READING AS SCULPTURE: RONI HORN AND EMILY DICKINSON

DISSERTATION

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The United States sculptor Roni Horn has produced four bodies of work that present lines from Emily Dickinson as aluminum columns and cubes: *How Dickinson Stayed Home* (1992-3); *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* (1993); *Keys and Cues* (1994); and *Untitled (Gun)* (1994). This dissertation examines Horn’s Dickinson-objects within the context of twentieth century sculpture as well as within the context of debates surrounding the material and conceptual circumference of the Dickinson poem—in particular the new privileging of the visual in the Dickinson manuscript—and the emergence of text-based art that positions the viewer as a reader and raises questions about the dislocation of the visual in contemporary art. It is argued that Horn’s Dickinson-objects harness the syntactical demands of the Dickinson lyric in the service of the artist’s preoccupation with temporal experience and the demands of sculpture.

Each of the dissertation’s four chapters is centered around one work in Horn’s Dickinson series and discusses the work in terms of both Dickinson studies and the history of sculpture. Chapter One considers the installation *How Dickinson Stayed Home* and examines circumference as both theme and artistic strategy in Dickinson’s work followed by a discussion of the dialectical relationship between center and circumference enacted by the work of Robert
Smithson and Richard Serra. Chapter Two investigates the relationship between part and whole that characterizes the Dickinson poem followed by a discussion of the series *Keys and Cues* within the context of minimalism. Chapter Three argues that the series *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* is not only a reading of Dickinson but a doubling of Dickinson. Establishment of the difference between reading and doubling is developed through a discussion of the artist’s earlier use of doubling strategies and a comparison of *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* to Dickinson-inspired works by artists Joseph Cornell and Lesley Dill. Chapter Four considers Horn’s 1994 untitled work (Gun) and discusses the significance of the poem “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun” within the Dickinson corpus and within feminist literary criticism in order to highlight a tension at the heart of Horn’s entire series of Dickinson objects—that between the experience of the Dickinson poem as “work” and the experience of Dickinson’s words as “text.” A comparison of Horn’s use of Dickinson’s words with the use of text by Lawrence Weiner, Mary Kelly, and Jenny Holzer provides a context for evaluating the degree to which Horn’s Dickinson work participates in what the art critic Craig Owens has characterized as the transformation of the visual field into a textual field.
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INTRODUCTION

READING AS SCULPTURE

The United States sculptor Roni Horn has produced four bodies of work that present lines from Emily Dickinson as aluminum columns and cubes: *How Dickinson Stayed Home* (1992-3); *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* (1993); *Keys and Cues* (1994); and *Untitled (Gun)* (1994. The works are resolutely sculptural at the same time that they are attentive to the eccentricities of Dickinson’s writing; the viewer of Horn’s objects encounters a tension between the experience of sculpture and the experience of reading Dickinson. This dissertation examines Horn’s Dickinson-objects within the context of twentieth century sculpture as well as within the context of Dickinson’s poetic strategies. The stakes in this examination are two-fold. First, there is the question of what it means for sculpture to open itself up to text; these works suggest why sculpture in general and Horn’s work in particular might use text as an extension of sculptural values. Second, there is the question of what it means for a late twentieth century sculptor to construct work out of the words of a nineteenth century poet. Horn uses the experience of Dickinson’s work to make sculpture whose activity parallels the activity of the Dickinson poem, such that the demand
of Horn’s work is equal to the demand of Dickinson’s work. Not all of the works in Horn’s series are equally demanding, however, and I am interested in examining both the successes and failures of these works as sculpture. In applying the term “sculpture,” I accept Richard Serra’s definition of sculpture as “a structuring of materials in order to motivate a body and to demarcate a place” (Foster 179) and Rosalind Krauss’s characterization of sculpture as “a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing” (Passages 5). Of additional pertinence to my examination is Alex Potts’s assertion that sculpture at the end of the twentieth century has become more an utterance than a thing (377).

Entangled in the success of Horn’s work as sculpture is its use of the words of Dickinson and the ways in which it either engages Dickinson as “work” or succumbs to Dickinson as “text.” Maurice Blanchot makes a distinction between work and text, ”between the book which is the read and the work which is never there in advance” (Space 195). He writes,

the nonliterary book is presented as a tightly woven net of determined significations, a set of real affirmations. Before being read by anyone In contrast to the nonliterary text, literature loosens the web of significations; it exists in what Blanchot refers to as “the solitude of the work.” Blanchot’s attempt to describe the experience, the nonliterary book has already been read by all, and it is this prior reading that guarantees it a solid existence (194).

In contrast to the nonliterary text, literature loosens the web of significations; it exists in what Blanchot refers to as “the solitude of the work.” Blanchot’s attempt to describe the experience of literature is useful to a discussion of Horn; to get at
why Horn’s Dickinson-work matters as sculpture is also to get at why it counts, or fails to count, as a reading of literature.

Reading, for Blanchot, is constitutive of a work: reading transforms the book into a work. The difference between the nonliterary text and the literary work has to do with the difference between affirmation and negation, between the positing of presence and the experience of absence. The encounter with absence is not peculiar to literature; it is the nature of language, as a system of signs, to refer to that which is not present. The ordinary usage of language doesn’t emphasize this absence, however, but quickly replaces it with image or concept. As Blanchot puts it, “I say, ‘This woman,’ and she is immediately available to me, I push her away, I bring her close, she is everything I want her to be, she becomes the place in which the most surprising sorts of transformations occur and actions unfold: speech is life’s ease and security” (Gaze 41). The woman—this woman—is accessible as image or concept; the words, as markers of absence, disappear. In contrast, literary language holds onto the absence; literature draws attention to language itself and, hence, the absence to which it alludes. Blanchot states, “And yet: when I say, ‘This woman,’ real death has been announced and is already present in my language; my language means that this person, who is here right now, can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence” (42). The paradox of literary language is developed in Blanchot’s discussion of Stéphane Mallarmé:
First, language fits into a contradiction: in a general way, it is what destroys the world to make it be reborn in a state of meaning, of signified values; but, under its creative form, it fixes on the only negative aspect of its task and becomes the pure power of questioning and transfiguration. That is possible insofar as, taking on a tangible quality, it becomes a thing, a body, an incarnate power. The real presence and material affirmation of language give it the ability to suspend and dismiss the world. Density and sonorous thickness are necessary to it to extricate the silence that it encloses, and that is the part of the void without which it could never cause a new meaning to be born. It goes on being like this infinitely, to produce the feeling of an absence—and must become like things in order to break our natural relationships with them (Work of Fire 37).

In other words, with literary language, the object disappears, but the act of disappearance is exposed to view. Quoting Mallarmé, Blanchot suggests that the role of writing “is to replace the thing with its absence, the object with its ‘vibratory disappearance’” (38).

Another way of putting literature’s refusal to allow the reader to get too close is to say that literature generates an experience of distance, or “space.” In an effort to develop his metaphor of literary space, Blanchot contrasts the experience of the reader of literature to the experience of the viewer of sculpture. Using Rodin’s works The Kiss and Balzac as his examples, he suggests that sculpture exists in a detached “rebellious” space that excludes the viewer and keeps him or her feeling, before the work, out of place:

The plastic arts have this advantage over writing: they manifest more directly the exclusive void within which the work seems to want to dwell, far from every gaze. The Kiss by Rodin lets itself be gazed at and even enjoys being thus regarded, but the Balzac goes without a look, it is a closed and sleeping thing, absorbed in itself to the point of disappearing. The book seems to lack this decisive separation, which sculpture makes its element and which places in the center of space another, rebel space—an inaccessible space both evident and withdrawn, perhaps
immutable, perhaps ever restless, the contained violence in the face of which we always feel in excess (Space 192).  

In the original French, this “inaccessible space both evident and withdrawn” reads as “un espace dérobé, évident et soustrait.” The verb “dérobér” can mean to steal something, as in “to steal a kiss.” It also means to conceal or to screen, as in “the wall conceals the view.” Thus, the adjective “dérobé” means both hidden and stolen. Blanchot further qualifies his use of the adjective by adding the phrase “évident et soustrait.” Sculpture claims a space that is both screened and conspicuous: it is conspicuous as marker of that which is inaccessible. This rebel space is also described as a “contained violence” (“violence préservée”), suggesting that the space is not only inaccessible but that it is disruptive as well.

Blanchot compares the experience of viewing sculpture to the act of reading. The statue does not require the viewer in the way that the book requires the reader, asserts Blanchot. The sculpture is already made when the viewer encounters it. The book, however, requires a reader in order to take shape:

Reading gives to the book the abrupt existence which the statue ‘seems’ to get from the chisel alone. From its reading the book acquires the isolation which withholds the statue from the eyes that see it—the haughty remove, the orphan wisdom which dismisses the sculptor along with the gaze wishing to sculpt it (Space 193-4).

1 The passage in the original reads: “L’œuvre plastique a sur l’œuvre verbale l’avantage de rendre plus manifeste le vide exclusif à l’intérieur duquel elle semble vouloir demeurer, loin des regards. Le Baiser de Rodin se laisse regarder et même se plaît à l’être, le Balzac est sans regard, chose fermée et dormante, absorbée en elle-même jusqu’à disparaître. Cette séparation décisive, dont la sculpture fait son élément, qui, au centre de l’espace, dispose un autre espace rebelle, un espace dérobé, évident et soustrait, peut-être immuable, peut-être sans repos, cette violence préservée, en face de laquelle nous nous sentons toujours de trop, semble manquer au livre” (253).

2 These examples are taken from Le Nouveau Petit Robert; Dictionnaire Alphabétique et analogique de la langue française, eds. Josette Rey-Debove, Alain Rey (Paris: Dictionnaire le Robert) 1993.
Blanchot grants the reader more agency in the making of a work than the viewer of sculpture: “Somehow the book needs the reader in order to become a statue” (194). Paradoxically, the book is dependent on the reader for its independence: “It needs the reader if it is to declare itself a thing without an author and hence without a reader (Le livre a en quelque sorte besoin du lecteur pour devenir statue, besoin du lecteur pour s’affirmer chose sans auteur et aussi sans lecteur) (Space 194; L’espace 255). The reader confers isolation upon the book.

Blanchot’s interarts analogy is not entirely satisfying in its assumption that sculpture is detached from the viewer’s space. For example, Alex Potts in a discussion of the same two Rodin works, notes that Rodin considered The Kiss less successful because of its self-absorption but found Balzac more successful because it actively engaged the viewer. Potts claims that Rodin’s individual figures “are almost always posed so as to impinge actively in some way on the space around them” (90)—a quite different observation than that of Blanchot. I take from Blanchot’s reading of modernist sculpture not an insight into sculpture, however, but an image of Blanchot’s conception of literature—a detachment, a space that is both visible and shielded, a protected violence. Smock discusses Blanchot’s use of the word “space” in reference to literature:

it implies the withdrawal of what is ordinarily meant by ‘place’; it suggests the site of this withdrawal. Literature’s space is like the place where someone dies: a nowhere, Blanchot says, which is here. ....Literature’s ‘space’ is likewise inaccessible and inescapable: it is its very own displacement or removal (Space 10).
The isolation that Blanchot idealizes for the book, translated as “haughty remove,” reads in French as “cet écart hautain.” The term “écart” can mean a swerving, deviation, mistake, fault, variation, difference. The French term suggests that the isolation, the conspicuous concealment characteristic of literature (and sculpture), is a swerving from the usual experience of the reader or viewer: one swerves, strays from the familiar path, in the encounter with sculpture, and with literature.

Blanchot’s notion of a protected silence, of rebellious space, is pertinent to a discussion of Dickinson’s poems; restless syntax and exploitation of ellipsis generates a reading experience that demands at the same time that it estranges. Blanchot’s interarts analogy, intriguing in its positing of rebellious space for literature, disappointing in its idealization of sculpture’s space, nonetheless points to the difficulties inherent in the use of sculptural language to evoke poetic language. The difficulty of Horn’s presentation of Dickinson’s work is that she is taking a poet whose language is noted for its slipperiness, for its omissions and vacancies, and casting this language in a form that appears to evoke the spare geometric values of minimalist sculpture. The solidity and straightforwardness of Horn’s forms appear to deny the restlessness that is characteristic of Dickinson’s language. Another difficulty with Horn’s project is the extent to which “Dickinson” is itself a web of significations and intrudes in advance of one’s reading of the poem. To paraphrase Blanchot: I say “Dickinson,” and she is immediately available to me, I push her away, I bring her close, she is everything I want her to be, she becomes the place in which the
most surprising sorts of transformations occur and actions unfold. Dickinson as a cultural icon interferes with Dickinson-the-poem; Horn’s work must negotiate between, to again paraphrase Blanchot, Dickinson which is the read and the work which is never there in advance. Not only does Dickinson’s language restlessly circle around absence as subject but it also, in its strategies, absents itself as “poem.” Debates surrounding the editing of Dickinson’s manuscripts and arguments over the implications of the poet’s practice of providing variants (words or phrases listed at the end of a poem which may be substituted for those within the poem) have generated disagreement among scholars as to what even counts as the location of the Dickinson poem.¹ I am not arguing that Horn is aware of the scholarly debates surrounding Dickinson’s poems; however, Horn’s presentation is not inconsistent with Dickinson’s own attitude toward the poem as a porous and shifting entity. Horn’s re-presentation foregrounds the absence integral to the Dickinson poem; it also tests the absence of the Dickinson poem itself as well as the referent of “Dickinson.”

Part of the argument of this dissertation is that the materializing of Dickinson is not a misreading or literalizing of the absence integral to the Dickinson poem but harnesses this absence in order to reinvent or test experiences of reading and extend sculptural issues. Horn’s series, in its exploitation of reading and text, re-materializes the medium of sculpture; the space of literature, in

³ For a summary of the manuscript debates see Cristanne Miller’s “Whose Dickinson?” and Domhall Mitchell’s “Revising the Script: Emily Dickinson’s Manuscripts.” For a discussion of the implications of Dickinson’s practice of variants as a testing of lyric, see Cameron’s Choosing Not
Blanchot’s sense, is reabsorbed into, and serves to extend, the space of sculpture. While Blanchot’s understanding of sculpture points to the very experience of sculpture’s ideal space that Horn resists, his understanding of reading as the opening and shaping of a space is akin to Horn’s aim to generate a space for reading: the space is her reading, not only a reading of Dickinson but a critical reading of the legacy of minimalism as well.

In *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, Rosalind Krauss places minimalism within a history of modernist sculpture. The L-beams of Robert Morris, the boxes of Donald Judd, and the steel props of Richard Serra are seen as an extension of the “project of decentering” that Krauss associates with modernist sculpture as exemplified by the works of Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brancusi. The language of minimalism is anti-figural and abstract; however, minimalism addresses, as does modernist sculpture, “our bodies and our experience of our bodies” (279). “Passage” is a crucial term; the encounter with modernist sculpture is an experience of passage, of the reciprocities of public and private experiences. Traditional sculpture encourages the illusion that its surface is propelled by inner necessity. In contrast, modernist sculpture occurs in the encounter between the private and the public, the internal and the external. The term “sculpture,” in Krauss’s argument, does not refer to a stationary, inert mass; rather, the experience of modernist sculpture is the experience of the body in time as it responds to the demands of spatial form. Krauss argues that modern

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Choosing. For discussion of Dickinson’s practice as resistance to the ideology of the book, see Smith’s “Corporealizations of Dickinson and Interpretive Machines.”
sculpture “manifests its makers’ growing awareness that sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing” (5). It is “this tension” that “defines the very condition of sculpture” (5).

Alex Potts, in *The Sculptural Imagination*, builds on Krauss’s argument and claims that this tension as a defining characteristic of the experience of sculpture extends back to the early nineteenth-century. In what might appear a brash gesture, Potts compares Robert Morris’s 1967 felt pieces to Antonio Canova’s *The Three Graces* from 1815-17:

Morris’s sculpture, which is literally a play of surface almost entirely disconnected from any supporting structure, dramatises something that goes on in certain moments of the close viewing of a work such as Canova’s *Three Graces*. …There is a weight and measure to it, a weight and measure that one simultaneously knows, feels, and sees. It is perhaps no less a whole thing than the Canova, where the apparent tightness of linear composition and the figurative motif disguises a certain cavalier disregard for integrated plastic form. The elusive and provisional sense of wholeness one has in the presence of the Canova can never be pinned down—it too hovers forever on the margins of one’s immediate awareness (13).

What the Morris and the Canova have in common is the viewer’s experience of the work as both weighted and fugitive. Even though sculpture takes different forms according to the historical period, Potts argues that “the instability of a viewer’s encounter with a three-dimensional work has been integral to any affective and conceptual power it might have” (23). The history of sculpture, then, is the history of the viewing experience of three-dimensional form—of the objects and situations that, at a given period, *move* the viewer (spatially,
conceptually, and in time). According to Potts, two of the defining characteristics of contemporary sculpture are, firstly, “the positing of presence as something unstable, more like an utterance than a thing, and activated in the contingencies of a viewer's encounter with a work rather than being anchored in its form,” and, secondly, “a dramatising of psychic splitting and dispersal” (377).

The early works of Horn—austere, geometric objects produced in the seventies and eighties—fit squarely within the history of sculpture as narrated by Krauss and Potts. Consider, for example, a 1979 series of rubber pieces. Each piece consists of a wedge form which tapers from a solid 12-inch thickness to a 2-inch thinness that molds itself to the imperfections of the ground on which it is placed. Two different kinds of sculptural forms manifest within one object: a form which might be described as ideal and autonomous, and one which is shaped by the conditions of its viewing. In 1980, Horn began her signature practice of pairing identical forms. An ongoing series of *Pair Objects* consists of two identical machined forms that are presented as one object. Horn’s use of doubling forms is an attempt to destabilize the viewer's apprehension of a three-dimensional object by splitting the experience into that which is directly perceived and that which is recollected. In the series of rubber pieces, the ideal form and the contingent form are one object; in the series of *Pair Objects*, the two forms are identical but differently placed so that, in Horn’s words, “the viewer must perform the object” (*Roni Horn*, Kunstraum München 100).
In 1989, Horn began to integrate text into aluminum blocks. In one of her first works to use text, a Kafka quote—"It would be enough to consider the spot where I am as some other spot"—is embedded along the outer thickness of a floorbound aluminum slab. Text-driven work is not unusual for this period; one associates the use of text with the conceptual art practices of artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, and the critical art practices of artists such as Robert Smithson, Mary Kelly, and Barbara Kruger. Craig Owens credits Smithson’s work as a primary force behind the emergence of language in the visual arts in the 1960s. Referring to the *Spiral Jetty*, Owens claims that Smithson’s accomplishment is “a radical dislocation of the notion of point-of-view, which is no longer a function of physical position, but of the mode (photographic, cinematic, textual) of confrontation with the work of art” (47). The dislocation of point-of-view is evident in Kelly’s work which disperses the image and frustrates identification, and in Holzer’s work in which the “spooling” of one-liners also resists identification. This is the case as well with Weiner’s statements described as “different inscriptions, different locations, different viewing conditions; the same words spoken in different voices” (Batchelor 82). Horn’s use of text, however, is not entirely accounted for by the framework of conceptual and critical art practices that Owens characterizes as a “dislocation of the visual.” Horn’s use of text remains sculptural; by that I mean that it does not serve to dematerialize the object but rather, in Potts’ terms, offers “a different form of its materialisation” (22). Horn’s early text-based objects test sculptural
issues having to do with both the autonomy of the object and the conditions of viewing in ways that confound one’s expectations of both three-dimensional work and text-based work.4

Horn further confounds viewers when she produces, between 1992 and 1994, four bodies of work that present lines from Emily Dickinson as aluminum columns and cubes. Horn choreographs a reading space that is specific to Dickinson at the same time that it is sculptural. There is a tension in these works between the experience of an utterance as sculptural and the experience or expectations of the utterance as lyrical. By “sculptural,” I refer to an experience of place or object that motivates and shapes the movement of a lived body. The sculptural utterance is read in the contingencies of viewing conditions, conditions which are public. Horn states, “The object is not the end; what I’m interested in is the experience it provides for—how it incites and animates dialogue” (Saunders 120). In contrast, the lyric utterance is usually thought of as “what we say to ourselves when we are alone,” and the reader of the lyric puts herself in the subject position of the lyric “I” (Vendler xlii). The lyric focuses on the isolated moment, on “the severing of incident from context” (Cameron Lyric 71).5 It is these two forms of utterances—the sculptural and the lyrical—that are paired in Horn’s Dickinson work: the utterance that propels movement through space and the utterance that arrests action.

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4 The contrast between Horn’s use of text and that of her contemporaries Jenny Holzer, Mary Kelly, and Lawrence Weiner is developed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.
5 For an extended definition of “lyric,” see Chapter Three of this dissertation.
In an essay on René Char, Blanchot writes of the relationship between the poem and reader: "It is not true that poetry can do without being read, and that the poem must haughtily ignore the reader; yet previous to any reader, it is exactly the role of the poem to prepare, to put into the world the one who has to read it, to force him to exist starting from this still half-blind, half-composite that is the stammering reader involved in habitual relationships or formed by the reading of other poetic works" (Work of Fire 98-9). Dickinson’s omitted centers and syntactical eccentricities generate a reader who must make meaning in and around the omissions, whose understanding of lyric is continually tested. Dickinson’s lines “Perception of an object costs / Precise the object’s loss” describes the reader of Dickinson as well: perception of the poem and attentiveness to the poem as object results in its slipping away. When successful, Horn choreographs a reading space that is specific to Dickinson at the same time that it is sculptural. This process of reading Dickinson becomes constitutive of the Horn work: reading Dickinson makes Horn.

While Horn is a mid-career artist, and her work continues to evolve, I maintain that this particular and discrete group of work—How Dickinson Stayed Home; When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes; Keys and Cues; and Untitled (Gun)—is a rich and timely object of art historical attention and critical study in light of the current debates surrounding the material and conceptual circumference of the Dickinson poem, in particular the new privileging of the visual in the Dickinson
manuscript, and the emergence of text-based art that positions the viewer as a reader and raises questions about the dislocation of the visual in contemporary art. Each of the dissertation’s four chapters is centered around one work in Horn’s Dickinson series; each work is contextualized in terms of both Dickinson studies and the history of sculpture.

Chapter One, “The Business of Circumference,” is focused on the installation, *How Dickinson Stayed Home*, in which Dickinson’s frequently quoted assertion “My business is circumference” is presented as a scattering of blocks on the gallery floor. The discussion of this work begins with an examination of circumference as both theme and artistic strategy in Dickinson’s work, and concludes with a consideration of the dialectical relationship between center and circumference enacted by the work of Robert Smithson and Richard Serra. I argue that Horn is aligning her practice as a sculptor with Dickinson’s practice as a poet, and that this particular installation sets up a relay between the work of Horn and that of Dickinson.

Chapter Two, “Keys and Cues,” focuses on Horn’s series of the same name; this series reproduces the first lines of Dickinson poems as aluminum columns. I discuss the relationship between part and whole that characterizes the Dickinson poem followed by a discussion of *Keys and Cues* within the context of minimalism. I argue that the Horn column as an entity might be said to function like the dash in Dickinson: it generates a dual relationship on the part of the
viewer to what has gone before (the reading of Dickinson) to what will come after (the viewing of Horn).

Chapter Three, “When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes: The Place of Reading,” focuses on the series When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes. This consists of six works which each present an arrangement of the lines that belong to a given Dickinson poem. The chapter focuses on the dynamics of reading the Dickinson poem on—and as—the Horn object. My argument is that When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes is not only a reading of Dickinson but also a doubling of Dickinson. The relationship of When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes to the artist’s ongoing use of doubling strategies is examined. Establishment of the difference between reading Dickinson and doubling Dickinson is developed through a comparison of When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes to Dickinson-inspired works by artists Joseph Cornell and Lesley Dill.

Chapter Four, “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun,” focuses on Horn’s 1994 untitled work which presents Dickinson’s line “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” as stacked cubes. A discussion of the significance of this poem within the Dickinson corpus and within feminist literary criticism highlights a tension at the heart of Horn’s entire series of Dickinson objects—that between the experience of the Dickinson poem as “work” and the experience of Dickinson’s words as “text.” A comparison of Horn’s use of Dickinson’s words with the use of text by Lawrence Weiner, Mary Kelly, and Jenny Holzer provides a context for evaluating the degree to which Horn’s Dickinson work participates in what Craig
Owens has characterized as the transformation of the visual field into a textual field.

**About the Use of Dickinson’s Texts**

Horn’s series of Dickinson-inspired works were conceived in response to reading a paperback copy of Thomas H. Johnson’s 1955 edition of Dickinson’s poems—the most popular and accessible of Dickinson editions. In discussing Dickinson’s poems in the context of Horn’s presentation, I refer to the one-volume Johnson edition because this is the one used by Horn. In addition, my own reading of the poems is indebted to the 1998 three-volume variorum edition of R.W. Franklin. Thus, both the Johnson numbers (prefixed with a J) and the Franklin variorum numbers (prefixed with a F) are cited in references to Dickinson’s poems.
CHAPTER 1
THE BUSINESS OF CIRCUMFERENCE

I.

In the 1992 installation, *How Dickinson Stayed Home*, Roni Horn presents Emily Dickinson’s often quoted statement “My business is circumference” as a scattering of blocks on the gallery floor. The blocks are aluminum, 5 x 5 inches, each with one bright blue plastic letter going through the blocks. On initial viewing of the installation, one encounters what appear to be random blocks. Walking among the letter-blocks, one may gradually realize that the scatter of blocks on the floor spell out “MY BUSINESS IS CIRCUMFERENCE.” The difficulty of reading the Dickinson line is due to the distance among letter-blocks; one must move among the blocks, back and forth, in and out, to discover a thread. Horn choreographs an experience of the outer limits of legibility: reading becomes an act of the body. This chapter focuses on the installation *How*

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*Examination of Horn’s Dickinson-work is based on my experience of Horn’s objects as presented in the Wexner Center for the Arts 1996 exhibition, *Earths Grow Thick*, curated by Sarah J. Rogers. I also visited the exhibition when it traveled to Wellesley College’s Davis Museum and Cultural Center, but the description and interrogation of my experience as reader of Dickinson on the Horn object is based on my frequent visits to the Wexner Center’s presentation.*

*I’m not sure how long it would take a viewer to realize that the letter-blocks spell something in particular. During my first encounter with the work, a friendly Wexner Center security guard stepped forward to inform me what the cubes spelled.*
Dickinson Stayed Home and examines circumference as both theme and artistic strategy in Dickinson’s work, concluding with a consideration of the dialectical relationship between center and circumference enacted by the work of Robert Smithson and Richard Serra. I argue that Horn aligns her practice as a sculptor with Dickinson’s practice as a poet, and that the installation How Dickinson Stayed Home sets up a relay between the work of Horn and that of Dickinson.

“My business is circumference” is one of Dickinson’s most frequently quoted lines. The line is from a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson with whom Dickinson began what would become a lifelong correspondence in 1862 after reading "Letter to a Young Contributor," published in Atlantic Monthly. In this article, Higginson, a respected literary critic and prominent advocate of women’s rights and the abolition movement, discusses what an editor looks for and expresses eagerness for fresh, new work. Dickinson’s first letter to Higginson includes a calling card and four poems. The first two lines of Dickinson’s short letter are to the point; Dickinson asks, “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive? The Mind is so near itself—it cannot see, distinctly—and I have none to ask—” (L260). Dickinson seeks the perspective of a detached reader. Her dilemma appears to be that she is too close to her own work. This first letter to Higginson, dated April 15, 1862, is considered significant because Dickinson, although a prolific letter writer, is nonetheless reaching out for the first time to a

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8 The importance of Higginson as a writer is discussed in St. Armand 199-217.
9 These are “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (J 216, F 124), “The nearest Dream recedes unrealized (J 319, F 304), “We play at Paste” (J 320, F 282), and “I’ll tell you how the sun rose” (J 318, F 204). See Farr 49.
prominent figure in the literary community with whom she has no personal acquaintances; it is an attempt, as a writer, to make professional contact (Salsak 175-6).

Dickinson’s third letter to Higginson, dated June 1862, gives an indication of his initial response to her work:

I smile when you suggest that I delay “to publish”—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin—
If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me—then—My Barefoot-Rank is better—
You think my gait “ spasmodic”—I am in danger—Sir—
You think me “uncontrolled”—I have no Tribunal (L 265).

One may infer from this letter that Higginson suggests that Dickinson’s work is not ready for publication, and that he criticizes the poet’s use of meter. Dickinson’s stated preference for barefoot rank is not only a reference to her status as an unrecognized poet. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff points out, Dickinson often punned on anatomical feet and metrical “feet” (188). The image of being undressed surfaces in another letter to Higginson in which she states: “While my thought is undressed—I can make the distinction, but when I put them in the Gown—they look alike, and numb” (L261). The “dressing” that Dickinson is wary of, as Robert Weisbuch reminds us, consists of the elements of poetry such as rhyme and meter as well as “all the elements of decorum” (12). Most of Dickinson’s statements on her artistic process occur in the five letters written to

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10 Weisbuch also points out that Dickinson’s image of the gown is an allusion to the clothing metaphor used by Higginson himself in “Letter to a Young Contributor” (12).
Higginson between April and November 1862 (Salsak 175-6). The July 1862 letter contains Dickinson’s now famous statement of artistic purpose:

> Will you tell me my fault, frankly as to yourself,...I shall bring you—
> Obedience—the Blossom from my Garden, and every gratitude I know.
> Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that—My Business is
> Circumference—An ignorance, not of Customs, but if caught with the
> Dawn—or the Sunset see me—Myself the only Kangaroo among the
> Beauty, Sir, if you please, it afflicts me, and I thought that instruction
> would take it away (L 268).

The statement “My business is circumference” occurs in a context in which Dickinson’s overall tone is coy and self-deprecating. She promises obedience and a flower from her garden in return for Higginson’s instruction. While she plays the part of demure female student, she also insists that her position as “Kangaroo among the Beauty” is not the result of ignorance but is chosen. Having suggested in her first letter to Higginson that she doesn’t have enough distance from her own work, she nonetheless claims in this letter that distance is the work of the poem; that reach is its gesture.

In geometry, the term “circumference” refers to the line which forms the boundary of a circle. It can also refer to any boundary—geographic, psychological, spiritual. The term, usually understood in opposition to center, may suggest reach: the reach of history; the reach of the world; the limits of one’s consciousness. For Dickinson—who uses the term in over a dozen poems—the term often refers to experience of psychological or spiritual limits.

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11 Wolfe reminds us that “Dickinson’s assertions of self-abasement and apparent humility become affirmations of power and worth” (194).
In the following poem, circumference is used in a work about the relationship between poet and poem:

The Poets light but Lamps—
Themselves—go out—
The Wicks they stimulate
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns—
Each Age a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference—     (J 883, F 930)

Writing is compared to lighting a wick; the poem is compared to a lamp. Reading itself is compared to a lens that focuses the light. Each generation has its own characteristic lens that determines the circumference of that light. In this poem, the term “focus” is equivalent to center and magnification. The focus (or center) is disseminated—in other words, de-centered. The poem plays on the notion that “center” has a “circumference.” Dickinson describes an effect that is simultaneously both reach and focus.

