THROUGH A SIMPLE COMPLEXITY,
TOWARDS A FINITE CONTINUUM

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As I write, I strive to create my own definitions. As I write, I am aware of the formal language that governs the implementation of my intent. Words, as the carriers of content, are the vehicles for the contextual meaning I hope to impart. The words I use are predetermined symbols which I must force into the service of my meaning. This reformulation, while dependent on what existed previously, is motivated by my content in particular. In the case of this thesis, the basic formal decision is exemplified by the choice of prose over poetry. Yet further choices are made, within and beyond the original gesture, which complete the context in which my ideas will be perceived. My struggle to effectively personalize verbal form towards communication with others parallels my work in sculpture. In his "Sentences on Conceptual Art", Sol Lewitt says that "since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words to physical reality, equally, (and that) if words are used and they proceed from ideas about art, then they are art and not literature, (as) numbers are not mathematics." These statements shed light on my experience as their is a concurrent effort evidenced in everything I do. Through my
work in writing and sculpture, I am attempting to understand the roles verbal and visual language play in thought process, and to discover the ways in which that understanding can best be communicated.

Thought as a primary experience is inseparable from and dependent on the language and visual imagery that prompts and provides for its expression. That thought, and words as thought forms, may be as fleeting as conversation, stirs the need for the concretization of ideas. In order for contemplation and communication to take place, more than a putting in of appearances is necessary. Joseph Kosuth wrote that through art the "meaning-making mechanisms of the cultural dynamic reveal themselves as a moment in practice...Our role as artists, is the development of specialized tools of understanding those very mechanisms...Art is a practice, and insofar as it makes consciousness, it participates in making the world." In using the verbage that Kosuth dubs the "materiality of ideology", I attempt to create a sustained appearance from effervescent moments.

The meaning of an isolated word is symbolic before its fusion into a composition. In context there occurs, as Duchamp explained, "something like an explosion of certain words: they have a greater value than their meaning in the dictionary." For words to act as more than captions underlying a situation, they must become captors of the con-
scious and unconscious that pass through language as thought and memory and feeling. If it is true, as Mel Bochner said, that "beneath materiality are not mere facts but a radiation spreading out beyond dimensionality, involvement, and signification", then the context, or how something is presented or perceived goes beyond the specifics of what, materially, is present. By presenting writing in a sculptural context, I attempt to give an integrated view that goes beyond the literal meanings of my words.

As I manipulate words, I do so with an ambivalence towards their potential potency that breeds an intense respect. I know how easily words can sway or misrepresent through self-righteous or unskillful presentation in print. In turn, I am wary of any work of art that depends on external verbage to relay and sustain its meaning, if that verbage is not conceptually inherent in the work. We can look to Duchamp's use of inscriptions for an intrinsic qualifying of objects through words. In creating an object whose reason for existence is as apparent as its existence, an autonomy prevails that clarifies the intent of the maker. Therefore, I strive for greater justification through a coalition of form and content.

Form is a container that, dependent on its application, may either impart potency or evade it. The coalition I
speak of entails the unity of responsible visual form and visionary content. The realization of my visions must take place through an embodiment that is responsible to the most direct communication of them. David Smith wrote that he "never conceived of a work of art in other than the material demanded by that intention." This process involves the acknowledging of preexistent structures, forms or languages, as well as the seeking of personally acceptable ones through a trusting of the intuitive. It is through structure of some sort that intuition is analyzed and imparted. In this way, structure is superimposed upon intuition to ensure mutual compliance, in a process through which form becomes content.

My use of verbal formats in sculpture stems from the observation that my developing ideas most naturally took a written form rather than appearing as drawings, for example. My skepticism that nonobjective brush strokes are able to elicit responses from more than a specialized audience trained in that particular type of aesthetic appreciation is an extension of my observation, as well. Kosuth states that, "rather than isolating the viewer as individual faced with an enigma ('abstract art') or projecting him/her into another fictional space ('realism')...texts, as art, initially demystify themselves... by connecting the viewer/reader on the level of culture...." My art is in-
tended to be seen and understood and the materials and formats I choose are commensurate with that goal.

