises several recent proposals of the modern art: be them linked with the exhibition space of a gallery, such as Alexander Calder's kinetic art, or also the sculptural pictures of George Segal and Edward Kienholz; be them presented as scenic elements of dance spectacles (the partnerships between Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer, as well as between Robert Rauschenberg, Trisha Brown and Merce Cunningham); or yet those inserted in the heterogeneous and multidisciplinary context of the happening (in this case, Claes Oldenburg). All this heterogeneous set of works can be analyzed through the bias of theatricality, being exactly this the effort of Rosalind Krauss.

She organizes her argument based on the dichotomy – transversal to the book – between the proposals grounded, on the one hand, on an illusory space analogous to the interiority of the artist; and, on the other, those that establish a playing field based on the external relationship between the elements, thus highlighting the mutual implication between externality and expression. When contrasting Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* (1923-30)¹⁵ and Francis Picabia's *Rêlache* (1924)¹⁶, both works used in a scenic context, Krauss (1981, p. 213) claims:

Although the *Light Prop* and the *Rêlache* set are both theatrical, they are vastly different kinds of objects. The first is a technological contribution to the conventional sense of dramatic space and time, while the second is involved in a movement to radicalize the relationship between theater and its audience (Krauss, 1981, p. 213).

Likewise, she counters Alexander Calder's poetics and the kinetic sculptures of Claes Oldenburg and the minimalists. In this case, the opposition is formulated by means of the catalytic function of the movement. In Calder's case, the mobiles' action, for instance, is basic to the creation of virtual volumes that, in turn, function as metaphors of the human body, being the works considered as mechanical actors. According to this prerogative, both gravity and balance and the shift of the integrant parts of the mobile form an anthropometric image through a geometric concision that alludes to Gabo's sculptures. In a similar way, the kinetic artists, when providing the objects with mechanical movements, produce ventriloquists that allude to the presence of a subjective interiority. The movement, both in Calder's case and in the kinetic art, is responsible for the *subjectivation of the object*.

An inverse trend is found in Claes Oldenburg's sculptures, and also in the minimalist proposals. Here, the movement is not used to *subjectify the object*, but rather to *objectify the subject*. For Krauss, the expansion in large scale of daily objects developed by Oldenburg in malleable materials, when betting in a double inversion (the small becomes big; the rigid becomes flexible) also theatricalize the exhibition space. In this case, however, instead of the subject's becoming of an object, the subject is identified – either by the size, either by the organic flexibility – with the object. And thus:

Though softened and veiled by irony, the relationship Oldenburg's work has with its audience is one of attack. The softness of the sculptures undermines the conventions of rational sculpture, and its associations for the viewer strike at his assumptions that he is the conceptual agent of the temporal unfolding of the event. When Picabia turned the spotlights on the audience of *Rêlache*, his act of incorporation was simultaneously an act of terrorism. If Oldenburg's work is theatrical, it is so in the sense of *Rêlache* rather than in terms of conventional theater, whether those terms are realized by the movement of Moholy-Nagy's *Light Prop* or the static nature of the sculptural tableau (Krauss, 1981, p. 230).

When identifying a terrorist act in Oldenburg's work associated with the luminous attack of Picabia's enormous scenic device, Krauss suggests,

on one hand, a connection of this poetics with Antonin Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* (the only modern stage manager mentioned by her) and, on the other, with the Happenings. By the way, the bond between the happenings and Artaud is borrowed from Susan Sontag's argument in *Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition*¹⁷.

In this text, it is traced the genealogy¹⁸ of the new genre of spectacle emergent in New York, being also identified the general traces of this scenic manifestation. While the filiation between Happenings and the North-American painting does not cause surprise, Sontag's choice of a surrealist principle of juxtaposition – which should not be, however, identified solely with the Andre Breton's movement – is intriguing. Such principle, although ordinary among the artists of this movement, manifests also in other artistic contexts, as in the case of the Happening, circumscribing, therefore, a broad surrealist sensitivity.