The following poem, in contrast to the above poem, uses the term “circumference” to describe an experience of isolation:

I saw no Way—The Heavens were stitched—
I felt the Columns close—
The Earth reversed her Hemispheres—
I touched the Universe—

And back it slid—and I alone—
A speck upon a Ball—
Went out upon Circumference—
Beyond the Dip of Bell—                  (J 378, F 633)
The first quatrain opens with an image of non-visibility and inaccessibility. Not only is the world closed to the narrator but it makes no sense: the hemispheres have reversed; nothing is as it should be. However, in spite of this isolation in a world that no longer makes sense, the narrator “touched the Universe.” This moment of connection yields an opening—and the narrator arrives at the edge of the known world: “beyond the Dip of Bell.” Circumference names an extreme—of location, of experience, of contact—that, paradoxically, results in “touching” the universe. The poem juxtaposes an experience of limit with that of openness. It remains ambiguous, however, whether the limit brought the touch (the narrator saw no way and therefore she touched the universe), or whether the narrator was able to touch the universe because everything was stitched shut. Because the phrases are separated by hyphens, the relationship between one state of affairs and another is not clear. Perhaps “I saw no way” and “the Heavens were stitched” and “I touched the Universe” are parallel statements. Perhaps the perception of “no way” is the impetus for touching the universe. Or, perhaps touching the universe names effect and the earlier statements indicate cause. Although the sequence remains unclear, it is fair to say that the situation at the beginning of the poem is not the situation at the end of the poem. The poem moves from an image of closure and limit to an experience of limitlessness—or the bounds of limit. As with many of Dickinson’s poems, experience of one extreme leads to an experience of the other extreme; one state carries within it the opposite state. Dickinson’s interest in conveying experiences of opposition
is characterized by Sharon Cameron as an interest in experiences of
doubleness. Cameron asserts that, for Dickinson, doubleness “has the power to
liberate us” (Lyric Time 51). She writes: “Such [dialectical] knowledge frees the
mind of the constraints of the moment by making it conscious of those elements
of its own experience that, if they were not hidden, would transform it” (51).

“I saw no Way—The Heavens were stitched—” describes a world of
expanding and sliding circles. Cameron points out the influence of Ralph Waldo
Emerson’s essay, “Circles,” on Dickinson’s general interest in the term
“circumference.” Emerson’s essay “Circles” posits “the circular or compensatory
color character of every human action” (403). Emerson writes: “Our life is an
apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that
there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always
another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens”
(403). Dickinson’s use of the verb “sliding” is a more explicit echo of Emerson:
“The natural world may be conceived of as a system of concentric circles, and
we now and then detect in nature slight dislocations, which apprise us that this
surface on which we now stand is not fixed, but sliding” (409). In Cameron’s
reading of the poem, Dickinson describes an experience of dislocation, an
awareness of the lack of fixity of both the natural world and one’s
consciousness:

When Dickinson felt the “slight dislocations” of which Emerson spoke, she
became a mere “Speck upon a Ball—” who “Went out upon
Circumference—/ Beyond the Dip of Bell—” (P 378). Concentric circles
falling out of alignment with the world, her poems designate a space less
circumscribed than the one Emerson knew. And the “sliding” he
describes (Dickinson echoes the word: “I touched the Universe—/And back it slid—and I alone—/A Speck upon a Ball—”) in Dickinson’s depiction is the world folding itself in measured retreat away from the speaker (157).

The term “circumference” is a term of mathematics, of place, of boundaries, of mapping, but in this poem it is used in a context which remains abstract. Perhaps the verb “stitches” and the nouns “ball” and “bell,” or “dip” and “columns,” may summon visual images. There is no context, however, in which “stitches” or “column” may be pictured. The reader finds herself in a landscape that is cosmic; the language is of mapping—“globes”; “hemispheres.” The prime image is that of the circle, or its variations: ball, hemisphere, circumference, dip (understood as an arc). The poem is a landscape without markers. If one considers Dickinson’s statement “My business is circumference” within the context of this poem, one might characterize the poet’s business as one conducted at the fringes of the mapped world, beyond the dip of both bell and poetry. The mapped world is the world as divided by language. Paul Crumbley discusses Dickinson’s references to “circumference” in terms of the experience of the abyss, an experience that exceeds language. He writes:

    Dickinson’s spatial metaphor—“Circumference”—applies to the efforts of consciousness to illuminate the magnitude within which the self dwells. Because perception moves back and away from linguistic containment, it spreads its light in a circle or sphere formed by the borders of discourse, that ever-shifting demarcation where energy is translated into language systems (140).

Thus, circumference—as Dickinson’s business—can be understood as an attempt to articulate the lack of fixity of not only consciousness but language itself.
In the following poem, the term “circumference” refers to a point of transfer rather than an outermost limit:

At Half past Three, a single Bird  
Unto a Silent Sky  
Propounded but a single term  
Of cautious melody.

At Half Past Four, experiment  
Had subjugated test  
And lo, her silver Principle  
Supplanted all the rest—

At Half Past Seven, element  
Nor implement—be seen  
And Place was where the Presence was  
Circumference between.       (J 1084; F 1099)

The diction is that of science: “propounded;” “experiment;” “test;” “principle;” “element;” “implement.” The poem describes a relationship among three terms: place; presence; circumference. Interestingly, circumference is a middle term—it’s not at the edge; it is what is between opposing experiences, that of place and that of presence. The poem begins with the image of a single bird singing “Unto a Silent Sky.” In the second stanza, the single bird’s song is supplanted by a chorus of birds; by the start of the business day a few hours later, however, neither “element / Nor implement” remains. “Revelatory ‘Presence’ becomes dull ‘Place’ at the moment humanity awakes,” states Weisbuch (122). In Weisbuch’s reading, “place” is the name for uninspired human occupation, whereas “presence” is the name for nature and the divinely inspired. He writes,

Circumference intrudes not only because the sun is risen and the bird’s rite completed but also because man’s dreamy intelligence has given way to his daylight perception, practical and limited. Only the early riser, with his awakened imagination, catches the bird, and only he can recognize and
mourn the inevitable escape of this compound tenor and vehicle, this ‘Element’ which is its own ‘Implement.’ Paradise is lost every morning as nature and men become busy (122).

In this poem, circumference is a middle term; the middle ground is not geographic but temporal—between one moment and another. Thus, the difference between place and presence is one of time. In another poem—“The Soul’s distinct connection” (J 974, F 901)—a flash of lightning “Exhibits Sheets of Place”: “place” is the aftermath of an act, or event. Dickinson’s use of the term “circumference” refers to a transfer point between experiences; even as “circumference” names the very end of something, its circumference implies the beginning of something else.

Dickinson’s use of the term “circumference” evokes the experience of limit—of sense, perception, connection, time. It would seem to refer to an experience of the marginal as opposed to the central, but in Dickinson’s poems these two experiences—of the center and of the edge—require one another. In addition, circumference is not just subject but also a writerly strategy. Working at the circumference of meaning is necessary because words are inadequate, a view Dickinson frequently expresses, as in “To tell the Beauty would decrease / To state the Spell demean—” (J 1700, F 1689); or “It is the Ultimate of Talk— / The Impotence to Tell—” (J 407, F 540). Words are inadequate, but they also carry weight:

Could mortal lip divine
The undeveloped Freight
Of a delivered syllable
‘Twould crumble with the weight. (J 1409, F 1456).
As Josef Raab puts it: “Since the center itself cannot be grasped, Dickinson focuses on its circumference” (284).

Jay Leyda remarks that the Dickinson poem is characterized by an “omitted center” (xxi). The reader’s experience of an omitted center is the effect of the compression of Dickinson’s language. Cristanne Miller describes compression as resulting “from ellipsis of function words, dense use of metaphor, highly associative vocabulary, abstract vocabulary in complex syntax, or any other language use that reduces the ratio of what is stated to what is implied” (Emily Dickinson 24). Building on the work of another scholar, Miller writes:

Samuel Levin claims that a greater use of compression is one of the three major features differentiating poetic from ordinary language (the other two being poetry’s greater uses of unity and novelty). Using Dickinson’s verse as his test model, Levin argues that the deletion of part (or parts) of a sentence is frequently nonrecoverable in poetry, the omitted part cannot be recalled from the deep structure of the sentence (24).

Miller explains nonrecoverable deletion in poetry by comparing it to ordinary speech which “permits only recoverable deletions” (24). In contrast, writes Miller, “Compression stemming from, nonrecoverable deletion—or compression that creates gaps in meaning—particularly distinguishes the language of poetry from that of prose” (24). Miller states that, unlike in classical parataxis, Dickinson’s omissions “between sentences or phrases [are] most often nonrecoverable or multiply recoverable, depending on the reader’s interpretation of the poem” (30). The effect of this on the reader is that she is more engaged, less passive, yet kept at a remove. Miller reminds us that, “The fascination of
reading Dickinson’s poetry is one and the same with the frustration of reading it” (19). Albert Gelpi notes, “The very confusion of the syntax...forces the reader to concentrate on the basic verbal units and derive the strength and meaning largely from the circumference of words” (qtd in Cameron 33). As readers of Dickinson, our business is circumference.

In *How Dickinson Stayed Home*, Horn might be said to spatialize the nonrecoverable deletions characteristic of the Dickinson poem. Dickinson writes, "I only said—the Syntax— / And left the Verb and the pronoun—out" (J 494, F 277). In Horn’s installation, the viewer is pronoun and her activity the verb. Horn mirrors spatially the difficulty of reading Dickinson. She physically maps an experience parallel to the experience of Dickinson’s ‘business’—but Horn's syntax implies a viewer; the viewer performs the object, as the reader performs the poem.

The title of Horn’s work—*How Dickinson Stayed Home*—alludes to Dickinson’s comment in a letter that she traveled by staying home. In addition, Dickinson is reputed by her niece to have said, while pretending to lock her bedroom with an imaginary key, “Matty: here’s freedom” (Rich *Vesuvius* 178). Adrienne Rich, visiting Dickinson’s room, imagines her “in this white-curtained, high-ceilinged room...[where she] wrote poems about volcanoes, deserts, eternity, suicide, physical passion, wild beasts, rape, power, madness, separation, the daemon, the grave” (180). This is often what strikes imaginations regarding Dickinson, the contrast between the domestically-bound
life and the poems' far-reaching subject matter. As Dickinson writes, “The Outer—from the Inner / Derives its Magnitude—” (J 451, F 450). Diana Fuss asserts that Dickinson’s use of the term circumference “operates as a sign less of an increasingly elusive exteriority than an infinitely expanding interiority” (Interior Chambers 15). In a discussion of Dickinson’s reliance on spatial metaphors, Fuss argues that interiority “was a complicated conceptual problem, continually posited and reexamined in [the poet’s] body of writing” (4).

Interiority as a conceptual problem is related to notions of private and public. In the article “Public Women, Private Men: American Women Poets and the Common Good,” Shira Wolosky discusses two different understandings of the private / public dichotomy in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, there is the use of the terms “private” and “public” to refer to separate spheres: the domestic, associated with women; and the non-domestic, associated with men. In what Wolosky refers to as the discourse of the spheres, “privacy applies to women, as limitation, constraint, enclosure” (666). In contrast to this, there is the use of these terms in political theory. In this understanding, privacy is associated with autonomous individuals: “In liberal discourses, privacy as self-ownership and self-determination is prior to, and the ground of, the public realm, which exists as a space ceded by autonomous individuals for their greater protection and prosperity” (667). Wolosky points out that “the private founds the public, since it is the consent among private, autonomous, propertied and self-owning individuals that establishes a public sphere for their own better advancement and security and that constrains public life to these roles” (667).
While the discourse of spheres has been used to interpret the literary activity of women in the nineteenth century, Wolosky argues that poetry by women did indeed address public issues. An examination of the 1848 anthology *Female Writers in America* indicates that the majority of poems are forms of public address, from Margaret Fuller’s “Governor Everett Receiving the Indian Chiefs” and Lydia Sigourney’s “Indian Names” to Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn” and Emma Lazarus’s Statue of Liberty poem. Thus, Wolosky concludes, the context of Dickinson’s writing should be considered “not only in terms of women’s domestic confinement, as has been mainly emphasized, but also in terms of women’s distinctive voices in critique against the fantasies of autonomy and self-reliance increasingly commensurate with American identity itself—models of identity that Dickinson’s work at once deploys and disrupts” (689).

While Dickinson was publicly known by her community to be a poet, the poems themselves did not circulate through publication. Cameron suggests that Dickinson’s resistance to publishing afforded her more space in which to experiment as a poet even as she actively publicized “the fact of her writing”:

> It may be, then, that formal inventiveness is something that writing in private allowed Dickinson to develop. For Dickinson the process of writing the manuscripts without circulating them opened the space of writing to incorporate the social into the private sphere. Or rather it resituated the social in a liminal space: readers, or potential readers, were established at the edge of the private. They were able to look at the fact of her writing, forced to look at it, while being essentially prevented from looking *into* it. For it was a well-known fact—well known to all who knew Dickinson—that Dickinson was a writer. Thus Dickinson created the public spectre of herself as a writer. But in not publishing her poems, and in not circulating her manuscripts, with the exception of
certain lyrics, she achieved the particular feat of writing in public while effectively exempting her writing from public legislation (Choosing 53-4).

Recent historical treatments of Dickinson’s relationship to her nineteenth century readers counter what are perceived to be exaggerations of the poet’s isolation. Martha Nell Smith writes, “To say Emily Dickinson was a private poet disregards the facts that she circulated at least one-third of her poems (and very probably many more, since most of her letters have been lost) to contemporary audiences by ‘publishing’ them in her letters” (Corporealizations 213). Smith points out that the claims for Dickinson’s agoraphobia are not substantiated but are a product of assumptions about the female poet in the nineteenth century. She writes, “Akin to our collective biography of the rock star—wears blue jeans, has long hair, has lots of sex, consumes drugs—the popularly held biography for women writers in the nineteenth century asserted that she wore white, bore a ‘secret sorrow,’ and was reclusive” (220 n33).

The point of this reconsideration of Dickinson’s artistic and social isolation is to indicate the conservative nature of Horn’s assumptions regarding Dickinson’s absence of readers. Dickinson’s assumed isolation is exaggerated, according to recent scholarship; however, Horn’s appreciation of the uniqueness of Dickinson’s work is shaped by an assumption of the isolation of Dickinson. Horn writes, “The fact that Dickinson did not publish her poetry had a radical though obscure influence on its nature, the direction her writing took, and the realm of

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13 Also see Smith *Rowing in Eden* 11-16.
heightened sensibility she articulated in her poems” (Among Essential 78). Horn assumes the absence of readers as formative. She claims, in effect, that one’s experience of reading Dickinson is shaped by Dickinson’s own experience of not being read. Thus, to choreograph the experience of reading Dickinson is to choreograph, in part, those energies shaped by the poet’s experience of an absence of readers. Part of the loss we experience as readers is the absence of reader to which we (in our presence as reader) are indebted. Horn states:

Dickinson’s silence and solitude were propagated—invented, in the sense that they are so unfamiliar—within the expanse of her relationship to herself. I wonder if you can see her as both the viewer and the view: though the world was vital to her invention, it played a different role in her work than it does for most artists; her view was never mediated by an audience…. Dickinson developed and completed her work within the boundaries of a rare self-sufficiency. In her work the idea of the world exists in the context of this independence. Her self-sufficiency was catalyzed further by this silence / solitude and is perhaps one of the sources for the unique complex knowledge typical of her writing (78).

Horn’s statements about Dickinson suggest that she assumes artistic isolation as an experience internal to Dickinson's work—although it is not internal to Horn's work. What might appear to be differences in the aesthetic values of the Horn object and the Dickinson poem contribute to the tension and paradox of Horn’s adaptation of Dickinson. The differences might be summed up as opacity versus clarity, and the relationship between the private and the public.

Horn's work is not conceived without an awareness of a viewer; this is a part of making the work that is at odds with what is imagined of the making of Dickinson’s poems. In terms of relationship to audience, one might say that Horn consciously works toward a public audience and toward a scale that resists
that of the domestic and private. In an interview with Mimi Thompson, she states: "That kind of pastoral comfort that's offered in domestic space—that scale of events, that kind of inertia—my sculpture is rarely able to exist in those terms" (35). Objects are not considered to exist without the viewer, as Horn makes clear in the Thompson interview:

> Things don't exist unless you experience them. From the point of view of the maker, they all necessarily exist a priori. They are essential to the artist's existence. These objects exist in very literal relationship to human presence, not without human presence; not in the making and not in the viewing (38).

The privacy and indirectness of Dickinson as an artist might appear to be in stark contrast to the values implied by Horn's works. Horn's work is direct and open; there is nothing to interfere with the viewer's direct experience. Kathy Halbreich states:

> By minimizing visual incident, Horn maximizes the physicality of the object's and viewer's existence. Her use of ubiquitous forms, devoid of extraneous anecdote or metaphor, reiterates both the abstractness of her work and its grounding in direct, palpable experience (1).

On the one hand, it's all there in front of the viewer, and there's nothing to decipher. There are no omissions; but this is not to say that everything is visible and present. The move from privacy of poems to public space is a move on the part of the viewer from the institutional space of the museum gallery into the vastness of Dickinson's interiority—the hour that is a sea; the clover that is a prairie. To read Dickinson's poems, writes Cameron, "is to be lodged within a spaciousness so unfamiliar that it is experienced as disorienting" (Choosing Not
Choosing 186-7). As Halbreich puts it, Horn’s work is grounded in direct, palpable experience; however, as Cameron puts it, “what [Dickinson’s] poems make available is interiority itself—interiority without either origin or outside” (187).

By quoting Dickinson, Horn is stating, My business is circumference. And indeed it is; we can barely discern the stated claim, although we experience the enactment of the claim. Horn’s installation How Dickinson Stayed Home might be dismissed as mere illustration of the Dickinson statement. Horn’s staging of the experience of circumference could be compared to the work of Nancy Dwyer, for example; Dwyer spells out words in three-dimensional letters using a variety of materials, including plastic, wood, and found objects. One such work, “Window Seat (The Window Always Wins)” (1996) consists of six upholstered stools and is exhibited beneath a window. Each puffed floral shape functions as both letter and seat, and together the six seats form the word “window” (reproduced in Princenthal). “Fate Built” (1996) spells the word “fate” in block letters of simulated granite. As Eleanor Heartney notes of this particular work, it resembles, from the sides, a minimalistic sculpture. Only when looking down on the work does one recognize a word. Referring to the “double prospect” of the letter-forms, Heartney writes, “Meaning seems to hover over their topmost layer, a thin skin only lightly impressed over their dumb mass” (124). If one compares the nature of the reading required by Dwyer’s work to that demanded by Horn’s, similarities are apparent. For example, Horn’s dispersal of block letters spelling
“MY BUSINESS IS CIRCUMFERENCE” operates similarly to Dwyer’s “Fate Built” and “Window Seat (The Window Always Wins).” Reading does not happen at once, but the forms coalesce into legible words over time. The physical demands placed on the viewer’s body are greater with Horn’s work, however. In addition, Dwyer’s letter-forms often present an image of a given word’s meaning. For example, “Ego” is spelled with helium-filled plastic pillows that float to the ceiling. This is a playful image of the semantic meaning of a given word—in this case, “ego”—but is it an image of language? Jean-François Lyotard, writing of Mallarmé, states, “When the word is made thing, it is not to copy a visible thing, but to render visible an invisible, lost thing: it gives form to the imaginary of which it speaks” (qtd. in Jay 179). Likewise, Horn’s presentation of Dickinson’s words does not copy a visible thing, but renders an invisible, lost thing. Even though Horn spatializes Dickinson’s artistic statement, she also asserts that her business is circumference. Considering How Dickinson Stayed Home within the context of Horn’s other three Dickinson works, one might consider the term “circumference” to refer to both the reach of Dickinson’s work and the reach of Horn’s work. In the Dickinson poem “At Half Past Three, a single Bird” discussed earlier, the term “circumference” refers to the pivot of presence and place—and in Horn’s Dickinson work, one might consider “circumference” as the pivot term between the presence of Dickinson and the place of Horn.
II.

Dickinson’s line, “My business is circumference,” is an assertion of artistic practice. This assertion does not explain or justify the work’s difficulty, but stakes a claim for its activity as work. This activity is one of de-centering and dispersal. Horn, by quoting “My business is circumference” in the language of sculpture, asserts that her business, as sculptor, is circumference. A consideration of the work of two artists, Robert Smithson and Richard Serra, provides a framework for understanding the terms within which Horn, coming of age as an artist in the late 1970s, is working, terms which include the tension between center and circumference. The work of Smithson and Serra recast the possibilities of artistic practice; an understanding of their work provides a background for understanding Horn’s early work and illuminates the Dickinson-inflected work.

Smithson is perhaps best known for *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a 1500-foot spiral constructed of basalt, limestone, and earth which extends into the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Fifteen feet wide, it is said to have required 6,650 tons of bulldozed material (Fineberg 330). The corner of the lake from which Smithson’s work uncoiled was an abandoned industrial site and not easily accessed by the public. It was soon covered by water and few actually saw the work. Experience of the work exists through its documentation, which includes a 1972 film and essay by Smithson, both titled “Spiral Jetty.” The most commonly reproduced image of the *Spiral Jetty* is a photograph taken in April 1970 by
Gianfranco Gorgoni; this is an aerial view taken low and from somewhere in the lake. One sees the entire spiral as it uncoils from a low hill at the coastline. It is a simple geometric form, impressive more for its scale than its complexity of form. In the photograph, nothing human-built is visible—one sees only a distant line of mountains, a hill, and Smithson’s spiral of earth in an expanse of water. It has the same impressive and primitive monumentality as the mysterious unexplained forms of primitive peoples, such as the earth mounds in Ohio. As Gary Shapiro puts it, *Spiral Jetty* can be “read as an inscription or mark, a way of writing on or signing the earth that would be analogous, as Smithson suggests, to the ways in which the earth was marked in prehistoric times, before the institution of the artist’s signature” (228).

*Spiral Jetty* is the quintessential earthwork, or land art. One of the defining characteristics of earth art is not just that it is a construction or process enacted in the landscape, but that the work made is usually not accessible to a viewing public, being either in a remote place or temporary. The circulation of the work occurs through its documentation, most often photographs, written statements by the artist, and maps. The irony of an earthwork such as *Spiral Jetty* is that for all of its monumentality, and for all the exertion that went into its making—the physical endeavors required to bulldoze over six thousand tons of rock and earth—the made thing is not there to be experienced first hand but is to be known indirectly. Part of what makes the work interesting is its large scale intervention in what Michael Heizer would call “the real space,” yet it is the
remoteness of this “real” space that renders it inaccessible to a viewer and reduces the experience of the work to viewing documentation. The work as work is to be located in its forms of documentation. Craig Owens writes: “Unintelligible at close range, the spiral form of the Jetty is completely intuitable only from a distance, and that distance is most often achieved by imposing a text between viewer and work” (47).

Smithson’s series of Nonsites, begun in 1967, are succinct enactments of the conceptual challenges of earthworks produced in the late sixties and early seventies by not only Smithson but Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, and others. A given Nonsite consists of a topographical map or aerial photograph of a particular site, mounted on the wall, with earth, rocks, or gravel from the site in bins on the floor. The configuration of the bins echoes the graphic configuration of the map or photograph. For example, A Nonsite, Pine Barrens, New Jersey (1968) consists of a hexagon-shaped topographic map of an area of New Jersey. In the gallery, thirty-one trapezoidal bins of varying sizes arranged in the configuration of a hexagon each contain sand taken from a site marked by a red dot on the map (Shapiro 70-1). Smithson intends these Nonsites to frustrate the viewer’s usual experience of the work of art as placed; rather, the work sets up what Smithson calls a dialectic between site and the nonsite. Smithson states, “The site, in a sense, is the physical, raw reality—the earth or the ground

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14 Heizer states, “The museums and collections are stuffed, the floors are sagging, but the real space still exists,” referring here to the Nevada desert where he constructed work in the late sixties (quoted in Fineberg 324).
that we are really not aware of when we are in an interior room” (178). In contrast, the Nonsite “is an abstract container” (178). The paradox of Nonsites is explained by Shapiro: “The nonsite is both a nonplace (it is not the place from which the material is taken) and a ‘non-sight,’ because in seeing it one is not seeing the site / sight to which it refers. We are not there and we are not seeing it; we are reconstructing ‘the inability to see’” (72).

It is with Smithson’s work in the late sixties that occurs what Craig Owens terms a dislocation of the visual. According to Owens, Smithson’s work was a primary force behind “the eruption of language into the aesthetic field in the 1960s” (47). Owens refers to this as the transformation of the visual field into a textual field. He writes, “Smithson thus accomplishes a radical dislocation of the notion of point-of-view, which is no longer a function of physical position, but of the mode (photographic, cinematic, textual) of confrontation with the work of art” (47). An example of Smithson’s textual practice is Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan, an essay published in a 1967 issue of Artforum. The title refers to a series of site-specific works—"mirror displacements”—that he executed while traveling through Yucatan peninsula. The title alludes to a travel book by John Lloyd Stephen, Incidents of Travel in Yucatan (1843), and so inserts itself into the tradition of travel narrative even as it purports to be the documentation of a series of art works. The essay is an autobiographical narrative describing nine separate occasions on which Smithson set up, photographed, and then

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15 For the conceptual beginnings of earth art, see excerpts from the 1969 Cornell University symposium on earth art, in Smithson 177-187.
dismantled a group of twelve square mirrors. The essay is accompanied by black-and-white photographs of the mirrors. Each photograph presents two simultaneous views: “a view of the landscape at which the camera points, partially obscured by the mirrors, and another view (usually skyward), partially caught on the mirrors” (Roberts 556). The result is not chaotic, however. Jennifer L. Roberts notes, “What is striking about the mirrors is the care with which Smithson has installed each so that its face parallels the others, as if the array were a single delicate instrument, tuned to receive a specific frequency or to observe a specific quadrant of the heavens” (556).

In reading Smithson’s text, it’s not always clear whether the artist is describing his view of the work on site or is reflecting on the photographic documentation of the work. Smithson’s precise descriptions of the scenes of “mirror displacements” rival the photographs in their evocative use of language. For example, in the seventh mirror displacement, the mirrors are set up—“balanced”—in a small tree. The reflections, as Smithson describes them, “made the tree into a jumbled wall full of snarls and tangles” (128). He writes, “The mirror surfaces being disconnected from each other 'destructuralized' any literal logic” (128). This observation is followed by a description of the photograph. He states nine of the twelve are visible but two are in shadow:

The displacement is divided into five rows. On the site the rows would come and go as the light fell. Countless chromatic patches were wrecked on the mirrors, flakes of sunshine dispersed over the reflecting surfaces and obliterated the square edges, leaving indistinct pulverizations of color on an indeterminate grid. A mirror on the third row jammed between two

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16 See Roberts for a discussion of Smithson’s work within the context of travel narrative.
branches flashed into dematerialization. Other mirrors escaped into visual extinguishment. Bits of reflected jungle retreated from one's perception. Each point of focus spilled into cavities of foliage. ...Scraps of sight accumulated until the eyes were engulfed by scrambled reflections (128-9).

Smithson’s narrative is, on the one hand, an attempt to record a series of works, and a series of experiences; on the other hand, it records the impossibility of doing just that. Smithson’s dislocation of the visual honors the visual:

Art brings sight to a halt, but that halt has a way of unraveling itself. ...one must remember that writing on art replaces presence by absence by substituting the abstraction of language for the real thing. There was a friction between the mirrors and the tree, now there is a friction between language and memory. A memory of reflections becomes an absence of absences (129).

At the end of the essay, Smithson writes,

If you visit the sites (a doubtful probability) you find nothing but memory-traces, for the mirror displacements were dismantled right after they were photographed. The mirrors are somewhere in New York. The reflected light has been erased. Remembrances are but numbers on a map.... (132-3).

I quote at length from the essay because it demonstrates Smithson's interest in constructing work that interrogates what it means to see a work of art. Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan reads as if the documentation of a work, but it is the work. Smithson describes the usual experience of a work of art as bringing "sight to a halt;" the eye is meant to be stilled in contemplation before an object. Smithson, however, “unravels” that illusion of stillness. Smithson’s assertion in Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan that the absence that is language replaces presence parallels Dickinson's assertion that “Perception of an object costs / Precise the Object’s loss” (J 1071, F 1103).
Smithson’s work sets up a dialectic between site and non-site, the visible and the non-visible, the material and the textual. Smithson’s work does not engage the viewer as a specific body; rather, “the real drama of encounter is played out in an imagined encounter between the self and an open outdoor site, which takes off from, and is ultimately defined by, the viewing and reading of Smithson’s gallery presentation” (Potts 324). In contrast, the work of Richard Serra, while also dialectical in the sense that its energy is the result of a relay of forces, engages the built environment and the body of the viewer.

Serra’s early *Prop Piece* (1969) consists of a rolled sheet of lead leaning against a wall; on top of the rolled lead is a lead sheet held in place against the wall by the rolled sheet. The verticality of the piece is not a function of attachment or construction but is a function of the tension between the two pieces of material as they meet against an expanse of wall. In a later work, the wall as support is done away with. *One Ton Prop (House of Cards)* consists of four 500 pound lead slabs holding each other up as they lean against one another. Krauss explains the principle of Serra’s series of props as “stability achieved through the conflict and balance of forces” (Richard Serra 108). Another series, *Stacked Steel Slabs*, demonstrates Serra’s interest in producing work that see-saws between stability and instability. His first in this series is a forty-foot tower of steel slabs that tilts twelve feet off axis “at the boundary of its tendency to overturn” (Serra quoted in Krauss 115). Krauss describes the work as a relationship between center and circumference:
Stacked Steel Slabs is concerned with the dynamics of a relationship between a center and an outside that exercises a powerful pull on that center—a relationship that is, one could say, the very meaning of its existence. And what is at issue in that relation of center to periphery continues to be the nature of the human subject (117).

The tension of the verticality of the Prop pieces mirrors the uprightness of the human form. Krauss argues that “the abstract conditions of the body were modeled by One Ton Prop (House of Cards) or by Stacked Steel Slabs: the body as a will toward erectness, as the seeking of containment through balance” (124).

It is with a work such as Serra’s Shift (1971-2), however, that the viewer’s body actually becomes implicated in the sculptural experience. Serra’s Shift is constructed within a three hundred yard section of a field in rural Ontario, Canada. The terrain consists of two hills, with a flat valley between. In Serra’s words, “The boundaries of the work became the maximum distance two people could occupy and still keep each other in view” (11). There are six concrete sections, comprising two pairs of what Serra refers to as “stepped walls”; each wall begins at ground level and “extends for the distance that it takes for the land to drop five feet.” Serra explains, “The direction is determined by the most critical slope of the ground” (12). According to Krauss, “Serra’s conception of Shift seems to arise quite naturally from the kind of phenomenological setting in which it is argued, ‘I cannot understand the function of the living body except by enacting it myself, and except in so far as I am a body which rises towards the world’” (129). As Hal Foster points out, the significance of this work is that not
just the body of the viewer is important, but the time that it takes for the body through movement to respond to the work is important; thus corporeality and temporality are crucial terms for sculpture (The Un / making of Sculpture 178).

Serra describes the experience of sculpture as the “‘topology of [a] place’ demarcated ‘through locomotion,’ a ‘dialectic of walking and looking into the landscape” (qtd. in Foster 178). The experience of place depends upon the movement of the body, itself a form of “place,” as Edward S. Casey, working out of Martin Heidegger, argues:

my being-here is the absolute product of my body and my immediate place, the two together in an indissoluble composition. Walking is paradigmatic of this very composition, since when I walk I am at once actually moving and yet experience myself as ‘a stable null-object.’ In walking, I oscillate between the modes of ‘keeping still’ and ‘keeping-in-operation’ (225).