Yet forms that are specifically derived from and intended to support a concept can express contradictions as well as complicity. At times, the crassness of the materials through which I am forcing my vision stands in stark contrast to the vision I see with my mind's eye. The repulsion of contradictions leads me to simultaneously seek refinement as well as to accept the abandon that the materials suggest. In the process of learning about myself through my choices, I am sickened and embarrassed as well as enlightened and amazed. Linda Benglis, in her questioning and exposing of the vulgar, would say that "taste is 9 (the) context" in which I see myself at those times. I am forced to let go of myself, for I am repulsed. Yet that which causes the greatest embarrassment may be the source of the greatest pride as well, an impulse towards modesty attempting to hide that which is closest to the true self. The transformation, in "Lifeline", of my literary residue into an image of gaudy refinement which harkens to heirloom portraits is an example. I was playing on my obsessive saving of mundane documents which instilled in them the quality of personal memorabilia. At the same time, I was punning on the doctrinaire way that people tend to approach anything written by making the specific content of the im-
ages inaccessible through overlapping. So I walk a fine line between a protective egocentricity and an open communication with myself, my materials and my viewers.

It follows that persuasion cannot be realized through more than mere material presence, but must come about through the appreciation of an audience. The significance of a successful work often extends beyond the artist's intent and beyond the object itself. If communication occurs, the spectator participates in supplementing the creation by interpreting it. Both Duchamp and Lewitt believe that art is the intermediary between artist and spectator. For Duchamp the art is the "product of two poles", for Lewitt it is "a conductor from the artist's mind to the viewer's". In this way, the translation of thought into a formal language needn't be seen as a finite entrapment, but as an effective way of striving towards what may be recognized as universal.

The intimacy of communication is engaged, in art, through the transcedency of the object. My ideas become self-perpetuating through their transformation into objects that trigger response. Because of this, I am able to drop out of the picture, abandon my work, and leave the viewer in a silent dialogue with the work. However, my forced self-containment in my work leads me beyond that, for ultimately it is my life I want to share, with those around me
who may or may not be artists.

The self, or artist as observer, is both the content and the context within which the question of content lies, a composite of inherent and inherited traits that defines the structure of the universe in microcosm. As the need for individual definition arises, so immediately does the definition, the process of searching defining the structure which is the ultimate seat of identity. David Smith said that it is "the conflict for realization (that) makes art, not its certainty, nor its technique or material". I question any structure: visual, literary, academic, which I may be involved in or considering for use. This questioning incorporates not only an analysis of the structure but an observation of my interaction with it. In that the effort to write this thesis embodies my drive to create an original platform for the presentation of my ideas, I shied away from using written material from any source other than myself. Yet I have since found the sympathetic thoughts of other people to be an aid in clarifying my ideas. Eva Hesse was quoted as saying that she "feel(s) so strongly that the only art is the art of the artist personally (who) found out as much as possible for himself and by himself."

The process of self-actualization involves a working through that incorporates immediate vision and drawn out trial and error periods, while inherited tendencies and
and practical alternatives are weighed and balanced. This is further exemplified in the art making process where an immediate visual response to materials is necessarily followed by the technical traumas of presenting that response.

A process of reaction and synthesis, alienation and integration, is constantly underway, the choices I'm making ultimately labelling me as my own greatest influence. Those artists who do not deal openly with blatantly personal issues do so through the integration of their particular choices and interests into their work. Additionally, those people who do not view their lives as art are living, in a sense, as artists, through the incorporation of their choices, interests and ideas. My influences can be seen to be taken from the random coincidences that I am drawn to and from the detritus of this consciously and unconsciously filtered imput. Although this process of response, through which my choices are made, can be seen to be derived from and demanded from outer sources, I believe that the ultimate source of response is oneself. Joseph Beuys believes that "the origin of the flow of information comes not from matter, but from the 'I'...from an idea". Although such a mentality might be seen as a determination to come to grips with one's environment, I believe that the major impetus is the desire for freedom within that environment,
for the control of and the ability to change one's surroundings to fit one's needs. This stubbornness reveals itself as an attitude of self-acceptance which precludes self-censorship through such pressures as history, contemporary criticism, or social or personal taboos. Smith speaks against "tradition holding us to the perfection of others...Where conclusions are felt, the understanding of art has been hampered, and the innovations of the contemporary scene are often damned."

I cannot hold myself to my own past successes, either. The acceptance of the ways in which I might surprise myself, rather than the ruling out of aberrations, is a way for me to enlarge my experience of this life rather than narrow it. The unself-conscious things I do are as important in taking care of the whole as are my moments of consciousness. That which occurs as a distraction, uninfluenced by a preconceived course of action, or maybe driven to distraction by one, can be a source of productivity and consciousness. Duchamp's insistence that some of his best known works, such as the "Bicycle Wheel", were executed as 'diversions' is a case in point. It is not necessary to discount one's distractions or narrow one's focus. Bochner writes that it is only through the "'opening out' (of background) that we are presented with a passage to the density of things". The fuzziness of the written
imagery in my pieces dealing with superimposition can be seen to relate to the observation that everything cannot be at the forefront of consciousness at all times. There is always more than one thing going on at any given moment, so that when perception isolates any one activity, there can be seen an incredible array of meanings, existences, implications and contradictions.