One of the most remarkable traces of this procedure is the provocative way by which it reaches the audience. The juxtaposition principle is a transversal element to the divergent conceptions of happening¹⁹, being this a usual strategy used by the artists to frustrate the expectations of the audience, shocking them whenever possible. Articulated with this tactic, there is also a trend of depersonalization, both of the performers and the audience. It is added to this the unpredictable, open and multidisciplinary character, the non-conventional use of the word, as well as the emphasis in a *camp* aesthetics, that, in set, protest against the aseptic, museological and transcendental conception of the art. This set of characteristics is synthesized, in Sontag's perspective, by Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, being this the most exemplary case of the terrorist use of the surrealist sensitivity:

The prescriptions which Artaud offers in *The Theatre and its Double* describe better than anything else what Happenings are. Artaud shows the connection between three typical features of the Happening: first, its supra personal or impersonal treatment of persons; second, its emphasis on spectacle and sound, and disregard for the word; and third, its professional aim to assault the audience (Sontag, 1966, p. 272-273).

In fact, the Happenings are founded on a confrontation between artists and viewers. Oldenburg himself, when commenting on *City Upside Down* (1962) – one of the few remaining sculptures of the time of his Happenings –, underlines the provocative tone of these artistic proposals. Carri-

ed through with the same language as the other sculptures (large scale and flexibility of the material), *City Upside Down*, as the title itself suggests, is a sculptural landscape of New York city, suspended upside down from the ceiling. At the time of its creation, the sculpture was used in one of the events organized by Oldenburg in 1962 in the East Village, in a rented space baptized as Ray Gun Manufacturing Co²⁰. *City Upside Down* actively participated in the *World's Fair II*, since the performance of his installation happened exactly where the people were. As the artist himself recalls²¹, the strategy of such action was to reduce the audience space in order to squash the spectators and make them uncomfortable. In another moment, the performers, carrying large cardboard screens, pressured the public against the wall, to the point that, in one of the occasions, one member of the audience, feeling intimidated, perforated the bulkhead with a knife. Such reaction, undoubtedly, certifies the type of relation that the Happenings established with the viewers.

However, while the sculptures, when being manipulated by the performers in the context of a Happening, displace the audience out of their comfort zone, can the same be said for the ones arranged in the exhibition space of a gallery? Is the terrorist act not linked with the actors' performance, or is it implicit in Oldenburg's formal vocabulary? Is it possible to operate the shift of the violence of the Happening to the objects destitute of this context? Moreover, it is necessary to have in mind that some of Oldenburg's sculptures, if they are not manipulated by performers, they present, just like the kinetic sculptures, an automatic movement that alludes to the human body. Let's take, for instance, the work *Ice-Bag (Bag-Scale C, 1971)*, that inflates and deflates just like the respiratory rhythm, producing, according to the artist²², an "uncanny sense of being alive" from a "magic effect". This work, given its mysterious pulsation, could not be located in the other pole described by Krauss?

In any way, it is by means of the impersonal treatment of the human being that Krauss observes a link between the Happenings and the contemporary dance of Merce Cunningham, Simone Forti and artists linked to the *Judson Dance Theatre* (Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, Carole Schneemann, Lucinda Childs, among others). Rather: Krauss adopts a position that is diametrically opposed to Michael Fried's, highlighting the importance of the theatricality for the American sculptural production:

Just as Oldenburg's work began to flourish in the theatrical ambience of Happening, a concern with performance in the context of new dance shaped some of the initiating attitudes in the work of Robert Morris [...]. It was the very dependency of theater on a variable situation that was able to put pressure on and disrupt the conventions of classicism lodged so deeply within their twentieth century variants, in futurism, constructivism, and their technological extensions. By mid-1960s it was clear that theatricality and performance could produce an operational divide between the sculptural object and the preconceptions about knowledge that the viewer might have about both it and himself (Krauss, 1981, p. 236-240).

Finally, the mention to Robert Morris' work in the above excerpt is quite enlightening. While the critical positioning of Rosalind Krauss has changed very little regarding the minimalist illusion, later she reevaluates certain poetics under the aegis of the externality. The hard-edged idealism that she initially observed in Morris' *Mirrored Boxes* gives way to the phenomenological relations specific to the elements arranged spatially and borrowed from the New Dance. Thus, the artist deviates both from Judd's and Flavin's pictorialism and from the "misleading path of an aesthetics of ideal forms" (Krauss, 2013, p. 89) suggested by the titles of the early exhibitions of the minimalists, especially *Primary Structures* (1966) and *Systemic Painting* (1967).