Casey notes that the body-place relationship “is paradoxical in being at once subjective and objective and, more especially, private and public” (241). Casey makes a distinction between site and place: “we experience place and space as kinesthetically felt situations—in contrast with site, which is not felt by our lived body and thus lacks phenomenal presence” (232). Thus, place is generated by the lived body in motion—but motion within a limit. Casey writes,

Within a limit, room is made—and thus place. To lack limit is to lack place, and conversely: not to be in place is to be unlimited. A limit is a positive power within which place is made (262).

The lived body in movement is at the center of Serra’s conception of sculpture; sculpture is understood as that which demarcates the limit against which a body’s movement generates an experience of place. Sculpture is defined as “a
structuring of materials in order to motivate a body and to demarcate a place: not a fixed category of autonomous objects but a specific relay between subject and site that frames the one in terms of the other, and transforms both at once” (Foster 179).

Serra and Smithson provide contrasting understandings of the experience of a work in relationship to site. James Meyer characterizes the two conceptions of site as that of the literal site and the functional site. The literal site is located in the particularities of a specific physical place:

The artist’s intervention conforms to the physical constraints of the situation, even if (or precisely when) it would subject this to critique. The work’s formal outcome is thus determined by a physical place, by an understanding of the place as actual. Reflecting a perception of site as unique, the work is itself ‘unique’” (The Functional Site 24).

The functional site, however, employs a “vectored and discursive notion of ‘place’” (25). It is understood to be temporary. As with Smithson’s series of mirror displacements, the work is “a temporary thing, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories: a place marked and swiftly abandoned” (25). Serra’s notion of site is phenomenological; it is “a unique, demarcated place available to perceptual experience alone” (30). Serra’s work can be understood in the terms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who writes, “What counts for the orientation of the spectacle [around me] is not my body as it in fact is, as a thing in objective space, but as a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal ‘place’ defined by its task and situation” (qtd. in Casey 232). Smithson’s work, however, “becomes a network of sites referring to an elsewhere” (Meyer 30).
While Smithson and Serra offer competing models of site and place, both Smithson’s dialectic of place and Serra’s definition of sculpture as relay between subject and site extend and complicate the notion of the autonomous object, a central term in discussions of modernist work, and the notion of the specific object, a key term associated with minimalism. Serra states of his work: “the center, or the question of centering, is dislocated from the physical center of the work and found in a moving center” (13). This parallels Owens’ remark that Smithson’s site / non-site works engage “the dialectical relationship between center and circumference” (40).

Horn’s series of Dickinson-inspired works is indebted to Serra’s phenomenological model of site, but it is also interested in the experience of “elsewhere” invoked by Smithson’s dialectical model of site. A consideration of Horn’s ongoing practice of pairing identical forms provides a context for appreciating the complexities of site as enacted in the artist’s Dickinson-work.

Horn’s first one-person exhibition, in 1980 at Clock Tower Gallery, included *Pair Object*, a pair of copper rods (16’ x 2.5”) leaning against the wall, diagonally opposite to the entrance. The name of the work refers not only to its two forms but also to the vertical line of the Clocktower; thus the configuration of the work is paired to (or echoes) the architectural structure in which it is placed (L. Horn 13). The presentation of two identical machined forms as one object continues five years later with *Pair Object II*, consisting of an identical pair of solid copper spheres. The spheres are arranged in such a way that the second sphere is
seen only after one enters the room; thus time elapses and space is traversed before the object is seen in its completeness as a pair.

Pair Object III consists of two solid copper forms—truncated cones—that have been installed in a variety of relationships, each configuration considered a separate work. One installation, Piece for Two Rooms, presents the forms in separate rooms. Each of the copper forms, which taper from 17" in diameter at one end to 12" at the other, is placed in relation to an entrance such that one encounters each form similarly. As one enters the first room—depending on one’s height—one is most likely to see an object that looks like a copper disk. As one moves into the room, the form is perceived to extend into space and recognized as a truncated cone. Entering the second room, the same thing happens. But one knows—from one’s memory of the previous room—the nature of the visual experience about to unfold. Even though identical objects are encountered in similar circumstances, the experiences of each are not identical. The initial experience of the form as unique and self-contained is irretrievable once it becomes perceived, through its repetition, as part of a relationship; and the second form—inevitably experienced as a double—is never perceived as a singularity. In Pair Object (III), the absent form is “brought into focus as something which, from the beginning, is there by being elsewhere” (Gilbert-Rolfe 9).

17 My understanding of the dynamics of this installation is indebted to Gilbert-Rolfe’s discussion of the work in Roni Horn: Pair Objects I, II, and II.
In approaching *Pair Object*, one is quickly aware that the forms in adjacent spaces are identical; it is the difference between them, between now and then, here and there, that underscores their sameness and pairing. Further implications of the Pair Object series to an understanding of the complexities of Horn’s Dickinson works are discussed in later chapters; in this context, I want to point out that Horn’s sculptural syntax involves decentering the viewer—but it is decentering in the aim of focusing and so involving the viewer. Horn doesn’t simply place objects in a space; she inserts space into the experience of the object—space and time must be traversed in order to experience the object. One might consider this installation of *Pair Object III* to test the circumference of the object—how far from one another can the parts be and still be experienced as one thing. As Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe describes the relation of center to circumference in Horn’s work: “Horn’s object, which is more than one object, rewrites the object as a multiplicity, destabilized by its elaborate completeness rather than closed off by it; a concentration which proposes an openness, the rule of never only one, never only this, never only here, never only what’s present” (*Beyond Piety* 224).

Horn’s strategy of pairing is complicated further with *Pair Field* (1990-1). As with *Piece for Two Rooms*, the work is comprised of forms in adjacent spaces. In one, eighteen different forms of copper and steel are arranged. They are machined forms of identical volume but different shape. Low and dense, the highest is no more than eleven inches off the ground. In an adjacent space of
different dimensions, one sees similar forms, also arranged on the floor. It is only with effort and a going back and forth between the two spaces that one perceives that the forms in identical relationship to one another are repeated. (Because one space is considerably smaller and of different proportions than the other, the arrangement of forms, although identical, is compressed.)\textsuperscript{18} The pairing is field-to-field, but it is also individual form paired to identical form in adjacent space. Horn explains this work as a “duplicating [of] the group while changing their interrelation.” She claims: “Finally, you have two identical things with different identities” (Fuchs and Kersting n.pag.)

With \textit{How Dickinson Stayed Home}, Horn creates a place in which the viewer must maneuver. The object is not a pair object, but it is comprised of twenty-five forms that don’t cohere as object until the viewer has negotiated the space. In this sense, one can see how the dynamic of the work operates within the sculptural terms set up by Smithson and Serra. Serra’s definition of sculpture as “a structuring of materials to motivate a body” is the context in which Horn’s work exists. Serra also claims that sculpture “demarcates a place,” but it is a site which is framed in terms of subject, and a subject framed in terms of site. In the case of the Dickinson-Horn objects, the subject, or viewer, is framed in terms of a site which is a place of reading Dickinson. Dickinson is site, not subject. And Dickinson, as site, as place to be read, is framed in terms of the subject who is a viewer in an art gallery. Throughout Horn’s series of Dickinson-objects, as is discussed in later chapters, there is tension between subject (split between

\textsuperscript{18} I would like to thank Hendrik Driessen, Director of the De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, for providing me with copies of the artist’s diagrams of the placement of forms within the two rooms of the installation.
viewer / reader) and site (split between Horn / Dickinson). By quoting Dickinson and setting up the quotation as situation / site, Horn aligns her practice with Dickinson’s practice, but she also sets up a relay between Dickinson and Horn: the center is the Horn work and the circumference is Dickinson; but the Horn object is destabilized and de-centered by the Dickinson quotation. Serra’s definition of sculpture as relay between subject and object is reworked in Horn as relay between object and memory, perception and memory: to perceive the Horn object is to remember the experience of Dickinson’s work.
CHAPTER 2
KEYS AND CUES

I. “Best witchcraft is geometry”: The Dickinson Line as Geometric Object

Roni Horn’s 1994 series Keys and Cues is comprised of sixteen individual works. Each work consists of one aluminum column that reproduces the first line of a Dickinson poem. The columns lean against the wall. Their height varies depending on the length of the line, but the scale is roughly that of the human body. The first line of poem 1755, “To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,” is 102 1/2 inches, one of the tallest of the works in Keys and Cues. The column which quotes “Fame is a bee” (J 1763, F 1788) is a mere twenty-seven inches tall. Some of the first lines quoted by Horn contain visual images, such as "A rat surrendered here" (J 1340, F 1377) or “Two butterflies went out at noon” (J 533, F 571). Others are abstract, such as "The Brain—is wider than the Sky—" (J 632, F 598), “Best witchcraft is geometry (J 1158, F 1158). ), and “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus” (J 689, F 284). 19

19 Other lines represented in Horn’s series are: “An Hour is a Sea” (J 825, F 898 ); “Crisis is a Hair” (J 889, F 1067); “Air has no Residence, no Neighbor” (J 1060, F 989); “This quiet Dust was Gentlemen and Ladies” (J 813; F 1090); “I felt my life with both my hands” (J 351, F 357); “Remembrance has a Rear and Front” (J 1182, F 1234); “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died” (J 465, F 591); “Ideals are the Fairy Oil” (J 983, F 1016); and, the last poem in Johnson’s edition, “The earth has many keys” (J1755, F 895).
This chapter, focusing on the series *Keys and Cues*, begins with a discussion of the often troubled relationship between part and whole in the Dickinson poem, exacerbated by eccentric syntax and an excessive use of the dash. *Keys and Cues* alludes to the relationship between part and whole which characterizes the Dickinson poem as well as to that relationship between part and whole which characterizes the objects of minimalism. *Keys and Cues* is discussed within the context of minimalism, in particular its interest in the perceptual experience of the viewer. Examination of earlier work by Horn places *Keys and Cues* within the sculptor’s ongoing concern with the relationship between immediate perceptual experience and memory. In *Keys and Cues*, it is the simultaneous perception of the Horn object and memory of the Dickinson work which splits the gallery visitor and, I argue, holds in dialectical tension both the viewer of sculpture and the reader of the Dickinson. My argument is that Horn’s geometric assertions—quotations of Dickinson’s first lines—function rhetorically and sculpturally as a dash.

Consider the following poem:

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The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—
We learned to like the Fire
By playing Glaciers—when a Boy—
And Tinder—guessed—by power
Of opposite—to balance Odd—
If White—a Red—must be!
Paralysis—our Primer—dumb—
Unto Vitality!      (J 689, F 284)
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The first line is especially baffling. The capitalization of nouns implies specificity, yet there is little that the reader can picture. The “Zeroes,” if an image at all,
might be the symbols that indicate “nothing.” “Phosphorus,” capitalized, might allude to the personification of the morning star, Phosphor. Etymologically, the word “phosphorus” is derived from a Greek adjective meaning “light-bringing.”

The line “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—” is obscure and frustrating until the reader realizes that the entire poem is structured around a series of opposing terms: ice and fire; white and red; paralysis and vitality. Once the reader understands that the first line presents nouns in opposition to one another, an unraveling of one of the nouns—either “Zeroes” or “Phosphorus”—yields the meaning of the other. Phosphorus is something that absorbs sunlight and emits light; thus, “Zeroes” might refer to the absence of light. However, phosphorus’s emission of light is weak, such that it can only be seen in the darkness. Darkness, therefore, is required for the recognition of the presence of phosphorescence.

The poem’s second pairing involves ice and fire: the speaker asserts that it is “playing Glaciers” as a child that instilled an appreciation for fire. This is another line that baffles attempts to visualize it: does playing glaciers refer to playing in the snow, or does it refer to being emotionally cold or numb? The fourth line begins with “And Tinder”; because of the hyphens separating phrases, it’s not clear whether “Tinder” was a game played as a child, or whether the notion of “Tinder” was arrived at (“guessed”) by assuming the existence of an opposite to any extreme experience. It is not clear what sort of power this “power / Of opposite” is; perhaps it is the attraction of what one doesn’t have. At the end of the poem, the reader is informed that paralysis is primer for vitality, that paralysis
serves as preparation for actively engaging the world. Once having read this last line, the reader returns to the first line and understands “Phosphorus” as that which gives off light and “Zeroes” to indicate stasis, emptiness, and darkness.20

“The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus” can be read as a poem about desire as conflict; desire as created by lack, and by the presence of its opposite. The term “primer” suggests that one is prepared for one state by the experience of its opposite—paralysis is a primer for vitality; the glacier is a primer for fire; white, often a symbol for purity, is a primer for red, a color of disobedience and flamboyance. The binaries in this poem are zeroes / phosphorus; glacier / fire; red / white; paralysis / vitality; odd / even. We are compelled to “balance Odd,” Dickinson seems to be saying; and we do this with an opposing term. Note the verbs used: taught; learned; guessed; and the infinitive “to balance.” One might say the glacier is a cue for fire; white a cue for red; or, the glacier is a key to fire; white is the key to red. As David Porter writes of Dickinson: “Life astonished her with its denials. They were one of the peculiar springs of vitality for her art” (Modern Idiom 2).

Consider the use of dashes in “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—”: the dashes create internal pause—the pause of guess, the pause of balancing. The dash separates and holds one term against the other. The dash performs the

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20 In addition, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a box of matches was referred to as a phosphorus box: “a box containing matches tipped with chlorate of potash, with phosphorus on which to ignite them.” Also, fireworks might be referred to as “phosphorus boxes.”
poet’s subject of opposition and enacts division. As Cristanne Miller says of the use of the dash in the Dickinson poem:

>the dash’s primary function is rarely syntactic, to mark a tangential phrase for the reader or enclose a narrative aside. Rather, dashes typically isolate words for emphasis, provide a rhythmical syncopation to the meter and phrase of a line, and act as hooks on attention, slowing the reader’s progress through the poem (Emily Dickinson 53).

The dash draws attention to a word or phrase; Dickinson’s use of the dash also relates to her interest in conveying experiences of opposition, what Sharon Cameron has referred to as experiences of doubleness. Cameron’s discussion of the significance of dialectical knowledge is pertinent to “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—,” as well as to many other poems by Dickinson. Cameron asserts that, for Dickinson, “doubleness” is liberating. She writes:

>For dialectical knowledge in which experience is put in touch with its antithesis involves the mind’s ability to construct, through memory, a connection between that which is not present at a given moment in time and that which is. Such knowledge frees the mind of the constraints of the moment by making it conscious of those elements of its own experience that, if they were not hidden, would transform it. Frederic Jameson writes, ‘From the physical intimidation of the Fascist state to the agonizing repetitions of neurosis, the idea of freedom takes the same temporal form: a sudden perception of an intolerable present which is at the same time, but implicitly and however dimly articulated, the glimpse of another state in the name of which the first is judged.’ The claim that an experience has antithetical aspects and that one’s knowledge of it depends upon the confrontation of those aspects is founded upon a profound insight into the nature of identity. Herbert Marcuse spoke of identity as ‘the continuous negation of inadequate existence’ (Lyric 51).

Dickinson’s use of the dash is a syntactic enactment of this dialectical knowledge. As Robert Weisbuch has characterized Dickinson’s use of dashes:

“They often display a word’s dual relationship to what has gone before and what will come after it” (73). Additionally, dashes are evidence of the creative
process; dashes indicate “a struggle to find the right word, and they serve to represent hesitancy, always defeated, to reveal the word which in turn reveals the poet’s mind” (73). The dash “serves as a syntactical equivalent to Dickinson’s dictum, ‘The Soul should always stand ajar’ (1055)” (76).

Dickinson’s poems, especially her use of the dash, anticipates the significance of lineation in twentieth century poetry. Line breaks are one of the chief characteristics of poetry as opposed to prose. The poet Heather McHugh contrasts the progression of the sentence of prose with the interruptions of the sentence in poetry:

In poems, the convention of continuance is always being queried by poetic structure: a lineated poem is constantly ending. A sentence can have many line breaks in it, and each line break significantly reconceives not only the status of the sentence, but the status of the narrative the sentence stands for (208).

Giorgio Agamben argues that the energy of the poem is in part a function of the “inner disagreement” between rhythm and meaning: “In the very moment that verse affirms its own identity by breaking a syntactic link, it is irresistibly drawn into bending over into the next line to lay hold of what it has thrown out of itself” (40). Similarly, David Lehman, contrasting the etymologies of “prose” and “verse,” notes the “turning” demanded of readers of poetry:

'Prosus' means 'straight on'; 'versus' denotes 'turning,' as our eyes turn at the end of a line. By definition, then, the writer of verse controls our turning, and thus our pace of reading and the emphasis we give to certain words; both sound and sense are affected, and sometimes actually governed, by this principle of lining, this revolt against luck (78).

The poem is understood today as “a structure of internal resistances” (McHugh 208); until the early twentieth century, however, line breaks tended to follow the
general logic of sense and metrical pattern. It is with the experiments of William Carlos Williams that line works against the logic of the sentence; and enjambment becomes an important device. It is with Williams that line break is used “for expanding syntax and charging contemporary, idiomatic, ‘spoken’ language with the energy of poetry” (Ladin 41). Jay Ladin argues that Dickinson, with her dashes within lines, anticipates the twentieth century preoccupation with lineation. Ladin claims that Dickinson’s dashes serve the same purpose as Williams’ lineation; it is “a technical device for introducing a pause and heightening attention” (42). Williams called Dickinson his “patron saint” because of her practice of “seeking to divide the line in some respectable way” (50).

My point is that the line does a lot of work in Dickinson; not just the lines in relationship to one another; but also the internal divisions within the line that are created by the dash and that act like line breaks within the line. Dashes function to: (1) introduce multiplicity; (2) create gaps that require readers to collaborate in making sense by adding links; (3) slow down reading; and (4) emphasize an individual word or phrase. The energy of the poem—its construction—isn’t necessarily sequential or progressive; its building materials slip and slide; the poem may appear to retreat; or it may break down. The only lines that never move backwards and forwards are the first lines and the last lines. The last line often ends with a dash, suggesting that the last word isn’t an indication of completion.
Despite the slippery performance of Dickinson’s lines in general, her first lines deserve special attention for several reasons. To begin with, the first line transitions the reader into the poem. Secondly, in the case of Dickinson, the first line serves to identify the work. Dickinson’s poems are untitled, and the only way to locate a particular poem is by going to the "Index of First Lines." As a frequent reader of Dickinson knows, it is crucial to remember the first line of a poem that is important to one; otherwise one must wade through over 1700 works in order to relocate the poem. Dickinson’s first lines are both keys and cues; they enable one to find the poem, and they also set up what is to follow. The first lines might be said to function in one context as a whole; in another context, as a part.

Although significant, Dickinson’s first lines are also problematic. Critics have remarked that her first lines are often the most powerful line, but that the development of the poem doesn’t sustain the force of the first line. Cameron summarizes the critical views toward Dickinson’s first lines:

...many poems contain lines that are memorable in contexts that are not, and the memorable lines are frequently the first lines. Of the provocative first lines, Charles Anderson writes, “Not one in ten [poems] fulfills the brilliant promise of the opening words,” and R.P. Blackmur adds, “The movement of the parts is downward and towards a disintegration of the effect wanted.” Dickinson herself, hardly blind to the power of initial lines, wrote of another (unidentified) poet, “Did you ever read one of her Poems backward, because the plunge from the front overturned you?” (Lyric 14).

In Lyric Time; Dickinson and the Limits of Genre, Cameron examines those Dickinson poems that she considers unsuccessful in order to appreciate the strategies of those poems that do work. Cameron’s larger project is to consider
the ways in which Dickinson’s work departs from the reader’s expectations of the lyric in order to better understand the nature of lyric conventions. Cameron focuses on a particular type of Dickinson poem—the definition poem—in an effort to, as she puts it, “consider the problems that arise when a poem’s beginning is more forceful than its conclusion; when the name or definition it contains bears no relation or a problematic relation to its context; when a word in such a poem lacks adequate contextual specification” (34). There are two general categories of definition poems in the Dickinson corpus. Poems in the first category transfer the qualities of one thing to another, and the main verb is usually a form of “to be.” Examples include “Crisis is a Hair” (J 889, F 1067), “Water is Taught, by Thirst” (J 135, F 93), and “Faith—is the Pierless Bridge” (J 915, F 978). These definitions, as Cameron puts it, are “global” in nature. Poems in the second category focus on one aspect or property of a given subject (30). Examples in this category include “Pain—has an Element of Blank” (J 650, F 760) and “Remembrance has a Rear and Front” (J 1182, F 1234).

Cameron argues that Dickinson’s definition poems are motivated by the desire to match difficult and baffling experience with language. Referring to a number of poems that attempt to articulate an experience of pain, Cameron writes:

...names specify relationships that have been lost, forgotten, or hitherto unperceived. Dickinson knew, moreover, that the power of names was in part a consequence of their ability to effect a reconciliation between a self and that aspect of it which had been rendered alien. Names were a way of remembering and accepting ownership of something that, by forgetting or refusing to know, one had previously repudiated. Metaphor, then, is a response to pain in that it closes the gap between feeling and one’s
identification of it. Metaphoric names are restorative in nature in that they bring one back to one’s senses by acknowledging that what has been perceived by them can be familiarized through language (28).

The subjects of many Dickinson poems concern experiences that threaten a cohesive sense of self: loss, remorse, pain, and death. The situation of many poems is that of “aftermath” (Porter 9). Cameron states: “Similes recognize that we fail at direct names because we fail at perfect comprehension, and that certain experiences evade mastery and hence definition—the best we can do is approximate or approach them; a simile is an acknowledgment of that failure and contains within it the pain of imperfect rendering” (35). Finding the name for an experience is a contradictory impulse, however. Cameron points out that finding new names for interior experience is an ambivalent process, for on the one hand by the very insistence upon its necessity, the invention of a new name defies the social matrix. On the other hand, since articulation is a matter of social coherence, it must make reference to that matrix. Hence, naming is in need of precisely that thing which it deems inadequate (29).

According to Cameron, a definition poem fails when “the most complex part of the assertion is the name itself”; this is because “an explanation of, or rationale for, the genesis of the name after the fact of it cannot help but affect the reader as gratuitous” (35). Cameron continues:

The problem with these poems and with the many like them is twofold. First, they raise the question of the point in an experience at which one’s awareness of it yields a name. For whether a name seems gratuitous or appropriate is contingent upon its relationship to the rest of the experience being narrated. Second, there is the problem of how a given speaker manifests the need of, or reason for, the name at which she arrives (38).

Because Dickinson’s poems are so often sceneless, there is no motivating context in which the urgency of naming is developed (Lyric 44). A successful
definition poem is one in which the definition is experienced as inadequate not because the poem is incoherent or confused—two accusations made by Cameron—but because inadequacy itself is the crux of the matter: “the point of a definition can be to reveal the speaker’s knowledge of its inadequacy” (38). One example of this is the poem, “A Coffin—is a small Domain” (J 943, F 890):

A Coffin—is a small Domain,  
Yet able to contain  
A Citizen of Paradise  
In its diminished Plane.

A Grave—is a restricted Breadth—  
Yet ampler than the Sun—  
And all the Seas He populates  
And Lands He looks upon

To Him who on its small Repose  
Bestows a single Friend—  
Circumference without Relief—  
Or Estimate—or End—

The poem does more than assert a definition (the coffin is domain); rather, the poem describes the process whereby the narrator reaches this conclusion which then results in a revision of her understanding of “domain.” The speaker “discovers that its object is not elsewhere at the supposition of another life, but rather here at the fact that this one is mortal” (Lyric 39). When successful, asserts Cameron, "Definition, then, can be a way of coming to terms with a discrepancy between what one believes and what one feels, of growing knowledgeable about one’s feeling" (39). Cameron criticizes those Dickinson poems that “falsify the experience they represent” by disentangling experience from its “roots” and remaining “blind to the problem of opposites” (50). The
works that Cameron claims are significant are those which embrace contradiction and generate dialectical knowledge.

The relationship of the first line to the remainder of the poem is an issue that involves the relationship of part to whole, an important issue because Dickinson’s grammatical structures partition the poem. In particular, a frequent use of dashes may be experienced as a fragmentation of the poem. Kamilla Denman describes the various ways Dickinson’s use of the dash generates meaning:

Unlike the exclamation mark, the dash that dominates the prolific period is a horizontal stroke, on the level of this world. It both reaches out and holds at bay. Its origins in ellipsis connect it semantically to planets and cycles (rather than linear time and sequential grammatical progression), as well as to silence and the unexpressed. But to dash is also “to strike with violence so as to break into fragments; to drive impetuously forth or out, cause to rush together; to affect or qualify with a different strain thrown into it; to destroy, ruin, confound, bring to nothing, frustrate, spoil; to put down on paper, throw off, or sketch, with hasty and unpremeditated vigor; to draw a pen vigorously through writing so as to erase it; [is] used as a euphemism for ‘damn,’ or as a kind of verbal imprecation; [or is] one of the two signals (the other being the dot) which in various combinations make up the letters of the Morse alphabet.” Dickinson uses the dash to fragment language and to cause unrelated words to rush together; she qualifies conventional language with her own different strains; and she confounds editorial attempts to reduce her “dashed off” jottings to a ‘final’ version (33).21

The relationship between part and whole is one which exists in time. As Cameron points out: “Fragmentary lines, the refusal of syntax and diction to subordinate themselves to each other, the subsequent absence of context and progression, the resulting ambiguity and tension—we may conceive of these

21 The quoted material in Denman’s passage is from Theodora Ward, “Poetry and Punctuation,” Letters to the Editor, Saturday Review (1963) 46:25.
problems as temporal in origin, for the relationship between the parts of a poem is inevitably a temporal relationship" (Lyric 18).

Barbara Hernstein Smith argues, “The manner in which a poem concludes becomes, in effect, the last and frequently the most significant thing it says” (196). Cameron suggests that the Dickinson poem disappoints when the first thing it says is the most significant. The complaint is not that the poems are inconclusive, for anti-closure is not necessarily a failure of the poem’s conclusion but is an overall effect, but that the poem is, following the first line, “gratuitous,” that it is restatement rather than development. To return to the poem “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—”, the conclusion is forceful not only because of the exclamation point as end punctuation but because the repetition of antithesis continues. The last noun of the poem, “Vitality,” an opposite of the first noun of the poem, “Zeroes”—thus the poem is framed by a final pairing, and one understands the first line once the last is reached. Even though each line, with the exception of the second, is fragmented by a dash such that most phrases are three syllables or less, creating a perpetual pausing, a halting quality, nonetheless, by the end, the poem coheres as a whole, albeit a whole of syncopation. The poem is one that appears to splinter, but the splintering is part of a larger agenda to describe the splintering of the self in pursuit of identity and desire. This is an example of a poem that appears fragmented due to its use of the dash, but it succeeds as a whole, in contrast to an unsuccessful definition poem in which the parts, in particular the first line, don’t cohere into a whole.
The strangeness of the first line, “The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus—”, may be unequaled by the other lines, but the other lines provide a context for it.

In summary, part of the difficulty of reading Dickinson is that the relationship of part to whole is troubled; the reader experiences the poem in parts, as parts, and the difficulty is in putting them together. This is a problem with the line: its internal divisions; and syntax that does not clarify the relationship among lines. Sometimes the disconnections serve as an enactment of the narrator’s own difficulties with speaking, and hence is the very subject of the poem; other times the poem comes apart in our hands, as it were, because the poet is holding back a necessary hinge or screw. The difference between a fragment and a part might be enumerated thus: a part is a whole that fits together with other parts (wholes) to form a larger whole; parts are in certain contexts interchangeable. A fragment, however, alludes to the past, holds the past and present in abeyance; it is unique and not interchangeable. Sometimes an entire Dickinson poem reads like a fragment. Sometimes a poem seems to present nothing more than a series of fragments. Sometimes the poem is a mix of parts and fragments. Sometimes an entire poem is a part of a larger whole in the context of Dickinson’s fascicles, booklets of poems she fastened together with thread. But it is the first line in the Dickinson poem that in general constitutes “part.”

The columns in Horn’s series *Keys and Cues* present not only a part of a Dickinson poem, but a part which stands in for and identifies the whole. The first line is representative of the whole and, as identification, it is whole. Horn states,
In reading [the “Index of First Lines”], I found myself thinking of the first lines as entrances, tools, maps, signs, connections. I found myself thinking of alphabets, keys, and elemental things, thinking of things that were self-contained yet only beginnings.22

Like the letter "a"—itself a complete entity but also able to be linked with other complete entities to form yet another whole, a word—the first line is seen by Horn as self-contained. In conceiving of the series, Horn states that she chose those lines which she considered to be “complete statements”: “The first lines I selected had to have a certain containment (closure) and yet a certain complexity that would hold this completeness open” (Among Essential 81). The completion that Horn refers to does not have to do with content but with the integrity of structure. As she says of the statements which comprise the series Keys and Cues:

I don't think the content of the first lines carries the content of the poem it was taken from. The contents of a Key and Cue has more to do with the particularity that distinguishes Dickinson’s poetry as a whole. Each Key and Cue carries these qualities and speaks as the part that contains the whole, like a fractal—it can’t be broken down into something other than what it is. Each Key and Cue is there, as it leans against the wall taking up space, functioning with the pragmatic value of furniture (81).

This is an important statement: Horn is indicating that her interest is not in content but in particularities, in that “something that can’t be broken down.” In addition, the reference to furniture is significant; Horn has emphatically declared that for her sculpture is not about making objects that can exist on a domestic scale; rather, she is interested in making objects that re-make and exert a pressure on the space in which a viewer encounters them. Horn's primary

22 Conversation with artist, February 2, 1996.
concern as a sculptor—despite a meticulous attention to materials and fabrication—has been to choreograph the viewer's experience rather than to simply produce objects. As she put it in an interview, "The object is not the end; what I'm interested in is the experience it provides for" (Saunders 120).

Horn’s columns might remind one of a linotype line of raised type—with the important difference that in Horn’s line, it is the negative space rather than the letters which are raised. The letters, slightly recessed, appear from a distance as negative shapes—as if holes in the metal. It is important to note that the viewer is not looking at typeface but at fully three-dimensional letters, letters which—although they possess an identifiable "face"—are not themselves merely faces but exist three-dimensionally as bodies. The plastic letters are solid and extend all the way through the column, such that if one were to turn the column around one would see the line in reverse.

The top and bottom of each letter is flush with the edge, and where the top and bottom of a letter meet the edge, horizontal bands are formed on the sides. For example, where the top of a "T" meets the edge, a thick black band results. Where the bottom of the "T" meets the edge, a much thinner band results that runs horizontally. Thus, Horn's representation of the poetic line—which runs vertically—forms in its wake a horizontal banding. This banding, as a visual counter-rhythm, interferes with the legibility of the poetic line. The columns are thin—2" x 2"—and unless one is directly in front of a work, one's view of the line includes this other notation. From most perspectives, the letters appear distorted. For example, if one looks at a Keys and Cues column on a diagonal,
the letters look as if they are being thrust forward on long sticks. From certain angles, the columns are difficult, if not impossible, to read.