Through self-awareness, I make way for an understanding of the ways in which effective thinking and doing might take place. When I play, or work, as it is more often referred to in serious circles, it is as if I am simultaneously the observant mother or teacher watching over the child to discourage negative tendencies and encourage and initiate new activity. In fact, playing was one of those things I had difficulty with as a child, preferring to sit over a book, and my mother was frequently disturbed by it. The part that personal history plays in an artist's work cannot be underestimated. Jack Burnham comments on Joseph Beuys' structuring of the early events in his life to read as a series of exhibitions. He writes that "in themselves, these childhood events are trivial, yet they help to create a pattern and sense of artistic purpose that is mythically supportive to the mature art." Every observation can be used and every tendency extended in a creative way that is honest to the child and satisfying to the mother, both of
whom are embodied in the person of the artist.

Duchamp defined taste as "a habit. The repetition of something already accepted." By dealing with myself as critically as some are wont to do with others, I can uncover my habitual tendencies and extend myself towards the perpetration of positive activity. The self becomes the most abused and discarded tool in the service of life and art, at the same time it is also the most precious and indispensable, for nothing can be accomplished without it. The notion of art as a precious entity has been toyed with and coddled throughout history and by every artist in the course of her play. At times it seems that only by expressing preciousness explicitly can I come to grips with what I see emerging in myself and the materials I use. The gold and silver covered "Y's" in "The Path of Why Through the Land of Is" expanded ironically on the gold leafed frames in "Lifeline". I was interested to learn of Beuys' use of gold leaf and honey, with which he covered his head, in the piece "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Rabbit."

In my work, I have come to exalt that which is most precious to me through materials and formats that allude to such things in a larger sense. Through this exposure, I hope to present preciousness so that others may sense what is precious within themselves.

I've had to search, through the choices that life has
presented me, for a path of my own, or one that would serve to propel me in my direction. The history of my work is a history of the internalization of historical precedents at first and then a survey of reactions to those precedents and my own work. It has come to the point where I sense a microcosm of my life's choices as I follow myself through the making of a piece. A clear reflection of this working process has become important through a consciousness of it-which is not just to be held in retrospect, but to be inclusive in the work. As Duchamp's "Box" of 1914 and "Green Box" of 1934 "refer in a highly concentrated fashion to almost all his important work of the years ahead", my piece entitled "Revisions" chronicles the evolution of documents supporting my art making endeavors.

For every person and every situation there is a new solution that by nature places itself within the attitudes of a time.

During my early involvement in sculpture, I worked in steel, a material I accepted as a given at the time. I was exposed to the use of that material through the work of people who used it for its immediacy of construction and inherent strength and scale. Sculptors such as David Smith and Mark deSuvero did work that was commonly based on their use of welded steel, work that came about, respectively, through the influences of Cubism and Abstract Expressionism.
The term, Constructivism, which encapsulated the new genre, seemed to me to signify the making of something from nothing, which is where it seemed I was at the time. I accepted abstraction as a rule whereby I could take what I saw and make it my own, a process which, I've now come to believe, often results in making that which one sees unrecognizable to others. My attraction to rusted steel was to its organic qualities which referred to the earth from whence it came, originally. Through my intention that my pieces act as intermediaries between people and their environment, they were built on a scale slightly larger than life, with references either to landscape, the figure, or everyday (though outsized) objects, such as chairs, garments and books. But because of the adamancy of the material, this work became a stumbling block rather than a stepping stone for the viewer. For me, the observation of the ways in which my intentions failed became the way to a new understanding of monumentality.

Large or magnificent buildings are considered monumental in that they inspire awe in proportion to one person's notion of what they might be capable of accomplishing on their own; they embody a monumental task. Sites of natural origin are deemed monuments by virtue of a scale and beauty seemingly unapproachable and unparalleled by any man made form. I saw the definition of monumental as encompassing
things at once human (made by hand, pieced together, constructed) and then awe inspiring. What I did not accept was the definition's dependency on size, nor its reliance on certain materials, the subjugation of which exclaimed the positive strength of the artist. In John Ruskin's words, "No beauty of design in architecture, or of form in mountains, will entirely take the place of what may be called the 'brute largeness'. That is to say...the greatest effect on sublimity will be produced by the largest
test truth which is clearly manifested to us." In contrast to the extreme physical implications of the materials I used in these early pieces, there was an intended aura of intimacy surrounding them. My goal became to understand the nature of that intimacy. I believe I was reaching to attain my own scale.