However, one question remains. If, in fact, the investigations in the field of the scenic arts and the Happening are closely related in their refusal of the theatrical conventions (narrative, fourth wall, characters, etc.), and if they also are parallel to the changes of direction of the modern sculpture, the attempt promoted by each one of these manifestations does not necessarily have the same nature. Then, this proximity carried through by Krauss on behalf of a "sculptural attack on a classical explanation of how things are known" (Krauss, 1981, p. 240) still deserves further investigation. For, nothing is more distant from the attack to the observer and his violent reaction in Oldenburg's Happenings than the solipsistic formal vocabulary of Yvonne Rainer in *Trip A*.

Notes

- ¹ Judd uses geometric progressions, formed by a numerical sequence in which the following number is obtained from the multiplication of the preceding

number by a fixed ratio (for instance: 1, 2, 4, 8, 16); arithmetical progressions, in which the following number is obtained from the addition of the preceding number by a fixed ratio (for instance: 1, 4, 7, 10, 13); alternate harmonic series (1, -1/2, 1/3, -1/4), whose addition is considered the ln 2, therefore having a convergent point; and also Fibonacci sequence, formed by a sequence of integers (usually starting with 0 or 1), in which each subsequent number corresponds to the addition of the two precedent ones. The Fibonacci sequence, known since the Antiquity, can be observed in biological configurations, as in Nautilus spiral shells, in leaves distributed in a stem of certain plants, or yet in arrangements of cones of artichokes, bromeliads and pineapples. It is worthy highlighting also that the rate of growth of this sequence tends to the golden ratio, recurrent in Renaissance paintings.

- ² When linking Albers to Judd, Yve-Alain Bois also addresses such pictorialism: “Judd’s position is clear, and perfectly congruent with his declared empiricism: even if their structural is identical, none of his stacks, none of the works related to the Wallraf-Richartz piece, none of the mural progressions, no work is ever the same as another. It’s just like Albers’s *Homage to the Square*, a painter for whom Judd, in basing a large part of his work on the potential gap between a ‘factual’ form or color and its ‘actual’ perception (as Albers put it), very early felt a certain elective affinity” (Bois, 1991, p. 11). In fact, the relationship between Judd and Albers is confirmed by the writings of the former on the latter. As an art critic, Judd wrote reviews published in *Arts Magazine* on Albers’ exhibitions in 1959, in 1963 and in 1964. Finally, in an essay-homage for an Albers’ exhibition in 1991, in the Chinati Foundation, addressing what he calls the *know-nothingism* of the art critique (including Clement Greenberg and Hilton Kramer), Judd makes an effort to rehabilitate the master by valuing his geometric-chromatic concern and his bond with the Bauhaus (Judd, 2006).
- ³ Mel Bochner, in his essay *Serial Art, Systems, Solipsism*, also observes Dan Flavin’s pictorialism: “One of the artists to make use of a basically progression procedure was Dan Flavin. [...] Although his placement of fluorescent lamps parallel and adjacent to one another in varying numbers or sizes is ‘flat footed’ and obvious, the results are anything but. It is just these ‘brilliant’ results that confound and compound the difficulties” (Bochner, 1968, p. 99).
- ⁴ For Foster, Dan Flavin’s poetics, despite being inserted in Judd’s and Andre’s *movement*, does not fully represent a specific object, but a specific phenomenon. Here lies the catastrophe of the Minimalism, also referred by Krauss (1990) in *The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum*, to the extent that

the second line of the Minimalism becomes dominant with the works, for instance, of Olafur Eliasson, James Turrell and the remaining artists of the *Light Art*.