*Keys and Cues* represent the first lines of Dickinson poems and, as such, represent the first breaking, the first turn of an extended turning. Unlike the turning of a middle line or the final turn of an end line, this first turn also bears an indexical function. Poems are routinely indexed by first lines, and this becomes particularly important with untitled poems. *Keys and Cues* are not just representations of poetic lines; they are also representations of titles, markers of identity. And, as Horn's own title indicates, they function as cues—as signals for an entrance or as stimulus for behavior. The columns inhabit a specific space and create a specific place but in so doing cue us elsewhere, not to a past or future in the sense that a fragment does, but to a parallel elsewhere—the text of the poem. This, of course, is the nature of language—that it is impossible to be here with language even when it is here with us, on the page. Part of the struggle of the poem is to sustain a hereness of the word over and against the inevitable rush of the sentence—and in part the line breaks function as resistance to the hurry of time. The lines of a poem not only affect rhythm and pacing but they also impart a visual presence to the poem. Details of book production aside, the brevity of Dickinson or the expansion of Whitman bear different "looks" on the printed page. The line is a visibility whose presence is demarcated by invisibility, a deliberately marked absence. Christopher Ricks—in a discussion of a line from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* which describes the
horizon as "The boundary lost, the line invisible / That parts the image from reality"—describes the poem's progression from line to line as a crossing of visibilities:

The boundary is also that which we cross when we pass from one 'line' to another; the 'line invisible' is also that which separates one line from another, 'invisible' because it is emblematised on the page by the white space. Invisible, but not non-existent; there is no thing solidly there, no formal punctuation, but there is nevertheless the parting—by means of a significant space, a significant vacancy—of one thing from another (qtd. in Lehman 84).

The relationship of the Horn column to the gallery space is significantly different than that between poem on page and its white space. The "significant vacancies" that mark one line from another: this is the viewer's space in Keys and Cues.

The series Keys and Cues and When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes (to be discussed in the next chapter) are, according to Horn, “the only objects I have made specifically for domestic space” (Among Essential 80). Horn is interested in closure and movement. She states:

An experience of Key and Cue is the experience of an entrance; but since every entrance is also a point of departure, the Key and Cue prepares the viewer for departure. So while the Key and Cue is an object present like any other everyday thing, it is also a cue, a prompt, a signal to something that can only be brought here, wherever the viewer is, by the viewer (81).

These, then, are the intentions of the series as stated by the artist: (1) to present quotations of Dickinson lines that function as complete and elemental objects; (2) to present the particularity of Dickinson, not the content of Dickinson; (3) to present objects on a domestic scale such that they project the objects of everyday use; and (4) to present objects that function as a prompt for the viewer,
“a signal to something that can only be brought here, wherever the viewer is, by the viewer” (81).

It is this last intention—the Key and Cue as prompt—to which I'd like to turn my attention. As viewer, one is confronted with a specific object in a gallery space. Despite the stubborn geometry of Horn’s columns, however, it is difficult to remain fully present to columns on which are written "The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus" or "An hour is a sea." The columns—despite their specificity of placement—cue one elsewhere, not to a past or future in the sense that a fragment might, but to a parallel elsewhere: the text of the poem. On one level, a given Keys and Cues demands completion—a completion of reading (not viewing). To complete the line, "The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus," one doesn't locate seven additional aluminum columns and line them up from left to right; one re-discovers the missing lines by going to the text. It is not just the poem that is missing; it is the context of the index. Looking at a first line within an index, one knows that one is not looking at a fragment; nothing is missing because nothing else is supposed to be there. One seeks the cue or identity; one is not expecting completion. Horn's columns exist autonomously—outside context of poem and index. The sculpture itself is surrounded by this absence of text; an absence that is, for the Dickinson reader, necessarily present. It is made present to the viewer in part because of its difference which might, to the Dickinson reader, appear baffling, disloyal, or wrong.
The most striking difference between the Horn column and the Dickinson line is that the letters are all capped. Dickinson’s capitalized words simultaneously suggest concrete, immediate presence and belie it. As Cristanne Miller puts it, “When capitalized, they [the poet’s nouns] occur with a deliberate, suggestively referential presence, but that distinctive prominence gives them a larger than life or symbolic undertone that detracts from a single referentiality” (Emily Dickinson 63). The particularity that Horn admires in Dickinson’s work is partly an effect of the capitalizations of nouns:

Nouns create the illusion of thingness in Dickinson’s poems, but they do not direct us to particular events or things. They give, instead, the sense that the world is as mobile and flexible as her perception of it (Miller 63). Horn’s columns all appear similar, unlike Dickinson’s lines that—with dashes and eccentric capitalization—are characteristic but not predictable. Dickinson’s capitalization of nouns emphasizes the individual word while the use of dashes also draws attention to the word unit. In contrast, Horn’s use of caps throughout transfers emphasis from the word to the line.

Paradoxically, it is Horn’s emphasis on the three-dimensionality and solidity of her presentation of the poetic line that flattens and reduces the visual form of Dickinson’s individual words; yet it is the flattening of the individual words and focus on the line that presents the materiality of the word in Dickinson. Because the letters are capped throughout, they form the substance of the columns, and are not simply applied to a surface or embedded in an object. Horn wants the lines to be encountered spatially, such that “the hierarchy between the read and the physical reality is not so disparate; that the experience of reading and the
experience of physically being there are one thing” (Conversation, February 2, 1996).

The primary effect of capping all the letters is to give the appearance of uniformity to the lines; another is that the dashes do not stand out to the degree that they do on the page. Thus the line, rather than breaking internally as it does on the page, is all one thing; it appears solid and whole, autonomous, intractable. The dash, with all that it signifies, is muted. Everything that has been argued is characteristic of the line in Dickinson is absent in Horn’s column. One might consider the Horn column to be an unconvincing representation of the Dickinson line, as the artist’s misreading or misunderstanding of the Dickinson line; or as a fraudulent exploitation of the uniqueness of the Dickinson line in order to impart presence to the geometric object.

If I read these columns as a representation of Dickinson, it falls short. If I read this particular series as an interpretation of Dickinson, it is not convincing. If I read it as a memorial, it isn’t effective. If I look at it simply as sculptural, I might respond as did the critic Ken Johnson in Art in America:

The Dickinson-based installation was...so dominated by the poet's distinctive voice that Horn's own role seemed somewhat compromised. Although there was logic in the way poetic lines and stanzas were translated into blocks and bundles, the mechanical sculptural style was distractingly out of sync with the particularity of Dickinson's vision (77).

Johnson argues that Dickinson outweighs Horn. One might argue as well that Horn's sculptural syntax effaces Dickinson. However, keeping in mind Horn’s assertion that the end is the experience rather than the object, I claim that the
experience that this object provides for is to split the spectator into viewer and reader. The viewer of *Keys and Cues* is split between a viewer of sculpture and a reader of the Dickinson line. The work does what the best of Dickinson does; it, as Roland Hagenbüchle puts it, “hold[s] alternatives in dialectical tension” (311). This is the tension and difficulty of the work: one is split between the viewer of late twentieth century sculpture and the reader of a mid-nineteenth century lyric poet. What I must bring to the Dickinson text, what is demanded of me as a Dickinson reader, would seem to be at odds with what I must bring to an experience of late twentieth century sculpture that has been shaped by minimalism and post-minimalism. I assert that the columns of *Keys and Cues* function as a sort of dash. The dash in the Dickinson poem, in the terms of Ladin, functions to “introduce a pause and heighten attention” (42), to introduce multiplicity, to slow down reading. But most importantly, dashes, in Weisbuch’s words, “display a word’s dual relationship to what has gone before and what will come after it” (73). The Horn column as an entity might be said to function like the dash in Dickinson; it slows down perception of the object with the introduction of words by Dickinson; it generates a dual relationship on the part of the viewer to what has gone before (the reading of Dickinson) to what will come after (the viewing of Horn).

The single column leaning against the wall might be said to mark the division between the viewer of the Horn object and the reader of Dickinson. This is a division between immediate perceptual experience and memory, an ongoing
preoccupation of Horn’s as exemplified by her series of *Pair Objects*. Linda Norden describes Horn’s sculptures as “agents” that shape the viewer’s perception of space. She writes, "Through the precise configurations of her sculptural forms and their highly specific placements, Horn sets up relationships intended to heighten our awareness of the contrast between immediate sensory experience and the cumulative associations of memory" (122). With the *Keys and Cues* series, Horn furthers this mission—“to heighten our awareness of the contrast between immediate sensory experience and the cumulative associations of memory”—by quoting Dickinson’s first lines in the form of aluminum columns. In light of Horn’s *Pair Objects*, one is tempted to regard each of the works in *Keys and Cues* as one component of a pair. It is not just that the three-dimensional column is a double of one line of text, but it is that the viewer herself becomes doubled. Our experience as viewer of *Keys and Cues* pairs us to our experience as reader of Emily Dickinson. In turning to Dickinson’s poem to complete the train of thought begun by the line, "The Zeroes—taught us—Phosphorus," what becomes of one’s relationship to the column of *Keys and Cues* that sent one to the text? The poem on the page is not missing its first line; it does not require the aluminum column for its completion. Yet for the viewer-become-reader, the first line is paired to an aluminum column. Horn claims as the double of this sculpture, the poems of Emily Dickinson—and in so doing she disciplines the Dickinson line. Dickinson's "spasmodic gait" becomes regulated by Horn's columns which—except for their
height—all appear similar, unlike Dickinson's lines themselves that—with their dashes and eccentric capitalization—are characteristic but not predictable (as Horn's "lines" become).

As readers of Dickinson know, the lines following the first line might not live up to the promise of the first line—the poet doesn't sustain the force of her entrance. The entry's promise may exceed what it in fact delivers. The passage is more narrow and less satisfying than its entry. And, as viewer of Horn, the column might not live up to one's expectations of the Dickinson line. Horn's rendition of the first lines are doors without passage; or, physical doors whose passage must be constructed through recollection. Horn selects lines that appear complete in themselves; this, however, is one of the criticisms of the Dickinson first line, that it can be so independent an assertion that the explanation that follows is gratuitous.

II. The Object as Cue

*Keys and Cues* is not only a sculptural response to the reading of Dickinson but it is also a revision of the geometric object as idealized by minimalism. Horn uses the visual rhetoric of minimalism, but her integration of the Dickinson text confounds the expectations of geometric specificity and exteriority associated with minimalism. Horn's Dickinson-objects combine geometric forms and the texts of a poet known for her privacy and preoccupation with interiority. While Horn's work does not project a theater of personality or the imagined contents of interiority, it does set up a reading experience that, on the one hand, is public
and neutral, but that, on the other hand, is shaped by a private reading experience of material that is itself shaped by privacies of form and content. Horn might claim that any perceived interiority is projected onto the work by the viewer; as readers of Dickinson we bring to Horn’s work the cultural myths surrounding Dickinson and our own experience of the cryptic intensities of her work. I would argue, however, that Horn—even as she claims to have no interest in the biography of the poet or the scholarship surrounding her work—is utilizing the fact (but not the specifics) of the mystique surrounding what Joseph Cornell referred to as “the E.D. experience” (qtd. in Porter, Assembling 200). One might say that its very presence is an energy field in which Horn situates work that in its austere geometry resists and channels the cultural excess away from the Dickinson work itself and onto the viewer. The work plays on the viewer’s assumptions about minimalism and the reader’s readymade response to Dickinson.

Minimal art generally refers to abstract, geometric work produced in the United States in the 1960s. Following Frances Colpitt’s lead, I prefer to use the term “minimalism” to refer specifically to those artists who began working in the 1960s and share “a philosophical commitment to the abstract, anti-compositional, material object” (1). These artists include Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and Robert Morris. In other words, “minimalism” describes not a style but a kind of thinking, the products of which share certain characteristics, such as a preference for the square and the cube, an absence of gestural mark-
making, the use of modular and serial forms, and the use of industrial materials. Minimalism was “canonized” in 1968 with Judd’s retrospective at the Whitney and the publication of Gregory Battcock’s anthology, *Minimal Art* (Meyer *Minimalism*). While minimalism as an active movement appeared to have exhausted itself by 1968, it had enormous influence on subsequent generations through the critical debates it sparked, and through its re-thinking of how art is made. The legacy of minimalism includes: (1) a new awareness of the gallery space as inhabited by the viewer and an interest in how objects might activate that space; (2) an interest in the body of the viewer; (3) a decentering of private psychological space and a new emphasis on what’s coming from outside the work; and (4) a new interest in temporal experience.

The “thinking” of minimalism is in large part a response to issues raised by the art criticism of Clement Greenberg. For Greenberg, the history of modernist painting is a history of the development of a critical consciousness toward the medium of painting. As stated in the 1961 essay “Modernist Painting,” traditional painting used “art to conceal art,” whereas modernist painting “used art to call attention to art” (755). Modernist painting openly acknowledges the limitations that constitute painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of pigment. Greenberg considers Edouard Manet’s paintings as the first modernist ones because of what he calls “the frankness” with which they draw attention to the surfaces on which they are painted. Greenberg’s championing of “frankness” in painting is recast by Donald Judd as a dismissal of any form of
illusion. Illusion is defined as visual presentation on a two dimensional surface that might imply three-dimensionality. Judd grapples with this in his early paintings, experimenting with form and material, for example, adding sand to the oil medium in an attempt to, as he put it, “make [the painting] just surface” (Haskell 27). With “Relief” (1961), an aluminum baking pan placed within a shallow box covered with asphalt, Judd attempts to render pictorial space “real” with the use of a three-dimensional object.

It is Frank Stella’s black paintings, shown in 1960 in the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition, Sixteen Americans, that offer a solution to the problem of pictorial illusion. Stella’s all black canvases are patterned with parallel stripes about 2 1/2 inches wide, the same width as the wooden bars used for support. The works employ an internal motif that echoes the shape of the external support, thereby emphasizing the painting as a single object. Soon after seeing Stella’s work, Judd abandons painting altogether and begins to make three-dimensional reliefs and open boxes whose structure and image are coextensive (Haskell). The open boxes, attached to the wall or floor bound, exhibited singly or functioning as modular units, are fabricated of wood, metal, and / or Plexiglass. For example, a 1987 untitled work consists of an aluminum box divided vertically: black Plexiglas fills the right half and is closer to the viewer than an inset of orange Plexiglas recessed into the left half of the box. The physical placement of color contradicts its optical effect—the physically recessed

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23 The description of this work and the Judd work that follows is based on a discussion of his work in my essay, “On the Collection of Pétur Arason” (36).
orange is optically forward thrusting, while the forwardly placed black is optically retreating. One is reminded of Hans Hoffmann’s push-pull theory of color that asserted the space-producing effects of color relationships. An influential teacher from the mid-thirties to the late fifties in New York, Hoffmann emphasizes that form in painting should not serve as container for color; rather, form must be the result of color. A work such as this demonstrates the degree to which an issue at the heart of painting is being reworked three-dimensionally. Judd asserts, “My thought comes from painting, even if I don’t paint” (qtd. in Agee 12). Color and form are co-extensive; the color orange was not applied to the Plexigas—it is the Plexiglas. Thus, Greenberg’s call for painting that is attentive to the actual surface of the canvas is interpreted as a call for real space—for an existence in three dimensions. Judd writes, “Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface” (Specific Objects 813).

Painting’s move from the illusion of three-dimensionality into a flattening of forms becomes a solidifying of form, becomes something that is, in fact, not painting. Judd’s work is the result of working through a problem in painting, but they appear to be neither paintings nor sculpture. Judd refers to them as “specific objects.” The intention of Judd’s “specific objects” is that nothing relevant should be sayable about them which is not a description of their physical characteristics and means of fabrication. In the 1965 essay, “Specific Objects,” Judd attempts to describe the work of contemporary artists who, like
himself, are struggling to resist painting and sculpture as “set forms” (812). He places this new work into two broad categories, that which “is something of an object, a single thing, and that which is open and extended, more or less environmental” (812). Alex Potts, however, points out that these distinctions not only describe the diversity of objects being produced in the sixties but also serve to describe any given work by Judd himself: “Any of the works posit a certain tension between the articulation of a clearly defined whole and a certain openness and extension in relation to the space immediately round it” (284). For example, a 1991 untitled work by Judd consists of a shallow plywood box partitioned with a square piece of wood—flush with what in painting would be called the picture plane. A narrow horizontal plank cuts through the middle space between the square and the back of the box. Even though the viewer recognizes the existence of space between the horizontal and square partitions, the two partitions nonetheless read to the eye as a cross-motif—the proportions of which are similar to the cross-motif that appears in the work of Kasimir Malevich, considered one of the first abstract painters (Agee 12). Judd sports with iconicity—in particular the iconicity granted painting. This is not a cross-

motif but a literal crossing of space. In addition, the recesses created by this crossing slow and hold the eye—a reminder that the noun “recess” names not only hollow but also interlude. The work is perceived as one thing, as an object, rather than as a surface on which forms have been placed, yet the object is
literally open to the viewer; one could place one’s hand into the work and around and behind what in a painting would be the middle ground.

One of the ongoing problems faced by minimalist artists is that of composition. The traditional practice of composing through a balancing of parts results in spatial illusion and in pictorial experience. Carl Andre’s solution is a non-hierarchical composition through the use of modular units. *Lever* (1966) consists of 137 bricks set down one beside the other, described by Nicholas Serota as an “uncompromising line which captures the isolation of a prime number of only itself and one” (Whitechapel n.pag.) Andre’s 1967 *Equivalent* series consists of eight sculptures, each constructed of 120 bricks stacked two deep on the gallery floor. They are assembled in combinations of 60, such as: 3x20, 4x15, 5x12 and 6x10. While the eight works have identical mass and volume, they appear quite different because of differing proportions. Thus, they are “equivalent” but not the same. According to Meyer, the title *Equivalents I-VIII* alludes to the title of Alfred Stieglitz’s photographs of clouds: “Just as Stieglitz had conceived his series as a permutation set of related images, Andre considered his works the ‘equivalent of the other’ even though each was different” (*Minimalism* 189).

As Meyer points out, Andre’s work is not a built thing in the same way that an object by Judd is:

Instead, the Equivalents were temporary arrangements of identical, unattached units—low piles of bricks laid there for the show’s duration, held in place by gravity alone. They did not so much fill space as mark it; they were
not ‘objects’ to look at (like a Judd or Morris cube) so much as cairns directing
the body through the gallery space (196).

Krauss describes this form of composition as an attempt “to defeat the idea of a
center or focus toward which forms point or build” (Passages 250). As Andre
describes his practice, “My first problem has been to find a set of particles, a set
of units, and then to combine them according to laws which are particular to
each particle, rather than a law which is applied to the whole set, like glue or
riveting or welding” (qtd. in Krauss 275). This is an example of a compositional
device that resists the appearance of manipulation and refuses to participate in a
logic that grants importance to the interior space of forms. This is, as Krauss
puts it, “a mode of composition from which the idea of inner necessity is
removed” (250). Meyer summarizes Andre’s use of bricks in this way:

André observed that his materials had been ‘processed by manufacture,’
yet had not been given ‘the final shape of their destiny’ by the factory. His
aim was not to ‘[lay] a brick wall with mortar’ but to reveal the formal
potential of ‘the bricks themselves’ (186).

The use of industrial materials and readymade forms, characteristic of minimalist
art, results in a radical rethinking of how art is made. Carving and construction—
a grappling with materials—is replaced by conceiving and placing or presenting.
In Colpitt’s words, “It is more a case of transference than transformance” (9).
This use of industrial materials also contributes to the abstractness of the work
which does not seem to have a history outside of the works of art themselves.
As Serota points out, the work 8 Cuts was made by covering a floor with cement
blocks and then removing blocks in the shape of eight rectangles, “raising
questions as to whether the sculpture is the negative (the removals) or the positive (remaining blocks) form.” This ambiguity underscores the importance to minimal work of the space it occupies. “Up to a certain time I was cutting into things,” states Andre. “Then I realized that the thing I was cutting was the cut. Rather than cut into the material, I now use the material as the cut in space” (qtd. in Waldman 8).

The minimalist preoccupation with strategies of anti-illusion and so-called real space is accused of literalism by Michael Fried in the 1967 essay, “Art and Objecthood.” Fried accuses Judd and other minimal artists of taking Greenberg literally, and thus misreading him. Greenberg writes, “Where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a Modernist is one into which one can only look, can travel through only with the eye” ("Modernist Painting" 758). The issue at stake, claims Fried, is that of spatial illusion versus optical illusion, not that of illusory space versus real space.

Despite his criticism of minimalism, Fried is appreciated as one of the first to articulate the experience of viewing minimalist work. In “Art and Objecthood,” Fried convincingly describes the context of viewing work by Judd or Morris as being in a situation that solicits the beholder and that takes time. The minimalist object’s reliance on the spectator renders it theatrical, as does its existence in time which, like a drama, must unfold. Fried states a preference for Anthony Caro’s work because of its relational character: the sculpture is not a compound object as much as it sets into play a relationship, a syntax. At any given
moment, from any given position, the work is wholly present. Even though different positions yield different views, at each moment the work is whole; it doesn’t require a circling around in order to complete the experience. Fried privileges the experience of “presentness,” and counters this to the minimalist preoccupation with presence.

Fried’s criticism that minimalism is too literalist is accused by others of furthering pictorial values. Krauss states, “Essential to the two-dimensionality of painting is the fact that its contents are available at any one time to a viewer with an immediacy and wholeness that no three-dimensional art can ever have” (Passages 200). Lucy Lippard complains that Fried “does not take into consideration fundamental differences between experiences of perceiving painting and perceiving sculpture” (quoted in Colpitt 92). In reply to these criticisms, one might point out that the artists associated with minimalism are all painters, and the questions they are working through are painterly questions; therefore, within the historical context, it seems fair to accuse an artist such as Judd as taking literally problems that are optical in nature. Consider Judd’s remark that actual space is “more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface.” Judd compares his practice to that of painting; he makes work in response to a perceived crisis in painting. Fried, however, denies that his essay intends to oppose optical experience to experience of the three-dimensional object; rather, he is interested in “what it would mean to think of art syntactically” (Fried et al Theories of Art 72). He states of the controversial essay: “So what
there isn’t in ‘Art and Objecthood’ is a reification of opticality; what there is in the text is some other kind of notion that has to do with relation and syntax—the way sculptures like Caro’s are formed and how that is different from the syntax of ordinary objects, which is the syntax hypostasized, reified and projected by minimalism” (72). Fried’s criticism and subsequent criticisms of Fried indicate that given works of art are no longer identified as either painting or sculpture, that the boundaries among mediums are blurred. This is another complaint of Fried’s, that what lies among the arts is theater. Fried’s descriptions of the experience of viewing minimalism, while serving as evidence for his critical argument, are generally considered to be accurate descriptions that clarify the objectives of minimalist work. “As this work’s most thoughtful denunciation, ‘Art and Objecthood’ was also, ironically, its canonisation,” observes Meyer. “The seal of a negative definition—the isolation and naming of the dread object, the discovery of ‘theatre’ in the visual arts—became a seal of recognition” (The Writing of ‘Art and Objecthood’ 87).

Robert Morris is interested in the work of art as evidence of a form of behavior and the experience of the spectator as the art object might affect it. In “Blank Form,” an early piece of writing, Morris states:

For as long as the form (in the broadest possible sense: situation) is not reduced beyond perception, so long as it perpetuates and upholds itself as being object in the subject’s field of vision, the subject reacts to it in many particular ways when I call it art. He reacts in other ways when I do not call it art. Art is primarily a situation in which one assumes an attitude of reacting to some of one’s awareness as art (qted. in Grenier 315). A 1965 work consists of three identical L-shaped plywood forms in different positions such that “no matter how clearly we might understand that the three L’s
are identical (in structure and dimension), it is impossible to see them as the same” (Krauss 267). In this work, Morris is drawing attention to a discrepancy between intellectual knowledge and perceptual experience:

…Morris seems to be saying [that] the “fact” of the objects’ similarity belongs to a logic that exists prior to experience; because at the moment of experience, or in experience, the Ls defeat this logic and are “different.” Their “sameness” belongs only to an ideal structure—an inner being that we cannot see. Their difference belongs to their exterior—to the point at which they surface into the public world of our experience. This “difference” is their sculptural meaning; and this meaning is dependent upon the connection of these shapes to the space of experience (267).

Morris discusses minimal work as “expand[ing] the terms of sculpture by a more emphatic focusing on the very conditions under which certain kinds of objects are seen” (Notes on Sculpture 819). There are no longer internal relations—relationship of parts; unit to unit; figure to ground. As Morris puts it, “Every internal relationship, whether it be set up by a structural division, a rich surface, or what have you, 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” (818). In contrast, minimal work puts in play a set of external relations. Morris claims:

The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some ways more reflexive because one’s awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships (818).

Morris’s interest in the embodied perception of art work is in marked contrast to the definition of modern sculpture developed in Clement Greenberg’s 1948 essay “The New Sculpture.” Using David Smith’s work as example, Greenberg
argues that modern sculpture is as visual as painting: “It has been 'liberated' from the monolithic” (Art and Culture 142). Greenberg asserts: “The human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art; now it is eyesight alone” (143). Morris’s work refutes the claim that sculpture is no longer invested in either space or the body. Of Morris’s project, Annette Michelson writes: “Morris’s questioning of a self-contained system of virtual space is impelled by the recognition of the most profound and general sense in which our seeing is linked to ourselves as being bodies in space” (43-4).

Morris’s preoccupation with the relationship between seeing and the body can be understood in terms of the philosophical work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The philosopher argues that vision—indeed perception in general—is not a disembodied activity; rather the body is integral to perception. By “body,” Merleau-Ponty means “the working, actual body.” The lived body is “an intertwining of vision and movement” (Primacy of Perception 162). The Platonic duality of mind and body is an impossibility; as Merleau-Ponty, considering the activity of the painter, muses, “Indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint” (162). Writes Merleau-Ponty, “It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings” (162). Perception, as embodied, is also subject to the effects of time. The body is not only a spatial existence but also consists of a “temporal structure” even as it is exists in a perpetual now:

Just as it is necessarily “here,” the body necessarily exists “now;” it can never become “past,” and if we cannot retain in health the living memory of sickness, or, in adult life that of our body as a child, these “gaps in memory” merely express the temporal structure of our body. At each successive instant of a movement, the preceding instant is not lost sight of. It is, as it were, dovetailed into the present, and present perception generally speaking consists in drawing together, on the basis of one’s present position, the succession of previous positions, which envelop each other (Phenomenology of Perception 162).

Merleau-Ponty’s writings were translated into English in the 1960s: Phenomenology of Perception (1945) and the art essays “Cezanne’s Doubt” and “Eye and Mind” had been translated by 1963; The Visible and the Invisible was published in 1968.25 While the writings of Merleau-Ponty are not direct influences on minimalism, the philosopher’s examination of the relationship between the lived body and perception provides terms with which to describe the work that emerged as the result of a rethinking about how art is made and a reconsideration of the role of the viewer.

Throughout Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty repeats his assertion that the body is not in space and time, but of it: “I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them” (162). This has implications for how one understands the body of the viewer in a gallery; in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, the lived body in its perception of the art work is not in the space with the work but is of the space in which the work is both in and of. Krauss, in a discussion of

25 Potts discusses the reception and influence of Merleau-Ponty, see especially Chapter 6, “The Phenomenological Turn.”
Morris’s L-beams, argues that minimalist works depend on a different understanding of the self. Morris, states Krauss,

is suggesting that the meanings we make—and express through our bodies and our gestures—are fully dependent on the other beings to whom we make them and on whose vision of them we depend for them to make sense. He is suggesting that the picture of the self as a contained whole (transparent only to itself and the truths which it is capable of constituting) crumbles before the act of connecting with other selves and minds. Morris’s L-beams serve as a certain kind of cognate for this naked dependence of intention and meaning upon the body as it surfaces into the world in every external particular of its movements and gestures—of the self understood, that is, only in experience (Passages 267).

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the relationship of the body to perceptual experience; perception is not neutral, not disembodied. And minimalist work addresses itself to a subject that is an embodied inhabitant of space and time.

While minimalism in general is characterized by an interest in spatial experience that resists spatial illusion and in the relationship between perceptual experience and the embodied viewer, specific investigations of these issues manifest themselves differently according to the artist: Judd’s focus is on wholeness—the gestalt—and the specificity of an object; Morris’s interest resides in the reciprocal relationships among object, the space it occupies, and the viewer; Andre’s preoccupation is with compositional questions arising from a resistance to internal hierarchies. Meyer describes minimalism as a debate in response to the work produced between 1963 and 1968 by Judd, Dan Flavin, Andre, Sol Lewitt, and Morris. Meyer characterizes minimalism as a “dynamic field of specific practices” which are often defined in opposition to each other.
Thus, when I place Horn’s work within the context of minimalism, I place it within a field of differences. I position Horn’s work as negotiating between Judd and Morris, and Judd and Andre.

Meyer describes the critical contexts in which Judd and Morris conceptualize their artistic practice over and against the practices of others:

Judd formulates his notion of the Specific Object as reviewer for Arts Magazine, when he is called upon to critique the practices of Morris and Truitt, among many others. By attacking their work, Judd comes to a more powerful understanding of his own position. Morris in turn formulates his art as a negative response to Judd’s. In other words, his theory of sculpture is essentially a notion of the Specific Object, an art form that is “neither painting nor sculpture” but a category in between these media. Morris instead asserts that he is making sculpture, not objects, and this leads to a remarkably different conceptualization—a different “minimalism” (4).

Meyer summarizes the major difference between Judd and Morris:

...Judd also had valorized wholeness, arguing against a visual separation of parts. The notion of the Specific Object implied that wholeness was a quality of painting and sculpture, or better yet, of both media combined. It implied that the wholeness and large scale of the most advanced “American” painting and the real space and materials of sculpture had been forged into a new hybrid. However, Morris claimed that wholeness was an integral quality of sculpture alone, for wholeness could only be seen in three dimensions. In short, Morris and Judd held quite distinct conceptions of “wholeness.” Whereas for Judd the non-relational shape embodied an epistemological attitude, a skepticism of anthropocentric “truths,” wholeness for Morris has a primarily perceptual interest—the quality he referred to as Gestalt. The Gestalt implied a wholeness known by a viewer, a wholeness seen. For the act of viewing itself, the perceptual bodily encounter, was the abiding focus of Morris’s analysis. Judd, who began as a painter rather than as a performer, was far less worried about how his works were experienced; his concern was the formal interest of the object itself (158).

Morris’s series of four articles, “Notes on Sculpture,” sets the terms of the debate surrounding the minimalist object. Meyer discusses the significance of Morris’s
writings which “developed a literal notion of sculpture at odds with the optical model of Greenberg and Fried, as well as the pictorialized Specific Object of Judd”:

Theorizing a sculpture of radically simplified shape, it conceived “wholeness” anew: the concern of “Notes on Sculpture” is not wholeness as a formal goal (the wholeness of Stella and Judd) but the experience of wholeness. Sculpture does not exist for its own sake, but to make us aware of ourselves as perceiving objects. Morris shifted the focus of debate from the empirical object of Judd, with only an implied viewer, to a sculpture orchestrated as a contingent and inextricable relationship between a subject and an object. (“The object itself has not become less important. It has become less self-important.”) He proposed a sculpture that was no longer something merely to “look at,” a work directed to vision alone, but a sculpture for a mobile and perceiving body within a larger syntactical whole (166).