My attachment to the objects I made stretched to far reaching proportions; they were beings with lives of their own, but I felt my being was directly tied up in their presence. I hauled the pieces from one place to another as I moved, because they affected a sense of home for me as if I were the turtle and they my shell. However, the directness through which they were conceived, through my dreams or visionary flashes, was confounded by the toil that went into their making, and then the more extreme preoccupation with their transportation. I began to question the ability
of sculpture to create a sense of place through mere landmark status, that is to say, through an obvious but mostly arbitrary placement on a site. What I was struggling with was the problem of how I interacted with and affected any environment I found myself in. From these incidents came an awareness of the results of working directly and actively, and involving myself in an activity which showed concrete results. The void which was the point of power and freedom where I found myself at the start of my encounter with sculpture was being filled, and emphasized, by newly discerned choices.

The notion of transparency was one I had been brought to through my work in wood and steel when I came to feel that an interaction with the space around the pieces was impeded by the solidity of the materials. That a transparency, other than that which exists in the atmospheric sense, must appear as a solid entity in contradiction to its visual clearness, expresses the transitional stance of the object as it simultaneously involves the physical and intellectual space of the viewer. Transparency became a metaphor for understanding, clarity and memory. I began to make transparencies of my written documents through the feeling that, as Bochner reiterates, "memories tend to be remains, not of past sensations, but past verbalizations." I began to use the transparencies to their own detriment, as well,
through the formation, when multiply layered, of an opacity of a highly reflective sort. Understanding, as prompted by visual and experiential identification, is not visual in itself, although the visual artist finds it possible to attempt to express it in visual form.

The identification of my sculptures as human counterparts came about through the observation of their psychological force as much as their physical size. My focus turned toward the human identity which was dwarfed by the landscape, and very much aware of itself. Rather than feeling a need to be generous to the landscape, I began to feel a responsibility to the identity in which perception takes place. Performance artists such as Eleanor Antin and Linda Benglis were interesting to me because of their of-the-moment and directly intimate involvement in their work. Their activities brought a sense of vulnerability to a head, and in teaching me not to fear this, pointed out and encouraged directions in which I might take my work.

In "Ghosts of Passion", I used a personally historical array of red women's pants, including infant's leotards, maternity pants with the abdomen extended by the use of a resin coating, and a pair that currently belonged to me. I felt a need to allude to my awareness of the aggressive literalness of these objects by encasing each pair in a vinyl counterpart. This more subtle transformation precluded the
more drastic abstraction in my earlier work. My interest in space as perceived by people in the mundane sense of their immediate physical surroundings began to be expressed. I was determined to make it clear that my attachment to objects was as to people, to myself, and hoped that through the presence of the pants, the identity of a person might be extended. As art generally, and my work, specifically, is directed towards people, an immediate identification with the self provides access to my ideas. I found myself involved in conceptual derivations of forms and materials to this end.

In a way that was closer to my own activities, the awareness that the visceral attitude of the artist was viable as a source and focus in one's work, was brought to bear by the work of Eva Hesse. Her use of abstractionist sources expressed a strong self-identity, although she took pains to erase the anthropomorphic in her work and I tend to emphasize such literal references. The sense of isolation suggested by my earlier objects in the landscape is intense and conscious in Hesse's work. The use of repetition to create a kind of ironic emphasis appeals to me; I used over one hundred letter boxes in the piece "Revisions" to refer to the compartmentalization that takes place in institutions, as well as our minds. Through repetition, my obsession with structure began to express itself. I de-
sired to break through the limitations of materials and
suggest the ongoing, self-perpetuating continuum of life.
The linear and vertically superimposed formats that this
expanded into provided the basis for the chronology that
I've incorporated into my work.

The idea of a personal calendar occurred to me through
my frustration with the academically imposed calendar that
has affected me for most of my life. Until one replaces a
distasteful situation with a viable one, there is only con-
lict. Many times I felt trapped in a void, frustrated or
distracted, and observed this as an invitation to present
myself with an alternative system. The basis of my system
was fed by the 'old' system, in a sense, as it was a col-
lection of academically oriented documents that I had ha-
bitually saved over the past year. It occurred to me that
handwriting could be an intrinsic way of scaling a work. I
had been aware of Joseph Kosuth's billboard narratives and
liked the look of Mark Tobey's calligraphic prints, as well.