- 5 Such consideration questions Fried's argument that his essay is based not only on the texts, but also on the minimalist experiences. According to the author, the question of theatricality comes from his "experience of literalist works and exhibitions during the previous several years, in particular my recurrent sense, especially in gallery shows devoted to one or another artist, of literalism's singular effectiveness as *mise en scène* (Morris and Carl Andre were masters at it)" (Fried, 1998, p. 40).
- 6 Thierry de Duve notes a contradiction in Judd's argument, insofar that it resounds in it a Greenbergian bias, despite the skepticism of the artist concerning the doctrine of the critic: "Judd's notion of *specific object* seems to me, paradoxically, a very Greenbergian defense against Greenberg's dictum about the separation of mediums. Let me draw a little schema. Here is the overlapping of painting, where all the work Judd talks about in his article, including his own, can be located. Greenberg reads this area as being both painting and sculpture, and that's how he validates the work of Anne Truitt, for example. But Judd attempts to isolate this area, to read its content as being neither painting nor sculpture, and to autonomize it by giving it a new name, just as specific as painting and sculpture, but brand new: *Specific Objects*, precisely" (Buchloh et al., 1994, p. 142). Krauss appeals to Duve's opinion in *Specific' Objects*, in which she also recognizes that the emphasis on the three-dimensionality by Judd would not be anything but the recognition of the post-cubist conquests: "Judd's 'specific objects' are acknowledgments of the relief (or sculptural) conditions of post cubist paintings which now exist as slabs or shallow boxes affixed to the wall" (Krauss, 2010, p. 48). In his turn, Hal Foster, in *What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?*, considers the enormous list of precursors developed by Judd – involving there the incoherent juxtaposition between Duchamp and the New York School Painting – as a method that tries to extract a new practice beyond the objectivity – promoted both by Duchamp's nominalism and the formalism of the North-American school – towards to specific objects.
- 7 Stella: "The other thing is that European geometric painters really strive for what I call relational painting. The basis of their idea is balance" (Glaser, 1968, p. 149).
- 8 Lucy R. Lippard, in her introduction to the text published in *ARTNews*, claimed that the interview contained "the first extensive published statement by

Frank Stella, a widely acknowledged source of much current structural painting, and Donald Judd, one of the earliest exponents of the sculptural primary structure”, being the last mention an explicit reference to the exhibition *Primary Structures* that occurred in the Jewish Museum between April and June 1966 under the curatorship of Kynaston McShine, having participated several artists, such as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sun LeWitt, Walter De Maria, Robert Morris, etc. (Glaser, 1968, p. 148). It is an interesting elaboration, to the extent that it underlines the systemic question of the work of both, having a basic relation between the elements that is in the core of the notion of structure.

- ⁹ Stella even claims that he would like to forbid the observers of his works to explore the pictorial details.
- ¹⁰ While, for Fried, Tony Smith is a minimalist artist, for Harold Rosenberg, he is its antithesis: “With the Symbolists of the turn of the century, ‘pure art’ was an art of metaphysical essences. Smith’s structures are pure in this Symbolist sense, as quiet and solitary as the space under a viaduct at midnight. Minimalist constructions have an exactly opposite character; stripped of metaphysical intimations, they assert their purity by confronting the art public with an aggressive challenge to its expertness, like something offered ‘as is.’ Primary art is environmental and audience participation art to no less a degree than a kinetic fun house or a Happening” (Rosenberg, 1968, p. 307).
- ¹¹ The problem raised by Tony Smith’s poetics is the following: how one can link the formal simplicity of his works with the nocturnal experience in New Jersey and also the invitation of the artist to a permanent investigation of his cubes? The reading carried through by Georges Didi-Huberman, in *What we see, what looks at us*, is quite enlightening of the conjugation between these elements. Locating Tony Smith’s trajectory in contrast with David Smith’s pictorialism, Didi-Huberman interprets his black cubes in the context of a nocturnal paradigm – they are *night blocks*, *latency blocks* – where the Cartesian coordinates, the tautological solutions and the superstitions are insufficient. There is a dialectic process – and an image –, since the simplicity of the cube does not motivate only tautological conclusions but discloses itself as a stain in the visible that induces the observer’s disorientation, a wandering resulting from the blurring of the limits between the psychic reality and the material reality. Thus, “the simplest image is never simple nor quiet, as we lightly say on the images. The merest image, as long as it comes to the light as Tony Smith’s cube did, does not allow one to perceive something that would be