While the work of Judd and Andre investigate issues that arise from a crisis in painting, the work of Morris aligns itself with the history of sculpture and his series of “Notes on Sculpture” attempts to articulate distinctions between the tactility of sculpture and the opticality of painting. He writes of painting, “If painting has sought to approach the object, it has sought equally hard to dematerialize itself on the way” (814). In contrast, sculpture has not sought a dematerialization but “the sculptural facts of space, light, and materials that have always functioned concretely and literally” (814). The debates of sculpture are not the same as those of painting; Morris writes that sculpture, “never having been involved with illusionism could not possibly have based the efforts of fifty years upon the rather pious, if somewhat contradictory, act of giving up this illusionism and approaching the object” (814).
Horn defines her practice in opposition to minimalism, but I want to clarify the nature of the minimalism that she refutes. In an early interview, she states, "Minimalist art is, in a sense, antidialectical: things are self-contained almost to the exclusion of nonideal relationships" (Saunders 120). This, then, is part of Horn’s definition of minimalism: objects are self-contained; and the dynamic of the work is not dialectical—I take this to mean that there is no tension or conflict within or among forms. In the context of this statement, Horn discusses 1979 works which consist of soft black rubber cast into wedge forms that each taper from a 12-inch thickness to a thin 2-inches. Horn positions this work in opposition to a minimalist preoccupation with self-containment:

In my early rubber floor pieces, I was attempting to formally integrate platonic notions of the ideal with the imperfections of immediate, circumstantial reality. The thicker areas of the rubber forms retain the platonic integrity of the original casting; the thinner areas are deformed by the imperfections of the floor itself. Here the interest is in the imperfections, which create the territory necessary for ideal forms to exist at all. These pieces want to exist eccentrically in the space; they could never be placed in the center. Instead, they create an imbalance that develops a centering (120).

Note the language Horn uses: it is a language of center and circumference—of eccentric existence in space. Louise Neri describes Horn’s rubber works as “half-object, half-place” (32).

In minimalism, the emphasis is less on internal issues and more on external issues. Internal issues have to do with the relationship of parts; external issues are those between object and spectator. As Colpitt points out, these issues have to do with the perceptual object as it is experienced by the spectator. In minimalism, objects are to be seen at once, not part by part (43). What Krauss
says of Andre’s work, “that internal space is literally being squeezed out of the sculptural object” (quoted in Colpitt 57), can be seen in early works by Horn. *Powdered Graphite Forms* (1976-77) consists of powdered graphite sifted directly on the floor. In *Soft Metal Amassed* (1979), three tons of scrap lead are compressed into place. In *Soft Metal Forms* (1979-80) a sheet of lead (25’ x 4’ x1/64’) is compressed into a small mass, weighing about one hundred pounds. The *Twice Compressed Lead Mat* (1980) and *Construction of a Place* (1981) (fifty thin sheets of lead hammered on top of another) indicate Horn’s interest in material and horizontality.

*Gold Field* (1980-82) consists of two pounds of gold, machine-rolled into eighteen strips, slightly thicker than gold leaf, and then compressed into a mat four by five feet. It is so thin that it doesn’t lay entirely flat but wrinkles and curls at the edges. The work appears “simultaneously as surface and mass,” notes Gilbert-Rolfe (Beyond Piety 224). Horn states that her interest in working with gold as a material had to do with the cultural value of gold that made it nearly impossible to see as material: “Here is this physical material that has been denied any material presence in the world; *Gold Field* is just literally putting it back” (Conversation). In notes on this work, published in the 1983 Kunstraum München catalogue, Horn writes and quotes the following:

“The splendor of gold keeps and holds everything present in the unconcealedness of its appearing.” Martin Heidegger, Poetry, language, thought
To attenuate a material until it approaches an adequation of surface and substance, of appearance and being.

To give the viewer back the original perception of gold: the original motive and inspirations towards metaphor and mythological invention.

A material bound up with being in the world in terms of its perceived substance, in distinction to its actual matter (Freidel 99).

*Forms from the Gold Field* (1980-82) consists of a series of permutations on the *Gold Field* that evolved from its tendency to curl and twist. What is evident is less an interest in object and more on material; the object is the result, or evidence of process with material. The photodocumentation and the description of these works emphasize the experience of great density and compression and, as Andreas Strobl puts it, “reciprocal interaction of fragility and massiveness” (116). In *Mats Paired—For Ross and Felix* (1994-5) two sheets of gold are placed one on top of the other. At the edges where the two sheets buckle and separate slightly from one another, the color is particularly bright because the two inner surfaces are reflecting off of one another, giving the impression of a hidden intense interiority. Whereas *Gold Field* is an attempt to present a materiality disrobed of cultural associations, *Gold Mats Paired* invites metaphor. The intensity and heat of the color emanating from between the mats would not have been possible without the coupling of the two forms, and the work functions as metaphor for intimacy. Certainly the title, with its dedication to the artist Felix Gonzales-Torres and his lover Ross Laycock, encourages this reading, and Horn
herself states, “the light is the gold reflecting off itself. Here is the metaphor for intimacy” (Schorr 45).

In “Sculpture in an Expanded Field,” Krauss explains postminimalist developments in sculpture as a response to the sitelessness, or homelessess, of sculpture. In the first half of the twentieth century, sculpture’s disengagement from its previous dependence on commissions and its only function, that of commemoration which tied it to the public built environment, was experienced as liberating. Sculpture wasn’t severed from site and public space, but the ties that restrained it were loosening. Rather than being placed—on a pedestal, for example—sculpture became autonomous. As Krauss put it, “the sculpture reaches downward to absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place; and through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy” (280). The space in which sculpture sat was now an ideal space, as Krauss puts it, ideal in the sense of being non-specific: “a domain cut off from the project of temporal and spatial representation” (Originality 280). On the one hand, this liberated sculpture to explore its own syntax—Constantin Brancusi’s polished surfaces “fraught with distorted patterns of light and dark reflected from the space of the room in which the object is seen” (Passages 86-7); Julio Gonzales with the introduction of welded and collaged elements; David Smith with the idea of drawing in space; Anthony Caro with the emphasis on sculpture as syntax. By mid-century, however, this ideal space started to feel restrictive. To complicate matters, minimalism in the early sixties literalized the space of painting and Judd’s
promotion of the specific object, neither painting nor sculpture, further spurred a crisis of identity. One indication of this crisis was the 1967 *Artforum* focused on the state of sculpture which included Fried’s “Art and Objecthood,” Morris’s series, “Notes on Sculpture,” and a scathing review of a large sculpture exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Krauss’s reading of this crisis involves what she refers to as sculpture’s “negative condition—a kind of sitelessness, or homelessness, an absolute loss of place” (Originality 280). Sculpture was defined by what it was not: “it was what was on or in front of a building that was not the building, or what was in the landscape that was not the landscape” (282). In Krauss’s narrative, sculptors beginning at the end of the 1960s started to explore or push the limits of not-landscape, or not-architecture, with work that expanded the field, that admitted into the field what had been denied it: architecture and landscape. A prime example of this is Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. Another artist who explores architecture plus not-architecture is Serra: “the possibility explored in this category is a process of mapping the axiomatic features of the architectural experience—the abstract conditions of openness and closure—onto the reality of a given space” (287).

Roni Horn graduated from Yale University in 1978 with a Master of Fine Arts degree, within eleven years of the *Artforum* issue devoted to sculpture. In 1986, Serra had a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. In 1986, only eight years after graduating, Horn was featured in *Art in America* as one of ten young sculptors. In this issue, Horn states: "I work instinctively towards a certain kind
of experience that I want to crystallize—and then the object comes into being. The object is not the end; what I'm interested in is the experience it provides for—how it incites and animates dialogue" (Saunders 120). Horn’s early work and statements suggest that her practice is a critique of Judd’s minimalism; but her practice does appear to work within the terms of Morris’s minimalism and Serra’s postminimalism. For example, the rubber floor pieces which, in places, take their form from the imperfections of a floor, might remind one of Serra’s *Splashing*. In fact, many of Horn’s statements echo the views stated by both Morris and Serra. Horn, coming of age as an artist in the late seventies, would have been exposed to minimalism already in critical revision. While she might consider herself to be working in opposition to minimalism, she nonetheless works within the terms generated by the minimalist debates. Horn asserts that "the making of objects as merely things that have shape in three dimensions, but [that] refuse the responsibility of existence in three dimensions" is a "gross misunderstanding of sculpture" (Thompson 35). This assertion indicates Horn’s preoccupation with many of the issues put into play by the critical debates surrounding minimalism. The terms of this responsibility are not entirely clear; but it is important to consider Horn’s Dickinson-objects as working through what this responsibility entails.

For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to consider *Keys and Cues* within the context of one of the issues central to the minimalist debate—that of the relationship between part and whole. The relationship of part to whole as
exemplified by Andre’s work has been discussed using the grammatical concept of parataxis. “Parataxis” is defined as “the joining of one simple declarative sentence to another in parallel series, usually with a conjunction (and, or, nor, but, yet, or for)” (Kinzie 443). Paratactic syntax is additive and each unit of meaning is equivalent in importance; this is in contrast to more complex syntactical structures which employ subordination. Before exhibiting as a sculptor, Andre wrote poetry influenced by Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein.

Meyer describes the effects of this influence:

The lapidary phrases of the Cantos, arranged paratactically on the page, disrupted the transparency and flow of common syntax, stressing “individual constitutive elements...the plastic and Constructivist quality of words,” and indeed Andre modeled his own poetic practice during these years...on Poundian and Steinian principles of repetition and spacing (Minimalism 127).

Paratactic structure avoids hierarchy or giving the impression of sequence; thus; it also evokes a continuous present. As a sculptor, Andre’s use of modular units is paratactic.

Horn’s series of Pair Objects might also be considered paratactic. In Pair Field, for example, each part of a pair is paratactic, and all the pairs together are paratactic. One of the differences between the parataxis of Andre’s use of modular units and the parataxis of Horn’s use of identically machined forms is that Horn’s forms do not have a corollary in the industrial world. Unlike the bricks used by Andre, Horn’s geometric forms are not ready-made forms. To see a brick in a line of bricks in a gallery is to see the bricks as bricks rather than as part of something built. The sculpture is not built as a brick wall is built; the
bricks are placed. As Meyer says, “the brick is removed from practical use, it is estranged from itself, as the Russian formalist would say” (187). In the paratactic structure of Horn’s work, the machined form of Pair Object III encountered in one room is not estranged from itself; rather, it is not fully present except as its absence is taken into account. This is another difference from the minimalism of Andre and Judd: objects are to be seen at once, not part by part. The relationship of part to whole is that each part is a whole and equivalent, but together they are perceived as a whole. Horn’s paired forms are to be perceived as object, but an object which must be perceived through time and space.

What Horn’s Pair Objects have in common with Andre is an interest in marking space rather than filling space. Unlike the Judd object or Morris, according to Meyer, “They [Andre’s works] did not so much fill space as mark it.....cairns directing the body through the gallery space” (196). The columns of Keys and Cues mark space; they too are cairns that direct the body through space—we must turn and locate a position from which to read the column. But they also direct the viewer to the space of the page on which one has read or might read the Dickinson poem. Horn takes one of the concerns of the Pair Object, which is to critique wholeness through temporally perceived doubled forms, but instead of using two duplicate forms, she pairs one of her geometric forms with another that exists in a space parallel to the gallery space—that of the page. With Pair Object, before one form, one must hold in abeyance that other form. With Keys and Cues, before one column, one holds in abeyance the
existence of the words in not just another space but also another form, typography on a page.

Krauss describes Andre’s floor plates as having “no appearance of inside or center” because they are “coextensive with the very floor on which the viewer stands” (272). Horn’s forms do have an inside, but it’s an inside that is transparent and literal. The letter forms of the Horn column go all the way through the form; they are not surface; and this is important because it means that the letters appear in reverse on one side; thus the column has clear front and back and sides—its geometry is not neutral; not all sides are equally legible. There is no interiority implied, however, as there is, for example, in a Michelangelo sculpture. Nonetheless, interiority is evoked by, for example, the words, “The brain is wider than the sky.” While rejecting sculptural interiority, Horn’s work is allied to an interiority assumed by the words. Minimalism cast attention away from the artist and the cult of personality onto the viewer. Horn, however, sets within the austere geometries of the object the words of a revered poet. The minimalist rhetoric used to deflect attention away from content, from object, back onto the viewer, teases the viewer with words to which the Dickinson personality is attached.

In “The Crux of Minimalism,” Hal Foster writes that, with minimalism, sculpture was repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of place. In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular
intervention in a given site. This is the fundamental reorientation that minimalism inaugurates (Return 38).

*Keys and Cues* does this as well; but the viewer is also repositioned as a Dickinson reader. A viewer at the end of the twentieth century is used to encountering objects in situations; to be thrown back onto one’s self; to encounter objects or situations in gallery spaces that make one suddenly conscious of oneself as a viewer and as a viewer that is embodied—a central legacy of minimalism that was accomplished through the “lack of experiencing content.” This lack, in the words of Colpitt, “for[ed] the spectator to locate the meanings of the work within the experiencing self rather than within the object” (88-9). What is baffling about the Horn work is that the austere geometries are not without content—content as constituted by the words attributed to Dickinson. However, the words themselves lack the form or incident which we associate with Dickinson; they are greatly reduced in visual incident even as they are magnified in terms of size and proportion, becoming things in and of themselves. Thus, by presenting Dickinson in this way, we become the place wherein the meaning is located, within ourselves as viewer-turned-reader.

Horn’s Dickinson-columns possess the integrity and self-sufficiency of an entity and yet they are at the same time a block with which to build—but the building must be done by the viewer, and in the viewer’s head. It’s not that the viewer must complete the work, because the work—Horn’s work—is complete; but the Dickinson poem is not. Horn does not compromise minimalist concerns: there is no illusion; space is actual; visual incident is minimal; there is no mark of
the hand; there is nothing that could be characterized as expressive. The placement of material is more important than construction; the work is non-hierarchical; it resists appearance of manipulation; it doesn’t grant importance to interior space of forms; it is not pictorial. The minimum of incident is meant to keep the viewer present to his experience as a viewer in the gallery space. Douglas Crimp, in talking about how the minimalist object—geometric, repeated—made the viewer’s relationship different, wrote, “Such a reorientation of the perceptual experience of art made the viewer, in effect, the subject of the work” (qtd. in Suderburg 5). Following this, I would assert that not only is the Horn viewer the subject, but the subject is also the Dickinson reader. On the one hand, Horn’s Dickinson-columns have the specificity and geometry associated with the minimalist object. On the other hand, they are quotations. One quotes to do one of three things: (1) to repeat a phrase that is memorable and can’t be paraphrased: (2) to call into question or distance one’s self from a term; or (3) to align oneself, one’s own work or values, with those of the quotation. Horn, by quoting Dickinson, is in a sense repeating something memorable but within the context of her own sculptural values, and she is aligning her sculptural values with those of the works from which the quotations are taken—not the content of Dickinson, however, but the particularity. From the perspective of a viewer with experience of minimalism, this is interesting: the wholeness of the Horn column subverts the autonomy or wholeness of the object, because it throws onto one lines from somewhere else. It extends the object, but not by interiority or by depth. From the perspective of a Dickinson
reader, these columns look wrong; the appearance of the lines, their situation, are so antithetical to one’s history of experiencing Dickinson that one is continually drawn back to the fact of one’s situation as a viewer. The question is whether the experience of wrongness belongs to the Horn object and indicates a misreading and thus we can dismiss these columns; or whether our experience of the wrongness is a misreading of the Horn object. Perhaps, too, the wrongness is located in the cultural assumptions and perceptions of what counts as “Dickinson.” What we are looking at is a reading of Dickinson, and it’s a reading of Dickinson that offers not insight into Dickinson but throws Dickinson, the responsibility for our relationship with Dickinson, back onto ourselves. At the moment that it is thrown onto the reader, it is thrown onto us as a viewer; we are left to juggle our experience as being in the white cube of the gallery and also the white page of the, for most of us, Johnson edition of the poems.  

Part of the tension of Horn’s Dickinson-work is that the characteristics associated with minimalism—accessible, direct, public—are at odds with our impulse to privatize Dickinson.

“To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee”: this is a poem about the power of imagination, as Suzanne Juhasz argues. She writes:

> action is set in the mind and not somewhere in Kansas, that in this recipe we are concerned with prairie-ness and not an instance of it….A prairie in the world of nature cannot be composed from one clover and one bee, but the idea of prairie can (Undiscovered Continent 50).

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26 The "white cube of the gallery" is Brian O’Doherty’s term for the modernist concept of the gallery as a “white, ideal space.” See Inside the White Cube; The Ideology of the Gallery Space.
One might say, after reading Dickinson on the Horn object, that to generate a Dickinson poem it takes the first line and a reader. Of course the Dickinson poem cannot be constructed from a first line that exists outside the context of the *Collected Poems* and is isolated in the space of the gallery, but the idea of the Dickinson poem can. This idea, cast in the language of Horn, is both particular and contingent on an absence. In Letter 587, Dickinson writes, “To the faithful Absence is condensed presence.” The word “faithful” in this quote is generally read as a noun, but considering it for a moment as adjective, one might consider that it is a faithful Absence that is paired to condensed presence—the absence, for example, of the pair object is faithful not in and of itself but as perceived by the viewer. Horn constructs a work in which the viewer’s faithfulness to Dickinson is called into question; one is troubled by this work because it betrays the memory of Dickinson on the page—“faithful” as synonymous with loyal, constant, true, close, accurate, exact. The absence of Dickinson in Horn is a condensed presence. For all of its obdurate physicality and placement of Dickinson’s words “among essential furnishings,” one experiences the Horn object as absence—absence of Dickinson—but, as I argue in the next chapter, the Horn object is a marking of the faithful Absence of the Dickinson poem.
Roni Horn’s series *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* (1993) consists of six works; each work presents one Dickinson poem as an arrangement of aluminum columns leaning against the wall. Of Horn’s Dickinson-related works, this series is the only one that uses Dickinson poems in their entirety. In museum presentations of *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes*, no more than three works are exhibited together, emphasizing that, as with the series *Keys and Cues*, each work in the series is to be considered an autonomous work; thus, the circumference of a given Dickinson poem rivals the circumference of a given Horn work. This chapter focuses on the dynamics of reading the Dickinson poem on—and as—the Horn object. My argument is that *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* is not only a reading of Dickinson but also a doubling of Dickinson. In the first part of this chapter, discussions of three Dickinson poems as they appear in the Johnson edition are each followed by examinations of these same poems as three-dimensional objects; an appreciation of Horn’s series hinges on the contrast between reading the Dickinson poem on the page and reading it as

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27 My use of the phrase “in their entirety” should be qualified: Horn’s presentation of a given poem consists of those lines that appear in Thomas H. Johnson’s 1955 reading edition of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*; it does not acknowledge the poet’s practice of including “variants”—words or phrases listed at the end of a poem which may be substituted for those within the poem. On Dickinson’s use of variants as a critique of wholeness, see Sharon Cameron, *Choosing, Not Choosing: Dickinson’s Fascicles*. 
an arrangement of aluminum columns. Establishment of the difference between reading Dickinson and doubling Dickinson is developed through a comparison of *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* to Dickinson-inspired works by United States artists Joseph Cornell and Lesley Dill. The relationship of *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* to the artist’s ongoing use of doubling strategies to investigate the limits of sculpture is the focus of the second part of this chapter.²⁸

Threat as a reminder of one’s mortality is the premise of Dickinson’s poem, “The Soul’s distinct connection” (J 974, F 901):

> The Soul’s distinct connection  
> With immortality  
> Is best disclosed by Danger  
> Or quick Calamity—

> As Lightning on a Landscape  
> Exhibits Sheets of Place—  
> Not yet suspected—but for Flash—  
> And Click—and Suddenness.

The truism is less interesting than the analogy developed in the second quatrain: the experience of danger is to the soul what a bolt of lightning is to the landscape: it illuminates, suddenly and sharply. The Christian promise of “immortality” is compared to “Sheets of Place:” Christ overcomes the nothingness of death as lightning creates a lighted spot in formless dark. The poem suggests that both danger and darkness occasion insight. However—to continue the analogy—“Sheets of Place” quickly return to darkness and one’s “distinct connection / With immortality” softens once threatening conditions pass.

²⁸ A portion of this chapter was published as “Roni Horn and Emily Dickinson: The Poem as Place,” *Women’s Studies; An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 31. 6 (Nov. – Dec. 2002) 759-767.
The abruptness of danger is underscored by the poet’s use of the dash: it occurs at the end of first quatrain and four times in the last three lines of the poem. The capitalization of “Flash,” “Click,” and the poem’s last word, “Suddenness,” also contributes to the reader’s experience of abruptness.

The poet does not refer to lightning in a landscape but to lightning on a landscape: lightning is described not as an event within the landscape but as a force outside of it. In an 1859 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Oliver Wendell Holmes employs lightning as a metaphor when considering the use of photography to document war:

> The time is perhaps at hand when a flash of light, as sudden and brief as that of the lightning which shows a whirling wheel standing stock still, shall preserve the very instant of the shock of contact of the mighty armies that are even now gathering. The lightning from heaven does actually photograph natural objects on the bodies of those it has just blasted—so we are told by many witnesses (qtd. in Frank 10).

Much of the vocabulary used in “The Soul’s distinct connection” is associated with painting and photography. The term “landscape” is inextricably linked to painting; during Dickinson’s lifetime, landscape painting in the United States was at the height of its popularity. Dickinson’s brother was an avid collector of painting, and the poet’s experience of landscape was conditioned by looking at paintings as well as by reading John Ruskin. The verb ascribed to lightning is “exhibits,” and place is perceived in “sheets.” The word “sheet” refers to any broad continuous surface or a thin piece of any material, but its use in the poem evokes a surface for representation because it directly follows the verb
“exhibits.” The linking of the onomatopoetic “flash” and “click” to the exhibition of “Sheets of Place” suggests the flash of the camera which develops the momentary. This reading is supported by a consideration of the poem’s variants: the poet lists the verb “developes” as a substitution for “exhibits” (F 901). In addition, the word “quick”—used in the poem to describe calamity—was a technical term associated with photography. Thus, the second quatrain yields another analogy: the experience of danger is to the soul what a bolt of lightning is to the landscape; and a bolt of lightning is to the landscape what the flash of a camera is to its subject: it illuminates, suddenly and sharply. The flash of the camera renders permanent—“immortal”—what is momentary, as Christ renders immortal a life otherwise impermanent. The poem, pairing the metaphysical and the palpable, pivots on oppositions: eternity is known in an instant; the instant begets an immortality. The off-rhyme pairing of “place” and “suddenness” emphasizes the contradiction.

Horn presents “The Soul’s distinct connection” as a series of eight aluminum columns propped against the wall. As with the columns in the Keys and Cues series, solid plastic letters extend all the way through each 2” by 2” aluminum column such that if one were to turn the column around, one would see the line in reverse; the top and bottom of each letter, all of which are capitalized, is flush with the edge; and where the top and bottom of a letter meet the edge, horizontal bands are formed on the sides that, depending on placement, may

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29 For a discussion of Austin Dickinson’s art collection as well as Emily Dickinson’s reading of Ruskin, see St. Armand, and Farr.
interfere with the legibility of the poetic line. The columns do not all face out; some are turned in reverse; some are facing either to the left or to the right. The columns are propped at different angles; some are nearly flush with the wall; others extend into the viewer’s space.

The first line—THE SOUL’S DISTINCT CONNECTION—faces sideways, to the viewer’s left, and is nearly flush with the wall against which it leans. The second line—WITH IMMORTALITY—faces front, and leans against the wall at a much greater angle such that it intrudes into the viewer’s space; it is read from the floor up. The third line—IS BEST DISCLOSED BY DANGER—faces front, but the line must be read from the top down. The last line of the quatrain— OR QUICK CALAMITY—is, like the first line, turned on its side so that the viewer must move back and to the left in order to read it. Thus, in order to read this particular quatrain, the viewer must: position her body to the left and side of the work in order to read the first line; move to the front of the piece and cock one’s head to the left in order to read the second line; move slightly to the right and re-cock one’s head to the right in order to read the third line; move to the left again and peer sideways, into the work, in order to read the short last line of the quatrain.

The arrangement of the second quatrain is such that the columns are closer together. The column AS LIGHTNING ON A LANDSCAPE faces the viewer and is almost flush to the wall, but the second column, EXHIBITS SHEETS OF PLACE, faces left, is read from top to bottom, and is propped at an angle such

30 According to Adam Frank, “quick” referred to the gloss on albumen paper (3).
that the word PLACE is much more in the viewer's space, but EXHIBITS is
shadowed by the first line. The tallest column, NOT YET SUSPECTED—BUT
FOR FLASH—, is read from bottom to top, but it is more difficult to read because
the column is turned all the way around and one must read the line in reverse.
The last line, AND CLICK—AND SUDDENNESS, is propped at the greatest
angle; it faces one and is read from top to bottom such that the last line
SUDDENNESS advances into the viewer's space.

In order to read Horn's poem-object, one must frequently shift position. The
line break—which is so critical to the pace of a poem and counters the logic of
the sentence—is a more abrupt parting in Horn's presentation. The lines don't
just break but turn in space. Each line commands our bodies a little differently,
emphasizing the autonomy of the individual line (or column) at the expense of
the poem (or arrangement) as a whole. Because Dickinson's syntax postpones
and suspends resolution, one's sense of the work as a whole continually shifts
during the process of reading. This finds its spatial parallel in the ways in which
the legibility of a given line changes, in some cases radically, because of the
changing relationship of the horizontal striations to the vertical read of the poem.
Each line read, as it compels us to alter our position, changes our perception of
the poem's configuration.

It takes more time to read the poem as sculptural object than it does to read
the poem on the page. Those stylistic characteristics which evoke disjunction
and suddenness in the poem—hyphens, capitalization of nouns, the pairing of
oppositions through rhymes and off-rhymes ("Immortality" and "Calamity"; “Place
and Suddenness”) are less apparent because of the uniformity of the columns. What is foregrounded in Horn’s presentation is an intractability of language that demands the physical engagement of the viewer. The poem on the page is not on exhibit; thus, one does not make an immediate comparison between the poem in space and the poem on the page. Although one’s physical response might echo a remembered reading experience—bafflement; turning among lines—one doesn’t encounter representation of the poem’s content. That the column WITH IMMORTALITY intrudes into the viewer’s space and the column OR QUICK CALAMITY is turned away from the viewer, or that the column IS BEST DISCLOSED BY DANGER must be read from top to bottom and the column NOT YET SUSPECTED—BUT FOR FLASH— is read from bottom to top, has less to do with the meaning of a given column’s words and more to do with choreographing the reading experience of the Dickinson poem. In other words, by turning the column OR QUICK CALAMITY sideways, Horn is not offering an interpretation of that particular line or of the nature of calamity in general; rather, the Horn object is physically enacting the syntactical difficulty of Dickinson’s lines. In Horn’s presentation, the “poem” resists the reader: it doesn’t face the viewer-turned-reader. One must move back and forth among the columns to track the poem. The horizon of the poem, its legibility, continually shifts.

Horizon—the furthest point of visibility—is the central image of Dickinson’s poem, “These tested Our Horizon” (J 886, F 934):

These tested Our Horizon—
Then disappeared
As Birds before achieving
A Latitude.

Our Retrospection of Them
A fixed Delight,
But our Anticipation
A Dice—a Doubt—

The “Delight” of remembering is contrasted with the “Doubt” of anticipation. The past, although absent, is of more comfort because it is “fixed;” the present is uncomfortable because it remains unfixed. The experience of space (behind, ahead) is conflated with the experience of time (looking back, anticipation). Yet it is only in the present that one is embodied and so occupies space. This is a point made by Sharon Cameron in her discussion of Dickinson’s proleptic utterances: “Only the present has a sure space of its own” (Lyric 134). Cameron revisits St. Augustine’s point about any experience of time being an experience of the present: “the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future” (133). The present, in Cameron’s words, is “that fulcral moment that not only arbitrates between past and future but that also embodies them” (134). In this poem, the pivot between past and future is compared to the experience of visibility and non-visibility at a horizon. Birds “achieving / A Latitude” is an analogy for who or what is absent in the narrator’s life. The bird’s achievement is equated with non-visibility, and loss for the narrator. It is the momentary visibility that is associated with the past and its stability, whereas non-visibility, not-seeing, is associated with the present and instability. The moment that one sees is the moment that has passed.
In Horn’s presentation of the poem, the first column, THESE TESTED OUR HORIZON, cannot be seen when facing the work head on; it faces left and is read top to bottom. Head on, one sees a column of striations with a short column in front of it, propped against not the wall but the first line; this reads, THEN DISAPPEARED. The next column faces one, is read from bottom to top, and states, AS BIRDS BEFORE ACHIEVE. To complete that thought, one must cock the head and read a short column, from top to bottom, that states, A LATITUDE. A considerable space must be crossed, or sidled, in order to centrally face the second quatrain. OUR RETROSPECTION OF THEM reads from top to bottom in reverse. A FIXED DELIGHT, read top to bottom, faces one and extends a bit more into the viewer’s space. The column, BUT OUR ANTICIPATION, can’t be seen unless one moves to the left and reads it from top to bottom. The first two columns of the quatrain are close together, with more space between the second and third lines. There is even greater space between the third and last line, A DICE—A DOUBT--; this column must be read from top to bottom, faces the viewer, and extends even more into the viewer’s space.

In reading the poem on Horn’s columns, the viewer is continually moving forward or turning back in order to keep the lines on his or her side of the horizon. The viewer’s body is the fulcrum that arbitrates among lines and so also embodies them. The body of the reader does not absent itself; and so the experience of reading, because embodied, might be said to generate, in Cameron’s words, “a sure space of its own” (134).
The intractability of Horn’s columns is most acute in the artist’s presentation of “My Heart upon a little Plate” (J 1027, F 1039):

My Heart upon a little Plate
Her Palate to delight
A Berry or a Bun, would be,
Might it an Apricot!

This is a light poem about expressing love through food; the quatrain may have accompanied a gift of fruit. In Horn’s presentation, however, the gesture is perplexing. Columns are propped at the apex of a corner, as if four tools hurriedly propped in a broom closet. The first two columns face outward and must be read from bottom to top; the third, A BERRY OR A BUN, WOULD BE, is propped at the least angle and its last two words WOULD BE are shadowed. The last line MIGHT IT AN APRICOT! is in reverse. I refer to this as the “last” line but I’m not sure it would be entirely accurate to refer to it as the last column. Because the columns are propped in the same corner, there isn’t a clear sequence unless we follow the sequence of the poem on the page (which isn’t posted at the gallery presentation of Horn’s work). An examination of the installation photograph suggests that the column representing the last line may have been propped first, the third line second, the second line third, and the first line last. In this particular arrangement, Horn’s presentation baffles sequence. The line, HER PALATE TO DELIGHT, because of the angle at which it is propped, appears to be the most legible and may in fact be the first line one reads (as a viewer). Many of Dickinson’s poems are sequence-frustrating due to

syntactical ambiguity; however, in this particular poem, the lines are syntactically straightforward. This is not a confusing poem on the page, although it is confusing as an arrangement of columns. This suggests that Horn’s presentation evokes the general experience of reading Dickinson’s poems rather than a reading of a particular poem. Although the experience of the Horn work requires reading a particular poem as an arrangement of columns, one is not reading an interpretation of a particular poem.