The compilation of these documents represented my
specific and symbolic involvement in a particular place at
a particular time. If one wanted to take the time, the ev-
olution of my thinking over that time could be traced
through the specifics of the content. The documents ran
through the development of my vita to proposals for pieces
to letters to prospective employers and former teachers.
In all the pieces ("Revisions", "Skyline", "Lifeline", "Gray Matter", and the "Compressed Sculptures") the first draft through the final draft of each document was used, which objectified my wavering moments of indecision and insecurity, and displayed the role that conscious editing plays in content. The unity of purpose and process inherent in writing as well as in making sculpture was exemplified in this way. This work comprises a look at the promotional and ideological stance of a visual artist from the literal side of the coin.

In "Revisions", I used the idea of the sorting process I spoke of earlier in a literal sense. The papers were placed in open letter boxes of the type often used in offices. A feeling of concurrent containment and accessibility was projected, personal content placed within the larger framework of tables and shelves that reiterated each document's position in the chronology. The shelves were made accessible by a ladder that could be rolled back and forth in front of them, in an allusion to a library, and more indirectly, to a hardware store. The tables were composed of boards placed upon sawhorses, in further reference to manual work. I consider writing, as well as making art, a physical activity with deep mental attachments; in fact, thinking and doing energize each other.

Further versions of this chronology were built to take
the development of this continuum as far as it could go. The reproduction of the primary written material in various ways was a means to this end, as was the use of various structural permutations of superimposition. In "Skyline" an open vertical and linear ordering was used, which made the content of the images semi-accessible. The further compression of the images in "Lifeline" resulted in a highly reflective surface reminiscent of certain types of smoked mirror. The random and totally inaccessible reflective nature of "Gray Matter" resulted from the use of the slip sheets which acted as the transfer medium that relayed the image from original to transparency. When layered within acetate that was notched to recall file folders, the ghost images of the original writing, which the slip sheets retained, were barely visible. The "Compressed Sculptures" utilized the same information, superimposed via typewriter and xerox machine, within formats of flattened folded paper files. The word 'expanded' was, interestingly enough, the only word in the xeroxed version that escaped obliteration.

The installation "The Path of Why Through the Land of Is" embodied, for me, a reaction to the intense and conscious structuring that preoccupied me in the making of some of the other pieces. I wanted to experiment with content of a less literal type, and place the act of reflection in
an environmental arena in an attempt to have the passerby
become aware of his/her environment and question the subtle
changes that had been brought to bear on it. The hanging
of the curtain forms in a way that suggested they had al-
ways been there, on another level provided a sense of mys-
tery to the setting. Lengths of expandable paper files ran
along the opposite wall the entire length of the corridor
and held a flood of styrofoam packing beads and an array of
gold- and silver-covered styrofoam "Y's". The hallway be-
came a metaphor, as well as a catalyst, for the stream of
consciousness that is always with us.

That the existence of these forms was manifested
through the activities of making and viewing sculpture,
leads me to believe that recollection and primary experi-
ence run on convergent paths, meeting where conscious
choice and chance are filtered through the past to make
way for the future. I provide this path for myself through
the making of art: it presents itself to me in unrelenting
persistence. The journey along the path of choices and
stalemates becomes more interesting than any predetermined
or projected end result I might romantically see for my-
self; life is immediately reflected in the activities of
the moment. However, it is in the momentary that the un-
conscious becomes conscious in what may seem like a stop-
ing of time. Life continues through this vehicle as well,
reflected in acts of consciousness such as the making of art objects. The union of all contradictions that take place within me are echoed in the well of my work. The echo takes on an ulterior form as it is transformed into a material other than my own. But it is from my own voice that the sound issues, and so carries that characteristic as far as can be before it uncontrollably transfigures. The analytical and the ephemeral, which by definition stand at odds, are intertwined in ways that redefine the definitions.
ENDNOTES


2. "Seven Remarks For You To Consider While Viewing/Reading This Exhibition," (Leo Castelli Gallery, 1979).

3. Ibid.


7. "Seven Remarks For You To Consider While Viewing/Reading This Exhibition," op. cit.


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Ghosts of Passion

The Path of Why Through the Land of Is
Revisions

Gray Matter
Lifeline

Skyline
Compressed Sculpture - xeroxed

Compressed Sculpture - typewritten