exhausted in what is seen, and even in what would be said that is seen. [...] Tony Smith's cube, despite its extreme formalism – or rather, because of the way how its formalism is given to the sight, is presented –, frustrates beforehand a formalist analysis that could be considered as pure definition of the 'specificities' of the object. But it also frustrates an iconographic analysis that would like to consider it, at all costs, like a 'symbol' or allegory in the trivial sense of these terms. [...] Images of art – no matter how simple and 'minimal' they might be – know how to *present* the visual dialectics of this game in which we knew (but forget) to unease our vision and invent places for this uneasiness [...] A sculpture of Tony Smith – and his cube in the first place – could be, this way, considered as a large toy (*Spiel*) that allows to operate dialectically, visually, the tragedy of the visible and the invisible, of the open and closed, of the mass and the excavation" (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 95-7, p. 107). Therefore, Didi-Huberman replaces the metaphysical implications that Rosenberg saw in Smith's sculptures by psychoanalytical implications.

- ¹² The epic theater was defined by Bertold Brecht (2005) in overt opposition to what is known as traditional dramatic theater. One risks saying that Artaud's theatricality is much more radical than that one developed by Brecht, as he does not try to replace a set of conventions for other ones. The theatre of cruelty, far from being a gathering of techniques, questions radically all the foundations of the western theatrical practice, especially the logocentrism that submits the scene to the text. If the distancing theatre would be oblivious to the theatre of cruelty, the same could also be said concerning what Derrida calls as *abstract theater*, which must be understood as a scenic happening that does without some resources of meaning (dance, music, volume, plastic depth, visible, sonorous, phonic image, etc.), not being, therefore, a *total* theater. "An abstract theater", points Derrida, "is a theater in which the totality of meaning and the senses would not be consumed" (Derrida, 2014, p. 356). The fragmentation of the perceptive experience in resources of meaning directed toward specific meanings makes the abstract theater to echo, so to speak, the Greenbergian perspective of compartmentalization of the arts in accordance with the respective *mediums*.
- ¹³ The anthropomorphism is investigated by Didi-Huberman both for the recurrence with which the minimalist works use the human dimensions (specially height) and the latent associative chain in the simplicity of the geometric form: "Tony Smith's cube is *anthropomorphous* insofar it has the ability, by its own presentation, to impose to us a chain of images that will make us pass from the

box to the house, from the house to the door, from the door to the bed, and from the bed to the coffin” (Didi-Huberman, 1998, p. 127).

- ¹⁴ It cannot be ignored, for instance, that the non-representative vocation of the performance art explores with certain frequency the notion of monstrosity (think of the *Happenings*, the Viennese Actionists, pre-commodity Marina Abramovic, Paul McCarthy’s performances, etc.). On the other hand, the emergence of the curatorship in the last decades, parallel to the blooming of the installations, is also related with a certain notion of theatricality. Traces of this are found in the presence of curators with previous theatrical experience, such as the Swiss Harald Szeemann, the Italian Francesco Bonami and the Costa Rican Jens Hoffmann. Also, recent exhibitions propose a more explicit dialogue between the performing and the visual arts, especially *The World as a Stage*, curated by Jessica Morgan and Catherine Wood; and *Theatrical Fields*, curated by Ute Meta Bauer. If the notion of theatricality in Fried, despite little relating with the modern development of the performing arts, foresees negatively the dissemination of performing exhibitions, it, on the other hand, recovers from the 19th century the debate around the term through its bond with Denis Diderot’s theatrical and pictorial theory.
- ¹⁵ “Like a human figure, the *Light Prop* has an internal structure that affects its outward appearance, and, more crucially, an internal source of energy that allows it to move” (Krauss, 1981, p. 208).
- ¹⁶ “[*Rêlache*] disrupts the spectator’s idea that he is to be given some measure of control over the events on stage by knowing how to anticipate the direction the action will take” (Krauss, 1981, p. 212).
- ¹⁷ In ‘*End of Art*’ or ‘*End of History*’?, Fredric Jameson situates the advent of the Happening in the wider context of theatrical experimentation that marked the 1960s. For the author, the main characteristic of the production of this decade would be the scenic emancipation, not submitted to the dictates of a dramaturgy anymore, being this used as a pretext: “[...] The theatrical practice in this period stands at a certain minimal distance from the texts it presupposes as its pretexts and conditions of possibility: Happenings would then push this situation to its extreme limit, by claiming to do away with the pretext of the text altogether and offering a spectacle of the sheerest performance as such, which also paradoxically seeks to abolish the boundary and the distinction between fiction and fact, or art and life” (Jameson, 1998, p. 74-75). The author does not hesitate in highlighting the political bias of the theatrical experimentation

of the 1960s, being the performance considered a social praxis closely linked with the political demonstrations that marked the period.