There are six poems re-presented in the series *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes*: “The Soul’s distinct connection”; “These tested Our Horizon”; “My Heart upon a little Plate”; “Perhaps I asked too large” (J 352, F 358); “Size circumscribes—It has no room” (J 641, F 707); and “Peace is a fiction of our Faith” (J 912, F 971). The poems take a metaphysical or psychological experience and render it in palpable terms: awareness of mortality happens like a flash of lightning; memory and anticipation are like birds moving in and out of view at the horizon; love offers itself to the beloved like an edible sweet; grasping for knowledge is like berry-picking; the mind’s expansiveness limits one’s tolerance for the mundane like the giant for whom furniture is “petty;” the comfort of faith is like church bells on a winter night. With the exception of “My Heart upon a little Plate,” all of the poems are about experiences that exceed the perceptual limitations of the body. Horn’s title for the series, *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes*, alludes to Dickinson’s remark in a letter that “to close my eyes is
to travel.” Dickinson’s poems in general abound in spatial metaphors that contrast the limitations of physical space with the expanses of psychic space. Thus, it might seem contradictory to take work that examines the life of the mind—those experiences of the brain that are wider than the sky, as Dickinson puts it in another poem—and recast it as aluminum columns that put the poem firmly in the world and grounds the reader in her body. The paradox of Dickinson, however, is that the poems, while mapping the expanses of interiority, would not be adequately experienced by shutting one’s eyes and listening to a recitation of the words. Syntactical constructions and dashes that resist sequence and promote simultaneity demand that the reader frequently re-trace her path through the poem, a spiraling in and out of meaning rather than a forward thrust through the poem. In addition, studies of the poet’s manuscripts indicate that Dickinson worked with a heightened awareness of the poem’s material context.

Susan Howe was one of the first to insist that reading Dickinson in manuscript was crucial to understanding Dickinson’s artistic practice. As she put it: “In the precinct of Poetry, a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence, or sound, volatizes an inner law of form—moves on a rigorous line” (These Flames 147). Between 1858 and 1864, Dickinson copied over eight hundred of her poems onto stationary and then stitched them together

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32 See Horn’s short prose piece, “When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes,” in Making Being Here Enough (55-6).
33 See “Some Notes on Visual Intentionality in Emily Dickinson,” and “These Flames and Generosities of the Heart: Emily Dickinson and the Illogic of Sumptuary Values.”
to form booklets, referred to as fascicles.\textsuperscript{34} There are forty bound fascicles, and fifteen unbound sets. According to Marta Werner, the earlier fascicles appear neat—poems fit on the page—and there are no “ambiguities”; by the 1860s, however, the fascicles “take on the character of a workshop: variant word choices appear in abundance, and the almost habitual quatrain of the early work is ruptured and transformed under the pressures of a new vision” (2). Werner’s edition of facsimiles of Dickinson’s late writings makes visible “Dickinson’s relationship to the edge, indicating the ways in which an inscription is at times shaped by the contours of the writing surface itself—by the seal of an envelope, for instance, or by the jagged edge of a scrap of stationary” (51-2). Werner reaffirms Howe’s point that “Dickinson’s late writings continually reopen the field of visual-verbal exchange in order to explore the links between inscription, accident, and revisioning” (23). The fascicles and Dickinson’s late writings suggest that the poet came to ignore the printed page as an ideal or end point.

Martha Nell Smith states:

The material record made by Dickinson shows that she began to focus more and more on the possibilities afforded by the manuscript page and began to exploit more fully the details of scriptural corporealization—lineation not bound to patterns and variation of conventional meters, calligraphic orthography freed from the regulations of typography, angled marks of punctuation likewise liberated from the typographical settings of the en- and em-dash, alternative word choices extricating readers from editorial predeterminations, handcrafted units shaped and situated to incorporate (or consciously transform) page design into the work of making meaning. In other words, as she wrote more and more, producing hundreds of poems, letters, and letter-poems, Emily Dickinson began to render her poetic embodiments in terms of her holograph and cottage

\textsuperscript{34} See Franklin, \textit{The Editing of Emily Dickinson: A Reconsideration} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).
industry rather than in terms of typography and the publishing industry (Corporealizations 196).

One of the implications of the recent reconsideration of the manuscript poems is that, as Smith points out, scholars “do not agree on the location of the object ‘Dickinson poem’” (195). In addition, the fascicles raise the question, according to Cameron, of “the nature of the relation between poem and text”:

That is, there is the ‘text’ that is the document; there is the ‘text that is the poem as the published or, in Dickinson’s case, publishable entity; and there is the more contemporary sense of ‘text,’ which is what the poem becomes as ‘read.’ In Dickinson’s case the contemporary or semiotic nature of ‘text’ depends on the text as document. It specifically depends on the felt ladenness of the document’s alternatives in some exacerbated way (Choosing 42).

The location of the poem is also problematic because of Dickinson’s practice of including variants, a practice that seems to have started about midway in the fascicle-making process. The variants are words, usually listed at the end of the poem, that are offered as alternatives to words within the poem. The words for which there are variants are marked with a small cross above the first letter. A fascicle is the most finished state in which one encounters a Dickinson manuscript, and the fact that variants occur in fascicle-poems suggests that these were not simply notes toward possible revisions but were indeed a part of the finished poem. This assumption is also reinforced by the fact that a given poem’s list of variants occurs above the horizontal flourish that marks the poem’s conclusion. The variants are words which exist both outside the poem and yet may be said to be part of it, thus complicating the reader’s experience of what
constitutes a work by Dickinson and rendering the identification of a single, final poem impossible.  

Given the issues raised by the manuscripts and the poet's practice of supplying variants, Horn's extraction of Dickinson's words from the page of Johnson's edition is not necessarily a violation of the place of the poem. Indeed, there is no agreed place of the Dickinson poem. I am not suggesting that Horn is aware of the debates surrounding Dickinson's manuscripts or that she is consciously working within an arena informed by discussion of the variants and the materiality of Dickinson's page. Rather, I simply want to point out that Horn's presentation is not grossly inconsistent with Dickinson's own attitude toward the poem as an open and shifting entity. Dickinson's resistance to finalizing the poem is reinforced by studies of Dickinson's material practices, but this open attitude is also apparent to a reader of the Johnson edition: the use of syntactical ambiguity and frequently omitted centers render the poem as a place that is porous and demands active engagement on the part of the reader.

Horn's presentation is not an attempt to objectify the poem, or to turn it into a specific object; rather, the poem as an arrangement of columns is placed within a nexus of relations that include Dickinson's words, Horn's aluminum columns, the gallery space, the viewer's body, and the viewer's prior experience of Dickinson. This embodiment of the reading process of the poems, this reading as motivation of the body, appears, on the face of it, to be contradictory. The task Horn seems to be setting for herself is one which runs counter to the

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35 This is Cameron's argument in *Choosing Not Choosing.*
reading experience. The reading experience is characterized by the absenting of the body, by the forgetfulness of one's surroundings. In order to read a passage of text with ease, words themselves, as discrete objects, must not be visible as such. Although the book as object and the reader share the same space, one couldn't say that the poem or the story and the reader's body share the same space. The very layout of the book resists the intrusion of the environment into one's reading experience. Margins, for example, function to keep eye movements from straying. In contrast, Horn creates a situation in which spatial experience and reading experience occur simultaneously, which is to say that the body as the ground of sculptural experience also becomes the ground of the reading experience.

Horn puts Dickinson's language in the world in such a way that it interacts with the viewer's own presence. Rather than simply picturing or representing the tensions present in the Dickinson work, Horn uses three-dimensional objects to double Dickinson's work. This assertion of doubling will be developed in the latter part of this chapter. First, in order to underscore this difference between doubling Dickinson and representing Dickinson, I want to compare Horn's series When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes to the Dickinson-inspired works of the United States artists Joseph Cornell and Lesley Dill. I am not arguing that Horn's work is a more successful adaptation than either Cornell's or Dill's. The purpose of these comparisons is: (1) to point out the difference between reading and viewing Dickinson-inflected visual work; and (2) to point out the difference
between the poem as presence in Horn's work and the poem as evoked in the work of Cornell and Dill.

In the 1930s, the United States artist Joseph Cornell began making collages and assemblages that were placed in boxes. He was influenced by Surrealist collage, in particular an exhibition of Max Ernst’s collages at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1931. Cornell frequented secondhand bookshops and junk shops as he built an extensive collection of images and objects—postcards, stamps, game pieces, stuffed birds, illustrated books, old magazines—with which he assembled his boxes. Many of the boxes recall the stage, as Robert Hughes points out: “the ‘fourth wall’ of each box, the glass through which one looks at what is going on inside, is a miniature proscenium arch” (257). The boxes also remind one, as Hughes states, of the specimen-cabinet—a filing system, sealed off from ordinary space, in which delicate, exotic, or precious samples of an actual world (fossils, gems, butterflies, or scarab-beetles) are laid out under glass, as classified sets, so that their ordering suggests a wider organization outside the ‘frame.’ In short, the box was an exceptionally convincing way of focusing an image and presenting it as both real and private: plainly in view, but protected from the embrowning air of real life by its glass pane (257).

Cornell himself, in a diary entry, suggested yet another way to see the box-form: "perhaps a definition of a box could be as a kind of ‘forgotten game,’ a philosophical toy of the Victorian era, with poetic or magical ‘moving parts,’ achieving even slight measure of this poetry or magic...that golden age of the toy alone should justify the ‘box’s’ existence” (Ades 29).

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Cornell created at least ten boxes inspired by the work and life of Emily Dickinson. David Porter recounts the story of Cornell’s preoccupation with Dickinson which began when Cornell came across Marsden Hartley’s chapter on Dickinson in the 1921 *Adventures in the Arts*. A journal entry indicates that Cornell identified with the poet’s seclusion and her notion of ‘travelling’—and he relates this to his own “‘voyaging’ through’ materials” (201). Journal entries indicate that Cornell’s fascination with Dickinson was spurred by two contemporary studies of Dickinson, and that these secondary sources on her life may have been as inspiring as the poems. For example, the 1953 box “Toward the Blue Peninsula” alludes, in its title, to poem J 405, F 535, but Porter argues that the source for Cornell was most probably a passage in a contemporary biography that used the image of the blue peninsula to refer to the Italy of a hypothetical lover of Dickinson’s. A journal entry notes the first time Cornell encountered the daguerreotype of Dickinson as reproduced in a book which he flipped through at a secondhand shop, adding in his journal that the experience was also noteworthy for the context in which he saw it: “these surroundings...countless browsings” (qtd. in Porter 203).

Porter points out that there was a surge of interest in Dickinson from 1945 onward with which Cornell attempted to keep up. Cornell met Jay Leyda in 1952. During the fifties, Leyda—in the process of writing his two volume *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*—regularly supplied Cornell with lists of the Dickinson “scraps” that he encountered: clippings, collaged cards, drawings and
pasted found images in her letters, jottings on discarded bills, receipts, invitations, and, in one instance, the back of a wrapper for chocolate. Cornell constructed eight boxes that used wrappers from the same brand of chocolate—Chocolat Menier—that supplied Dickinson with scrap paper on which to draft a poem (Porter). Carter Ratcliffe’s interpretation of Cornell’s frequent use of the Chocolate Menier wrapper was that it was, for Cornell, “a sign of spiritual affinity” with Dickinson (50). (Because Cornell himself had a sweet tooth and had been familiar with this brand of chocolate, his discovery that a Dickinson poem had been written on the back of a Chocolate Menier wrapper was experienced as a connection to the poet.) Cornell “cultivate[d] obliqueness,” states Ratcliff. “The very slightness of this link seems to have made it precious to Cornell” (50).

After seeing two holograph manuscripts at an exhibition at the Morgan Library in New York, Cornell wrote the following in a letter to his sister: “That sunny day in an after-church ‘wandering’ mood I thought of collage & poetics and how all kinds of possibilities might be worked out stemming from such a mood as this, just keeping busy with cutting up, keeping an eagle eye out for correspondences, combinations, etc. etc” (qtd. in Porter 213). Porter discusses the characteristics of the work, with its juxtapositions of fragile images of the past with objects of the city. Porter connects the two artists in terms of their solitude and independence as well as an “array of practices” (214). In the 1952 Chocolate Menier box, a bird behind a partition stands for the reclusive poet. One can’t see the bird, but a string is looped from behind the partition hiding the bird and is tied to a nail at the top of the box; the chocolate wrapper pasted at
the center of the box’s visible half is the only evidence of the poet’s presence. Porter writes of a shared “aesthetics of spatial form, tiny and infinite in the same instant” (221). Porter states of Cornell’s Dickinson-inspired works: “He reproduces the means of her art: the compactness, the spontaneity and secretiveness, and the surprise” (221). Cornell’s works allude less often to specific poems than to the poet’s creative process. Cornell’s “Gold Ball Box” (1959) is accompanied by a note that reads “As tho made by E.D.”

Lesley Dill, of the same generation as Horn, uses Dickinson as source for performance pieces, sculpture, and works on paper. Like Horn, Dill uses both fragments from the work as well as entire poems. Dill’s *White Poem Dress*, from 1993, reproduces the Dickinson poem, “This world is not conclusion” (F 373). The page of the poem has been replaced by a three-dimensional dress form constructed of painted metal and plaster, roughly fifty-five inches in height. The work is not a presentation of the poem to read but is rendered as an image—a white dress—and suggests the tension between the constraints of Dickinson’s gender and the act of writing. The writing is dependent on the dress form—the dress provides the shape or ground on which the writing conforms. The words, however, pierce the dress form, exposing the absence of the body underneath.

In Dill’s *Word Made Flesh* (“The SOUL has Bandaged Moments”), from 1994, the first line of J 512, F 360. runs down the spine of a woman sitting with her

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37 This is reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, *Language as Object: Emily Dickinson and Contemporary Art*, ed. Susan Danly.
back to the viewer. Dill's composition suggests an ambiguity between the perception of the writing as a marring of the body, and the possibility that the writing serves as some form of bandaging. The words may be wounds; or the words may serve as the bandaging of wounds. This, as an interpretation of Dickinson, pictures the dual nature of writing to both reveal and hide.

Dill's work pictures the tensions in Dickinson's work as those of a female body being pierced or otherwise inscribed by language that is itself pressured and contorted by both the limits of nineteenth century gender expectations and the need for secrecy. The viewer of these works experiences Dill's historically astute and evocative interpretation of Dickinson's writing, but it wouldn't be accurate to say that the viewer experiences the Dickinson poem itself. One is not meant to read these as poems. The poem is subject, but it is not structure.

Cornell's works express an affinity for the Dickinson manuscript (as evidence of her working process). Dill's work is moved by the poet’s biography. Horn, however, is resistant to both these forms of knowledge—the biographical and the indexical—in favor of an interest in the phenomenology of reading. In contrast to the Dickinson-inspired works of Cornell and Dill, the Horn objects might be said to double Dickinson because the place created by these objects is not only a reading of Dickinson but also a place in which the viewer of Horn reads Dickinson. And this reading is not passive. The viewer of *When* ..

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38. This is also reproduced in *Language as Object*, where it is described as a photolithograph with etching on tea-stained Japanese mulberry paper, sewn with blue thread. It is from *A Word Made Flesh*, a set of four prints (Arms, Back, Front, Throat), all four of which are owned by the Mead Art Museum, Amherst College.
Dickinson Shut Her Eyes must negotiate the presence of the three-dimensional poem and the absence of the poem-on-the-page. The viewer must also negotiate the contrast between her assumptions about the Dickinson poem and the geometric severity of Horn’s presentation. To read the Horn object as Dickinson-inflected is to be drawn into a relationship between object and memory and body, a relationship that tests the viewer’s own version of what Cornell calls the Dickinson experience.

II.

In the above section, the relevance of Horn’s work to Dickinson’s work is considered; Horn’s series When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes is placed within the context of the Dickinson poem itself and other creative adaptations of Dickinson. However, Horn’s series raises a question about the limits of something counting as a poem and as sculpture. In this section, I reverse the terms of the issue and ask, What does Dickinson’s work have to do with Horn’s work? The aim is to provide a context for understanding Horn’s turn to Dickinson as an extension of sculptural preoccupations.

Horn’s series When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes was conceived in the last decade of the twentieth century at a time when sculpture, influenced by the debates surrounding minimalism, was rethinking its understanding of space and the conditions of viewing. In Rosalind Krauss’s narrative of twentieth-century sculpture, minimalism is not only a radical development in the history of
sculpture but it is also a renewal of the thinking of two crucial figures in the early history of sculpture—Auguste Rodin and Constantin Brancusi: "The art of both men represented a relocation of the point of origin of the body's meaning—from its inner core to its surface—a radical act of decentering that would include the space to which the body appeared and the time of its appearing" (Passages 279). Krauss argues that modern sculpture “manifests its makers' growing awareness that sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing” (5). It is “this tension” that “defines the very condition of sculpture” (5). For example, Krauss states of Brancusi’s work that its temporality “is a product of the situation in which the work is placed—the reflections and counter-reflections that tie the object to its place, making it the product of the real space in which the viewer encounters it” (106). Minimalism continues "this project of decentering through a vocabulary of form that is radically abstract” (279). In Krauss’s words, “The ambition of minimalism was, then, to relocate the origins of a sculptor's meaning to the outside, no longer modeling its structure on the privacy of psychological space but on the public, conventional nature of what might be called cultural space” (270). The experience of “a moment-to-moment passage through space and time” is the focus of much minimalist and post-minimalist works: “And with these images of passage, the transformation of sculpture— from a static, idealized image to a temporal and material one—that had begun with Rodin is fully achieved” (282-3).
Horn’s practice in the decade preceding her series of Dickinson-inspired works indicates an interest in the sculptural object as dispersed by the conditions of viewing. For example, as discussed in Chapter Two, early rubber pieces consist of soft black rubber cast into wedge forms which taper from a thickness of twelve feet to two-inches. The thicker areas retain the solid shape of the original casting but the thinner areas are, as described by the artist, “deformed by the imperfections of the floor itself” (Saunders 120). The artist explains, “Here the interest is in the imperfections, which create the territory necessary for ideal forms to exist at all” (120). The rubber pieces contrast forms which absorb the contingencies of space with those that are impervious to them. One can read this early work as a staging of two different kinds of sculptural forms, one which is ideal and autonomous, and one which is shaped by the conditions of its viewing.

Richard Serra’s definition of sculpture as “a structuring of materials in order to motivate a body and to demarcate a place” (Foster 179) is key to understanding the preoccupations of Horn’s sculptural practice leading up to the Dickinson work. For a 1983 installation at the Glyptothek Museum in Munich, Horn made lead copies of the cobblestones found in a three hundred square foot area of the museum’s courtyard. A triangular section of these cobblestones were then replaced with lead equivalents. Here is the artist’s description of the work:

Like most of my other works, *Cobbled Lead(s)* is concerned with dwelling in the world—with the possibility of a thing creating a location, a specific
animation of place. .....with *Cobbled Lead(s)* I broke the symmetry of a
classical structure, both experientially and visually. I inserted this dull,
quiet, soft and massive lead into the ground. I placed it so that
pedestrians would traverse it, moving from the hard resilience of granite
to the massive dullness of lead, and then back onto the stone. It was no
more than an interval of slower passage; maybe there was a slightly
amplified sense of gravity. I was thinking of a short walk upon a larger
world—more friction. It seemed to be enough to set this difference into
this austere place (Saunders 120).

Horn’s interest in making a work which is “an interval of slower passage” places
her squarely within the terms used by Krauss to describe sculptural practice that
values the temporal and material over the static and the ideal. The experience
of *Cobbled Lead(s)* requires the movement of the body; the viewer feels the
work through the soles of his or her feet. In addition, apprehension of the work
depends on a felt experience of the contrast between the artist’s forms (the lead
imitations of cobblestones) and the space into which these forms were placed
(the surrounding courtyard of cobblestones).

The act of walking becomes pivotal to the experience of Horn’s work in
general; for example, a walk is required to experience *Piece for Two Rooms.*
The experience of walking is also used by Horn to describe the difference in
experiencing the two rooms of *Pair Field.* Each space has an identical set of
machined forms in identical relationship to one another but because of the
different room dimensions, the pairing isn’t readily perceptible and the
experiences are quite different: “It’s like a passage in *The Last of the Mohicans*
(1826) which compared the experience of walking through a field with that of
walking through a forest, describing the way each experience gives you a
different sense of yourself” (Horn qtd. In Schorr 128). In other words, Horn
generates, with paired machined forms, the experience of “the indeterminacy of
the landscape” to which Serra refers (12; 149). Horn states that “the distinction
between the physical reality of looking at the object versus what it is when you
walk away from it is a key part of the experience” (qtd. in Neri 35). The
experience of walking is paradigmatic of the experience of both sculpture and
the lived body in relation to place. Sculpture is stationary; it is of a place, yet it
must be perceived through movement. Edward S. Casey writes,

My body seems to stay put not only when things move around me but
even when it is itself moving. Or, as Husserl puts it paradoxically, “the
body moves, [yet] without ‘getting farther away.’” It is stationary in regard
to itself, just as it is stable in relation to everything perceived around it
(218).

The paradox is that “when I walk I am at once actually moving and yet
experience myself as ‘a stable null-object” (225). Horn’s signature practice of
pairing and doubling, however, destabilizes the viewer as “stable, null-object.”

Horn’s doubling strategies—attempts to disperse the experience of sculpture
and to decenter both viewer and object—can be understood in the terms used
by Alex Potts to describe factors at work in contemporary sculpture:

First, there is the positing of presence as something unstable, more like
an utterance than a thing, and activated in the contingencies of a viewer’s
encounter with a work rather than being anchored in its form. This denies
the viewer that stabilised self-awareness occasioned by apprehending a
sculpture as a substantial autonomous other. Secondly, there is a
dramatising of psychic splitting and dispersal, as opposed to wholeness
and condensation, and a refusal of the integrative structuring associated
either with an ideal sculptural figure or a pure plastic form (377).
Horn’s use of doubling forms is an attempt to destabilize the viewer’s apprehension of a three-dimensional object by splitting the experience into that which is directly perceived and that which is recollected. In the rubber pieces, the ideal form and the contingent form are one object; in a Pair Object, the two forms are identical but differently placed so that “the viewer must perform the object” (Roni Horn, Kunstraum München 100). As Horn puts it, "The pair form, by virtue of the condition of being double, actively refuses the possibility of being experienced as a thing in itself" (Thompson 35)

In 1989, Horn began to integrate text into geometric forms. Horn’s first sculpture to use text was Thicket No. 1 (1989-90), an aluminum block (64 by 48 by 2 inches). Purple plastic letters embedded in two of its sides spell out "To see a landscape as it is when I am not there," a quote from Simone Weil’s book Gravity and Grace. The work is low—only two inches off the ground—and the lettering isn’t legible except from a distance or if one stoops low to peer at its sides. From the height of a human, and the typical distance one makes around an object, the letters would not be visible and the object would appear to be an aluminum platform. The work itself is machine-made, geometric, with no corollary in the natural environment. The work’s only reference to landscape is the word itself. The apparent contradiction of the work’s material and form with its linguistic assertion is mirrored in the assertion itself. The statement refers to the desire to know the world without the interference of the self. The complexities and difficulties of perception are themselves embedded in the very
phrase, “To see a landscape as it is when I am not there.” Horn asserts that a work such as *Thicket No. 1* exists within a landscape tradition, relating it to John Constable and J. M. W. Turner in its "manifestation of an insistent relating-to-place" (Saunders). The phrase, however, is a riddle when one considers the historical use of the term “landscape” to refer to a representation of the natural environment. Landscape, as a genre of painting, has been shaped by notions of the picturesque that sought to provide or discover, if not construct, a view. Thus, to see a landscape is to see a representation; it is to see the natural environment in pictorial terms. The phrase “To see a landscape as it is when I’m not there” is roughly equivalent to a phrase such as “To see a painting as it is when I’m not there, “ or “To see a sculpture as it is when I’m not there.” The painting or the sculpture—or the landscape for that matter—is a human construct and thus is non-existent without human perception.

In another text-based work produced the same year, *Thicket no. 3: Kafka’s Palindrome* (1990), Horn quotes Kafka: "It would be enough to consider the spot where I am as some other spot." The line is spread along the outer thickness of a floorbound aluminum slab. Because the form is four-sided, one might consider the line to be divided into a quatrain, with the corners forming the line breaks: IT WOULD BE ENOUGH / TO CONSIDER THE SPOT / WHERE I AM AS / SOME OTHER SPOT. Depending on the viewer’s position, one can read two sides at a time or only one.39 Thus, one might come upon the piece and see simply the

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39 When I saw this work at the De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg, in 1998, it was installed in such a way that the viewer might approach it from several directions.
line IT WOULD BE ENOUGH; or SOME OTHER SPOT / IT WOULD BE ENOUGH. One might also read WHERE I AM AS / SOME OTHER SPOT; or one might read IT WOULD BE ENOUGH / TO CONSIDER THE SPOT. As a quotation, the work refers to some other textual spot. But the work, as encountered, splits and so remakes the quotation: from one position it claims this spot; from another, it hails “some other spot.” The spot to be considered is the work itself—as spot, as place—but it reconfigures itself as one moves around the work. The entirety of the line can’t be seen at once; and the lines “pair” differently according to approach. (This might remind one of the ambiguous breaks in the lines of a Dickinson poem.) The reading resembles the experience of enjambment in a poem; thus, one might say that Horn takes a line from a prose writer and re-presents it as not only a piece of sculpture but as a poetic quatrain. The work asks viewers “to consider this spot,” the spot of Horn’s work, as a consideration of another spot. Krauss’s definition of sculpture as “a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing” (5) is pertinent here. Thicket no. 3 juxtaposes arrested motion—this spot, this work—and the time of a reading which requires movement among “spots.” The work stakes a claim as this spot, this situation, this object, this moment; but the embedded line running along the side of the object requires another spot. The work doubles itself: it is both “spot” and “some other spot.”
Both *Thicket No. 1* and *Thicket No. 3* present quotations that have to do with place; the first quotation expresses a desire for the impossible—to see a place as it is when not seen; the second quotation acknowledges the force of memory or imagination that summons an absent place in lieu of present place. The first quotation bemoans the mediation of self in the experience of place; the second quotation appears to acknowledge, if not hail, mediation. Although these quotations are about the experience of place, there is no reference to a specific “landscape” or “spot”: the only specific place encountered is the place of the work. Horn defines “place” as “a constellation of acts” (Freidel 100). One of those acts is that of reading. J. Hillis Miller describes the act of reading as an event:

Each event takes place in a place which its occurrence as event makes into a place, as opposed to a vacant space with no meaning or coordinates. The same thing may be said of each act of reading. It takes place as an event in a certain spot and turns that spot in a certain sense into a sacred place, that is, into a place which is inaugural. Reading too turns empty space into a locus where something unique and unforeseen has occurred, has entered into the human world, and where it will have such effects as it will have (52-3).

Miller’s point about reading “turn[ing] empty space into a locus where something unique and unforeseen has occurred” helps to explain why the integration of text might extend sculptural investigations of the juncture of stillness and motion. As Yi Fu Tuan puts it, “if we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). Paradoxically, reading is both movement and pause. As Wolfgang Iser puts it, “The reading process always involves viewing
the text through a perspective that is continually on the move” (285). This is because reading necessarily involves both anticipation and retrospection: “Every sentence contains a preview of the next and forms a kind of viewfinder for what is to come; and this in turn changes the ‘preview’ and so becomes a ‘viewfinder’ for what has been read” (284). Miller’s discussion of reading as place-making is in the context of literature; certainly reading one line of Weil or one line of Kafka on the Horn object is not the same experience as reading the entirety of *Gravity and Grace* or a Kafka novel. However, the Thicket series indicates Horn’s interest in using text to not only motivate the viewer physically but also to split the viewer. In describing the experience of *Thicket* no. 1, Klaus Kertess writes:

> The bars on the top indicate that the words have not been printed on the plate but are a solid material (epoxy resin) embedded in the aluminum and flush with its contours. Are the words equal to or different from the mass into which they are set? Where does the meaning of the words reside? .... the wholeness of mass is undermined in Thicket no. 1, but now with language instead of abstract form. The transparency of language impinges upon and becomes the opacity of mass, and vice versa (n.pag.)

Kertess suggests that the use of language disperses the mass; language “undermines” the opacity and stasis of the aluminum block. Because the quotations extend around a four-sided block, text itself, performed by the reader, is reconfigured by the viewer’s body: the horizon of the text changes as one moves around the piece; the body, in effect, generates enjambment. The use of language achieves what the pairing of forms achieves: the viewer is required to “perform” the object; and the object, as Horn has said of the pair form, “actively refuses the possibility of being experienced as a thing in itself” (Thompson 35).
Indeed, one might consider the use of quotation as a form of pairing: the line itself pairs to an “original” context (that of the Weil or Kafka work); and the line refers to a pairing of the experience of place (the place as not-seen paired to place as seen; an absent place “considered” in lieu of the present one). In works such as Pair Object III and Pair Field, the artist’s concern is with creating a relay among relations such that the sculpture activates a space and generates place, rather than simply taking up space. With the Thicket works, the relay includes text associated with another context. The text is not flat or neutral or ambiguous in tone; it is language that is invested in an idea about place. To rephrase Hillis, the Thickets take place as a sculptural event and turn it into, or evoke, “a place which is inaugural,” for a quotation from Kafka suggests the place that is Kafka, the experience of reading Kafka.

Horn’s turn to Dickinson can be seen within the context of her prior interests in (1) the creation of place through the motivation of a body; (2) doubling as a way of subverting the autonomy of the object; and (3) text as way of subverting the autonomy of the object. Crucial to many installations of Horn’s series of Pair Objects is the play of absence and presence; this play of absence and presence becomes much more complex and weighted in the Dickinson series. The Dickinson text present on the Horn column is paired to the absence of the poem on the page, but there is also the absence that is associated with the Dickinson poem. To begin with, there is structural absence: the absence of a context or “omitted center” that is the effect of ambiguous syntax and vague pronouns. In addition, absence is frequently the subject of Dickinson’s poems. The Dickinson
poem often focuses its attentions on an object or detail and then, unpredictably, swerves through a change in diction or scrambling of grammar that causes the poem to swell with some other presence. This swerve might be read as an attempt to delay temporal advance—to slow things down—and the swell might be understood as the presence of loss that Dickinson repeatedly links to perception. As Dickinson expresses in a poem: “Perception of an Object costs / Precise the Object’s loss— / Perception in itself a Gain / Replying to its Price—” (J 1071, F 1103). Dickinson’s syntactical eccentricities may be understood as the result of the pressure put on language to both record perceptual acuity and register the loss this entails. And, for Dickinson, it is the anticipation of loss that often drives attention. To quote from another poem: “By a departing light / We see acuter…./ Than by a wick that stays” (J 1714, F 1749). In Dickinson, it is the experience of loss that ties absence to presence. As Cameron puts it, “loss itself [is] seen as a standing-instead-of; to hold onto it is to retain the thread whose end leads to the missing object” (Lyric 143). The linguistic flash and material presence of language in Dickinson’s poems are propelled by the attempt to accommodate loss as a replacement for, and substitution of, presence “otherwise withheld.” Loss is thus both the subject of Dickinson’s work and the result of an ambiguous syntax and absence of context (what Sandra Runzo has referred to as the “cracks and closets” of Dickinson’s poems [348]).

Horn’s re-presentation of entire Dickinson poems tests the circumference of the Dickinson poem. The viewer’s experience of Horn’s Dickinson-objects is shaped in part by the viewer’s experience as reader of the Dickinson poem on
the page. Because the Dickinson poem itself puts pressure on the reader’s understanding of the lyric, I want to develop a definition of lyric as it is tested by Dickinson and thus by the Horn object as well.

In the essay “What is Poetry?” (1833), John Stuart Mill describes the effect of reading a lyric as that of overhearing someone talking to themselves:

Eloquence is heard, poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude (qted. In Tucker 226).

The effect of reading a lyric is that of overhearing private speech; however, the lyric form itself is generated by its writerliness. Jeffrey Hurwit argues that the nature of the consciousness privileged by the lyric could only have emerged in a culture of writing. The lyric’s prevalence in seventh century Greece had to do with the spread of literacy. Literacy “subverted the central process of oral epic” (149). Hurwit states:

...writing creates a barrier between poetic creation and poetic performance: although lyrics were written to be sung in public, they were written in private, where there was opportunity for reflection (as well as evasion). ...The process of writing may thus have encouraged what seems to be one of the principal traits of the Greek lyric: its apparent revelation of the poet’s mental and emotional state, its introspection, its presentation of personality (140).

This is not to suggest that the late twentieth-century use of the term “lyric” is similar to the understanding of the lyric in ancient Greece. Annabel Patterson makes the point that the contemporary understanding of the lyric “as an intense, imaginative form of self-expression or self consciousness, the most private of all genres,” is a legacy of Romanticism (151). While the specific nature of lyric
consciousness at any given time is historically contingent, its energies remain tied and shaped by the nature of writing, as argued by Paul Allen Miller:

This projection of a complex and unique image of consciousness is only possible...within the multi-referential and multi-temporal system which writing, by allowing recursive modes of reading, makes possible. For lyric subjectivity exists not as a linear narrative...but rather as an interrelated series of temporal loops moving at various speeds and levels of consciousness. It...moves forward and back simultaneously, compulsively analyzing and reinterpreting the same multivalent experiences, even as it adds to them (2).

Miller places emphasis on the lyric as part of a collection (as opposed to the lyric as an occasional poem). A characteristic of the lyric collection is that “poems refer back and forth to one another in terms of their collective participation in a complex and multi-faceted whole” (6). A given poem is re-experienced through others in the collection of which it is part: "the action or sentiment described in one poem frequently only becomes fully intelligible in light of the actions or sentiments described in another poem" (56).

A significant characteristic of the lyric poem is the ways in which the reader steps into, or acts, the part of the “I” and the role of the addressee, the “you.” Vendler uses the term “twinship” to describe the relationship between writer and reader of the lyric (xliii). As she puts it, “a lyric is meant to be spoken by its reader as if the reader were the one uttering the words” (xlii). But the reader is also positioned as “you,” the one addressed. Susan Stewart writes:

First-person expression in lyric is related existentially to the context of the poem as a whole; it is the poem that makes first-person expression emerge in its individuality as it engages the reader in the eidetic task of the appearance of the “you.” The doubled “I” (authorial intention, the expression
of the first-person voice in the text) encounters a doubled “you” (the reader’s intention toward reception, the implied addressee in the text) (47)

Another way of putting this is that the reader “is an echo within the poem and not a separate voice” (Rajan 196). While the lyric focuses on the private moment, it nonetheless claims language as the privileged connection to another person. Stewart states, “Lyric brings forward, as the necessary precondition of its creation of a world of ‘I’s’ and ‘you’s’ in mutual recognition, this place of language as the foundation of intersubjectivity and intersubjectivity as the foundation for the recognition of persons” (47).

While Stewart’s discussion of the lyric focuses on its relationship between the writer and the reader, Cameron emphasizes the lyric’s relationship to time: “The contradiction between social and private time is the lyric’s generating impulse” (120). Cameron suggests “the extent to which all lyrics oppose speech to the action from which it exempts itself, oppose voice as it rises momentarily from the enthusiasms of temporal advance to the flow of time that ultimately rushes over and drowns it” (23). Presence—a term used by Cameron as synonymous with the lyric voice—is opposed to history and narrative: “Presence then is action’s corollary” (89). The lyric is interested in the isolated moment:

Meaning is consciousness carved out of the recognition of its own limitations. They [lyric poems] insist that meaning depends upon the severing of incident from context, as if only isolation could guarantee coherence. The lyric’s own presence on a page, surrounded as it is by nothing, is a graphic representation of that belief (71).

The lyric’s focus on the isolated moment is also a focus on the present. Working with George Wright’s article, “The Lyric Present,” Cameron notes, “The present
tense is so characteristic of the lyric that Wright terms it ‘the lyric sense,’ and he adds that its assertion of presence may be the poem’s dominant symbolic gesture” (132). This concern with the present moment as it is preoccupied with a past is a contradiction central to the lyric. As Dickinson puts it, “It is the Past’s supreme italic / Makes the Present mean—” (J 1498, F 1518). Referring to Dickinson’s proleptic utterances, Cameron writes: “This mythologizing of the lyric present, the insistence that present and, by implication, presence can achieve permanence is perhaps accounted for by the tenacious hold the past has on the present, by its dexterity in casting itself up as if it still were” (133-4). Dickinson’s preoccupation with loss generates a play and tension in her work between absence and presence, absence summoned as presence. Cameron writes:

Memory defines its space (hollowing out of conception the exact shape of the something missing) and simultaneously fills it with its own representation. Memory implies a double negation, for loss must be (be acknowledged) before it can be done away with, and it is from the paradoxical reaches of the phenomenon itself that Dickinson’s lexical structures borrow their power (144).

For Cameron, the lyric derives its power from its focus on an arrested moment shorn of narrative, and its presentation of a present and presence hollowed from the past and absence.

In summary, key characteristics of lyric consciousness include: (1) the valuing of incident and isolated moment; (2) a private form of address that nonetheless conflates reader and the lyric “I”; (3) an awareness of being produced by the nature of writing, its recursiveness, and its graphic form; and (4) a brevity that resonates and is complicated within a collection. These features of lyric
consciousness are exaggerated in the Dickinson poem. They are exaggerated to such a degree that, as Cameron argues, Dickinson’s works pressure and test the limits of the lyric as a genre. This testing of the limits of the lyric is experienced by even the most general reader as bewilderment and the awareness of intense emotion without clues to identify its cause or context. This encounter with the bafflement of Dickinson’s poems is crucial to an appreciation of the complexity and integrity of Horn’s three-dimensional presentation of Dickinson.

The Dickinson lyric, like the lyric in general according to Cameron, is interested in the moment as fugitive, its activity a straining to register the moment as it is aware of itself passing. In the Pair Object series, by presenting the object as double, Horn offers an object that carries within itself its moment of passing. The play of absence and presence in a *Pair Object*, however, is different than that with which the Dickinson poem is preoccupied. With *Pair Object*, absence is not loss but simply elsewhere. One wouldn’t think to describe the absent unit of a *Pair Object* as Dickinson does the absent object: “Convenient to the longing / But otherwise withheld” (J 1753, F 1770). The viewer’s experience of Horn’s doubling of the Dickinson lyric is pervaded by this experience of loss necessarily tied to reading the Dickinson lyric. There is a significant difference between *seeing* the Horn object as Dickinson-infused and actually *reading* the object as a lyric. To read the object—as opposed to viewing it—is to be drawn into a relationship between object and memory and body that,
in its public and embodied enactment is foreign to the evasions and privacies associated with Dickinson yet—I would claim—startling and credible in its sensitivity to the syntactical economies. To read the Horn object is to necessarily engage with one’s memory of having read Dickinson on the page. This memory of one’s self as reader is crucial to one’s ability to perceive the object as lyric. In this way, the Horn object renders the Dickinson poem present by establishing a relationship both to its absence and the absence that informs it. Absence is necessary to the identity of a Pair Object as object. But in the case of the Dickinson-object, absence is itself already internal to one’s experience of Dickinson. Reading work whose absence of readers inflects our own activity of reading, pairs our presence to this absence. The Horn object is both instead-of and beside the Dickinson poem, which is its way of being the same as the Dickinson poem. And the reader of the Horn object recognizes herself as here, before the object, by being elsewhere.

In Horn’s re-presentation of the Dickinson experience, there is a keen sense of the poem being both here, before us, and not here. While one might argue that the difference between the Dickinson words on the Horn column and the words on the page of Johnson’s edition are no greater than the difference between the typographic form of the poem in Johnson’s text and the handwritten form of the poem on the manuscript sheet, there is nonetheless a sense of loss when confronted with the aluminum columns. The text on aluminum columns, even as it enters into the space of the viewer / reader, even as it is recognized
as Dickinson, still registers as an absence of the poem, even as one reads the poem. This experience recalls Smithson’s dialectic of site / non-site. Horn’s aluminum columns of text constitute the non-site; they bring into the gallery pieces of a place to which one can’t go. One might protest that this isn’t a successful analogy: we can go to the page much easier that to the New Jersey wasteland from which Smithson transported his pieces; and Horn isn’t transporting material from some place, however inaccessible, but she has the aluminum columns manufactured. As the Dickinson editing controversies demonstrate, however, the page itself, even for readers of Dickinson who aren’t viewers of Horn, is experienced as, in Smithson’s terms, a non-site as well. The paradox of the Nonsites, as explained by Shapiro, is that “the nonsite is both a nonplace (it is not the place from which the material was taken) and a ‘non-sight,’ because in seeing it one is not seeing the site/sight to which it refers” (72). This is also the paradox of Horn’s Dickinson-object (and the paradox of the poem in typographic form). The Dickinson poem is never there, even on the page. As Cameron points out, there is no single, final text of a Dickinson poem; because of the use of variants, Dickinson “revolutionizes what reading is” because one is required to read “in several registers simultaneously” (Choosing 70). Thus, Horn’s pairing of sculpture and text is like Smithson’s pairing of non-site and site. Smithson writes,

‘There’s a central focus point which is the non-site; the site is the unfocused fringe where your mind loses its boundaries and a sense of the oceanic pervades, as it were. ...The interesting thing about the site is that, unlike the non-site, it throws you out to the fringes. In other words, there is nothing to
grasp onto except the cinders and there’s no way of focusing on a particular place. One might even say that the place has been absconded or lost. This is a map that will take you somewhere, but when you get there you won’t really know where you are. In a sense the non-site is the center of the system, and the site itself is the fringe or the edge (249).

In reading the Dickinson editing discussions, there is a sense in which the poem itself throws the reader out to the fringes. The Dickinson poem is like Smithson’s description of “the site [as] a place where a piece should be but isn’t.”

Cameron poses the following question: if Dickinson was so concerned with unboundedness, why didn’t she write in a much looser form—why the quatrains and hymn meter; why not the looseness of a Walt Whitman? One might ask a similar question of Horn; if she is interested in the ambiguity of the paired object and in troubling issues of identity or wholeness, then why work with such austere, geometric rhetoric? Cameron answers her own question by suggesting that it “might be that Dickinson is rather exploiting a form so as to point to the ‘identity’ or convergence of boundedness and unboundedness” (28). Cameron relates this to Freud’s concept of condensation and to his discussion of the antithesis that is at the heart of what Freud calls primal words: “Dickinson condenses to a point where she ends up with formal antitheses which have...thematic equivalents” (29). The implication of this is that: “Both thematic and formal oppositions advance a psychological or philosophical proposition; that in condensation, what is revealed at the core of identity is not just difference...
but more fundamentally antithesis" (29). Given the understanding that antithesis is at the core of identity, Cameron asserts that

the formal boundedness of the quatrain and the subversion of boundedness in the heteroglossia of the variants are not matters of Dickinson’s form *subverting* Dickinson’s project. They are rather matters of form *revealing* the audacity of the project as founded on identity that can only be understood as deriving its element from opposition (28-9).

Horn’s project might be understood as a condensation of Dickinson: our recognition of the poem derives from its loss. Our recognition of what counts as Dickinson derives as much from what is not in front of us as what is. The intractability and geometric austerity of her material is at odds with the materiality of the word as incarnated on the typeset page or the manuscript page. And our recognition of what counts as sculpture derives from what’s not there (in the Pair Object series). In addition, not only is Dickinson rendered strange, but the Horn sculpture itself is also rendered strange. The use of geometric form, all-capped letters embedded in aluminum columns and turned every which way, reveals the audacity of Horn’s project, that of re-presenting the Dickinson poem as sculpture.

To what extent does the place created by the Horn object constitute a reading *of* Dickinson, or provide a place *for* the reading Dickinson? To rephrase this question, is the presentation of Dickinson-as-experienced-by-Horn a reading of Dickinson, or a doubling? How are the coordinates of place affected by the doubling of an event of reading? In the first instance—that of reading—the Dickinson text and the Horn object would function as dual objects. In the latter
instance, the Horn object would function as a double of the Dickinson poem.

The distinction that I'm trying to make between, on the one hand, the Horn object and the Dickinson poem as dual objects, and, on the other hand, the Horn object as double of the Dickinson poem, is influenced by Paul Gordan, who explicates the difference between dual and double in the following passage:

*Dual* refers merely to two related objects, while *double* refers to an uncanny repetition of the same. The latter thus contains an important paradox which the former does not: to be dual is to be *both* the same and different, while to be double is to be different *and* the same. The paradox lies in the fact that the double is, in the words of Paul de Man, 'neither one nor two'; it would also be correct to say that the double is therefore *both* one and two (19).

Of additional importance to the distinction I am attempting to draw between two possible approaches to the pairing of Horn and Dickinson is the etymological relationship between the terms "double" and "doubt." Horn's doubling of Dickinson would put into question not only our understanding of what it means to read Dickinson but also what it would mean to read sculpture.

As Cameron argues, the experience of doubleness is intrinsic to reading Dickinson's poems. I make a distinction between doubling and doubleness; doubling is something direct and active, a kind of repetition; doubleness names an effect experienced by the reader that is the result of the structure and preoccupations of the poems. According to Cameron, there is a doubleness operating within Dickinson's poems; it is a doubleness that the reader experiences. According to Cameron, various forms of doubleness occur. First, syntactically the poems create doubleness; this is often the effect of Dickinson's
use of the dash: “[A]ccording to the indeterminacy conveyed by the dashes the line cannot but be read in opposite directions and this simultaneously” (26).

Another form of doubling is

the fact that two conflicting stories are told simultaneously. While the disruption caused by the doubleness punctuates the experience of reading the poems, it is also a characteristic of these poems not to acknowledge the existence of double stories, hence not to establish alliances with one or the other of the stories, and thus to predicate a seamlessness belied by what is being voiced. So voice is at odds with itself in these poems, so much so that the proper term for the disagreement is in fact heteroglossia in another form (26-7).

Doubleness is thematized; but it is also experienced by the reader in the process of actively engaging the poetry. Cameron also points out the pairing which goes on within fascicles; in some, first and last poems are paired as either complementary or antithetical; in others “single lyrics each maintain two (paired) perspectives generated as if from one vantage” (Choosing 35n). The effect of this is that “the perspective gleaned from one place, emotion, or state illuminates not the site of its origin but the site of its reversal” (35n).

Horn's earlier non-text works also employ strategies of doubling. As discussed earlier, her pair objects behave as doubles. However, it should be pointed out that the pair, in general, does not necessarily constitute a double.\footnote{This is a thread running throughout Gordon's \textit{The Critical Double}.} A pair of shoes, for example, does not constitute a double. In fact, a shoe doubled could not function as a pair. For two shoes to be a pair presupposes that the two work together, and this depends as much on a difference as it does
on a sameness (i.e., one shoe must be fitted for a left foot and one for a right).

The difference between pairing and doubling is explored at length in Jacques
Derrida’s "Restitutions," an essay on Vincent Van Gogh’s paintings of shoes as
read by Martin Heidegger and Meyer Shapiro. It is the assumption that Van
Gogh’s shoes are a pair that makes it possible for Heidegger and Shapiro to
assign a subjectivity to the painting—in the case of Heidegger, a peasant
woman, and in the case of Shapiro, the artist himself. Derrida states:

Since it is a pair, first of all, and neither of them [Heidegger and
Shapiro] doubts this fact, there must be a subject. So that in this
shoe market [marché; also, 'a deal'], the contract, the institution, is
first of all the parity between the shoes, this very singularly dual
relationship which fits together the two parts of a pair (identity and
difference, total identity in the concept or in formal semantics,
difference and non-overlap in the directionality of the traits). If there is
a pair, there is a possible contract; one can look for the subject....

(282).

Derrida’s discussion of pairing is a reminder that there is a presumed contract;
and that for a pairing to work there is a presumed difference. In the series of
Pair Objects, the difference is not form or content, but placement. In the
Dickinson work, the difference is form as well. The subject presumed is both the
reader and the viewer; this is the contract, that we will read Dickinson and see
Horn. It is a double because it is, as Gordon says, an uncanny repetition. The
term “uncanny” refers to Freud’s discussion of the uncanny as an effect of the
double. Freud’s discussion of the etymology of the German words heimlich and
unheimlich—home-like and not home-like—underscore an ambivalence at the

41 In an interview, Horn herself does not make a distinction between the pair and the double but
appears to be conflating the two terms: “The pair form, by virtue of the condition of being double,
heart of the experience of “home.” The uncanny, according to Freud, has to do with the secretive and the impenetrable; it is both intimate and private, known and not known, like the private parts of the body. For Freud, the experience of the uncanny is the experience of the repressed, or of former more primitive states of feeling. The double can represent that which is uncomfortable for the ego, or those impulses that are suppressed by the reality principle. I understand the uncanny to be resemblance that generates the effect of strangeness; for example, encountering a stranger who resembles someone one knows. One might argue that the imaginary is by nature uncanny. For example, in “The Two Versions of the Imaginary,” Blanchot speaks of “cadaverous resemblance”: the cadaver is “so absolutely himself that it is as if he were doubled by himself, joined to his solemn impersonality by resemblance and by the image” (Space 258). The relationship of a once living person to his cadaver is like that of the object to its image: “The image becomes the object’s aftermath” (260). Blanchot writes: “Not only is the image of an object not the sense of this object, and not only is it of no avail in understanding the object, it tends to withdraw the object from understanding by maintaining it in the immobility of a resemblance which has nothing to resemble” (260). An experience of reading the Dickinson poem on the Horn object is, perhaps, an experience of the uncanny. It is not that the Horn object is an image of the poem. Horn renders words material but not word-as-image; and this parallels the practice of Dickinson. Words in her poems,
because of the ambiguous syntax and use of dashes, become thingly. Blanchot discusses the nature of the image in poetry in the following passage:

We are apt to think that poetry is a language which, more than any other, does justice to images. Probably this is an allusion to a much more essential transformation: the poem is not a poem because it includes a certain number of figures, metaphors, comparisons. On the contrary, what is special about a poem is that nothing in it strikes a vivid image. We must therefore express what we are looking for in another way: in literature, doesn’t language itself become entirely image, not a language containing images or putting reality into figures, but its own image, the image of language—and not a language full of imagery—or an imaginary language, a language no one speaks—that is to say, spoken from its own absence—in the same way that the image appears on the absence of the thing, a language that is also addressed to the shadow of events, not to their reality, because of the fact that the words that express them are not signs, but images, images of words and words in which things become images? (Gaze 77)

François Lyotard, writing on Mallarmé, states, “When the word is made thing, it is not to copy a visible thing, but to render visible an invisible, lost thing: it gives form to the imaginary of which it speaks” (quoted in Jay 179). Horn doesn’t provide an image of the poem but might be said to “render visible” that invisible, lost thing which is experienced as the Dickinson poem.

Dickinson’s series, When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes—while not meant to rival the poem on the page or in manuscript—is itself a reading that raises questions about reading Dickinson similar to those raised by the recent debates on editing Dickinson. Werner quotes Blanchot on translation in her discussion of the untranslatability of Dickinson’s marks, and these remarks may offer a way to understand what Horn is doing: in translation, Blanchot writes, “likeness…is not

What is involved rather is an identity that takes off from an alterity” (50). While I am not claiming that Horn herself is interested in issues of editing, my point is that the problems or irritations created by Horn’s presentation, with its dismissal of the page, co-exists with, and is sensitive to, the problems of reading in general posed by the eccentricities of Dickinson’s work. What enters the Dickinson work through Horn’s doubling of the poem is a place both for and as reading. Horn’s work has always been invested in place—in what it takes for the verb place to coalesce into place as noun. Horn creates a place for reading the poem, and constructs this within the context of sculptural notions of place. In doubling the lyric, Horn creates the Dickinson lyric as place, as a nexus of body, object, space, and memory. Thus, the audacity of the Dickinson-object is, in the words of Potts, to make sculpture something more like an utterance than a thing by re-presenting a poem more like a thing than an utterance.43

43 Potts claims that late twentieth century sculpture is characterized by “the positing of presence as something unstable, more like an utterance than a thing, and activated in the contingencies of a viewer’s encounter with a work rather than being anchored in its form” (377).
CHAPTER 4

“MY LIFE HAD STOOD—A LOADED GUN”

I.

In the Wexner Center exhibition of all four of Roni Horn’s Dickinson works, the last work that one encounters is in a room by itself; it consists of aluminum blocks stacked in a corner. The blocks spell, from top to bottom, the first line of one of the most enigmatic of Emily Dickinson’s poems: “MY LIFE HAD STOOD—A LOADED GUN.” This chapter focuses on the relationship of the 1994 untitled work to Horn’s other Dickinson objects and to feminist readings of this poem. A discussion of the significance of this poem within the Dickinson corpus and within feminist literary discussions highlights a tension at the heart of Horn’s series—that between the experience of the Dickinson poem as “work” and the experience of Dickinson’s words as “text.” A comparison of Horn’s use of Dickinson’s words with the use of text by Lawrence Weiner, Mary Kelly, and Jenny Holzer provides a context for evaluating the degree to which Horn’s Dickinson work participates in what Craig Owens characterizes as the dislocation of the visual and the transformation of the visual field into a textual field (47).
The five-inch square blocks of Horn’s 1994 untitled work are aluminum, with one black plastic letter going through each block. The blocks are placed such that some of the letters face sideways, while some are seen in reverse. The blocks are identical to the blocks in *How Dickinson Stayed Home*, with the exception that the plastic is black rather than blue. In addition, the blocks are not scattered but precariously stacked—as if in the moment just before scattering. The appearance of instability is accentuated by the bottom block which is a hyphen. The precarious thrust of the piece—letters facing every which way, a hyphen at its base—evokes the pent energy of the Dickinson poem with its conflation of woman and gun, speech and violence.

“My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—" (J 754, F 764) begins one of the most difficult and cryptic of Dickinson’s poems:

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My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified—
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

And do I smile, such cordial light
Upon the Valley glow—
It is as a Vesuvian face
Had let its pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—
I guard My Master’s Head—
’Tis better than the Eider-Duck’s
Deep Pillow—to have shared—
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To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—
None stir the second time—
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye—
Or an emphatic Thumb—

Though I than He—may longer live
He longer must—than I—
For I have but the power to kill,
Without—the power to die—

The narrator compares herself to a gun which is inert and passive until in the hands of its owner. The analogy is a disturbing one: the narrator characterizes her life as both passive and destructive. She possesses force, but neither identity nor self-possession; it is only in the hands of another that she is active. The narrator is ready and willing to be carried off, aimed, and fired by another. It is not clear who or what is destroyed when she goes off; but “hunt[ing] the Doe,” another female creature, is one of her activities. Ominously, the gun’s explosion is linked to speech. Thus, voice is achieved at the expense of another’s life. Her voice, however, is his speech: “And every time I speak for Him.” Her only reply is an echo—“The Mountains straight reply.”

In Adrienne Rich’s poem “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law,” published in 1963, the first line of this Dickinson poem functions as a summary of Dickinson’s life as a writer:

Reading while waiting for the iron to heat,

writing, My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
in that Amherst pantry while the jellies boil and scum.... (10)\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} For the influence of Dickinson on Rich, see Erkkila, “Dickinson and Rich: Toward a Theory of Female Poetic Influence,” 541-559.
This reading of the poem as an analogy of Dickinson’s creative life was later developed in Rich’s 1975 essay, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson.” Rich asserts Dickinson’s seclusion as “chosen” and as “a life deliberately organized on her terms”:

The terms she had been handed by society—Calvinist Protestantism, Romanticism, the nineteenth-century corseting of women’s bodies, choices, and sexuality—could spell insanity to a woman genius. What this one had to do was retranslate her own unorthodox, subversive, sometimes volcanic propensities into a dialect called metaphor: her native language. “Tell all the Truth—but tell it Slant—.” It is always what is under pressure in us, especially under pressure of concealment—that explodes in poetry (180).

Rich’s essay counters the myth of Dickinson as emotionally frail and disappointed in love. This was a popular view of Dickinson, perhaps best exemplified by William Luce’s play The Belle of Amherst which opened in 1976, had a successful Broadway run, and was later dramatized for television. According to Jonnie Guerra, the play’s subsequent “tremendous popularity with actresses and audiences in amateur and professional theaters around the world” served to further solidify the image of Dickinson as domestically confined and writing only because of “her ‘failure’ within the courtship-marriage plot conventionally used to narrate women’s lives” (390). In an introductory note to the 1979 republication of “Vesuvius at Home,” Rich refers to The Belle of Amherst as “specious and reductive” and calls for a criticism that does not assume “heterosexual romance as the key to a woman’s artist’s life and work” (177). The poem “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun” is pivotal to Rich’s reading of Dickinson’s artistic practice as conflicted but deliberate: “the poet sees herself
as split, not between anything so simple as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ identity but between the hunter, admittedly masculine, but also a human person, an active, willing being, and the gun—an object.” Rich asserts that the poem reflects an ambivalence toward the writer’s own powers: “That which she experiences in herself as energy and potency can also be experienced as pure destruction” (190-1).

David S. Reynolds points out that the poem exploits two female stereotypes from nineteenth century popular fiction, that of the adventuress and that of the outwardly meek but inwardly passionate all-suffering heroine:

On the one hand, the ‘I’ of the poem is the ultimate adventure feminist, the omnipotent aggressor who does all the hunting and speaking for her master and always guards him from danger. On the other hand, she has a ‘Vesuvian face’ that signals the total repression of her aggressions in deference to him (187).

Susan Howe summarizes various interpretive possibilities for “Life’s” referent. These include: “a Soul finding God”; Dickinson’s desire to be recognized by the editor Thomas Higginson; “a poet’s admiring heart born into voice by idealizing a precursor poet’s song”; the American continent with its westward moving frontier; a white woman held captive by Native Americans; and a slave (My Emily Dickinson 76). Because the poem is thought to have been written shortly after Dickinson’s first letter to Higginson requesting feedback on her poems, Howe suggests that the poem “in its most literal sense, can be read as her psyche’s startled response to her own boldness in hunting [Higginson] down” (79).
In David Porter’s reading—related to Rich’s reading, which he cites—the gun symbolizes “the instrument of language” (Modern Idiom 209). Porter points out that Dickinson frequently describes language as a force; one such example is her remark during a visit with Higginson that “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry” (213). Porter argues, “Three related functions create the signification of the poem: the poem’s voice is language itself, the language gun has the power to kill, and language to be purposeful and not randomly destructive must be under some mature authority” (210). William Shullenberger interprets the gun as an image of the reader of the poem: “the voice speaking in the poem is the breathless mouth of the poem itself (Yeats), waiting to be hailed and summoned into being by the purpose of the reader, content to be the cordial instrument through which the reader’s fantasies of power and defensiveness can be realized, deathless yet without life unless called by the human need for meaning” (104).

For Rich, Dickinson’s expression of a conflicted creativity resonates with her own experience as a woman writer in the twentieth century. Rich claims “My Life had stood” as “a central poem in understanding Emily Dickinson, and ourselves, and the condition of the woman artist, particularly in the nineteenth century” (191). The poem is emblematic of the conflicts of women artists in general: “It is an extremely painful and dangerous way to live—split between a publicly acceptable persona, and a part of yourself that you perceive as the essential, the creative and powerful self, yet also as possibly unacceptable, perhaps even
monstrous” (191-2). Rich’s essay, “Vesuvius at Home,” had an enormous impact on subsequent feminist scholarship, not only in regard to Dickinson criticism but to the critical treatment of other women writers as well.\(^4\) The loaded gun is a metaphor of female creativity but it is also emblematic of the task of the feminist critic who seeks to “identify” those loaded guns remaining in corners.

Mary Loeffelholz notes that “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun” is “the locus of discussion for feminist critics concerned about accounting in some way for the aggression of Dickinson’s poetry” (83). She states: “What it means to be inside or outside another identity; what it means to ‘take in’ or possess; the very meaning of a boundary—are put into question by ‘My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—'” (83). Loeffelholz argues that Rich’s reading of Dickinson’s poem is an absorption that parallels the aggression of the Dickinson poem: Rich “identifies Dickinson herself with a phallic power (the loaded gun’s power) of inseminating Rich’s thoughts” (83). Rich’s reading of Dickinson’s poem is characterized as an internalization of “Dickinson’s struggle with the problem of boundary and violence, rendering Dickinson both as the Other male ravisher and as an aspect of Rich’s own interior” (84). Loeffelholz reads Dickinson’s poem as preoccupied with literary influence and the extent to which what is out there is internalized and then put back out in the world. Howe offers a related reading: “She the man-made Gun; Poet influenced by the work of many men, tied by a cord of

attachment to her Master, may be shut in a prison of admiration that seals her
from a deeper region of herself—a mapless dominion, valueless value,
sovereign and feminine outside the realm of dictionary definition” (111).

Loeffelholz, alluding to Dickinson’s line “Thou canst not pierce tradition with the
peerless puncture” (J 1736, F 1760), notes that feminist interpretations of
Dickinson’s aggression

point also to the specificity of women writers’ experience within the
‘tradition’ that Dickinson’s speaker so strangely offers to ‘pierce,’ a
tradition that historically has done violence to women’s literary
productivity. Within this tradition, Joanne Feit Diehl suggests, it may be
necessary for Dickinson to kill in order to live—to be killed in such a way
that ‘she becomes agent rather than victim, even if the end be the same’
(84).

Dickinson, however, acknowledges the impact of the work of other women
writers, including the Brontës and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Referring to
Dickinson as Rich’s “Other,” Loeffelholz remarks that “matters of boundary and
identification are not automatically simplified or idealized when influence and
inspiration become properties of relations between women writers” (85).

Loeffelholz asserts, “‘Taking in’ (as she put it) Dickinson’s ‘My Life had stood—,’
Rich became host to a haunting guest who was not a self-identical, coherent,
unified mother-image but part of a fierce contest over the boundaries of power
and identity” (85).

Horn’s presentation of Dickinson’s line as a teetering of aluminum cubes is
the “straight reply” of Dickinson’s “gun,” the echo of Dickinson’s voice as Horn’s
“speech.” By re-presenting the first line of a Dickinson poem that is noted for its
aggression, Horn raises a question about the aggression of her own act of
recasting Dickinson’s words. Horn’s application of sculptural values onto the ragged phrases of Dickinson parallels, in the language of Loeffelholz, the “male Other who occasions her speech [and] may also commandeer her very bodily identity, leaving no refuse of interiority that is her own” (83-4). In the previous chapter, I argued that Horn’s work *When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes* actively resists cultural interpretations of Dickinson’s life and strives to choreograph an experience of reading the Dickinson poem. However, Horn’s 1994 work commandeers Dickinson’s identity, using a poem that aggressively splits the narrator’s identity in order to perform a Dickinson persona. By presenting a line that itself exists in tissues of quotation, Horn’s work inserts itself into a larger conversation about female creativity and the practices of feminist criticism.46 Horn uses the first line of a poem that is considered to be not only emblematic of Dickinson’s creative life but of the predicament of the woman artist in general.