- ¹⁸ Sontag highlights the importance of Allan Kaprow, a pioneering figure of the Happening, and also of a group of visual artists and musicians involved in this type of activity (Jim Dine, Red Grooms, Robert Withman, Claes Oldenburg, Al Hansen, George Brecht, Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Dick Higgins, Philip Corner and LaMonte Young). Moreover, she defends the hypothesis that the Happenings is a logical development of the New York School of Painting in the 1950s, also certifying the confluence between these events and the *assemblages* and combine paintings (something that is quite evident in Schneemann's poetics, for instance). Finally, Sontag's interest both for the Happening and for the *camp* aesthetics is grouped around her mistrust concerning the hermeneutic method of interpretation. She proposes then a replacement of the hermeneutic task of the art for an eroticism of the art, being this a provocation to a hegemonic thought that claims that the value of art would lie entirely in its content. For the author, the plethora of interpretations on art produced until the 20th century, before liberating the latent meanings in the works, would poison our sensibilities and would domesticate the artistic production (Sontag, 1966).
- ¹⁹ In fact, there is a tough debate among the proposers of the Happening regarding the accurate meaning of the term. The most appropriate example to this context is, undoubtedly, the epistolary discussion between Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg, which happened between July and December 1961, from the disagreements of the latter in front of the texts published by the former. Basically, they would disagree on the nature of the bond between art and reality: while Kaprow discards all the autonomy of art in advantage of its total fusion with life, to the point of undermine the existence and the *status* of his productions, Oldenburg, in turn, considers unacceptable the loss of the artistic intention and the aesthetic object. When commenting the essay *Happenings in the New York Scene* (*ARTNews*, May 1961), in which Kaprow exposes his doubts on the artistic condition of his production, Oldenburg says: "The creation of art is a capacity for projection of an illusion of reality which exists in certain individuals. Existing in these people is a need and a natural act. They exude it, there it is. It does not exist outside an artist like an object, and free of an artist and subject to 'horse trading' or 'creative life,' 'questions of ethics' and such" (Oldenburg *apud* Ehninger, 2014, p. 196). In the same text, the epistolary dialogue between Kaprow and Harold Rosenberg, in which the two authors re-

flect on the importance of the terms *Happening* and *action painting*, is also mentioned, and the former claims: “It is quite fortunate, therefore, that you and, to some extent I, came up with two of such root metaphor: Action and Happening (Kaprow *apud* Ehninger, 2014, p. 200).

- ²⁰ Oldenburg’s work is also included in the theoretical project of the *L’Informe*, in the entry *Ray Guns*, whose title refers to an infinite series that the artist produces from the perpendicular articulation between two strips of the most varied material. “A *ray gun* is the ‘universal angle’”, clarifies Bois, who reflects on the interest of Oldenburg for discarded elements of the consumer society, especially, in the early exhibitions of the artist – *The Street* (January to March 1960), *The Store* (1961-3) and the fictional museum of *Documenta 5*, Kassel (1972). In the first case, as much as the Judson Gallery (where the Happenings also occurred) has been transformed into a garbage can, given the accumulation of debris brought to the space by the artist, there would still be a process of aesthetization of the garbage, resolved by the following project, since “the store’s idea took off from the premise that all avantgardist daring is assimilable, recoverable by middle class culture [...] The projected solution to this dilemma: skip over the illusory stage in which art pretends to escape commodification” (Krauss; Bois, 1999, p. 175-176).
- ²¹ The commentary can be seen in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UP-8O-M0b18>>. Accessed: 19 March 2017.
- ²² The commentary can be seen in the Whitney Museum site through the *link*: <http://whitney.org/WatchAndListen/Exhibitions?context=Exhibition&play_id=53>. Accessed: 19 March 2017.

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This unpublished text, translated by Ananyr Porto Fajardo, is also published in Portuguese in the issue.

Received on August 10, 2017

Accepted on March 20, 2018



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