In the Wexner Center exhibition of Horn’s Dickinson works, the viewer walks among scattered cubes trying to make out the circumference of a line; one walks past solitary columns on which is read statements such as AN HOUR IS THE SEA or THE ZEROES—TAUGHT US—PHOSPHORUS—; the viewer turns among columns leaning against the wall to read the lines of a Dickinson poem shorn of context. Lastly, one encounters the line MY LIFE HAD STOOD A LOADED GUN—. Cultural and critical associations accumulate around the line

46 Dickinson’s poem is frequently alluded to in discussions of women writers and artists. For example, Marjorie Perloff titles a chapter, “Canon and Loaded Gun: Feminist Poetics and the Avant-Garde.” Herbert Leibowitz, in the introduction to the 1985 issue of *Parnassus* devoted to
and the space created by Horn becomes crowded, not with the work, but with the text that is “Dickinson.” This is a contradiction at the heart of the exhibition, and at the heart of Horn’s series of Dickinson objects. On the one hand, one encounters Dickinson lines on the Horn object that prompt one to piece together a work though the memory of one’s experience as a reader and as a viewer of sculpture. On the other hand, the encounter with a phrase such as “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—” or “My business is circumference” is an encounter with a phrase that is so often quoted that it risks the ring of a platitude; consequently, it unwittingly summons the pathos surrounding the Dickinson stereotype. One loses the line as a line of poetry; rather, it is caption, or slogan. Thus, the viewer discerns two contradictory impulses in the exhibition of Horn’s Dickinson-objects. There is an interest in the work, in what it means to be a work, and in the experience of the reader of Dickinson’s work; these are central interests of Keys and Cues and When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes. However, a work such as the untitled “My Life had stood” reminds the viewer of the business of reading Dickinson that resists or intervenes in Dickinson’s own business of circumference. Thus, the line “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—,” stacked in cubes like those used to disperse “My business is circumference,” risks scattering into pieces that confound the reader.

II.

women poets, writes, “the most remarkable event in American poetry of the last fifteen years has been the eruption of Vesuvius” (quoted in Perloff 34).
A discussion of the text-based work of Lawrence Weiner, Mary Kelly, and Jenny Holzer provides a context for understanding the contradiction between work and text raised by Horn’s re-presentation of Dickinson’s line “My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—.” Weiner, a conceptual artist, claims that his text instructions, whether or not executed, count as sculpture. The text-based installations of Kelly make no claims for themselves as sculpture; however, her use of text as a way to circumvent and critique the image owes a debt to conceptual art and raises issues having to do with the nature of “reading”—reading as an artistic practice, and reading as an activity of the viewer. Holzer’s one-sentence statements that enter public space through a variety of mediums, including electronic signage and chiseled granite, aspire, as Henry M. Sayre suggests, to “a prosody which denies the construct of the ‘book’ and the ‘page’” (201).

Lawrence Weiner is one of a group of artists associated with the emergence of conceptual art in the mid-to late sixties. “Conceptual art” refers to work that openly rejects the traditional art object and seeks to examine instead the cultural and philosophical machinery surrounding a work of art.47 Weiner stopped painting in 1968 for reasons similar to those of Donald Judd’s, believing that it fostered illusion. He began writing phrases and sentences directly onto the gallery wall. Weiner’s statements are not complete sentences; they lack a

47 For a summary of the development of conceptual art, see Peter Wollen, "Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art."
subject and most often consist of past participles and prepositional phrases.\textsuperscript{48}

Grammatically ambiguous, Weiner’s statements can be read as instructions for a performance, or as the description of an action already performed, such as the phrase, THE RESIDUE OF A FLARE IGNITED UPON A BOUNDARY, which was written on a wall of the Stedelijk Museum \textit{and} executed on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Weiner’s instructions do not require execution in order to be considered as a work of art. His aesthetic statement, originally published in \textit{Arts Magazine} (April 1970) and often reproduced, reads:

\begin{quote}
The artist may construct the work. The work may be fabricated. The work need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership (Wollen 76).
\end{quote}

Weiner’s early statements refer to artistic procedures; after 1970, however, the artist’s instructions refer to material processes in general. As Anne Rorimer writes:

\begin{quote}
Weiner treats language in a neutral way as the means to objectively impart information about the verifiable, external world. While certain works are more concrete than others, all of them are grounded in the actuality of observable qualities, processes, conditions, actions, substances, or things (25).
\end{quote}

One example is: SOME LEAD TO STAND ON / SOME LEAD TO THROW / SOME LEAD TO HOLD. A 1996 work originally executed for the Reykjavik gallery Second Floor was written across two adjacent walls and read: THE LIGHT OF DAY (SUCH AS IT IS) \& ICELAND SPAR (AS CLOSE AS PURE) TO FORM COLORS (ON THE SURFACE OF THE EARTH). I repeat these words—

\textsuperscript{48} For discussion of the characteristics of Weiner’s language, see Alberro and Zimmerman, “Not
on this page—as documentation of an installation: words written in a specific second floor room overlooking a particular street in Reykjavik during one season of one year. The light of day such as it was. But Weiner would claim that these words of his—on this page—constitute a work that exists now, in the moment they are read, and that this moment is equal to any other moment during which these words are encountered. As Weiner put it, "When you are dealing with language, there is no edge that the picture drops over or drops off. You are dealing with something infinite. Language, because it is the most nonobjective thing we have ever developed in this world, never stops" (quoted in Gardner 156).

David Batchelor, referring to Weiner’s 1979 work MANY COLORED OBJECTS PLACED SIDE BY SIDE TO FORM A ROW OF MANY COLORED OBJECTS, notes that Weiner’s words

have a cadence, a symmetry and a simplicity that precisely matches the operation they describe—an operation that is rhythmic, repetitive, and simple to perform. As with all of Weiner’s work, an ethical relationship with a material world is implied: not intrusive, not exploitative, not self-aggrandizing; respectful, restrained, informal and often reversible; generally provisional or temporary; always curious (76).

Weiner’s statements, however neutral, do not avoid the ambiguity of language, and some statements present commonly used figures of speech as impartial instructions. As Rorimer points out, “By presenting these phrases in isolation, the artist allows the literalizing propensity of language to take over in such pieces as AROUND THE BEND, OVER THE HILL, or BESIDE THE POINT” (28).
metaphorical is presented as material instruction for “sculpture.” For example, an instruction such as BESIDE THE POINT might be variously executed. For example, I might draw a point on a wall and then affix a glove next to it. Or, I might open Kant’s Third Critique, highlight a philosophical point made by Kant, and then place an object next to the highlighted “point.” Then again, I might arbitrarily pick a period (a mark of punctuation) in the text and draw an asterisk beside it. All of these acts would be materializations of the Weiner sculpture, BESIDE THE POINT. However, executions of Weiner’s instructions are “beside the point.” Weiner’s instructions themselves are to be understood as sculpture. “Understood” is the term used by Weiner, rather than “perceive” or “experience.” Weiner is not making language material or evoking the materiality of language; rather one might say that the material is language. Henry Flynt defines conceptual art as “an art in which the material is concepts,” arguing that “since concepts are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language” (qtd in Prinz 46).

Dieter Schwarz states that a Weiner work such as BROKEN OFF is always in the hands of the person who reads it; it never belongs to the architecture, to a client, to an issue, that is, to its carrier or producer. Material reference—and Weiner banks on it—is of course not an object but rather material that has acquired semantic density through long-term use in a variety of contexts. The original reference is transformed, in a work by Weiner, into an incalculable set of linguistic statements (49).

In a review of the publication of Weiner’s Specific and General Works, a collection of instructions, Frances Richard describes the experience of reading the Statements as “stubbornly lyric: describing fantasy spaces or paradises,
visions, wishful thinking, desire” (39). In discussions of Weiner, the visual effect of his language is often mentioned. For example, Batchelor describes MANY COLORED OBJECTS, a work painted on a brick wall in Ghent, in the following manner:

The lettering is a clear mid-blue, as the sky just above it might occasionally be. In this instance the inscription is also an exemplification: the text is among other things a row of coloured elements placed side by side. (It has been said that poetry turns words into objects; Weiner turns letters into objects) (81).

Weiner’s claim that his instructions are sculpture rests on the fact that they always have to do with the tangible, the concrete, the realizable; thus, even though they are not tangible or realized, they matter as and stand in for sculpture, but not sculpture perceived as an object but sculpture understood as a concept. In an interview with Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Weiner discusses his choice to refer to his statements as “sculpture”:

...I realized that I was working with the materials that people called ‘sculptors’ work with. I was working with mass, I was working with all of the processes of taking out and putting in. This is all a problem of designation. I also realized that I was dealing with very generalized structures in an extremely formalized one. These structures seemed to be of interest not only to me but to other artists at the time. I do not think that they were taken with the idea that it was language, but we were all talking about the ideas generated by placing a sculpture in the world. Therefore I did not think I was doing anything different from somebody putting fourteen tons of steel out. I said it was possible that I would build it if they wanted. I said it was possible to have somebody else build it, and then I finally realized that it was possible just to leave it in language (12).

As Charles Harrison states of the objective of conceptual art in general: “The substantial aim was not simply to displace paintings and sculptures with texts or ‘proceedings,’ but rather to occupy the space of beholding with questions and
paraphrases, to supplant ‘experience’ with a reading, and in that reading to reflect back the very tendencies and mechanisms by means of which experience is dignified as artistic” (55-6).

Weiner’s text instructions provide a precedent for words that claim to count as sculpture. Indeed, one might consider Horn’s early text piece, IT WOULD BE ENOUGH TO CONSIDER THE SPOT WHERE I AM AS SOME OTHER SPOT as an instruction of sorts. I am reminded of Weiner’s work SOME OBJECTS TAKING THE PLACE IN THE SUN OF SOME OTHER OBJECTS. An important difference, however, is that Horn’s statement, because it moves around a three-dimensional object, impels movement on the part of the viewer. Experience is not supplanted with a reading, but spatial experience is conjoined with reading. Another difference is that Horn’s words are quotations; thus there is a context that exists outside of Horn’s presentation. For Weiner, “the work can exist in more than one place at the same time” (qtd. in Salvioni 52). This may strike one as similar to Horn’s use of the pair object to refute wholeness. However, the effect of Weiner’s simultaneity is the dematerialization of the object; the effect of Horn’s installations of pair objects is not a dematerialization but a materialization that extends in time and space. Like conceptual art, Horn’s use of text raises questions about “the very tendencies and mechanisms by means of which experience is dignified as artistic” and literary. Horn’s use of text, however, is in the service of the three-dimensional object; it does stand in for the object: the
work is neither just text nor just material but a melding of the two to generate a work that reads as both “Dickinson” and “Horn.”

While Mary Kelly’s practices are related to the practices of conceptual artists, her questions have less to do with the status of the traditional art object and more to do with representational practices, particularly as they relate to the construction of female subjectivity. Kelly, reflecting on the development of her artistic practice, remarks on her early disappointment “that interrogating the conditions of existence of the object [did not] necessarily include the question of the subject and sexual difference” (Imaging Desire xx). Kelly uses appropriated and invented texts in order to interrogate those cultural images through which female subjectivity is constructed; the use of text is motivated in part by the desire to investigate the construction of identity without objectifying the female body.

Kelly’s understanding of the importance of the image to the construction of identity is influenced by Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage. Lacan’s narrative of the mirror stage, first elaborated at the 1949 International Congress of Psychoanalysis, describes that process by which a child first becomes aware of her body as an object to be distinguished from other objects. This initial encounter of the mirror image usually occurs at a time when the child has not yet mastered either language or bodily functions. In order to “see” this whole self in the mirror she must look outside the body, into the mirror. Consequently, there is a marked contrast between this seemingly complete being in the mirror and the child’s experience of being soiled or hungry or misunderstood. This tension
between the experience of the body and the image one is presented with in the mirror is described by Lacan as a drama that, in its see-sawing of here and there, produces the ego: "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation-and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject’s entire mental development" (Écrits 4). The mirror not only gives one the body as object, it also gives one the body as fragment, in that it is from this newly acquired position of wholeness that one looks back and exclaims fragmentation. As Jane Gallop puts it:

The mirror stage is a decisive moment. Not only does the self issue from it, but so does ‘the body in bits and pieces.’ This moment is the source not only for what follows but also for what precedes. It produces the future through anticipation and the past through retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion (148).

Not only is the wholeness an illusion but the experience of the fragmented state is equally an illusion, because it depends on the fiction of wholeness for its existence. Lacan states,

The body as fragmented desire seeking itself out, and the body as ideal self, are projected on the side of the subject as fragmented body, while it sees the other as perfect body. For the subject, a fragmented body is an image essentially dismemberable from its body (Seminar 148).
The body is a fragment that seeks the wholeness of its image. In this story, the image is not the aftermath of the body but precedes it—for it is in face of the image that one experiences the body's lack of clarity.

A consideration of Kelly’s *Interim* (1984-89) will demonstrate the complexities of Kelly’s textual practices. *Interim* has four components whose themes are roughly the body, money, history, and power. Each component exploits several different discourses: “Corpus” uses the discourses of fashion, advertising, and science; “Pecunia” employs the language of classified ads and greeting cards; “Historia” uses the format of the newspaper; and “Potestas” exploits the language of the social sciences. Kelly states, "I feel that the installation should be an event where the viewer gathers a kind of corporeal presence from the rhythm or repetition of images, rather than viewing the work from the fixed vantage point of traditional perspective" (179). An important aspect of this "event" is the experience of reading Kelly’s text-dense formats. For example, “Historia” consists of four three-dimensional objects—Kelly refers to them as “minimal sculptures that resemble four large books” (158). The pages in the “books” are numbered from 40-47; these are also the ages in 1990 of women who were active in 1968 and who tell stories of their lives at that time, when they were twenty-seven, twenty, fourteen, and three. In “Historia,” page 49 is a central reference, but it isn’t represented. According to Kelly:

the absent page projects the narrative into the imaginary space of the spectator. The space of reading, not literally but figuratively in the field of associations, is always to be continued in the present. What interests me, above all, is that I, too, am included in that space, and it is from there,
on page 49, where I am situated as another reader rather than a privileged interpreter of the text, that I have asked myself the most important questions concerning the implications of the piece (158-9).

These questions have to do with concepts of history—as narrative or as archeological—and with identity. As Kelly puts it, “Reading between the lines of the fictive page, I find a distinction unfolding in the work between identification as a psychically determined process on the one hand and identity as a social and political force on the other” (159). Kelly’s “pages” are first-person and third-person accounts of feminist consciousness pulled from what the artist refers to as an archive of interviews and conversations with women; the passages reveal a tension between the psychological and the social. “Historia” as a whole is concerned with “the question of ‘agency,’ or—from a political perspective—the problem of deciphering the relationship between social and psychic moments of oppression” (165). Kelly uses Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage to articulate uneasy identification with political ideals: “If a collective identity is formed by replaying the initial moment of gestalt as an image of political empowerment or totalization, then, at the same time it produces the alienating effect of a fundamental misrecognition (the feeling of imperfect fit we experience even at the height of our most passionate support for a campaign)” (161).

In "Corpus," the first part of Interim, texts are paired with photographs of female clothing that is folded or knotted. Captions on the photographs reproduce terms used by J. M. Charcot to classify his photographs of hysterical patients: menacé; appel; supplication; erotisme; and extase. Charcot was the
first to establish nervous disorders as legitimate objects of medical attention; however, he emphasized symptoms that were visible in photographs, such as what the patients looked like or what they did with their bodies, rather than what they were saying. Kelly compares the posing of Charcot’s hysterics to the posing of female models in advertising. In “Corpus,” however, articles of clothing pose rather than the female body. Each photograph is paired with a text that collages first and third person narratives. The text can be read in various ways, as one part of a conversation, as inner speech, or as unconscious thoughts. Some of the phrases have what looks like red lipstick drawn over them, as if to either gloss or delete. Kelly refers to her use of text as an “artistic strategy” that shifts the emphasis from looking to listening. Kelly asserts that when women look at images of other women, they become

caught in a self-reflexive web of identifications—Am I like that? Was I like that? Would I like to be like that? Should I be like that? [The female viewer] is no longer surveying the image but her own reflection in it, hoping to catch a glimpse of herself as others see her (140).

In order to frustrate this habitual identification, Kelly presents the effects, or masquerade, of woman rather than the figure of woman. “Corpus” is preoccupied with the tendency of women to identify with an image: “Identity is never fixed, yet it is, in a sense, framed, as [“Corpus”] suggested, by posing or repositioning the garments which act as surrogates for the mimetic body within discursive systems such as medicine, fashion, or romantic fiction” (160). Kelly’s focus on objects associated with the female body rather than representations of
the female body itself enables her to explore issues of female identity without risking voyeurism.

The reading experience set up by Kelly is always an engagement with images; it may be an engagement that has as its stated goal a process of disengagement; nonetheless the two, text and image, are entangled; and the text takes as its subject the image. The viewer is asked to read on the object, but the experience is to be pulled through a variety of personal, popular, historical, and theoretical discourses—what Hal Foster calls a “repertoire of sign systems” (Return 167). The act of reading in this case becomes that of reading cultural practices. Kelly’s texts prompt one to turn to the accompanying or imagined images and read them as texts; reading in this case is the process whereby one renders legible the ideological marks of culture.

Reading provides an experience of real time; it slows down the experience of the object, and it entangles that experience in other considerations. Kelly states:

It’s not just that I use narrative in the work, I am also interested in the way the spectator can be drawn in the space and involved in the experience of real time. Only secondly am I concerned about the way a conventional narrative can operate in that space. For example, it is not just a literal reading of the text, as there are a lot of other things happening in your peripheral vision....I don’t think this is at all like reading something which is in a book. It’s only in the context of reading in the installation that the writing has its full effect (88).

This is similar to Horn’s desire to ground the viewer in the body and to disperse the object through text. But there are important differences as well. While Horn’s Dickinson objects claim to resist the popular image of Dickinson, they are not in dialogue with that image. A work such as Horn’s *When Dickinson Shut*
Her Eyes points the viewer towards a different kind of reading and reminds one of the difference between reading the object as “text” and reading “work.” Blanchot claims that the work, as opposed to the text, “is never there in advance” (Space 195). Kelly takes as her subject and the activity of her artistic practice that which is there in advance of the image and in advance of the art work. Kelly’s aim is to expose the textual machinery that supports the gaze. In contrast, the Horn work which I would claim as most successful as sculpture (Keys and Cues and When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes) baffles the advance of Dickinson as text, a move that may be perceived as a betrayal of the “feel” of the Dickinson poem.

In “The Gaze of Orpheus,” Blanchot uses the relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice as an analogy of the relationship between writer and work, and between reader and work. Orpheus is allowed to retrieve Eurydice from the underworld, but only on the condition that he not look back at her as she follows him into the light. Orpheus fails Eurydice; he turns and looks to make sure she follows and so consigns her to the underworld. In Blanchot’s reading, Orpheus’s betrayal is necessary to the work: the sight of Eurydice in the daylight is sacrificed to the opportunity to see her in the darkness and as darkness; he sees her “in her distance, her body closed, her face sealed” (Gaze 100). Orpheus desires to see Eurydice “not when she is visible, but when she is invisible” (100). For Blanchot, the work of art is not illumination but the rendering visible of concealment: “to look into the night at what the night is concealing—the other
night, concealment which becomes visible” (100). The experience of the reader and viewer is an experience of both light and disappearance: “As we look at the most certain masterpiece, whose beginning dazzles us with its brilliance and decisiveness, we find that we are also faced with something which is fading away, a work that has suddenly become invisible again, is no longer there, and has never been there” (103). Smock explains the implication of Blanchot’s essay to an understanding of the experience of literature:

To see something disappear: again, this is an experience which cannot actually start. Nor, therefore, can it ever come to an end. Such, Blanchot insists, is the literary experience: an ordeal in which what we are able to do (for example, see), becomes our powerlessness; becomes, for instance, that terribly strange form of blindness which is the phantom, or the image, of the clear gaze—an incapacity to stop seeing what is not there to be seen (Blanchot Space 9).

Blanchot defines the unique work as "that which is only complete if something is lacking to it, a lack which is its infinite relation with itself, plenitude in the mode of a flaw” (Gaze 69). The aluminum column on which one reads "AN HOUR IS A SEA” exists, in the language of Blanchot, in the “plenitude in the mode of a flaw.” On the other hand, the stacked cubes on which one reads “MY LIFE HAD STOOD—A LOADED GUN—” exists in textual plenitude. A brief consideration of the text-based work of Jenny Holzer attempts to account for this difference. In particular, the critical reception of Holzer raises questions that have pertinence to Horn’s presentation of Dickinson’s words.

Holzer’s Truisms, begun in 1976, consists of a series of one-line statements that resemble platitudes or bits of received wisdom. Early in Holzer’s career, the
truisms were printed on paper and posted in public places, but their dissemination is now in a variety of forms, including T-shirts, I.e.d. (light emitting diode) signboards, benches, and billboards. At a 1989-90 exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Holzer’s truisms were presented as a series of moving I.e.d. signage. Mark Stevens, in a review for The New Republic, describes the experience:

No individual message is particularly interesting. Anyway there isn’t any time to consider it. One message generally follows closely upon the next and circles up the Guggenheim from left to right. ...Our minds begin to fill with neon chatter. Our arguments are billboards. We become a succession of one-liners, going round and round. The practice of thought seems infiltrated, possessed, violated by something mechanical (31).

Stevens characterizes Holzer as “a clever magpie who collects the shiny thought-scrap[s] that you think you’ve read somewhere but can’t place” (30).

Henry M. Sayres, however, suggests that Holzer’s work generates an experience that borders on the literary, implying that the words have integrity and that pleasure is experienced that relates to the language itself. He refers to the I.e.d. signage as “the stuff of rhythm, a matter of prosody” (201). Holzer, in Sayre’s characterization, provides an experience of prosody outside the book and in context of public spectacle, another form of the American vernacular valued by William Carlos Williams (199).

With the series Laments, Holzer appears to aspire to “a more private, poetic form of discourse” (Stevens 31-2). A lament, itself a poetic term referring to the

elegiac, stands in contrast to the understanding of truism. Holzer characterizes the laments as “the regrets, hopes and fears of the nameless deceased” (qtd. in Auping 22). The truism is obvious, automatic, and requires no sustained thought. A lament suggests sustained feeling, usually that of mourning. The laments are presented as both l.e.d. signage and inscriptions on marble sarcophagi. Stevens, however, criticizes Holzer’s refusal to let go of irony in her aspiration to the poetic and charges that “Holzer does to poetic thought what she has done to opinions and manifestos” (32). Stevens writes:

it might seem odd that Holzer, by rendering her messages on sarcophagi and on electronic signs, should choose to write in both stone and ribbons of light; one seems ancient and the other contemporary, one forever and the other for a second. In fact, they share an important attribute: neither presents the living, supple space in which real thinking can occur. If the electronic messages melt away before we can grasp them in our mind, the chiseled words are too slow and heavy.... (32)

Stevens’ criticism relies on a spatial metaphor: there is not enough space for thinking to occur. In other words, the viewer can’t really read the text. The viewer is denied the ability to read, reading understood as engagement and reflection.

Stevens’ criticism of Holzer calls to mind J. Hillis Miller’s discussion of the ethics of reading, a discussion influenced by Paul de Man’s essay “Allegory of Reading.” Miller speaks of the impossibility of stepping outside language. “To live is to read,” he writes (59). “We struggle to read from the moment we wake in the morning until the moment we fall asleep at night, and what are our dreams but more lessons in the pain of the impossibility of reading, or rather in the pain of having no way whatsoever of knowing whether or not we may have in our
discursive wanderings and aberrancies stumbled by accident on the right reading?” (59). The poignancy of Holzer’s work has to do with its presentation of the surround of language through which one stumbles daily. But Stevens’ remark that Holzer refuses responsibility is related to Miller’s criticism of the unethical reading. Miller writes, “Reading is one act among others, part, as Henry James says writing itself is, of the conduct of life, however unpredictable and surprising each act of reading may be, since the reader can never know beforehand what it is in this particular case of reading that is bound to take place” (59). Implied by the ethics of reading is that a given reading is both necessitated and free: “there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for the further effects.” I would claim that Horn’s reading of Dickinson is ethical: it is necessitated by the Dickinson work, and always by sculpture.

Experiences of text-based works of art, the instructions of Weiner, the investigations of Kelly, the messages of Holzer, comprise the art world context in which one encounters Dickinson lines on Horn’s aluminum columns. Horn’s desire to place Dickinson’s words “among essential furnishings” can be understood within the context of Holzer who aims for an experience of language “outside the book” and Weiner who equates the specific materiality of sculpture with instruction that, however specific, threads the expansion of language with the specificity of sculpture. The resistance of the Horn-Dickinson object to the image of Dickinson can be understood within the context of feminist artists such
as Mary Kelly who use text to interrogate the positioning and experiences of woman without the image of woman.

Craig Owens first theorized that the widespread use of text on the heels of minimalism resulted in a dislocation of the visual. Owens credits Smithson’s work as a primary force behind the emergence of language in the visual arts in the 1960s. Referring to the Spiral Jetty, Owens claims that Smithson’s accomplishment is “a radical dislocation of the notion of point-of-view, which is no longer a function of physical position, but of the mode (photographic, cinematic, textual) of confrontation with the work of art” (47). Visual dislocation is, in other words, the dislocation of point-of-view. Kelly’s work disperses the image and frustrates identification. Holzer’s “spooling” of one-liners also resists identification. Weiner’s statements have no “I”; it is a world of “many acts, but no actors” (Richard 40). Owens’ discussion of “text” is similar to Barthes’ characterization of text as “off-centred, without closure” (943). The text is a weave of multiple discourses and signifiers and Barthes compares the reader to someone “at a loose end” of the text (943).

Text-based art, as exemplified by the work of Smithson, Weiner, Kelly, and Holzer, provides the conditions of possibility for Horn’s use of text. However, Horn’s Dickinson-inflected object is not entirely accounted for by this textual field marked by Weiner, Kelly, and Holzer. Horn’s work emerges within this textual activity, but her choreography of a reading space that is specific to Dickinson at the same time that it is sculptural is importantly different in terms of the nature of
the reading demanded of the viewer. Interestingly, *Piece for Two Room* was

inspired by a reading experience:

> I was reading a book and started to think about how you could take an
> episode and repeat it a hundred pages later. I thought of this originally as
> a publishing defect; then it became the same thing in two different places;
> then it became two different things...I think in terms of syntax if not quite of
> grammar; of phrasing, leitmotif, chorus—the tools of language structures—
> which then take a visual form in the work (Neri 23).

Horn’s turn to text is grounded in Serra’s definition of sculpture as engaged
within the terms of the viewer’s lived body. In *Cobbled Leads*, the artist replaces
cobblestones with lead equivalents; in the Dickinson work, Horn replaces
typescript on a page with plastic letters inserted in aluminum: the insertion of a
difference in the path, the path as a metaphor for the reading experience.

This chapter began with a suspicion about Horn’s 1994 *Untitled (Gun)*. Of
the four works in the Dickinson series, this appears to be the most performative.
In the third work discussed—*When Dickinson Shut Her Eyes*—the viewer is
required to perform the work. In *Untitled (Gun)*, the performance is Horn’s. The
stacked cubes mirror the precariousness evoked in the poem, with a difference:
instead of the risk of explosion, one has the risk of letter-cubes toppling,
scattering, losing meaning. Dickinson’s work has been the critical point around
which debates in feminist criticism and aesthetics have circled. By quoting this
line, Horn summons not only Dickinson—the poem and the poet—but also the
critical debates surrounding Dickinson; these debates mirror larger debates in
which “feminism and queer theory are currently locked in territorial struggles over
how to define, conceptually and in disciplinary terms, the relations between
gender and sexuality” (Loeffelholz 4). Loeffelholz, examining two decades of
criticism on Dickinson, writes, “Dickinson, more than any other author so far
canonized by feminist theory, twists and turns repetitively and often brilliantly
upon the axis of the aesthetic problem—upon what Paul de Man once called
poetry’s tension between ‘the need for a substantial incarnation’ and ‘the need
for knowledge’” (5). There are those critics who want to assign a specific body
to Dickinson and there are those for whom Dickinson remains a textual entity
only. Horn’s work avoids questions of the poet’s materiality (unlike, for example,
Dill’s work) and focuses on the work’s materiality (but not on the work’s
textuality). Horn choreographs a reading experience that embodies the viewer,
certainly in keeping with Dickinson’s own experiences of reading that she
describes in terms of bodily responses (see Smith and Loeffelholz). Quoting the
line “My life had stood,” however, Horn summons the question “Who is
Dickinson?” and the varied responses. Part of my suspicion about Untitled
(Gun) is that it exploits the narrative of the poet’s life. Consider Horn’s remark
on narrative during a discussion of Piece for Two Rooms, however: “Narrative
has no interest for me except in terms of how an experience unfolds for the
viewer. That is the narrative of the work itself” (Neri 20). Thus, the tension at
the heart of the piece, between work and text, might be a tension generated by
the viewer herself. With Gold Field, Horn expresses the desire to restore
material presence to a culturally weighted material; however, the work’s splendid
lightness rides on a prior experience of such cultural weight. Horn’s Dickinson work, in its striking austerity, resists the cultural myth of Dickinson but its effect rides on a prior experience of grappling with that myth. While Horn’s Dickinson works might not operate within the textual field that is “Dickinson,” they do summon it.

_Earths Grow Thick: Works after Emily Dickinson by Roni Horn_, an exhibition at the Wexner Center for the Arts from February 3 to April 21, 1996, marked the first time that works from all four of Horn’s Dickinson-related series were seen together. For the exhibition, two of the Wexner Center galleries were reconfigured as four rooms of roughly domestic scale and proportion. In the room intended as point of entry to the exhibition, aluminum cubes scattered across the floor yielded, with effort and movement on the part of the viewer, the statement: “MY BUSINESS IS CIRCUMFERENCE.” In an adjacent room, three aluminum columns leaned against the wall, each spelling the first line of a Dickinson poem. In another room, arrangements of columns propped against the wall reproduced entire Dickinson poems. In the last room, aluminum blocks stacked in a corner spelled, “MY LIFE HAD STOOD—A LOADED GUN—.” On initial visits to the exhibition, I found myself moved by what I perceived as the self-effacement of Horn’s work in its making of a place for something other than itself: it was a struggle to see the Horn object without reading Dickinson. Later, I questioned my initial perception of the Horn object as self-effacing. I found
myself becoming rather possessive of Dickinson’s work as a written document; these aluminum columns felt like a violation, a coercion of Dickinson’s scrawl into machined letters, producing a reading that, as it rebuilt marks on paper into objects for public space, simplified the Dickinson lyric. Over the course of repeated visits to the exhibition, I did not question my attachment to the experience of reading Dickinson on the page of my paperback copy of the Thomas H. Johnson edition. Indeed, it was my attachment to Dickinson that was, in part, the point: the point of contact; the point of resistance; the point of interference; the impetus to movement, restless movement, to the elsewhere that was *my* Emily Dickinson and the here that was Horn’s sculpture. In rereading my way through the four rooms, I was struck by the ways in which these austere objects—as attentive and responsible to the syntactic eccentricities of the Dickinson poem as they were—did not compromise the object as a three-dimensional force but, in fact, harnessed the syntactical demands of the Dickinson lyric in the service of Horn’s own preoccupation with temporal experience and the demands of sculpture. Horn forced a certain movement and experience of sculpture through forcing the viewer to read Dickinson. Horn’s Dickinson-object complicates the question of identity with that of identification. The Horn object identifies with the Dickinson lyric through an incorporation of its syntax and structure. Paradoxically, the identification of Horn’s sculpture with the poem becomes the very means by which the object identifies itself as sculpture. Identification is a process of incorporation within
oneself of loss. It is both the result of an incapacity to achieve self-identity but is also the very means by which one does so. It has been described as a kind of psychic mimicry in response to real or imagined loss (Butler Imitation 27). The disruption of the Dickinson lyric at the heart of sculpture provides the very condition of this sculpture’s possibility.
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